

DIDO, TITYOS AND PROMETHEUS¹

This note brings to light some instances of Vergilian borrowings from Lucretius and Catullus in the composition of the Dido episode. The way in which Vergil adapts these sources and combines them in the depiction of tormented love is discussed and it is suggested that a consequence of this is to invest the image of love eating Dido internally with a significance beyond that of an erotic topos.

I

Vergil's debt to Lucretius has long been recognized. Over a century ago, Sellar commented that 'the influence...exercised by Lucretius on the...Georgics was perhaps stronger than that exercised, before or since, by one poet on the work of another.'² Parallels between the diatribe against love at the end of Lucretius Book 4 and Vergil's portrayal of *amor* in the Georgics have been recently discussed.³ The portrayal of love in the Georgics is explicitly linked with the Dido episode; expressions which frame the Hero and Leander story are clearly alluded to in Dido's tale,⁴ suggesting that Vergil wishes to categorize the story of Dido as very much in the same vein (though with a reversal of gender⁵). One should not be surprised to find, therefore, that the Dido tale bears resemblances to Lucretius' account of love. In a recent commentary on Lucretius' diatribe against love, R. Brown remarks that 'Vergil...displays a strongly Lucretian strain in his violent portrayal of *amor* or in the Georgics (3.209–83) and in the tragic tale of Dido's *furor*.'⁶ It is not within the scope of his book to develop this claim beyond the occasional reference to the Aeneid,⁷ but Brown's discussions of certain passages invite comparisons with Dido's situation.

At two points in Aeneid 4 the sleeplessness of Dido is described. The choice and collocation of the words *cura* and *quies* (and cognate words) in the description suggest that there is more to these passages than the elegiac topos of the sleepless lover.⁸ Brown notes on *cura* at DRN 4.1060 that 'the cornerstone of the attack on love is that it is incompatible with ataraxia' and that *cura* corresponds to tarache in Epicurus.⁹ *Quies* and its cognates are used by Lucretius as equivalent to the notions expressed by ataraxia.¹⁰ In the first line of Book 4 of the Aeneid we find that Dido is afflicted with *cura* and four lines later the statement that *cura* will not give her limbs *placidam quietem*. Again at 521ff. Dido's condition is contrasted with that of the natural world. In a passage recognized as having a strong Lucretian flavour,¹¹ the birds and beasts enjoy *placidam soporem* and nature in general is at peace (the cognate verb *quiescant*

¹ I wish to record my thanks to Philip Hardie for much advice and encouragement.

² W. Y. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age: Virgil* (Oxford, 1877), p. 199.

³ P. R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 163–4.

⁴ *Geo.* 3.258: 'versat in ossibus ignem'. *Aen.* 1.660: 'ossibus implicit ignem'; *Geo.* 3.259 and *Aen.* 6.442: 'durus amor'; *Geo.* 3.263: 'nec moritura super crudeli funere virgo'. *Aen.* 4.308: 'nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido'.

⁵ See F. Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 138.

⁶ R. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex* (New York, 1987), p. 142.

⁷ See, e.g., n. 15 below.

⁸ Pease, ad loc. See also McKeown on Ovid, *Amores* 1.2.1–4. ⁹ Op. cit., p. 204.

¹⁰ e.g. DRN 6.73. At 5.983 *cura* and *quies* are set in opposition. Cf. *Aen.* 4.379.

¹¹ R. D. Williams, *Aeneid 1–6*, ad loc. compares DRN 2.344ff.

is used). Not so Dido: amongst other troubles, *ingeminant curae*.¹² The same opposition as that at the beginning of the book is stressed.¹³ Dido is in a state of ataraxia.

