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‘PLAUTINISCHES IM VERGIL’: COMIC INFLUENCE ON *AENEID* 4

Abstract. – The late antique commentator Servius asserts that Book 4 of Virgil’s Aeneid displays a marked influence from comedy, a judgment that has been largely ignored in scholarly criticism. Close study of the Virgilian depiction of the amatory affair of Aeneas and Dido from its inception in Book 1 through its tragic culmination in Book 4 and its underworld coda in Book 6 reveals the pervasive influence of Plautus in particular, confirming Servius’ analysis and allowing for a more nuanced reading of Virgil’s presentation of Rome’s rival Carthage.

The influence of the literary antecedents Homer (Calypso; Nausicäa; Circe), Euripides (Medea; the Bacchants), Apollonius Rhodius (Medea), and Ennius (Medea again) in particular on Virgil’s depiction of Dido in Books 1 and 4 of Virgil’s *Aeneid* has been the subject of much scholarly investigation.[1] Alongside these epic (both archaic and Hellenistic) and tragic (both Attic and republican) sources, the relevance of the disastrous dalliance of the triumvir Mark Antony with Cleopatra VII Philopator to the poet’s presentation of Aeneas and the ill-starred Carthaginian royal has attracted significant critical focus.[2]

[1] For commentary on the book and its problems note C. Buscaroli, *Il libro di Didone: Testo con traduzione a fronte seguito da ampio commento interpretativo ed estetico*, Milano-Genova-Roma-Napoli: Società Anonima Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1932, A. S. Pease, *Publi Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1935, R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus*, Oxford, 1955, A. Schmitz, *Infelix Dido*, Gembloux: Éditions J. Duculot, S.A., 1960, B. Tilly, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus*, London: University Tutorial Press Ltd., 1968, and L. M. Fratantuono and R. A. Smith, *Virgil, Aeneid 4: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2022. On tragic antecedents for Carthage’s queen note C. Collard, “Medea and Dido,” in *Prometheus* 1 (1975), pp. 131-51, and S. Perris, “Bacchant Women,” in R. Lauriola and K. N. Demetriou, eds., *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Euripides*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015, p. 509. More generally on Dido’s *Vorleben*, J. Kowalski, *De Didone graeca et Latina*, Cracow: Gebethner and Wolff, 1929 remains useful.

[2] See further here P. M. Astorino, "Dido como alusión a Cleopatra en la Eneida," in *Myrtia* 35 (2020), pp. 275-92; also J.M. Benario, “Dido and Cleopatra,” in *Vergilius* 16 (1970), pp. 2-6.

The story of Aeneas and Dido is replete with allusions both to earlier works of poetry and to the historical realities of Augustan Rome, not to mention Rome's long and often violent engagement with Carthage.

Less attention has been paid to what the ancient exegete Servius declared to be the secondary fount of Virgilian inspiration for his account of Punic passion and its baleful consequences: the comic style.[3] We shall endeavor to study closely how the *fabulae palliatae* of the poet Plautus in particular provided significant material for the crafting of Book 4 of the *Aeneid* (together with related Dido and Aeneas passages from Books 1 and 6), such that the archaic Latin poet emerges as the prime exemplar of the Servian musing on the comic nature of Virgil's meditation on love.[4] We shall proceed through the Virgilian account of the dolorous passion of Dido and Aeneas, examining how the epic poet repeatedly mined his comic predecessor for intertextual and verbal parallels.[5] Taking our start from Servius' statement about the relevance of comedy to *Aeneid* 4, we shall explore the largely unappreciated importance of Plautus to an understanding of the genesis and composition of Virgil's tale of disastrous love.[6] Our investigation will support the Servian contention, as part of an attempt to take seriously the place of comedy in the epic poet's toolkit of intertextual implements.[7] Plautus was a serious, learned poet, and Virgil incurred no blight on his record by adapting material from his plays.[8]

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[3] Foundational to the modern study of this problem is W. S. Anderson, "Servius and the 'Comic Style' of *Aeneid* 4," in *Arethusa* 14.1 (1981), pp. 115-25. R.B. Lloyd, "Comico, stile," in F. Della Corte, ed., *Enciclopedia virgiliana I*, Roma: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1984, pp. 853-5 offers a general appraisal.

[4] There are numerous verbal echoes that reflect usages of conversational language, alongside other reminiscences of Plautine diction and lexicography: e.g., *credo* with *equidem* at *Aeneid* 4.12 (cf. *Amphitruo* 282; *Aulularia* 307; *Pseudolus* 1302; *Vidularia* 44); 4.516 and *Casina* 102; 4.327 and *Epidicus* 561; 4.533 and *Miles Gloriosus* 196; 4.66 and *Mostellaria* 243; 4.420 and *Poenulus* 237; 4.530 and *Pseudolus* 144; 4.132 and 648; 4.576 and *Rudens* 160.

[5] Our focus will remain on Plautus; for how Menandrian New Comedy influenced Virgil see *Troy's Children: Lost Generations in Virgil's Aeneid*, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2005, p. 193.

