

THE WOMEN OF THE *AENEID*

Vanishing Bodies, Lingering Voices

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The "constant changeability" that Vergil's Mercury predicates of "woman" (*mutabile semper femina*, 4.570) might well be applied to the *Aeneid* itself. For readers' understanding of the poem continually evolves, reflecting changes in historical circumstances, cultural mores, and critical fashions. Essays in this volume discuss ways in which the elusive meaning of Vergil's epic has been quite differently understood, for example, by readers for whom the sun never set on their national empire and by readers whose nation was embarked on a war they believed to be unjustified and unjust. Not surprisingly, just as Victorian imperialism or the Viet Nam War inflected, in their time, readers' understanding of the *Aeneid*, so has the political and intellectual movement of feminism in recent decades led some readers to look at the *Aeneid* in a different way, to ask new questions of the text, and to reevaluate its significance.

In the context of widespread critical reappraisal and reevaluation of the role of women in literary texts, it is worthwhile to examine female characters and their deployment in the *Aeneid*, for they figure importantly in almost every book of the epic. The history of critical attention to the female figures of the *Aeneid*, however, is marked by paradox. There is no doubt that the *Aeneid* is profoundly centered around men, their aspirations and relationships with one another. And yet the divine figure of Juno and especially the human figure of Dido have always elicited great interest among readers. Both characters, it is true, have been largely perceived as fascinating obstacles in the path of the inevitable (and male-identified) mission of Aeneas. But that is not the whole story. While Juno has been seen in an almost unrelievedly negative light, Dido has been understood both as the most dangerous threat to the Roman project and as an enormously sympathetic tragic figure.

St. Augustine provides perhaps the most stirring example of the emotional impact of Dido's tale, admitting in a well-known passage of his *Confessions* that he wept over her death when she was abandoned by Aeneas, although he did not weep for the death of his own soul when he had abandoned God. The great German classicist Richard Heinze called Dido "the only character created by a Roman poet to pass into world literature." Much more recently, in her exploration of "gender and the politics of reading Virgil," Marilyn Desmond notes that "to many readers, the Dido story eclipses the plot of the *Aeneid* as a whole."

Thus Dido, who seems to present the greatest threat to the eventual founding of Rome that is the subject of the *Aeneid*, also emerges paradoxically as the focus of readerly sympathy and even, perhaps, as the most memorable creation of Vergil's epic. I shall argue here that this representational strategy, which casts the woman both as what must be rejected -- even destroyed -- and as what remains most indelibly present, is not unique to Dido, but characterizes Vergil's representation of other women in the *Aeneid* as well. This essay will explore three aspects of the depiction of women that contribute to this construct, all of which are dramatically exemplified in the case of Dido: the centrality

of female suffering and its distinction from Vergil's portrayal of male suffering; the resistance female characters offer to what has been called the "dominant voice" of Vergil's poem; and, finally, women's frequent tendency in the poem toward (self-) destruction and/or disappearance. Even as they disappear from the narrative surface of the poem with alarming regularity, women remain deeply inscribed as traces in the Vergilian text.

TAKE IT LIKE A MAN

As one contemporary scholar has written, "Dido's suffering lingers in the mind long after Aeneas' plotting and piety have faded." The centrality, the defining quality of suffering in the perception of Dido's greatness is surely no accident. The experience of loss and its painful memory -- *lacrimae rerum* -- lie at the heart of the *Aeneid*, even if the celebration of empire-founding beckons on its horizon. In the bleak and shadowy landscape through which the men and women of the *Aeneid* pass on their way to that promised empire, they endure great hardship and pain, both physical and spiritual.

As readers of the *Aeneid*, we are led to understand immediately, from his first appearances in the poem, that Aeneas is a character haunted by the anguish of suffering and loss, yet also deeply marked by a sense of responsibility to master (even, if necessary, to mask) that anguish for the sake of others. Early in Book 1, when Aeneas' ships have found refuge from the storm at Carthage, the poet tells us explicitly that Aeneas' words of encouragement are crafted for his men, to "put a good face on things," while the leader suppresses within himself his own grave concerns:

*Talia voce refert curisque ingentibus aeger
spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem.* (1.208-9)

These are his words; though sick with heavy cares, he counterfeits hope in his face; his pain is held within, hidden. (M 290-92)

In the figures of Aeneas and Dido, Vergil has created characters who differ dramatically from one another along a multitude of dimensions. But perhaps their differing capacity for absorbing and conferring meaning upon suffering is one of the most significant of those dimensions, not only for understanding the continuing tragic appeal of the Carthaginian queen, but also for understanding broader implications of the roles of women in the epic. Women in the *Aeneid* suffer greatly, but not well. The men seem capable of performing a marvelous alchemy that transmutes the seemingly senseless pain endured and inflicted for an elusive future goal into the fine stuff of heroism and civic virtue. But women possess no such philosopher's stone. Rather than absorbing and somehow transforming pain, the women of the *Aeneid* very often simply reflect it back into the community. Sometimes they do this in the form of outrage or even violence (as in their burning of the ships in Book 5 or seizing makeshift weapons in Book 11). More often they do it in the form of weeping and

wailing, the onomatopoeic ululation of women's lamentation that sounds continually at the periphery of the poem. And not infrequently, a woman reflects back into the community the pain she cannot endure by destroying herself, making of her own death an unmistakable message.

