HELIOS, vol. 20 no. 1, 1993

WHEN DIDO READS VERGIL: GENDER AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN OVID'S *HEROIDES* 7

Marilynn Desmond

illa tamen gravior, quae cum discumbere coepit,
laudat Vergilium, periturae ignoscit Elissae.

That woman, however, is more oppressive, who, upon reclining at the table, praises Vergil, excuses Dido about to perish. (Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.434-35)[1]

In his satirical diatribe against the learned woman, Juvenal simply assumes that the female reader of Vergil's *Aeneid* will show a special interest in Dido. Such assumptions—laced with misogyny as they are—invite us to explore the issues of gender and reading implicit in the text of Vergil's *Aeneid* and the literary reception of that text. Ovid's *Heroides* 7—Dido's epistle to Aeneas—explicitly presents a reading of Vergil's *Aeneid* rhetorically structured around the "hypothesis of the female reader,"[2] in this case, Dido herself, one of the female victims of imperial destiny in Vergil's text.[3]

In the rhetorical display of pathos that constitutes *Heroides* 7, Ovid dramatizes the thematics of reading as interpretation in order to locate his Dido in direct relation to Vergil's Dido. *Heroides* 7 evokes Vergil's *Aeneid* in a series of scattered allusions and paraphrases that allow Ovid's Dido to reconsider Vergil's representation of her actions and understanding in *Aeneid* 4. Consequently, Dido's epistle, ostensibly addressed to Aeneas, requires its audience to read two texts: Vergil's and Ovid's. The reader who follows the echoes of Vergil's *Aeneid* in *Heroides* 7 not only recognizes the Vergilian text in the Ovidian text but likewise reads *Heroides* 7 against the *Aeneid*. Ovid's text represents a de-contextualized Dido who revises her understanding of the events narrated in the *Aeneid*; consequently, Ovid's Dido may be considered a possible figure for the reader of Vergil's text who must negotiate the complexities of Vergil's narrative.

That Ovid's Dido represents an impersonation—a male poet ventriloquizing the reactions of a female reader—illustrates a particularly Ovidian concern with the possibilities of gender as linguistic performance.[4] The female-voiced *Heroides* provide Ovid with an opportunity to consider a female point of view, a poetic effort representative of his concern throughout his poetry with shifting identities, particularly in relation to gender as "the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes."[5] In addition, a consideration of Ovid's Dido as a reader of Vergil's *Aeneid* exemplifies a current theoretical premise, articulated by Diana Fuss: "Readers, like texts, are constructed; they inhabit reading practices rather than create them *ex nihilo*."[6] The reading practices at issue in *Heroides* 7 are the result of a specific interpretive stance that depends on a particular point of view.

Through Dido's reconsideration of the events of *Aeneid* 4—a particularly self-interested interpretation on Dido's part—Ovid explores the implications of

a gender-based understanding of Vergil's narrative. In fact, this exploration is analogous to other well-known literary impersonations, such as the Wife of Bath—who allowed Chaucer, in Carolyn Dinshaw's terms, to foreground gender as a "set of assumptions, a catalog of postures."[7] The rhetorical postures examined in *Heroides* 7 exploit the possibilities of gender and intertextuality in Augustan poetry. As speaker of *Heroides* 7, Dido responds directly to many of the textual invitations of Vergil's narrative: Ovid portrays Dido as a character who metaphorically reads between the lines and in the margins of the first four books of Vergil's *Aeneid*.

Like his Dido, Ovid himself is a perceptive and skeptical reader whose poetry often demands that we see Ovid-the-poet as a reader of earlier texts; as he states in *Tristia* 4.10.41-42, he honored the poets who lived in his youth. Whether he composes in elegiacs or hexameters, he continually evokes and transforms earlier poetry. Of all precursor poets, Vergil would have required a particularly careful reading strategy on Ovid's part. Ovid comments that he barely knew Vergil before his death (*Vergilium vidi tantum*, *Tristia* 4.10.51), and the canonical status of Vergil's poetry even in Ovid's lifetime was likely to produce a certain amount of "anxiety of influence" in a later narrative poet such as Ovid. Indeed, Ovid's relationship to Vergil has occasionally been represented in such Bloomian terms, most notably in Brooks Otis' characterization of the *Metamorphoses* as a literary assault on Vergil.[8] Though modern readers of Ovid might resist the reductive implications of Harold Bloom's family romance as a model for understanding literary history, Ovid's awareness of Vergil's canonical position in Augustan poetics has nonetheless left visible traces throughout his poetry. In *Metamorphoses* 14.77-81, Ovid manages to summarize *Aeneid* 4 in five lines:

Libycas vento referuntur ad oras.
excipit Aenean illic animoque domoque
non bene discidium Phrygii latura mariti
Sidonis inque pyra sacri sub imagine facta
incubuit ferro deceptaque decipit omnes.

They are carried by the wind to the Libyan shores. There Dido welcomes Aeneas into her heart and home; unable to endure the departure of her Trojan husband, she fell upon the sword, on a pyre fashioned in the semblance of sacred rites. Deceived, she deceives everybody.

The simplicity of this summary of *Aeneid* 4—altogether different in purpose and tone from the reading of this book in *Heroides* 7—effectively reduces and thus unravels the conflicting points of view in *Aeneid* 4. Its skeletal outline presupposes a knowledge of the scenes and details that constitute *Aeneid* 4. The bareness of its statement of plot (*excipit Aenean illic animoque domoque*) omits both the divine explanation and the human motivation so carefully articulated in the *Aeneid* to represent the conditions under which Aeneas and Dido come together. The brief concluding remark (*deceptaque decipit omnes*) conflates several incidents into a sort of epigrammatic summary.[9] The reader of the *Metamorphoses* is called upon to fill in all such details from a prior knowledge of the *Aeneid*; by reducing the plot of *Aeneid* 4 to a five-line summary, the

Metamorphoses represents a purposeful contrast to the complex narrative of Vergil's text.

