

## MARRIAGE IN THE *AENEID*: VENUS, VULCAN, AND DIDO

EDWARD GUTTING

ROMAN TREATMENTS OF LOVE in such genres as elegy, philosophy, and comedy sometimes suggest a sharp distinction between marriage and erotic love. The *Aeneid*, particularly Venus' interactions with Dido and Vulcan, presents fruitful ground on which to examine the two worlds of such apparently polarizing approaches. The resulting view of Vergil's engagement with the conjugal and erotic worlds shows a more complex picture than that of simple polar opposition, or, for that matter, the negation of such an opposition. Vergil does, however, preserve a separation between the two realms, which superficially appears to reinforce the construction of polarizing norms. Venus' relation to erotic love is a monolithic one that displaces conjugal love. Her assault on Dido, for example, is an effort to replace Dido's conjugal love for Sychaeus with *amor* for Aeneas. Even when Venus appears before Vulcan as his wife, her erotic nature overwhelms her conjugal role. But, as we shall see, Vergil actually presents the dichotomy in terms that confront other constructions of it and confound the meanings they ascribe to it. As a result, Vergil provides tools for rethinking the place of marriage and erotic love in Roman society.

### MARRIAGE AND EROTIC LOVE

Central to Roman concepts of marriage was the idea that the institution involved a man and woman joined in a sharing partnership in order to produce legitimate children.<sup>1</sup> Procreation involves sexuality, of course, but the Romans did not restrict all approved sexual activity to the marital realm. Men could liaise with slaves and prostitutes without criticism, provided they did so in moderation.<sup>2</sup> Such free attitudes were limited, however, by a double standard that dictated that respectable women restrict all sexual activity to marriage. The variety of men's potential partners was matched by the multiple forms their love could take. For instance, love between spouses ideally contained

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1. Treggiari 1991, 3–13.

2. Lyne 1980, 1–18. I use prostitute here to cover the range of professional and semiprofessional sex workers whom Lyne discusses.

a deep-rooted affection that belonged not so much to passion as to friendship and was characterized by terms such as *societas* and *concordia*.<sup>3</sup> An affair with a prostitute, on the other hand, could be no more than a matter of physical, passionate love. These two ways of loving are not mutually exclusive. Passion could be an element in a marriage, while courtesans who took Athenian ἑταῖραι as their models offered to their patrons opportunities for physical passion accompanied by something more.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, some Romans had a tendency to exclude sexual passion from marriage.<sup>5</sup> From a philosophical standpoint, for example, Lucretius presents marriage and erotic love in a hierarchical dichotomy in which marriage is dominant.<sup>6</sup> Nor was this a parochial Epicurean view; the example of Seneca shows that Stoicism could accommodate similar ideas.<sup>7</sup> A comparable opposition exists in literary texts, though for different ends. Elegiac poetry, for example, reserves real passion for extramarital affairs.<sup>8</sup> Roman comedy, in turn, delights in pairing young men and women in passionate affairs when marriage is seemingly impossible.<sup>9</sup> The extraordinary dramatic tricks required to turn these lovers into husband and wife suggests the distance between such liaisons and marriage. Thus, in the mosaic of Roman social attitudes one finds a variety of positions that polarize marriage and erotic love.

It is useful when considering these polarizing approaches to keep in mind their description of the world in terms of two domains of sexual activity. On the one hand, there is the conjugal world, where the essential element of sexuality is procreation, always central although other attributes may accompany it. On the other hand, in the erotic world sex is an end in itself, the ultimate consequence of the needs and desires created by a physical and emotional focus on the beloved.<sup>10</sup> These approaches tend to distinguish the two domains of sexual activity with a clear hierarchy. The conjugal world has normative priority over that of the erotic, as is best seen in the acceptance of erotic

3. Treggiari 1991, 229–53.

4. Griffin 1986, 118–22; Lyne 1980, 8–13; and Treggiari 1991, 253–60, on passion in marriage, and 299–309, on affairs outside marriage.

5. These are the sort of Romans that caused Niall Rudd (1981, 140–58) to say that romantic love and its attendant erotic passion were not part of what he calls “the prevailing social ethos.” Treggiari (1991, 253–61) uses Rudd as a foundation for further arguments for the presence of romance and passion in Roman marriage, but still acknowledges Romans who polarize passion and marriage in that she sees what she describes as a trend contrary to other, older elements in Roman society: “It may be that individualism had grown stronger in the first century B.C., that the search for satisfaction in a passionate sexual relationship had consequently become more common, and that the romantic ideas associated with extramarital affairs had been transferred to *iustae coniuges*” (p. 260).

6. See Lucr. 4.1030–57, with the discussion in Brown 1986, 87–90, of Lucretius’ polarization of passionate love and a more reserved sort of love appropriate to long-term relations such as marriage; on the affinity of this Epicurean conception with a broad range of Roman social ideas, see 123–27.

7. See frags. F25–28 from Sen. *De matrimonio* in Vottero 1998. F27 provides a provocative insight into his views: *In aliena quippe uxore omnis amor turpis est, in sua nimius. sapiens vir iudicio debet amare coniugem, non affectu; regit impetus voluptatis nec praeceps fertur in coitum. nihil est foedius quam uxorem amare quasi adulteram*. Treggiari 1991, 214–24, has a helpful discussion of the *De matrimonio*.

8. Wyke 2002, 13–18, surveys scholarship on the extramarital affairs of elegy and, in particular, the women involved in them.

9. Duckworth [1952] 1994, 280–81, and Anderson 1993, 65–66, 74–76, with illustrations from specific plays in the pages following those cited.

