to show there can exist a measure of common response among sensitive readers of Latin poetry today, sufficiently substantial to make discussion profitable. By discussion recognition of what we all sense can be elicited and stated for agreement. Through discussion, since readers are not (fortunately) uniformly responsive, it should be possible for one reader to learn occasionally from another. In the last resort, taste rightly still decides.

2

Virgil's Tragic Queen

THE fourth book of Virgil's *Aeneid* is mainly Dido. She speaks one hundred and eighty-eight of the seven hundred and five lines—more than a quarter of the book. Between her return at line 296 to accuse Aeneas of running away and her death at line 692, her words form nearly half the text. She is usually considered Virgil's greatest character; the only character created by a Roman poet, Richard Heinze said, to pass into world literature.[1] She is regarded, indeed, by many as more successful than the poem's hero. Aeneas gets a thin time of it from his critics, not only for the pathetic figure he seems to them to cut in Book IV, but for his whole performance in the poem. The majority, as Professor Perret has shrewdly pointed out,[2] conceive their ideal epic hero in shallow terms: a strip-cartoon superman, assailing with equanimity and mastering without effort the perils that beset him, as untouched by moral anguish as by lethal weapon. These are the standards they unconsciously impose. Equally, they expect an ideal lover, cast in the same mould, his passion always the servant of his chivalry. Aeneas, they feel, hardly meets the case.

But Dido causes the critics no such misgivings. Many,

[1] Heinze *V.E.T.*, p. 133:
. . . die einzige von einem römischen Dichter geschaffene Figur . . ., die in die Weltliteratur übergehen sollte.

[2] J. Perret, *Virgile l'homme et l'oeuvre* (1952). His brief delineation of the character of Aeneas (pp. 133–40) is penetrating and convincing. For a sensible defence of Aeneas as 'a developing character, . . . who grows greater as his responsibilities grow', see D. R. Dudley, 'A plea for Aeneas', *G.R.*, viii, No. 1 (1961), pp. 52–60.

however, feel compelled to add to their praise of Virgil's heroine their opinion that success came to Virgil by accident. The common view is often held to be neatly summed up in a phrase used by John Conington in the introduction to his edition of Virgil a hundred years ago. In Dido, said Conington, Virgil

> has struck the chord of modern passion, and powerfully has it responded; more powerfully, perhaps, than the minstrel himself expected.[1]

So much of what passes for literary criticism in classics belongs to a kind of patchwork quilt. On it are stitched together the eye-catching pronouncements of scholars and critics whose eminence is taken to compel assent. What Coleridge said about Lucretius;[2] what Housman, or Wilamowitz, or Goethe said about Horace;[3] every classical poet has received his due, and the old aphorisms continue to pass for fresh criticism, their context seldom checked. Yet we should remember the nature of patchwork quilts. They are serviceable, comfortable and warm, evocative of pleasant reminiscences of past days. The patches, however, seldom harmonize, and if we could see rather more of the materials from which the scraps have been salvaged to serve a fresh turn, the stuff might often seem now oddly old-fashioned and perhaps produce a different impression altogether from the one it produces on the quilt; or at any rate one less striking.

When we lift his words from their context, as the slightly flamboyant prose of Oxford's first Corpus Professor of Latin tempts critics to do, it is easy to read more into them than was intended. Remembering Conington grew up when Romantic poetry and criticism reigned supreme (he was ten years old when Coleridge died), we might suppose he had at the back of his mind the conviction that modern (i.e., nineteenth-century)

[1] J. Conington, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (vol. ii, 2nd edn. 1863, p. 13).

[2] Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs, iv (1959), p. 574:

> Whatever in Lucretius is poetry is not philosophical, whatever is philosophical is not poetry.

The remark is thrown out in passing by Coleridge in a letter to Wordsworth on 30 May 1815 while discussing a proposed philosophical poem by Wordsworth, 'The Recluse'.

[3] See Chapter 1.

sensibility far surpassed that of the ancient world; and that, as a consequence, Dido appealed to the modern reader to an extent Virgil could not foresee. In fact, Conington's intention seems to have been to point to a clash, which he thought constant in the *Aeneid*, between the conventions of Homeric epic and what he called 'the poet's modern spirit'. In Dido, he maintained, Virgil inadvertently conceded too much to the modern spirit.

But the idea that Dido had somehow got out of hand caught on, and Conington's dictum was used to set the seal of authority upon it.[1] It seemed to the later English Romantic critics, who rated Virgil highly (one thinks of Tennyson), an attractive explanation for the conflict they felt between Virgil's presumed intention to cast Dido in a secondary role and what seemed to them her manifest domination of the book. The case is strongest put by J. W. Mackail, the last of Virgil's great Romantic critics, writing as recently as 1930:

> . . . art proved greater than the artist; and his human sympathy . . . swept him away irresistibly.[2]

('Irresistibily' because Aeneas is thrust into a role that cannot

[1] Conington's words are quoted, e.g., by Sir Paul Harvey, *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (1937), *s.v. Aeneid*, in support of his own judgment:

> It is perhaps unintentionally that the poet so powerfully enlists our sympathy for Dido.

Pease quotes an impressive list of authorities for the opinion (which he himself rejects, p. 38ff.) 'that her cause so gained with him [Virgil] the upper hand as to endanger the purpose and unity of the whole poem' (p. 8). A vigorous rebuttal of the common view is attempted by Austin, p. xiii: 'Virgil,' he maintains, 'planned the book on clear firm lines.' Dido is shown plainly as 'a temptress of the flesh, dominated by passion'. Austin's quotation of L. C. Knights on *Antony and Cleopatra* in *Scrutiny*, 1949, p. 322 ('It is one of the signs of a great writer that he can *afford* to evoke sympathy or even admiration for what, in his final judgment, is discarded or condemned') seems to me most just, though he does not reconcile Knights' notion of passing sympathy finally rejected with his own view of Dido, that in the end 'we remember nothing but her nobility'. His short Introduction does not allow space, however, for supporting the assertions made about Dido's character by argument. In his commentary Austin seems to me to miss Virgil's intentions at a number of crucial points, e.g., the '*odi et amo*' note of Dido's fourth speech, lines 416–36, and the significance therefore of the concluding lines of that speech (see my discussion of this speech).

[2] Mackail, p. lxvii. Cf. his Introductory Note to Book IV:

> Yet we may feel that in this episode the lure of his art has carried the artist further than he intended.

be defended: 'defence of Aeneas is impossible . . .'.) It is important to understand Mackail means to praise Virgil: quality of inspiration meant more to him than quality of structure. For the later Romantic critics, as Mr. F. W. Bateson has put it, 'ideally a poem wrote itself'.[1] They believed poetry *should* get out of hand: inspiration, which alone counted, should take over from the poet, to produce things different from what the poet had planned, and greater than he could have conceived unaided.

We need not, of course, reject the possibility that the character of Dido came to fascinate Virgil so much that he was led beyond what he had originally planned in laying out his poem. It is an attractive hypothesis, but we should not let it draw us into speculating about what the poet might have written, instead of looking at what he wrote. The common view, however, implies more than this. It is argued that Dido by getting out of hand did serious damage to the poem Virgil actually wrote. The damage done is said to be of two kinds. First, her final heroism in the planning and execution of her suicide is said to involve Virgil in inconsistencies in his development of Dido's character. Second, Dido, in rising out of control to these heights of moral nobility, is said to damage Aeneas, the proper hero of the poem, by the role she forces Virgil to assign him. Here are strictures which, if justified, must materially affect our appreciation of the book. They constitute a criticism of its artistic success that must be looked into with care.