There is a further glance at Lucretian philosophical ideas. The end of Book 4 of the DRN explains how the sensory effluences (*simulacra*) which are emitted by an object of desire stimulate the production of semen in the beholder. The resultant physical tension is normally relieved by intercourse. Problems arise if a strong emotional attachment is engendered. Then relief can only be attained by sexual intercourse with the particular object of desire. If she is unavailable her *simulacra* are nevertheless present to the mind of her admirer: 'nam si abest quod ames, praesto simulacra tamen sunt / illius et nomen dulce obversatur ad auris.'¹⁴ At Aeneid 4.83-4, Dido is described in terms which are suggestive of this theory. The sense of 'illum absens absentem auditque videtque'¹⁵ closely resembles that of the lines just quoted (though with no specific reference to *simulacra*). Lucretius uses the word *imago* at DRN 4.379 to refer to a collection of *simulacra*. It is tempting therefore to interpret the phrase 'genitoris imagine capta' as 'obsessed by the *simulacra* of his father'. In other words, as before when alone on her bed, so now in the company of Ascanius, the *simulacra* of Aeneas are present to Dido and she cannot free her mind from them. The lover in Lucretius is advised to 'mix up' (*conturbes*) the wounds of love by engaging in sex with another party and attempting to 'transfer elsewhere the movements of the mind'.¹⁶ Similarly (though not by engaging in sex) Dido 'tries to cheat her love by petting the boy as a substitute for Aeneas'.¹⁷ Again, Brown sees in the weapon imagery used by Lucretius to describe the effect of a boy's or girl's beauty a hint of the *simulacra* which are thrown from objects in the same way.¹⁸ Tantalizingly similar is Vergil's use of the verb (*in*)*figo* to describe both the lodging of the arrow in the hind at 4.70 and the lodging of Aeneas' features and words in Dido's heart at 4.5. (Notice also the use of *haerere* in both contexts.)¹⁹

Finally, there are verbal correspondences outwith the stock terms of erotic vocabulary, particularly in relation to the wound image. Vergil had already shown an interest in DRN 4.1068, 'ulcus enim vivescit et inveterascit alendo'. A real wound is the subject of a similar expression in the Georgics but the imagery and phraseology are derived from Lucretius.²⁰ The borrowing is repeated at *Aen.* 4.67, 'vivit sub pectore vulnus' and *Aen.* 4.2, 'vulnus alit venis'. (Note that the concentration of parallels to Lucretius in the first five lines suggests that Vergil is signalling the Lucretian quality right at the outset of the book.)

The evidence assembled supports the view that the diatribe against love in DRN Book 4 is a source for Vergil's portrayal of Dido. It is impossible to determine how far Vergil would have agreed with the details of Lucretius' scientific account of the origin and nature of love; certainly such a thoroughgoing scientific account would have been out of place in an epic, particularly one which has the goddess Venus as

¹² 4.531.

¹³ Noted by J. Ferguson *PVS* 10 (1970), 57-63, p. 61.

¹⁴ 1061-2.

¹⁵ Quoted by Brown, op. cit., p. 73 n. 50 in a discussion of lines 1061-2 but with no further comment.

¹⁶ Brown's translation.

¹⁷ Page, *Aeneid 1-6* (Macmillan, 1894), ad loc. Austin's note is unconvincing. Surely *aut* distinguishes between the time Dido is alone and the current time when she is in the company of Ascanius.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 72.

¹⁹ Is there word play on *vultus/vulnus* in 4.4, 'infixi pectore vultus' (*vulnus* appears two lines earlier) and 4.689, 'infixum stridit sub pectore vulnus'?

²⁰ 'alitur vitium vivitque tegendo'. The dependence on Lucretius is noted by R. F. Thomas, ad loc.

a central figure. One point of the correspondences is to convey general agreement with Lucretius' view of the disturbing irrational and destructive aspects of love. Typically, however, Vergil adapts his model.²¹ He undermines the easy Lucretian certainties that love is merely a physical disturbance consequent upon false perception and that there is an easy cure. Dido's sufferings will be on what I might self-indulgently call a Promethean scale and the only 'cure' is to be death.

