Chapter One

Asia under the Sign of Woman:

The Feminization of the Orient in The Aeneid

Consider the heroic narrative, intensely "literary," ancient, "classical," quintessentially prestigious in the Western tradition of literature—and an Orientalist fantasy. The overwhelming *gravitas* of Virgil's *The Aeneid* and the impact it had on the West guaranteed that, until very recently when the Latin classics lost much of its hold on the humanities, its way of looking at the world would be passed along through the generations and might even be taken as true. The West created an East as a kind of distorting mirror that helped define "us" by what "we" are not. Virgil did not initiate that move, but his work did more than any other to maintain an image of the East that persists to this day. The East—that is, what is now called the "Middle East and North Africa"—is usually taken as a place where men dominate women to the point of secluding them. Ironically, the East has come to be seen under the sign of the feminine, and *The Aeneid*, because of its prestige, played an important role in that signification.

The Orientalism of Virgil includes a complex of factors: the Asiatic origin of Phrygian Great Mother worship and the Bacchic rites; the historical connection between the Trojans and the Phoenicians (and its development into the Aeneas/Dido, Roman/Carthaginian contact

and then hostility); an East that could include things as far afield as the effeminate dress and behavior of the Phrygians (derived from the worship of Cybele) and the luxury of North African desert tribesmen. Of greatest importance was the association between the East and the Woman. Otherwise unrelated images of uncontrol and chaos, of passion, anger, love, ecstasy, bestiality, fire, and madness are coded feminine and oriental. Dido is the great embodiment of them all, just as Aeneas embodies a wide array of masculine images, the ones that have been repeated endlessly in the Western literary tradition.

If the gods represent a higher plane of existence for Virgil, to which humans can only approximate, the exchange between Juno and the great Jupiter, who recognizes the importance of destiny, is paradigmatic of the female in the patriarchal order. While Juno has a great deal of freedom to act in human affairs, when the smiling Jupiter declares it over, her activity stops. In her terrible anger she is yet able to make a deal, a clever way of allowing Aeneas to win the heroic battle and yet lose his Eastern culture—his garments and his language—as the noble Trojan stock is introduced into the manliness of the Latins.

From this angle it is easy to see the importance of the Oriental woman, Dido, to the heroic destiny of Aeneas. Following her, in the vision of history advanced by Virgil, was the contemporary threat of yet another Oriental woman, Cleopatra. At other times in the emergence of a Western civilization the East has been perceived as a threat, most notably during the Crusades and during the fall of Constantinople to the Muslims, as Edward Said and a growing body of scholarship have shown. In modern times, from Napoleon's penetration of Egypt through the Western imperialist operations in the Middle East and North Africa, the East was no longer a military or a political threat. But a threat did remain, a seductive East of the imagination, an exotic dreamscape peopled with fierce Arab chieftains and inscrutable women, dangerous desert lands where hashish (or even un-Islamic alcohol), violence, and sex tempted the Christian to give into base, if fascinating, urges; a land at once soft and harsh; a land of fierce individualism and lawlessness—yet dominated by cruel despots and filled with slaves.

In her survey of the changing image of Cleopatra from antiquity to the present, Lucy Hughes-Hallett indicates just how widespread the perception of a "feminine East" has become since the nineteenth century: "The image of an Eastern country as a woman and of a Western

male—whether military aggressor, mystic, scholar or tourist—as her heterosexual lover is one so commonplace as to pervade all Western thinking about the East" (207). Raymond Schwab, in passing, noted the importance of *The Aeneid* in establishing a notion of the "people of the dawn" and a *res orientales* essentially different from a West (1). Edward Said's *Orientalism* demonstrated that the perception is much older than Virgil, at least as early as Aeschylus' *The Persians* (56). From Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* we have learned that the East was by no means dismissed by the Greeks, who recognized that many of their intellectual achievements derived from the Egyptians and the Phoenicians. (It is Bernal's thesis that the denigration of the East, including the denial that the Greeks could have learned anything important from the East, is a product of romanticism and its attendant science of antiquity on the one hand and the European conquest of the East on the other [30–31].) Although *The Aeneid* was not the first to raise the problematic, I will argue that the specific association of the East with the feminine is articulated fully in *The Aeneid* and that the historical importance of Virgil's epic contributed to the continued acceptance of that association.

It will become evident in the analysis that follows that this chapter shares Stephen J. Greenblatt's new historicist theory (or antitheory) that history and literature are both "textual," that is, made up by particular texts, and it shares his desire to "subvert the tendency to think of aesthetic representation as ultimately autonomous, separable from its cultural context and hence divorced from the social, ideological, and material matrix in which all art is produced and consumed" (429). It will also become clear that the patriarchal ideology of what Toril Moi has called "traditional humanism," especially the notion of a self-contained, powerful "phallic self," the "seamlessly unified self—either individual or collective—which is commonly called 'Man'" (8) is embodied in the work for which Virgil is most praised. Virgil and his creation, Aeneas—not to mention the Augustus of literature/history—are examples without equal in the West of that humanistic phallic self.