In contrast to the brevity and reductiveness of such summaries of the *Aeneid* in the *Metamorphoses*, Dido's lament in *Heroides* 7 rhetorically amplifies Vergil's text. As an expansion rather than a reduction of the *Aeneid*, Ovid's text implicitly elucidates the narrative complexity of the prior text. That the *Heroides* specifically refer to earlier texts is a commonplace of Ovid criticism.[10] But more than any other epistle in the collection, *Heroides* 7 engages in a dialogue with a contemporary "master text." By taking up Dido's point of view, Ovid directly addresses the most popular, most frequently read portion of Vergil's *Aeneid*, as he himself notes in the *Tristia* (2.533-36). In this regard, he initiates a long tradition of reading Dido and detaching her situation and story from the *Aeneid*, thereby decentering Aeneas as the thematic focus of the *Aeneid* story and essentially disrupting the imperial theme that Aeneas ostensibly represents. In *Heroides* 7, as in many later versions of the *Aeneid* in medieval and Renaissance literature, the figure of Aeneas is displaced to the margins.[11]

Dramatized as the writer of Ovid's epistle and simultaneously represented as the reader of Vergil's *Aeneid*, Dido brings a gendered point of view to the interpretive tasks of her suicide letter. Vergil's Dido, to whom the narrator assigns the label *fati nescia* (1.299) upon her entrance into the narrative, has a much more limited point of view. Explicitly characterized by her ignorance, Vergil's Dido is fatally affected by the blind spots in her understanding of fate as it is represented in Aeneas' narrative in books 2 and 3. In this respect, Vergil's narrative dramatizes Dido's limits as a reader: her responses to the narrative of *Aeneid* 2 (the Fall of Troy) and *Aeneid* 3 (the Wanderings of the Trojans until they reach Carthage)—the stories to which she listens with such rapt attention—are neither penetrating nor astute. In fact, as *Aeneid* 4 opens, Dido is doomed in part due to her inadequate interpretation of the long tale that has occupied Aeneas for the two previous books. At the end of *Aeneid* 3, Aeneas brings to a finish his narration, his rehearsal of divine fate (*fata renarrabat diuum*, 717), an effort that has given voice, shape, and arrangement to his experience. He has concluded a narrative—one that invites interpretation and one that has a powerful effect on his audience, especially Dido, who desires to hear the story repeated over and over (4.78–79).

Characterized as *fati nescia*, Vergil's Dido cannot apprehend the historical significance of the narrative she has heard; indeed, as he tells his story, Aeneas himself does not fully understand the implications of the divine destiny he chronicles in his narrative. The opening lines of *Aeneid* 4 represent Dido's responses to Aeneas' story. Aeneas' looks and words are impressed on her heart: *haerent infixi pectore uultus! uerbaque* ("His looks,/ His words remained with her to haunt her mind," 4-5). His words indeed have had a powerful effect, leading Dido to a compassionate awareness of his sufferings: *heu, quibus ille/ iactatus fatis! quae bella exhausta canebat!* ("What scenes of war/ Fought to the bitter end he pictured for us!/ What buffetings awaited him at sea," 13-14). As narrator of books 2 and 3, Aeneas is the subject of the same verb (*canere*) used to authorize the inception of the *Aeneid* by the poet-narrator (*arma uirumque cano*). Dido validates Aeneas' authorial stance by her assessment of his heroic qualities as a character in his own narrative: *quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!* ("How princely, how courageous, what a soldier," 11).

In books 2 and 3, Aeneas' narrative of his escape from Troy and his wanderings at sea has been punctuated throughout with revelations of his destiny—*fata*—in quite specific detail. These two books represent Aeneas' ever-growing awareness that he must seek a kingdom in Italy on the shores of Hesperia. Although the exact location of this land poses some problems for Aeneas, Dido's kingdom clearly is not this Italy, and neither she nor Aeneas ever thinks it is. Thus the cumulative effect of *Aeneid* 2 and 3 for the reader of the epic—the thematic emphasis on destiny and fate—is lost on Dido. Infatuated, deluded, and misled, she ignores the significance of Aeneas' narrative and nourishes the destructive love that has already begun to undo her. Dido's ignorance of fate is thus compounded by her compassion for Aeneas and her uncritical acceptance of his character. Her responses to Aeneas' story are fatally inadequate.[12]

Ovid's Dido has a much more privileged point of view than Vergil's. Purportedly the text of a letter written immediately before Dido falls on Aeneas' sword, *Heroides* 7 allows her an opportunity to engage in a long, self-indulgent meditation on the causes of her death. Ovid's text pretends to insert itself into Vergil's narrative just before the close of *Aeneid* 4 and thereby to amplify Dido's final speeches in that text. The fictionality of this pretense is transparent, since Ovid's text explicitly presents itself as an epistle composed later in time and written in a different meter. It is, moreover, part of a collection of such patently artificial "literary" epistles. Consequently, the references in Ovid's text emphasize its retrospective awareness of Vergil's *Aeneid* as a prior text. For Dido, the privileged narrator of *Heroides* 7, this retrospective position makes it possible to read *Aeneid* 4 with extreme skepticism.

