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## Compensations for exile: A Lacanian analysis of Aeneas's destiny and Dido's tragedy in Virgil's Aeneid

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COMPENSATIONS FOR EXILE: A LACANIAN ANALYSIS  
OF AENEAS'S DESTINY AND DIDO'S TRAGEDY IN  
VIRGIL'S *AENEID*

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition

---

by  
Jessica Marie Hayes

June 2008

COMPENSATIONS FOR EXILE: A LACANIAN ANALYSIS  
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Approved by:

  
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## ABSTRACT

In the purest form of Homer's heroic code, early and spectacular death in battle results in being immortalized in song forever. Virgil's revision of the Homeric heroic code does not require of the hero death in battle. Rather, Aeneas suffers numerous personal sacrifices along his ordained nation-founding quest. The narratives of Aeneas's *Destiny* and *Dido's Tragedy*, both beginning with an exile from a homeland thereafter sought suggests a new view of the compensations for exile and empire founding. Virgil's *Aeneid* presents the reader with a fundamental interpretive crux: whether to interpret Virgil's revision of the Homeric heroic code as a reification of empire building as a glorious endeavor; or as a critique of the costs of empire as altogether too high.

Examination of this crux is facilitated by a surprising theoretic lens: that of the model of gender development provided by French psychoanalyst and semiotician Jacques Lacan. Lacan's model of the human condition as one of exile from, and constant attempt to return to, a pre-linguistic state provides a critical vocabulary for reckoning the various costs of, compensations for, and comportments to exile, gender, and

power alternatively presented by Aeneas and Dido. Lacan's model provides a perspective on Dido's Tragedy as one in which her suicide functions as a recognition that the very compensations and privileges Aeneas clings to so tenaciously prove to be inadequate compensations for the loss of the homeland.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### VIRGIL'S REVISION OF HOMER'S HEROIC CODE:

#### AENEAS'S DESTINY, DIDO'S TRAGEDY

Virgil's epic poem, *The Aeneid* famously derives major components of its plot structure, myths, and themes from Homer's epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Eminently, Virgil revises the Homeric heroic code, in which warriors exchange early and spectacular death on the battle field for poetic immortality. The destiny of Aeneas, which predicts his escape from the fall of Troy, his voyage to Italy, and his eventual founding of Rome, requires of Virgil's hero, not death, but numerous personal sacrifices. Most strikingly, during his voyage, Aeneas meets, falls in love with, and ultimately abandons Dido, the Queen of Carthage, who subsequently commits suicide. This thesis will attempt to show that *Dido's Tragedy*, rather than reinforcing or celebrating a patriotic version of Homer's heroic code, offers a critical view of the suffering involved in the founding of a new nation, and thus, of Aeneas's Destiny. As a result of Aeneas's quest to fulfill his destiny, Dido, rather than Aeneas, pays the ultimate price—her life. Moreover, by creating a character in Dido who becomes more

sympathetic as the epic progresses and as Aeneas's character becomes less sympathetic, Virgil suggests that the price of heroism is the hero's humanity.

My analysis of the way Dido's Tragedy forms a critique of Aeneas's Destiny will rely heavily upon specific terminology coined and developed by Jacques Lacan, twentieth-century psychoanalyst and literary theorist. I will devote Chapter Two to exploring Lacan's models of the relationship between gender construction and human development and how they inform Virgil's explorations of Aeneas's destiny as a form of compensation for his loss of and exile from Troy. While my detailed argument must therefore wait until Chapter Three, an outline of the argument will help focus the literary review that comprises this first chapter. Lacan's contemporary theory proves to be surprisingly relevant to Virgil's classic epic since both texts explore consequences and compensations of perpetual exile from a homeland and the eternal desire to return to it.

In Virgil's epic, both Aeneas and Dido are strikingly characterized by exile from homelands: Aeneas from the recently fallen Troy; Dido from Tyre. Both major characters seek compensations for their exiles. Aeneas's

compensation arises from his ultimate destiny as the founder and ruler of Italy while Dido's compensation arises from her attempt to seize power for herself as founder and ruler of Carthage. Moreover, the romantic relationship between Dido and Aeneas itself results in large part because of their shared status as exiles; their relationship, while it lasts, may also be read as a kind of compensation for their earlier losses of home and family.

Similarly, Lacan's theories of gender development and language acquisition issue from a model in which exile from a pre-linguistic union with the maternal is central. While Dido and Aeneas are exiled from political states rather than a developmental stage, Virgil strikingly associates the homeland of Troy, that magical, whole and legendary state that is always already lost in Western Tradition, with maternal and feminine imagery. Thus, just as *The Aeneid* leads the reader to question the conventional economy of the heroic code Virgil inherits from the Homeric tradition, so Lacan's theories of exile and its ultimately insufficient compensations (language and gender development and relations) provide a useful lens for thinking through the competing claims of Dido and of Aeneas on the reader's sympathies.

This chapter will first explore the Homeric heroic code and Virgil's revision of the heroic code in Aeneas's *Destiny* and *Dido's Tragedy*. The chapter will then briefly review traditional or optimistic interpretations of the relationship between Virgil's heroic code, Aeneas's *Destiny*, and *Dido's Tragedy*, which variously uphold *The Aeneid* as a patriotic affirmation of Empire and its costs. A brief consideration of Barbara McManus's discussion of "transgendering," or the fluid movement between gender roles, will help to best situate my argument, which takes issue with such conventional, optimistic interpretations. The chapter will end with a brief review of other pessimistic interpretations of *The Aeneid*, in which I will situate my own analysis.

#### The Heroic Code: Virgil's Take on Homer's Tradition

Along with early and spectacular death in battle, the Homeric heroic code dictates that suffering and sacrifice for the good of the empire count as heroism. According to Margalit Finkelberg in her essay, "Odysseus and The Genus 'Hero,'" "a hero is one who prizes honour and glory above

life itself and dies on the battlefield in the prime of life" (Finelberg 1). Northrop Frye adds that the hero, is superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment...He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature. (Frye 33-34)

In the purest form of the heroic code, early and spectacular death in battle for one's country results in being immortalized in song as a hero. Thomas Greene agrees and adds, "The hero encounters a new sort of resistance and reaches the limitations of his being" but uses the promise of poetic immortality to persevere and fulfill his destiny (Greene 14).

In a famous scene in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Odysseus extols the virtues of the heroic code to the shade of one of the Greeks' most beloved heroes, Achilles, who dies from a wound he suffers during the Trojan War. Odysseus, upon meeting Achilles's shade in the underworld, exclaims:

There's not a man in the world more blest than  
you—  
there never has been, never will be one.

There was, when you were alive, we Argives  
honored you as a god, and now down here, I see,  
you lord it over the dead in all your power.  
So grieve no more at dying, great Achilles.  
(Homer 11: 548-53)

Achilles's response to Odysseus: "I'd rather slave on earth for another man- / some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive- / than rule down here over all the breathless dead" (Homer 11.556-58). While this example classically affirms that the warrior's death is compensated because he is even more loved now than when he was alive, it also shows that Achilles may renounce the heroic code that he once gloriously represented. It shows that Achilles's compensation of immortality through poetry has come to fruition, but that he does not believe a life ruling over "the breathless dead" compensates for a life lost among the living. He is indeed remembered and revered in *The Odyssey*, but his response to his own fate suggests that the price paid, his life, was too high.

While Virgil clearly derives much of his epic structure and plot line from Homer's great epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, he also uses his own understanding of the Homeric heroic code. In Virgil's version of the Homeric

heroic code the hero does not die in battle, however he does endure suffering and sacrifice which, as some passages in the poem suggest, are compensated for by poetic immortality. In Virgil's version of the heroic code, the hero sacrifices aspects of himself as a price for fulfilling his nation-founding destiny. Aeneas does not die defending a nation, but rather sacrifices his personal will and his compassion for others as he strives to establish a new nation.

However, the hero is not the only character to suffer and make sacrifices during his quest. As seen in what is commonly called Dido's Tragedy (Dido falls in love with Aeneas, with help from the gods. She is heart-broken when Aeneas leaves her to fulfill his destiny. Dido kills herself because she cannot bear the loss of Aeneas), Dido, rather than Aeneas, arguably becomes the most sympathetic character, conventionally a role ascribed to the hero. Homer's heroic code is ostensibly masculine in nature; however Virgil's exploitation of it calls the treatment of women in the code into question, as seen in Dido's Tragedy. Virgil's presentation and management of several key female characters including Dido, Creusa (Aeneas's first wife), Lavinia, and Camilla, show the important role women play as

foils to the hero and, as in the case of Dido, as more sympathetic characters than the hero. Through Virgil's portrayal of women, it becomes clear that in his version of the heroic code, both women and men are similarly subject to the confines of the code.

More than simply a code of values, the Homeric heroic code is a way of life. According to Seth Schein in his book *The Mortal Hero*:

Life is lived and death is died according to this code of values: to be fully human—that is, to be a hero—means to kill or be killed for honor and glory.

The human situation in the *Iliad* might well be called tragic, because the very activity—killing—that confers honor and glory necessarily involves the death not only of other warriors who live and die by the same values as their conquerors, but eventually, in most cases, also of the conquerors themselves. Thus, the same action is creative or fruitful and at the same time both destructive and self-destructive.

(Schein 71)



The heroic code can be seen as a way of life in *The Aeneid* in the battle which rages between the Greeks and the Trojans in the opening of the epic as well as in the final battle scenes between the Trojans and their allies and the Italian/Rutulians. After Virgil invokes the muse in the opening lines, he introduces his hero, Aeneas, during the Greeks' siege on Troy. Both opponents in the Trojan War subscribe to the Homeric heroic code and fight not only for their respective nations, but also for the opportunity to die a spectacular death and earn heroic immortality in song. Aeneas desires to stay in Troy and die a hero's death with his comrades just as Greek warriors, such as Achilles, strive for poetic immortality by dying heroically in battle.

The battle between the Trojans and the Italians in the final books of *The Aeneid* ends with a final duel between the leaders of each side, Aeneas and Turnus. Both men fight not only for their respective nations, but also for Lavinia and her father's empire, Latium. The dual implies a fight to the death, which both men readily accept, exemplifying Schein's point that the heroic code comprehensively requires an expectation of death in battle for both the competitor and the rival. Because war plays

an essential part in the reality of the epic, it is only natural that the heroic code which dictates conduct in battle spills over into the lives of both men and women in the nations immersed in the martial realm.

Both the Trojan War and the war between the Trojans and the Italians have a woman to be won and to blame for the pandemonium inherent in warfare. Commonly held responsible for the turmoil between the two nations, Helen of Troy, with questionable agency, becomes a prize to be won by either the Trojans or the Greeks, depending on the outcome of the war. Similarly, Lavinia, King Latinus' daughter and heir to the kingdom of Latium, becomes the trophy to be won by Aeneas, the Trojan, or Turnus, the Italian. Whoever wins the final dual, will win Lavinia's hand and inherit her kingdom. While women may not commonly have an opportunity to die a hero's death, the heroic code does impact their lives.

#### The Hero's Journey: Virgil's Derivative Epic

While the heroic code conventionally applies to men, the women in their lives are also affected by the code's values and hallmarks. An examination of *The Aeneid* and the major scenes between the famous couple of Aeneas and Dido

will show the way the heroic code plays out in both Aeneas's Destiny and in Dido's Tragedy. Virgil's epic pays homage to Homer by following the structure and plot line from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, referencing specific scenes from both epics. Homer's epics progress from the martial in the form of the Trojan War in *The Iliad* to the hero's journey in *The Odyssey*. Virgil's epic famously begins with Aeneas's journey to Latium in books I through VI and engages the martial theme in the ensuing battle for possession of Latium in books VII through XII. *The Aeneid* opens with Aeneas fleeing Troy as it is under siege by the Greeks. He receives several prophecies from gods and ghosts telling him to leave Troy and head for Latium where he is destined to establish Rome. Along the road to Rome, Aeneas and his men run into a fierce storm which lands them in Carthage.