Compensating to some extent for the prevalence of pain and sorrow in the *Aeneid's* moral universe is the father/son relationship, which -- it is clear -- grounds the more extensive systems of mutual commitment and obligation through which not only familial but civic order may be forged and preserved by men. It is not at all clear, however, that women are capable of participating successfully in the social relationships like those bonding father to son and comrade to comrade in a way that can confer meaning upon and in some sense transcend or redeem suffering.

While it is by no means primarily women who endure hardship or suffer grief in the *Aeneid*, yet Vergil represents women, by contrast to men in pain, as suffering extravagantly, without measure, often without dignity, and without sublimation to a higher purpose. This gendered distinction is well illustrated in the tightly packed sequence of tragic events in Books 9-11, which includes the death of Euryalus and the reaction of his mother; the death of Lausus and the reaction of his father Mezentius, and the death of Pallas and reaction of his bereaved father Evander.

Focusing not on the pathos experienced by these young men in meeting their untimely ends but on the pathos of reception as a parent is informed of tragic death, the clearest comparison may be made between Vergil's representation of Euryalus' mother and of Pallas' father, as they learn that their respective sons are dead. It is worth noting at the outset several fundamental distinctions between these characters. One lies in their identity or fullness of being in the text. Euryalus' mother is not a figure whose narrative significance extends, as does Evander's, through the course of the *Aeneid*, yet Book 9 confers considerable attention upon her -- without conferring a name. Her presence in the Trojan camp is first alluded to by Nisus, a presence that comes as a surprise, since it contradicts the reader's understanding that at the conclusion of Book 5 all of the Trojan women have elected to stay behind in Sicily. In this passage, in which Nisus and Euryalus discuss taking on a dangerous reconnaissance mission, Euryalus' father is immediately named, but his mother is simply called (proleptically) by Nisus, *mater misera* ("wretched mother," 9.216). When the two friends, having made their pact, present their plan to Ascanius, Euryalus asks only that Ascanius see to the welfare of his mother; should he not return, noting also that he could not bear to tell her of his departure. Ascanius responds emotionally that she will be like his own mother to him, lacking only her name. In fact, here and later, Euryalus' mother lacks any name. Vergil's choice to leave her unnamed inevitably renders her a more contingent figure than Evander. She enters into the text not as a subject but as a topic of men's discussion, an object of their concern -- to be sure -- but also an object for their disposition.

In addition, the two parents, we realize from Euryalus' words, are distinct in the matter of agency. While Evander in fact sent his son off to war with Aeneas, Euryalus' mother not only had no say in her son's fatal decision, she was not even informed of it. Thus, Evander's suffering is an outcome to which he has, in some sense, given prior consent, even authorized, by sending his son into war with Aeneas. At the moment of his son's departure Evander offers fervent prayer for Pallas' protection, but the premonition of disaster is clearly present, as he suddenly fails and faints at the

moment of leave-taking (8.572-84, M 745-60). The possibility of bereavement for Euryalus' mother is also foreseen in Vergil's text, but only by others -- Nisus, Euryalus, Ascanius. The woman herself is kept ignorant of the potentially tragic events transpiring. That ignorance is suddenly and horribly ended by the sight of her son's head, dripping gore, affixed to an enemy spear. Confronted with this sight, Vergil explicitly describes her as "out of her mind," (*amens*, 9.478), as she rushes to the wall of the Trojan camp, tearing her hair and wailing "like a woman" (*femineo ululatu*, 9.477), filling the air with her screams of lamentation.

Evander, like Euryalus' mother, is alerted by Fama ("Rumor") to the approach of his son's remains. The sight he encounters, however; is far different from that (*visu miserabile*, "awful to see," 9.465) which confronts the mother of Euryalus. Approaching Evander's city is a funereal procession, flanked by torchlight, bearing home the bier of Pallas. Although unable to accompany the corpse himself, Aeneas has made elaborate arrangements for this procession, decreeing that a thousand men accompany the fallen soldier home and himself wrapping the body in cloth of gold and purple. It is to this body, carefully and appropriately composed, that Evander clings in mourning. Unquestionably, the father is deeply grieved by this terrible loss (*lacrimansque gemensque*, "crying and groaning," 11.150), but -- equally clearly -- he is not driven mad (*amens*) by it, as Euryalus's mother is represented.

