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Fama and Fiction in Vergil's Aeneid

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Syson, Antonia.

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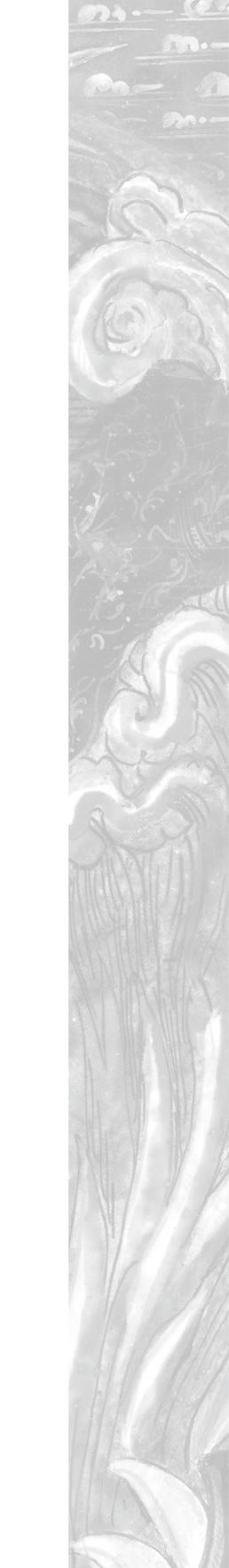
The Ohio State University Press, 2013.

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7

Slithery Changes

In *Aeneid* 2 Venus suggests that human beings usually perceive their submission to divine will through a cloud, which obscures the forces shaping material existence and acting on mortal minds, as we saw in the previous chapter. This chapter explores some of the ways that hellish forces join with Olympian gods to shape this cloud and make it integral to their power.

Demonic and Olympian deities alike work on the imagination of mortals within the *Aeneid*'s story world by exploiting (often deceptively) a sense of recognition linking “this” new perception with “that” familiar experience or existing belief. The *Aeneid* emphasizes how new beliefs are anchored in what people think they already know. As we shall see, Cupid and Allecto in Books 1 and 7 serve Venus and Juno by producing in their victims a hallucinatory—though at times unconscious—heightening of ordinary modes of recognition. Much the same interpretive procedures allow mortals to obey the demands of *pietas*. Characters try to maintain ritual cleanliness by deciding which “this” will match a suitable “that,” and untangle verbal and visual metaphors so as to decode the riddling advice and commands given by the gods in epic. It is by extending the effects of these modes of recognition that the gods warp human minds.

The poem imagines a continuum of irrationality, which is so pervasive that it becomes an ordinary feature of human existence, part of the vapor that protectively and misleadingly clouds mortal visions of the gods. How could a rational mind fully grasp what it means to live in a world buffeted by clashing divine wills? While Dido, Amata, and Turnus suffer the greatest extremes of *furor*, few mortal characters in the *Aeneid* are immune to it.¹ The gods sometimes distort perceptions so completely that they unleash characters from the conventions that are usually regarded as necessary for keeping communities in order, and into all out madness.

The *Aeneid* claims divine authority for its fictive knowledge less through its invocations of the Muses than from the stories it tells, structuring its narrative around god-sent ways of knowing as well as divine imperatives. But readers do not need to believe literally in such divine authority in order to be strongly affected by their encounters with fiction. The potential to change minds and re-order experience claimed by epic is shared by genres of fiction that do not characteristically enlist the authority of the gods—most obviously the novel. The *Aeneid* imagines this potential, at its most extreme, as external to the human mind—as Fury-poisoned *furor*. Rhetorically, however, its force stems from exploiting the subtlety with which verbal and visual means of persuasion (interpreted consciously or absorbed unwittingly) intersect with social and material forms of power. The epic’s rhetoric of fiction affords us the opportunity to explore in heightened allegorical forms some much more general concerns about where the ordering and disordering possibilities of fiction leave the agency of individual readers.

7.1 Venus’ fictions

Book 1 presents in terms of *fama* the changes that Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, and Cupid work on Dido and Aeneas, well before the appearance of the many-tongued deity in Book 4. Human talk and images circulate Aeneas’

1. The subtlety with which characters experience different gradations of *furor* extends in both directions. Many characters (not least Aeneas) are affected at times by *furor*, but without being completely alienated from their surroundings. Dido, Amata, and Turnus do reach the point of losing contact with their communities, estranged by their distorted perceptions, but all three are only temporarily or incompletely estranged. Dido’s passion partly succeeds in drawing Aeneas into her people’s life. Amata incorporates her madness into ritualized alienation in Bacchic rituals that are shared with other Latin women, and only fully removes herself from her people through her eventual suicide. Turnus is repeatedly alienated and then reincorporated into his community, in Books 9 (caught when he fails to open the gates to the Trojan encampment), 10 (when he pursues the cloud-Aeneas), 11 (during Drances’ verbal attack), and 12 (when he lets his disguised sister drive his chariot to the outskirts of the fighting).

reputation among communities around the Mediterranean, but responses to his *fama* are filtered through the machinations of Venus and Cupid. The poem upholds Aeneas' claim to be known through *fama* beyond mortal reach—above the *aether* (1.379)—but it also makes vivid the desperation he expresses almost in the same breath at his current desolation, at being driven out of mortal reach in a negative sense that temporarily deprives him of a known identity (*ipse ignotus, egens, Libyae deserta peragro*, 1.384).

We see from the outset varying degrees of imperceptibility in gods' control over human knowledge. Sometimes divine persuasion seeps into the human mind and body through poison sinuously entwined with easily identifiable people and objects. Sometimes the gods work on mortals by displaying the strange horror of their power; so in Book 7 Allecto displays herself to Turnus, as we saw in chapter 1.2. These problems of cognition are articulated by the narrative in terms that link the persuasive efficacy of gods with the often mysterious operations of human *fama*.

The first we hear of Dido in the poem is an ambiguous statement of how the gods direct her behavior; Jupiter sends Mercury to achieve a peaceful welcome for the Trojans in Carthage (1.297–304). Jupiter's anxiety is that Dido, in her ignorance of fate (*fati nescia*, 1.299), may bar the storm-scattered Trojans from her borders, whom Jupiter has just watched being shipwrecked off Libya.² The emphasis in this passage falls on a shift in perceptions that leads Dido and her people to view things the way Jupiter wills. But this shift is mystified by the poem's ambiguities, with the result that communicative speech merges indistinguishably with nonverbal techniques for enforcing Jupiter's *fatum*.

Haec ait et Maia genitum demittit ab alto,
ut terrae utque nouae pateant Karthaginis arces
hospitio Teucris, ne fati nescia Dido
finibus arceret.

He says this and sends down Maia's son from on high,
so that the lands and the new city-heights of Carthage may be open
in hospitality for the Trojans, in case, in her ignorance of fate, Dido
should fend them off from her borders. (*Aen.* 1.297–300)

2. Since the Mercury passage serves as a scene change back to Libya after Jupiter's prophecy to Venus, 1.299 is one of those moments when *fatum* seems to mean "what has been said by Jupiter" as much as some external "fate." The verb *fari* introduces Jupiter's speech in 1.256; a much-commented-on first person *fabor* in 1.261 explicitly links Jupiter's speech with his knowledge of *fata* in 1.262 (*fabor enim [. . .] longius et uolvens fatorum arcana mouebo*); this knowledge seems to be authorial as much as prophetic or interpretive.

Uncertainties cluster in a short stretch of narrative. We are not told whether Jupiter's worry is justified. We learn that the Carthaginians put aside their fierce dispositions, but not whether that ferocity lies in special bitterness against Troy. Later in Book 1, Ilioneus' experience confirms that the Carthaginians are indeed violently wary of strangers (1.525–41), but nothing in the narrative invites readers to imagine Dido as economizing with the truth when she explains this as a general precaution rather than intentional enmity (1.563–64).