Lucretius' attack on love in Book 4 'has its preview in book 3 – in the portrayal of Tityos'.²² Brown calls attention firstly to the similarity in treatment of Venus in Book 4 to that of the unmasking of the mythical tales of the underworld and secondly to the similarity between the phrases *haec Venus est nobis* and *sed Tityos nobis hic est*.²³ Lucretius' Tityos, however, is a restyled version of Homer's figure; Tityos is not in the underworld, nor is it possible for his liver to provide eternal food for the vultures. His Tityos is here on earth and is beset by Cupids.²⁴ As such his description constitutes an allegory: he represents the 'prototypical anguished lover'²⁵ being consumed by love. Vergil, I believe, also compares his anguished lover to Tityos. The description of Tityos at *Aeneid* 6.595ff. contains a verbal echo of the description of Dido tossing on her bed at the beginning of Book 4 in the words 'nec fibris *requies datur* ulla renatis'; compare 'nec placidam membris *dat cura quietem*'. But Vergil in his description of Tityos has reversed Lucretius' rejection of Homer. K. F. Smith remarks that 'Vergil's description [of Tityos]... apparently shows an attempt to meet the objection raised by Lucretius (3.984ff.)'.²⁶ Vergil remythologizes Lucretius' demythologized version.²⁷ Nor does Tityos serve for Vergil as an allegory. The verbal echo functions, as it were, as a retrospective simile; we are invited to compare the tormented Dido with the tormented Tityos. Moreover, there is a quite specific point of comparison in the image of love (in Dido's case in the form of *flamma*) eating the marrow or innards of the lover – 'est mollis flamma medullas'²⁸ – an expression occurring in the same sentence as the phrase *vivit vulnus* which has been shown to be dependent upon Lucretius.

A possible source for the erotic topos of love eating the lover's marrow at *Aeneid* 4.66 has been traced to Theocritus, *ὁ πόθος... τὸν μέλον ἐσθίει*,²⁹ with Catullus as the 'mediator'.³⁰ An alternative, or rather an additional, source is again Lucretius. E. J. Kenney argues that the winged creatures which beset Tityos in Lucretius' version of the story are not vultures but Cupids.³¹ It is the Loves that are tearing at his heart and the anguish of love that is eating him ('*exest anxius angor*', 3.983). Kenney discusses the verbs *lacerant* and *scindunt* at length but has virtually nothing to say about *exest*. There are two aspects to the explanation. Firstly, *exest* is functioning at the level of 'latent myth'.³² Though the myth of Tityos having his liver eaten by vultures has been rejected, the new account is couched in language that is appropriate

²¹ See Hardie, *op. cit.*, pp. 158ff.

²² Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

²³ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁴ E. J. Kenney, 'Tityos and the Lover', *PCPHS* (1970), 44–7. See further discussion below.

²⁵ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

²⁶ On Tibullus 1.3.75–6.

²⁷ Hardie, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

²⁸ *Aen.* 4.66.

²⁹ R. E. H. Westendorp Boerma, 'Vergil's Debt to Catullus', *Acta Classica* 1 (1958), 51–63 citing Theoc. 30.21.

³⁰ Boerma, *op. cit.*, p. 59, citing Cat. 66.23. Cf. also Cat. 35.15: 'ignes edunt medullam'.

³¹ E. J. Kenney, *op. cit.*

³² M. Gale, 'Myth in the De Rerum Natura of Lucretius' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1992), pp. 113ff. The example of the acquisition of fire by mortals, explained 'scientifically' but in language appropriate to the Prometheus myth at DRN 5.1091–1104, is discussed at p. 128.

to the rejected version. Secondly, Lucretius has borrowed an image from erotic poetry in his description of the prototype of the anguished lover; the figure against whom he is to launch his diatribe in Book 4.³³ Given the extent of the influence of Lucretius' general account of love on Vergil, and given that Vergil's description of Tityos in Aeneid 6 looks like a reaction to Lucretius' rejection of the Homeric Tityos, it is likely that Vergil was also influenced by this related description. The motif of the anguished lover being eaten by love symbolized by Lucretius' restyled Tityos is another source underlying the depiction of Dido.

II

It is not unnatural to associate Tityos and Prometheus. The traditional accounts of them in Hesiod and Homer describe both as having their livers eaten by predators, two vultures in the case of Tityos, one eagle (or vulture)³⁴ in the case of Prometheus. It would appear that Vergil certainly linked the two Titans. K. F. Smith³⁵ comments that 'Vergil's description [of Tityos] was influenced by the story of Prometheus.' Vergil makes the punishment of Tityos virtually identical to that of Prometheus. 'One vulture instead of two appears first in Vergil and the change is perhaps due to contamination with the story of Prometheus.'³⁶ I have argued above that Vergil compares Dido to Tityos. I now wish to argue that he also compares her to Prometheus.