In what is perhaps the most thorough and multifaceted collection of statements and responses to ancient (mainly biblical) texts, *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power* (*Semeia* 42 [1988]), one of the essayists, Esther Fuchs, identified three major narrative strategies that reinforced the patriarchal character of ancient storytelling.

Fuchs studied the story of Rachel (Genesis 31) and discovered a number of "narrative gaps," insufficient indices of authorial judgment, suppression of motivation, and the lack of closure when women were part of the story (68), even when women came to be praised by the tradition. These strategies would not be quite so obvious in the Homeric-Virgilian epic tradition, which eschews narrative gaps. Dido, to whom much of this chapter is devoted, is not slighted in any of the three ways Fuchs found in the story of Rachel; but Cleopatra, perhaps the "real" subject of *The Aeneid*, is so treated. (The Battle of Actium, Hughes-Hallett noted, formed a kind of "miniature" in the larger narrative of *The Aeneid* [62–63], but Virgil's contemporaries would have been reading the slighted Cleopatra into the more explicit story of Dido.)

Simone de Beauvoir stated the case for a large-scale shift in antiquity when *Homo faber* dethroned the Great Mother. As humans discovered a world of tools, including of course those intellectual tools of logic and mathematics, a very different way of looking at the world, one in which women and the religion of woman were central, was overthrown. "The religion of woman," she maintained,

> was bound to the reign of agriculture, the reign of irreducible duration, of contingency, of chance, of wailing, of mystery; the reign of *Homo faber* is the reign of time manageable as space, of necessary consequences, of the project, of action, of reason. . . It is he who makes the crops grow; he digs canals, he irrigates or drains the land, he lays out roads, he builds temples; he creates a new world.[1]

De Beauvoir's thesis has been extended by Riane Eisler, who has surveyed the archeological and historical evidence for the change. The earliest literature that has yet been discovered, written in cuneiform Sumerian from the third millennium B.C.E., would seem already to confirm the shift.

Sumerian stories of the god Enki contesting with the great goddesses of the Sumerian pantheon deal with virtually all of the areas de Beauvoir cited.[2] The Sumerians were noted for the control of agriculture through the management of floodwaters—by canal digging and irrigation systems—and for road building and enormous temple complexes such as de Beauvoir considered as evidence of *Homo faber*. In this regard, Eisler noted that the key words for agriculture used by the Sumerians (the words for farmer, plow, and furrow, for example) were

not Sumerian in origin, and the terms signifying craftsmen, who in Sumerian times were thought to have a special relationship to the male-imaged Enki—the crafts of the weaver, tanner, basket maker, smith, mason, and potter—were taken over from the goddess-worshiping peoples living in the areas the Sumerians came to dominate.[3]

Because of its great prestige in the West, *The Aeneid* has been in a position to influence thinking about two apparently unrelated images—the feminine on the one hand, and the East on the other—that are brought together in a particularly striking way in Virgil's poem. At the center of this complex is the tragic heroine Dido, certainly one of the most noteworthy characters in Western fiction, an Eastern queen. The tragedy of Dido will be considered at some length here, for in her famous portrait the feminization of the Orient is most artfully figured. After a brief notice of the way Dido's tragic death is set against Aeneas's manly resistance to feminine passion, a series of related images will be presented. Then Dido's tragedy will be taken up again.

To understand the full impact of Dido's tragedy, one must trace the connections between the divine world, on the one hand, and the historical world of humans, on the other. Dido mediates between Juno and Cleopatra, the other important characters that feminize the Orient. On three levels, then, woman is marked as Eastern and therefore unable or unwilling to control herself. The results in the heavens, in the heroic world of the past, and in the recent Roman past (Augustus's battle with Cleopatra) are always the same: chaos and the need for male (marked "Western") intervention. To display these levels operating in *The Aeneid*, the argument here will move from Dido's tragedy to:

1. the impact of "Eastern" religions on a "West" that was coming to define itself in opposition to those very "Eastern" cultures imported through increasingly popular religions (not the least of which would be Christianity). The opposition, which is now called "Orientalism," is almost as old as Western literature itself; but Homer's even-handed treatment of East and West gave way quickly to what will appear full grown in Virgil;
2. the way in which Jupiter resolves Juno's passionate demand that Phrygian culture be stripped from the Trojans even as they triumph over the Latins will be shown to play out the conflicts between East and West, female and male, on a cosmic plane;

3. on the human level the charge of Phrygian effeminacy is glimpsed in the conflict between Ascanius and Numanus;
4. in a related note, an "Eastern" male, Iarbus, ironically redoubles the feminization of the Orient by presenting a corrupt image of a male who objects to Dido acting like a man;
5. Dionysian madness, genuine or feigned, intensifies the identification of destructive passion and the feminine (in Dido and in the allegory of Allecto); and, finally,
6. Cleopatra's battle against Virgil's master, Augustus.