After Dido's brother, Pygmalion, kills her husband, Sychaeus, to seize his wealth, Sychaeus visits Dido from beyond the grave to help her establish her kingdom in Carthage. Dido, the queen of Carthage, welcomes Aeneas and his men on to her friendly shores. She listens to Aeneas tell of their journey and with the help of Cupid, falls in love with Aeneas. During his time in Carthage, he helps

build the city. One day, while hunting, Aeneas and Dido seek shelter together in a cave from a storm. While in the cave, they consummate their relationship and Dido believes this act constitutes marriage. With a reminder of his destiny from Mercury, Aeneas decides he must leave Carthage and continue on to Italy. Dido, exceedingly upset with Aeneas's decision, fails to convince him to stay and takes her own life.

Aeneas heads for Italy, where he and his men are initially welcomed peacefully by the king, Latinus. However tensions arise over who will marry the king's daughter, Lavinia; Aeneas or Turnus. The winner of her hand will gain control of Latium. Latinus believes Aeneas to be the foreign suitor from the gods' prophesies, however his wife, Amata, wishes the local hero, Turnus, to marry her daughter. Fighting between the Trojans and the Italians ensues and ends with a duel between Aeneas and Turnus. Aeneas, injured, slays Turnus as he lies wounded at his feet.

## Optimistic Interpretations: Epic Compensation for Aeneas

Optimistic interpretations of *The Aeneid* locate the epic's patriotism in its message that suffering and sacrifices endured for empire are compensated by poetic immortality. In conventional optimistic readings, which reaffirm the Homeric heroic code, the cost of empire building takes the form of personal sacrifices, including those of the hero, Aeneas. Three optimistic interpretations are particularly relevant as points of departure for my own argument: those of Thomas Van Nortwick, Gordon Williams, and J.P. Sullivan. Nortwick claims that Virgil's revision of the Homeric heroic code is fundamentally affirmative. He suggests that, while the terms of Virgil's heroic code differ from those of Homer's, both involve just compensation for due sacrifices. While I will argue that Virgil's revision of the Homeric heroic code is fundamentally critical, Norwick's focus on the relationship between the Virgilian and the Homeric heroic codes provides an important starting point for such examinations. Williams's discussion of agency in the epic likewise provides a useful context for my examination of agency, although his conclusions support an optimistic

reading and mine support a pessimistic reading. Finally, Sullivan's analysis of gender roles in the epic, while ultimately critical of Virgil's heroic code, lead her to acknowledge the sacrifice of Dido to be justified by the epic's patriotic economy.

In his book, *Somewhere I Have Never Traveled The Second Self and The Hero's Journey in Ancient Epic*, Thomas Van Nortwick argues that Aeneas is an epic hero, but has a different destiny than that of a Greek hero. Aeneas aims to found a new city instead of to return home after fighting in a glorious war, or as in the heroic code, dying in the war. Van Nortwick argues that Virgil reframes the Homeric heroic code to fit the narrative of Aeneas's quest, but that Virgil's code maintains the Homeric code's conventional economy, rewarding the hero with poetic immortality for the suffering and sacrifices he bears. Aeneas is compensated for the agony he endures even though he is not destined to die in battle. Rather, his destiny, as communicated to him in three prophecies, is to leave Troy and found a new nation.

Aeneas receives several prophecies to leave Troy during the siege. The ghost of Hector, the most heroic of

the Trojans who died in the Trojan War, visits Aeneas. He appears

...as once he was, dismembered by  
the dragging chariot, black with bloodied dust;  
his swollen feet were pierced by thongs. Oh this  
was Hector, and how different he was  
from Hector back from battle, putting on  
Achilles' spoils, or Hector when he flung  
his Phrygian firebrands at Dardan prows! (Virgil  
II.375-81)

Hector urges Aeneas to flee from Troy:

Troy falls from her high peak.  
Our home, our Priam—these have had their due  
...But Troy entrusts  
her holy things and household gods to you;  
take them away as comrades of your fortunes,  
seek out for them the great walls that at last,  
once you have crossed the sea, you will  
establish. (Virgil II.397-404)

Aeneas's destiny is not to stay and fight until he dies  
some glorious death in battle, but to flee and establish  
the kingdom which will become the Roman Empire and to carry  
on the Trojan race. Although Aeneas does not lose his

life, he does endure suffering and makes personal sacrifices along his nation-founding journey, which according to Van Nortwick, are duly compensated by poetic immortality just as a heroic death would be in Homer's epics. While I do not dispute that Aeneas follows his destiny, I do hope to demonstrate that he pays a heavy ransom to fulfill his ordained fate. He pays with his agency and with his humanity.

Gordon Williams argues that understanding the relationship between Aeneas's destiny and his love affair with Dido requires examination of the role of individual agency. As with other optimistic interpretations of *The Aeneid*, Williams' essay "Retrospective Judgement Enforced" posits Aeneas's relationship with Dido as a challenge of his will-power to fulfill his destiny. Williams suggests that, while Aeneas does have a destiny to fulfill outside of Carthage, he chooses to remain with Dido for a considerable amount of time. He questions Aeneas's resolve to fulfill his destiny when he writes:

[H]ow could this man seriously think of staying in Carthage? Throughout the first book the poet, and throughout the next two Aeneas himself, portrayed him as a man driven by a



compelling inner sense of purpose, of a destiny that required him to find a particular part of Italy and there to found a state; that inner sense was shown to be constantly reinforced by omens, oracles of the gods, messages from the dead, and never to be out of the forefront of his consciousness since he left Troy. (Williams 43)

Williams admits that the reader does not know how or why Aeneas falls in love with Dido so strongly but writes, "In the absence of explanation one is inclined to suppose that love grew from the episode in the cave and that it was characterized by physical passion" (Williams 43). The cave scene, because the gods arrange the circumstances surrounding it, leaves both Aeneas and Dido with little personal choice of where to seek shelter, however I hope to show that their agency allows them to consummate their relationship in the privacy of the cave.

For Williams, the interference of the gods in the human realm—as evidenced by Venus's meddling with Dido's emotions—tests human agency but does not altogether obliterate it. Moreover, Williams argues that because the gods ordain Aeneas's destiny, the scale of Dido's suffering pales in comparison to the greater good of the Trojan race

and empire. I hope to show that Aeneas sacrifices a piece of his humanity when he turns his back on Dido. In addition to Aeneas's loss of self, Virgil's sympathetic portrayal of Dido's plight puts her suffering and suicide on center stage. In this light, Dido, not Aeneas, pays the ultimate price, her life. Williams' interpretation insists that Dido, while a tragic figure, is not heroic. Rather, she is the obstacle whom the hero must overcome. I hope to show that Dido's sacrifice may be seen as heroic.

Such gender-related differences between heroism, Dido, and Aeneas are further illuminated by J.P. Sullivan's essay, "Dido and the Representations of Women in Vergil's *Aeneid*." Sullivan acknowledges that Dido impedes Aeneas's progress and almost derails him from establishing Rome and fulfilling his destiny. As Aeneas prepares to leave Carthage and Dido, the god Mercury delivers a warning to him about Dido:

...Madman, can't you see  
the threats around you, can't you hear the breath  
of kind west winds? She conjures injuries  
and awful crimes, she means to die, she stirs  
the shifting surge of restless anger...An ever

uncertain and inconstant thing is woman. (Virgil  
IV 777-787)

Sullivan suggests, "Aeneas's duty is to complete his divinely ordained mission and his behaviour has to fit an established mythic pattern of the final rejection by the hero of the heroine who had helped him" (Sullivan 66). According to Sullivan, the mythic pattern of epics drives Aeneas to leave in haste. In this model, "Women, clearly, may have to be sacrificed in the interests of patriotic or moral goals" if the hero is to fulfill his destiny (Sullivan 67). Dido's reaction to Aeneas's desertion of her implies that she does not want Aeneas to fulfill his destiny if it means she will pay the price. Again, Sullivan:

There is an implication here that women crack under the pressure that the tougher male would resist. Aeneas survived the test with Dido, but Dido, wracked by pangs of love for Aeneas, would not endure the separation and committed suicide, and in the underworld she bears, for Aeneas, an incomprehensible grudge. (Sullivan 68)

Sullivan's interpretation points to the ways in which Virgil's rendering of the heroic code affirms conventional

connections between masculinity, martial prowess, and patriotism at the expense of feminine characters. The dichotomy of male/positive and female/negative is a conventional view of gender in epic. I will argue that Dido's comportment toward Aeneas in the underworld, rather than resulting from an "incomprehensible grudge," can be interpreted as a critique of the compensations of poetic immortality. Unlike Homer's scene between Odysseus and Achilles in the underworld, Virgil's scene between Aeneas and Dido in no way affirms the compensations of the code. In Homer, the salient difference between Odysseus and Achilles is that between a living and homeward-bound warrior and a dead warrior. Virgil amplifies the differences between the living and the dead with Aeneas's self-preservation and Dido's suicide, between the man and the woman. My own interpretation of the significance of the gender difference between Aeneas and Dido in the scene is informed by Barbara McManus's argument that famous epic characters have the ability to move between gender roles.

## Transgendering: Movement without Loss of Gender Identity

The Homeric heroic code prescribes clear-cut gender roles by which both genders must abide. The relationship between Penelope and Odysseus epitomizes the expected gender roles prescribed by the Homeric heroic code. Odysseus, the epic hero who survives the war, tells his story to all he meets on his journey, thus providing him with the much sought poetic immortality while Penelope, his wife, waits twenty years, coyly keeping the suitors at bay, for her husband to return to her from the war, without any proof that he in fact will return. Penelope represents femininity in its most pure form in Western Tradition. Virgil's version of the heroic code treats the traditional gender expectations differently. In Virgil's heroic code, women and men can assume each other's gender roles as long as they maintain their femininity or masculinity, respectively. Barbara McManus describes moments of possessing the role of the opposite sex as "transgendered," in chapter four, "Transgendered Moments: Revisiting Vergil's *Aeneid*," of her book *Classics and Feminism Gendering the Classics*. She defines these moments as "those that have come to be considered appropriate for both

men and women but that are still affected by gender expectations and gender power differentials" (McManus 95). While both genders can participate in transgendered moments and behaviors, they are viewed differently when performed by different sexes. An argument for Virgil purposefully including transgendered moments within his epic comes from the context within which he writes. McManus writes:

The public role so painstakingly constructed for Augustus's wife Livia can be seen as transgendered...primarily because her special legal status, civic honors, statues, dedications, and public acts and patronage were carefully crafted within the discourse and imagery of femininity. (McManus 96)

Livia actively participates in the public and political spheres traditionally reserved for males. McManus also argues that Virgil's contemporaries, including Ovid, Tibullus, Propertius, and Catullus, "were also exploiting transgendered possibilities within the conventions and situations of elegiac poetry" (McManus 96). The movement between gender roles in the public realm and in poetry gives Virgil the poetic license to include transgendering in *The Aeneid*.

Transgendered moments in Roman poetry and politics during Virgil's lifetime make it possible for him to include them in his epic. By examining these moments in the epic, it may be possible to gain a more complex understanding of the characters and the epic as a whole. His fluid gender roles bring the traditional economy of the masculine Homeric code, that is to say martial heroic code, into question. I hope to explore the notion of the lack of equal compensation for the women who make sacrifices and endure suffering as a result of living within the confines of the heroic code.