As a skeptical reader, Ovid's Dido often emphasizes the interpretation of Vergil's text at its most literal level. The ignorance of Vergil's Dido, represented in terms of her ignorance of fate, is cynically characterized by Ovid's Dido as her inability to recognize the gender bias of Aeneas' narrative. To Ovid's Dido, Aeneas' narrative in books 2 and 3 thematically asserts his priorities and politics in terms of gender. In focusing on this aspect of Aeneas' narrative, Ovid's Dido exposes the fatal inability of Vergil's Dido to recognize the gendered implications of Aeneas' narrative. Ovid's Dido implicitly mocks Vergil's Dido for her inadequacies as a reader, and explicitly presents her tragedy as the result of her limited interpretations of Aeneas' story and behavior rather than of her ignorance of fate.[13] Consequently Ovid's Dido strikes an entirely different tone than Vergil's. The anger expressed in the extreme and sometimes vicious rhetoric of Vergil's Dido (4.600-02) is erased from the lament of Ovid's Dido, who says that she does not hate Aeneas (29). Given the rhetoric and structure of elegy, Ovid's Dido blames herself for her foolishness (*stulta*, 28) and her shortsightedness which tempers her discourse.

Although Dido's point of view in *Heroides* 7 is a distortion of that constructed for Dido in *Aeneid* 4, this distortion is due in part to the lack of narrative context provided for Ovid's Dido. As a 198-line declamation, *Heroides* 7 allows Dido to indulge her passion to a much greater extent than is allowed Vergil's Dido by either the narrative framework of *Aeneid* 4 or the centrality of the character of Aeneas throughout Vergil's text. Although most of *Aeneid* 4 allows Dido to express her point of view, sometimes quite eloquently and powerfully, her version of the events in the narrative is not reinforced by the normative values of the poem as a whole. By comparison to the *Metamorphoses* and the *Aeneid*, the *Heroides* are rhetorical rather than narrative poetry, since the *Heroides* represent, not the plots and scenes of narrative, but rhetorical commentary on past events which have already been recorded and represented in other texts.[14] The rhetorical structure of the *Heroides* insures that we see only Dido's side of the story: we witness a representation of her last, somewhat drawn out moments as she acknowledges her desperation and loss before she falls on Aeneas' sword. In *Heroides* 7, Dido's only action is her declamation, which retrospectively interprets the causes of her downfall and her suicide.

The rhetorical structure and purpose of *Heroides* 7 emphasize issues of causality and expressly seek to produce closure—to explain and interpret the events narrated in Vergil's text and under re-consideration in Ovid's.[15] *Heroides* 7 ends as an explicit attempt at closure. Dido requests that her story be inscribed (*inscribar*) in a verse (*carmen*) as her epitaph:

> Praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ensem.
> Ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu.
>
> Aeneas supplied both the cause of death and the sword. Dido killed herself by her own hand. (197-98)

Ovid's poem represents Dido's epitaph as the final, entirely unambiguous statement that purportedly explains the events of Vergil's *Aeneid* 4. The *Aeneid*, however, represents a complicated relationship between cause and effect; the causality narrated in Vergil's text resists any simple, linear, or narrow interpretation. Throughout the *Aeneid*, the reader must mediate between the omniscient narrator who ostensibly, yet unsuccessfully, asks for causes (*mihi causas memora*, 1.8) and the limited, often ambivalent, points of view constructed for any one character. The single point of view articulated in *Heroides* 7 and the resulting attempts to produce closure illustrate the status of Ovid's text as a reading of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Given the interpretive authority that readers achieve in their attempts to produce closure, Dido's declamation allows her to comment on the politics of gender and empire in Vergil's *Aeneid*.

Aeneas' description of his escape from Troy and the events leading to the death of Creusa illustrates the narrative ambiguity that is a standard feature of Vergil's text. In his narration of his family's departure from Troy, Aeneas reviews his decision to have Creusa follow along behind him (*et longe seruet uestigia coniunx*, 2.711), while he takes his father on his back and his son by the hand to lead them out of the burning city. Creusa slips his mind until it is too late: *nec prius amissam respexi animumue reflexi* ("Never did I look back/ Or think to look for her, lost as she was," 2.741); and although Aeneas indulges in a long rhetorical expression of his loss (2.745-70), he does not blame himself

for the decisions which led to Creusa's death. Instead, he blames everyone but himself: *quem non incusaui amens hominumque deorumque* ("Out of my mind, whom did I not accuse,/ What man or god?," 745). Nevertheless, to the reader of Vergil's *Aeneid*, Creusa's loss clearly results from Aeneas' decision that his father and son deserve protection before his wife.[16] Even within the context of a patriarchal culture, Creusa's death—as Aeneas tells it—presents disturbing contradictions.

In *Heroides* 7.79-85, Dido reacts, as have many readers,[17] to the implications in Aeneas' account of the loss of his wife. In the context of Aeneas' impending departure from Carthage, Dido reconsiders the whole narrative of Aeneas' escape from Troy and his dutiful attention to the Penates and to his father:

> Sed neque fers tecum nec quae mihi, perfide, iactas
> presserunt umeros sacra paterque tuos.
> Omnia mentiris; neque enim tua fallere lingua
> incipit a nobis primaque plector ego:
> Si quaeras ubi sit formosi mater Iuli—
> occidit a duro sola relicta viro.
> Haec mihi narraras . . .
>
> But you do not carry them with you, nor did your Penates or your father press your shoulders, as you, perfidious one, declare to me. You lie about everything. Nor does your deception start with me, nor am I the first to suffer: if you ask what has become of the mother of beautiful Iulus—she perished, abandoned alone by her harsh husband. This you had narrated to me . . .