[6] Our task is both aided and hampered by the question of how much Plautus has been lost. The relatively large size of the extant Plautine corpus allows for a more expansive study of the influence of the comic poet on Virgil than is possible for the comparatively smaller surviving repertoire of Menander. For a reminder that what we have is "a drop in the ocean of Roman republican comedy," see A. Sharrock, *Reading Roman Comedy: Poetics and Playfulness in Plautus and Terence*, Cambridge, 2009, p. 27.

[7] For the view that Plautus and Terence are not fruitful fields for students of Virgilian sources cf. e.g. "The influence of (Roman) comedy on Roman epic is not easily detected and quite rightfully heretofore neglected by critics …" (A. Augoustakis, "*Plautinisches im Silius*? Two Episodes from Silius Italicus' *Punica*?," in I. N. Perysinakis and E. Karakasis, eds., *Plautine Trends: Studies in Plautine Comedy and its Reception*, Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2014, p. 263 n. 15). In contrast, see e.g. B. Dufallo, *Disorienting Empire: Republican Latin Poetry's Wanderers*, Oxford, 2021, pp. 232-5; J. P. Hallett, "Latin Literary Lenses on Phoenician Female Speech," in J. Fabre-Serris, A.

Servius' comment at the commencement of his notes to *Aeneid* 4 may be quoted:

> Apollonius Argonautica scripsit ubi inducit amantem Medeam; inde totus hic liber translatus est, de tertio Apollonii. est autem paene totus in affectione, licet in fine pathos habeat, ubi abscessus Aeneae gignit dolorem. sane totus est in consiliis et subtilitatibus; nam paene comicum stilum habet; nec mirum, ubi de amore tractatur.[9]

Book 3 of the Hellenistic epic *Argonautica* is said to have been the main source for Virgil's book ("inde totus hic liber translatus est"), with comedy close behind ("totus est in consiliis et subtilitatibus; nam paene comicum stilum habet"). The *consilia* et *subtilitates* of *Aeneid* 4 include in particular the interactions of Anna and Dido on the mortal level, and of Juno and Venus on the divine; we may consider too the pairs Iarbas and Jupiter; Jupiter and Mercury; Mercury and Aeneas; Aeneas and his men; Dido and Aeneas; Dido's further exchanges with her sister; Dido's revelation of her alleged scheming with the Massylian mage; also Anna's failed appeal to Aeneas and her unwitting role in the suicide plans of her sister, in which Dido's instructions to the nurse Barce figure too, and finally Juno's mission for Iris. In short, *Aeneid* 4 is a book of one scene after another of quasi-theatrical two-person interactions, of set piece speeches in the theatrical style. Indeed, the conversational style of the book has been seen by some as the main import of Servius' consideration of comic influence, and this is readily apparent in the numerous monologues and dialogues for which the book is noted.[10]

The fourth book of the *Aeneid* is not known for its humorous interludes.[11] And yet its amatory themes lend themselves to depictions

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Keith, and F. Klein, eds., *Identities, Ethnicities, and Gender in Antiquity*, Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2021, pp. 175-94, with study of the language attributed both to Virgil's Dido and to Plautus' Phoenicium in the *Pseudolus* (41-73).

[8] On Plautus as a particularly noteworthy literary practitioner, see especially S. Papaioannou and C. Demetriou, eds., *Plautus' Erudite Comedy: New Insights into the Work of a Doctus Poeta*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. For the part played by such Second Sophistic writers as Gellius and Fronto in recognizing the seriousness of Plautus after comparative neglect, see R. Ferri, "The Reception of Plautus in Antiquity," in M. Fontaine and A. Scafuro, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*, Oxford, 2014, p. 779. By the time of Ausonius' *Cupido cruciatus*, a learned poet could commence his work with an allusion to Plautus, and close it with one to Virgil (vid. R. Rees, "Nailing down the poet: Ausonius' *Cupid crucified*," in P. Millett, S. P. Oakley, and R. J. E. Thompson, eds., *Ratio et res ipsa* …, Cambridge, 2011, p. 145).

[9] Servius is cited from A. F. Stocker and A. H. Travis, *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum editionis Harvardianae volume III*, Oxford, 1965.

[10] Anderson, *op. cit*., pp. 122-3; note also M. Hanses, *The Life of Comedy after the Death of Plautus and Terence*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2020, p. 289.

[11] C. Bourquin, *Humor in der Aeneis* … Berlin: Frank & Timme GmbH, 2019; also R. B. Lloyd, "Humor in the *Aeneid*," in *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Feb.-Mar.,

of anxiety, deception, rumor and other stereotypical concomitants of passion and problematic *affaires de cœur*. Further, Plautine comedy was composed in the shadow of the Second Punic War, and extant Plautus reveals an interest in the emulous relationship between Rome and its Mediterranean neighbor.[12] Even Virgil's account of the fall of Troy – Aeneas' rendition of which to Dido's court played no small role in the queen's captivation with her Trojan guest – owes something to Plautine comedy.[13] We shall see as we proceed through the narrative of the tragic *amour* of Trojan and Carthaginian that much from Virgil's text can be paralleled in Plautus, until the final scene of Dido's suicide, where at last what is feared and dreaded in the comic playwright becomes all too real for the epic poet – suicide in consequence of amatory frustration and disappointment. *Aeneid* 4 will be revealed to be something of a tragi-comedy or failed comedy, with exactly the resolution that clever slaves and adroit scheming manages again and again to forestall and avoid on the Plautine stage. The debt of Virgil to Plautus will be shown to involve more than mere verbal reminiscences of the archaic dramatist, though as we have seen already, this aspect of intertextual *hommage* is also a feature of Virgilian compositional craftsmanship.[14]