McManus argues that both Dido and Camilla attain transgendered moments in the epic as they cope with the strict requirements of the heroic code. Dido achieves a transgendered state of being in the political realm while Camilla accomplishes transgendered behavior in the military realm. According to McManus Camilla and Dido can partake in transgendered moments for two reasons. She writes:

The situations of both characters exhibit the two major features of the transgendered: (1) their positions and actions in these spheres are accepted and positively valued by the other humans in the epic...(2) their positions and

actions in these spheres are still seen as feminine and interpreted through the lenses of gender (i.e., these women are neither constructed as 'masculine' nor evaluated in the same way as men in similar positions). (McManus 99-100)

The transgendered moments for Dido can be seen throughout the first book according to McManus. She argues that the declaration, "A woman leads" exemplifies the transgendered moments spread throughout the first book (Virgil I.516). The transgendered Dido comes into view when she first speaks to Aeneas. The feminine descriptions of Dido throughout the discussion of her political leadership make Dido's character transgendered. She is feminine in appearance and yet masculine in action. She refers to Carthage as her kingdom and sits on the throne as the queen. While Dido's actions are clearly associated with the political realm, a traditionally masculine realm, Virgil also compares her to the beautiful goddess Diana, which reaffirms her unmistakable femininity. Her transgendered moments end abruptly after Aeneas fulfills the masculine role as Dido's husband and political leader in Carthage. McManus argues that Dido has one final



transgendered moment in Book IV. In Dido's final speech before taking her own life, she says:

...I have lived  
and journeyed through the course assigned by  
fortune.  
And now my Shade will pass, illustrious,  
beneath the earth; I have built a handsome city,  
have seen my walls rise up, avenged a husband,  
won satisfaction from a hostile brother. (Virgil  
IV.900-04)

McManus argues that this speech corresponds more with the masculine sphere and resembles "the kind of life courses typically inscribed on the tombstones of elite Roman politicians" (McManus 104). I hope to show that Dido moves fluidly between gender roles and that she relinquishes and reclaims power in conventionally masculine and conventionally feminine ways throughout the first half of *The Aeneid*.

#### Pessimistic Interpretations: Dido's Insufficient Compensation

A brief review of pessimistic interpretations will prove useful in situating my own interpretation of *The*

*Aeneid*. In conventional pessimistic interpretations of *The Aeneid*, the lack of due compensation for individual suffering suggests a critique of the harsher aspects of empire building and, ultimately, of the Homeric heroic code. Put differently, conventional pessimistic interpretations suggest that Virgil's revision of Homer's heroic code varies not merely in substance (for instance, in the substitution of personal sacrifices by a hero who lives, for the sacrifice of life itself by a hero who must die), but in fact, in tone. That is, such interpretations suggest that Virgil's version of the heroic code reckons the price of heroism and nation founding as altogether too high. By extension, such a critique challenges classical epic understandings of individual sacrifice as always justified by the "greater" good of the community as a whole. Three pessimistic interpretations: those of Verda Evan Bach, Thomas Van Nortwick, and Gracy Starry West, will elucidate this argument and act as a springboard for my own argument.

Verda Bach Evans who argues, in her essay, "A Study of Dido and Aeneas," that Aeneas and Dido, while torn by their political and religious obligations, must be viewed primarily as a man and a woman. She writes:

The true treatment of Dido and Aeneas...demands that Dido be treated primarily as a woman, though a queen, to whom love was absolute and overpowering; and that Aeneas be considered as a man, but a man of destiny, to whom love was of importance second to his mission. (Evans 99)

Evans argues that Dido is first and foremost a woman with traditional feminine characteristics. Dido's public or royal life becomes secondary and falls to the side in the cave when she symbolically marries Aeneas. While Evans does believe that Aeneas loves Dido, she argues that his fear of the gods and a sense of his own destiny compel him to leave her and continue on to Italy. As a woman, not as a queen, Dido cannot handle the loss of Aeneas and his love, so she dramatically commits suicide. In Evans' analysis, neither Dido nor Aeneas receives due compensation for their suffering caused by their separation. While I agree with Evans' assertions, I hope to expand upon her argument by showing that Dido in fact claims agency through her suicide.

The relationship between the Trojan hero and the queen of Carthage shows both their individual agency and their ability to move between gender roles. Revisiting Thomas

Van Nortwick's book, *Somewhere I Have Never Traveled The Second Self and The Hero's Journey in Ancient Epic*, offers, in addition to previous optimistic discussions, a pessimistic interpretation of Dido's character within the epic. He argues that Aeneas and Dido comprise two halves of a single self. In this line of argument, Dido kills herself because Aeneas leaves and she cannot survive without her other half. This claim seems odd though, because Dido thrives as a queen without a king after the death of her first husband, Sychaeus. After Dido's brother, Pygmalion, kills her husband to acquire his wealth, Sychaeus visits Dido from beyond the grave to help her establish her own kingdom in Carthage. Sychaeus "urges her to speed her flight, to leave / her homeland; and to help her journey, he / discloses ancient treasure in the earth, / a hoard of gold and silver known to none" (Virgil I. 506-9). Virgil calls attention to Dido's gender when he writes, "A woman leads," when describing Dido piloting her companions to Carthage and establishing rule in the new kingdom (Virgil I.516). The question arises: why does Dido lose control when Aeneas leaves? According to Van Nortwick, Dido has a stronger connection with Aeneas than she had with her first husband. While Van Nortwick's makes

valid claims, I hope to expand on his notions by showing how in seemingly weak moments, Dido in fact is at her strongest. I will argue that Dido's suicide and silence during her underworld encounter with Aeneas form a deliberate critique of his choice toward nation-founding and patriarchal duty, and away from his relationship with her and with Carthage. Dido's suicide and silence thus suggest, rather than belie, her agency. While Dido arguably has agency, as a pessimistic reading dictates, she does not receive due compensation for the suffering she endures while Aeneas fulfills his heroic destiny.

Another critic who supports a similar pessimistic interpretation is Gracy Starry West, who argues for a fluid movement between genders and their corresponding traditional roles for Dido. In her essay, "Caeneus and Dido," West argues that Dido has the ability to be both a queen and a wife, but that she does not believe in her own ability. Instead, she rules in the absence of a man, her deceased husband, but as soon as Aeneas becomes what she believes to be her spouse, she relinquishes her power to him in such a complete way that when he leaves, she cannot imagine succeeding again as a queen and ends her life. West brings her argument to light by comparing Dido to

Caeneus, one of Dido's companions in the Fields of Mourning in the underworld. She writes:

Caeneus' ambiguous gender in death—though female in shape, 'she' has a masculine name—corresponds to a tragic conflict in Dido's soul, evident during her life and emblematically reasserted in her last words at death and in her condition as a shade in the underworld. (West 315)

West argues that Caeneus transforms genders from a woman to a man then back to woman but that the last transformation remains incomplete as evidenced by the fact that she retains the masculine version of her name. According to West, Virgil's inclusion of Caeneus in Dido's entourage in the underworld asks the reader to compare the transformation of Caeneus to the movement that Dido makes between gender roles. By drawing the comparison between Dido and a member of her entourage in the underworld, West highlights the lack of compensation for Dido.

To highlight Dido's uncompensated suffering and sacrifices, West discusses Dido's transformation from a married woman to a political leader, a traditionally masculine position, and back to a married woman. Unlike Caeneus, Dido reverts back to complete femininity and when

forced to regain the position of the leader of Carthage, she ends her life. West writes, "Dido acts as if she can fulfill only one role at a time" (324). Dido, unwilling to live in a hybrid gender as a docile female and a commanding ruler, commits suicide. I agree with West's comparison between Caeneus and Dido; however I hope to show that while Dido is unwilling to live in a hybrid gender role, by ending her life, she ironically regains power and agency, usually reserved for men, and thus dies possessing more than one traditional gender role. Dido's death signifies a relinquishing of the gender roles of conventional masculinity and conventional femininity.

While the existing discourse surrounding *The Aeneid* covers every facet of the epic, reframing the discussion may prove helpful to future readers. By reexamining key scenes in the epic through the theories of Jacques Lacan, a contemporary French psychoanalyst, I hope to contribute a pessimistic interpretation which will show the lack of due compensation for both Aeneas and Dido in the wake of Aeneas's nation-founding destiny.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LACANIAN PHALLIC POWER AND LINGUISTIC COMPENSATION

As I suggested in Chapter One, Virgil's *The Aeneid* presents the reader with a fundamental interpretive crux: whether to interpret Virgil's revision of the Homeric Code as a reification of empire building as a glorious, if costly, endeavor; or as a critique of the costs of empire as altogether too high. Chapter One suggests that Virgil further specifies the terms of this crux—whether the epic recommends an optimistic or pessimistic interpretation of the Homeric heroic code—in the narratives of Aeneas's Destiny and Dido's Tragedy. Both Aeneas and Dido are characterized by exile from a homeland—Aeneas from the recently fallen Troy; Dido from Tyre. And as I hope to show in Chapter Three, both Aeneas and Dido seek compensations for their exiles—Aeneas seeks compensation from his ultimate destiny, as the founder and ruler of Italy; whereas Dido's compensation arises from her attempt to seize power for herself as the founder and ruler of Carthage. Aeneas and Dido present alternative responses to suffering, loss, and in particular, to exile: and, as I hope to show in Chapter Three, the variations between their



responses dictate the extent to which Aeneas and Dido function as sympathetic characters. In attempting to decide which relationship to exile is preferable, the reader also chooses between an optimistic reading (in the case that Aeneas is found, ultimately, to be the more sympathetic character) and a pessimistic reading (in the event that Dido is found, ultimately, to be the more sympathetic character). My own analysis will argue that Dido emerges as the more sympathetic character, and the loss of her life, following the loss of her home, decidedly determines Virgil's revision of the Homeric heroic code as itself forming a subtle but substantive critique of the costs of empire.

In order to best understand the different relationships of Aeneas and of Dido to exile, to empire building, and to the costs and compensations of both, I will bring to bear a perhaps surprising theoretical lens: that of French psychoanalyst and semiotician Jacques Lacan. While it is undeniably anachronistic to employ a post-structuralist theorist to a Latin epic, Lacan's model of the human condition as one of exile from, and constant attempt to return to, a pre-linguistic state provides a critical vocabulary for reckoning the various costs of,

compensations for, and comportments to exile, gender and power alternatively presented by Aeneas and Dido. While Troy and Tyre are nation-states rather than pre-linguistic states, they are associated with maternal imagery and language, like the pre-linguistic stages named the Real and the Imaginary in Lacan's model. Similarly, Latium and Carthage are associated with paternal and patriarchal imagery and language, like the post-linguistic realm Lacan names the Symbolic. Similar to the way in which Virgil invokes the language of the maternal and the paternal to connote various relationships to nation and to home, Lacan re-envisions Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic model of gender development through a semiotic and linguistic model. Lacan's understanding of the maternal as the realm one is exiled from, and the paternal as the realm which attempts to compensate for this primary loss, will prove useful for weighing and balancing the relationship between gender and power in Virgil's epic. Put differently, Lacan's mode, which employs a symbolic understanding of maternal and paternal figures through the language of exile and its compensations, proves surprisingly appropriate for an epic that employs similarly figurative language about maternal homelands, patriarchal nation-building, and the various

accesses to compensations for exile discovered by Dido and by Aeneas.