We are also not told *how* Mercury carries out Jupiter's orders. The brief narrative in Book 1 looks a lot like an abridgement of the more elaborate presentation of Mercury's role as messenger in Book 4. Both passages show strong affinities with Book 4's animation of *Fama*.³

uolat ille per aera magnum
remigio alarum ac Libyae citus astitit oris.
et iam iussa facit, ponuntque ferocia Poeni
corda uolente deo; in primis regina quietum
accipit in Teucros animum mentemque benignam.

Mercury flies through the sky's expanse
on the oarage of his wings and soon touches down on the shores of Libya.
And he is already carrying out his orders, and the Carthaginians cast aside
their fierce
dispositions as the god wills; above all the queen takes on a peaceful
attitude towards the Trojans, and friendly intent. (*Aen.* 1.300–304)

Readers are left without guidance on whether Mercury uses sheer divine power to change the Carthaginians' thoughts and feelings without their awareness, or whether he softens them by giving them information, acting as a vehicle of *fama* as well as a servant of Jupiter. We might think that the poem's mention of Dido as *fati nescia* indicates that this ignorance is to be remedied by Mercury as messenger—but then in Book 4 it emerges that she still knows almost nothing about Jupiter's plan, and has not fully heard even the little that Aeneas has told her by that time.⁴ The identity of the

3. See Hardie 1986, 276–79, who focuses on Book 4. Hardie pays as much attention to the contrasts between *Fama* and Mercury as to their similarities but provides a useful set of parallels between the two figures, both in the *Aeneid's* text and in the mythological tradition surrounding Mercury. Hardie 2012, 91–95 reemphasizes these parallels.

4. Or we may see a concessive force in *fati nescia*; Jupiter sends Mercury “so that Dido, although unaware of fate, would not fend them off from her borders.” Unlike Juno, Dido has no reason to hate the Trojans, since she does not share Juno's awareness that Carthage is destined to be destroyed by the Trojans' descendants, but Jupiter still fears the defensive precautions she may take for her new city.

deus in the ablative absolute *deo uolente* (“as the god wills”) is left open; the phrase could mean that Mercury’s work is carried out as Jupiter intends, or could indicate that Mercury’s own divine will changes Carthaginian minds without the need of words.

Aeneas’ counterpart to this terse section of narrative comes in the much longer episode immediately after it; Venus meets Aeneas exploring the local territory after being storm-driven to Libya and disguises herself as a virgin huntress to tell Aeneas who Dido is (1.305–417). Venus here in many ways personally embodies the slippery, boundary-crossing attributes that belong to *fama* even in its most benevolent, informative instances. As so many gods in epic do when they talk directly to mortals, she speaks from a position that she presents as both human and divine, and she claims both knowledge and ignorance. Like Allecto in Book 7, Venus combines truth, fiction, and lies. She makes Aeneas aware of her divine power with an emotional violence that comes close to prefiguring the physical violence with which Allecto reveals her divinity to Turnus.

The first part of Venus’ talk with Aeneas begins and ends with informalities, which contribute to Venus’ fictive characterization of herself as a blunt, outdoorsy Spartan/Libyan huntress-type. The virgin-Venus accosts Aeneas and Achates, *heus, inquit, iuuenes* (“Hi! Lads!” 1.321ff.); this part of the dialogue ends with a series of laconic inquiries, *sed uos qui tandem* (“But what about you?” 1.369–70).⁵ Her informalities, combined with her insistence on her mortal powerlessness and anonymity, lend the air of a gossip chat to the narrative she provides, though in its main substance her narrative is shaped as a mini-epic of Carthage’s foundation and Dido’s sorrows and achievements. *Fama* as gossip—or, to put it more neutrally, information sharing—and *fama* as poetic memorialization become one. The huntress then goes beyond the range of purely human information; through an analogical interpretation of visual cues, which she presents as a traditional augural technique, she reports on the lost ships that were scattered out of Aeneas’ view in the storm.⁶

5. In that sense, her *coturni* (1.337) equip her as a stock character rather as a pair of green wellies would in twentieth-century English fiction. See Harrison 1973, 13, who argues for *heus* as a mark of characterization, and for Venus’ footwear as a generic clue that Dido’s tragedy begins with this scene as prologue (the analogy with the discursive function of green wellies breaks down at that point).

6. She interprets the very fact of Aeneas’ arrival at Carthage as a kind of divine sign: *quisquis es, haud, credo, inuisus caelestibus auras / uitalis carpis, Tyriam qui adueneris urbem* (“whoever you are, not, I reckon, at odds with the heavenly powers do you draw the breath of life, since you have reached the Tyrian city,” 1.387–88). She grounds her subsequent instructions on the augural skills that parents pass on by teaching their children (*ni frustra augurium uani docuere parentes*). Humans claim access to superhuman knowledge through memory that spans the generations. The weight of tradition gives this nameless *faux*-human a way to use god-granted information as authority to support the impera-

After Aeneas' courteous guesses at the identity of the huntress, he begins to define his own position. He tries to use his reputation and the familiarity of Troy's name to establish the context for his future goals, his past travels, and his present loss of home, identity, resources, and direction (1.380–85).

nos Troia antiqua, si uestras forte per auris
Troiae nomen iit, diuersa per aequora uectos
forte sua Libycis tempestas appulit oris.
sum pius Aeneas, raptos qui ex hoste penatis
classe ueho mecum, fama super aethera notus;
Italiam quaero patriam, et genus ab Ioue summo.

From ancient Troy—if by chance the name of Troy
has reached your ears—after we were brought across many different seas
a storm drove us by its own luck to Libyan shores.
I am *pius* Aeneas, and with my fleet I convey the Penates snatched from
the enemy
to accompany me, known by *fama* beyond the sky;
It is Italy I seek as a fatherland, and my family line comes from Jupiter on
high. (*Aen.* 1.375–80)

Venus silences her son just at the point when he begins to express his unease at the disjunction between his identity as the divinely guided *pius Aeneas* (transcending the human sphere through his fame—*fama super aethera notus*, 1.379) and the chancy isolation that makes him *ignotus* (1.384) as he roams through the wastes of Libya. Here Aeneas seems to define *fama* in terms of being known among the gods; this divine knowledge is set in striking opposition to the acknowledgement among human communities that he lacks at this point.

His attempt at characterizing his position in terms of *fama* forms part of a fictive exchange whose status Aeneas has misjudged. Once she has finished directing her son, Venus shows herself, running away from Aeneas' troubled cries. On her departure, we learn, “her true self was manifest in her gait—a goddess” (*uera incessu patuit dea*, 1.405).⁷ Bewilderment and indignation prompt the questions with which Aeneas pursues his mother:

tives she speaks, though the irony lurking in her words directs the poem's readers to Jupiter as one of her parents.

7. Heuzé 1985 suggests, however, that in spite of the narrator's emphasis on the huntress's virginal appearance (1.315–16), “De même que la déesse perce sous la jeune fille, de même Vénus transparaît sous les traits de Diane” (331).

ille ubi matrem
 agnouit tali fugientem est uoce secutus:
 ‘quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis
 ludis imaginibus? cur dextrae iungere dextram
 non datur ac ueras audire et reddere uoces?’
 talibus incusat gressumque ad moenia tendit.

He, when he recognized
 his mother, followed her with this speech as she fled:
 “Why so often do you, also cruel, mock your son
 with deceptive likenesses? Why is it not granted to join
 right hands, and to hear and exchange real speech?”
 With such words he accuses her, and makes his way to the city walls.
 (*Aen.* 1.405–10)

Those demands “Why?” have been echoed by many readers of the poem. It is as if Venus adopted her disguise purely and perversely to compel her son to engage in interpretation. Aeneas realizes well before Venus’ revelation that there is an element of fiction in his conversation with the unknown huntress. He has no means of recognizing his mother, but he judges by her voice and appearance, and rejects the possibility that she could be human (1.327–34); even after she has self-deprecatingly turned aside his worship, he continues to call her *dea* (1.372).⁸ Until Venus reveals herself he gets to have things both ways. He knows that her words and appearance intermingle referential assertions with nonreferential communication—evident fictions—but he can take part in a dialogue with her and learn new information without being impeded by this awareness. When he eventually learns that he was right about the huntress’ divinity, he is troubled by a new element to the fiction, however. He had not sensed before that Venus was the one using this human disguise, and using it to withhold herself as his mother.⁹

8. Odysseus’ conversation with Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6 indicates elaborate courtesy as another explanation for this address, but other scenes of gods presenting themselves as humans in the *Aeneid* suggest that we should imagine Venus as adopting a disguise that includes traces of an immortal identity.