Ovid's Dido interprets Aeneas' role in this episode to his disadvantage. For instance, Ovid's Dido appears to echo and question Dido's assertion in *Aeneid* 4 about her understanding of Aeneas' character:

> Quem secum patrios aiunt portare penatis,
> quem subiisse umeris confectum aetate parentem!
>
> Of one they say bears with him everywhere
> The hearthgods of his country! One who bore
> His father, spent with age, upon his shoulders! (598-99)

She not only challenges Aeneas' representation of his dutiful attention to his father and his household gods, but also blames him specifically for Creusa's loss, since by not extending protection to Creusa, Aeneas in effect abandoned his wife to her fate at the hands of the Greeks. In addition, Dido notes one further irony of *Aeneid* 2. Vergil's Dido listens to the account of Creusa's death without reacting. Ovid's Dido implies that Aeneas' account of this scene might have proved a warning for Vergil's Dido, had she heeded its implications. In this passage, Ovid's Dido adumbrates the unstated implications of *Aeneid* 2: that Aeneas himself tells Dido (*haec mihi narraras*) of his behavior toward his wife, behavior which Dido might have read more cynically, behavior which would have told her what Aeneas' actions in the *Aeneid* confirm—that women are not a priority for this fate-driven hero. The queen of Carthage has no reason to expect better treatment than Creusa had received.

In *Heroides* 7, Dido also reconsiders her understanding of the events in the cave (4.165-68), the incident that represents the height of Dido's deluded interpretations. The misunderstandings in *Aeneid* 4 all result from Dido's and Aeneas' conflicting interpretations of the significance of their affair, due to the problematic hallucination in the cave.[18] Pronubial Juno, Primal Earth, and the

nymphs all participate in staging the wedding. In the *Aeneid*, the narrator summarizes Dido's understanding of her experience when he tells us that she calls the affair a marriage (172). Yet Aeneas later makes a persuasive statement that he did not participate in any rituals that produce a marriage contract (338-47). Furthermore, the cave scene is followed by an unusually authoritative statement by the narrator:

> speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem
> deueniunt. prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno
> dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius aether
> conubiis summoque ulularunt uertice Nymphae.
> ille dies primus leti primusque malorum
> causa fuit.
>
> Now to the self-same cave
> Came Dido and the captain of the Trojans.
> Primal Earth herself and Nuptial Juno
> Opened the ritual, torches of lightning blazed,
> High Heaven became witness to the marriage,
> And nymphs cried out wild hymns from a mountain top.
> That day was the first cause of death, and first
> Of sorrow. (165-70)

Ovid's Dido represents the scene in language that evokes and all but quotes the passage from Vergil:

> Illa dies nocuit, qua nos declive sub antrum
> caeruleus subitis compulit imber aquis.
> Audieram voces, nymphas ululasse putavi:
> Eumenides fatis signa dedere meis.
>
> That day destroyed me, when a dark storm cloud followed by rain forced us under the steep cave. I had heard voices; I thought the nymphs were shrieking: the Eumenides gave the signal for my fate. (93-96)

Having acquired the retrospective knowledge and understanding of a reader, Ovid's Dido thus shares the privileged point of view to which only the authoritative narrator had access in Vergil's text. In her comment *illa dies nocuit*, she echoes the interpretive authority of Vergil's narrator, whose own assertion emphasizes the implications of the cave scene for the unknowing Dido (*ille dies primus leti primusque malorum/ causa fuit*). In her allusion to the earlier, omniscient statement, and her newly acquired omniscient point of view as speaker of *Heroides* 7, she exposes the limited understanding of Vergil's Dido as a participant in the cave scene. Likewise, she revises her understanding of the mock ritual in the cave and assigns the Eumenides the role (*Eumenides fatis signa dedere meis*) which Tellus and Juno had played in Vergil's representation of the cave scene (*prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno/ dant signum*). By inserting the Eumenides into this scene, Ovid's Dido recalls the Eumenides' appearance in a simile (469-73) used by the Vergilian narrator to describe Dido's later, frenzied disintegration.

In revising the cave scene to include reference to the Eumenides, Ovid's Dido conflates the textual details of *Aeneid* 4 and exhibits her point of view as a reader of Vergil's text rather than a character in it. In presenting such an interpretation of Vergil's text, Dido implicitly questions whether Aeneas' presentation of himself as *pius Aeneas* (1.378) provides a valid framework for understanding

his character and motivations in the text as a whole. As one modern reader characterizes Aeneas' treatment of Creusa and Dido:

> To Creusa, Aeneas is fatally inattentive. To Dido he is also irresponsible, even treacherous. Each of the women perceives Aeneas as abandoning her. Creusa's criticism of Aeneas, while briefer and gentler than Dido's, is comparable in substance. Finally, there is in each case a connection between Aeneas' departure and his *pietas*. Thus each of the women becomes in some sense a casualty of the Roman mission.[19]

The reading of *Aeneid* 4 produced by Ovid's Dido arrives at similar conclusions in its emphasis on Aeneas' treatment of these two women.

Heroides 7 echoes the language of *Aeneid* 4 throughout.[20] Most significant, however, are the passages that transform the implications of the passage alluded to in the earlier text. In Aeneas' final interview with Dido in Vergil's text, he sets forth a series of justifications for his departure, none of which satisfy Dido. He appeals, of course, to the divine plan that he found a new city in Italy, summarizing his commitment to this plan to the exclusion of all else: *hic amor, haec patria est* (4.347). As part of his explanation for his devotion to duty, he states that a messenger from the gods (*interpres diuum*, 356) and his father's ghost have stressed the urgency of his mission. By this point in *Aeneid* 4, Vergil's Dido is already beyond hearing Aeneas' explanations with any degree of understanding, and she rages wildly rather than responds directly to his speech (4.365–87).