Dido's is the story of a woman who died for love. She kills herself, indeed, in a strangely horrible and spectacular form of carefully premeditated suicide. The concluding scenes of the drama of her death are pervaded by a sublimity of tone and a sense of tragic inevitability that provide the reader in abundance with all that most readers require of the tragic experience. Their success conceals in fact from most a question all should ask—because upon our answer our judgment of the structure of the whole book depends. The question is: *Why does Dido die?*

Let us look for a moment at the text. At line 504 a passage begins, describing in some detail the scene that remains the

[1] F. W. Bateson, *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (1950), p. 48.

dominant one in our minds during the final act of the three into which Virgil has divided his narrative:

> at regina, pyra penetrali in sede sub auras
> erecta ingenti taedis atque ilice secta,
> intenditque locum sertis et fronde coronat
> funerea; super exuuias ensemque relictum
> effigiemque toro locat haud ignara futuri.

> *But the queen in an inner fastness of the palace rears*
> *a great pyre skywards of pine brands and hewn ilex-oak;*
> *decks the place with garlands, crowns pyre with foliage*
> *of death; on it places the sword and harness he had*
> *left, and him in effigy, not in doubt of what will be.*

From here to the end of the book no normal reader feels impelled to ask why Dido is killing herself, because the detail of what is happening absorbs his attention. And at the end of the book, moved (as readers from St. Augustine onwards confess they have been moved) by the evident quality of the last two hundred lines and their almost irresistible power over him, the normal reader may not immediately question the plausibility of the events just enacted in his mind.

Yet the question *Why does Dido die?* is clearly a relevant and important question. Not all women deserted by their lovers commit suicide. Few of those who do, kill themselves in so spectacular a fashion. Did Virgil perhaps make a mistake when he decided to keep Dido's suicide upon the funeral pyre as the climax of his story, after introducing quite different circumstances from those which traditionally led up to it? (In older versions of the story, in which Aeneas does not figure, Dido kills herself to avoid marrying Iarbas.) The commentators have little to offer that can be called a convincing, or even an adequate, answer to our question. They seldom attempt to look for the pattern of events and situations which, in the poet's fiction, should act upon his characters; or ask themselves whether those events and situations so act upon Dido as to lead her, convincingly and inextricably, to an end to which events and situations like these could lead a woman like the Dido Virgil draws.

The commentators are too obsessed with looking for the single tragic error of Aristotle. They claim to find it in Dido's oath to her dead husband not to remarry, and her respect for her oath. The approach is too mechanical. If you want a single tragic error, it lies (as we shall see) in Dido's assumption that Aeneas shared the view she took of their liaison. This is not of course an error we find her acknowledging, as she is not fully aware of it; but it is the main single factor that releases the chain of events leading to her death. It only leads there, however, because Dido is the person Virgil makes her. But this is anticipating.

If *Aeneid* iv were a poem about Dido's death and nothing else, we could afford to ignore such reflections perhaps, regarding them as questioning things that are not an integral part of the poem. It is perfectly possible to write a fine and moving poem about a situation that is artificially contrived. The plausibility of the events leading to the situation in which Hamlet finds himself at the beginning of Shakespeare's play hardly concerns us because those events are not an integral part of the play, but constitute merely a preliminary hypothesis which the poet asks us to accept in order to proceed with his drama.

But in *Aeneid* iv the suicide of Dido is only the final episode of a series of episodes, all of which are part of the poem. It is, in fact, but the third of the three sections into which Virgil has divided his book. He takes some trouble, moreover, to make it clear where each section starts, by beginning each with the same two-word formula, *at regina*, which serves almost as a stage direction, marking the queen's entry. The book opens with *at regina*. The same words bring us back to Dido again at line 296 after a long sequence of scenes in which she does not figure. And they introduce her a third time at line 504, for the sequence of scenes that leads to her suicide.

Virgil spends in fact some five hundred lines leading up to the final two hundred. The moment we realize this, it is clear the question *Why does Dido die?* must indeed form part of our assessment of the book. How far is her death due to tragic inevitability of circumstances, and how far to excesses, clearly pointed to by the poet, in Dido's character? For we have agreed that her action in taking her life is not reasonable, or at any rate not usual; and the poem, we must now agree, purports to

relate the events that led up to her suicide. Does *Aeneid* iv, in a word, provide the reasons for tragedy as well as the tragic spectacle?[1]

If we find reasons given or suggested and if they are plausible ones, the charge against Virgil that he let his character get out of hand loses much of its force. At best then the charge deals with things that may have influenced the architecture of the book; it does not call in question the quality or the harmony of its design, as built. And if, as we may already suspect, the reasons why Dido took her life are more complex than concentration on the final spectacle caused us to suppose, and if they impute to her a share in the responsibility for the tragedy; then perhaps Virgil has not after all allowed his sympathy for his heroine to blacken his hero beyond defence.

In this chapter we must concentrate on Dido; but we may permit ourselves the passing reflection that those who think ill of Aeneas for deserting Dido are often the same people who think ill of Mark Antony (the historical character) for not deserting Cleopatra. This is not a sophistical rejoinder. We cannot doubt Virgil intended his readers to have at the back of their minds the historical parallel his fiction foreshadowed. As Perret has pointed out, pre-historic legend and the Augustan age (and the historical pageant that linked the two) keep blending into one another throughout the poem.[2]

But Book IV is Dido's book, and our first task must be to understand Virgil's tragic queen. A word however, before we turn to the text, about the formal lay-out. We shall find it convenient to use the terminology of drama; but we must bear in mind that *Aeneid* iv is not a play. It remains in many respects epic poetry. The action of epic, for example, changes in tempo more easily than in a play because the whole is spread, normally, over a period of time considerably longer than the action a

[1] Heinze *V.E.T.*, p. 141, is forced to argue it does not. He finds Dido a shallow character and the events leading up to her death (the *Weg zum Tode*) exciting enough, because of Virgil's compact artistry, but lacking convincing motivation:

> . . . diese Kunst zwingt dem Leser unvermerkt das Gefühl der Notwendigkeit des tragischen Schlusses auf, wie es bei andern grossen Dichtern aus den Voraussetzungen eines tief angelegten und individuell gezeichneten Charakters herauswächst.

[2] See Pease, pp. 24–8, for the similarities between Dido and Cleopatra.

classical tragedy embraces.[1] Epic possesses, moreover, narrative resources tragedy must do without. The poet is enabled to use his authority as narrator to put beyond doubt factors in his plot that might remain doubtful if left to emerge from dialogue. He must use the device discreetly, of course, or he will make things too easy for the reader, and, by rendering alert attention to the dialogue unnecessary, surrender that active collaboration of the reader with the poet upon which all really successful writing depends. Virgil in fact intervenes as narrator at more than one important point in *Aeneid* iv. For example, in line 395 (at the end of the quarrel scene), to tell us what we might otherwise be unsure of, and what many inattentive readers doubt despite Virgil's precaution: that Aeneas is so deeply in love with Dido (*magno labefactus amore*) he almost goes back on his decision to depart.[2]

Nevertheless *Aeneid* iv comes closer to tragedy than any of the other books of the poem.[3] Partly because dialogue bulks so large, and is used to lay bare emotions of a complexity we associate more with classical tragedy than classical epic. Partly, too, because of the book's unusually dramatic structure. It falls, as we have seen, into what we may call three acts, each beginning with Queen Dido on stage.[4] Let us look briefly, before focusing our full attention on Dido, at the unfolding of the story in these three acts. At the beginning of the first, the extent to which she has fallen in love with the handsome adventurer, whose exploits have held her attention, as they have held ours, during Aeneas' recital of them in Books II and III, is rapidly and poignantly revealed. Within the first fifty lines Anna, her sister, has convinced Dido she should not resist her passion, and the two set out to elicit divine approval for what Dido is persuaded can be a *mariage de raison* as much as a *mariage de coeur*. But it is marriage she wants. After the scene of religious ritual (described by Virgil with his crisp relish for the grisly), we see Dido seeking Aeneas' company openly. By line 89 the action of

[1] The question is discussed in Chapter 8.