9. Harrison 1973 argues that the disguise makes sense as a precaution for Venus when entering Juno’s territory, but this logic is expressed so obliquely via the Odyssean intertext for the scene that Harrison’s suggestion does not close down the interpretive problems raised by Venus’ disguise. Until Aeneas learns more about the concealment involved, he seems content to notice a divine disguise without worrying too much about it, rather as Odysseus does when a disguised Athena guides him in Phaeacia. But the poet explains why Athena disguises herself (so as not to anger Poseidon), and Odysseus does not comment on the disguise during the episode itself. Then in *Odyssey* 13.322–23 we

Often when things seem most recognizable, there is the least need consciously to unravel the entangled elements of perception. That leap-frogging of interpretation has generated many long-standing fears about the potentially deceptive effects of *mimesis*. By eluding conscious perception and interpretive interaction Cupid tricks Dido in Book 1; in Book 7 Allecto wields her Gorgonian power over Amata and others by similar means, as we shall see later in this chapter. When Aeneas recognizes his mother, however, he miserably batters against his awareness that he cannot escape new interpretation. We are back to that question, “Why?”. By letting Aeneas know who she is just at the very moment when she makes further knowledge inaccessible to him, Venus reinforces his awareness of how much his human fragility, his isolation and his ignorance of the gods’ intentions are at odds with his transcendently divine *fama*.

With its own mechanisms of *fama* at its disposal, the *Aeneid* replicates and confronts the disjunction Aeneas experiences. On one level the epic’s response is to transcend ignorance and other human limitations by appropriating divine intent for its fictions. But the poem also asks readers to share in Aeneas’ swift fluctuations between utter bafflement and the consciousness of being a privileged recipient of more than mortal knowledge. Through these fluctuations the epic acknowledges the impossibility of understanding the very forces that it would harness for its persuasive authority.

The imbalance of knowledge between Venus and her son amounts to an assertion of divine power.¹⁰ So Aeneas’ vulnerability, which Segal, Oliensis, and Reckford, in different ways, have located in incestuous and murderous verbal hints, extends to his lack of control over his own speech and identity.¹¹ Tricked by *falsis imaginibus* (1.407–8), he is prevented from a true exchange of words (*ueras audire et reddere uoces*). Next, Venus even takes possession of Aeneas’ appearance. She hides him in a mist, and picks the moment to lift the mist and beautify him (1.411–14, 586–93); his (visible) entry onto the Carthaginian scene is removed from his own control.

are told that Odysseus had recognized the goddess. This is a crucial difference. In the *Odyssey* Athena’s disguise and Odysseus’ claim that he could read it in full illustrates the close ties between that god and mortal. Here in the *Aeneid*, the disguise becomes a symptom of what it means for Aeneas to exist as the mortal son of a goddess, a survivor with (limited) divine guidance, acting under the gods’ orders, but without the knowledge and security enjoyed by the gods.

10. We could compare this with Achilles Tatius’ narrator in *Leucippe and Clitophon*, as analyzed by Bartsch 1989, 176: “Achilles Tatius undermines the readers’ confidence in their ability to read and compels them to reactualize the text on his terms; thereby he implicitly asserts his will over that of the reader/interpreter.”

11. Segal 1981; Oliensis 1997 and 2001; Reckford 1995–96.

Contrasts between the Odyssean intertexts for this scene and the powerlessness experienced by Aeneas are telling. The *Odyssey* presents Athene's sleight of hand as a way to celebrate Odysseus' own ability to make and remake himself through lies and fictions, while the *Aeneid* portrays Aeneas as a victim of Venus as much as a beneficiary of her wiles. Her mingling of fiction with overwhelming deceit saps Aeneas' agency and casts a shadow over her strategies for shaping his *fama* in Carthage.¹²

The fluidity of that *fama* becomes apparent when Aeneas reaches Juno's temple precinct and discovers that knowledge of Troy has reached North Africa, as he had hoped when speaking to the virgin-Venus (1.375–76). “In this grove for the first time the new circumstance (*noua res*) that met him soothed his fear, here for the first time Aeneas dared to hope for safety and to put better trust in his lowered fortunes” (1.450–52). His optimism turns out to be justified—Dido and the other Carthaginians will recognize and warmly welcome him as “that” Aeneas (1.617), the one whom they all know about.

The whole situation is new and strange (*noua*) in that it offers an unexpected familiarity. Arriving at Carthage, Aeneas finds images of his own experience, when he discovers that Carthaginian artists have depicted the Trojan War as part of their temple decorations.¹³ Even the *labor* of the artistry involved seems to mirror the *labor* endured by the Trojans:

dum quae fortuna sit urbi
artificumque manus inter se operumque laborem
miratur, uidet Iliacas ex ordine pugnas
bellaque iam fama totum uulgata per orbem,
Atridas Priamumque et saeuum ambobus Achillem.

While he wonders about the city's fortune,
and while at the craftsmen's combined endeavors and the toil of their
works
he marvels, he sees Ilium's battles in order
and the wars already bruited about by *fama* throughout the world,

12. See Reckford 1995–96. Discussing Venus' cloud, Reckford builds on Segal's (1981) analysis of “Aeneas' ambiguous position between the godlike (or authorial) observer of events and the confusedly involved participant in a world of blind happenings and violent human passions” (14). Reckford shows how closely this scene echoes the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, with its portrayal of Aeneas' conception and birth as a cause of sorrow (*ainon achos*) to the seductive, destructive goddess.

13. It has been pointed out to me that this uncanny mixture of strangeness and familiarity extends to readers' experience of this scene, thanks to the particular intensity of Homeric allusions in this part of *Aeneid* 1.

the Atreidae and Priam, and—savagely angry with both alike—Achilles.
(*Aen.* 1.454–58)

Aeneas regards the commemoration of their past as providing a shape for the next stage of their story: he moves swiftly from recognition to reasserting the utility of *fama*. “Dissolve your fears,” he tells Achates, “this *fama* will bring some safety” (1.463). For Aeneas, the pictures in Juno’s temple at Carthage demonstrate that a wide-reaching *imperium* of sorrow exists: *quis iam locus, [. . .] Achate, quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?* (“By now what place, Achates, what part of the world is not full of our toil?” (1.459–60). Trojan endeavors have not yet won *imperium sine fine* for the remnants left by the Greeks, but every area of the world is full of the war’s *labor*.

Aeneas dares to hope for safety because he assumes that Carthaginian familiarity with Trojan suffering will make this strange place accessible for them. *En Priamus!* (“Look, there’s Priam!” 1.461), Aeneas cries. The sight of the Trojan king leaps out at him, and his immediate recognition prompts Aeneas’ notoriously perplexing words about the rewards belonging to *laus*, *lacrimae rerum* and mortal concerns touching the mind (*sunt hic etiam sua praemia laudi, / sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*, 1.461–62).¹⁴ The poem continues to emphasize the importance of recognition in Aeneas’ reaction to the images, repeating the verb *agnoscere* in present and perfect tenses (he recognizes Rhesus’ tents 1.469–70, and himself entangled in battle 1.488–89).¹⁵

Some readers have felt that Aeneas takes too much for granted in imagining that these signs of his *fama* betoken sympathy and respect in Dido’s

14. Here is a prosaic translation: “Even here its own rewards belong to excellence; there are tears for things and the concerns of mortals touch the consciousness.” One problem is the vague genitive *rerum*: “thing” is hopelessly inadequate for the chameleon word *res*, but any more colorful choice closes an interpretive question that the poem leaves open. Another difficulty is *laus*: this is both praise and the distinction that merits praise, ideas demanding separate words in English. Wharton 2008 carefully analyzes the challenges presented by this line and summarizes its interpretive history. Among the most influential translators of the last half century or so, consistency emerges in some choices (*mens* as a seat of emotion, the “heart”). But decisions about how to express personal involvement vary greatly in a line where the subjects or implied agents of the (implied) actions and emotions are notably absent. Day-Lewis (1986) goes for “Here too we find virtue somehow rewarded, / Tears in the nature of things, hearts touched by human transience.” Fitzgerald 1983 gives us “Even so far away, / Great valor has due honor; they weep here for how the world goes, and our life that passes / Touches their hearts”; Eagles 2006 has: “Even here, merit will have its true reward . . . / even here, the world is a world of tears / and the burdens of mortality touch the heart.”