10. Treggiari 1991, chap. 8, surveys the Latin semantic field of the conjugal world, while Pichon 1902 and Adams 1982 survey erotic semantics.

urges, provided they are satisfied in a way that does not trespass on conjugal ground. Consider, for example, the advice of Plautus' *Curculio*, which countenances a wide range of sexual activity so long as it does not debauch a marriageable virgin or another man's wife.<sup>11</sup> Elegy, in its valorization of the erotic world over that of the conjugal, casts itself as inverting what it represents as a Roman norm. It is clear that Seneca privileges marriage, but even Lucretius, whose Epicureanism might lead one to expect a denigration of marriage, indicates it has a kind of *amor* better than the passionate erotic *amor* he attacks at the end of Book 4.<sup>12</sup> Whatever meaning one of these works imputes to the dichotomy between erotic love and marriage, the meaning generally seems rooted in this hierarchy.

#### VENUS AND DIDO

Venus' plan to aid the Trojans through a love affair between Aeneas and Dido must overcome Dido's faithfulness to her late husband Sychaeus, a fidelity so strong that Dido counts its loss as undermining her primary claim to fame: *extinctus pudor et qua sola sidera adibam / fama prior* (4.322–23). Dido had also been passionately in love with Sychaeus, and it is only by comparison to those feelings that she recognizes her love for Aeneas (4.23). However, it is significant that Vergil relegates her passion to the past. Dido speaks of it in terms of its *vestigia* (4.23), that is, as something that is absent, with only traces to remind her of it. Moreover, she remarks that Sychaeus has taken away her passionate feelings (*meos . . . amores / abstulit*, 4.28–29). Thus the primary resistance that Venus must overcome in Dido is a conjugal one, her immediate and continuing feelings of obligation due to the conjugal virtue of being *univira*. Venus seeks to displace Dido's conjugal feelings with erotic ones. The ensuing onslaught of erotic feelings never entirely eliminates Dido's conjugal orientations, but nevertheless subordinates them to her erotic passion.<sup>13</sup>

Venus begins with a literal displacement of the conjugal by the erotic. She bids Cupid, the very embodiment of *amor*, to take the place of Ascanius and so secretly infect Dido with erotic love. Ascanius, because he is a child, is himself a token of the conjugal. Children are the *raison d'être* of Roman marriage, and, furthermore, Ascanius has a marked conjugal resonance for Dido because of the conspicuous childlessness of her prior marriage. Her famous epithet, *infelix*, refers not only to her misfortunes but to her childlessness as well.<sup>14</sup> Anna, who is *unanima* with Dido, knows to play on Dido's desire for children when she tries to convince her to marry Aeneas: *nec dulcis natos . . . noris?* (4.33). Ascanius, as proof of Aeneas' ability to father and

11. *Curc.* 33–38: *nemo hinc prohibet nec votat, / quin quod palam est venale, si argentum est, emas. / nemo ire quemquam publica prohibet via; / dum ne per fundum saeptum facias semitam, / dum ted apostineas nupta, vidua, virgine, / iuventute et pueris liberis, ama quid lubet.*

12. Brown 1986, 87–91.

13. The opposition between erotic love and marriage is consonant with Putnam's reading of Pallas' *baldrice* (1998, 189–207). The story of the Danaids is frozen in the moment of their killing, and so Vergil deliberately excludes the appearance of any Aphrodite/Venus championing the power of *eros* in order to defend marriage.

14. See Pease 1935, ad 4.68.

raise children, would, under normal circumstances, make Aeneas particularly attractive to Dido as a husband.

But when Cupid replaces Ascanius, the boy makes Aeneas more erotically attractive to Dido (1.709–22 [trans. from line 695]):

mirantur [sc. Tyrii] dona Aeneae, mirantur Iulum,  
 flagrantisque dei vultus simulataque verba, 710  
 pallamque et pictum croceo velamen acantho.  
 praecipue infelix, pesti devota futurae,  
 expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo  
 Phoenissa, et pariter puero donisque movetur.  
 ille ubi complexu Aeneae colloque pependit  
 et magnum falsi implevit genitoris amorem,  
 reginam petit. haec oculis, haec pectore toto  
 haeret et interdum gremio foveat inscia Dido  
 insidat quantus miserae deus. at memor ille  
 matris Acidaliae paulatim abolere Sychaeum 720  
 incipit et vivo temptat praevertere amore  
 iam pridem resides animos desuetaque corda.

Cupid meantime assum'd his form and face,  
 Foll'wing Achates with a shorter pace,  
 And brought the gifts. The queen already sate  
 Amidst the Trojan lords, in shining state,  
 High on a golden bed: her princely guest  
 Was next her side; in order sate the rest.  
 Then canisters with bread are heap'd on high;  
 th' attendants water for their hands supply,  
 And, having wash'd, with silken towels dry.  
 Next fifty handmaids in long order bore  
 The censers, and with fumes the gods adore:  
 Then youths, and virgins twice as many, join  
 To place the dishes, and to serve the wine.  
 The Tyrian train, admitted to the feast,  
 Approach, and on the painted couches rest.  
 All on the Trojan gifts with wonder gaze,  
 But view the beauteous boy with more amaze,  
 His rosy-color'd cheeks, his radiant eyes,  
 His motions, voice, and shape, and all the god's disguise;  
 Nor pass unprais'd the vest and veil divine,  
 Which wand'ring foliage and rich flow'rs entwine.  
 But, far above the rest, the royal dame,  
 (Already doom'd to love's disastrous flame,)  
 With eyes insatiate, and tumultuous joy,  
 Beholds the presents, and admires the boy.  
 The guileful god about the hero long,  
 With children's play, and false embraces, hung;  
 Then sought the queen: she took him to her arms  
 With greedy pleasure, and devour'd his charms.  
 Unhappy Dido little thought what guest,  
 How dire a god, she drew so near her breast;  
 But he, not mindless of his mother's pray'r,

Works in the pliant bosom of the fair,  
 And molds her heart anew, and blots her former care.  
 The dead is to the living love resign'd;  
 And all Aeneas enters in her mind.