TRAGEDY IN *THE AENEID*

The Aeneid contains elements of "tragedy," which again until recently was assumed to be the only form of narrative in the West to carry the prestige of the epic. Since a woman, Dido, is the tragic hero of the work, one might assume that this raises rather than diminishes her stature. Virgil's narrative incorporates tragedy but goes beyond the tragic. *The Aeneid* swallows the tragic—W. F. Jackson Knight's term for the *misera*[4] of Dido's death,

> *nam quia nec fato, merita nec morte peribat,*
> *sed misera ante diem subitoque accensa furore* (IV.696–97)[5]
> ("She perished neither by destiny nor by a death deserved, but tragically, before her day, in the mad heat of a sudden passion." Knight, *Aeneid* 118)

in the larger, though no less moving, action of the epic. The West would come to value such *misera* for its own sake, as Renaissance and modern narratives became more and more interested in the psychology of the tragic hero. Barbara J. Bono has shown, for example, how the *Aeneid* "establishes subtle typological ties between its foreground tragedy, the story of Aeneas and Dido, and the historical event that occasioned its composition, the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra by Octavius Caesar at Actium."[6] She argues that Virgil's Orientalism, in typologically relating Dido to Cleopatra, understands the history of Antony and Cleopatra "as the domestication of a rich, evocative, barbaric culture to Roman values" (86). In turn, the Renaissance would turn "Dido's tragedy into Cleopatra's triumph"—the transvaluation of the story into its "romantic apotheosis" (87).

But this happens much later in the West. The gap between the attitude of the ancients and that of the moderns was noted explicitly at least as early as John Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). In that work, one Eugenius argues for the superiority of Shakespeare's "excellent scenes of passion" to even the great classical tragedies,

> for love-scenes, you will find few among them; their tragic poets dealt not with that soft passion, but with lust, cruelty, revenge, ambition, and those bloody actions they produced; which were more capable of raising horror than compassion in an audience: leaving love untouched, whose gentleness would have tempered them; which is the most frequent of all the passions, and which, being the private concernment of every person, is soothed by viewing its own image in a public entertainment. (101–2)

Earlier, though, such a "mad heat" of "sudden passion" was the mark of woman's nature, and its value was to a great extent lessened by that association.

The feminization of an "Orient" was accomplished in large measure by two women, Dido and Cleopatra. Although it has suffered something of an eclipse by Homer in the twentieth century, Virgil's *The Aeneid*, left unfinished at the author's death in 19 B.C., became the single most important narrative (excepting the Bible) in a line of continuous readings from antiquity to only recently and can lay claim more than any other work to defining a "Western" literature. The epic and its only serious rival, tragedy, were emulated for centuries. The feminization of the Orient came about largely because of the successful portrait of the Roman hero who was able to overcome the dangers imaged in the Oriental woman.

Roman "manliness" (*virtus*, from which we derive the word *virtue*, everything excellent, especially moral worth) is embodied in the hero Aeneas. Aeneas is not the stereotypical macho womanizer or bully. He falls in love. He weeps when occasion demands it. He feels deeply about those around him. And while he represents the ideals of Stoicism,[7] he is not perfect. The rational control of the passions that is his most admirable quality—the ability to accept his grand destiny, the establishment of what would become the Roman Empire, though it earns him little joy; the ability to conquer fear, especially the fear of death—stays with Aeneas until the very end of Virgil's long epic. The outrage his enemy Turnus committed against Aeneas' friend Pallas is simply too great for him to bear with his usual equanimity.

> Aeneas' eyes drank in the sight of the spoils which revived the memory of his own vengeful bitterness. His fury kindled and, terrible in his rage, he said: 'Are you to be stolen hence out of my grasp, you who wear spoils taken from the one whom I loved? It is Pallas, only Pallas, who by this wound which I now deal makes sacrifice to you; he exacts this retribution, you criminal, from your blood.' Saying this and boiling with rage he buried his blade full in Turnus' breast. His limbs relaxed and chilled; and the life fled, moaning, resentful, to the Shades.[8]

With his hero's victory, and his loss of control, the "war-weary" Virgil ends his battle-filled narrative. If the demonic passion links Juno, Dido, Allecto, and Turnus—as studies of the "fire" image in the poem have shown—finally with Aeneas, the end of the epic is all the more disturbing.[9]

Still, Aeneas is as close to a model of "masculine" control as can be found in Western literature. In the one episode of *The Aeneid* that has received perhaps more attention than any other, he walks away from the woman he loves, the Carthaginian queen, Dido, in order to fulfill his great historical destiny. No literary work of antiquity better exemplifies the phallic self than *The Aeneid* does in this episode.

The despairing Dido, in trying to keep Aeneas with her, is willing to give him anything in exchange only for a little more time, time to give her "mad mood a breathing-space and a rest" until she could be taught "submission and the art of grief" (1:424, 426; Knight, *Aeneid* 110).