Aeneas' disastrous involvement with Dido commences in consequence of the Junonian storm of *Aeneid* 1.[15] Certain aspects of the depiction of the Trojan shipwreck in north Africa and its aftermath recall plot elements from Plautus' *Rudens*.[16] Both Virgil's book and the

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1977), pp. 250-7. For how Plautus himself sometimes straddles the border between comedy and tragedy, cf. e.g. R. P. Bond, "Plautus' *Amphitruo* as Tragi-Comedy," in *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Oct., 1999), pp. 203-20.

[12] The *Poenulus* offers an obvious point of engagement on the matter. On Virgilian engagement with the problem of Carthage see E. Giusti, *Carthage in Virgil's Aeneid: Staging the Enemy under Augustus*, Cambridge, 2018; cf. also J. H. Starks, Jr., "*Fides Aeneia*: The Transference of Punic Stereotypes in the *Aeneid*," in *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (Feb.-Mar., 1999), pp. 255-83; cf. E. S. Gruen, "*Punica Fides*, in *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Princeton, 2011, pp. 115-40. *Poenulus*104-13 has been cited in connection with attitudes that a reader of Virgil might have brought to his encounter with Dido, " … as part of a litany of anti-Carthaginian prejudices which any Roman reader would have to carry with her and impose on the complex and suffering figure of Virgil's Dido." (O. Taplin, *Literature in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A New Perspective*, Oxford, 2000, p. 7). For the reflection of wartime and immediate *post bellum* virtues in Plautus, see A. J. Clark, *Divine Qualities: Cult and Community in Republican Rome*, Oxford, 2007, p. 81.

[13] See further M. Fontaine, "Troy Destroyed (Plautus *Bacchides* 973-74 and 1053)," in *Classical Philology*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (July 2006), pp. 280-86;

[14] See here R. B. Lloyd, "Plauto," in F. Della Corte, ed., *Enciclopedia virgiliana IV*, 1988, p. 138.

[15] For commentary on passages from the book note both R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*, Oxford, 1971, and also E. Marmorale, *Virgilio Eneide Libro I*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1946.

[16] E. Sonnenschein, *T. Macci Plauti Rudens*, Oxford, 1891; F. Marx, *Plautus, Rudens: Text und Kommentar*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1928.

Plautine play offer a tempest, a forced landing on African shores, and an important role for Venus: the goddess serves as a key character in *Aeneid* 1, while her temple and priestess figure prominently in *Rudens*.[17] "There is … an atmosphere of wildness, exoticism, and romance not present in Plautus' other plays ... The sea, and the motif of water in general, are inextricably enmeshed with the central theme(s) of *Rudens*."[18] It has been observed that "Plautus' *Rudens*, *Cistellaria*, and *Poenulus* all contain elements that are the stuff of romance: a sense of cosmic order, tempests, divine interventions, traveling, lovers and family members kept apart, recognitions, reunions, etc."[19] The *milieu* of the commencement of the Dido-Aeneas romance in *Aeneid* 1 is similar, just as are common elements of the romantic novels that are derived from comedy.[20]

The first act of Rudens commences with mention of a recent serious storm, as Sceparnio indulges in his own intertextual comment on such dire events:

> Pro di inmortales, tempestatem quoiusque modi
> Neptunus nobis nocte hac misit proxuma!
> detexit ventus villam – quid verbis opust?
> non ventus fuit, verum Alcumena Euripidi,
> ita omnis de tecto turbavit tegulas;
> inlustriores fecit fenestras indidit.[21]

The storm of *Aeneid* 1 is not the work of Neptune, who in fact is responsible for quelling it.[22] The shipwreck in *Rudens* too is not Neptunian in origin, but rather the work of Arcturus, who seeks to hinder the transport of two girls to Sicily to serve as prostitutes.[23] Labrax – the *leno* they must be saved from – is described in words that scholars have compared to Dido's invective against Aeneas after she learns of

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[17] On the significance of priestesses and women's religious rituals in comedy (with reference to the *Rudens*) see A. Traill, *Women and the Comic Plot in Menander*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 142. The topos is important to the Dido story in *Aeneid* 4.

[18] D. Christenson, *Plautus Rudens*, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012, p. 11

[19] S. Frangoulidis, "Plotting the Romance …," in G. F. Franko and D. Dutsch, eds., *A Companion to Plautus*, Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020. On the similar plots of *Rudens* and *Poenulus*, see D. Konstan, *Roman Comedy*, Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 94.

[20] S. D. Smith, "From Drama to Narrative: The Reception of Comedy in the Ancient Novel," in S. Douglas Olson, *Ancient Comedy and Reception: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Henderson*, Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2014, p. 323.

[21] Quotes from Plautus are taken from W. M. Lindsay, *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae, Tomus I, Tomus II*, Oxford, 1905.

[22] 1.124 ff.