Cupid approaches bearing gifts that reflect his role as displacer of the conjugal.<sup>15</sup> The gifts, chosen by Aeneas, are a *palla* and *velamen* of Helen that she received from her mother Leda, the scepter of Ilione, a necklace, and a crown. When the gifts are first described at 1.648–55, the *palla* and *velamen* receive the most emphasis. Four lines describe them with special attention to the fact that Helen brought them to Troy when she sought *in-concessi hymenaei*.<sup>16</sup> The scepter of Ilione<sup>17</sup> is described in only a line, while the necklace and crown seem to pale in comparison to the two prior gifts because they have no history of prior ownership and are tacked onto the end of the list almost as afterthoughts. When Cupid brings the gifts to Dido, only the *palla* and *velamen* receive specific mention. As badges of Helen's adultery they are symbols of Venus' greatest subordination of the conjugal to the erotic, that is, her defeat of Juno at the Judgment of Paris, a victory achieved by a promise to dissolve Helen's marriage to Menelaus for the erotic enjoyment of Paris.

Dido, *infelix* in this part of the text as nowhere else (twice in forty lines, 1.712, 739), has two reactions to Cupid and the gifts: *expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo*. *Ardesco* continues the use of fire as an image of erotic passion, which Venus introduced in her instructions to Cupid, but note its inceptive force. This is *ardesco*, not *ardeo*; by looking, Dido here just begins to catch fire.<sup>18</sup> Cupid has not yet fully worked his erotic magic on Dido, and thus his displacement of Ascanius and the conjugal world is not complete. The appearance of a child looking like Ascanius, whether actually Cupid or not, still pricks Dido's maternal instinct and so makes Aeneas look more conjugally attractive to her, as indicated by the phrase *expleri mentem nequit*. *Expleri* should be understood in light of its cousin *implevit*, which occurs three lines down: *et magnum falsi implevit genitoris amorem*. The *genitoris amor* that Cupid fulfills is an *amor* that in the *Aeneid* is based upon the conjugal bond shared by the child's parents. Aeneas characterizes it as such when he relates the very last words of Creusa: *iamque vale et nati serva communis amorem* (2.789). The use of *implere* to indicate the conjugal fulfillment provided by children colors the meaning of its synonym, *explere*. So *expleri mentem nequit* has overtones of Dido's inability to find such fulfillment, a wound that the presence of Ascanius/Cupid irritates.

Cupid, however, is not in the conjugal business, so the charming picture of *ille* [Cupid] *ubi complexu Aeneae colloque pependit / et magnum falsi*

15. On symbolic gifts and Dido, see Henry 1989, 18–42.

16. This emphasis on the adulterous nature of the gifts may be further emphasized by indications, such as the color of the veil, that they were originally wedding gifts for Helen's marriage to Menelaus.

17. Itself a frightening gift, in that her marriage is a tale of murder and woe.

18. This depiction of Cupid's seduction of Dido as a series of progressive stages continues with the *paulatim* of 1.720.

*implevit genitoris amorem* is shattered with the word *falsus*, which serves to remind us that *implevit*, while it seems to be the warm fulfillment of paternal love, is actually colored more by the word's connotation of fulfilling an obligation or duty.<sup>19</sup> Cupid fakes filial affection because it is part of his mission.

In the same spirit, he plays to Dido's maternal instincts:<sup>20</sup> *haec oculis, haec pectore toto / haeret et interdum gremio fovet inscia Dido. haec . . . haeret* emphasizes Dido's pathetic inability to *expleri mentem*. She can cling to the boy bodily through sight and touch, but such physical contact remains outside the mental realm where her need resides. However much she smothers the boy in her embrace, she will always know that he is not her child. At any rate, Cupid makes only temporary use of Dido's maternal instincts. Once in her lap he follows Venus' instructions and infects Dido with a powerful erotic love that begins to displace her conjugal fidelity so that she will forget about her late husband Sychaeus: *at memor ille / matris Acidaliae paulatim abolere Sychaeum / incipit et vivo temptat praevertere amore / iam pridem resides animos desuetaque corda*. There is something diabolical about Venus' plan. She has used Dido's desire for a fruitful marriage to get Cupid close enough to her to overcome her conjugal feelings with a tide of erotic passion. Venus has used Dido's conjugal disposition against itself.

A change in Dido's attitudes toward children reflects the displacement of her conjugal inclinations with erotic love. Even when the real Ascanius returns and once again sits in Dido's lap, it will be as a poor substitute for her erotic fixation upon Aeneas: *illum absens absentem auditque videtque, / aut gremio Ascanium genitoris imagine capta / detinet, infandum si fallere possit amorem* (4.83–85). *Detinet* and *capta* lend a harsh note that distinguishes this scene from that of the maternal caresses Dido bestowed in Book 1. Dido is no longer acting only out of maternal affection for the child, but has also made the boy a sop to her own erotic passions. The child is no longer for her primarily a token of the conjugal world.<sup>21</sup> Cupid successfully displaced Ascanius.

Dido's wish that she were pregnant by Aeneas expands upon the same theme: *saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset / ante fugam suboles, si quis mihi parvulus aula / luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret, / non equidem omnino capta ac deserta viderer* (4.327–30). The phrase *parvulus Aeneas* is striking because it is a rare use of a diminutive adjective in Vergil's epic.<sup>22</sup> The diminutive recalls the *parvulus Torquatus* of Catullus 61. There, the *parvulus Torquatus* exemplifies perfectly the use of children as tokens of the conjugal bond. Catullus explains that the child should be a replica of his father in order to serve as a sign to all of his mother's *pudicitia* (61.209–18). But in Dido's case, the typically conjugal desire for a child who looks like his father has become a facet of erotic desire. She does not want a child

19. As, for example, in the first line of the prologue to *Controv.* 9 of the elder Seneca: *iam videbar promissum meum implesse*.

20. Gillis 1983, 39–42.

21. A similarity between Dido and Phaedra, which joins those already observed by Oliensis (1997).

22. Austin 1955, ad 4.328. Diminutive nouns are also quite rare; Nisbet (1991) notes only two in the poem, *palmula* and *sagulum*.