The words of mourning uttered by the two parents diverge in an equally dramatic way. Euryalus' mother begins with a harsh reproach to the dead (*crudelis*, "cruel one," 9.483), for leaving her thus alone. Lamenting that she has not even been able to perform the appropriate funeral rites for her son's corpse nor wrap it in the clothing that she has been weaving for him, she reaches a crescendo of grief with the apparently perverse plea that, if the Rutulians have any *pietas*, they should manifest it by running her through with their spears and swords (9.493-94). An alternative prayer to Jupiter to cast her into the Underworld (9.495-97) concludes the words allotted to her in the text before, at a signal from Ilioneus and Ascanius, she is seized and carried away:

*illam incendenter luctus Idaeus et Actor Ilionei monitu et multum lacrimantis luli
corripiunt interque manus sub tecta reponunt.* (9.500-502)

As her grief kindles, so Actor and Idaeus, at a word from tearful Iulus and Ilioneus, lift her and bear her homeward in their arms. (M 664-67)

What is portrayed, then, in the case of Euryalus' mother is a suffering that is at once deranging, that lashes out and accuses the other; that culminates in the purely negative desire for self-destruction, and that also apparently threatens to enlist others in its nihilistic force -- since the motivation for the woman's physical removal from the scene seems to be the debilitating effect her words are having on Ascanius' men.

Hoc fletu concussi animi, maestusque per omnis it gemitus, torpent infractae ad proelia

vires. (9.498-99)

Her wailing moved their minds; a moan of sorrow passed through all; their force is broken, numbed for war. (M 66244)

Though presented with precisely the same overmastering tragedy in the loss of his son, Evander's reaction to that loss -- and its effect -- are diametrically opposite to the grieving of Euryalus' mother. The father acknowledges at once that he realized the possibility (*haud ignarus eram.. .*, "I was not ignorant," 11.154) of this sad outcome -- in sharp contrast to the mother who was not even aware of her son's perilous undertaking. Then, rather than cursing the dead boy as cruel (*crudelis*), Evander pronounces a blessing upon his wife, fortunate, in her death, to have been spared this tragedy. Again in direct contrast to the reproachful words of Euryalus' mother, Evander explicitly absolves his Trojan allies of blame in this calamity, reflecting philosophically that this sorrow was simply his lot in life:

nec vos arguerim, Teucris, nec foedera nec quasiunximus hospitio dextras: sors ista senectae debita erat nostrae. (11.164-66)

But I cannot blame you, Trojans, or our treaties or the right hands we have joined in friendship, for this was the chance assigned to my old age. (M 212-15)

Indeed, going further, Evander explicitly praises his son's death in a worthwhile cause and takes pleasure in the appropriate honor that has been shown him by Aeneas. Though he reflects briefly at one point that it would have been better had he been the one to die, Evander expresses this wish only as a contrary-to-fact conditional, in contrast to the multiple imperatives calling for death that conclude Euryalus' mother's speech. Evander concludes on a note that could hardly be more different. Reproaching himself for even having detained the Trojans briefly from battle, he urges them to fight with renewed vigor and -- far from seeking death -- pledges to remain alive expressly so that he may see his son's killer, Turnus, dead and the Trojans victorious. In pointed contrast to the mourning of Euryalus' mother, which had broken the men's spirits for further battle, Evander receives the news of his son's death in such a way that his lamentation actually turns into a rallying cry.

The representation of the mother's sorrow renders it accusatory, self-pitying, irrational, and excessive in a way that is so directly harmful to Aeneas' cause it must be silenced. But the father's sorrow is measured, reflective, and supportive -- even appreciative -- of the martial and civic ties that bind men and mitigate such sorrows (even if, implicitly, they are also contributing causes). Evander's suffering, far from undermining Aeneas' project, is supportive of it in every way and even reinvigorates it, adding urgency and purpose to renewed battle by including the explicit motive of vengeance. The destructive urge resulting from Evander's loss is appropriately channeled and directed against the enemy other -- and it is also accompanied by constructive aspects, reaffirming the importance of established bonds, shared purpose, and cooperative effort. But the raging grief of Euryalus' mother

lacks a constructive dimension, and its destructive force is turned back, ineffectually, upon the self.

The tragic narratives of *Aeneid* 9-11 of course present another case in which a bereaved parent -- in this instance, a father -- reacts to loss by seeking death. Vergil's treatment of Mezentius and his son Lausus is complex and many-faceted, yet even the suffering of this father, in many ways an explicitly evil figure in the poem, finds a positive resolution that we do not see exemplified in women's suffering.