[23] On the significance of the attribution of the storm to Arcturus, note the classic study of E. Fraenkel, "The Stars in the Prologue of the *Rudens*," in *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No.1/2 (Jan-Apr., 1942), pp. 10-4.

his decision to leave her.[24] Iarbas in *Aeneid* 4 is not without affinities to the *leno* of Roman comedy: both Gaetulian prince and stock comic procurer are of the view that they possess a claim on a particular girl who is loved by another.

The two girls Palaestra and Ampelisca are shipwrecked in Africa and separated; after a successful reunion, they appeal to Venus for help. Travel between Africa and Sicily is common both to comic play and epic book; the key role of the two girls in the plot of the north African adventure may remind one of the plight of the sisters Dido and Anna, hemmed in as they are by hazards and seemingly bereft of protectors. Anna invokes the danger of tempests and the stormy season as part of her recommended rationale for persuading Aeneas to delay any travel, in a reminder of the signal role of a storm for the noxious passion that is unleased.[25]

In a neat nod to the Plautine inspiration for elements of the genesis of the love of Dido and Aeneas in his first book, near its end Virgil depicts the bard Iopas as singing of Arcturus, the very figure whose prologue opens Plautus' comedy.[26]

The Trojan shipwreck alone does not secure the subsequent passion that develops between Dido and Aeneas. That tragic love is engendered by Venus' meddling in affairs in Carthage in cooperation with her son Cupid. Venus is of inestimable importance to Roman comedy; it is telling that Phronesium invites the audience to applaud for Venus' sake at the close of the *Truculentus* (967 *Veneris causa adplaudite*).[27] In Plautus a lover is compared to a soldier of Cupid.[28] Further, the comic poet identifies the lover as being under the military authority of both Cupid and his mother Venus.[29] We may compare *Persa* 24-5 *… saucius factus sum in Veneris proelio: / sagitta Cupido cor meum transfixit*.[30] This is imagery common to the elegiac tradition, and it infuses the narrative of Aeneas' sojourn in Carthage with the amatory poison, as it were, of the shaft of Cupid working at the behest of Venus.[31] At *Mostellaria* 161-5 we see something of a blending of Cupid and storm imagery, as Philolaches address Venus:

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[24] See here R. Monti, *The Dido Episode and the Aeneid: Roman Social and Political Values in the Epic*, Leiden: Brill, 1981, p. 100 n. 15, with consideration of *Rudens* 651-3.

[25] *Aeneid* 1.52-3.

[26] 1.742-6. The song of Iopas has been the subject of an appreciable bibliography, which explores *inter al*. its debts to Lucretius. Plautus too should be named among its poetic antecedents.

[27] On the significance of this reference, see A. Clark, "Gods and Roman Comedy," in M. T. Dinter, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, Cambridge, 2019, p. 217.

[28] *Mercator* 851-63.

[29] Cf. *Curculio* 3-6.

[30] J. M. Conlon, *Persa: Introduction and Commentary*, Dissertation Princeton, 2016.

[31] Cupid does not figure in *Aeneid* 4 as he does in Book 1, though we recall his action with Dido in the simile of the wounded deer at 4.68-73, the last verse of which is imprinted with the framing acrostic Di-do.

> … o Venu' venusta,
> haec illa est tempestas mea, mihi quae modestiam omnem
> detexit, tectus qua fui, quom mihi Amor et Cupido
> in pectus perpluit meum, neque iam umquam optigere possum:
> madent iam in corde parietes, periere haec oppido aedes.

Philolaches' *pectus* is thoroughly drenched by the metaphorical storm of love; we may recall the same protagonist's celebrated comparison of individuals to buildings.[32] After the storm and action of Cupid in *Aeneid* 1, the city-building activity with which Dido and her Carthaginians were preoccupied on Aeneas' arrival will be abandoned, and the Trojan quest for a new home and city will be delayed.

Dido's sister Anna plays her own key role in the progress of the disaster, as she encourages open pursuit of and indulgence in the hitherto secret passion. Alongside her sororial status, she is something of an amalgam of the nurse confidante from Attic tragedy, and the *callidus servus* of Roman comedy.[33] What the immortals started, the mortal sister aids and abets as she offers her advice that passion should be pursued as decorum is discarded.

Anna is all too successful. Plautus may provide a clue for understanding a textually vexed verse in the description of the effects of the words of Anna on her sister's Dido's emotional state:

> His dictis incensum animum inflammavit amore (4.54)

This is the so-called vulgate reading, which has been both defended and critiqued by several editors.[34] The alternative reading offers both Lucretian and Plautine echoes: *His dictis impenso animum flammavit amore*, where *impenso* recalls both *De Rerum Natura* 5.964 *vel violenta viri vis atque impensa libido* and Plautus' *ingrato homine nihil impensiust* (*Bacchides* 394) – republican passages of obvious thematic relevance to Virgil's context.

The queen's inflamed heart does not need to wait long for some relief, however fleeting. Juno senses the timeliness of making a renewed foray into the action of the epic, and she confronts Venus with a plan for Dido and Aeneas to be united – a plan that is designed so as for Venus to be unable to acquiesce, even as her powerful divine rival has her own reasons for proposing the arrangement.[35] The stage is set

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[32] *Mostellaria* 84 ff.