Two essays particularly relevant for developing Lacan's revision of Freud are: "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," and "The Signification of the Phallus." Both deal with the emergence of culturally prescribed gender roles from human stages of development. The arguments Lacan poses provide a way to view power for both men and women. The first, "The Mirror Stage," outlines human subjectivity as resulting from an infant's recognition of separation from his or her mother. While Lacan's account relies heavily upon the distinction between pre- and post-linguistic states, his resulting model of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic will prove useful for thinking through the contrasting trajectories Aeneas and Dido's narratives and character development take. The second, "The Signification of the Phallus," theorizes a relationship between gender, representation, and power useful for thinking through the ways in which Aeneas and Dido seek compensation for their losses. For the purposes of clarity, I will capitalize eight crucial terms developed by Lacan, regardless of whether he himself consistently

capitalizes them: the Mirror Stage, the Real, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Other, Need, Demand, and Desire.

A Reflection of *I*: The Fall into Language through  
"The Mirror Stage"

In "The Mirror Stage," Lacan presents the initial claim of subjectivity and the subsequent fall into language in what he terms, the Mirror Stage.<sup>1</sup> Lacan's argument begins with his explanation of why he must address the issue of *I* as opposed to accepting Rene Decartes' explanation of "I think, therefore I am." The difference lies mainly in what Lacan terms the Mirror Stage, which is:

an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*. (Lacan 2)

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan presented "The Mirror Stage" to the sixteenth International Congress of Psychoanalysis at Zurich in 1949, although the idea was originally presented in 1936 and published in 1938 (Ragland-Sullivan 17).

This stage first occurs when a baby sees its reflection and realizes that he or she is a full and separate entity from the reflection as well as from the mother. According to Lacan, the child must still be pre-linguistic, and he or she must still be nursing or dependent upon another. The crucial establishment of subjectivity or the "I" occurs when the child realizes he or she is separate from the mother. The basic act which determines the Mirror Stage requires that a child must, according to Lacan, visually see itself from the outside in a mirror before he or she can understand that he or she has an individual identity. Before this moment, the I is the "Ideal - I" in that it, situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming -into-being..of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality. (Lacan 2)

The fiction involved in the recognition of subject-hood becomes tightly mingled with the subject's understanding of himself or herself.

Ironically, then, the fiction of agency continues throughout the child's life. The child comes to think that the image's movements "are animating him" (Lacan 2). The reflection appears to have more agency than the child, who, in its seemingly spectacular movements and powers, misrecognizes the extent of his or her own autonomy. Lacan describes the mirror image as a Gestalt-form, pattern, or whole-separate from the subject or child. The Gestalt appears a different size and is inverted from the subject. Lacan writes that while the Gestalt "symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination," it unites the *I* with how man sees himself (Lacan 2). Crucially, then, this first recognition of the child's own reflection is a mis-recognition, one that accords the child more power, independence, and agency than he or she actually possesses.

Moreover, because the child first encounters itself as an external image (or Gestalt) it confuses itself with the images of other subjects among whom it finds itself. Before the child falls into the Mirror Stage and recognizes its own subjectivity, it exists in the realm of the Real, the pre-linguistic realm in which all humans begin life. The Real is the stage before the Mirror Stage, when the

child does not know life as a separate entity from the mother. According to Lacan, the Real is the realm to which all humans strive to return, but it is impossible to reach this realm again. The Real represents a lack of a lack and a fullness of being.

The child next reaches the realm of the Imaginary, the second realm of development, in which the child has a fragmented body image. The child recognizes that possession of its own limbs but still sees itself as attached to the mother. According to Lacan, humans may be able to return, fleetingly, to the realm of the Imaginary, but only through dreams. The next developmental stage is the Mirror Stage, when the child distinguishes itself from its mother. The Mirror Stage results in a fall from the pre-linguistic stages of the Real and the Imaginary into the Symbolic—the realm of language.

Language, according to Lacan, stems from the recognition of the Ideal I—the child is a separate entity from the other, most often the mother. This realization becomes the original terrible loss, also referred to as Primary Castration, because the child visually sees the self as severed from the mother. Because the child cannot care for itself and depends upon a separate mother and food

source, the child must now acquire language to express needs previously met automatically. Lacan specifies that humans are the only animals who develop language because they are born prematurely and must express needs they cannot meet themselves. The child must express a desire for food because it cannot feed itself in a state of "anatomical incompleteness" (Lacan 4).

Moreover, Lacan argues that Desire is inherent during and after the Mirror Stage and that "even before the social dialectic, the effect in man of an organic insufficiency in his natural reality" can be detected (Lacan 3). To move from the realm of the organism, what Lacan terms the *Innenwelt*, to the realm of reality, what Lacan identifies as the *Umwelt*, is not wholly possible. The impossibility stems from the fact that a mirror always mediates human reality. The realm of reality or the Real stipulates that one must be whole to exist within this realm, which is only possible before the Mirror Stage: all humans strive to regain the Real after passing through the Mirror Stage. The lack of the Real causes what Lacan calls a "fragmented body-image" which will always be part of human subjectivity (Lacan 4). The longing to reach full reality is one that stays with all humans for their entire lifetimes.



By the end of the Mirror Stage the child not only recognizes the Other, but desires the Other. Lacan writes:

This moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the imago of the counter part and the drama of primordial jealousy...the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations.

It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the *I* into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation—the very normalization of this maturation being henceforth dependent, in man, on a cultural mediation.

(Lacan 5)

At this decisive point, the child has been thrust into language—into the realm of the Symbolic—and will always use the dialectic gained to compensate for the loss of his or

her wholeness and his or her resulting fragmented self image.

The Symbolic is the realm of language, culture, signification, and meaning itself. Lacan borrows Freud's terms, libido and sexual libido to describe primary narcissism, or one's desire for self preservation. When relating to the Other, the narcissistic I alienates itself and becomes aggressive in protecting itself. The I, or ego, is not

centered on the perception-consciousness system, or as organized by the 'reality-principle'—a principle that is the expression of a scientific prejudice most hostile to the dialectic of knowledge. (Lacan 7)

Lacan argues that the ego starts "from the *function of meconnaissance* that characterizes the ego in all its structures" (Lacan 7). Misrecognition, according to Lacan, remains a part of all individuals' self image.

The recognition of separation from the mother, the food source, causes the child to express desire for food. This symbolizes the child's fall from the Real, the pre-linguistic realm in which all needs are met, to the Symbolic, the realm of language. An important note on the

Mirror Stage: we never fully leave this stage. Human relations are all influenced by the Mirror Stage because the "I" that we project is merely a reflection of who we really are because it is the only "I" that we know.

Language and Power: Need, Desire and Demand in  
"The Signification of the Phallus"

Lacan begins his discussion in the "Signification of the Phallus" by describing the paradox, or "knot" of Sigmund Freud's model of the castration complex, most famously developed in Freud's lecture "Femininity." Freud's castration complex allows for "dynamic structuring of symptoms" and the regulation of the development of sexual identity (Lacan 281). Lacan questions why a man only acquires sexual attributes through a threat, in this case the threat of castration. To answer his own question, Lacan writes, "Freud, as we know, went so far as to suggest a disturbance of human sexuality, not of a contingent, but of an essential kind" (Lacan 281). The inherent threat results in a castration complex for men and a penis envy for women. Lacan argues that Freud's reasoning does not follow a logical path, but rather, the knotty and contradictory path outlined by four major Freudian

conclusions, which Lacan delineates as follows: 1.) the female child considers herself to be castrated because she lacks the phallus; she first feels that her mother deprives her of the phallus, but soon transfers this feeling to her father; 2.) both sexes see the mother as possessing the phallus, as being the phallic mother; 3.) castration becomes important for the formation of gendered attributes only after the child recognizes the mother's castration; 4.) the phallic stage centers around the phallus and masturbation, but fails to consider the "vagina as locus of genital penetration" (Lacan 282). Lacan relates this oversight to misrecognition, on Freud's part, of symbol for anatomy, of the phallus for the penis. As we will see, Lacan's "Signification of the Phallus" attempts to recognize the actual nature of the phallus and the threat of its loss as semiotic, representative, and symbolic, as opposed to Freud's anatomically driven understanding of the penis and of the castration threat.

Lacan, while giving credit to Freud for being able to unlock the mysteries of the unconscious, argues that there must be a reason for Freud to include "the evident paradox of his position" on the castration complex and the phallic stage (Lacan 284). Lacan uses linguistic theory derived

from Ferdinand de Saussure to complete Freud's theory.

Lacan writes:

It is Freud's discovery that gives to the signifier/signified opposition the full extent of its implications: namely, that the signifier has an active function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to its mark, by becoming through that passion the signified. (Lacan 284)

In other words, Freud, without the benefit of Saussure's linguistic categories, attempts to discuss the relationship between the signifier and the signified in his theory of the development of human sexuality. The signifier is a "new dimension of the human condition" because the structure of language governs both the signifier and the signified (Lacan 284). The structure of language is so fully woven into humanity's consciousness that language speaks through him and makes it possible for him to speak. Lacan makes it clear that the relationship between man and language and the signifier and the signified does not rely on culture. Instead, he argues that the relationship allows for a "rediscovering in the laws that govern the other scene, which Freud...designates as being that of the

unconscious" (Lacan 285). After the discussion of why Freud's theory seems incomplete, Lacan develops the argument for using the acquisition of language to complete Freud's theory about the castration complex and the emergence of gender in the human development process.

Lacan furthers his argument by incorporating the Other into the relationship between man and language. Anytime a man partakes in speech, theoretically an Other will always be present. The laws of language speak through the Other as well as through the subject. The subject may not notice the inherent structure in what he or she hears because the signifying takes place in the subconscious and therefore is not always consciously detected. The structure of language causes a splitting in the subject because the subject expresses needs that must be fulfilled from outside itself—going back to the emergence of language. Lacan argues that "that phallus reveals its function here" (Lacan 285). The phallus, for Lacan, is a signifier. He writes, "[i]t is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier" (Lacan 285). Lacan connects this part of his theory back to the theory he presents in "The Mirror Stage." He relates the effect of the phallus

to the necessity of demanding needs be met, which ultimately results in the need being met outside of the subject.

Because the expressed need must be met by an Other, it inherently creates alienation which leads to Lacan's model of the trinity of Need, Demand, and Desire. Just as the subject associates with his or her reflection during the Mirror Stage, Need becomes associated with Desire—or, to put it more specifically, the attempt to satisfy Needs through Demands becomes confused with the subject's constant state of unsatisfiable Desire. Lacan argues that Demand implies that someone, the Other, will be there to receive the utterance. To Demand requires a recognition of an absence or lack that the Other has the privilege to satisfy. The Other has the power to withhold the satisfaction, which Lacan relates to a mother depriving love. He argues that Demand for an object signifies a Demand for proof of love, but that the result crushes the Demand for love. Lacan explains:

For the unconditional element of demand, desire substitutes the 'absolute' condition: this condition unties the knot of that element in the proof of love that is resistant to the

satisfaction of a need. Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting. (Lacan 287)

When Lacan relates Desire to sexual relationships, he argues that both the subject and the Other must signify the cause of Desire, not just the Demand for proof of love nor be the object to prove love. The phallus, as the signifier, joins desires and language.

Lacan claims that the phallus is the ultimate signifier for several reasons. One reason: the phallus "is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation" (Lacan 287). The phallus literally represents the copula, which becomes another reason for the phallus to be the signifier. Yet another argument for the phallus is "that it can play its role only when veiled" or hidden (Lacan 288). The phallus disappears when the Desire it signifies is repressed. The subject desires the Other, but the signifier is veiled at a ratio to the Other's desire, so the subject must recognize the Desire of the Other. Lacan



writes, "it is in the dialectic of the demand for love and the test of desire that development is ordered" (Lacan 289).