Mezentius' status as an exemplar of evil is immediately established with his introduction into the poem as *contemptor divum* ("disdainer of the gods," 7.648, cf. 8.7). Also highlighted immediately is his paternal relationship to Lausus, who "deserved a better father" (. . . *dignus patrus qui laetior esset / imperiis et cui pater haud Mezentius esset*, 7.653-54). The monstrous behavior that has led to Mezentius' overthrow by his own people is later vividly described by Evander to Aeneas (8.481-503), and the man's brute, virtually inhuman strength and force are displayed in a sustained epic *aristeia* in Book 10, in the course of which he is compared to a huge boulder buffeted by the sea (10.693), a wild boar (10.708), a hungry lion (10.723), a whirlwind (10.763), and Orion (10.763). But hinted at as well is a tenderness between father and son, as Vergil briefly notes Mezentius' gift of battle spoils to his son (10.700-701) and his boast that Lausus shall also have Aeneas' armor as a trophy (10.774-76).

When, rather than taking Aeneas, the old man is wounded by him, Lausus rallies at once, slipping under Aeneas' spear to protect his father's retreat and ultimately, predictably, falling to the experienced warrior's greater force. Lausus' death turns immediately to pathos, as even his killer Aeneas is overwhelmed by the enormity of what he has done. Mezentius, like Evander and Euryalus' mother, suffers the experience of his son's untimely death. The result, in this case, is utterly transformative.

Although no Fama alerts him to the tragedy, Mezentius intuits the awful truth (10.843). Like Achilles mourning the death of Patroclus, he defiles himself with dirt in his mourning and blames himself for his son's demise. This heretofore vicious individual at once articulates an understanding of his past transgressions, their repercussions upon his son, and the debt he owes his own people (10.851-56). He proclaims his intention to ride to his own death at Aeneas' hands.

At this point, Vergil pulls out all of the emotional stops, depicting the supposedly heartless Mezentius not only as ready and willing to sacrifice himself to atone for the death of his son, but also as emotionally attached even to the animal kingdom, when he lovingly addresses his faithful horse Rhaebus. Vergil then exploits this figure's narrative potential by making the horse both Aeneas' direct victim and the indirect killer of Mezentius, as it is pierced between the temples by Aeneas' spear and then pins in its fall its unfortunate master. Thus trapped, Mezentius offers no resistance but rather an unflinching acceptance of the inevitable. Essentially, his submission to death at the hands of Aeneas proclaims an acceptance of his own failures, of the warrior's code, and of Aeneas' mission.

The death of Mezentius unmistakably and -- I would argue -- unequivocally confers nobility upon this contemnor of the gods who has, himself, perpetrated acts beneath contempt. The quintessential Roman virtue of *pietas* typically entails an appropriately reverential recognition of one's place in a "great chain of being," stretching from the divine father through the senatorial "fathers" of

the Roman state to one's own father and on into the endless future of Rome through one's own son, with corresponding obligations, responsibilities, and privileges at each link in the chain. In the character of Mezentius, however; Vergil has boldly severed this chain, separating its lower; merely mortal reaches from its supernatural span. Mezentius is repeatedly identified with the stock epithet of *contemptor divum* (7.648, 8.7), explicitly claims that he has no concern for the gods (10.880), and at one point declares his own right hand his god (10.773); yet at the moment when he learns of Lausus' death he spreads his hands to heaven in a gesture recognizably that of Roman prayer; and the extraordinary power of his love for and sense of obligation to his son is not just ennobling but ultimately salvific.

Confronted with the death of his beloved son, Mezentius, like Euryalus' mother; wishes to die. But Mezentius courts that death in a way that Vergil's text sanctions and in fact validates, using it as a means of redeeming this formerly despicable character. The same does not hold true for the female mourner. Rather than enlisting her in some larger project on behalf of Aeneas' mission and the Roman state's values, her suffering is represented as pointless and destructive. As Vergil represents it, women's grief is a dead end confrontation with limitless sorrow, lacking the power either to redeem the self or to edify others. Men's grief, by contrast, provides not disillusionment but a reason for perseverance.