It has long been recognized that Vergil owes a particular debt to Catullus in the writing of the Dido story. Many verbal parallels have been pointed to by the commentators, particularly to phrases in the Ariadne 'insert' in Catullus 64. The phrase *veteris vestigia poenae* at Catullus 64.295 finds a clear verbal reminiscence at Aeneid 4.23, *veteris vestigia flammae*. The occurrence of the two identical words at the same metrical position makes it likely that this is a verbal echo which Vergil would have expected his readers to notice. Though not mentioned in the standard commentaries, this has been noticed by J. Ferguson as an echo of Catullus 'with the added point that *flammae* has replaced *poenae*'.³⁷ He does not make clear what the added point is, but it can be gleaned from studying the context of the allusion.³⁸ The context is the entrance of Prometheus to the wedding celebration of Peleus and Thetis. The replacement of *poenae* by *flammae* might be considered significant in itself in persuading us to look more closely; for of course the punishment which Prometheus suffered was meted out for the crime of stealing fire.³⁹ The words of Dido which immediately follow are interestingly tragic in tone. The prayer for the earth to swallow up the speaker is a common topos in tragic contexts⁴⁰ and indeed one of the functions of the passage is 'to point to the centrality of the tragic models for the Dido episode'.⁴¹ Of the various epic and tragic parallels cited by Pease, that at *Prometheus Vincitus* 152ff. corresponds most closely.⁴² The immediately preceding reference to the

³³ E. J. Kenney, 'Doctus Lucretius', *Mnemosyne* 23 (1970), 366–92. 'More subtle is the device of borrowing characteristic imagery in order to turn it back on its originators and their too receptive readers.' Gale, op. cit. p. 138. (Kenney (op. cit. n. 24 above) points to a possible earlier Greek model at *A.P.* 12.160.)

³⁴ Servius on Verg. Ecl. 6.42, '*vulturem* Hercules interemit, Prometheus tamen liberare, ne offenderet patrem, timuit.'

³⁵ Loc. cit.

³⁶ Op. cit., note on 1.3.76.

³⁷ J. Ferguson, 'Catullus and Virgil', *PVS* 11 (1971/2), 25–42, p. 29.

³⁸ R. O. A. M. Lyne, *Further Voices in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1987), ch. 3 (particularly p. 103).

³⁹ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 50ff.

⁴⁰ Pease, ad loc.

⁴¹ Hardie, op. cit., p. 271.

⁴² In particular one might compare the words *εἰ γὰρ μὲν ὑπὸ γῆν νέρθεν θ' Αἴδου... εἰς ἀπέραντον ἄρταρον ἤκειν* with 'adigat me... ad umbras / pallentis umbras Erebo noctemque profundam'. Cf. *PV* 1050ff.

Catullan Prometheus invites the inference that Aeschylus' Prometheus is the model for Dido's invocation.⁴³

After Anna has further inflamed the fire of Dido's love, the next occurrence of *flamma* is in the passage referred to above, where Vergil describes the fire eating Dido's marrow or 'vitals'.⁴⁴ Here then, in suffering the eating of the vitals, is a clear-cut way in which Dido does resemble Prometheus.⁴⁵ The link, hinted at in line 23 by the allusion and further suggested by Dido's immediately following words, is confirmed some forty lines later. *Flamma* replaces *poena* both verbally and conceptually. Finally, in Book 6 Dido is described as one of those 'quos durus amor crudeli tabe peredit'.⁴⁶ At the point where Vergil is about to describe her punishment in the underworld, the metaphor used to describe the effect of love is that of eating, and moreover eating of a long and painful duration (suggested by *crudeli tabe*). This reinforces the claim that, in terms of suffering at least, the fate of the frenzied lover is being likened to that of the tormented Prometheus.

Several examples of Vergil's allusive technique have been highlighted; the question arises as to Vergil's motives in employing allusion. No doubt he desires 'to pay tribute to the methods of a poet he values and wishes to be identified with'.⁴⁷ The examples discussed, however, do not merely display genuflection on Vergil's part. The technique of creating interrelations amongst the allusive passages is similar to a key feature of his style, the adapting of a Homeric episodic by 'fusing' materials from diverse genres in the making of a new episode.⁴⁸ As we have seen, Vergil used verbal and thematic echoes to associate Dido with the Tityos of Homer and Lucretius, and the Prometheus of Catullus and Aeschylus. The nexus of allusions from diverse sources is linked by the common factor of punishment in terms of the eating-away internally of the sufferer. The erotic topos of love eating at the innards of the lover is transformed by the combination of low and high genres. The multi-faceted creation has the romantic appeal of the elegiac lover, succumbs to the irrational frenzy of a Tityos and suffers agonies which are elevated to a Titanic and tragic plane. The evocation of sympathy, revulsion and pity is reinforced by allusion.