[2] We may, of course speculate whether Virgil succeeds in creating a character that convinces us, by his words and actions, that he is in love.

[3] The book's formal resemblances to tragedy are listed by Pease, pp. 9–11.

[4] A tripartite structure is found in other books too, e.g., II and XII. On II see R. S. Conway, 'The architecture of the epic', *Harvard Lectures on the Vergilian Age* (1928), p. 134.

the drama has been prepared for. It is precipitated by a pact between Juno and Venus, ending with the words '*Hic hymenaeus erit*' ('This will be their marriage') after a scene loaded with implications of trickery.[1]

The day of the hunt follows, culminating in the union of Dido and Aeneas in a cave, while a storm rages round them. The emotional climax of

> fulsere ignes et conscius aether
> conubiis, summoque ululârunt uertice Nymphae

> *A firmament flashing with fire was witness*
> *of their union, and wail of nymphs from mountain top*

is followed immediately by words that foreshadow disaster:

> ille dies primus leti primusque malorum
> causa fuit.

> *That day was first entered on an unhappy road that led to death.*

The reason for disaster is precisely stated:

> neque enim specie famaue mouetur
> nec iam furtiuum Dido meditatur amorem:
> coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.

[1] A word is perhaps necessary on the complex question of Virgil's divine machinery, if only in rebuttal of the curious opinion, occasionally put forward, that *Aeneid* iv is not a tragedy of character at all. E.g., H. E. Butler, *The Fourth Book of Virgil's Aeneid* (1935), p. 24:

> Dido . . . is the sport of circumstances, the victim of two designing goddesses, and the poet never seeks to evoke any emotion in our hearts save pity.

The usual (and to my mind most reasonable) view is that the gods serve as an externalized reflection of the natural tendencies of character; that 'divine actions . . . merely bring to a focus feelings already latent' (J. MacInnes, 'The conception of *fata* in the *Aeneid*', *C.R.*, xxiv [1910], p. 173; cf. Warde Fowler, *Death of Turnus* [1919], p. 110). The gods, in fact, provide a conventional supernatural source for all that seems (often to us, too) genuinely mysterious in life: accidents of circumstance, sudden and apparently irrational decisions, impulses and intuitions (cf. the two interventions of Mercury in *Aeneid* iv), inspired feats of courage and physical prowess, etc. We may have the feeling that destiny intervenes (the divine machinery serves, too, of course as a relevation of destiny to the reader), even that it plays tricks; but we should not have the feeling that it manipulates automata.

Unmoved by talk, or how things looked,
it is no clandestine love now that Dido has in mind:
she calls it marriage, cloaking with this word how she failed.[1]

Roman law in Virgil's day did not draw the sharp line we draw between people who are respectably married and people who are not. The old religious marriage had yielded much ground to marriage by common consent. In such a relationship the parties might regard themselves as entering on marriage from the outset; or what began as a liaison might develop into binding marriage after a transitional period, during which the parties might easily have different views or hopes. This is the background to the relationship of Dido and Aeneas.[2] After the cave episode, Dido's goal, respectable marriage, seems within her grasp.[3] She regards herself, not as embarking on a liaison to be kept secret (*nec . . . furtiuum . . . meditatur amorem*), but an effective marriage to be openly acknowledged. For the moment, though, we can imagine she is as anxious as he to avoid explicit discussion of intentions. She must wait till she feels Aeneas willing to sacrifice for her his mission to Italy. But 'she calls it marriage' (*coniugium uocat*). The word slips out, perhaps, in his presence; if it does, he lets it pass. Virgil leaves it all as vague as he wants us to imagine they did. The danger of a misunderstanding when neither wanted to risk a show-down over a word would have been apparent to Virgil's contemporary readers. The Aristotelian-minded can regard this, if they wish,

[1] With *coniugium uocat* compare line 431:

'non iam coniugium antiquum, quod prodidit, oro.'

As Mackail points out in his excellent note on line 19, where Dido herself uses the word, *culpa* means only 'failing' (surrender to passion) and does not imply either criminality or moral obliquity.

[2] For types of Roman consensual marriage, see P. E. Corbett, *The Roman Law of Marriage* (1930), pp. 85–96. For a consideration of their relevance to Dido, see C. Buscaroli, *Il libro di Didone* (1932), 'L'unione fatale', pp. 136–48, especially pp. 141–3, and the comment (in a review of Buscaroli) of A. Guillemin, *R.E.L.*, x (1932), p. 502. I don't mean, of course, that Virgil expects us to view the relationship of Dido and Aeneas in strict accordance with Roman laws of marriage. He does, however, expect his readers to interpret the heroic situation realistically, in terms of what might have happened at Rome.

[3] The symbolic ceremony in the cave scene emphasizes the significance of the cave episode for Dido. It symbolizes, too, of course the hand of destiny, indicating perhaps what we mean when we say of two people 'they were meant for one another'. Obviously no one would suppose an immediately binding religious marriage had taken place.

as Dido's tragic mistake: she failed to ensure her view of their relationship would be shared by Aeneas, hoping (until the quarrel scene) he shared it already. It was hardly a reasonable construction for a queen to put on their relationship, but we shall see Dido was not a reasonable woman.[1] The plot in a word turns upon a misunderstanding; one, however, that is not merely a tragic device, but, as well as that, a piece of acute psychological insight.

The next hundred lines offer a kind of relaxation in the action. We have a series of scenes (the flight of Fama to spread news of the liaison, the slightly comic episode of Iarbas, the briefing of Mercury), terminating with a bravura passage in the best Hellenistic traditions of pure poetry: Mercury, on his way to Carthage to admonish Aeneas, passes by Atlas, simultaneously described as the mountain and the living giant.[2] The main characters are off stage for only a hundred lines; but when they reappear (we come back first to Aeneas, at line 279), we renew contact with them feeling a lot has happened since we last saw them. Virgil has dextrously manipulated the resources of epic. He has relaxed the tension, but held our interest by three pieces of virtuoso writing. More important, it is with a feeling of time elapsed that we see Aeneas and Dido return. Virgil makes it easy to assume that Aeneas has in some measure compromised himself by acquiescing in Dido's evident view of their relationship. But, by avoiding direct narrative of the liaison, he avoids, too, explicit inculpation of Aeneas, allowing the assumptions we naturally make (as a result of our feeling that time has passed) to perform the work of direct narrative more economically, more discreetly, and, because the reader's collaboration is sustained, more poetically.