The ratio of the subject's Desire to the Desire of the Other fluctuates as each of their Desires change. The subject's Desire also changes as the Other tries to become the object of Desire for the subject, and thus satisfying the subject's Desire. Lacan illustrates this idea with an example of a relationship between a mother and her child, in which the mother desires the phallus. That is, the mother desires access to privilege in the Symbolic Order. According to Lacan, in patriarchal cultures, the male gender has privileged access to power in the Symbolic Order through the Law of the Father, that rival whom the child sees as separating him or her from the mother. Women, according to Lacan, desire privileged access to the Symbolic—that is, they desire the phallus.

A child, to attain love from the mother, desires to "be" the phallus to satisfy his mother's Desire. Thus, the Other remains conflicted between his or her own Desire, and the longing to fulfill the Desire of the object of his love. To describe this balance, Lacan specifies that one may either "be" the phallus or "have" the phallus. That

is, one may either access the privileged position in the hierarchies of the Symbolic, or function as the point of elaborations for such privileged access. Lacan specifies that both roles cannot be simultaneously occupied.

The male gender is born into the privileged position because they have the phallus, which signifies the fullness of being lost with the loss of the Real. The phallus compensates for the lack of the Real for men. Lacan suggests that Freud's theory mistakes the penis for the phallus, but that, in general, Freud's notions about the phallus nonetheless retain interpretive force, since privileged access to Symbolic power masquerades as compensation for the loss of the Real, for the loss of pre-linguistic unification with the mother, or the feminine. Thus, Lacan defines masculinity as that quality of "having" the phallus, or "having" access to a symbolic privilege that masks the primary castration.

Conversely, Lacan defines femininity as that quality of "being" the phallus—providing the site of elaborations for masculinity's power and dominance. Put differently, femininity is that category which represents "lack" of privilege, and which forever reminds humanity of primary castration, original loss, though femininity itself masks

such loss here. Lacan suggests, then, that masculinity masquerades as "the lack of a lack," while femininity is made to represent "lack." In this way, a woman too can claim power within her gender by compensating for the universal lack, the lack of the Real. Lacan:

relations will turn around a 'to be' and a 'to have' which, by referring to a signifier, the phallus, have the opposed effect, on the one hand, of giving reality to the subject in this signifier, and, on the other, of derealizing the relations to be signified. (Lacan 289)

The categories of being or having the signifier take on more vitality from the Demand they satisfy. That Demand is always the Demand for love. Lacan argues that while the ideal of being the phallus or having the phallus does allow women to have some agency in the matters of desire, it also requires "that a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely, all her attributes...It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as loved" (Lacan 290). The ideal Lacan presents about the phallus and Desire, allows both sexes to claim power as the object of another's Desire and as a subject with his or her own Desires.

Through his discussion of the Symbolic and the Real, Lacan implies the important role of the visual in exerting power. In the realm of the symbolic, men may use language to compensate for their symbolic castration and loss of immediate access to experience. Traditional femininity, on the contrary, is associated with lack—with what is not seen and with silence. Culturally, men hold the position of power, which they show through spectacle, while women are attributed with silence and discretion.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A LACANIAN VIEW ON THE SACRIFICE AND SUFFERING OF DIDO AND AENEAS

As I suggested in Chapter Two, Jacques Lacan's model of human development describes masculinity and femininity as alternative reckonings with alienation from the Real, the prelinguistic state of unity with the maternal. Lacan stipulates that representation itself directly results from humanity's attempt to compensate for the loss of direct access to the maternal, which functions in the psyche as that homeland from which humanity is forever exiled. Moreover, according to Lacan, humanity is divided between those who mask their exile through possession of symbolic privilege—possession of "the phallus"—and those who wear their exile by functioning as the site of elaboration of privilege by comprising "the phallus." Those who "have the phallus" exhibit conventional masculinity; those who "are the phallus" exhibit conventional femininity. The important point, for Lacan, is that, while the genders are distinguished from each other by their relationship to either masking their exiled condition (masculinity) or demonstrating their exiled condition (femininity), both

genders are constituted by the condition of exile. For Lacan, the ultimate therapeutic goal is simply that the subject—male or female—recognizes that the whole of the symbolic hierarchy, including gender, is an inadequate compensation for the loss of the Real; and that no amount of Demand will result in the satisfaction of Desire. In other words, the therapeutic goal in the Lacanian model requires that the subject recognizes all failed attempts to compensate for his/her loss—in other words, to “name his/her desire.”

Lacan's model of exile, gender, and its compensations will inform my analysis of Aeneas's and Dido's alternative relationships to exile. This chapter will argue that both characters seem most sympathetic when they are least heroic, in the Homeric sense of heroism. Thus, Aeneas's character gains maximum sympathy at the outset of the epic, which enacts his exile from Troy. Virgil narrates Aeneas's exile from Troy, in language associated with the maternal and feminine, which solicits the sympathies of readers who associate Troy with a legendary realm of abundance and unity that has always already been lost. Aeneas's Destiny, which ostensibly seeks to compensate his (and Western

tradition's) loss by empire building, figures his duty in terms of paternalistic or ostensibly masculine language and imagery. Aeneas's character becomes less sympathetic as he abandons Dido and conquers the Rutulians; the epic's final scene portrays Aeneas as replete with battlefield heroics and devoid of humanity. Conversely, Dido becomes more sympathetic as the epic progresses. Lacan's therapeutic model provides a perspective on Dido's Tragedy as one in which her suicide functions as a "naming of desire," or a recognition that the very compensations and privileges Aeneas clings to so tenaciously prove to be inadequate and self-perpetuating surrogates for the homeland.

#### Troy as the Maternal, Aeneas's First Exile

The opening lines of *The Aeneid* introduce Aeneas, his exile, and his quest. Virgil writes:

I sing of arms and of a man: his fate  
had made him fugitive; he was the first  
to journey from the coasts of Troy as far  
as Italy and the Lavinian shores.  
...he brought a city into being  
and carried in his gods to Latium;  
from this have come the Latin race, the lords

of Alba, and the ramparts of high Rome. (Virgil  
I.1-12)

Aeneas's destiny requires that he leave the ruins of Troy and lead a fleet to Italy where he is to establish Rome. While Virgil's epic opens with a nod toward the Homeric heroic code by introducing Aeneas in vaguely Achillean terms, as battle-worthy hero—"I sing of arms and a man"—the martial is no sooner introduced than the language of exile modifies it (Virgil I.1). The second line emphasizes, not his martial prowess, but rather, his exile: "his fate/had made him fugitive" (Virgil I.1-2). In the epic's opening, Aeneas's relationship to "arms" begins as a defensive one, demanded not only by his fate, but by the larger fate of Troy, instantly recognizable to all Virgil's readers. From the outset, the epic links Aeneas's Destiny and his identity to those of Troy; Aeneas functions as a kind of synecdoche for the city. Moreover, the epic's opening lines paint the Trojans—Homer's transgressors— as the sympathetic underdogs who lose their home to the Greeks' finally successful military strategy. Virgil locates the origins of "high Rome" in this "fugitive" line. The origins of Italy lie in exile (Virgil I.2). Thus, the opening lines of the epic pair loss of the legendary Troy



with the gain of the paternalistic line ("the Latin race, the lords / of Alba") that will found Rome (Virgil I.11-12).

The poem's opening lines similarly pair the Homeric heroic code with Virgil's revision of the code. Before the gods reveal Aeneas's Destiny to him, Aeneas questions why he was not allowed to die a hero's death. He laments,

O, three and four times blessed  
were those who died before their fathers' eyes  
beneath the walls of Troy...why  
did I not fall upon the Ilian fields,  
there where ferocious Hector lies. (Virgil I.133-39)

Clearly, Aeneas feels cheated out of his heroic death as if anticipating the response of readers familiar with Homeric tradition. Virgil may sing of "arms and the man," but Aeneas is no Achilles (Virgil I.1). If not to Aeneas, Jupiter's words answer Aeneas's questions for the reader: "' [Aeneas] shall wage tremendous war in Italy / and crush ferocious nations and establish / a way of life and walls for his own people'" (Virgil I.367-69).

After Aeneas receives three prophesies during the siege of Troy, he comes to understand that his destiny does

not dictate death on the battlefield in his beloved city, but rather to flee and to carry on the great Trojan race. Two of the three confrontations associate the fall of Troy with maternal and feminine imagery and language; the first prophecy builds upon the Homeric Heroic Code. The first prophecy comes from Hector's bloodied ghost. Aeneas sees "Hector as once he was, dismembered by / the dragging chariot, black and bloodied dust; / his swollen feet were pierced by thongs" (Virgil II.375-77). He then remembers Hector in his glory days of battle and how strongly that image contrasts with the ghost in front of him. Hector's shade has a "beard unkempt, his hair was thick with blood, / he bore the many wounds he had received / around his homeland's walls" (Virgil.382-84). Aeneas weeps at the sight of the defeated Hector, who urges Aeneas to flee Troy:

...snatch

yourself out of these flames. The enemy  
has gained the walls; Troy falls from her high  
peak.

Our home, our Priam—these have had their due

...But Troy entrusts

her holy things and household gods to you;

take them away as comrades of your fortunes,  
seek out for them the great walls that at last,  
once you have crossed the sea, you will establish.

(Virgil II.395-404)

Hector has died the hero's death denied Aeneas. Rather than emphasizing Hector's glorious immortality, his ghost appears as pitiful. This portrayal of Hector subtly suggests Virgil's critique of the Homeric Heroic Code, in which the compensation of immortality is questioned.<sup>2</sup>

Hector's prophecy moves Aeneas, but not enough to take action and leave Troy. Aeneas feels attached to Troy, his maternal homeland, as a child feels attached to his mother. He, as did Hector, perceives his identity and his destiny as intertwined with those of the city; thus, he does not understand his survival during the siege. Hector reflects the conventionally masculine, martial role prescribed by Homeric heroism. Virgil's Hector recalls the Hector of Homer's *Iliad*; when Hector, the greatest Trojan warrior, falls to Achilles, Troy's fall, too, becomes inevitable.

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<sup>2</sup> A similar questioning of immortality as compensation for heroic death in battle can be seen in Book 11 of Homer's *The Odyssey*. In a discussion between Achilles and Odysseus in the underworld, Achilles says he would rather have lived as an ordinary man than rule over the dead as a hero. His words have been interpreted variously; however they are often seen as Achilles renouncing the heroic code he once represented. See Chapter One for a discussion of the aforementioned scene between Achilles and Odysseus.

Hector's appearance heightens the reader's sympathies for the Trojans in general and for Aeneas in particular. His appearance reminds the reader that any battle has its victims as well as its victors. Hector's account of Aeneas's Destiny revises the Homeric heroic code. Rather than embracing his own immortality as just compensation for his loss of life, Hector suggests that the building of a new Troy, elsewhere, may compensate for the spectacular and heartbreaking loss so richly imagined by Virgil's depiction of the siege of Troy. However, the sorry spectacle of Hector's shade equally calls to mind those who will be similarly victimized by Aeneas's conquest.

If Hector's appearance specifies Virgil's revision of Homer's heroic code, the appearance of Aeneas's mother, with a second prophecy, emphasizes the association of Troy, the homeland, and the maternal. After Hector's prophecy, Aeneas continues to push toward battle until he sees Helen, "the daughter of Tyndareos clinging / to Vesta's thresholds, crouching silently / within a secret corner of the shrine" (Virgil II. 763-65). Aeneas blames Helen for the siege of Troy. He calls her "the common / Fury of Troy and of her homeland, she / had did herself; she crouched, a hated thing" (Virgil II. 771-73). Aeneas wants to avenge

his falling city but his mother intervenes. Aeneas describes his mother appearing as "pure light, unmistakable goddess" (Virgil II.797). Venus tells her son to ignore Helen and worry about the fate of his own family. She orders him to find his wife Creüsa, his son Ascanius, and his father Anchises and to "be quick / to flee, have done with fighting" (Virgil II. 836-37). The command that Aeneas must save his family and leave the fight seems to penetrate when it comes from his mother. He finds his family and convinces them that they must flee Troy. While trying to induce his father to leave with him, he longs for death in battle, but his powerful memory of his mother's words enable him to usher his family away from the fight. The potent association of Aeneas's mother, the goddess of love, with Aeneas's decision to leave Troy, symbolically associates Troy with the ultimate motherland from which Virgil's readers are also metaphorically exiled.