THE GRAND REFUSAL

The model for male, heroic, Roman comportment that Aeneas enacts is one of assent. However confusedly, however reluctantly, however misguidedly, Aeneas accepts and endures. Told that his mission is to "seek your ancient mother" (*antiquam exquirite matrem*, 3.96), he repeatedly misinterprets the injunction, yet persists. Confronted with the necessity of abandoning Dido -- and explaining to her his need to do -- so he pleads that his will is not his own: *Italiam non sponte sequor* ("It's not of my own volition that I'm setting out for Italy," 4.361). When his goddess mother, Venus, presents him with a miraculous shield on which is depicted the future history of Rome, though he cannot understand what he sees, nevertheless he admires it and takes pleasure in the images (*miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet*, 8.730). Aeneas assents -- to the burden of destiny and, often, to the will of others (even, apparently, to Dido's desire to detain him and love him). The great female characters of the *Aeneid*, by contrast, refuse. They refuse, in various ways, their traditional roles of passivity, domesticity, and subordination; they refuse the mission of Rome; they even refuse to give credence to the pronouncements of the gods.

The implicit assumption that Dido's leadership of her people is paradoxical and fundamentally unnatural -- in some sense a refusal of the female's appropriate role -- is what gives point to the brief tag *dux femina facti* ("they made a woman their leader," 1.364). The way in which Dido's highly unusual choices in how she lives her life are seen by those around her as specific *rejections* of more normal roles is made explicit both by Iarbas' outraged allusion to her rejection of his advances (*conubia nostra / reppulit*, 4.213-14) and by her sister Anna's attempt to bring her round to more

sensible ways:

solane perpetua maerens carpere iuventa nec dulcis natos Veneris.nec praemia noris?
(4.33-34)

...are you to lose all your youth in dreary loneliness, and never know sweet children or the soft rewards of Venus? (M 39-42)

Even further outside the boundaries of feminine decorum is the warrior maiden Camilla, a young girl inured to harsh battle, whose distinctiveness is initially presented as a negation of feminine norms: *non illa colo calathisque Minervae / femineas adsueta manus, sed proelia virgo./ dura pati* ("she did not accustom her girlish hands to weaving but instead, a virgin, she endured harsh battle" 7.805-7, my translation).

Dido and Camilla present extreme examples of nontraditional female behavior. But women who play the more typical roles of wives and others also refuse at various points throughout the poem to remain confined within those roles. Explicitly inspired by the courage of Camilla, for example, the Italian mothers fight in desperation to fend off the Trojan invaders and save their city:

ipsae de muris Summo certamine matres (monstrat amor verus patriae, Ut videre Camillam) tela manu trepidae iaciunt. ... primaeque non pro moenibus ardent.
(11.891-95)

Even the mothers along the walls, remembering Camilla, are rivals in their eagerness to cast their shafts with anxious hands; true love of homeland points out the way...each burns to die first for her city's sake. (M 1180-86)

The Trojan mothers in Book 5, frustrated and discouraged by the fruitless voyages on which Aeneas has led them in search of "the ancient mother," violently signal their refusal to continue by setting fire to the ships on which they have traveled. Euryalus' mother, as we have seen, seems clearly to overstep her proper bounds in the lamentation for her dead son and is forcibly removed from the public space of the camp and reconfined to an interior space appropriate for women (9.498-502). Such acts dare to question the inevitability and inherent rightness both of the state-founding mission on which Aeneas is embarked and of the women's duty to support that mission.

Indeed, although Aeneas affirms that he is on "a mission from god," Dido openly questions this claim, noting with sarcasm that she doubts very much the gods are troubling themselves about him (4.376-80). While Dido rejects Aeneas' *claim* of prophetic guidance, at other points females more directly refuse to accept the will of the gods. The *contemptor divom* is a stock figure in epic, a hubristic, megalomaniacal character who refuses to recognize the gods as superior to himself. The women in the *Aeneid* who refuse to capitulate to divine will, however; do so not out of hauteur but out

of desperation. Amata, for example, cannot accept that her daughter must be married to a foreign invader rather than to Turnus, the bridegroom Amata has chosen for her. In part, Amata's ultimately frenzied opposition to Lavinia's fated union is caused by the intervention of Juno, via the insinuation of the Fury Allecto into the queen's very body. Yet Vergil makes it clear that Amata has fixed upon refusal of fate's course *before* Allecto appears on the scene (7.344-45) and that she clearly articulates her reasons before the Fury's poisons take effect (7.356-58).