*qui te tamen ore referret* as proof of *pudicitia*; her *pudor* is already *extinctus*. Like Ascanius and the *genitoris imagine* in her lap at the beginning of Book 4, her desire for a *parvulus Aeneas* expresses her erotic fixation on Aeneas. She wants a *parvulus Aeneas* to remind her of the object of her passion when he is no longer with her.

Thus, Venus does not simply stop at substituting Aeneas for Sychaeus and making Dido forget her dead husband. Venus goes farther than she needs to achieve her immediate goals, so much so that Dido's general interest in the conjugal is shaken to the point that even children are of interest to her primarily as erotic tokens. In Book 4 it will take direct intervention by the goddess of marriage herself to reassert the conjugal interests of a Dido who is now overcome by such a disease (*tali peste teneri*, 4.90).

When Dido returns to the poem at the beginning of Book 4, she is deep in the grip of erotic love, as the standard metaphors of wounds, poison, and fire, as well as the common trope of sleeplessness, all present in 4.1–5, indicate.<sup>23</sup> Dido's speech to Anna still shows some concern for conjugal fidelity to Sychaeus,<sup>24</sup> but leaves it clear that the incremental (*paulatim* 1.720) subordination of the conjugal to the erotic continues. The first sign of this is in the tense shifts in Dido's elaborate counterfactual conditional in 4.15–19, which follows a description of Aeneas' attractiveness.

The first protasis (*si mihi non animo fixum immotumque sederet / ne cui me vincolo vellem sociare iugali, / postquam primus amor deceptam morte fefellit*) begins the conditional as a present counterfactual statement describing the condition Dido would have to be in if she were now to abandon her fidelity to Sychaeus. Then a second protasis (*si non pertaesum thalami tædæque fuisset*) acts as an example of theme and variation on the first, but with a notable change of tense. It is now a past counterfactual. Thus Dido's first protasis is a statement that precludes infidelity to Sychaeus at the present time, but the second protasis only precludes infidelity in past time. The possibility of present infidelity is left open. Thus the change in tense reflects the incremental *paulatim abolere Sychaeum* begun by Cupid at 1.720. The apodosis, *huic uni forsā potui succumbere culpæ*, leaves no doubt of the cracks in Dido's fidelity.

From this shaky start Dido moves further and further from her conjugal feelings. After she admits openly the erotic attraction Aeneas holds for her (*hic inflexit sensus . . . animumque . . . impulit. agnosco veteris vestigia flammae*, 4.22–23) she appeals to external sources, hoping that they will shore up her fidelity. She calls upon the ground to swallow her up or Jupiter to blast her with thunderbolts before she violates her *pudor*. Clearly, she has already lost the battle with erotic love if she must look outside herself for aid that can only save her by destroying her. In the same way she apostrophizes *pudor* at 4.27. The apostrophe distances *pudor* from her by turning it into

23. In considering Dido and erotic love, it is important to keep in mind the elegiac aspect of these and many other elements in Dido's portrayal; for discussion of these, see Cairns 1989, 129–50.

24. On Dido *univira*, see Rudd 1990.

another external force, which makes one wonder where her own *pudor*, previously a key internal attribute of her person, has gone. The appeal to Sychaeus (*ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores / abstulit; ille habeat secum servetque sepulcro*, 4.28–29) is the final and most striking of these external appeals. She leaves it to the dead man to watch over her living actions and guard against impropriety. Thus Dido acknowledges her defeat at the hands of erotic love by abdicating personal responsibility for her actions. If she is not to abandon her *pudor*, it will be through the intervention of something other than herself.

Anna's response, while modeled on the response of Phaedra's nurse in the *Hippolytus*, is in a markedly different spirit. Euripides' nurse is a champion of erotic passion, but Anna counsels marriage to Aeneas, not a love affair with him.<sup>25</sup> Her reply opens with the desirability of children (*nec dulcis natos Veneris nec praemia noris?* 4.33), which implies marriage from the outset.<sup>26</sup> Then she casts Aeneas in the role of a suitor by comparing him with Dido's previous suitors (4.35–38). Finally, she argues on the basis of the practical benefits to be gained from giving up fidelity to Sychaeus. The Carthaginians are threatened by the indigenous African populations as well as by Pygmalion in Tyre, and so marriage to a seasoned warrior like Aeneas would be welcome (4.39–44). No doubt Juno, whom readers should understand as acting as both champion of Carthage and goddess of marriage, brought Aeneas to Dido (4.45–46). A marriage alliance will be the basis of a powerful union of Trojans and Carthaginians that will lead to more than defense against threats, but great glory as well (*quam tu urbem, soror, hanc cernes, quae surgere regna / coniugio tali! Teucrum comitantibus armis / Punica se quantis attollet gloria rebus*, 4.47–49). These practical points are well taken and, from the limited point of view of a mortal, true.<sup>27</sup>

Anna's reply is full of empathy and understanding for her sister, but it fails to grasp the fact that erotic love has undermined not only Dido's conjugal loyalty to Sychaeus, but has also come to dominate her conjugal sensibilities.<sup>28</sup> Dido's reaction to Anna proves the point: *his dictis impenso animum flammavit amore / spemque dedit dubiae menti solitque pudorem* (4.54–55). How can an exhortation to marriage have such effects, given the gulf between passion and conjugal affection in the Lucretian philosophical discourse Anna draws upon in her speech?<sup>29</sup> Based on the results of the speech, one would think that it was Cupid and not Anna who spoke to Dido. Although Anna's

25. Pöschl 1962, 76.

26. *Veneris praemia* may refer to sexual pleasure or children, according to Pease 1935, ad loc. Consequently the *nec . . . nec* can be taken as listing alternatives or as a case of pleonasm. Anna's pragmatic, dynastic, and therefore conjugal outlook in this speech supports the latter reading.