> Such was Dido's entreaty; and her poor, unhappy sister carried the tearful messages between them. But all these appeals left Aeneas quite unmoved. He was deaf to every plea, for destiny barred the way and a divine influence checked his inclination to listen kindly. He stood firm like a strong oak-tree toughened by the years when northern winds from the Alps vie together to tear it from the soil, with their blasts striking on it now this side and now that; creaking, the trunk shakes, and leaves from on high strew the ground; yet still the tree grips among the rocks below, for its roots stretch as far down towards the abyss as its crest reaches up to the airs of heaven. Like that tree, the hero was battered this side and that by their insistent pleas, and deeply his brave heart grieved. But his will remained unshaken. The tear rolls down, but without effect.(IV.437–49)[10]

While Dido and her people are now, in the words of Philip Hardie, "set on an irreversible course of decline" (280), Aeneas is recovering "the path toward ultimate control of the vertical axis." Hardie

notes the "extremes of up and down" caught in the same simile, where the ancient mountain and tree, battered by the winds, remain unmoved—the tree whose roots reach toward the Underworld but, like the world tree so conspicuous in Ancient Near Eastern poetry, whose branches reach toward the heavens.

Virgil and Eastern Religions

Why, though, connect the despairing Dido with the East?

In his important work *Orientalism* Edward W. Said observes that as early as Aeschylus, the Greeks, so important in the development of a "Western" identity, were drawing a line between East and West. The earliest extant Athenian play, *The Persians*, celebrates the destruction of the Persian armies under Xerxes by the Greeks (56). Asia is a hostile "other," defeated and distant, while Europe is "powerful and articulate" (57). Yet Asia remains a threat, a danger because the "excess" of the East threatens Western rationality. Robert M. Grant calls his chapter on the post-Homeric influx of Eastern deities and rites "Mediterranean Religions Westward."[11] Certainly it is difficult to distinguish East and West in the intensity of that movement west and in the generally syncretistic religious centers like Hellenistic Alexandria. But as Grant points out, when Mark Antony proclaimed himself a new Dionysus paired with the new Isis, Cleopatra, the Romans did not take to "this sort of behavior" Dio Cassius thought was "alien to the customs of his country" (39).

Said has made clear the dangers of Orientalism, not as a representation of a certain place in the world or even as a nefarious plot to keep Eastern peoples subject to the West.

> It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident), but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly a different (or alternative and novel) world. (12)

The Orientalism of *The Aeneid*, because of the profound influence of the work in the Western literary tradition, exaggerates a tendency already centuries old but not so evident in Virgil's models for the epic.

Homer seems to have avoided the distinction. The evenhandedness with which the enemies that fought at Troy are treated by Homer—perhaps as much a reflection of the techniques of oral composition as of any intention to give equal treatment to both sides in the dispute—has often been remarked. Both sides in the conflict know the same gods and share the same culture. In Aeschylus, both sides name the same gods, but the cultures are very different on either side of the line. By the time of Virgil, the distinction between East and West had hardened. The "Teucrian" line of the Trojans (from an ancestor of Aeneas, Teucer) may have produced the pious Aeneas, the ideal of virtue, but the Trojans were as often as not in *The Aeneid* "Phrygians," effeminate followers of the Oriental goddess, the Phrygian Mother Cybele.

While there may be no simple concept of a Trojan "culture" operating in *The Aeneid*, there is a notion of the *res Asiae Priamique...gentem immeritam* (III.1–2), Knight's "Asian empire and Priam's breed of men."[12] Any unified concept is obscured by Virgil's use of a great variety of fixed epithets, formulas imitative of Homer (and imitative of the oral tradition): "Phoenician woman," "Phrygian bonnet," and the like. So many names tie the narrative to Greek literature, on the one hand, and to the history of Rome, on the other, that the modern reader, having lost the foundations of a humanistic education, Greek and Roman literature, is often bewildered by the many allusions. If it is not driven by a simple concept of the East, however, *The Aeneid* nevertheless displays a clustering of epithets and motifs that suggests that Asia is not just a geographical designation and that the East has become a cultural other that is important in defining the West, Hesperia, which, like the East, is not just a geographical designation.

Asian, Oriental, Teucrian, Phrygian, Phoenician, Tyrian—the connection between Carthage, a Phoenician city founded by exiles from Tyre—set off different aspects of the East within the Trojan "people." (Bono details the "Asiatic richness" of Dido's kingdom, which she interprets as "a temptation to lawless indulgence."[13]) The Asiatics are certainly not charged with the negativity that, say, medieval narratives (e.g., "Saracen" in *The Song of Roland*) carry when they distinguish between good

and evil realms. The two features that most readily identify the Trojans as orientals, the garments they wear and the language they speak, are ultimately stripped from them, even as they are victorious.[14]

Juno and Phrygian Culture

The episode in which Trojan (Teucrian/Phrygian) culture is given up includes the most obvious statement of the patriarchal order that, for Virgil, holds both for human society and for the cosmos. The statement is all the more important because it deals with the gods, with the relationship between the great gods, Jupiter and Juno. Dido and Cleopatra (the one representing the already legendary past, and the other representing a very present danger to Rome in Virgil's time) are, after all, merely humans. What happens to Juno validates the patriarchal order in human society. The problem is not seeing the god under the sign of woman as weak or passive.