In the *Aeneid*, Dido's tirade includes a brief comment about this divine messenger: *nunc et Ioue missus ab ipso/ interpres diuum fert horrida iussa per auras* ("Now the gods' interpreter, if you please,/ Sent down by Jove himself, brings through the air/ His formidable commands," 377-78). Ovid's Dido mimics this response and characteristically focuses on the significance of Aeneas' assertions in the context of his own narrative. She challenges the adequacy of the divine plan as an explanation for human action by reference to Aeneas' own relationship to the gods:

> Sed iubet ire deus! Vellem, vetuisset adire
> Punica nec Teucris pressa fuisset humus.
> Hoc duce nempe deo ventis agitaris iniquis
> et teris in rapido tempora longa freto.
>
> But a god orders you to go! I wish he had forbidden you to come, or that the Punic ground had not been trodden by Teucrians. Certainly, led by this god you are blown on adverse winds and you waste a long time in swift rapids. (141-44)

Dido comments on the irony inherent in Aeneas' story—that Aeneas' journey is certainly slow and difficult for a hero under divine protection. In this passage she attempts not only to demystify the relationship between mortals and the divine, but likewise to demythologize the sense of destiny and fate that the *Aeneid* so problematically represents. Ovid's Dido punctuates her commentary on Aeneas' sense of duty when she offers Carthage to Aeneas, not in abstract terms of *amor* and *patria*, but in concrete terms that are more representative of Aeneas' needs as a fugitive: *hic pacis leges, hic locus arma capit* (158). Such an offer slightly devalues the category of *patria* as Aeneas employs it. In questioning the abstract values to which Aeneas appeals and in mocking his excuses that the gods have ordered his

departure from Carthage, Ovid's Dido ultimately exposes the imperial values to which Aeneas refers in his justification for his departure and his treatment of her.

Ovid's Dido also subverts the predominantly tragic tone of *Aeneid* 4 by emphasizing elements of pathos. In a moment of rhetorical embellishment, she amplifies Vergil's Dido's wish that she were pregnant (4.328-29) by carefully entertaining the possibility (*forsitan*, 135), and referring to this potential child as Julus' brother (139). Such rhetoric pointedly explores the possibility of this hypothetical pregnancy from a female point of view—a purposefully gender-specific interpretation of *Aeneid* 4, expressed specifically in terms of maternal longing. Compared to Vergil's Dido, whose concern for the future of Carthage and the fate of the Carthaginians as a consequence of Aeneas' departure makes possible the tragic scope of *Aeneid* 4, Ovid's Dido emphatically foregrounds her personal concerns and her responses as an individual woman, not a queen.

The pathos of *Heroides* 7 often depends on Dido's literal interpretation of the language of *Aeneid* 4. For instance, Dido exploits the presence of Aeneas' sword, bathed with her tears and soon to be bathed in her blood (186-90). Such emphasis on the poetic details of Vergil's narrative, however, works to expose the textuality of the *Aeneid*—its manipulation of metaphor and symbol in its depiction of Dido and her tragedy.

Ovid's Dido, likewise, acknowledges and simultaneously deflates the most powerful symbol of *Aeneid* 4—the representation of Dido's passion as *uulnus* (67), which is metaphorically evoked at the beginning of book 4 and becomes a literal wound at the end of the book when Dido has stabbed herself with Aeneas' sword (*infixum stridit sub pectore uulnus*, 689). Ovid's Dido quite matter-of-factly acknowledges the reality of the metaphorical wound and the symbolic value of the wound she is about to inflict upon herself:

> Nec mea nunc primum feriuntur pectora telo:
> ille locus saevi vulnus amoris habet.
>
> Nor is my heart pierced first by the sword: that place has the wound of cruel love. (191-92)

Her assertion that her heart already has a wound betrays her awareness of this metaphor in *Aeneid* 4. Her straightforward acknowledgement of this metaphor (*saevi vulnus amoris*), however, diminishes its force in comparison to the *Aeneid*, where Dido's inability to think of her passion in metaphorical or abstract terms is emblematic of her lack of vision and consequent vulnerability. By having Dido herself express the connection between the metaphorical and literal wounds, Ovid again allows Dido a point of view that only the narrator or reader of Vergil's text can possess. Yet by allowing Dido the position of a reader whose literal interpretations emphasize the pathos in the narrative, and by frequently making the implicit explicit, *Heroides* 7 effectively deflates the metaphorical quality of Vergil's language.

Ovid's Dido, through her cynical interrogation of Aeneas and Vergil's *Aeneid*, expresses that which remains unexpressed in the *Aeneid*. Her attempts to impose closure on Vergil's narrative, which culminate in her epitaph as a statement of cause and blame, elucidate the complexity and ambivalence of Vergil's representation of character and event in the *Aeneid*. Her point of view

as female narrator/reader dramatizes the interpretive relationship between gender and reading, since her skepticism specifically exposes contradictions between Aeneas' representation of himself as dutiful and heroic and his treatment of Creusa and herself. Her exposure of the interpretive blindness of Vergil's Dido implicitly represents the dangers of uncritical acceptance of character and narrative, especially for a female character in epic and, perhaps by implication, the female reader of epic.[21]

At a critical moment in Vergil's *Aeneid* 4, when Mercury appears to Aeneas to command his departure, he authoritatively tells Aeneas: *uarium et mutabile semper/ femina* (4.569-70). Though such an antifeminist statement may not be a normative assertion for the entire text of the *Aeneid*, this pithy construction of a specific definition of *femina* casts a long shadow over the *Aeneid*: much of the chaos and instability in the cosmos as well as in society is attributed to the feminine. Ovid's *Heroides* 7 depends on a discernibly different concept of *femina*, a construction of woman that assumes her literal relationship to language and meaning. For Dido, this results in a sort of practical skepticism in the face of abstract imperial values and the poetic shape they take in Vergil's narrative.