[33] She will be outwitted, in the end, in the trickery and deceit that characterize Dido's suicide scheme.

[34] R. A. Smith, "Dido's Already Inflamed Love: The Manuscripts and the Servian Tradition ad *Aen*. 4, 54," in *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* n.s. 126.1 (2021), pp. 185-91.

[35] A potentially interesting facet of the divine drama of *Aeneid* 4 is the fact that Venus is cast in the role of would-be mother-in-law to Dido; the character was one of the stock *dramatis personae* of Roman comedy (cf. here A. Sharrock, "The Roman Mother-

on the divine plane for another tempest, one that will result not in a north African shipwreck, but in a sexual escapade that will mark the abandonment of pretense and the inception of an illicit affair. Aeneas, his son, Dido, and the collected Trojan and Carthaginian polities assemble on horseback for the day's active entertainment, a hunting expedition that the goddesses Juno and Venus agree will be interrupted by an impromptu quasi-nuptial ceremony, a parody of a Roman wedding.

Aeneas' son participates in the hunt, indeed in what is nothing less than his debut in the epic as a boy on the cusp of manhood, with more to do than be rescued by his father or fondled in Dido's lap.[36] Ascanius is described by Virgil as being the "Dardanian grandson of Venus." In context, the fateful storm has broken on the hunt. Aeneas and Dido flee to the cave that will witness the consummation of their illicit union. Ascanius takes flight too, despite his praying for the chance to confront series game but a few verses earlier. Virgil is explicit about the fearful motivation that inspires the flight of Ascanius and his fellow hunters:

> Dardaniusque nepos Veneris diversa per agros
> tecta metu petiere; ruunt de montibus amnes. (4.163-4)[37]

The grand periphrasis for Ascanius in his moment of trepidation and anxiety is mock heroic: one would expect that someone of such lofty status as "Dardanian grandson of Venus" would be more stalwart.[38] A few lines prior, wild game had rushed down from mountain lairs (4.151-5); now torrents of water are like rivers as they threaten sudden flooding and destruction (again, water as metaphor for overwhelming eroticism). The Dardanian grandson of Venus joins the crowd in seeking safety from the storm, and he disappears from the action.

Plautus is the source for Ascanius' striking epithet, which occurs three times in two variations in his longest extant comedy, the *Miles Gloriosus*:[39]

> nescio tu ex me hoc audiveris an non: nepos sum Veneris (1265)
> si te salvom hinc amittemus Venerium nepotulum (1413)
> ut te hodie hinc amittamus Venerium nepotulum (1421)

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in-Law," in A. Sharrock and A. Keith, eds., *Maternal Conceptions in Classical Literature and Philosophy*, Toronto, 2020, pp. 140-66.

[36] At 4.156 he is called *puer Ascanius*, which in Roman terms would mean up to seventeen; Pease, *op. cit*., *ad loc*. considers him to be eleven or twelve. The image of the horsebound Ascanius at the hunt is recalled at 5.570-2, where we are reminded that Dido had given the boy a horse.

[37] Passages from the *Aeneid* are cited from G. Conte, ed., *Publius Vergilius Maro: Aeneis*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2019 (*editio altera*).

[38] For the possible influence of Plautus' depiction of the braggart soldier on Plutarch's presentation of the doomed triumvir Antony, see C. B. R. Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 124.

[39] M. Hammond, A. M. Mack, and W. Moskalew, *Plautus: Miles Gloriosus*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968.

The Plautine passages offer the only extant occurrence of the appellation before Virgil; it does not recur until as late as Apuleius. The seemingly rare name offers what would appear to be a clear undercutting of the presentation of Ascanius at one of the lowest points for the honor and repute of the house of Aeneas given the imminent reality of the tawdry episode in the cave, and its grim consequences both for Aeneas' Trojans and the Romans of the future.[40]

The love affair proceeds in earnest, as Aeneas and Dido indulge in a luxurious winter that for Virgil's Augustan Age audience would evoke Cleopatra's Alexandria and her time with both Caesar and Antony. Powerful people are especially liable to the scrutiny of their subjects, and soon enough word of the relationship reaches Dido's aggrieved suitor Iarbas.

The episode with the monstrous Rumor is the direct catalyst for the divine intervention whereby Jupiter orders Mercury to see to the departure of Aeneas from Carthage. There are two passages in which the messenger god is depicted as urging the Trojan hero to flee from Dido's city.[41] The power of rumor and report is highlighted in a memorable extended passage from Plautus' *Trinummus* (199-222), as well as in a fragment of an uncertain comedy.[42] The fragment neatly highlights the speed of Fama:

> Nullam ego rem citiorem apud homines esse quam famam reor. (fab. inc. fr. VII (XXI))[43]

The swiftness of rumor was proverbial.[44] Rumor too sings equally of that which happened, and of that which did not – *Fama* and mendacity are kindred, as Virgil observes at 4.190 *gaudens, et pariter facta atque infecta canebat*, a verse that is indebted to Plautus.[45] Indeed Rumor is one of the more important of the poetic personificati-

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[40] That is, in light of Dido's curse on the Trojans and its manifestation in the future enmity between Carthage and Rome (4.607 ff.).