The two goddesses most prominent in *The Aeneid*, Juno and Venus, are anything but passive, and they are treated in a positive way by the poet.[15] They act at their own initiative, and they act forcefully again and again, to help or hinder Aeneas in the fulfillment of his destiny. But the patriarchal cosmos, of which imperial Rome is a reflection, is revealed in the figure of Jupiter, "king of all-powerful Olympus," who has finally had enough of the bickering of the two goddesses. In the final book of *The Aeneid*, Jupiter invites the goddesses to yield to his "persuasions:"

> My wife, how shall it end now? .
> Then yield to my persuasions, give up the long feud now at last!
> No more of the hidden rancour that so consumes you, the sullen
> Recriminations your sweet lips have troubled me with so often!
> This is the end, I say. You had power to harry the Trojans
> All over lands and seas, to kindle accursed war,
> Bring tragic disgrace on a king's name and drape a betrothal
> in mourning.
> I forbid you to carry the feud any further. (XII.793–806;
> Lewis 634–44)

Knight translates the last line, "Further effort I forbid" (334). Juno must yield, but she does not accept the decision without striking a bargain with her consort.

> Do not command the indigenous Latins to change their ancient
> Name, to become Trojans and to be called the
> Teucrians: Allow them to keep the old language and their
> traditional dress:
> Let it be Latium for ever, and the kings be Alban kings:
> Let the line be Roman, the qualities making it great be Italian.
> Troy's gone; may it be gone in name as well as reality.
> (XII.823–29; Lewis 644; cp. Knight, *Aeneid* 334)

Jupiter is amused by Juno's passionate demand, and he grants what she asks, though not without a comment on her overly emotional address.

> The creator of man and of all things replied to her with a smile:—
> Jove's sister you are indeed and the second child of Saturn,
> So powerful the tides of wrath sweeping within your breast!
> But come, there was no need for this violent emotion; calm
> yourself.
> Willingly I grant what you ask: you have won me over.
> The Italians shall keep their native tongue and their old traditions;
> Their name shall not be altered. The Trojans will but sink down in
> The mass and be made one with them: I'll add the rites and usage
> Of Trojan worship to theirs. All will be Latins, speaking
> One tongue. From this blend of Italian and Trojan blood shall
> arise
> A people surpassing all men, nay even the gods, in godliness.
> (XII.830–39; Lewis 643–44)

(Note: Knight translates Juno's request as, "Let there be the Roman breed drawing power from Italian manliness," and in Jupiter's response, he prefers, "The Trojans shall only blend, absorbed, in the Italian breed.")

Phrygian Effeminacy

Since few today in the West trace their ancestry to the Phrygians, no one mourns the loss of those Trojan rites and customs. What the Trojans would be asked to give up can be glimpsed, though, in a brief

episode involving Aeneas's son, Ascanius (Iulus). Numanus tries to draw the young man into battle with the taunt of effeminacy. The Teucrians were also Phrygians. The Phrygian garments, soft and beautiful, were associated with the gentle arts and rituals of Cybele, the Phrygian goddess. Note the references to pipe, timbrels, and boxwood flute used in the service of the Great Mother. Already the East is associated with softness and luxury, idleness, music, dance, and the worship of the Mother.[16]

> Twice-captured Phrygians, are you not ashamed to be this second time beseiged and imprisoned behind a stockade, relying once again on walls to fend death from you? . . . We are by our birth a hard race. We carry our baby sons down to a river as soon as born and toughen them by the water's icy cold. Our boys go sleepless for their hunting and never do they let the woodlands rest. . . And our young men work and endure and are trained to privation; constantly they harrow and master the land; or set towns quaking in warfare. At every age we are bruised by iron. To goad our bullocks' backs we use a spear reversed. . . But you, your garments are embroidered in saffron and ablaze with purple dye. You love best a life of idleness, and indulgence in the dance is your joy. Why, your tunics have sleeves and your bonnets strings to tie! You are women of Phrygia, not Phrygian men. Go running over Dindyma's height, to the music of a twin-bore pipe of reed, for which indeed you are trained. The Mother of Ida's Berecyntian tabors and boxwood flutes are the tools of your trade. But leave arms to men; lay not claim to steel. (IX.598–620; Knight, *Aeneid* 244)

To the extent that "Asian" had come to be associated with the feminine, the loss of garment and speech could be seen as another triumph of the masculine, Latin virtues. A few of the more obvious examples will serve for a host of other, often quite subtle associations.