This understanding of Troy invites comparisons with Lacan's model of the Real, that realm of wholeness and peace only vaguely discernible in retrospect. Aeneas's departure from Troy compares to what Lacan describes as a fall from a magical realm of wholeness and home. In place of the lost homeland, Aeneas pursues the compensatory act

of founding a new homeland, which, according to Lacan, is already over-determined as an imperfect replacement for and representative of the lost Troy.

The third prophecy Aeneas receives as his beloved Troy falls comes from Creüsa's ghost. As Aeneas, his son, his wife, and his father flee, he dictates that his "wife Creüsa follow at a distance" (Virgil II. 961). The family and the servants plan to rendezvous at an old cypress tree outside the city wall. Aeneas takes less-traveled roads to the meeting place to avoid detection, but he loses Creüsa. He says, "'fate tears from me / my wife Creüsa in my misery'" (Virgil II.994-95). It is important to note that Aeneas's misery is not caused only by losing his wife, but also by losing Troy. Again, the loss of Troy becomes associated with the loss of union with Aeneas's initial feminine partner. Frantic, Aeneas returns to the battle in the city to seek his wife. He anxiously calls out for Creüsa as he searches the crumbling city. Suddenly her shade appears. She once again gives him the prophecy advising him to leave Troy. She urges:

O my sweet husband, is there any use  
in giving way to such fanatic sorrow?  
For this could never come to pass without

the gods' decree; and you are not to carry  
Creüsa as your comrade, since the king  
of high Olympus does not grant you that.  
Along your way lie long exile, vast plains  
of sea that you must plow; but you will reach  
Hesperia, where Lydian Tiber flows,  
a tranquil stream, through farmer's fruitful  
fields.

There days of gladness lie in wait for you:  
a kingdom and a royal bride. (Virgil II.1046-58)

This account of Aeneas's Destiny makes explicit the brutal gender hierarchies at the heart of Troy's fall and of the ultimate conquest of Latium. Ironically, the same man who recently wanted to take Helen's life for her role in the demise of Troy is informed, by his own wife's shade, that he is destined to marry into the royal line of the kingdom he will surmount. Thus, the epic's opening insistently and continually inscribes the feminine into both the heartbreaking loss of Troy and into Aeneas's Destiny.

Aeneas himself does not verbally accept Creusa's prophesy. Markedly, he has no words to respond to his wife's shade. He just weeps and tries to reconnect with her by reaching out to embrace her, but her shade evades

him three times before disappearing. Aeneas surprisingly displays a lack of language during the encounter with his wife's shade. His inability to speak again invites comparison with the pre-linguistic realm of the Real. Aeneas's encounter with Creusa's shade elicits readers' sympathy precisely because they experience her loss. Aeneas's reluctance to accept his Destiny as adequate compensation for the loss of his city and of his wife emphasizes his humanity and the humanity of all the victims of Troy's fall—which represent, in classical Western tradition, all victims everywhere, or the very condition of victim-hood.

As Aeneas travels on he tries, as do all humans according to Lacan, to regain that home which has been forever lost. Strikingly, the prophecies continue to associate the mythical lost and searched-for homeland with feminine and maternal imagery. For example, one night at sea, Apollo's voice visits Aeneas and his father:

O iron sons of Dardanus, the land  
that gave you birth, the land of your ancestors,  
will welcome you again, returned to her  
generous breast. Seek out your ancient mother.  
For there Aeneas's house will rule all coasts,



as will his sons' sons and those born of them.

(Virgil III. 125-130)

Here, Troy is literally figured as maternalistic, "that land that gave you birth;" and Aeneas's nation-founding is figured, not as an iteration of the bloody conquest he himself just suffered, but rather, as a return to the infinitely abundant and maternal homeland, "the ancient mother" with "her/ generous breast" (Virgil III.125-28). However, the desire for such a return is quickly refigured from the maternal language of the "ancient mother" to the paternalistic line that will lead to the founding of Roman Patriarchy: "for there, Aeneas's house will rule all coasts, as will his son's sons and those born of them" (Virgil III. 129-30). Paternalistic associations with Aeneas's symbolic founding of the line resulting in Rome are heightened by the ways in which Aeneas consults his father in every detail of the plan to land in Italy. After receiving his father's approval, Aeneas and his fellow Trojans set sail from Crete to find Italy. Once Aeneas recognizes his Destiny as a chance to return to a state of wholeness—with that ancient mother—by establishing the future site of the Trojans, he eagerly pursues his fate. Crucially, the epic figures this recognition as a

misrecognition. In Virgil, as in Lacan, the association of the feminine with the realm of an ideal past masks the brutal patriarchal orders of the future.

Dido's Tragedy, Aeneas's Turning-Point: Exile  
from Humanity and into Heroism

As Aeneas makes his way toward his Destiny, he lands in Carthage and captures the heart of the queen, Dido, who takes her own life when Aeneas eventually abandons her. As I suggested in Chapter One, the relationship between Aeneas's Destiny and Dido's Tragedy forms an interpretive crux for the epic, as it highlights the tension between personal fulfillment and the realization of a nation-founder's destiny, between honoring one's duty to loved ones and honoring one's duty to the larger community. Often, scholars who accept optimistic readings of the epic also affirm Dido's Tragedy as the necessary cost of Aeneas's Destiny or as a tragic but requisite test of his commitment to his duty. Conversely, I will argue that Dido's Tragedy, as arguably the most moving part of the epic, challenges the paternalistic heroic code, wherein the ultimate founding of Rome provides compensation for her death. Lacan's perspective on the inadequate compensations

of the Symbolic—of access to power through the exercise of *logos*, for the loss of the Real specifies my critique. I have argued that Aeneas's commitment to his Destiny is informed less by his desire to found a new nation than to re-build, or more accurately, to *return to*, Troy itself. Arguably, such a Desire could have been better fulfilled by remaining in Carthage, ruling alongside Dido, than by forcing himself upon the Rutulians and stealing Lavinia away from Turnus. Indeed, the very associations of Dido with Carthage are reminiscent of Troy and its associations with femininity. Lacan's model highlights an important figurative split in Aeneas's journey: the juncture between Troy, Carthage, and the feminine as that idealized past which exiles humanity; and Italy and Rome, as the patriarchal and paternalistic future that both guarantees and promises compensations for such exile. Dido's Tragedy highlights the perversity and inadequacy of such an economy, for it revises the role of Rome from the compensation for such loss to the cause of such loss. Moreover, the ways in which Aeneas and Dido employ language itself—*logos*, that hallmark of inadequate Symbolic compensation—highlight their different relationships to their experiences of exile.

For instance, Dido's response to Aeneas is predicated upon his identity as an exile, highlighted by his narrative of the fall of Troy and his wanderings since. Aeneas relies on *logos*, or language, to please Dido by telling her of his voyage. Dido has developed strong feelings for Aeneas after hearing his narrative. Virgil writes, "Aeneas's / high name, all he has done, again, again / come like a flood. His face, his words hold fast / her breast. Care strips her limbs of calm and rest" (Virgil IV. 3-6). Aeneas's use of *logos* and his residence in the symbolic, along with Cupid's arrow, incite love in Dido's heart.

Aeneas grows close to Dido as well, but never verbalizes his love for her. While hunting with Dido, the gods conspire to intertwine his life with hers forever. They conjure up a storm where "confusion takes the sky, tremendous / turmoil, and on its heels, rain mixed with hail" disrupts the activities of the day (Virgil IV.213-14). Aeneas and Dido seek shelter in the same cave where they privately consummate their growing relationship. After the cave scene, Dido, but not Aeneas, considers them to be a married couple. Aeneas remains in Carthage and continues to help build and fortify the city. It is not

until Aeneas receives another message from a god, this time Mercury, that he realizes he must continue his quest, sacrificing Dido. Aeneas knows his departure will hurt Dido. Virgil writes, "With what words dare / he face the frenzied queen? What openings / can he employ?" (Virgil IV. 378-80). Aeneas decides to not discuss his departure with Dido, but instead to have his crew "equip the fleet in silence" (Virgil IV. 385). While Aeneas does not employ *logos* to tell Dido of his impending departure, his actions certainly convey his purpose.

Dido's reaction to Aeneas's abandonment of her and Carthage fails to persuade him to stay. She tries everything from manipulation to honestly appealing to his heart, but to no avail. He has already decided to leave the comfort of the maternal surrogate for Troy as a result of Mercury's reprimands, masculine admonishments, of his behavior. Dido, with the vision of losing Aeneas, cascades from the realm of the Real, where she feels a sense of wholeness with Aeneas, to the realm of the symbolic, where she uses *logos* to persuade him to stay so she can regain the real. She says,

Deceiver, did you even hope to hide  
so harsh a crime, to leave this land of mine

without a word? Can nothing hold you back—  
neither your love, the hand you pledged, nor even  
the cruel death that lies in wait for Dido?”

(Virgil IV. 410-14).

Here, Dido's accusation links Aeneas's silence with deception, departure, and with the activity of exiling Dido from his company. Similarly, Dido appeals to the honors and commitments that exist between husband and wife (“Can nothing hold you back--/neither your love, the hand you pledged,”) which she intends to honor through “cruel death” (Virgil IV. 12-14). Arguably, Dido anticipates a loss on par with the loss of nations; she anticipates an exile even greater than their suffering as exiles from their native homes in her anticipation of loss of life itself. Nonetheless, Dido rants around the city without convincing Aeneas that staying in Carthage, even for a short time longer, is more important than reaching the shores of Italy.

Aeneas finally has to explain himself. He begins his speech with kind words when he admits,

...I never shall  
deny what you deserve, the kindnesses  
that you could tell; I never shall regret

remembering Elissa [the Greek version of Dido  
(Holst)] for as long

as I remember my own self. (Virgil IV. 449-53)

Aeneas admits that he and Dido have experienced a profound intimacy and mutual constitution of identity. Moreover, the language of memory here ("I never shall regret / remembering Elissa for as long / as I remember my own self") suggests that Aeneas's time with Dido in Carthage, not unlike his former life in Troy with Creusa, has been crucially constitutive of his sense of self; a sense of self which, from this point on, relies much less on "love" or a "pledged" "hand," and more upon his dogged commitment to Destiny (Virgil IV. 51-53).

This exchange with Dido highlights Aeneas's turning point from sympathetic exile and affable co-Carthage builder to grim conqueror. No sooner has Aeneas vocalized the importance of Dido than he continues to tell Dido he never entered into a marriage with her. He has no choice in leaving Carthage. He argues, "'I have never held / the wedding torches as a husband; I / have never entered into such agreements" (Virgil IV. 457-59). At this point, Aeneas's use of language, rather than his former use of silence, may well register as deceptive to the readers as

well as to Dido, since, at the very least, such consummations of marriages were not uncommon. The discrepancy in Dido's and Aeneas's accounts highlights the gap between representation itself and the represented act, and the violence and discord that can enter such a gap. Similarly, Aeneas then reaffirms his allegiance to Troy and explains that even if he could control his fate, which he cannot, he would have remained in Troy and never would have landed in Carthage. Again, Aeneas's use of *logos* here at least begs interpretation. His suggestion that, because fate exiled him from Troy, he remains forever doomed to be exiled, itself highlights the gap between his inability to recognize the compensations and homecomings Carthage itself might represent and his insistence that somehow Italy will form better compensation. Similarly, this argument reduces the Destiny to something like the Excuse—Aeneas refuses all personal responsibility and choice.