[41] 4.238 ff., and 4.554 ff. In the former passage the god appears directly, while in the latter episode there is a more mysterious dream apparition.

[42] For commentary on Meganorides' soliloquy see C. E. Freeman, *T. Macci Plauti Trinummus*, Oxford, 1890, *ad loc*.; also E. Lefèvre, "Politics and society in Plautus' *Trinummus*," in R. Scodel, ed., *Theater and Society in the Classical World*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993, pp. 183-4. Cf. also *Amphitruo* 325-6; 587-8; *Trinummus* 98-9. Plautus also references the many-eyed sentinel Argus (*Aulularia* 555), who is considered as a possible "mythical model for the construction of the Fama character" (G. Guastella, *Word of Mouth: Fama and Its Personification in Art and Literature from Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 2017, p. 176).

[43] The text is from Lindsay's Oxford edition. The fragments have also been edited by S. Monda, *Titus Maccius Plautus: Vidularia et deperditarum fabularum fragmenta, Editio Plautins Sarsinatis, 21*, Sarsinae/Urbini: QuattroVenti, 2004.

[44] See Pease, *op. cit*., *ad* 4.174 *Fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullum*.

[45] Cf. *Amphitruo* 884 and *Truculentus* 730.

ons in Plautus, as too in Virgil.[46] "Long before Virgil or Statius created their personifications, *fama* and *rumor publicus* acted as the custodians of Roman *mores*."[47] And Fama in her own venomous way is not unlike Cupid with his poisonous arrows.[48] The action of the two divine or quasi-divine figures is analogous: Cupid and Fama work in tandem, as it were, with one's reputation suffering in the wake of erotic heartache.

There is an interesting echo of the role of Fama in the Dido drama at *Aeneid* 7.144-7 *diditur hic subito Troiana per agmina rumor / advenisse diem, quo debita moenia condant. / certatim instaurant epulas atque omine magno / crateras laeti statuunt et vina coronant*.[49] The scene is Latium, where Aeneas and his men have made arrival at last. The scene offers a reminiscence of the banquet at Carthage: 1.723-4 *postquam prima quies epulis mensaeque remotae, / crateras magnos statuunt et vina coronant*. But the most noteworthy feature is the framing *diditur … rumor*. *Didere* is not a common verb ("After Plautus, Cato, and Lucretius the verb *dido* is very rare"[50]). It occurs but once elsewhere in the *Aeneid*, again in conjunction with the notion of report and rumor.[51] In Book 7, at the crucial juncture in the progress of the Trojans to their Roman destiny, we are reminded of Dido and the monstrous rumor that played so important a role in driving Aeneas toward Italy. The elegantly framed verse *diditur … rumor* reminds us of the Dido episode, as the verb *dido* recalls the queen *Dido*, especially when the subject of the verb is *rumor*, and in a context of enjoyment of wine that verbally echoes Aeneas' reception in Carthage, a parallel meal to the humbler fare enjoyed at the fated "eating of the tables" in Latium. The archaic verb *didere* means to scatter or to spread abroad, which is appropriate both to rumor and to the implications of the curse of Dido on the Aeneadae, the consequences of which continue to haunt the Trojans in the later books of Virgil's epic, most notably in the explicit reminiscence of Dido in the requiem for Aeneas' Arcadian ally Pallas.[52]

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[46] See here F. Goldmann, *Über die poetische Personifikation bei Plautus: Personifikationen menschlicher Körperteile, sinnlicher und seelischer Kräfte, abstrakter Begriffe*, Halle: Druck der Buchduckerei des Waisenhauses, 1887, p. 9.

[47] C. A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: The University of California Press, 2001, p. 21.

[48] See Fratantuono and Smith, *op. cit*., *ad* 4.195 *haec passim dea foeda virum diffundit in ora* (on the semantic implication of *diffundit* after *virum*, where the word for "men" is not without a hint of the notion of "venom.")

[49] On this passage note especially N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 7 A Commentary*, Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2000, *ad loc*.

[50] M. P. J. van den Hout, *A Commentary on the Letters of M. Cornelius Fronto*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1999, p. 236.

[51] At 8.132 we find *tua terris didita fama*, a similar collocation as Aeneas addresses Evander at Pallanteum.

[52] 11.72-80; cf. 9.266 *cratera antiquum, quem dat Sidonia Dido*, of the drinking vessel of Dido that is presented (prematurely, we might think) to Nisus by Ascanius.

Once word of the passionate relationship of Aeneas and Dido reaches the ears of Iarbas, the clock ticks inexorably on its lifespan: Iarbas makes his appeal to Jupiter, and the supreme god sees to the termination of the dalliance.