Aeneas' admonition by Mercury and his decision to depart from Carthage occupy fifteen quick-moving lines. He suddenly realizes, to rephrase it in naturalistic terms, that he is getting too deeply involved in something incompatible with his obligations to those under his command. The tempo of the narrative

[1] Pease's comment, p. 45, that Dido 'consistently exaggerated the closeness of her ties to Aeneas' shows how an able commentator can read his text attentively, and yet miss a vital point.

[2] The whole passage 238–61 is reminiscent of the mannered style of Catullus Poem 64. Even in detail: cf., e.g., the play on *Atlantis* in lines 247–8 with Catullus 64, 19–21. For a similar interlude of pure poetry, cf. *Aeneid* viii, 407–53, Vulcan in his forge.

is fastest here. In lines 289–94 Virgil resorts to a comparatively rare device: when Aeneas tells his men the reasons for departure, we are not given his actual speech, but a reported summary. Again Virgil's purpose is not only to speed the narrative, but to reduce to a minimum the evidence put on record against Aeneas. In particular Aeneas' responsibility for the disaster that is to come is underplayed. He promises his men to take the first favourable opportunity to tell the queen he is leaving—and then understandably procrastinates until it is too late. The soundness of Virgil's psychological insight is once more evident.

In fact Dido finds out they are going before Aeneas gets round to telling her. Act 2 begins with her confrontation of him. The quarrel scene—her first long speech, Aeneas' brief reply, her long rejoinder—occupies not quite a hundred lines (to line 387). It marks the end of their liaison, although again Virgil avoids underlining facts that must tell against Aeneas. But clearly we are to suppose that Dido and Aeneas have been living together, till the moment of the quarrel, in the royal *thalamus*. After the quarrel Aeneas takes up residence with his men at the harbour and preparations for departure become open and frantic (to line 415). Although the action moves so fast, we must not miss Virgil's explicit statement at line 395 that Aeneas is deeply in love with Dido. It does not occur to Dido that Aeneas could love her and still leave her. Their alienation, like their liaison, rests on a misunderstanding. He loves her, but she believes he despises her. It is against the background of these facts that we have to think of Aeneas in the great tree simile. Dido has been trying through Anna to get Aeneas to consent to a meeting with her. But though Anna tries repeatedly to arrange the interview, she cannot sway Aeneas:

> ac uelut annoso ualidam cum robore quercum
> Alpini Boreae nunc hinc nunc flatibus illinc
> eruere inter se certant; it stridor, et altae
> consternunt terram concusso stipite frondes;
> ipsa haeret scopulis et, quantum uertice ad auras
> aetherias, tantum radice in Tartara tendit:
> haud secus adsiduis hinc atque hinc uocibus heros
> tunditur, et magno persentit pectore curas;
> mens immota manet, lacrimae uoluuntur inanes.

> *Imagine an oak-tree, strong with years of growth:*
> *about it rage the Alpine blasts, now this way, now that,*
> *struggling to overthrow it; leaves from its howled-round*
> *top strew the ground and the tree's trunk shakes;*
> *but it holds fast to the rock, for its roots stretch*
> *as far Hellwards as its top does skywards into the air:*
> *just so the storm of words beats this way, that way, around*
> *Aeneas. His great heart feels the full impact of anguish.*
> *The mind remains unshaken. Ineffectual tears fall.*[1]

This brings us to line 450. Dido conceives her plan for death and gives Anna a version of it that conceals her real intentions. Her unnatural calm contrasts with the turmoil of her thoughts just after, as she lies awake on the eve of suicide. At line 552 Aeneas receives a second warning from Mercury—an intuition,

[1] Whose are the tears? Unless we are prepared to believe Virgil spoilt the coherence of his simile in its last three words, we must give the tears to Aeneas. Three things about the oak-tree are relevant to the comparison: (1) Its trunk is tossed around. (2) Its foliage falls to the ground. (3) Its roots are firm in rock. Obviously (3) corresponds to the *mens immota*: the innermost fastnesses of Aeneas' resolution are unshaken. The trunk of the tree (1), corresponds to Aeneas' *pectus*, tossed about by the emotional storm to which it is exposed. Aeneas is not an unfeeling brute: *persentit* shows this and we have already been told at line 395 that he loved Dido deeply. (There is a deliberate ambiguity involved in *magno pectore*, which is (*a*) visual—the great manly frame of Aeneas [compare Dido's remark at line 11, *quam forti pectore et armis!*] which we can think of as resembling the oak-tree's massive trunk; (*b*) it equals 'in his great heart', the abstract notion, reinforced by echoes of *magno animo*, etc.) When this is realized, it seems hard to doubt that the tears (as Rand suggested) correspond to the falling leaves—the only external sign of damage wrought by the stress imposed. See Viktor Pöschl, *Die Dichtkunst Virgils* (1950), pp. 76–80.

The tears can hardly be Dido's, as many (including Austin) have rather carelessly supposed. Aeneas and Dido are not together again after line 392, and Virgil would hardly ruin his image at its climax by asking us without warning to take in simultaneously an extraneous image of the absent Dido. Anna certainly cries. But are the tears of a minor character relevant at the climax? When Aeneas meets Dido in the underworld, it is he who cries (vi, 455).

A final word on *inanes*. If the tears were Anna's (or Dido's), *inanes* would mean 'ineffectual', i.e. unable to shift Aeneas. Used of Aeneas' tears, the word implies tears of frustration because Aeneas is not free to go against fate. Just as in *Aeneid* x, line 465, Hercules is unable to prevent the death of Pallas:

> audiit Alcides iuuenem magnumque sub imo
> corde premit gemitum lacrimasque effundit inanis.

It may seem to us to weaken the impressiveness of Aeneas' *mens immota* if Aeneas is acting under fate's compulsion. But this, I think, is not how Virgil looked at it. Aeneas is the good Stoic whose merit is the strength of will to place himself on the side of destiny, however much the passions pull in another direction.

if we prefer to think of it that way, that disaster will come if he does not sail at once. He departs hurriedly. As dawn rises on the departing fleet, Dido breaks into a passionate denunciation of Aeneas (lines 590–629). The death scene follows soon after. Dido dies in Anna's arms, and the book ends with a brief epilogue.

It is clear from an examination of the lay-out of the book that it is constructed around two main themes, the disintegration of the liaison and Dido's suicide. These form the second and third of the three acts and occupy about four hundred lines out of seven hundred. The events leading to the liaison and those determining its rupture are sketched in quickly and precisely in the first act, along with clear hints about the nature and progress of the liaison and Dido's view of it. Act 1 in terms of action therefore embraces much more than the other two. Its structure is also different: after opening dramatically, it proceeds more in narrative form, relieved by short speeches. It is in short more representative of the normal epic structure of the remainder of the poem.

In Acts 2 and 3 dialogue predominates. In them, nearly everything turns on the speeches. We notice how fast, and how much, the character of Dido develops from speech to speech. The speeches are, as it were, detailed reflections of successive states of mind. The mood of each is clear cut, the moods so different they justify Mercury's warning:

> 'uarium et mutabile semper
> femina.'
>
> *'A thing that changes, always different,*
> *that is woman.'*

Though the speeches are often preceded or followed by brief sketches of Dido's emotional state or appearance on the poet's own authority (stage directions, as it were), it is to the speeches themselves that we must look if we are to understand the character Virgil is creating and the portrait he gives of her emotional disintegration. It will help if we tabulate for reference the nine speeches Dido makes, the position they occupy in the text

and their length, rather as though they were the arias of an opera. Our tabulation will read like this:

Act 1

I: *'Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent! . . .'* (9–29; to Anna; 21 lines; there is an interval of 276 lines, mainly narrative, between Speech i and Speech ii).