Another notable example of a woman's resistance to fate is the case of Juturna, Turnus' sister who, as a recompense for rape by Jupiter, has been transformed from a human being into an immortal nymph. Throughout the final book of the *Aeneid*, Juturna acts to aid her brother, although Juno has made it clear to her that Turnus' fated day is upon him. Juno, it must be said, also urges the nymph to undertake the futile effort on Turnus' behalf, a last-ditch attempt to thwart (or at least delay) the inevitable. Yet, despite Juno's original instigation, Juturna's brilliant and resourceful interventions are very much her own. So much so that Juno explicitly circumscribes her role in the episode (12.813-17), and her own retreat from the arena does not effect Juturna's as well. Finally, Jupiter must summon what seems to be the ultimate weapon of horror, the Dira, to drive Juturna from the field of combat. Her brother Turnus has, we learn late in the book, cannily recognized his sister throughout, despite the inventive disguises she assumes. He perceives just as clearly that what is at stake is Juturna's persistent but futile defiance of what has been fated:

*iam iam fata, soror, superant, absiste morari; quo deus et quo dura vocat Fortuna
sequamur.* (12.676-77)

"Sister, fate has won; do not delay me; let us follow where both god and cruel fortune call." (M 900-902)

Whereas Aeneas, Anchises, Evander, and Latinus yield unquestioningly to the exigencies of fate, female figures such as Dido, Camilla, Amata, Juturna, and others suggest the possibility of choice and independent volition. By refusing what has been spoken (*fatum*) by the gods, scripted by their society, or chosen for them by others, the strong women of the *Aeneid* assume a tremendous narrative burden for the poem: acting as a counterpoint to *pius*, passive Aeneas, they serve as signposts to the road not taken. It may seem surprising that this exploration of independent judgment should be allotted to the women of the *Aeneid*. It is less surprising, however, when we note the regularity with which the memorable female characters of the *Aeneid* die -- or wish to die. While representing alternatives to the "dominant voice" of the *Aeneid*, women also indicate and play out in the text the failure of these alternatives. In contemporary critical terms, one might employ the Lacanian notion of being "under erasure." That is, Vergil's representational strategy enables him to show, often through women who question, refuse, or reject dominant ideological tenets of the *Aeneid*, that alternative modes exist. Yet, to the extent that they fail, they do not in fact exist as *viable* alternatives. Both these women's choices and -- as we shall see -- they themselves are under erasure

in Vergil's text, a presence that (quite literally) becomes an absence.

ALL THAT IS SOLID SELTS INTO AIR

Contemporary scholarship has shown the way in which classical texts, in the representation of women, draw heavily upon a cultural imagination that constructs woman as deeply embedded in a body, paying particular attention to the rounded forms and surfaces of that body and attending as well to the mysterious inner spaces in which unborn progeny or thoughts or words may be harbored. This construction is almost entirely absent from Vergil's poem. Indeed, the opposite is true -- women in the *Aeneid* seem transient sojourners in the material world, drawn inexorably toward incorporeality, toward disappearance, toward nonbeing.

The woman's tenuous hold on physical presence and corporeality is well exemplified by the fate of Creusa, Aeneas' first wife. As he relates in Book 2 the story of Troy's last night and his own confused attempts both to fight and to flee, Aeneas thinks of Creusa a number of times (2.562, 597, 651, 666). Yet from the moment the decision is made to set out for exile and the Roman destiny -- Aeneas' wife becomes oddly tangential. In the physical configuration of his family that the hero constructs as he plans their escape from the besieged city, the superfluity, the nonessential nature of Creusa's presence is starkly visible: Aeneas carries his father on his shoulders, takes his son by the hand, and has his (unnamed) wife follow at a distance (*et longe servet vestigia coniunx*, 2.711). This vignette physically embodies the patrilineal relation and accurately represents the woman's marginal relationship to it.⁸ First moved in this way from her position in the center of the home to the margins of the filial group that Aeneas is intent on saving, Creusa soon vanishes altogether.

As Aeneas reconstructs the story (for the narrative of the fall of Troy takes place entirely as a "flashback" related at the court of Carthage), he realizes that Creusa must have fallen behind as he ran erratically through the streets of the falling city. Given the circumstances, in the panic of flight, it may not be surprising that he fails to remark her absence. Yet even after he has arrived at safe haven, it seems as if this loss impinges on Aeneas in an oddly mediated and impersonal way, virtually as the result of an inventory:

hic demum collectis omnibus una defuit, et comites natumque virumque fefellit. (2.743-4)

... here at last when all were gathered, she alone was missing -- gone from husband, son, companions. (M 1001-3)

Having realized that "one was missing," Aeneas turns his steps back to the burning city. In doing so, he enters an urban landscape that itself seems elusive or surreal. The destruction of Troy is presented to Aeneas' gaze as in a film or a dream: fire races from threshold to roof and structures collapse, yet the city is eerily silent; Aeneas' shouts of Creusa's name echo through the empty streets.

Strangely arrested within those streets -- and in one of Vergil's rare unfinished lines -- is a group of women and children:

pueri et pavidae longo ordine matres stant circum. (2.766-67)

and Trojan boys and trembling women stand in a long line. (M 1034-35)

While this group is present to Aeneas' sight, it seems not to share the same existential plane; he sees them as one might see creatures trapped in amber.