15. When Aeneas cries out “look, there’s Priam,” nothing tells us whether to imagine that the image looks like Priam in the sense of being an individualized portrait that closely resembles Priam’s facial features, whether the context of the image identifies him as Priam—i.e., if he is carrying out an obviously Priam-like act, or whether there is some convention in the iconography that Priam images would all share.

Punic city.¹⁶ It has become a widespread view that the images are better seen as gloating over Trojan suffering—an attitude that would please the temple’s goddess, Juno.¹⁷ But given the evasiveness of the narrative whenever it so much as hints at preexisting Carthaginian hostility (in Jupiter’s dispatch of Mercury to prepare the ground for Aeneas’ arrival, or in Dido’s explanation to Ilioneus of their violent reception), and given that the events to come in Book 4 provide an aetiology for later enmity between Rome and Carthage, the point here is surely that the *fama* of Aeneas and his people is malleable.¹⁸

Venus makes the most of this malleability. She alters Aeneas’ appearance, so that his god-like looks will match his sky-reaching *fama*, but she intervenes still more decisively by sending her other son, Cupid, disguised as her grandson Ascanius, whom she temporarily abducts, on an errand to control how Dido will regard her guest Aeneas. Impersonating Aeneas’ son Ascanius does far more than merely enable Cupid to poison Dido at close quarters. The disguise entwines mythic and incestuous resemblances with the poisoning and inflammation in such a way as to embed the divine power of Cupid and his mother Venus in a whole network of perceptual operations, many of which have been thoroughly analyzed by Charles Segal, Kenneth Reckford, and Ellen Oliensis.¹⁹

16. Aeneas nourishes himself (his *animus*) on a hollow image, like the hollow tomb where Andromache performs death rituals for Hector in 3.304, and mourns (*animum pictura pascit inani / multa gemens, largoque umectat flumine uultum*, 1.464–65). Despite being *inanis*, the artwork satisfies Aeneas’ emotional hunger, because *fama* has made it possible to represent the void created by his losses at Troy. Barchiesi in particular has noted how many functions the adjective *inanis* performs; he connects the word with the way the poem renders these images of Troy literally immaterial, by omitting any mention of the medium in which they are crafted, and suggests a range of other interpretations (1994; trans. in Hardie 1999, 336). See also Johnson 1976, 105; Dubois, 1982, 33; Leach 1988, 318.

17. Horsfall 1973 offers the most clear-cut assessment of Aeneas as a misreader. See especially Fowler 1991 and Barchiesi 1994 for nuanced examinations of the hermeneutic problems raised by the ekphrasis; both Fowler and Barchiesi resist assuming a “Roman perspective” that would judge Aeneas as simply wrong in his interpretation. Bartsch 1998, 338 points out that the *pictura inanis* does not so much deceive or mislead as set up “a model for viewing that invites the participation of the viewer in making his own, positive meaning out of art.”

18. Ahl 1989, 24–30 argues that a major rhetorical goal in Books 2 and 3 is to ensure that Aeneas’ reputation, which comes across ambiguously in the temple images, is untainted by any unflattering suggestions.

19. For instance, in an extraordinary passage, Cupid moves to Dido’s lap, after satisfying the great love of his supposed father. She clings to him with her eyes, with her whole heart, and cherishes him in her lap, without realizing how great a god lays ambush to her—a phrase with erotic overtones that will be picked up by *Fama* in book 4 (*ille ubi complexu Aeneae colloque pependit / et magnum falsi implevit genitoris amorem, / reginam petit. haec oculis, haec pectore toto / haeret et interdum gremio fouet inscia Dido / insidat quantus miserae deus*, 1.715–19; cf. 4.193–94: *nunc hiemem inter se luxu, quam longa, fouere / regnorum immemores turpique cupidine captos*). See most recently the analysis of motherhood in the *Aeneid* by Oliensis 2009, 61–72. For Cupid’s Ascanius disguise and its web of incestuous

At Cytherea nouas artis, noua pectore uersat
 consilia, ut faciem mutatus et ora Cupido
 pro dulci Ascanio ueniat, donisque furentem
 incendat reginam atque ossibus implicet ignem.
 quippe domum timet ambiguam Tyriosque bilinguis;
 urit atrox Iuno et sub noctem cura recursat.
 ergo his aligerum dictis adfatur Amorem:
 ‘nate, meae uires, mea magna potentia, solus
 nate patris summi qui tela Typhoea temnis,
 ad te confugio et supplex tua numina posco.’

But the Cytherean goddess is mulling over new devices, new plans, for Cupid, transformed in face and appearance, to come in place of sweet Ascanius, and for him to use gifts to inflame to a point of frenzy the queen and weave flame into her bones. For she dreads the doubtful house and two-tongued Tyrians; she is seared by the thought of fierce Juno, and towards nightfall her trouble haunts her.

So with these words she addresses winged Love:
 “Son, my strength, my great power, you who alone,
 son, scorn the Typhoean missiles of the father on high,
 to you I run for refuge, and suppliant call upon your divine will.”

(*Aen.* 1.657–66)

Doubts surrounding the intervention are heightened by the participle *furentem* in the predicative accusative (1.659). Its position in the narrative suggests a proleptic understanding (as translated above, “to inflame to a point of frenzy”), but without a context to steer one in that direction, one could also read it as “to inflame the queen in her madness”—which would favor what Lyne has analyzed as divine interventions “working with” humanly generated emotions and choices.²⁰

Cupid’s body becomes the vehicle for Venus’ verbal cunning, her *artes*, as she shows with her flattering vocatives, *meae uires*, *mea magna potentia* (“my strength, my great power,” 1.664). A hint of this is given first through a playful jarring of expectations in the word order *ergo his aligerum dictis*

associations, and intertextual connections with different literary instantiations of Medea, see Bowie 1998, 67; Oliensis 1997, 306; Reckford 1995–96, 25–28; and Segal 1981.

20. See Lyne 1987, 67–71. This use of *fallere* appears again in Allecto’s work on Amata; cf. 7.350, *fallitque furentem*.

adfatur Amorem (“so with these words she addresses winged Love,” 1.663)—which associates Love with the “winged words” we might expect Venus to utter in an epic. The language she uses for the sharing of plans and information with Cupid continues this idea: the circumstances are known (*nota*, 1.679) to Cupid, just as the boy will be taking on the “known features” of the boy Iulus (*notos . . . uultus*, 1.684; “known” both to Cupid and to the mortal characters who are to be deceived). Cupid, she informs him, has been pained with Venus’ pain over Aeneas (*nostro doluisti saepe dolore*, 1.669), and she wants Dido to share her emotions, too—to be girt with flame, “so that she may be held with great love for Aeneas, along with me” (1.673–75).

Venus worries about Dido’s potential unreliability not because she thinks the queen fickle (as in Aeneas’ much-quoted dream of Mercury, 4.569–70), but because she worries about verbal doubleness and difficulties in interpretation (1.661)—exactly the qualities she will employ herself. Venus’ other motivation comes from Juno, who scorches her; the same verb, *uro*, describes Dido’s painful love at 4.68 (*uritur infelix Dido*). All this figurative and conceptual mirroring provides a kind of poetic logic for Venus’ choice of action, in which she arranges for her trickery and poison to be breathed through Cupid’s embraces in the recognizable form of Ascanius (1.684, 687–88). The parallels also rule out the possibility of seeing cunning stratagems and mad inflammation as the special preserve of Juno and her agents.