The elegiac context of *Heroides* 7 emphasizes the pathos of Dido's lament detached from the narrative context of the *Aeneid*. Dido's skeptical questioning of the imperial values represented by Vergil's text actually illustrates many of the problems of meaning, interpretation, and understanding shared by the characters and readers of Vergil's *Aeneid*. When Dido reads Vergil she encounters a problematic representation of epic deeds and values never quite fully understood by any of the characters within the text. From outside the text, as reader rather than character, she is able to question both deeds and values, though her questions themselves—in spite of her attempts to produce closure—ultimately tend to emphasize rather than resolve the difficult issues of causality and meaning in Vergil's narrative. In this respect, Ovid's Dido allows him to construct a gender-specific vantage from which to explore the ambivalences of Vergil's text.

Dido's reading of Vergil, however, focuses attention on Vergil's Dido rather than on the central character of Vergil's text—Aeneas—and thereby distorts the emphasis on Aeneas and destiny found in Vergil's text. Though this should hardly be surprising in the *Heroides*—a collection of epistles which give voice to female characters—the character of Dido has historically claimed considerably more attention than her role in the *Aeneid* would appear to warrant. In this respect, Ovid's *Heroides* 7 appears to be representative of readers' responses to the *Aeneid* as well as being an influential reading of the *Aeneid* which has encouraged such responses: the youthful Augustine, for instance, found himself captivated by Dido when he read the *Aeneid*, describing himself *flente Didonis mortem, quae fiebat amando Aenean* (*Confessions* 1.13).

NOTES

1. I have used the following editions: J. D. Duff, *D. Iunii Iuuenalis Saturae XIV* (Cambridge 1966); W. S. Anderson, ed., *Metamorphoses* (Leipzig 1982); S. G. Owen, *Tristivm Libri Qvinqve* (Oxford 1978); H. Dörrie, ed., *Epistulae Heroidum* (Berlin 1971); R. A. B. Mynors, ed., P. *Vergili Maronis, Opera* (Oxford 1969). Translations for the *Aeneid* are from Robert Fitzgerald, *The Aeneid* (New York 1981). All other translations are my own.

2. Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York 1985) 128.

3. For an excellent discussion of the politics of gender in the *Aeneid*, see Paul Allen Miller, "Sive Deae Seu Sint Dirae Obscenaeque Volucres," *Arethusa* 22 (1989) 47-79, and Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca 1989) 92-149. For a discussion of the Roman construction of gender, see Judith P. Hallett, "Women as *Same* and *Other* in Classical Roman Elite," *Helios* 16 (1989) 59-78.

4. Warren Ginsburg, "Ovid and the Problem of Gender," *Mediaevalia* 13 (1989) 9-29; Ginsburg discusses how "Ovid considers gender within the context of the power of language to create new definitions for newly formed objects" (11).

5. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York 1990) 6. As Hallet (above, note 3, 65) notes, "Such Latin love poets as Catullus and Propertius . . . clearly draw on female models for their literary identities." Ovid's interest in gender is not quite the same as Catullus' or Propertius' use of gender to expresses amatory points of view. Ovid, however, continually invokes gender as a category throughout his poetry.

6. Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York 1989) 35.

7. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison 1989) 30. For a general discussion of gender as performance, see Butler (above, note 5).

8. For the concept of "anxiety of influence," see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York 1973). Brooks Otis succinctly expresses one critical position on the *Metamorphoses*: "Virgil is turned inside out and this is true whether we consider the indirect parody of the *Perseus*, the direct parody of the *Orpheus* and *Achaemenides* or the truly comic ellipses of the later 'summaries' of the *Aeneid*": *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge 1970) 351. Indeed, many modern scholars introduce their discussions of Ovid with reference to the opinion, "Ovid's poetry directly opposes Vergil's": John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven 1979) 17. See also Leo C. Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the *Metamorphoses*," *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 213-41. However, not all scholars look sympathetically on Ovid's treatment of Vergil's *Aeneid*: "In this poem we hear not simply Dido struggling with Aeneas, but Ovid waging war against Vergil; and he is doomed to defeat from the start because of his incapacity and unwillingness to appreciate the Vergilian position": Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton 1974) 90. For recent studies of *Heroides* 7 see Alain Michel, "Rhétorique et poésie dans le maniérisme des Héroïdes: Didon chez Ovide," in *Acta Conventus Omnium Gentium Ovidianis Studiis Fovendis*, ed. N. Barbu, E. Doboriu, and M. Nasta (Bucharest 1976) 443-50; W. S. Anderson, "The Heroides," in *Ovid*, ed. J. W. Binns (London 1973); D. W. T. Vessey, "Humor and Humanity in Ovid's *Heroides*," *Arethusa* 9 (1976) 91-111; Joachim Adamietz, "Zu Ovids Dido-Brief," *Wurzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 10 (1984) 121-34.

9. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith describes the epigrammatist's manner: "To epigrammatize an experience is to strip it down, to cut away irrelevance, to eliminate local, specific and descriptive detail, to reduce it and to fix it in its most permanent and stable aspect, to sew it up for eternity": *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago 1968) 208. Ovid elsewhere presents epigrammatic summaries of his own version of *Aeneid* 4 (*Heroides* 7); see *AA* 3.39-40, *Amores* 2.18.25, and *Fasti* 3.545-50.