Creusa is not among these women, but when she appears to Aeneas a few moments later, it is clear that she too now belongs to a different onto -- logical order. In recounting thirty -- five lines earlier the story of her loss, Aeneas had said that after setting out from their household he never laid eyes on her again: *nec post oculis est reddita nostris* ("nor, after this, did she ever return to my sight," 2.740). Yet, when he reenters the city, the image of Creusa does in fact appear before him:

infelix simulacrum atque ipsius umbra Creusae visa mihi ante oculos et nota major imago. (2.772-73)

... the effigy and grieving shade of my Creusa, image far larger than the real. (M 1041-43)

No longer living and yet not dead, Creusa seems to exist in some interstitial niche between the human and the divine. As she explains to Aeneas, the gods did not see fit for her to accompany him into exile, nor to be taken as a captive Trojan slave to Greece; rather, the Magna Mater has "detained her on these shores" (*sed me magna deum genetrix his detinet oris*, 2.788). Having accurately foretold the wanderings, war; and wife that the future will hold for Aeneas, she dissolves into thin air, bidding him farewell:

"haec ubi dicta dedit, lacrimantem et multa volentem dicere deseruit, tenuisque recessit in auras. ter cognatus ibi collo dare brachia circum; ter frustra compressa manus effugit imago, par levibus ventis volucrique simillima somno." (2.790-94)

"When she was done with words -- I weeping and wanting to say so many things -- she left and vanished into transparent air. Three times I tried to throw my arms around her neck; three times the Shade I grasped in vain escaped my hands -- like fleet winds, most like a winged dream." (M 1065-70)

Creusa has been translated to some other realm of being; we might think of it as the realm of ideas. For throughout her representation in the book, Creusa seems to have been to Aeneas less of a

being than an idea. Even before her disappearance, she comes into Aeneas' thoughts not as a fully encountered person but rather as a concept, a sign of his familial responsibilities and of the home to which he must return. If Aeneas will fulfill his destiny in the act of founding, Creusa seems to fulfill hers through a process of etherealization, an abstraction from the flesh -- and -- blood of an embodied woman to a disembodied concept or relation. This apparent tendency toward incorporeality and etherealization, first encountered in Creusa, is by no means unique to her.

Vergil is never a deeply carnal poet. Yet he takes full account of the bodiliness of male characters. In his many poignant depictions of male deaths, Vergil leaves readers not only with the keen sense of life profligately lost but also with the pitiful remains of heroic sacrifice, the too, too solid flesh. Aeneas' moment of epiphany as he contemplates the lifeless features of Lausus is unforgettable. The disposal of the bodies of Pallas, of Mezentius, of Nisus and Euryalus is explicitly cause for concern in the text. But females tend, in various ways, to waft away. While the bodies of fallen male warriors may be variously retrieved by their comrades, pitied and provided for by their slayers, or even intentionally and quite explicitly defiled by the enemy, the body of Vergil's lone female warrior, Camilla, is miraculously transported through the air at the behest of her patron goddess, Diana (11.593-94). Presumably, from the point of view of mere human warriors, Camilla, lying lifeless on the battlefield one moment, simply disappears the next moment.

Another female death striking for its elusive quality is that of Amata, Latinus' queen, who -- mistakenly believing that her champion, Turnus, has already been killed -- suddenly hangs herself from a roofbeam within the palace:

purpureos moritura manu discindit amictus et nodum informis leti trabe nectit ab alta.
(12.602-3)

...she is ready to die and tears her purple robe and fastens a noose of ugly death from a high beam. (M 808-10)

This suicide, as Vergilian commentators note, is clearly modeled on Greek tragedy and particularly Sophocles' Oedipal cycle, in which no fewer than three women hang themselves -- Jocasta in the *Oedipus Tyrannos* and, in the *Antigone*, both Antigone and Creon's wife Eurydice. In each of these instances, however; the body of the hanged woman appears in the text -- famously and horribly so in the case of Jocasta, as Oedipus pierces his eyes with the brooches he has torn from the lifeless body of his wife and mother (*Oedipus Tyrannos*, 12674). Haemon embraces the hanging body of his lost love Antigone (*Antigone*, 1221-25) and, just a few lines later, the body of Creon's wife Eurydice is revealed to him by the chorus (1293).

Vergil follows and even outdoes these tragic models in the swiftness of his female character's suicidal action. But he completely elides its result: the lifeless body. Although Lavinia, Latinus, and indeed an entire entourage (*turba*, 12.607) of Latin women seem to learn immediately of the queen's death, how they do so is unspecified. Certainly, there is no mention of a body. Instead, within the

space of five lines, Amata -- or at least her death -- has been transformed into *fama*, "a tale," "a rumor" (12.608). In the Sophoclean texts the body itself signifies, the corpse of the woman becoming in a sense her ultimate statement. But in Vergil the woman's body vanishes, it takes flight at the earliest opportunity, leaving behind a meaning expressed not corporeally but verbally.