Act 2

II: *'dissimulare etiam sperasti . . .'* (305–30; to Aeneas; 26 lines).

III: *'nec tibi diua parens . . .'* (365–87; to Aeneas; 23 lines; narrative interval between Speeches ii and iii: 35 lines).

IV: *'Anna, uides toto properari litore circum . . .'* (416–36; to Anna; 21 lines; narrative interval between Speeches iii and iv: 29 lines).

V: *'inueni, germana, uiam (gratare sorori) . . .'* (478–98; to Anna; 21 lines; narrative interval between Speeches iv and v: 42 lines).

Act 3

VI: *'en, quid ago? rursusne procos inrisa priores . . .'* (534–52; soliloquy; 19 lines; narrative interval between Speeches v and vi: 36 lines).

VII: *'pro Iuppiter! ibit . . .'* (590–629; soliloquy; 40 lines; narrative interval between Speeches vi and vii: 38 lines).

VIII: *'Annam, cara mihi nutrix, huc siste sororem . . .'* (634–40; to Barce; 7 lines; narrative interval between Speeches vii and viii: 5 lines).

IX: *'dulces exuuiae, dum fata deusque sinebat . . .'* (651–62; soliloquy; 12 lines; narrative interval between Speeches viii and ix: 11 lines).

Let us now consider these nine speeches. The book begins magnificently with eight lines tersely describing Dido's brooding passion. Her opening speech to Anna reveals a woman deeply in love, so emotionally tense she must talk to someone. Her exclamation

> 'quis nouus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes?' 10
>
> *'Who is this stranger with us now in the palace?'*

(note how the s's fix its tone in an urgent whisper) is a transparent excuse for talking, as the following line

'quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!' 11

'How confident he looks! What a chest on him, what shoulders!'

shows more clearly still. Dido is already starting to think of marriage to Aeneas, as indeed she might, for she is a widow. She has exceptional standards however: those of the Roman matron who aspired to the proud claim at her death that she died *uniuira*, one man's wife. To Dido any remarriage seems a dereliction of *pietas*, a 'failure' (*culpa*), an act of surrender to passion, hitherto rejected, now for the first time half entertained:

'huic uni forsan potui succumbere culpae!' 19

'For this man, no other, I might have come to fail, and yield!'

She wants Aeneas desperately and would like to find a way of convincing herself that remarriage can be justified. Virgil here uses the tragic device of the confidante with skill. Anna is not merely on stage to be told what the reader-audience must know. Nor is she really there to make up Dido's mind for her. Dido's mind *is* made up, unconsciously, and Anna is there to find for her the arguments from expediency that Dido's pride will not allow her to explore for herself. How great the tension is in Dido is shown by the way in which the passionate protestation of fidelity to her dead husband that bursts out after the ominous admission, *agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae*, is followed first by a desperate effort at calm statement,

'ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores 28
abstulit,'

'He who first joined me to him stands now
between me and love,'

and then by collapse into tears.

What may we expect of the woman Virgil draws in this opening speech? Much of her nature is clear. It will be natural for such a woman to find a way of yielding to passion. We may

expect she will allow herself to be convinced that remarriage *is* possible; and Anna soon convinces her. But—and again this is a type we know—hers is a scrupulousness that fixes on the letter, not the spirit. And in fact we shall soon see her (at the end of Act 1) ready to regard as assured marriage, and not mere surrender to passion, what no one else, least of all Aeneas, could seriously be expected to regard as certain to develop into marriage:

neque enim specie famaue mouetur 170
nec iam furtiuum Dido meditatur amorem:
coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.

Unmoved by talk, or how things looked,
it is no clandestine love now that Dido has in mind:
she calls it marriage, *cloaking with this word how she failed.*

Here is a woman who can easily accept private standards of her own rightness of conduct, and maintain them by flagrant self-deception. This is the character Virgil wants, and that is the person we feel Dido is after her first speech.

A character like this is more than usually prone to moral disintegration. Each speech now brings that disintegration closer. The Dido of the second speech is as remote from the conscience-stricken widow, tormented by love's renewal, of the first speech as she is from the transparently love-sick woman who a while ago resorts to any pretext that brings her lover to her side:

Iliacosque iterum demens audire labores 78
exposcit pendetque iterum narrantis ab ore;

and mad to hear a second time what Troy endured,
she demands the tale, hangs on his lips when he tells it;

or from the radiant queen, all golden, who sets out on the morning of the hunt, aware she will spend the day at her lover's side:

tandem progreditur magna stipante caterua 136
Sidoniam picto chlamydem circumdata limbo;
cui pharetra ex auro, crines nodantur in aurum,
aurea purpuream subnectit fibula uestem.

At last she emerges with her great entourage,
an embroidered Phoenician cloak thrown about her.
Her quiver is of gold, her hair is tied with gold,
a golden brooch clips up her bright red dress.

When Dido reappears at the beginning of Act 2, all that seems far away. Now she is reeling under the impact of the knowledge that Aeneas is leaving. Observe how the narrator has intervened to fix the tone of Dido's speech. When she learnt of Aeneas' plans to leave, she did not rush straight to him, as we might have expected if love for him were all she felt. Instead, she stormed through the city:

saeuit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem
bacchatur, qualis commotis excita sacris
Thyias . . .

Seething, aflame, at her wits' end, the city's width
and breadth she storms, like some Bacchante when she feels
the frenzied rites begin . . .

Her mood is not so much despair as anger: the angry thought 'he can't do this to me!'. At the moment the liaison begins to disintegrate, we have Dido's impetuous pride hinted at. It will become an important ingredient in the tragedy. For the moment it is underplayed.

In the speech that follows (Speech ii, '*dissimulare etiam sperasti . . .*') Virgil wants us on Dido's side. When it ends, she has gained a clear moral ascendancy. The angry opening sentence is followed by a reasoned appeal to pity. She keeps emotion under control, though her words make clear the effort it costs her. Even in the truly moving conclusion,

'saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset
ante fugam suboles, si quis mihi paruulus aula
luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret,
non equidem omnino capta ac deserta uiderer,'

'If at least I had had a child of you before
you ran away, a baby Aeneas playing in the
palace whose looks yet brought you back to me,
I'd not then feel a prisoner, utterly alone,'

pride adds dignity and restraint to her appeal. The strength of the speech comes partly from Dido's queenly bearing, partly from her confidence in her moral claim upon Aeneas (Virgil catches both in the superb *mene fugis?*). It is important to observe that a moral claim is all Dido feels she has. She takes it for granted that, if Aeneas is deserting her, it means he does not love her. But he should pity her, and he is (in her view) really under an obligation to her. She goes on to say, 'We're as good as married' (*per inceptos hymenaeos*, line 316), and thus assert her moral claim. It is perhaps the first open statement Aeneas has of Dido's view of their liaison, and that may contribute to the embarrassed reticence with which he takes up the point (*nec praetendi taedas*, lines 338–9) in his reply.

The appeal to pity carries with it the first hint of the course disaster will take:

'nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido?'

'Dido will die a cruel death: does not that hold you back?'

In part, Virgil gets in the threat of death by a kind of linguistic trick: the convention, embedded in words such as *pereo*, that violent unrequited love destroys its victim.[1] Virgil, however, has perhaps tried to extract too much from the device of dramatic irony in this line, by making it serve as well (at the outset of the disintegration of the liaison) as a hint that Dido will die in reality a cruel death.