A Moorish Man's Lament

A somewhat more complicated instance combines Phrygian effeminacy with the worship of Bacchus/Dionysus. Aeneas' only serious rival for the hand of Dido is Iarbus. Furious at Dido and Aeneas, Iarbus laments to Jupiter Ammon,

> O Jupiter Almighty, to whom now the Moorish (*Maurusia*) nation, banqueting on divans of rich-coloured weave, pours Bacchic (*Lenaeum*) offering in your honour, do you see what is done? . . . For a woman, a vagrant,

> . . . has rejected my marriage-suit, and accepted Aeneas. . So now this second Paris, wearing a Phrygian bonnet (*Maeonia . . . mitra*) to tie up his chin and cover his oily hair, and attended by a train of she-men (*cum semiviro comitatu*), is to become the owner of what he has stolen." (IV.206–17)[17]

For Iarbus, Aeneas in his Phrygian bonnet and oily hair and surrounded by his half-men is deserving only of contempt. However, his own Moorish nation is itself characterized by Oriental luxury and softness, "banqueting on divans of rich-coloured weave," and pouring out offerings of the oriental god of intoxication, Bacchus. The image of an Asian chieftain—since North Africa is as much the East as is Asian Minor—arrogant in his wounded male pride and yet wearing the trappings of unmanly softness will manage to persist through centuries of Orientalist fantasies. Note as well the very different way Iarbus considers Dido: while Aeneas shares a romantic atttachment with Dido, Iarbus considers her merely a possession. Aeneas, from his point of view, has simply stolen what was Iarbus's right to hold. Iarbus is simply ignored thereafter, unmotivated, without even the dignity of authorial judgment, his story simply dropped.

Dionysus in the West

The reference to Bacchic rites is a reminder that the Bacchus/Dionysus was another of the Oriental gods whose cult had invaded the West. Immensely popular, especially with women, the religion was marked by ecstatic rites quite different from the religion of the Olympians. When Bacchic rites are described in *The Aeneid*, they are associated with madness and bloodlust. Dido herself rages like a Maenad in Bacchic frenzy (IV.300–303).[18] When the "fire" of madness enters the great Latin hero, Turnus, he makes just the kind of mistakes that will enable Aeneas to defeat him (Clausen 46).

The story of madness entering Turnus is told by Aeneas in an elaborate allegory of the demonic Allecto (book VII).[19] The irrationality caused by Allecto and spread through the women keeps the leaders of the opposing camps from negotiating a peaceful settlement of their differences. *The Aeneid*, which ends in terrible war, could otherwise have been the story of a peaceful settlement of Trojans in Italy.

The story of Allecto and Queen Amata, in brief, is this. Juno seeks to destroy a proposed marriage that would unite the warring factions once Aeneas is in Italy. The great goddess sends the monster-demon Allecto to drive Queen Amata mad. Allecto's power is seen as fire that destroys reason. To save her daughter from marrying a Trojan, Amata hides the daughter in the mountains, where a wild, Bacchic frenzy is unleashed. While Virgil writes that Amata "pretends" the *numen* of Bacchus is upon her (*simulato numine Bacchi* (VII.385), it is difficult to see where pretense ends and the Dionysian madness begins.

> She even went out into the forests in her flight, pretending that the power of Bacchus was upon her, and so venturing on a still graver, wilder sin. . . The news flew fast; and every mother's heart now blazed with this same hysterical passion to look for a new dwelling-place. Quickly they forsook their homes, with necks bare and hair left free to the winds. Others, dressed in fawn-skins and carrying spear-shafts of vine, filled the sky with quavering holloas. In the centre of them was Amata, who feverishly held high a blazing pine-brand and, turning all about her her reddened eyes, sang the wedding-song for her daughter and Turnus. Suddenly she roared like a beast: "Mothers of Latium! Hey! Hear me, each one of you, wherever you may be! If you still have any sympathy for poor Amata in your faithful hearts, or any prick of conscience for a mother's claims, untie the bands around your hair and take to the wild rites with me!" (VII.373–404; Knight, *Aeneid* 187)

These Bacchic rites belonged to a group of religions—along with Mithraism, Judaism, and Christianity—that were thought to have come from "the East," and which did derive, for the most part, from that part of the world we now consider the Middle East. Virgil might, of course, have known about the Bacchic rites firsthand. That the religion had come from the East, and that it was in some way fused with the orgiastic and ecstatic rites of Cybele, was something he could have found in the literary tradition of the Greeks. The "Oriental" origin of Dionysus was made explicit in Euripides's *The Bacchae* (Guthrie 151–59). The syncretism that involved the Great Mother of Phrygia, Cybele with her ecstatic rites, and the Thracian Dionysus was clear as early as the fifth century B.C.

The Trojans, having lost at Troy, attempted a return to their ancient mother, but are advised in a dream from the gods to seek their "true home," what the Greeks call "Hesperia," the "western land," Italy.

The deflection of Aeneas from his goal, the tragic episode of his love affair with the Tyrian Dido, is the major stumbling block to the fulfilling of his destiny. And the episode involves the conquest of the inner man—or woman.