27. Heinze (1993, 99) writes that the arguments of Anna are specious and too easily accepted by Dido. But the flaws in Anna's arguments are apparent only if one has a Jovian knowledge of Fate.

28. Pöschl (1962, 75–76) and Monti (1981, 31–35) read Dido as motivated by the desire for dynastic marriage expressed in Anna's speech. While such considerations have significant resonance for Dido, nevertheless they take second place to her erotic passions. The subordination is no surprise: her natural dynastic interests as a ruler of a city are effective human motivation, but that pales beside the force of divinely inspired passion.

29. Serv. ad *Aen.* 4.34 (*id cinerem aut manis credis curare sepultos?*) notes Anna's Epicurean sentiments; for more recent scholarship on the topic, see Dyson 1996.



sober conjugal counsel is not the sort of thing that would fan the flames of love, Dido's erotic passion is so great that she hears what she wants to hear. She takes the conjugal content in Anna's speech to support her erotic passion.

Dido makes sacrifice as Anna suggested. This passage exercised Servius greatly because of the potential theological problems in having the gods approve of Dido's course of action. Even modern commentators have been unsure as to how to understand Vergil's *heu, vatum ignarae mentes!*<sup>30</sup> But when this passage is understood in light of the erotic slant of Dido's interpretation of Anna's conjugal advice, these problems disappear. Dido sacrifices to gods who, given their civic and conjugal roles,<sup>31</sup> reflect Anna's dynastic interests. But Dido reacts to them in the same way that she reacts to Anna's advice. Thus there are no theological problems, and we need not worry that *vatum ignarae mentes* is an attack on prophecy or on the ability of the seers to do their jobs. It is, however, a comment on the problem encountered when an imbalanced mind distorts sensible information.

However well the *vates* do their job, Dido will interpret what they say with a perverse emphasis on the erotic. Vergil underlines the peculiarities of this state of mind with the question *quid vota furem / quid delubra iuvant?* He does not need to provide a direct answer to the query because Dido's reactions first to Anna and then to the sacrifices have already answered it for the reader. Whatever the sacrifices tell her, she will pay attention only insofar as she can twist what is said to suit her erotic desires. Thus, consulting the *exta* of sacrificial victims is insufficient. One has to look inside the body of Dido too and see how *est mollis flamma medullas / interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus* (4.65, two lines after *consulit exta*), to understand truly the results of the sacrifices and Dido's reaction to them. Vergil has redefined the concept of extispicy for the *Aeneid*.

Following the sacrifices, Dido falls into an erotic torpor reflected in the cessation of all work upon the nascent Carthage (4.86–89). If she is not building her city, building a dynasty cannot be a high priority for her either. Erotic forces dominate Dido's conjugal impulses as well as her dynastic ones. An alarmed Juno takes action quickly, *quam simul ac tali persensit peste teneri* (4.90). Venus' success has made Dido forget her fidelity to Sychaeus and become completely enamored of Aeneas.

Juno, therefore, must intervene directly to reemphasize Dido's interest in conjugal matters and so try to counter Venus. She tries to recover the situation by arranging a marriage between Dido and Aeneas in order to counter Venus' erotic prowess with her conjugal power. To that end she presents the marriage as a reconciliation of the goddesses of the two realms: *sed quis erit modus, aut quo nunc certamine tanto? / quin potius pacem aeternam pactosque hymenaeos / exercemus?* (4.98–101) and *communem hunc ergo populum paribusque regamus / auspiciis* (4.102–3).

30. See Pease 1935, ad 4.65. O'Hara 1993 surveys the question and gives a good analysis of Dido's inability to interpret the rites, though without positing why she is unable to interpret properly. O'Hara 1997, 251, gives a quick rundown of the grammatical ambiguity of the genitive.

31. Monti 1981, 31–32.

Juno is grudging in her acceptance of Dido's love-struck state and prefaces her proposal with a sarcastic blast against the victory Venus has achieved through her erotic power (4.93–98). Moreover, the reconciliation she proposes does not mean an outcome fairly balanced between the goddesses. Juno disingenuously suggests that it will be a victory for Venus and the Trojans over the Carthaginians: *liceat Phrygio servire marito / dotalisque tuae Tyrios permittere dextrae* (4.103–4). She speaks with *simulata mente* (4.105), because, in fact, what really matters about the proposed reconciliation is that it will be a triumph of Juno over the future Romans, whose existence will be thwarted because Aeneas will never reach Italy.

Venus believes that Jupiter will not consent to such a marriage. This gives her the luxury of pretending to agree without making a commitment that will have any force. When she says *fatis incerta feror* she adopts like Juno a *mens simulata*. Venus has recently found out firsthand from Jupiter what is fated (1.254–96), and thus Venus can rest assured that Aeneas will not ultimately marry Dido and settle down in Carthage.<sup>32</sup> Despite Juno's plan, the marriage is sure to be swept aside, only this time it will not be through Venus' use of erotic power, but rather through the will of Jupiter. Though Venus relies upon Jupiter as custodian of the fates, a non-erotic source of power, she still counts on the suppression of conjugal forces in Dido's life, just as she did before Juno's intervention.

Venus' reply to Juno is very pointed. While it agrees with the plan to complement Dido's erotic affair with a marriage, it at the same time hints that Juno cannot come to terms with an amalgamation of the conjugal and erotic worlds in this case any more than she can in her private life. Venus accepts the marriage and consequent union of Trojans and Carthaginians, so long as Juno can convince Jupiter to support it: *tu coniunx, tibi fas animum temptare precando* (4.112). But Juno does not have such influence over her husband. Indeed, in one of the Homeric models for this scene, Hera needs to borrow Aphrodite's magical ἱμάς in order to gain the erotic power to sway Zeus (*Il.* 14.214–23). No such help is forthcoming in Vergil's version. Venus tells Juno to approach Jupiter as his *coniunx*, all the while knowing that such a request will fail because of the problems in her marriage. Without the ἱμάς or other such erotic aid, Juno will not convince Jupiter of anything. Venus mocks Juno's conjugal power and its inability to come to terms with the love affair at Carthage by insinuating that Juno cannot achieve an advantageous relation between the conjugal and the erotic worlds even in her own private life.