10. As Eleanor Winsor Leach argues, "In the *Heroides*, the past time of mythology is more specifically grounded in literature than it is in either of the other books . . . [T]he *Heroides* use their elegiac context to reopen questions of the literary incarnations of myth . . . [I]n re-interpreting their own histories, the heroines allude to events that have happened to them in other works by other authors": *A Study in the Sources and Rhetoric of Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and Ovid's Heroides* (Diss. Yale 1963); and Florence Verducci characterizes the relationship between the *Heroides* and earlier texts: "The words of most of Ovid's heroines exercise a calculated challenge, by way of parody, to an earlier literary prototype": *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart: Epistulae Heroidum* (Princeton 1985) 82.

11. There exist a number of texts in the Latin tradition written from Dido's point of view, from the early (fourth- century) *Epistula Didonis ad Aeneam* (4.271-77 Bachrens; see Gianniana Solimano, *Epistula Didonis ad Aeneam: Introduzione, Testo, traduzione e commento* [Genoa 1988]), to the two *planctus* expressing Dido's point of view in the *Carmina Burana* (ed. Raby, *Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*, #235, "O decus, O Libyae," and #236, "Anna soror ut quid mori"). Vernacular poets and writers testify to a long-standing fascination with the character of Dido in Western culture, especially evident in the anonymous *Roman d'Eneas* (1140), Chaucer's *House of Fame* and *Legend of Dido*, and Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. In addition, Dido often appears in *exempla* throughout the Middle Ages. See Jean de Meun, *Roman de la Rose* (vv. 13144–78); Guillaume de Machaut, *Jugement dou Roy de Navarre* (vv. 2095-132); Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, 1.46.1-3 and 2.55.1; and John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* 4.77-142. On the medieval Dido, see my forthcoming study *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis); for the Renaissance Dido see Don Cameron Allen, "Marlowe's *Dido* and the Tradition," in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig* (Columbia 1962) 55-68; Adrianne Roberts-Baytop, *Dido Queen of Infinite Literary Variety: The English Renaissance Borrowings and Influences* (Salsburg 1974); and Barbara Bono, *Literary Transvaluation. From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (Berkeley 1984).

12. Significantly, Vergil's Dido has one lucid, prophetic moment in her ultimate recognition of the inevitability of Aeneas' departure when her final curse predicts the Carthaginian Wars and the conflicts to come between North Africa and Italy. Not only does she foretell the rise of Hannibal (625) when she prophesies an avenger in her name, but she gives an ideological interpretation to the geographical placement of Carthage and Rome in her assertion that the two peoples be forever *litora litoribus contraria* (4.628). Her curse, of course, is recognized by Vergil's audience as part of their collective history: the fulfillment of the Roman ideal, prophesied in books 1, 6, and 8, would involve a long and bitter struggle with North Africa and the eventual destruction of Carthage. In spite of the narrator's focus on her ignorance, Dido's prophetic curse implicates her more directly in the telescopic sweep of Roman history than any of her other actions in *Aeneid* 4. Likewise, Dido's identification with Carthage throughout its centuries of struggles with Rome makes her a vivid reminder that the narrative of Roman history was not a seamless myth of uncontested development and expansion; indeed, though Carthage no longer represented a threat to Augustan Rome, Cleopatra's recent challenge would give a powerful resonance to Vergil's phrase *litora litoribus contraria*. Such juxtaposition of Dido's momentarily accurate curse against her ignorance of fate is emblematic of the complex and troubling representation of fate and character in Vergil's *Aeneid*.

13. A consideration of Ovid's Dido and Vergil's Dido as "readers" illustrates several important aspects of gender and reading that are currently the topic of much theoretical discussion. See, for example, Judith Fetterley's hypothesis concerning the "*immasculation* of women by men. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny": *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington 1978) xx. Compared to Vergil's Dido, Ovid's Dido in many ways illustrates Fetterley's definition of the resisting reader: "to become a resisting rather than assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted . . ." (xxii). Though Ovid's Dido—a female literary figure created by a male poet—does not resist enough to exorcize Aeneas, she does elucidate the dangers Dido faces in the *Aeneid* due to her "assenting" rather than resisting role as reader. For an applicaton of Fetterley's concept of the resisting reader to a classical Latin text, see Ronnie Ancona, "The Subterfuge of Reason: Horace, *Odes* 1.23 and the Construction of Male Desire," *Helios* 16 (1989) 49-57. For a general discussion of the current theoretical interest in gender and reading, see Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart, *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, Contexts* (Baltimore 1986). On the theoretical issues concerning gender and reading in Ovid, see *Helios* 17 (1990); in particular, see the articles by Mary-Kay Gamel, "Reading 'Reality,'" 171-74; Amy Richlin, "Hijacking the Palladion," 175-86; Judith P. Hallett, "Contextualizing the Text: The Journey to Ovid," 187-196; and Leslie Cahoon, "Let the Muse Sing On: Poetry, Criticism, Feminism, and the Case of Ovid," 197- 212. See also Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983) 321-47, whose title I have adapted for this article. Froula's article, which includes a valuable discussion of canonical authority in relation to "sacred" literary texts, suggests that "we can, through strategies of rereading that expose the deeper structures of authority

and through interplay with texts of a different stamp, pursue a kind of collective psychoanalysis, transforming 'bogeys' that hide invisible power into investments both visible and alterable" (343).

14. W. S. Anderson effectively describes the rhetoric of Vergil's Dido: "Whatever she says, he has circumscribed it with his narrative frame, and no audience should . . . surrender its objectivity and view the epic situation as Virgil's Dido does": "The Heroides" (above, note 8) 54. By contrast, he describes Ovid's Dido: "Ovid abstracts his Dido from that total drama, and freezes her in a single moment" (54).