Mercury's role in the fourth *Aeneid* is natural enough given his capacity as messenger of the gods. But Mercury is also depicted in Plautus as having a particular antipathy for love, given his patronage of commerce and economic endeavors that tend to suffer in the face of expenses for one's beloved.[53] This presentation of the god of profit and lucre comes alongside the reminiscence of the very different interaction of Jupiter and Mercury in the *Amphitruo*.[54] There Mercury served as an amatory procurer for his father, ready to carry out his instructions to secure Jupiter's wishes with respect to his paramours.[55] The inversion of this comes in the herald's task to secure Aeneas' flight from north Africa. Virgil's Mercury is a complex figure, more than mere divine postman in Jove's service, to balance his colorful counterpart Iris who serves Juno at the book's end. His Virgilian presentation in the context of the forceful severing of Aeneas' coupling with Dido comes with the memory of his Plautine role both as amatory ally of his father, and as patron of the profit that tends to dwindle in the face of love's expenses.[56]

Mercury's mission is successful (there could have been no doubt, given its Jovian origins). Dido discovers the attempted surreptitious flight plans of Aeneas, and confronts her *quondam* lover. Some have argued that Carthage's monarch displays more of a sense of honor and loyalty than Aeneas, notwithstanding stereotypes about Punic perfidy.[57] Despite impassioned efforts, Dido is not able to persuade Aeneas to remain with her, and the stage is set for her fateful decision both to curse Aeneas and his descendants, and to take her own life. Aeneas will take his leave of Carthage, indeed ultimately by severing the rope or tether that binds his flagship to Dido's pier (4.579-80).[58]

Dido's very name connects to the notion of gift giving (on this see M. Paschalis, *Virgil's Aeneid: Semantic Relations and Proper Names*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 150-1), but her gifts are depicted as having ominous import.

[53] Cf. *Poenulus* 327 … *damnum, quod Mercurius minime amat*. Cf. *Stichus* 403-5, where Mercury's patronage of commerce is highlighted.

[54] We may note that the deities of *Aeneid* 4 are all among of the most cited immortals in Plautus: Jupiter, Juno, Venus, and Mercury.

[55] Cf. *Amphitruo* 991 and *Aeneid* 4.238-9.

[56] For a rich study of the Plautine Mercury, note E. K. Moodie, "Hermes/Mercury: God of Comedy?," in J. F. Miller and J. S. Clay, eds., *Tracking Hermes, Pursuing Mercury*, Oxford, 2019, pp. 107-18, not without metapoetic reflections on the purpose of the poet's depiction of the god.

[57] The matter is summarized by R. R. Caston, *The Elegiac Passion: Jealousy in Roman Love Elegy*, Oxford, 2012, p. 144, with reference both to Virgil and to Plautus.

[58] Virgil may not have intended any connection between the severed *retinacula* of Aeneas' vessel and the eponymous *rudens* of Plautus' play. But it is noteworthy that the cutting of the rope recalls the title of the play that was one of the likely literary inspirati-

The cutting of the rope foreshadows the final movement of the book, when Dido's fateful lock will be severed.

The dramatic closing movements of *Aeneid* 4 are focused on the self-destructive actions of Dido. Her suicide has certain affinities with the historical deaths of Cleopatra and Mark Antony, and the parallel suicide of Ajax from cyclic tradition and tragedy.[59] Theatrical suicide, a sort of *mimica mors*, figures in Plautus as well. At *Cistellaria* 639-45, Alcesimarchus considers suicide, Indeed, suicide is a significant feature of Plautine comedy: "The earliest association made between frustrated erotic desire and self-killing in Latin literature is found in three plays by Plautus, where suicidal despair appears as an attribute of the young lover who forms the typical protagonist of New Comedy."[60] Besides the *Cistellaria* passage, we may compare *inter al*. *Asinaria* 617-43 and *Pseudolus* 95-106. "Carrying out the threat is foreign to comedy: in Roman (elite) male terms, the *adulescentes* who make empty threats to kill themselves over love are behaving in an effeminate manner …"[61] In a richly evocative sequence, Carthage's queen will take her own life, a suicide that has affinities with both Attic tragedy and the recent history of Virgil's own time. Her auto-demolition enacts the fulfillment of what was only threatened in comedy.

Dido's suicide at the end of *Aeneid* 4 is fraught with struggle and failure; the queen's self-inflicted wound results in an extended, painful process of dying that is ended only by Juno's intervention via the assistance of her own divine herald, the rainbow goddess Iris.[62] Dido's death comes only after a lock of hair is snipped, the blond hair meant to serve as an offering to Proserpina so as to facilitate her end. Here, too, Plautus offers an intertext.[63] In this final, climactic Plautine reminiscence in the book, once again the comic allusion is inverted, with significant comment on the action of the plot.

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ons for Virgil's presentation of the commencement of the relationship between Dido and Aeneas. The noun *rudens* occurs at 1.87 *insequitur clamorque virum stridorque rudentum*, during the tempest.

[59] See further here L. M. Fratantuono, "*Recens a vulnere*: Dido, Ajax, and the Hierarchy of Heroines," in *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* 106.1 (2014), pp. 185-198.

[60] So T. Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature*, New York-London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 88-91.

[61] D. Christenson, *Plautus: Pseudolus*, Cambridge, 2020. More generally on attitudes toward suicide in the Roman world, see Y. Grisé, *Le suicide dans le Rome antique*, Montréal-Paris: Bellarmin-Les Belles Lettres, 1982, and A. J. L. van Hoof, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity*, London: Routledge, 1990. There is also useful material in C. Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2007.