As demonstrably problematic as all this rhetoric is, however, most telling is Aeneas's final argument to abandon Dido and Carthage: Aeneas argues that he owes his son the throne in Italy. Again, Aeneas cleaves to a future nationhood determined, not by equal rule of maternalistic and paternalistic rule alongside Dido, but claimed by, for,



and through, his own paternalistic line from Troy. Such alternatives, despite Aeneas's claims to lack of will, do suggest a choice—a choice that refigures Aeneas from sympathetic exile and grieving husband to grim nation-founder. Aeneas ends his speech when he states,

...And now the gods'  
own messenger, sent down by Jove himself—  
I call as witness to both our lives—has brought  
his orders through the swift air. My own eyes  
have seen the god as he was entering  
our walls—in broad daylight. My ears have drunk  
his words. No longer set yourself and me  
afire. Stop your quarrel. It is not  
my own free will that leads to Italy. (Virgil IV.  
484-92)

Again Aeneas absolves himself once more through language of any wrong in his secretly planned departure. These are the last words Aeneas has for Dido until they meet once more in the underworld. Virgil writes:

But though he longs to soften, soothe her sorrow  
and turn aside her troubles with sweet words,  
though groaning long and shaken in his mind  
because of his great love, nevertheless

pious Aeneas carries out the gods'

instructions. Now he turns back to his fleet.

(Virgil IV. 540-45)

Although Aeneas feels compassion for Dido, neither his actions nor his words show his care for her. He puts his nation-founding destiny before his feelings for another human being, thus leaving his humanity, if not in Troy, in Carthage.

Aeneas meets Dido once more in Book VI, in Dis, the underworld. In this final meeting between the former lovers, Aeneas seems to regain some humanity and show true compassion for Dido. He questions, "'Unhappy Dido, then the word I had / was true? That you were dead? That you pursued / your final moment with the sword?" (Virgil VI.600-02). He questions Dido as if he has no idea what has happened to her, when in reality he watched "where the walls of Carthage glowed / with sad Elissa's flames" as he and his crew sailed away from the city (Virgil IV. 4-5). Aeneas, at the very least, had an idea that Dido committed suicide upon his departure from her shores, yet when he faces her shade he acts as if he had only heard a rumor that she may have died. Aeneas continues addressing Dido when he asks, "Did I / bring only death to you?" (Virgil

VI. 602-03). While Aeneas seems to be pleading for Dido's forgiveness he goes on to absolve himself of any blame. He says, "Queen, I swear by / the stars, the gods above, and any trust / that may be in this underearth, I was / unwilling when I had to leave your shores" (Virgil VI. 603-06). Aeneas diverts all responsibility for Dido's pain to the gods that control his destiny. He accepts no blame in the matter. He again relies on his Destiny to explain why he cannot spend more time with her in the underworld: "But those same orders of the gods that now / urge on my journey through the shadows, through / abandoned, thorny lands and deepest night, / drove me by their decrees" (Virgil VI. 607-10). He explains that he did not expect his leaving Carthage would cause Dido as much pain as she clearly experienced. While he does admit he did not realize he would hurt her so deeply, and that his leaving did in fact cause her pain, he never apologizes. He accepts no accountability. While this scene seems to show Aeneas's sincerity when Virgil writes that Aeneas, "wept" and spoke to Dido with "tender love," Aeneas's actual words tell a different story (Virgil VI. 599). Aeneas's lack of integrity in his last conversation with Dido provides

evidence for his declining humanity and his ever-growing sense of patriotic duty.

Only when Aeneas reaches his father in the underworld, does he finally realize the gravity of his destiny as founder of Rome. Anchises tells Aeneas of the glorious future of the empire that stems from his blood. Aeneas sees the future leaders and Caesars of Rome. Virgil writes:

And so they wander over all that region,  
across the wide and misted plains, surveying  
everything. And when father Anchises  
has shown his son each scene and fired his soul  
with love of coming glory, then he tells  
Aeneas of the wars he must still wage,  
of the Laurentians, of Latinus' city,  
and how he is to flee or face each trial. (Virgil  
VI. 1183-90)

After telling Aeneas about what he will face and what will come from his success in Latium, Anchises sends Aeneas out of the underworld through the ivory "gate of Sleep" (Virgil VI. 1191). Virgil describes two gates when he writes:

...the one is said  
to be of horn, through it an easy exit

is given to true Shades; the other is made  
of polished ivory, perfect, glittering,  
but through that way the Spirits send false dreams  
into the world above. (Virgil VI. 1191-96)

Aeneas can not possibly pass through the gate of horn  
because he is not a shade, which leaves only the gate that  
allows false dreams to act as his escape from the  
underworld. Aeneas's exit through the more difficult and  
false gate shows that he will not leave the underworld  
unchanged. For the first time he understands his destiny  
and the importance of his journey. This realization only  
furtheres Aeneas's sense of duty. As Aeneas's nation-  
founding destiny becomes increasingly important to him, his  
compassion for others diminishes.

Armed with a newly invigorated sense of duty, Aeneas  
and his crew continue on to Italy, where the gods have  
stirred up a frenzy which leads to war. In the underworld,  
Anchises tells Aeneas of the battles that he will have to  
fight to secure his supremacy in Italy. Upon arriving in  
Ausonia, Aeneas tells king Latinus that he wishes no harm,  
only a place to stay and that Latinus will not regret  
accepting the Trojans into his kingdom. Aeneas may believe  
that he does not intend any harm, but given the prophecy of

war Aeneas heard from his father in the underworld, it seems that he now deceitfully promises a peaceful settling. Latinus, due to the prophecy about his daughter, believes that the gods have ordained Aeneas to be his son-in-law. The ghost who delivers the prophecy to Latinus says,

O do not seek, my son, to join your daughter  
in marriage to a Latin; do not trust  
the readied wedding bed. For strangers come  
as sons-in-law; their blood will raise our name  
about the stars; and their sons' sons will see  
all things obedient at their feet, wherever  
the circling Sun looks on both sides of Ocean.

(Virgil *Vii*.121-27)

The prophecy and Aeneas's promise of bringing no harm sway Latinus to allow the Trojans to land in Ausonia.

Juno busies herself with delaying the impending marriage between Aeneas and Lavinia, Latinus' daughter, by inciting war in the heart of Turnus, Lavinia's previous suitor. While both sides technically fight over Lavinia's hand and her father's kingdom, they both also fight for the chance to prove their honor and their good name, and possibly to become immortalized in the process. While the warriors themselves operate under the original, Homeric

version of the heroic code, the haunting memory of Dido's sacrifice in the epic highlights the *pathos* of their expectations. Virgil describes the heroic Turnus when he writes,

The handsome-bodied Turnus is himself  
among the vanguard, taller by a head  
than all. He grips a sword; and his high helmet  
is crested with a triple plume and carries  
Chimaera breathing from her jaws with flames  
like Etna's; as the fighting grows more savage,  
with flowing blood, she rages more, ferocious,  
with her grim fires. (Virgil VII. 1029-36)

While the fight begins literally over the unintentional killing of a favorite pet, the stakes are much higher for Turnus as well as for Aeneas, both who have fates weighing in the balance.

The final display of Aeneas's loss of humanity comes in Book XII when he savagely ends Turnus' life. Aeneas sees Turnus begin to falter. Virgil writes, "In Turnus' wavering Aeneas sees / his fortune; he holds high the fatal shaft; / he hurls it far with all his body's force" (Virgil XII. 1225-27). Aeneas takes the moment of Turnus' weakness to end the battle. Although Turnus lies in the dust,

clearly defeated, Aeneas has not fully taken his revenge for Pallas' death. Turnus tells Aeneas, "'For you have won, and the Ausonians / have seen me, beaten, stretch my hands; Lavinia / is yours; then do not press your hatred further'" (Virgil XII. 1249-51). Virgil explains that Turnus' words move Aeneas,

...until

high on the Latin's shoulder he made out  
the luckless belt of Pallas, of the boy  
whom Turnus had defeated, wounded, stretched  
upon the battlefield, from whom he took  
this fatal sign to wear upon his back. (Virgil  
XII. 1255-60)

At the moment Aeneas sees Pallas' belt, he loses the rest of his humanity and reverts to a shell of a person full of rage and revenge. Virgil writes:

...Aeneas,

aflame with rage—his wrath was terrible—  
cried: 'How can you who wear the spoils of my  
dear comrade now escape me? It is Pallas  
who strikes, who sacrifices you, who takes  
this payment from your shameless blood.'

Relentless,



he sinks his sword into the chest of Turnus.

His limbs fell slack with chill; and with a moan  
his life, resentful, fled to Shades below. (Virgil  
XII. 1263-71)

In Lacanian terms, in the final scene of the epic Aeneas's actions show he has hopelessly fallen into a Symbolic Order which has cost him his humanity. Aeneas is left with no Troy, no homeland, and no unity with the maternal or feminine Other. In Homeric terms, the Symbolic is without the *Odyssey's* rich homecomings and the *Iliad's* raging heroics or finally peaceful burials, which themselves send shades homeward. Instead, Virgil's *The Aeneid* ends with a choice—between mercy/humanity and “relentless” violence—and Aeneas chooses the second. While Aeneas might justify killing Turnus by using language to explain that it is a payment for the death of Pallas, Turnus' death symbolizes the final and complete death of Aeneas's humanity—and the ultimate emptiness of economies that demand the exchange of humanity for heroism.

#### Dido's Tragedy: Naming Her Desire

While Dido's Tragedy forms a kind of turning point during which Aeneas becomes a decidedly less sympathetic

and human character, Dido herself emerges as more sympathetic and human. Moreover, Lacan's model facilitates an interpretation of Dido's spectacular suicide and subsequent silence in the Underworld as recognitions that the compensations of the heroic code, whether figured as nation-building or as poetic immortality for early death are always insufficient. In the Lacanian model, such recognition is the ultimate therapeutic goal. Thus, Lacan's model facilitates recognition of Dido as the epic's most sympathetic and successfully human character—she succeeds, where Aeneas fails, to “name Desire.”

Dido survives her first tragic exile from Tyre and loss of her treacherously murdered first husband. By building and ruling Carthage she proves to be a powerful queen able to build a new nation in exile. Arguably, Dido's early presence in the epic suggests the kind of ruler Aeneas might have been—may even suggest that the basic outline of Aeneas's Destiny may have formed a narrative of survival and of hope. However, as I have suggested, Dido's exile from Aeneas's company—her second exile—seems to stretch the limits of her resilience. Rather than rebuild in the wake of Aeneas's leave, she commits suicide. On one level, such an action could be

read as the hysterical response of a human stretched past her tolerance for loss. However, Lacan's model recasts Dido's suicide as a kind of therapeutic success. She could have realized that whatever compensations may remain for her are insufficient. The spectacle of Dido's death allows her to exert her feminine power and to name her desire. Additionally, Dido's silence when Aeneas approaches her in the underworld also allows her to reclaim any lost claim of power.

To return to Barbara McManus's model of transgendering, Dido is a complicated character, one whose political prominence enables her to possess phallic power even as her initial reception of Aeneas arguably transfers such power to him. As suggested by Lacan, in Western traditions, power is visual. Visual phallic display of power masks the Desire for a return to the Real. According to Lacan:

the division immanent in desire is already felt to be experienced in the desire of the Other, in that it is already opposed to the fact that the subject is content to present to the Other what in reality he may have the corresponds to this phallus, for what he has is worth no more than what he does not

have, as far as his demand for love is concerned because that demand requires that he be the phallus. (Lacan 1309)

In Lacanian terms, Dido, as Carthage's Queen, Dido "possesses" the phallus; Dido, as Aeneas's host and eventual lover, "requires that (she) be the phallus."