An 'extreme position' sees Vergil exploiting allusion on a systematic and far-reaching scale.⁴⁹ On this view, in relation to the current discussion Vergil would expect his readers to be receptive of signals indicating that the Prometheus and Tityos stories are operating at the level of 'implicit myth'.⁵⁰ A Promethean Dido has intriguing possibilities. Further coincidences hint that comparisons extend beyond that of their respective sufferings. Prometheus could avoid the ordeal of being eaten

⁴³ An interesting passage which has some similarities to the Dido episode is Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 2.23-5, where he translates lines from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Lyomenos*. There are the following verbal parallels: Cic. line 18: *custodem...alo*; *Aen.* 4.2: *vulnus alit*; Cic. 21: *a pectore*; *Aen.* 4.2, 689: *sub pectore*; Cic. 22: *pestes excipio*; *Aen.* 4.90: *peste teneri*. *Figo* also occurs in both contexts. (W. Berg, 'Daphnis and Prometheus', *TAPA* (1965), 11-25, argues that the Prometheus trilogy influenced Vergil in the composition of Eclogue 5.)

⁴⁴ *OLD* s.v. 2b.

⁴⁵ It should be stressed at this point that it is the aspect of suffering which is prominent in the reference to Prometheus in Catullus' poem. The point is made by J. C. Bramble, *PCPHS* (1970), p. 32. 'Catullus did not have to spend three lines dwelling on his [Prometheus'] punishment'. Later he asks why 'Catullus devote[d] this amount of space to describing the agonies of Prometheus'.

⁴⁶ *Aen.* 6.432.

⁴⁷ G. B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation* (Cornell, 1986), p. 37.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., W. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1969), ch. ix.

⁴⁹ Lyne, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁵⁰ Lyne, *op. cit.*, p. 139. M. Gale, *op. cit.*, p. 113, makes the attractive suggestion that Vergil learned this technique from Lucretius.

by the eagle if he did not lack foresight. The bearer of the name 'Foresight' needs a man of foresight to extricate him from his ordeal.⁵¹ Dido can be seen to have suffered a similar lapse of prudence. At 4.65 she approaches the seers in a frame of mind which will blind her to their advice.⁵² Again, in the famous deer simile she is referred to as *incauta*.⁵³ Secondly, Prometheus' crime was *furtum*.⁵⁴ Dido's love for Aeneas is described at 4.171 as *furtivum amorem*. Clearly, the elegiac topos of secret love is to the fore here.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Dido is attempting to acquire what rightfully belongs elsewhere, and the concept of theft is not out of place. Thirdly, Prometheus is described as a bringer of civilization to man.⁵⁶ His gift of fire, one of the acts in this process, causes him to fall foul of Zeus. When Aeneas arrives at Carthage he wonders whether men or beasts dwell there; for all that he sees is *inculta*.⁵⁷ But Dido is engaged in the process of building a city and establishing civilization. Her involvement of Aeneas in the construction of her city causes her to run foul of the plans of Jupiter.⁵⁸ This notion of a Promethean Dido, tentatively proposed, is one which would perhaps have appeal to the 'pessimistic' reader of the Aeneid.

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⁵¹ Aeschylus, *PV* 85–7. The statement of Kratos is ironic but with an element of truth.

⁵² V. Poschl, *The Art of Vergil* (trans. G. Seligson, 1970), p. 78 (and p. 194 n. 34) argues that *vatum* is an objective genitive.

⁵³ A theme also in the Georgics. Thomas at *Geo.* 4.488 on Orpheus (*incautus amans*) remarks that 'Orpheus' failure is emotional, a loss of control caused by *amor*'. Cf. 2.303 and Thomas ad loc.

⁵⁴ *Verg. Ecl.* 6.42.

⁵⁵ F. Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 143.

⁵⁶ Aeschylus, *PV* 447ff.

⁵⁷ *Aen.* 1.308.

⁵⁸ Significantly, Aeneas is engaged in construction when Mercury arrives with Jupiter's message. *Aen.* 4.260.