Aeneas makes a brief rejoinder. He is in that common situation where a morally right decision cannot be made to appear more attractive by defending it. The less said the better. The speech serves, too, as an emotional contrast, Aeneas' quiet realistic dignity opposed to the sublime tragic dignity of Dido. Scorn has been heaped upon Aeneas for his inadequate defence, but his reticence appears to me dramatically convincing.[2] He is aware he cannot help matters now by talking, and he is aware, too, of his moral responsibility. He has procrastinated when he should have told Dido he was going. Worse, he has got out of

[1] See the discussion of Propertius ii, 27 in Chapter 7.

[2] Any commentary will provide or quote instances. Sound defence of Aeneas is harder to find. The best perhaps is T. S. Eliot's, in 'Virgil and the Christian World', *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), p. 129.

step with destiny—as he had done once before in Book II (an occasion treated more leniently by the commentators) when he plunged into useless fighting on the night of Troy's destruction, instead of heeding Hector and making the salvation of his people and their gods his first care.[1] Here is the real answer to the critics who protest that, by letting Dido get out of hand, Virgil damaged the hero of the poem. Virgil is too good a poet to pretend that Aeneas' conduct is beyond reproach, and his delineation of Aeneas is sensitive enough to show a hero aware of his share of blame. More than that, Virgil is prepared to have Aeneas misjudged, as in real life (Virgil wants us to think, perhaps, of some of the ugly decisions Augustus took in the civil war) courageous, unsentimental decisions are often misjudged. He even allows for this view of his hero within the poem, in the vivid opening scene of Book V: Aeneas standing silent watching the flames on the horizon which the reader, though not Aeneas, knows are the flames of Dido's funeral pyre, apart from his men, emotionally separate as well. For, though they do not know the rights and wrongs of the 'great love that was polluted', they silently judge their leader in their thoughts. One of the functions of Book V is to heal this alienation of commander from his men.

Virgil now contrives a dramatic *tour de force* which seems to me extraordinarily successful, and with it the rehabilitation of Aeneas begins. By the end of the first of the two speeches she makes in the quarrel scene, Dido has won our complete sympathy. That speech marks, however, the climax of Dido's moral ascendancy. From now on it is Virgil's purpose to detract from the stature of the character he permitted, temporarily, to play the role of heroine. In her second speech in the quarrel scene (Speech iii, '*nec tibi diua parens . . .*') Virgil makes Dido lose every trick. First of all her appearance (again the narrator intervenes): instead of anger just contained, anger blazing forth, eyes rolling. Yet nothing she says this time really tells. The words seldom seem to us to justify the mood. Most of the speech is taken up with filling out clichés: the first is the customary accusation that Aeneas is not the son of his father;[2] the second a statement of Dido's *benefacta* toward Aeneas. A self-

[1] See the discussion of this point in Chapter 8.

[2] Compare Priam's words to Pyrrhus, *Aeneid* ii, 540 (discussed in Chapter 8).

righteous note is introduced that helps to alienate us from Dido. She recovers, it is true, some of her stature with the curse with which she ends the speech, bitterly picking up Aeneas' '*Italiam non sponte sequor*' (line 361) with '*i, sequere Italiam uentis*' (line 381) and again with '*sequar atris ignibus absens*' (line 384). Then, before she can finish, she faints and is taken back to the *thalamus* from which she had emerged so happily at line 133.

Virgil is careful of course not to draw in this other aspect of Dido explicitly too soon. It is sufficient if we are left with the feeling that her second speech in the quarrel scene evokes our embarrassment more than our sympathy. This is the moment Virgil chooses for what he has till now withheld: a clear emphatic statement on the poet's own authority that Aeneas is in love with Dido. The reader's collaboration is dextrously exploited. Told earlier that Aeneas loved Dido, his reaction to the first half of the quarrel scene would have been mixed. He could not have sided with Dido as whole-heartedly as Virgil wished him to—at that stage. But told now that Aeneas really loves Dido, when the pendulum of his sympathy has begun to swing away from Dido, the reader feels the swing accelerate, noting with grudging approval Aeneas' restrained anguish[1] and reluctantly contrasting it with Dido's lack of self-control. And, when Dido is carried off-stage in a faint, Aeneas seeks *his* release from pent-up emotion in action, the comfort offered by the routine of a job to do: he goes to prepare the fleet for departure (line 396). It is the end of the liaison.

By the beginning of her next speech (Speech iv, '*Anna, uides toto properari litore circum . . .*'), Dido has already been brooding for some time and watching Aeneas' preparations for departure. The flaming anger of Speech iii has hardened into a dull bitterness, mixed with a residual attraction to Aeneas that she cannot shake off. It is a mood familiar to the reader of Roman love poetry, summed up tightest in Catullus' famous antithesis, *odi*

[1] The anguish is restrained, but not suppressed. We see him *multa gemens*. For the expression, cf. Aeneas in *Aeneid* i, 220–2, quietly grieving by himself for comrades he thinks he has lost in the storm:

> nunc Amyci casum gemit et crudelia secum
> fata Lyci, etc.

Observe, too, that Aeneas is called *pius* (line 393) to emphasize his feeling for Dido. It is the only occurrence of the formula *pius Aeneas* in Book IV.

et amo. We can imagine the effort it would cost Dido to plead with a man who, as she believes, does not love her; particularly after the curse of lines 384–7. We know, of course, Aeneas does love her, and the tragic irony goes a little way toward restoring our sympathy for Dido, but on a new basis: not as a woman pitilessly deserted, but as a woman piteously self-tormented. Using of herself the language appropriate to one who has been conquered by an enemy in battle (*uicta*, line 434), she now asks Anna to approach 'the enemy' with a request on behalf of the conquered. Her petition is not for love, which she no longer hopes for; not for marriage or that Aeneas should abandon his voyage to Italy (to remain as her unloving consort); but for 'a little time' (*tempus inane peto*, line 433). Line 431 shows how far she has retreated since line 316:

'non iam coniugium antiquum, quod prodidit, oro,' 431

'I plead not for what once was marriage, by him betrayed.'[1]

Her request needs a word of explanation. Though Dido hates Aeneas, she wants desperately to be with him, at any rate until she can compose herself to face death. The conflict in her feelings is resolved by a bitter irony of expression. 'Let him lend me a little of his time,' the speech ends, 'and I shall repay him with interest':

'extremam hanc oro ueniam (miserere sororis), 435
quam mihi cum dederit cumulatam morte remittam.'[2]

She regards Aeneas, not merely as causing, but as desiring her

[1] The close-packed ambiguity in this line needs considerable expansion in interpretation: (1) 'I do not ask him to restore the marriage that was ours till he betrayed it (*antiquum* = 'former', and *oro* = 'ask back'); (2) 'I do not ask for old-fashioned, honourable marriage—he was false to that ideal' (*antiquum* = 'old and honourable', and *oro* = 'plead to get') .The second is the generally acknowledged marriage she hoped Aeneas would consent to—sanctified perhaps by a religious ceremony. She has abandoned hope of that. The first is her version of their relationship before the quarrel. She no longer hopes even for a restoration of the *status quo*. For the first meaning of *antiquum*, see Austin, p. 131, for the second Mackail, p. 150. Professor Jackson Knight in his Penguin translation (*Virgil: The Aeneid* [1956], p. 110) attempts to bring out both: 'I do not now beg him to restore our honoured marriage as it was before he betrayed it.' But, put plainly in prose, the statement sounds too rational—and just not true; whereas the ambiguity of Virgil's line well represents Dido's emotional indignation and her failure to distinguish in her own mind between what she had actually lost and what she had only hoped to get.