Juno ignores the topic of her husband and finalizes the plans for a marriage between Dido and Aeneas. But do Aeneas and Dido marry, or not, shortly thereafter at lines 4.160–72, in accordance with Juno's plan?<sup>33</sup> In either

32. Note the contrast with Aeneas, who has had a glimpse of what Jupiter wills, but completely forgets about it while in Carthage. He heard these things a long time ago, through less direct sources, and so they cannot be assumed to be part of his understanding of the situation with Dido, as they are for Venus. Aeneas will need Mercury to provide a more immediate reminder.

33. On this much-discussed topic see, for example, Feeney 1990; Lyne 1987, 173; Marin 1993; Moles 1984, 156; 1987; Monti 1981, 30–36; Quinn 1963, 37–58; Rudd 1990, 153; Williams 1962; 1968, 380; and Wlosok 1990, 336–43.

case, Juno, acting as *pronuba*, does revive the conjugal element of Dido's passions. But the conjugal complements her erotic passions only to be pushed out of the picture yet again, this time by the will of Jupiter. Marriage returns to the text and shows that Venus, as previously, can count on its marginalization. In such a context there is no practical distinction between a real and a fake marriage. Whatever its status, the marriage is doomed by fate. A real and an ersatz marriage can both fail equally well in this way, and such failure is so limiting that it does not give enough scope for the marriage to establish itself as real or fake. The status of the marriage is problematic because its function in the text is to show once again how a combination of marriage and the erotic leaves the conjugal obscured and unstable, the same state in which Cupid's seductions left Dido's memory of Sychaeus.

Venus has brought to life the dichotomy between conjugal and erotic to great effect. Key to this success is how Venus works within an arrangement of the conjugal and erotic worlds typical of the approaches that polarize the two, but reverses their usual privileging of the conjugal world over that of the erotic. In this, Venus reflects a broader reversal along the same lines. Throughout the poem, her erotic power is aligned with the dominant force of Rome and its future.<sup>34</sup> Of course, given the dangerous nature of erotic power, the alliance is unstable, as the problems that arise in Carthage for Aeneas and his mission show.

Venus' subordination of the conjugal to the erotic in the case of Dido serves the immediate purpose of marginalizing Sychaeus in her mind, but the effects are further ranging than that. Even when Juno directly reintroduces conjugal concerns into the plot, the resulting "marriage" is at best obscure and unstable. Furthermore, erotic orientations interfere with Dido's conjugal attraction to children, and she allows passion to fog the conjugal and dynastic import of Anna's speech and of the sacrifices that follow. Venus' achievement comes with an authority that suggests she subordinates the conjugal to the erotic as a matter of course. Her meeting with Vulcan (8.370–406) best illustrates how inevitable and natural this aspect of Venus is, and analysis of that scene combined with the above readings will allow a general assessment of Venus' relation to the conjugal and erotic worlds.

#### VENUS AND VULCAN

When Venus speaks to Vulcan in Book 8, the scene is set for a portrayal of Venus as wife. She plays the role of an *exterrita mater*, which pulls her away from some of her sexier manifestations and puts her into the realm of the domestic and the conjugal.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the scene takes place in a *thalamo coniugis aureo*. Venus' speech is that of a good wife intervening with her husband on behalf of a child. She addresses Vulcan in standard conjugal language as *carissime coniunx* (8.377). She portrays herself as a mother with

34. Herein lies the crux of Vergil's distinction of his Venus from the Greek Aphrodite. Both are erotic goddesses, but—as I hope to describe in another article—Venus' eroticism highlights the nexus between sexuality and imperial domination, while Aphrodite's eroticism leads to her humiliation and subordination.

35. Putnam 1988, 136–37.

*arma rogo, genetrix nato* (8.383), a pithy expression emphasized because it makes for a long enjambment and is bound together by its assonance. *Genetrix* is a carefully chosen word because it calls to mind Venus' most dynastic cult incarnation, the Venus Genetrix. Finally, she casts the *exempla* she chooses, Thetis and Aurora, in the most domestic light possible. Thetis is *filia Nerei*, which avoids mentioning her unsuccessful marriage to Peleus, while Eos is mentioned not by name, but as a wife—*Tithonia coniunx*.

The only note of dissonance in Venus' carefully conjugal speech is that it is so formally rhetorical that it lacks the domestic familiarity one might expect between husband and wife. Servius leaps at the chance to categorize her speech's rhetorical structures.<sup>36</sup> Venus asks a difficult favor of Vulcan because Aeneas was her son by another father, and so has to dig deeply into her rhetorical bag of tricks to insure a favorable reception.<sup>37</sup>

The conjugal nature of Venus' words is but one layer of the scene. Erotic caresses accompany what she says (*Aen.* 8.387–93):

dixerat et niveis hinc atque hinc diva lacertis  
cunctantem amplexu molli fovet. ille repente  
accepit solitam flammam, notusque medullas  
intravit calor et labefacta per ossa cucurrit,                   390  
non secus atque olim tonitru cum rupta corusco  
igne rima micans percurrit lumine nimbos;  
sensit laeta dolis et formae conscia coniunx.

She said; and straight her arms, of snowy hue,  
About her unresolving husband threw.  
Her soft embraces soon infuse desire;  
His bones and marrow sudden warmth inspire;  
And all the godhead feels the wonted fire.  
Not half so swift the rattling thunder flies,  
Or fork lightning flash along the skies.  
The goddess, proud of her successful wiles,  
And conscious of her form, in secret smiles.