The gods choose Dido to govern the place where the Trojans will come ashore, Carthage. The gods make their decision based upon Dido's character. Virgil writes, "Dido, above all, / receives into her spirit kindliness, / a gracious mind to greet the Teucrians" (Virgil 1.428-30). The Teucrians are the descendents of Teucer, a Trojan king. Virgil tells his readers that Dido's first husband, Sychaeus died at the hand of her brother, Pygmalion. Dido flees to Carthage as her husband, "urges her to speed her flight, to leave / her homeland" (Virgil 1.506-07). At this point, Dido, claiming some agency begins to recognize her own phallic power. By the time Aeneas meets Dido, she has already partially fulfilled her own version of Aeneas's Destiny—she builds a new nation from exile.

As Dido and her companions set out to Carthage from Tyre, Virgil notes, "A woman leads," (Virgil 1.516). With her husband's money, Dido exerts her power and buys Byrsa

and establishes Carthage. When Aeneas and the Trojans arrive, with the power as Carthage's ruler, Dido asks, "Who, then, are you? / From what coasts have you come? / Where are you going?" (Virgil 1.522-23). She demands Aeneas's attention and his response. Again, McManus and Lacan together provide an intriguing perspective on these seemingly simple questions. On the one hand, Dido's obvious political power—her possession of phallic representations—attracts Aeneas, as she mirrors what he would like, himself, to become: a nation founder. In Lacanian terms, her political prowess suggests conventional masculinity or possession of phallic power. On the other hand, Dido's clear exile from Tyre reminds Aeneas of his own exile. In Lacanian terms, she thus also performs conventional femininity, or "is the desire of the Other,"—she is the phallus.

Dido's welcoming speech to Aeneas demonstrates the extent of her transgendering, the extent to which she rapidly moves between masculinity and femininity as characterized in Lacanian short-hand, between "having the phallus" and "being the phallus." Dido:

Whoever you may be, I hardly think

the heaven-dwellers hold a grudge against you:

the breath of life is yours, and you are near  
a Tyrian city. Only make your way  
until you reach the palace of the queen.  
For I can tell you truthfully: your comrades  
are given back to you, your fleet is saved.  
(Virgil 1.550-56)

Dido's use of the traditionally male *logos*, or symbolic realm of language, allows her to establish herself as a powerful queen who can offer a safe harbor to Aeneas and his shipmates. Aeneas accepts her good will and kindness, and his willingness to amuse her with the story of his travels reveals the beginning of his attraction to Dido. In this way, Dido becomes the phallus. Conversely, Aeneas's tale of his journey attracts Dido to him and he in turn becomes the phallus for her. They both have moments of phallic power in their first meeting, and they both function as sites of elaborations for the Other's phallic power. For convenience and for clarity, the following analysis will employ "being the phallus" to connote Lacan's model of femininity and "having the phallus" to connote Lacan's model of masculinity.

| The phallus, or desire, for Dido, is Aeneas. Dido "burns with love" for Aeneas (Virgil IV.133). To ensure

that she can attain her desire, Aeneas, Dido convinces herself that the intimate time they share in the cave constitutes a marriage. Because a lasting relationship with Aeneas is Dido's desire, he is also the phallus for Dido. Virgil writes, "Primal Earth / and Juno, queen of marriages, together / now give the signal: lightning fires flash, / the upper air is witness to their mating" (Virgil IV.219-22). The poet tells the reader directly, "Dido calls it marriage" (Virgil IV.227). Through the marriage, Dido exerts her power as queen of Carthage who has just secured the safety of the city. She claims the phallus as her own, as her husband.

Aeneas too realizes that he has become the phallus for Dido. He is her desire. In Lacanian terms, he fulfills her Desire for love. He does not want to tell her of his departure destined by the gods because he fears her reaction. After Mercury questions Aeneas's actions: "Are you / now laying the foundation of high Carthage, / as servant to a woman, building her / a splendid city," Aeneas realizes he must follow his fate and leave for Italy (Virgil IV.353). Aeneas,

...burns to flee

from Carthage, he would quit these pleasant lands,

astonished by such warnings, the command  
of gods. What can he do?

With what words dare

he face the frenzied queen? (Virgil IV.375-79)

Aeneas realizes his leaving will hurt Dido and cause her to be defensive. Aeneas knows that Dido will not relinquish her phallic power in order to, in Lacan's terms, allow herself to be symbolically castrated. Aeneas is right. Dido fights to keep herself whole as Aeneas separates from her.

Moreover, Dido realizes that her loss of Aeneas will also weaken her formerly powerful position as sole ruler of Carthage. With Aeneas gone, Dido will be without a dominant man to protect her and Carthage, which becomes a problem because of the instability brought on by political problems with Libya and the Nomad princes. She states:

Because of you the tribes of Libya, all  
the Nomad princes hate me, even my  
own Tyrians are hostile; and for you  
my honor is gone and that good name that once  
was mine, my only claim to reach the stars.

(Virgil IV.429-33)



Dido's rant ends when she tells Aeneas that he leaves her "totally abandoned, beaten" (Virgil IV. 445). Aeneas completes the symbolic castration, removing himself as Dido's phallus by saying, "I have never held / the wedding torches as a husband; I / have never entered into such agreements" (Virgil IV.457-59). Aeneas tells Dido that they have never been married. She may construe their intimate acts as a marriage contract, but he never considers their union more than sexual. The crucially different interpretations of erotic exchange given by Aeneas and by Dido highlights the importance placed by Virgil on the interpretive act itself. Put differently, Dido's and Aeneas's disagreement about the status of their relationship highlights the non-translatability into language or conventions of non-linguistic, or for Lacan, pre-linguistic, acts of exchange or union. Virgil, millennia before Lacan's theories, highlights competing interpretations so as to acknowledge that recognition always carries the potential for *misrecognition*; Virgil's account of representation acknowledges its perpetual possible misrepresentations. I have shown that, following this interpretive disagreement, Aeneas increasingly sacrifices his humanity for a therefore empty heroism.

Dido, by contrast, recognizes the insufficient compensations of representation, gender, and power, and embraces her humanity by facing—and naming—her Desire.

The epic reckons Aeneas's leaving through gorgeous and heart-wrenching poetry. The morning Aeneas leaves, Dido sees

...the morning whitening,  
the fleet move on with level sails, the shores  
and harbors now abandoned, without oarsmen,  
she beat against her lovely breast three times,  
then four, and tore her golden hair. (Virgil IV.  
809-13)

Here, Dido performs her mourning, as would the mother or widow of a fallen soldier, through the cultural conventions of breast-beating and hear-tearing—her initial response to loss is thus classically feminine; or in Lacan's vocabulary, she "wears her lack." Next, Dido calls for her men to hunt Aeneas down. Here, Dido performs her phallic power, martially commanding a military, commanding her soldiers to carry out her will. Her second response to the loss follows the classically masculine; or in Lacan's vocabulary, she overcompensates for her loss by attempting to exert mastery over it—she "wears the lack of a lack."

However, in a striking moment of realization Dido questions, "What am I saying? Where am I? What madness / has turned awry what I had meant to do? / Poor Dido, does his foulness touch you now?" (Virgil IV. 819-21). Dido recognizes that her reactions to losing Aeneas are both problematic, both forms of "madness"; and that, particularly, ordering Aeneas's capture too closely mimics Aeneas's empty exertions of power at the expense of loved ones ("does his foulness touch you now?"). Dido finds that both the feminine elaborations and performance of loss and the masculine overcompensations for loss form kinds of Demand that will not fulfill her Desire. Dido, briefly dabbling in both feminine and masculine responses to loss, chooses neither the widow's role nor the soldier's strategies. Having reckoned with a grim destiny as the widow of a living but departed Aeneas who must struggle for the political capital she has lost, Dido seizes an altogether different destiny:

I mean to offer unto Stygian Jove  
he sacrifices that, as is ordained,  
I have made ready and begun, to put  
an end to my disquiet and commit

to flames the pyre of the Trojan chieftain.

(Virgil IV. 881-85)

As she readies the pyre, "she was seeking ways with which to slice- / as quickly as she can-the hated light" (Virgil IV.870-71). She says, "I shall die unavenged, but I shall die...thus, I gladly go below / to shadows" (Virgil IV. 909-10). Here, Dido's death anticipates neither the revenge nor the heroism that drench Aeneas's final moments in the epic. Rather, she recognizes that her "disquiet"-her Desire-will not be fulfilled by the roles her life offers her; such recognition, while tragic, does form the kind of "naming" Lacan urges as the ultimate therapeutic goal. Dido's silence during her meetings with Aeneas in the Underworld further supports this interpretation of Dido's suicide.

When Aeneas sees Dido's shade, he tries to make amends by saying, "Queen, I swear by / the stars, the gods above, and any trust / that may be in this underearth, I was / unwilling when I had to leave your shores" (Virgil VI.603-06). Dido, "turned away, eyes to the ground, her face / no more moved by his speech than if she stood / as stubborn flint or some Marpessan crag. / At last she tore herself away" (Virgil VI. 617-20). Certainly, such eloquent

silence invites multiple interpretations. However, I suggest that Dido's refusal to engage Aeneas through language becomes part of her larger refusal to continue in what Lacan calls the "comedy" between the sexes, in which they are forever doomed to "miss each" other through the inadequate gender roles thrust upon them in and by the Symbolic. Regardless of Dido's intentions, the effect of her silence is already over-determined and captured by the linguistic and Symbolic realm in which Aeneas still lives. Dido's refusal of Aeneas—her very inaccessibility—dictates that she now becomes Aeneas's Desire—that very entity which can not, by definition, be satisfied.

#### Virgil's Heroic Code: Empire as Exile

Outwardly, Virgil's epic appears to celebrate Caesar, the Roman Empire, and Empire founding in general. However, evidence in the epic suggests that Virgil's revision of Homer's heroic code understands the costs of empire founding as too high. Lacan represents the human condition as perpetual exile in which exile's compensations are typically misrecognized. I have argued that this model illuminates Dido's Tragedy as a recognition and refusal of the insufficient compensations of gender relations and

Symbolic power. To the extent that Dido "names her Desire," she fulfills the most positive therapeutic outcome of which Lacan can conceive. Dido seems to be Lacan's perfect patient; however, Dido's naming of her Desire is in an extremely negative and grim manner, suicide. In this way, Dido has both a tragic and yet fulfilling end—she tragically ends her own life and thus her compensation becomes a life among "the breathless dead," however, in Lacan's model, she correctly interprets the Symbolic order and gender hierarchies as insufficient.

Dido is not the only character who suffers. Aeneas, the hero, suffers tremendously throughout the entire story. His suffering ranges from his sorrow over not dying a hero's death in Troy to losing his entire sense of self and his humanity to his ordained destiny. Clearly, in the final scene, Virgil stages a choice for Aeneas. He must choose between mercy and rage, between his humanity and exacting his revenge. He chooses revenge, sacrifices his humanity, and kills Turnus. Virgil's language: "and with a moan / his life, resentful, fled to the Shades below" reminds the readers of the other "resentful" shades (Virgil XII. 70-71). The shades of Dido, Hector, and Achilles, whose compensation for their suffering and sacrifices

proves to be less than glorified, are forever banished to the underworld. From the considerable suffering by the two main characters, as well as many other secondary characters in the epic, I would say that Virgil feels that neither the New Romans nor the Rutulians are duly compensated and that the price of Empire is altogether too high.

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