15. As Verducci (above, note 10, 16) describes the rhetorical basis of the *Heroides*: "The epistle can combine, often in radical tension, the privacy of the interior monologue and the publicity of would-be persuasion. This combination simultaneously encourages rhetorical and expressive motives." For a consideration of the rhetorical conventions exploited in *Heroides* 7, see Nicholas P. Gross, "Rhetorical Wit and Amatory Persuasion in Ovid," *CJ* 74 (1979) 305-18. Gross proposes that *Heroides* 7, while not simply versified *suasoria* (note on p. 309) demonstrates Ovid's attempt to "undermine the traditional rhetoric of heroic speech" (314); see also Michel (above, note 8).

16. On the implications of Aeneas' treatment of Creusa, see Christine G. Perkell, "On Creusa, Dido, and the Quality of Victory in Virgil's *Aeneid*," in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Helene P. Foley (New York 1981) 355-77. Regarding 2.741-43, Perkell notes: "In this critical moment Aeneas plans effectively for his father, son, and household gods but not for his wife. May we infer that he is more concerned for them than for her?" (360).

17. For an impressionistic and feminist response, see Rachel Blau Du Plessis, "For the Etruscans," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York 1985) 271-91.

18. As W. R. Johnson notes concerning this scene: "I doubt that we can tell what is going on here precisely. All we know is that a real wedding is pictured; that the bride and the groom cannot see what we can see; and, finally, that the image of the wedding which we have just witnessed is obliterated": *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid* (Berkeley 1976) 163 n. 42.

19. Perkell (above, note 16) 370.

20. Besides the passages I have discussed, see, for example, *Aeneid* 4.4-5, and *Heroides* 7.25b-26; *Aeneid* 4.366-67 and *Heroides* 7.37-38; *Aeneid* 4.373–74 and *Heroides* 7.89-90; *Aeneid* 4.433-34 and *Heroides* 7.180-82; *Aeneid* 4.504-07 and *Heroides* 7.101-02. For a careful comparison of the two texts, see the commentary by A. Palmer, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Heroides* (Oxford 1898); see also J. N. Anderson, *On the Sources of Ovid's Heroides, I, III, VII, X, XII* (Berlin 1896).

21. As Christine Froula puts it, "For the literary daughter— the woman reader/writer as daughter of her culture—the metaphysical violence against women inscribed in the literary tradition . . . has serious consequences. Metaphysically, the woman reader of a literary tradition that inscribes violence against women is an abused daughter. Like physical abuse, literary violence against women works to privilege the cultural father's voice and story over those of women, the cultural daughters, and indeed to silence women's voices": "The Daugher's Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History," in *Feminist Theory in Practice and Process*, ed. M. Malson et al. (Chicago 1986) 151.

Helios, vol. 20 no. 1, 1993

OVID'S LITTLE *AENEID* AND THE THEMATIC INTEGRITY OF THE *METAMORPHOSES*

Garth Tissol

ταράσσει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οὐ τὰ πράγματα, ἀλλὰ τὰ περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων δόγματα.

"Things do not give people trouble, but ideas about things." (Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 5)

In all his works, and especially in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid persistently recalls the *Aeneid* to his readers' minds. Sometimes he adapts specifically Vergilian themes such as *pietas* and *antiqua virtus*, often in humorously paradoxical contexts; sometimes he alludes to specific passages; very often, in his basic diction and modes of expression, he produces less specifically localized echoes of the *Aeneid*, which keep forcing it upon our notice.[1] Those features of the writer's craft, such as versification, in which the *Aeneid*'s influence could scarcely have been avoided, do not account for its prominence in the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid goes well beyond the unavoidable; he even includes a remarkably distorted version of Vergil's plot in books 13-14, reducing most of it to summary as a frame for largely unrelated tales. Thus he invites comparison more explicitly than do any of the later writers of Latin epic, who all wrote for audiences steeped in the *Aeneid*, for none of them undertook to rework its specific subject-matter. By an odd paradox, most critics of the *Metamorphoses* feel called upon to compare it to the *Aeneid*, attributing significance of some sort to the comparison, yet find little of interest in Ovid's re-fabricated *Aeneid*. Fränkel goes so far as to suggest that Ovid should have quit after book 11; for him, the later books of the *Metamorphoses* show Ovid striving unsuccessfully to achieve epic sublimity along the lines of Homer and Vergil.[2] Galinsky, in the most extreme interpretation of these books, takes the opposite view of Ovid's purposes. On the subject of Aeneas, Galinsky remarks, "Ovid simply tells this story, as he tells all others, in other ways than did some of his predecessors."[3] According to this view, Ovid aimed—here as elsewhere—at nothing more than superficial innovation. This simple achievement, not surprisingly, appears much diminished in comparison to the works of Ovid's epic predecessors, which by contrast possess meaningful content. In Vergil, for example, "it is the meaning of events that matters, not the events themselves"; the "events themselves" are, according to Galinsky, all we get in Ovid, whose choice of metamorphosis as a theme "intrinsically leads to a neglect of moral and metaphysical questions."[4]

It is worth emphasizing that Ovid does empty the story of Aeneas of its Vergilian themes, but only to replace them with others. Ovid chooses to rework the subject-matter of books 3 and 6 primarily, the prophetic books, in which the *Aeneid* becomes most explicitly a providential history. In Ovid's version, the hand of providence is conspicuously lacking, as is any connection between plot and cosmic order, such as one comes to expect from Vergil. In its place Ovid