Augustus versus Cleopatra

Of Cleopatra, there is more than a little irony in the way Shakespeare was able to make her appear worthy of tragic *phobos*. His portrayal of the Egyptian queen, as Shakespeare scholars have been telling us for some time, is as the embodiment of "things Eastern" in contrast to the Roman leader who was able to resist her. Less studied these days is the important passage in *The Aeneid* (VIII.678–713) that sets the Oriental woman against the noble Roman male. Michael Grant put it succinctly. Cleopatra was "regarded as the epitome of un-Roman-ness" (Michael Grant 296; see Hughes-Hallett 45–48). There is no obvious *historical* connection between Cleopatra in Egypt; a Macedonian playing the role of the new Isis to Antony's new Dionysus; and the earlier Dido, a Phoenician, founder of Carthage. That is, of course, the point of working out a complex network of poetic images that symbolically link heterogeneous figures to an "other" Asian culture opposed to things Roman. Chaos, the demonic, passion, luxury, the feminine oppose the jovial, the rational, the male.

To set off the contrast between the heroic leader and his chaotic opponent, it is useful to cite a verse translation of the passage in which Virgil describes the naval encounter between Cleopatra and Virgil's patron, Augustus. C. Day Lewis captures the formal features of the verse that highlight order versus chaos.

> On one side Augustus Caesar, high up on the poop, is leading
> The Italians into battle, the Senate and People with him,
> His home-gods and the great gods: two flames shoot up from his helmet
> In jubilant light, and his father's star dawns over its crest.
> Elsewhere in the scene is Agrippa—the gods and the winds fight for him—
> Prominent, leading his column: the naval crown with its miniature
> Ships' beaks, a proud decoration of war, shines on his head.
> On the other side, with barbaric wealth and motley equipment,

Is Anthony, fresh from his triumphs in the East, by the shores
of the Indian Ocean; Egypt, the powers of the Orient and
uttermost Bactra
Sail with him; also—a shameful thing—his Egyptian wife.
(VIII.678-88; Lewis 641-42)

Committed, as he had to be, to the high style, appropriate to the epic (rather than breaking the style to present Cleopatra as a modern writer might, in a style more representative of ordinary life),[20] Virgil insinuates the corruption at the heart of the un-Roman East. While Augustus is brilliant in light and aided by the (right) gods (*Penatibus et magnis dis*, VIII.679), Antony brings with him into battle the uncivil horde (*ope barbarica variisque*, VIII.685). Virgil even intervenes with a comment—*nefas*, "O shame!"—on Antony's Egyptian wife.

Once the fleets converge, there is terrible slaughter. The military tactics are of less importance to the narrative than the image of Cleopatra.

In the midst, Cleopatra rallies her fleet with Egyptian timbrel,
For she cannot yet see the two serpents of death behind her.
Barking Anubis, a whole progeny of grotesque
Deities are embattled against Neptune and Minerva
And Venus....
Viewing this, Apollo of Actium draws his bow
From aloft: it creates a panic; all the Egyptians, all
The Indians, Arabians and Sabaeans now turn tail.
You could see the queen Cleopatra praying a fair wind, making
All sail, in the very act of paying the sheets out and running.
The Fire-god had rendered her, pale with the shadow of
her own death,
Amid the carnage, born on by the waves and the westerly gale;
And, over against her, the Nile, sorrowing in all its length,
Throws wide the folds of its watery garment, inviting the
conquered
To sail for refuge into that blue, protective bosom.
(VIII.696-713; Lewis 642)

What could be more grotesque than the demonic figures of Egyptian religion pitted against the Roman gods Neptune, Venus,

Minerva: *omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis*, "monstrous gods of every form and barking Anubis" (Virgil 2: 108-109)? The panic and terror that cause the crowd of Orientals to flee, the unseemly haste of Cleopatra to run away from conflict, even the strangely haunting image of the Nile, her watery garment opened to receive the vanquished—all images are of a rowdy, uncontrolled, and uncontrollable rabble, led by an unstable woman and barbarous gods to destruction. In contrast, Augustus, the victor, leads his people "in triple triumph" through the streets of Rome. "The conquered peoples move in long array, as diverse in fashion of dress and arms as in tongues" (*quam variae linguis, habitu tam vestis et armis*, VIII. 723; Virgil 2:109–11).

THE WOMAN AND THE SWORD

The most important figure in *The Aeneid* to represent both the feminine and the Oriental is, the queen of Carthage herself, Dido. We see her first in her city.

Knight's "The Holy City of the East" drew heavily on the Eastern tradition, as far back as ancient Sumer, to show that Virgil, much more than Homer, conceived of the city as sacred. For the Greeks, the city was the secular space of the public square. Virgil revived, rather, the old Eastern ideas of the sacred city.[21] The walls of the city in early Italy were holy or magical; the city was often identified with an important temple and with "in personification goddesses of the cities' defence"; and attacks on cities are manipulated by supernatural agencies (293–94), among other elements of the Ancient Near Eastern city.