After the first two lines emphasize the physical nature of the caresses, Vergil turns to the commonplace metaphor of fire for erotic desire, first used in the *Aeneid* by Venus herself in her erotic plans for Dido, *cingere flamma / reginam meditor* (1.673–74). Fire, of course, is especially apt for anything that involves Vulcan, and the *solita flamma* and *notus calor* play with this. Because Vulcan works in a volcanic forge, he finds flames and heat especially *solita* and *notus*. The lightning-flash simile strongly emphasizes the effect of the caresses. It is standard to consider erotic love, usually in the embodiment of Amor/Cupid, as the only thing to rival the power of Jupiter's bolts.<sup>38</sup> Again, Venus first used this concept in Book 1 of the *Aeneid* when appealing

36. Serv. ad 8.374. Serv. ad 8.373 acknowledges the difficulties Venus faces in this speech because of Aeneas' embarrassing parentage.

37. Lyne 1987, 39–40.

38. Vulcan, of course, manufactures Jupiter's bolts.

to Cupid to seduce Dido: *solus / nate patris summi qui tela Typhoëa temnis* (1.664–65).

In 8.393 the *dolis* cannot refer to Venus' speech, which is fairly straightforward. Instead, it refers to the discrepancy between her words and actions. Her deceit lies in her speaking conjugally but acting erotically. The words that follow, *formae conscia coniunx*, underline this discrepancy. Yes, Venus is a *coniunx* just as she has been presented, but the erotic attribute of her physical *forma* undergirds her conjugal words. Indeed, a good Roman *coniunx* would never be found in the sentence *sensit laeta dolis et formae conscia coniunx*. The fact that the word *coniunx* is out of place here helps to deflate the depiction of a conjugal Venus that has preceded it.

The next line, *tum pater aeterno fatur devinctus amore*, has a similar effect. Though Gransden (1976) and Fordyce (1977) both note (ad loc.) that such a use of *pater* generically applied to male gods is common, the appearance of the word here in this scene and particularly in this line cannot be so colorless as it usually is. First, Venus' speech is carefully wrought, suggesting a certain anxiety about Vulcan's reaction. But, as she herself points out, Vulcan has a record of being generally accommodating to requests for armor. There must be a reason for Venus' uncertainty about how Vulcan will respond, and the only plausible reason is that Aeneas is her child by another father.

Nor is Fordyce's citation of Venus' unproblematic use of *tuus frater* in referring to Aeneas when speaking to Cupid at 1.667 relevant here. Half-brothers in epic may have perfectly happy relations, as Teucer and Telamonian Ajax in the *Iliad* illustrate. Stepparents and stepchildren are another matter; consider Juno's hatred for Hercules. Finally, the *pater* of this line is paired with *aeterno . . . devinctus amore*, which echoes the *aeterno devinctus vulnere amoris* of Lucretius 1.34, where it is used to describe Mars in the embrace of Venus.<sup>39</sup> Thus *pater* is paired with a verbal echo of Venus' most famous adulterous love, and so the irony in calling Vulcan *pater* during a discussion of Aeneas, who is born of yet another adulterous love of Venus, cannot help but rise to the surface of the text.

Therefore the scene's portrayal of Venus in a conjugal light begins to seem problematic. As a result, the erotic actions that accompany Venus' words become all the more important. No matter what difficulties arise in Venus' adoption of the role of a wife asking her husband for a favor, her erotic enticements ensure that the request will be readily granted. Indeed, until Venus begins the physical persuasion, Vulcan (*cunctantem*, 8.389) does not heed her words. Vulcan's reply continues to develop this emphasis on Venus' erotic persuasion. By the time he has finished speaking, it is clear that the two conjugal speeches in the scene are superficial, and that it is the erotic action of the scene that really matters.

Vulcan's speech starts as an appropriate reply to the carefully constructed speech of Venus. His use of the words *fiducia* and *cura* are fitting in response

39. Note, too, an allusion to the same scene through reversal. In Lucretius Venus has moved Mars to put down his weapons and stop fighting, while here she persuades Vulcan to create arms so that Aeneas can start fighting.

to someone speaking as a wife and mother. He follows her distinction between the past of the Trojan War and the present, taking the time to discuss both and matching her *dum . . . nunc* with *tum . . . nunc*.<sup>40</sup> He may even respond to Venus' strongly marked *arma rogo, genetrix nato* with a similar assonance of "o" in *quod fieri ferro liquidove potest electro*, as Gransden notes (ad loc.).

But these elements of a carefully worded reply befitting his wife's careful request are undercut by the rest of his speech. Whereas Venus' speech contained a number of distinct ideas,<sup>41</sup> Vulcan restricts himself to repetitive affirmations of her request. He may appropriately mirror her rhetoric of past and present, but he does not otherwise bother to address the specific points she has made. It is almost as if he is falling all over himself to say, "Yes, yes, yes!" to her, and so his speech lacks the detailed response that would befit the detailed content of hers. This is capped by his mindlessly hyperbolic claim that he would have kept Troy standing for another ten years at her request.

Finally, he abandons all pretext of responding to her point by point (8.401–4):

quidquid in arte mea possum promittere curae,  
quod fieri ferro liquidove potest electro,  
quantum ignes animaeque valent—absiste precando  
viribus indubitare tuis.

Whatever melting metals can conspire,  
Or breathing bellows, or the forming fire,  
Is freely yours: your anxious fears remove,  
And think no task is difficult to love.