When Dido interprets Aeneas’ *fama* in the light of perceptions affected first by Mercury and then more uncontrollably by Cupid’s poisonous deception, she makes Aeneas’ hopeful words to Achates into a largely accurate assessment of the power of the Trojans’ reputation. The narrative here, as so often, gives no decisive clues about how Dido would see Aeneas and the Trojans if she were free from the gods’ sway. By withholding information about that hypothetically independent, purely human perception, the poem conceives of divine influence as a fundamental part of human experience. Within the *Aeneid*’s story world these imperceptible forces are incorporated into the *famae* through which characters and events are known and interpreted. On a larger scale, this presentation of unseen divine forces becomes a way for the poem to figuratively assert divine authority for its own blend of imagination and remembrance. But by giving such detailed attention to the unseen violence that Venus and Cupid perform, the poem raises the question of whether the poem borrows divine brutality, as well as the power behind it, for the fictive knowledge it brings into being.

7.2 What Amata sees

In Book 7, after Juno has sent Allecto on the rampage in Italy, the Fury's first step is to infiltrate the king's house in Latium. She does not use her powers directly on Latinus, who has been led by a series of convincing omens to take Aeneas for his daughter instead of Turnus. Instead she goes to work on the queen, Amata, as she is already ablaze with anger about the Trojans' arrival, impassioned with extraordinary love for her intended son-in-law (7.57, 344–45).²¹ Like Dido, whom readers get to know only after the gods' machinations (first Jupiter and Mercury, then Venus and Cupid), and like Turnus later in Book 7, Amata is characterized for readers through the depiction of her growing madness.

Allecto's divine inflammation works alongside the social and verbal authority Amata assumes in her attempts to change her husband's plans.²² When the queen is still in touch with her reason, she rationalizes her intense desire to marry Lavinia to Turnus. She adapts her interpretation of the omens to co-opt divine authority in support of her desire. She speaks to her husband Latinus according to what the poem describes as “the accustomed way of mothers” (*solito matrum de more*, 7.357). Amata acts according to the normal conventions of motherhood, and behaves just as mothers usually do. The analogical potential of the wording hints that she is performing motherhood as a role, turning to her rhetorical advantage the conventional expectations associated with maternity. This use of *more* resembles Lucretian wording in comparisons (e.g., 5.932: *uulgiuago uitam tractabant more ferarum*, “they managed their life in the random way of wild beasts”), in that it both describes a practice (the way wild beasts live, in the Lucretius example) and points to the structure of the analogy.

But in the *Aeneid*, *furor* is part of the customary behavior of mothers, and the idea that out of control passion is expected of women serves Allecto's—and perhaps Amata's—purposes well.²³ A similar process occurs when Iris takes possession of the Trojan women with Juno's power in Book 5.

21. See especially Lyne 1987, 13–26 on the eroticism of Amata's sufferings and the parallels between Amata and Dido.

22. Cf. Panoussi 2009, 130–33; she too addresses the social implications of this passage, though she reaches different conclusions.

23. This rhetorical strategy, here shared by Allecto and Amata, works according to the same logic that Allecto applies elsewhere in contaminating Italy with madness. When she spreads *rabies* among Iulus' hunting dogs, it just leads to more intense, uncontrolled doggy behavior. The dogs already participate in one of Allecto's areas of expertise, assisting Iulus in his *insidiae* (7.478 and 326); she touches their noses with *noto . . . odore*, 7.480, just as Venus and Cupid had exploited familiar perceptions when inflaming Dido. A similar technique is only partly successful with Turnus, however.

Verbal echoes in the narrative of Amata's madness, along with its structure, recall the persuasiveness of Iris–Beroe in Book 5, the madness of the Trojan women, and the flames they set raging among the ships. After the Trojan women's outburst in Book 5, Jupiter restores order and saves the flaming ships with a rainstorm which "rages without restraint": *sine more furit* (5.694). That is exactly what a good rainstorm does, it acts *sine more*.²⁴ Similarly, after Amata fails to sway Latinus she rages *sine more* (unrestrainedly or lawlessly) through the city, which is called "boundless," as if her capacity for infecting the local community with *furor* has now become unlimited: *immensam sine more furit lymphata per urbem* (7.377).

Amata at this point becomes identified with the *fama* of her doings (7.387, *euolat*; 7.392, *fama uolat*), when she melds her madness into the ritualized insanity of Bacchic rites, and weds her daughter to the god. A blazing pine—a tool which both spreads fire and figures the spread of madness several times in the *Aeneid*—becomes Lavinia's marriage torch, bringing close to fulfillment Juno's prophecy/command (7.319–22) that Hecuba will not be the only one to give birth to a firebrand.²⁵

The climax of Amata's infectious madness comes in a short speech to her fellow *matres*, where she uses her personal reputation to energize her community, inviting the other women to remember how they are connected with her. She instructs them to free themselves of their usual restraints—to loosen their headbands literally and metaphorically—and join in the rites, "if any sense of obligation towards Amata in her misfortune lingers in their attentively loyal (*piis*) minds, if anxiety for a mother's rightful authority chafes at them" (*si qua piis animis manet infelicis Amata / gratia, si iuris materni cura remordet*) (7.401–2). The poem later confirms the success of this rhetorical move on Amata's part. Her exalted social position, which would normally give her plenty of influence (*gratia*, 7.402) through favors done, has duly strengthened her claim to solidarity among all the mothers, who surround Latinus' palace and confirm his sense of helplessness. A parenthetical comment explains the mothers' motivation in *fama*-related

24. Cf. *Aen.* 10.603–4, where Aeneas spreads death, *torrentis aquae uel turbinis atris / more furens*, "raging like rushing water or a black tornado"; *more* primarily serves to introduce the comparison, but it also reminds us that the *mos* of a whirlwind is to behave *sine more*.

25. When Turnus attempts to burn the Trojan ships in Book 9, the fiery madness inflicted by Allecto turns him into an Allecto-figure himself, as "he, ablaze, fills his hand with flaming pine" (*manum pinu flagranti feruidus implet*, 9.72); his companions follow his lead; the whole group equips itself with "black firebrands" (*facibus . . . atris*, 9.74) and gives off a pitchy light (*piceum . . . lumen*, 9.75). But in 12.554–92, when Venus inspires Aeneas to burn Latinus' city, the firebrands used by Aeneas' companions do not give off this black light; the fire of Aeneas' aggression and divine possession more equivocally resembles the fire that attacks the city.

language, telling readers that “the name of Amata was not lightweight” (*neque enim leue nomen Amatae*, 7.581).

Amata’s madness uses *fama* to tap into familiar perceptions and expectations and alter them as it spreads among the community. This process extends the way Allecto manipulates Amata’s expectations so as to poison her and make her an agent of madness and *discordia*. Shape-shifting allows Allecto (like Cupid in Book 1) to get close to her victim and fire her with divinely kindled passion. Being seen, and at the same time not being seen, is an essential part of both divinities’ work: the disguises form part of the attack. As Cupid and Allecto warp Dido’s and Amata’s perceptions of their surroundings by presenting them with deceptively familiar entities, they skew their visions more drastically by overwhelming them with the emotional state that is each divinity’s essence: mad love and vengeful madness.

Both Amata and Dido are beguiled and changed because they recognize the images produced by Allecto’s snake and by Cupid without realizing that they are images. They are unaware that what they see are the vehicles for overwhelming divine force.²⁶ In these acts of recognition there is no Aristotelian moment of realizing that “this” is “that.” They have no idea that there is a “this” to deal with. Both her appearance and its shiftiness are crucial for Allecto’s approach to Amata: *exim Gorgoneis Allecto infecta uenenis / principio Latium et Laurentis tecta tyranni / celsa petit, tacitumque obsedit limen Amatae* (“Right away, steeped in Gorgon-poisons, Allecto starts by making for Latium and the lofty home of the Laurentian king, and planted herself at the silent doorway of Amata,” 7.341–43). Allecto’s ability to do harm comes not just from her inventiveness, the manifold skills praised by Juno (*mille nocendi artes*, 7.338), but also from the poisons in which she is steeped—being Gorgon-derived, these venoms must work through the eyes.