[62] Quasi-stage set suicides were fodder for comic humor (cf. Aristophanes, *Vespae* 522-3); note on this D. Dutsch, "Genre, Gender, and Suicide Threats in Roman Comedy," in *The Classical World*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (Winter, 2012), pp. 187-98. The lingering end of Dido has affinities with the historical case of Mark Antony, whose suicide was likewise botched.

[63] E. Sonnenschein, *T. Macci Plauti Mostellaria*, Oxford, 1884.

The cutting of the lock of hair is the device by which Dido's soul is freed from her body:

> nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertice crinem
> abstulerat Stygioque caput damnaverat Orco.
> ergo Iris croceis per caelum roscida pinnis
> mille trahens varios adverso sole colores
> devolat et supra caput adstitit. "hunc ego Diti
> sacrum iussa fero teque isto corpore solvo."
> sic ait et dextra crinem secat. omnis et una
> dilapsus calor atque in ventos vita recessit. (698-705)

In Plautus' *Mostellaria*, Philematium is encouraged by Scapha to devote herself to Philolaches, provided that she is certain of his loyalty, and of his lasting commitment to devotion to her.[64] Scapha encourages nothing less than marriage, which she alludes to by means of a traditional Roman wedding rite:

> soli gerundum censeo morem et capiundas crinis. (226)

Scapha encourages Philematium to "take locks of hair," that is, to marry Philolaches.

Scholarly criticism of Virgil's depiction of Iris' severing of Dido's lock has focused on surviving allusions to the cutting of strands of hair from the dying (such as the reference to such snipping by Thanatos in Euripides' *Alcestis*), and to the celebrated Callimachean/ Catullan intertext of Berenice's lock. Less appreciated is Iris' inversion, as it were, of a practice associated with Roman nuptial liturgies: the arrangement of the hair of the new bride by spear point or comb.[65] Iris' severing of Dido's lock relates to lore about death and the transition to the underworld, but it also perverts a custom of traditional Roman wedding ceremonies. Plautus' Scapha with Philematium is not unlike Anna with Dido in the matter of her sisterly encouragement of Dido's passion. In her recommendation of nuptial union, Scapha speaks (anachronistically) of *crinis capere* in accord with Roman nuptial customs. In his depiction of Dido's death and irrevocable separation from Aeneas, he speaks of *crinem secare* in accord with traditions about offerings to the infernal Juno, Proserpina – no patroness of marriage she, in contrast to the celestial Juno who orders the severing of the lock. It is an inversion (not to say perversion) of Roman marriage, befitting the Carthaginian royal whose union with Aeneas was not a

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[64] We may compare the problem of Aeneas' perceived devotion to Dido.

[65] K. K. Hersch, *The Roman Wedding: Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2010, p. 71; V. Panoussi, *Brides, Mourners, Bacchae: Women's Rituals in Roman Literature*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019, p. 17; also K. Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society*, London-New York: Routledge, 2008. Festus refers to this custom (p. 339 Lindsay).

legitimate nuptial relationship in the view of Virgil's contemporary Augustan audience – or of the Trojan hero.[66]

Dido thus formally is separated from Aeneas as her shade descends to the underworld. And there is more. In the underworld, the last stage of the Virgilian depiction of the relationship between Dido and Aeneas comes as the Trojan sojourner encounters the shade of Elissa in the Fields of Mourning (6.450-76). Aeneas' celebrated declaration *invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi* (6.460) in address to Dido's shade is borrowed from Catullus' *invita, o regina, tuo de vertice cessi* (c. 66.39), of the (Callimachean) lock of Berenice's hair.[67] The intertext recalls the fateful snipping of hair from Dido's death scene. It has been argued that one further antecedent for Aeneas' assurance to Dido's shade is Jupiter's comment to Alcmene *non ego te hic lubens relinquo neque abeo abs te* from Plautus, *Amphitruo* 531.[68] If correct, then the underworld epilogue of the Aeneas-Dido love story comes with another comic reminiscence, this time from a Plautine play in which Jupiter and Mercury – the gods most responsible for Aeneas' departure from Dido's shores – figure prominently. From the shipwreck imagery of the *Rudens* to the unwilling abandonment of a lover in *Amphitruo*, Virgil's *Elissiad* is colored with Plautine reminiscences, from its ominous start in *Aeneid* 1 to its poignant coda in 6.

Virgil's *Aeneid* offers a tissue of inter- and intratextual allusions to a wide range of Greek and Latin works, with Homeric and Alexandrian poetry holding prominent places on the spectrum of *Vorleben*, alongside reminiscences of tragedies both Euripidean and Ennian. But for his book of love, additionally the poet was especially indebted to the *fabulae palliatae* of Plautus, indeed to such a pervasive extent that Servius could rightly judge that (paradox notwithstanding) *Aeneid* 4 is, in no small part, drawn from comedy.

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[66] Cf. 4.338-9.

[67] For commentary here see especially N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 6, A Commentary, Volume 2: Commentary and Appendices*, Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2013, and R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Sextus*, Oxford, 1977, *ad loc*.

[68] So H. Pellicia, "Unlocking *Aeneid* 6.460: Plautus' *Amphitryon*, Euripides' *Protesilaus* and the Referents of Callimachus' *Coma*," in *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (December 2010-January 2011), pp. 149-219, 155-6, as part of a study of abandoned lover scenes in Greek and Latin verse.