He cannot be bothered to state his promise clearly but again falls into hyperbole. He is not, after all, going to make Aeneas armor on the level of Jupiter's aegis. Vulcan's glaring lack of a cogent, detailed response indicates that for him at least the speeches in the scene are of little importance. In the end, he lets his lack of interest in speaking take over completely,<sup>42</sup> which leads to the anacoluthon followed by open acknowledgment that the spoken words of this exchange are irrelevant and that the erotic actions (*viribus tuis* does not refer to Venus' rhetorical prowess, after all) are what matter to him. So the speeches, in which all the scene's conjugal elements were contained, fade in importance in the face of the purely erotic actions that Venus uses to persuade Vulcan.<sup>43</sup>

The simile of 8.406–16 completes the picture.<sup>44</sup> It shows how, with Venus at hand, the erotic world so supersedes that of the conjugal that erotic

40. So Fordyce 1977, ad loc.

41. These are the lack of any requests to him during the Trojan War, the stress on *debita* (*Pergama . . . debita* and *Priami deberem plurima natis*), her sorrow for Aeneas, the exempla of Thetis and Eos, and the description of war in Italy.

42. Lyne 1987, 41–42.

43. Putnam (1988, 138–39) and Gillis (1983, 127–29) describe how the erotic elements of the scene further carry over into the creation of the shield.

44. Lyne 1987, 42–44.

persuasion can turn the conjugal world upside down. Vulcan is compared to a Roman matron rising early to start the hearth fire, a powerful domestic/conjugal symbol, so that she may work to provide for her household. Venus' erotic prowess has so jumbled the conjugal world that the roles in her marriage are reversed. Evidently the erotic flame she inspired in Vulcan burns much stronger than the hearth flame of this simile.

Thus what started out as a straightforward conjugal scene with Venus playing the role of wife and mother ends with a thorough subordination of the conjugal to the erotic. Nothing in the situation itself required this. She deployed enough rhetoric to finesse the difficulty of asking for arms for a child not Vulcan's own, and surely as Vulcan's wife she has as strong, if not stronger, claims to Vulcan's skills as Thetis or Eos. But, because the dichotomy between the conjugal and erotic worlds is the basis of Venus' work, she is not one to rely on uxorial speeches. In fact, one gets the impression that Venus displaces the conjugal with the erotic as naturally, and unavoidably, as breathing. Moreover, as we saw in Book 4, she seems unable to control with precision the erotic forces on which she depends—they are like a natural force. None of this should come as a surprise. The rhetoric of dichotomy often seeks authority in claims to be natural, and the case of Venus is no exception.

In Vergil's treatment of Venus, his presentation of a dichotomy between the conjugal and erotic worlds, with its similarity to polarizing works on the same subject, superficially appears consonant with their understanding of a sharp distinction between the two worlds. The *Aeneid*, however, does not ultimately follow the polarizing works at all.

Vergil preserves the structure of the polar opposition but challenges the understanding of it as a hierarchy of the conjugal over erotic world.<sup>45</sup> His Venus instantiates the dichotomy's erotic pole, but, as the *genetrix* of the Julian *gens*, she is central to the future of Augustan Rome and so, by extension, opens the door to considering the erotic world as no less important than the conjugal world. Nor is Vergil content merely to destabilize understandings of the dichotomy that rest on its usual hierarchy. He simultaneously signifies the erotic pole through dangerous, anti-Roman impulses, and, in the case of the love affair at Carthage, puts the Venus who-would-be-*Genetrix* in charge of them.<sup>46</sup> Yet even the Shield of Aeneas, that testament of the future glory of Augustan Rome, is born of an erotic fire—markedly so, given the way erotic love muscles aside the expected conjugal affection that might have marked its production. So the polar opposition remains, but the priority of the conjugal over the erotic that defines it in other approaches<sup>47</sup>

45. Of course, the polar opposition would collapse if pushed hard enough, but here Vergil is apparently not interested in such a project.

46. On the tension between erotic love and empire, see Putnam 1995, 42–43, in addition to Putnam 1998 on *eros* turning into *eris*. Nor should we ignore Vergil's general associations of the erotic world with pain and *pathos*. Consider, for example, the eroticized deaths of virgins on the battlefield, as described by Fowler 1987 and Mitchell 1991.

47. I refer to the philosophical and literary approaches mentioned in the introduction to this article.

that polarize marriage and erotic love is gone. The result is an upheaval in the understanding of the dichotomy. The move is a bold one. Even elegy, which shares Vergil's interest in inverting the binary hierarchy, represents this interest as marginal in face of Roman norms. Vergil goes radically further because his association of the erotic world with Rome's dominance denies that his challenge to the hierarchy is any more marginal than the Augustan empire.

Vergil does not here give up the pretense that the dichotomy is in some sense natural and inevitable. But his presentation of Venus suggests that its terms can be interpreted from different perspectives. As a result the dichotomy remains, but only in a formal, structural sense. The meanings inscribed in it by approaches that privilege the conjugal world over that of the erotic are not the only possible interpretation of the dichotomy. This suggests that the dichotomy does not have any intrinsic, unalterable meaning and so appears to be a vehicle for meaning rather than meaningful in and of itself. Agrippa's comment on Vergil's use of ordinary words is thus evidenced here on a level beyond that of mere diction (*Vit. Verg.* 1.44). Just as he uses common language in uncommon ways, his presentation of Venus' relation to the conjugal and erotic worlds takes a concept common to a range of approaches that polarize marriage and erotic passion and puts it to novel use.

The dichotomy, being a vehicle for meaning, is rhetorical, but not in the pejorative modern sense of the word. It is a tool for thought and argument about basic elements of the social fabric, something especially useful in Vergil's time, when civil war had torn society apart. Accordingly, as we have seen, Vergil uses it to engage and challenge certain approaches that polarize the conjugal and erotic worlds. In the process, he breaks the identification of the dichotomy with meanings that do not vary in their dependence on an unchanging hierarchy in the dichotomy, and so opens the door to a multiplicity of descriptions of the relation between its elements. In this way, Vergil creates a window for flexible and creative thinking about issues of erotic love and marriage. It should be no surprise that his was the same age that introduced such radical legislation as the *lex Iulia de adulterii coercendis* and the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*. Though Vergil's conjugal ideas and the marriage legislation may be quite different, they both reflect an age that sought to escape moribund modes of thought in order to build a new society out of the ashes of civil war.

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