So the snake turns into objects which are familiar to Amata, and which are close to her body, but which retain snaky shapes and qualities. The snake slithers along without Amata feeling it; it goes unnoticed, and at same time actively deceives her, by taking on a cluster of disguises that are recognizable simultaneously as her personal ornaments and as snakelike in appearance.

huic dea caeruleis unum de crinibus anguem
conicit, inque sinum praecordia ad intima subdit,

26. So their mistake is different from the errors of Ovid’s Narcissus (or Milton’s Eve), and of Turnus when he is led astray by an Aeneas made by Juno out of cloud in Book 10: those images have no intrinsic force or volition, and their power over their beholders comes entirely from the confusion between reality and reflection (for Narcissus) or reality and a particular kind of imitation (for Turnus and perhaps Eve).

quo furibunda domum monstro permisceat omnem.
 ille inter uestis et leuia pectora lapsus
 uoluitur attactu nullo, fallitque furentem
 uipeream inspirans animam; fit tortile collo
 aurum ingens coluber, fit longae taenia uittae
 innectitque comas et membris lubricus errat.

The goddess thrusts at her a single snake from her dusky hair
 and slips it into her breast, near her heart,
 so that, maddened by the prodigious creature, she may throw the whole
 household into chaos.

The snake, sliding between her clothes and her smooth breasts,
 glides without touching her, and breathing on her its viperous breath
 tricks her into madness; the great serpent became the twisted gold
 at her neck, it becomes the ribbon of her trailing headband
 and binds the queen's hair, and meanders, slithery, over her limbs.

(*Aen.* 7.346–53)

The word *fallo* points to the double task accomplished by the snake. In Latin *fallo* can convey simultaneously imperceptibility and active trickery, and it does so here (just as in Venus' instructions to Cupid, 1.684, 688). *Fallitque furentem / uipeream inspirans animam* (7.350–51): “as it breathes its viperous breath into her the maddened queen does not realize what is happening” is another way of translating the line; in English we are forced to choose between a meaning like “deceives” or an expression such as “escapes her notice” for *fallit*.²⁷ In the Latin, the two senses work together; it is fitting that *fallit* should provide the link between words emphasizing imperceptibility, especially through touch (*uoluitur attactu nullo*, 7.350), and lines that describe how the snake looks to Amata (*fit tortile collo / aurum ingens coluber* 7.351–52). Amata both sees and does not see the disguised snake.²⁸ The snake's work on Amata is even harder to discern than Cupid's on Dido. While the sight of Ascanius (as his father's son) carries its own troubling erotic charge for Dido, it is hard to imagine how a ribbon or a torque could intrinsically have any ability to unhinge their wearer.

Allecto's deceptive shape-shiftings seem to lend her control over Amata's cognition, but the slipperiness of the Fury's disguise makes it impossible

27. This is Feeney's choice of language (1991, 165). Horsfall 2000 *ad loc.* has “[The snake] deceives her into madness exhaling its viperish breath.”

28. Similarly, she feels and does not feel it—it does not touch her, but it is *lubricus*: on this duality of representation, see especially Feeney 1991, 165–66.

for either Amata or the *Aeneid*'s readers to be sure just what is happening. While the venom is gradually beginning to do its work, Amata speaks gently to Latinus to dissuade him from joining Lavinia with Aeneas. The halfway state that Amata is in when she addresses Latinus connects Amata's understanding with the physical influence of Allecto's inflammation: [. . .] *pertemptat sensus atque ossibus implicat ignem / necdum animus toto percepit pectore flammam* [. . .] ("it assails her senses and twines its flame into her bones, and her mind has not yet whole-heartedly taken in the flame," 7.355–56). The word *percepit* suspends itself suggestively between "grasp" in the sense of "take fire" (Fantham, for example, translates this line "but her spirit has not yet caught fire with all her heart"²⁹) and "grasp" in the sense of "understand"—her mind has not yet *taken in* the flame. The supernatural flame is to be kindled, but the verb also reminds us that once kindled, it will transform Amata's understanding. It is not exactly that the flame needs to be *perceived* for its power to be felt—it is never clear whether Amata is conscious of her transformation—but the word hints that some cognitive process is involved in Amata's supernatural inflammation.³⁰

On another level, too, Amata's understanding of the situation goes along with the progress of her poisoning by the Fury's snake. Amata descends fully into madness as she sees that her attempt at persuading her husband is ineffectual, that Latinus stands firm against her attempt to re-conceive what "foreign" means and allow Turnus' Greek ancestry to qualify him as a son-in-law (7.373–77). The snake has attacked her *sensus*: the means by which she perceives the world, and her state of mind. We are directed towards a cognitive change in Amata—a change that is wrought through, as well as on, her eyes and mind—by the poem's emphasis on the *look* of the objects whose appearance the snake adopts. So the snake's venom works on Amata partly through her uninterpreted experience of the objects she perceives as ribbon and torque, and partly through her understanding that her attempt at maternal persuasion of the father Latinus has proved ineffectual. This latter understanding results from conscious interpretation of Latinus' response (*his ubi nequiquam dictis experta Latinum / contra stare uidet*, 7.373–74): she sees (*uidet*) that Latinus is standing firm (where *uidet* is both a visual metaphor for something occurring in the mind, and an indicator of her visually-derived interpretation of her husband's physical reaction to her words).

29. Fantham 1998, 140.

30. As a parallel for *animus . . . percepit* Horsfall 2000 *ad loc.* cites Hor. *Ars* 335–36: *quidquid praecipies esto brevis, ut cito dicta / percipiant animi dociles teneantque fideles*. Feeney translates this line "and her mind has not yet fully and wholly taken in the flame" (1991, 165). Hershkowitz paraphrases this moment with the words "At first Amata is unaware of this new passion . . ." (1998, 49).

But as Lyne, Feeney, and Hershkowitz, among others, have observed, we are not told how, exactly, this conscious shift in perception works alongside Amata's unnoticed alteration by the snake's *furiale malum* ("Fury-brought harm"). The two aspects of Amata's transformation are joined by a coordinating conjunction (the particle *que*), which obscures the logical relationship between the two clauses; both are subordinated to the sentence that expresses her wild reaction to the shift:

His ubi nequiquam dictis experta Latinum
 contra stare uidet, penitusque in uiscera lapsum
 serpentis furiale malum totamque pererrat,
 tum uero infelix ingentibus excita monstribus
 immensam sine more furit lymphata per urbem.

When after trying out her words on Latinus in vain she sees him
 stand against her, when the Fury's harm has slipped
 deep into her guts and is straying all over her,
 that is the moment when the unhappy woman, roused by immense
 portents,
 rages lawlessly in her madness throughout the boundless city. (7.373–77)

The *monstra* that work on Amata are powerfully persuasive sights (the ornaments which the snake has become, and her perception of Latinus) and at the same time are strange, horrifying beings, in this case with divine power to rouse Amata to frenzy (the Fury and her serpentine agent, who are *monstra* in the sense from which our word "monster" is clearly derived).³¹

The phrase *ingentibus excita monstribus* echoes Andromache's perception when she sees Aeneas at Buthrotum—a "miniature-golf" rebuilding of Troy, as Reed puts it—during his wanderings in Book 3.³² Aeneas tells the Carthaginians how Andromache reacts to the apparently ghostly sight: *ut me conspexit uenientem et Troia circum / arma amens uidit, magnis exterrita monstribus / deriguit uisu in medio* ("When she caught sight of me coming towards her and wildly beheld Trojan weapons round about, terrified by great portents, she stiffened in mid-gaze" 3.306–8). Here, *magnis exterrita monstribus* refers to Andromache's confusion about what category of experience

31. Like the *multa* [. . .] *uariarum monstra ferarum* in the underworld (6.285), which include at least Gorgons and Harpies and perhaps the Eumenides and *Discordia demens* (i.e., they perhaps include Allecto herself). They are marvels because of the strange horror of their bodily form (still not quite monsters in our sense); as we saw in chapter 4, Harpies and Furies are sometimes identified; both are *Dirae*, categorized by the dread they inspire.