[2] Nearly all editors reject the reading *dederis*, reported by Servius as an alternative to *dederit*.

unhappiness, and she will continue to believe this till the end. In her last speech of all she imagines Aeneas' satisfaction at the spectacle of her funeral pyre (line 661). (How he really feels then, Virgil tells us at the beginning of Book V, as we have seen.) All the same, she wants now to borrow back a little illusory happiness by being in his company. For this she is prepared to pay, not merely with renewed unhappiness when Aeneas finally goes, but with something she bitterly regards as likely to give Aeneas greater satisfaction and which she can only hint at in speaking to Anna—her death. The conclusion of her speech (especially line 436) has much puzzled the commentators, because it has not occurred to them that Virgil wants us to think of Dido as simultaneously hating Aeneas and desperately wanting his presence.

In this fourth speech, too, the plan to take her life begins to fall into shape. Her thoughts have naturally to be veiled in speaking to her sister. Indeed, the progress of Dido's thoughts towards a decision to take her own life needs careful examination, if we are to understand how her suicide is a consequence of her character. It began, as we have seen, with a fairly idly expressed cliché in her first speech in the quarrel scene:

'nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido?' 308

'Dido will die a cruel death: does not that hold you back?'

Then, in accordance with Virgil's conception of Dido as a noble woman made foolish by passion, the idea of a violent end steadily becomes an obsession. We have the cliché again near the end of the same speech:

'cui me moribundam deseris?' 323

'Whom do you leave me to, to die?'

By the end of the quarrel scene, the idea of death has already begun to embed itself:

'et, cum frigida mors anima seduxerit artus, 385
omnibus umbra locis adero.'

'And, when cold death subtracts my body from the living me, a ghost of me, omnipresent, will attend you.'

She has reached the point where she practically thinks of death as a way of getting her own back. There is still no indication of imminent suicide. Little more than the rhetorical gesture: 'I'll haunt you when I'm dead.'

However, by the time Dido reappears at line 416 for her speech to Anna, she *has* begun to think seriously of killing herself. Virgil emphasizes this by the words of comment with which he introduces Speech iv:

ne quid inexpertum frustra moritura relinquat. 415

lest she leave a way untried, and die in vain.

And the ominous ambiguity of her own words quickly reveals the way her mind is working:

'hunc ego si potui tantum sperare dolorem,
et perferre, soror, potero.' 420

'If I could bring myself to hope for this great passion,
then, sister, I'll bring myself to face it out.'

In line 419 *potui* has its common meaning of 'I brought myself' (to do something). There is a clear echo of the *potui* in line 19:

'huic uni forsan potui succumbere culpae.'

'For this man, no other, I might have come to fail, and yield.'

When Dido now says *'et perferre, soror, potero'*, for Anna this simply means 'and I'll endure it'. For Dido and us the same words have a grimmer note: they mean 'and I'll see it through to the end'—to the only conclusion there can be, death. Her decision is partly the outcome of despair and partly an hysterical gesture, in which two subconscious objectives may be discovered. The first is to keep an Aeneas who does not love her at Carthage by the threat of suicide if he leaves. The second a confused desire to 'punish' Aeneas, by imposing on him the responsibility for her death. They are the melodramatic thoughts of a woman made foolish by despair, who might say: 'It will serve him right if I kill myself.' With them, however, is introduced an aspect of

Dido's character that enables Virgil to reverse further her earlier moral ascendancy over Aeneas, by removing—temporarily—some of her tragic stature. A woman who behaves hysterically ceases to be truly tragic.

The structure of the action from now on needs to be looked at closely. What happens is that in a sense Dido's bluff is called. Somehow she had expected to influence Aeneas by talk of death; but Aeneas, though deeply moved, cannot abandon his decision to depart. In order, therefore, to maintain her belief in her own dignity (pride was, from the outset, an important element in her character), Dido is really forced to go ahead on the level of reality with a plan that had been embarked upon on an essentially rhetorical level.

The interesting thing is how the decision to take her life, once firmly entered upon, enables Virgil to restore to Dido the tragic stature he has so steadily taken from her. In different ways Dido and Aeneas are equally heroic in the end. Aeneas by reason of a resolute facing of realities. Dido by a resolute acting out, not under the impetus of a momentary impulse, but deliberately over a period of time, the consequences of a position hysterically assumed. Each has his concept of personal dignity and each is faithful to it.

Dido's plan is given shape in her fifth speech. It begins on a note of bitter, pathetic irony:

'inueni, germana, uiam (gratare sorori).' 478

'I have found a way, dear Anna, congratulate your sister.'

She unfolds her plans for the construction of a great pyre, and the magic ceremony that will, so she tells Anna, restore Aeneas to her. The reader finds it impossible not to guess her real purpose. Having failed to wring from Aeneas the brief respite for which she pleaded, feeling death close in upon her, she starts actually to look forward to it:

tum uero infelix fatis exterrita Dido 450
mortem orat; taedet caeli conuexa tueri,

Dido now, in terror at the direction fate is taking
prays for death, sick of looking on the curve of heaven.

Again the narrator intervenes to fix the tone of Dido's words. Frightful portents, terrifying dreams (an odd mixture—to us—of ancient conventional belief, exploited by Virgil for gruesome effect, and modern insight: the symbolism, for example, of the dreams), all seem to her to reveal the direction fate is taking. Act 3 begins with thirty lines of eerie descriptive writing showing Dido's plan being put into effect:

> at regina pyra penetrali in sede sub auras
> erecta ingenti taedis atque ilice secta,
> intenditque locum sertis et fronde coronat
> funerea; super exuuias ensemque relictum
> effigiemque toro locat haud ignara futuri.

But the queen in an inner fastness of the palace rears a great pyre skywards of pine brands and hewn ilex-oak; decks the place with garlands, crowns pyre with foliage of death; on it places the sword and harness he had left, and him in effigy, not in doubt of what will be.

In both Speech v at the end of Act 2 and the narrative that opens Act 3 Virgil's purpose is complex. He wants first to suggest the icy determination with which Dido goes ahead with her plan now she realizes she *must* kill herself. On the other hand we have seen enough of Dido to accept that she is the woman to make a spectacle of suicide. Her determination finds expression, therefore, in a macabre piece of hocus-pocus. Yet, as she places on the great pyre the effigy of Aeneas, the sword she gave him and which he left behind when they quarrelled, and then proceeds with the magical rites, the conviction grows that this is more than spoof; and, intermingled with our judgment that what we are watching is the behaviour of a wilful exhibitionist, we feel a mounting flood of pity. On the more rational level, the magic is all supposed to be an elaborate subterfuge: she wants to commit suicide dramatically, but keep her plan concealed. At the same time it is clear that Dido half believes irrationally in the power of the hocus-pocus, somehow, to stave off the inevitable and keep Aeneas.[1]

[1] Dido's half-belief in the power of magic may be compared with that revealed by Propertius in his opening elegy, i, 1, 19–24 (see Chapter 6): as in Dido's *odi et amo* Speech iv, we see Virgil applying the psychological subtleties of Roman love poetry to epic.