Perhaps the clearest example of this phenomenon, the distillation of the woman's body into pure signification, is that of Caieta, Aeneas' nurse, alluded to in the opening lines of Book 7, as Aeneas' ships reach the spot that bears her name. The physical presence of this woman whose body nourished that of the infant Aeneas is elided: of her we learn nothing except that, in dying, she left behind an undying name:

*tu quoque litoribus nostris, Aeneia nutrix, aeternam moriens famam, Caieta, dedisti; C
nunc servat honos sedem tuus, ossaque nomen Hesperia in magna, Si qua est ea
ona, signat. (7.1-4)*

In death you too, Aeneas' nurse, Caieta, have given to our coasts unending fame; and now your honor still preserves your place of burial; your name points out your bones in broad Hesperia -- if that be glory. (M 1-5)

While Caieta may present the most extreme example of passing from substance to sign, it is a pattern exemplified by many women in the *Aeneid*, their significance becoming all the more powerful the more evanescent their bodies.

Dido too, despite her erotic valence in the poem, remains remarkably unembodied and intangible. She is never visually realized. Vergil's introductory description of her; however powerful, relies solely on the suggestion that her presence among her people somehow resembles Diana processing with her nymphs (1.498-504). The queen is *forma pulcherrima*, "beautiful in form" (1.496), and that is all. To the extent that her body is represented at all by Vergil, it is a site not of *eros* but of *pathos*. Subject to the arrows, the torches, and the poisons of ill -- fated love, Dido's body seems less a presence than a space, a laboratory in which the gods may undertake their experiments on the emotions.

And Dido, like Creusa and Camilla, disappears. Her corporeality is first burned away through cremation and then transmuted, in Aeneas' final encounter with her in the Underworld; into a luminous mirage, a sliver of the new moon glimpsed or perhaps only imagined -- through a scrim of clouds. Like Creusa, but in more complex ways, Dido is transformed ultimately into a sign. When the Carthaginian queen takes her own life, climbing onto the funeral pyre she has deceptively prepared for her suicide, she will be physically changed into mere ashes. The fire and smoke of Dido's cremation, of course, as we know from the opening lines of *Aeneid* 5, are in fact perceived by Aeneas and his men as they sail away. Willfully ignorant of her demise, however; Aeneas receives this sign but does not interpret it: *quae tantum accenderit ignem causa latet*, "the cause which had enkindled such a great fire lay hidden" (5.3-4).

In addition to sending this smoke signal, however, Dido will become in the Roman future which lies beyond the narrative time of the poem that embodiment of pure speech, the curse. For Vergil and for his readers, Dido comes to represent, in essence, the undying hatred that she proclaims in her terrible curse upon Aeneas and his descendants (4.607-29, M 838-88), the enmity between the peoples of Carthage and Rome that will culminate in the Punic Wars. In her embodied form, the affect Dido holds for Aeneas remains inscrutable; but when her whole being has been concentrated upon the hurling of a curse, refined into pure language, there is no question of its power.

FURTHER VOICES / WHOSE VOICES?

Scholars of the *Aeneid* continually emphasize the multiple voices of Vergil's text, its undecidability and open-endedness. While it is a commonplace that many great literary works invite multiple, varying, and even contradictory readings, the *Aeneid* seems uniquely open and unceasingly contested. The representation of women in the *Aeneid* plays a substantial role in this textual polyvalence. In various ways, at a number of significant points, women present an oppositional point of view -- through their choices, their words, and their acts they question what has been called the dominant voice of the epic, they resist. The evaluation of that resistance is not clear. Although women raise opposition, the alternative views they present seem largely discredited by their own failure. They are shown to be lacking in authority, their counterclaims are repudiated, their personal passions are discredited, and they die ingloriously.

And yet, Vergil has not only raised a specter of doubt through his female characters but often done so with extraordinary sympathy -- particularly in the cases of Dido or Camilla. If one associates these female figures with certain values that appear to run counter to the Authorized Roman Version of cultural life -- such as romantic love, the preservation of life over honor; fidelity to the self rather than to the state -- these values seem, through their appearance in the epic, duly considered and ultimately renounced. Yet the questions raised in some ways resonate more than the answers given. Female figures of the *Aeneid* fail dramatically in terms of their represented life histories, but they triumph resoundingly in the language of the poem, transmuted from body to word. While they do not seem aligned with the overt values of the work, female figures nevertheless become identified with poetic language itself and indeed with the voice of the poet.