32. Reed 2007, 119.

her sight has granted her. The effect of this confusion is heightened by the fact that her physical reaction occurs *uisu in medio*. Aeneas and the Trojans themselves temporarily become *monstra* for Andromache, while at the same time the word suggests Fury-like demons, who keep the dead present in the land of the living through polluting memories.

The perceptions of Andromache in this scene parallel Amata's experience of Allecto's poison in interesting ways. Andromache is driven mad for a time (*amens*, 3.307; *furenti*, 3.313) by her inability to discern whether she is faced with reality or with some ghostly simulacrum of Aeneas and his men. Unlike Amata, Andromache is aware of her own uncertainty: she is fully aware of seeing *monstra*; she knows they need interpretation as marvels; she can be calmed by Aeneas' confirmation that the wonders she sees are not of her imagining, and that he is not an unearthly messenger. Amata, by contrast, never receives any explanation of the *monstra* by which she is altered; neither she nor the poem's readers ever know to what extent she is reacting to the situation around her and how far she is driven by forces that lie beyond interpretation.

Once Amata is fully untrammled, no longer following the conventional tracks set for anxious mothers, she dashes out to the woods in something like a Bacchic frenzy, *simulato numine Bacchi* ("pretending that she suffers Bacchus' divine influence" or "under a divine influence that mimics that of Bacchus," 7.385). Later we learn that the queen is afflicted from all sides with the goads of Bacchus, but that it is Allecto, not Dionysus, who harries her with these goads (7.404–5). Amata seems to be adopting her own disguise, impersonating a Bacchant, as a stratagem for taking her daughter away from the city and out of the masculine, civic realm controlled by Latinus. Yet the narrative avoids deciding whether Amata consciously and deceptively takes on the role of Bacchant as a mere cover for her activities, and how far Amata imagines herself as a worshipper of Dionysus.³³ Bacchism is always a powerful metaphor for the kind of madness that prompts women to challenge masculine authority. Here it is as if Amata chooses to live out in actuality a poetic figuration of her wild actions.³⁴

33. See Lyne 1987, 26 n. 50, who uses this as an example of his "working with" hypothesis for the causal aspects of the poem's divine apparatus; authorial responsibility for the false Bacchism is shared between Allecto and Amata. Hershkowitz 1998, 51–52 shows that another way to understand the combination of *simulato numine* with *reginam Allecto stimulis agit undique Bacchi* in 7.405 is that a fiction has gained its own persuasive momentum, becoming real as it makes its impact on life.

34. At 4.469–73 a simile that depicts Dido's imaginings (her dreams, and also her madness more generally) links the Fury-brought madness of Orestes with Pentheus' Bacchic suffering, explicitly evoking theatrical versions of the myths. Clearly the two stories are powerful and familiar examples of madness; since they lead up to Dido's suicide and abdication from her position as ruler, the parallels

7.3 Reading for the novel

One way that the poem emphasizes the role of sight in Amata's poisoning is by inviting the reader to visualize the event. But we are asked to try visualizing something that, as Feeney has carefully delineated, is impossible to see even in the mind's eye. The peculiarities of *what* we are asked to imagine in the *Aeneid's* stories of divine manipulation work alongside the difficulties raised by the *way* we are asked to imagine them. Together, these problems point towards questions about exactly what kind of fiction the *Aeneid* offers.

I have suggested that Allecto's creations and the *furor* they inspire in her victims are as essential to the *fata* endorsed or pronounced by Jupiter as they are to the *fama* established by the poem. We may also draw broader analogies between the ways characters in the *Aeneid* respond to divine manipulations and the ways that readers absorb fictive knowledge into our perceptual equipment. But how unique to this poem—or to epic as a genre—are the connections between such god-sent cognitive transformations (as the *Aeneid* imagines them) and the potentially metamorphic effects of fiction?

Feeney argues that this episode calls us to adopt two conflicting reading conventions. He suggests that our introduction to Amata, *quam super aduentu Teucrum Turnique hymenaeis / femineae ardentem curaeque iraeque coquebant* ("whom feminine anxiety and anger over the arrival of the Trojans and the wedding ceremonies of Turnus, were bringing to the boil," 7.344–45), invites a reading based on realist conventions, which typically use every-day, readily-seen examples of what is known and recognizable.³⁵ Then in the passage depicting the snake's transformations of itself and of Amata, Feeney describes how "[t]he lines present an irresolvable tension between the minutely particularized description of the event and the impossibility of the event."³⁶ In his discussion of both Amata and Turnus' experience of madness, Feeney opposes the "concrete," "naturalistic" and "humanly plausible" to the "supernatural" and "fantastic":

What happens to Amata is understandable and it is not understandable.
[. . .] The palpable images of the slippery snake, oozing wet poison, are

sketch visions of Dido as, like Orestes, a kind of matricide (of herself) and as a Pentheus departing from the civic, masculine realm in which she had acted as ruler. See also Hershkowitz 1998, 27–28 on other theatrical aspects of Dido's madness.

35. Feeney 1991, 164 notes how at 7.343–45 the narrative's "artfully condescending *femineae*, and colloquial *coquebant*, caters to the culture's expectation of what is natural in a woman in such a circumstance."

36. Feeney 1991, 165.

at odds with the calculated plausibility of the tête-à-tête with Latinus, yet this symbiosis of the concrete and the hallucinatory fantastic catches at something central to the experience of madness. [. . .] It is remarkable testimony to Vergil's confidence in his art that he can enmesh us in such reflections on human behaviour even as his technique flaunts the fictionality of the entire episode by continually unsettling us, keeping us dithering between two incompatible reading conventions.³⁷

The seeming incompatibility of these two reading conventions, however, does not stem only from a tension between two categories, realist and non-realist narrative, as Feeney suggests.³⁸ The apparent disjunction between the expression of seeming truths about the experience of madness and the way that the “fictionality of the entire episode” is “flaunted” depends as much on the way that we experience fictions as on the way that we face insanity. Since fictions change our minds partly without our awareness, we cannot shake off the effects of our literary experiences, even should we wish to. For instance, we cannot fully return to a state of pre-realist innocence, if there is such a thing.

Feeney clearly intends “realist” to be understood as a broad category. And in this broad sense the term tells us almost as much about readerly expectations as it does about the texts that are usually categorized as “realist.” He suggests at the start of *The Gods in Epic*: “Classicists tend to be the (unwitting) victims of realistic—indeed, novelistic—conventions of reading.”³⁹ Certainly Feeney has provided a greatly needed corrective to the bemusement that has sometimes greeted the gods of classical narratives.⁴⁰ But though there are important questions to be asked about the experience available to readers in Augustan Rome, that experience is ultimately unavailable to us, with so much literary and material evidence lost, quite apart from more intangible elements. I am concerned here with what it means to read the *Aeneid* as a witting survivor of a narrative addiction fed by the traditional English novel. Instead of trying to become the kind of readers who can

37. Feeney 1991, 168.

38. Johnson's 1976 study, *Darkness Visible*, makes the *Aeneid*'s relation to Homeric *mimesis* central to its inquiry. Mitchell-Boyask 1996 opposes Homeric “realism” to Vergilian “modernism.”

39. Feeney 1991, 2. Perplexity about how to imagine the gods is closely related to the bemusement at heightened rhetorical strategies: tools such as apostrophe and hyperbole ranged outside the comfort zones of many early and mid-twentieth-century readers (translations of Lucan, especially, make this unease clear).

40. Feeney's *Literature and Religion at Rome* (1998) further pursues the interaction between representations of Roman religion and questions about how such representations operate (e.g., in problems of religious and fictive “belief”).