The sacrality of the city is reflected in Virgil's treatment of Dido, for she is, as Philip Hardie has demonstrated so well in his study of Virgilian hyperbole, identified with her city. The identification of a queen with her subjects and her city is an example of what Northrop Frye called the "royal metaphor." The vertical dimension of sacrality enables Carthage to be seen cosmologically as well as historically the enemy of Rome, and the destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C., the working out of a struggle on two levels of existence. It prepares for the third dimension, recent history, Cleopatra.

> The most important type of power struggle here is that which opposes the forces ranged along the vertical axis, the powers of good and evil, of light and darkness, of heaven and hell. The themes of Roman imperialism in fact

> bind human and divine power struggles in an inextricable unity; the growth of Roman power is also the history of the the victory of the gods of the upper heaven over the forces of the Underworld. (Hardie 268)

The tragedy of Dido, however moving it is as a human love story, participates in the larger cosmological and historical orders of Virgil's story.

The identification of Dido and her city makes the otherwise puzzling detail—that work stops in the city when Dido is moved by the passion of the *hieros gamos* (another ancient Oriental theme) arranged by the goddesses. The neglect of usual occupations is a *topos* of ancient love poetry, as Hardie points out, but the *topos* does not account for the *city's* neglect of productive activity (271). The destruction of Dido prefigures the destruction of the city in its struggle with Rome (284). The notion of the sacred city also makes sense of the remarkable pyre in the center of a temple-like palace, a pyre "of gigantic proportions, reaching towards the sky" (282).

When Aeneas is given his first glimpse of Dido's Carthage, he sees "fortunate people" whose "city-walls are already rising" (Knight, *Aeneid* 41). Dido is acting vigorously, the way a ruler should.

> Aeneas looked wonderingly at the solid structures springing up where there had once been only African huts, and at the gates, the turmoil, and the paved streets. The Tyrians were hurrying about busily, some tracing a line for the walls and manhandling stones up the slopes as they strained to build their citadel, and others siting some building and marking its outline by ploughing a furrow. And they were making choice of laws, of officers of state, and of councillors to command their respect. At one spot they were excavating the harbour, and at another a party was laying out an area for the deep foundations of a theatre; they were also hewing from quarries mighty pillars to stand tall and handsome beside the stage which was still to be built. It was like the work which keeps the bees hard at their tasks. (I.421–30; Knight, *Aeneid* 40)

Where there had been only "African huts," there now could be seen the emergence of civil order, at least those aspects of civilization most valued by the Romans: paved streets, a carefully engineered citadel, harbor and theatre, institutions of law and politics. Collapsed in these few lines are the marks, not of a sprawling Oriental despotism, but of the *civitas*—the regime of *Homo faber*, as Simone de Beauvoir defined it.

This is not so much an admiring glance at Rome's—and the poet's—enemy, dreaded Carthage, as it is a measure of Dido's fall when once passion overwhelms her. The story of Dido is certainly moving. Even in antiquity this was so. Augustine, long after he had turned against the literature he had loved so long, could recall "weeping the death of Dido for love to Aeneas."[22]

But there is no question that Dido's passion for Aeneas overrules reason, and the city suffers for it immediately: "Meanwhile the partly built towers had ceased to rise. No more did young soldiers practise arms. The construction of harbours and impregnable battlements came to a stop. Work hung suspended on gigantic, menacing walls, and the sky-high cranes were still (IV.86–89; Knight, *Aeneid* 99).

What makes the story of Dido's tragic fall so moving is Virgil's ability to describe the rich interior life of the passionate woman. The increasing isolation of Dido from her queenly rule, from her sister and confidant Anna, and finally from Aeneas is captured in a series of interior monologues (IV.533–53, 586–629, 651–71).[23] Virgil's mastery of the interior monologue is brilliant. The very interiority of Dido, so valued in later Western literature, is used to condemn her.

In their study of soliloquies and monologues as devices for characterization, Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg analyzed Dido's first soliloquy (IV.533–53). They point out that the speech begins, as many others in the tradition of Greek literature, in a traditional rhetorical fashion. As Dido's passion intensifies, however, Virgil represents the movement of the tortured mind itself. In "the disjointedness of the last sentences, the hopping from topic to topic and thought to thought" (287), Virgil turns the piece into a very effective psychological exploration of a character in deep distress.

Dido prepares a bizarre setting for her suicide. She builds a setting for the event furnished with the symbols of her interior life:

> Presently the pyre had been built with logs of holm-oak and pine. It was vast, rising to a great height, and it stood in the centre of the building. The queen had festooned the hall with flower-chains, and wreathed the pure with the greenery of death. On it was the bed, and there she placed a sword which Aeneas had left, with garments which he had worn, and a portrait of him, knowing all the time what was to be. (Knight, *Aeneid* 112)

Tormented, and no longer able to speak even to her sister, she speaks to herself, "communing with herself in her heart:"