This is her mood in Speech vi (*'en, quid ago? rursusne procos inrisa priores . . .'*), her soliloquy as she lies sleepless in her bed. She must prove to herself there is no other way. Of course there is. Dido is much more the victim of character than the victim of circumstance. Presumably this is always the rational view of a situation that has led to suicide. But it cannot be Dido's. To tighten her resolution now in the shadow of the act, she must prove to herself there is no other way out. She does this by considering only alternatives that are clearly out of the question. For *her* there is no way out save death. She must go on with her plans.

Speech vi concludes with lines in which Virgil allows Dido an insight that is deeply touching into the reasons for her downfall:

> 'non licuit thalami expertem sine crimine uitam
> degere more ferae, talis nec tangere curas . . .'

'I was not allowed to leave marriage out of it, to live reproachless, animal-like, untouched by grief like this. . . .'

Dido frames it, of course, in terms of inevitability of circumstance. But we can understand 'I was not allowed' in the most general, allusive sense. Dido was not allowed by fate, by herself, by others, by the standards incumbent on a queen. Then *thalami expertem* evokes a complicated pattern of ambiguity. The more obvious meaning is the abstract one, 'marriage', and Virgil had prepared us for this meaning of the word already in line 18:

> 'si non pertaesum thalami taedaeque fuisset'

'Had I not come to loathe marriage, weddings.'

Disaster has come to Dido because she could not leave marriage out of it. Because her concept of queenliness demanded marriage. Because, thinking she had got marriage, she went ahead:

> coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.

She calls it marriage, *cloaking with this word how she failed.*

The other meaning of the words *thalami expertem* is more subtle, but beyond doubt. This time *thalamus* is the room in the royal palace that Dido shared with Aeneas. The *thalamus* in which we saw her linger on the morning of the hunt (*thalamo cunctantem*, line 133). The *thalamus* to which we saw her carried back when she fainted at the end of the quarrel scene (line 392). The *thalamus* from which, in her speech to Anna giving directions for the building of the pyre (Speech v), she had directed all should be taken that reminded her of the departed Aeneas (line 495). By this triple occurrence of the word in prominent contexts emphasizing its concrete meaning, Virgil has got that meaning established for use here in an implied contrast with *more ferae*.

If only, Dido means, there hadn't had to be the civilized marriage of a queen, if only she and Aeneas had been free as animals are free. As *they* would have been free if things had been left as things might have been left, with the liaison kept on the basis on which it began when they met *more ferarum* in the cave. If it seems strange that Dido's words should be so tight-packed, so many-sided, we should remind ourselves of the nature of poetic tragedy: the characters are real in the sense that their motivation is convincing, and they offer us, if we like to call it that, a psychological experience. Their *words* are poetry, and unrealistic, offering us the special complex, compact pleasure poetry affords. And, understandably, when the psychological experience is more than usually intense, the poetic experience is also likely to be unusually intense.

The sublimity of the concluding scenes has already been discussed. They have little more to contribute to our investigation of Dido's character. All that remains now is to translate decision into deed. A second apparition of Mercury precipitates the action. Aeneas departs the same night. As dawn breaks, Dido sees the Trojan ships sailing out of the harbour of Carthage. It takes a while for her to grasp that an unaccustomed scene, a harbour empty of ships, has taken the place of the accustomed one, a harbour filled with ships. Then she breaks into her seventh speech (*'pro Iuppiter! ibit . . .'*), ablaze with an indignation that is as illogical (because Aeneas' going was settled) as it is convincing. We do often react, when confronted with the spectacle of something happening that we knew would happen, as though

what we saw were totally unexpected. There is just a hint that Dido had at the back of her mind some form of vengeance. Or was the vengeance she planned that Aeneas should witness the spectacle of her suicide? We must not allow ourselves to be trapped into discussing what might have happened. The only details of the story are those the poem gives.[1]

Dido's short speech to the old nurse follows (Speech viii, *'Annam, cara mihi nutrix, huc siste sororem . . .'*)—a brief interval of calm while she pulls herself together after the near frenzy of Speech vii. The discipline she exercises on herself here at the very moment of her death enables Virgil to make convincing the dignity that her dying words restore to his tragic queen. They follow immediately (Speech ix, *'dulces exuuiae, dum fata deusque sinebat . . .'*):

> 'dulces exuuiae, dum fata deusque sinebat, 651
> accipite hanc animam meque his exsoluite curis.'
>
> *'Relics sweet so long as fate and god allowed,*
> *receive the life in me, and free me from my grief.'*

As she speaks her words acquire the ring of a formal epitaph, leaning on the familiar Roman convention which made the dead person address the living from the tomb:[2]

> 'uixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi,
> et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago.
> urbem praeclaram statui, mea moenia uidi, 655
> ulta uirum poenas inimico a fratre recepi,
> felix, heu nimium felix, si litora tantum
> numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae.'

[1] The dangers involved in expanding the poet's story for him are discussed by L. C. Knights in a well known, and important, essay, 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?', in *Explorations* (1946), pp. 1–39.

All the same we should not overlook hints the poet gives of complexities not dwelt on; they help to prevent the progress of the action from becoming simply mechanical.

[2] The words *dixitque nouissima uerba* suggest as well that Dido is pronouncing her own funeral oration: cf. the same words of Aeneas farewelling the dead, *Aeneid* vi, 231.

'Life's done, the span fortune granted ended.
And now my great ghost proceeds beneath the earth.
I founded a city of renown, I saw my walls rise. 655
I venged my husband's death (a brother was our foe).
Fortune favoured—ah! too much: if but these shores
had never felt the touch of keels from Troy!'

Dido's statement of her accomplishments in life is set out in four formal end-stopped hexameters, then a final flood of emotion breaks loose the moment her thoughts come back to Aeneas.

The spectacle that follows is noble and impressive. Nor does it lean intolerably upon its conventional tragic framework. Dido is an exceptional woman. She shows it in her capacity to inspire and return love. But we are left, as we should be left, with the feeling that this is not merely a story of a woman who kills herself because she has lost her lover. Dido is exceptional, too, in the standards she sets herself. It is her standards of queenliness, what is due to a queen, what a queen owes to herself, as much as her passionate despair, that lead her to her end. If there was a point in the drama where the motives that moved her seemed less heroic and more wilful and petty, we may now rightly feel that the pettiness has been transcended in the final grandeur of self-destruction.

3

Emergence of a Form: the Latin Short Poem

We should, I suppose, begin by considering what we mean by 'a Poem'. There will be no shortage of critics eager and competent to tell us. As we are anxious, however, to pass on, in order to get to grips with a problem of more practical concern to the reader of Latin poetry, we should look for a critic who is willing to be brief. If his answer clarifies the approach to our real problem, we should not be cross because it seems light-hearted. The distinguished modern German poet and critic Gottfried Benn, lecturing a few years ago at the University of Marburg on 'Problems of Lyric Poetry', began, like us, feeling it was necessary to secure some agreement about what a Poem was. His definition ran like this. You must have noticed, he said, from time to time when you open your Sunday newspaper (though this is something that can happen during the week too), among the solid columns of type, usually in the top right-hand or the bottom left-hand corner, a block of type different from the rest with a frame round it. Well, that is a Poem. It is usually quite short. In autumn it is about November mists. In spring about crocuses. . . .[1]

Benn, like us, was impatient to clear the air for a more profitable discussion; but there is much to be said all the same for this Wittgenstein type of definition in literary criticism.

[1] Gottfried Benn, *Probleme der Lyrik*, Vortrag in der Universität Marburg (1951), p. 5.

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