“adequately” respond to a nonrealist mode by discarding an inappropriate set of conventions, we may prefer to focus on how hard it is to discern the ways in which our perceptions—and therefore our reading practices—have been changed through our encounters with fictions, realist or otherwise.⁴¹

Feeney’s analysis of the narrative of the snake’s disguises can help re-describe the ways that fiction both overtly persuades and more subtly seeps into our memories. The *Aeneid* demands that the reader imagine the Fury’s snake altering its appearance. Yet it tells of these changes in a way that cannot be fully realized in the mind’s eye—not only because it is a supernatural metamorphosis, inexplicable in human terms, but also because the telling itself depends on imagining metaphors as embodied or reified in impossible ways.⁴²

For Turnus, Allecto becomes the priestess Calybe (*fit Calybe*, 7.419); for Amata, “the snake becomes the huge twisted gold on her neck, it becomes the ribbon of her trailing head-dress” (*fit tortile collo / aurum ingens coluber, fit longae taenia uittae*, 7.351–52). We saw in the previous section of my discussion how the familiarity of the objects whose shape the snake adopts makes the disguise imperceptible for Amata. They are part of her daily existence, and do not call for an interpretive response. The snake turns into objects that do not overtly try to change their viewers’ beliefs. They do not display a persuasive function that could be grasped and perhaps rejected by the queen, as Turnus rejects Allecto-Calybe’s explicit persuasion. Instead, their manipulative poison is soaked into their camouflaging of the madness they bring.

It is equally hard to grasp the relation between the perceptible and imperceptible aspects of fiction’s effects on readers, though fiction’s camouflage is not steeped with the destructive poison of a Fury’s snake. Reflections on concerns like these have entered the core traditions of the European novel. *Don Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey*, to name two key examples, imagine the bewildering effects of investing too heavily in the interpretive conventions of romance (*Madame Bovary* addresses related questions from a very different perspective). *Middlemarch*, too, though it is less concerned with the reading

41. My title for this section, “Reading for the novel,” pays tribute, of course, to Peter Brooks’ *Reading for the Plot*. Brooks uses Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to inquire into the dynamics of plotting and the ways that “narratives work on us, as readers, to create models of understanding” (1984, xiii), a goal I share—though my approach is not psychoanalytic, and my emphasis is on narrative forms such as epic and novel as *fictions*, so the result is a very different project from Brooks’ inquiry.

42. Many aspects of the contradictory description are explored by Feeney 1991, 165–66: “Does the snake touch Amata or not? Does the snake ‘really’ become a (substantial) necklace and a (fine) ribbon? If Amata does not feel the snake, in what way is it *lubricus* (‘slippery’)?”

of romances, examines the interaction between investigations of reality and imaginative perceptions.⁴³

One of the reasons it becomes hard to identify the effects of fictions on our lives is because fictions encourage readers to perceive life in the same terms that we perceive texts. When fictions shape our perceptions, they do not lie or deceive so much as they become a part of our experience. We find truth in any text—novel or epic, as well as non-narrative and nonfictional genres—less because the text matches some external state of affairs than because of the ways we have learned to understand reality.

In *Allecto's* work on Amata, Amata's contact—or lack of contact—with the snake alters her so that she loses control over the way she experiences the world. This is just the kind of cognitive shift that defines madness in most cultures.⁴⁴ But it is also one way of imagining what happens when fictions work their metamorphic effects on readers. Neither for readers, nor for Amata, is there a single, definable moment of transformation in this process. Although the narrative dramatizes Amata's change of mind, it also emphasizes that her new Fury-brought perceptions merge with her existing thoughts and feelings.

Feeney is right to want to free readers from a dependence on notions of “realism” that would merely discard elements that do not make narrative sense in the most immediately recognizable way. In fact very few texts fit such a narrow understanding of realism. (We only have to dip into the novels of Charles Dickens or Anthony Trollope to see just how schematic these categories are.) But although Feeney shows clearly that the Amata episode challenges a narrowly realist notion of verisimilitude, some version of this mimetic concept remains in the picture here. Thinking about *vraisemblance* (whose terminological history only partly overlaps with “verisimilitude”) can help us get at the similarities between the ways minds may be changed by fiction and the way *Allecto's* snake conceals its work by making itself familiar to the queen.⁴⁵ The *vraisemblable* operates by being recognizable, but one

43. Lydgate, for example, diagnoses the exalted vision of Casaubon that led Dorothea to marry him as a “heroic hallucination” (Eliot 1994, 769).

44. If any definition is possible. Hershkowitz 1998, 13 observes how “madness continually eludes all attempts to define or categorize it in a single, understandable way. [. . .] It is outside the boundaries of comprehension, yet it is also a necessary component of comprehensibility. It is outside discourse, yet can only be understood and described by being placed in some sort of discursive context in the form of models and metaphors.”

45. See Prendergast 1986, 51 for one helpful way of understanding the term: “*Vraisemblance* is a system of conventions and expectations which rests on, and in turn reinforces, that more general system of ‘mutual knowledge’ produced within a community for the realisation and maintenance of a whole social world.”

of the key ways it achieves its effects is through the imperceptibility of the work that it does.

Although the novel—at least in its so-called “classic realist” form—vividly exemplifies this mode, one cannot limit the type of effects brought about by *vraisemblance* to the periods and genres of writing that have most readily been labeled “realist.”⁴⁶ Some such operation pervades any narrative where communication depends on the possibility of recognition, even if this takes place through imaginatively heightened and unconventional figuration, rather than through seemingly transparent representations of a world familiar in everyday terms.⁴⁷ The scenes of Amata’s madness encapsulate the thought that some wild excess always potentially lurks in the process of perceiving the world through metaphor-based imaginings, whether those figurative structures are consciously interpreted, or remain a largely unobserved mode of cognition. This is *not* to say that metaphors make one mad. Rather the poem suggests that the analogical basis of cognitive processes makes an entry point for a certain level of disorder even in the usual activities of the mind. Analogies help us order our experience, as we decide “what goes with what,” and in what sense “this” is “that.”

But the process of assimilating new experience to existing perceptions allows newly imagined and sometimes discordant “thats” to blend with our perceptions of “this.” The poetics of the *Aeneid* unite its generic logic (the ordered excess of *fama* and *fata*) with the way it imagines human perception, by presenting this cognitive dissonance as integral to human experience, as much as—or more than—a literary device.⁴⁸ The *Aeneid* links this figurative excess with two important components of its generic self-definition.

46. This book focuses on fiction, but of course the epistemological questions raised by processes of figuration have been explored in a much wider variety of narratives. (De Man 1978 is an influential example of a deconstructive approach to tropology in philosophical writing.) Hayden White’s essay “Auerbach’s Literary History” (1996) is especially pertinent both to Feeney’s and my own questions about how to historicize problems of cognition in relation to realist expectations. White argues that “Auerbach tends to present the text as a representation not so much of its social, political, and economic milieus as of its author’s experience of those milieus; and as such, the text appears or is presented as a fulfillment of a figure of this experience” (92). Noting that “Auerbach historicizes historicism itself in the same way that he historicizes realism” (97), White observes that “Auerbach is quite explicit in characterizing modernism as a kind of fulfillment of rather than as a reaction to earlier realisms” (99).

47. See Laird 1999, 157. Emphasizing the relevance of theories of realism to the *Aeneid*, Laird suggests that “epic may not only be seen as a type of discourse, but also as a way of configuring the world.”

48. In this sense the poetics of the *Aeneid* may provide a view of metaphor and perception that has a lot in common with the analysis of perceptual blending given by Mark Turner in *The Literary Mind* (1996, especially chap. 6, “Many Spaces,” 85–115).

One is its expression of *furor* as one of the forces that sustain the memory-networks of *pietas* and *fama*. Another is its imagining of divine power as realized partly through different aspects of rhetoric—through words, images, thoughts—which express and feed feelings of powerlessness, grief, anger, love, and the other emotions which motivate both these forms of memory.