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A Latin Lover in Ancient Rome

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CHAPTER 2

AENEAS IN LOVE

But for me, as an amorous subject, everything that is near, everything that disturbs is received not as a fact, but in the aspect of a sign that must be interpreted.

—Barthes, *Discourse*, 66

But in fact Werther is not perverse, he is in love: he creates meaning, always and everywhere out of nothing, and it is meaning that thrills him: he is in the crucible of meaning.

—Barthes, *Discourse*, 67



AENEAS, FOR REASONS that may seem so obvious as to require no comment, is not widely celebrated as a Latin lover, but he is deeply implicated in the network of erotic fashions that developed in the last days of Rome's republic. Therefore, before we turn to Propertius and his Cynthia, it might be worthwhile to examine how and why Aeneas fell victim to an ideology so alien to his character and to the poetic project, high epic, that his creator intended him to serve, indeed, to incarnate. To suggest that Aeneas is an elegiac lover would clearly overshoot the mark, but to entertain the idea that he was inevitably—if unsuccessfully—conscripted by the erotic ideology that flourished during the years of his production is perhaps feasible. Numerous readers, including those who support the notion that the *Aeneid* is first and foremost a celebration of the Augustan Empire, have had no difficulty—once Dido is equated with Cleopatra—in reading him as a sort of reluctant and temporary Antony. And Antony, as Cicero was among the first to notice, was nothing if not a living emblem of what would come to be seen as the elegy's erotic imperative. Before I discuss the ways in which Aeneas/Antony strikes me as a vivid representation of the elegiac ideal, I need to review some of the literary

materials from which he and his Dido were manufactured. And before I do that, in an effort to provide an alternative to the fashionable model furnished us by Lacan's reworkings of Freud, I want to look at another model, one that seems to me to shed a more compatible light on the erotics of Propertius and the genre he perfected.¹

Not only does 'love' mean different things in different times and different places, but it can also mean different things at different times to the same person. The spectrum of its myriad connotations is baffling, and the gradations between the points that constitute its poles (for example, Christian agape vs. bestial lust) are subtle and at times barely perceptible. In his impressive, still influential study, *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont solves the problem that haunts this erotic spectrum by turning to history, where he discovers a deadly virus that arose from the fusion of Manichean beliefs and the poetry of Provence and that thereafter burgeoned into a plague which inflicted itself on European literature and European societies and which continues to damage the modern psyche and contributes hugely to the 'breakdown of marriage' (17, 275–79, 291–96). This version of passionate love (supremely incarnated by Tristan) is grounded in a radical distrust of the goodness of life; in a powerful antipathy toward monogamy and family life; in an overwhelming appetite for adultery; and, at its core, in an irresistible death wish. In a more recent study, one that eschews a historical solution, the authors of *A General Theory of Love* agree with de Rougemont about the virtues of successful marriage and are especially eloquent about the dangers that currently threaten it (Lewis et al., 204–9). But they offer a fascinating description of how the erotic identity is constructed and how it functions in all humans at every time and in every place. This perspective is, to my mind, possessed of greater explanatory power than those offered by de Rougemont or by various reformulations of the Family Romance. Briefly, what this general theory accounts for is the manner in which, acting for the most part independently of its rational (neocortical) counterpart, the emotional (limbic) portion of the human brain encodes changing patterns of erotic expectation and response as it encounters new erotic stimuli, thus fabricating the individual's erotic identity (113–44). In this version of how Eros behaves, the formation and activities of obsessive, irrational Love become, as nearly as possible, intelligible and cures for it become feasible (163–82). Aeneas may end

1. For an incisive analysis of the "inconsistencies and fallacies" of the Lacanian oeuvre, see Evans.

by desiring such a cure, but Marc Antony and Propertius will have none of it. They inhabit the realm they share with the splendid maniac who is the voice of Tennyson's *Maud*, Albertine's compulsive ruminator, and, in recent times, the definitive expert in these matters, Humbert Humbert. The joys and calamities produced by their limbic brains meet with an unscientific yet eminently lucid analyst in Stendhal.

THE CRYSTAL BOUGH

Stendhal's *On Love* is a strange farrago of often obscure anecdotes, savage travel writing, witty anthropology, and up-close and personal meditations on sex and passion. It breathes some of the same air as Rabelais, Montaigne, and Voltaire, it gives off now and then a strong Cartesian scent, and it is drenched in a potent concoction of High Romantic mentality. It was Stendhal's favorite among all the books he authored, but it has not been successfully exported to Anglo-Saxon climes. It has no central narrative, moreover, and it is by turns lushly mystical and antiseptically clinical. It mercilessly dissects domesticated romance of the Valentine's Day variety, and, prefiguring Proust, it canonizes the blissfully, incurably crazed erotic subject who has the luck and the misfortune to fall hopelessly in love. In American culture its best analogue is perhaps the central *donnée* of Country and Western music (e.g., "You grabbed my heart right outta my chest / And you stomped on it up and down—/ But, Honey, I'm still your man"), the sort of song which ends with the loving madman speeding off in his pickup, rifle at the ready, to shoot his rival, his sweetheart, and probably himself. Stendhal examines every variety of erotic behavior he can think of, every style of lusting and loving he has felt, witnessed, or heard about. But what interests him most, because it all but devoured him and because it kindled and continued to fuel his authorship, is the love that demands the lover's entire waking and sleeping existence, that transforms his identity, and stains his consciousness with its own dye even as it enlarges his very being and clarifies it. This fatal commitment, this determination to risk and sacrifice one's all, is what is meant by a 'consuming passion' (it is not what St. Augustine cleverly trivializes when he condemns himself for having been "in love with love," *amare amabam*, *Confessions* 1.31). This grand, sometimes fatal passion is what Stendhal's maddening, exhausting, and wonderful book is mainly about,

and that is why I have decided to use it as a theoretical template for my investigation of Propertius and his colleagues in erotic elegiacs.

Stendhal's essential gambit is deceptively simple. He insists that his readers face a fact that they know well but mostly choose to ignore: that the word 'love' is far more complex and far less precise than we are wont to admit. Accordingly, he takes up his scalpel and divides the word into four parts, four species of love, only one of which he deems truly worthy of the splendor that, when we are in the proper mood for it, we want the word to radiate. Stendhal's four kinds of love are as follows: 1) *l'amour-passion* (43), passionate love, exemplified by the Portuguese Nun and by Heloise (but not, note, by Abelard) as well as by a nameless gendarme and a nameless captain. (It is curious that Stendhal balances his famous females with two anonymous males, as if he could not, or was reluctant to, supply well-known masculine representatives of what, even in *that* modern, post-Werther era, usually was regarded as a primarily female condition or complaint.) The author himself, moreover, throughout his book, has no choice but to present himself as an expert in passionate love, and the book's subtext, which glimmers not very far from its surface, verifies that expertise: the author is clearly constructing his paradigm of Real Love, his analysis of its labyrinths, its illusions and its imposters, from his own encounters with his own obsession, his—but she never in the slightest became his—Méthilde Dembowska. 2) *l'amour goût* (43), which “flourished in Paris about 1769,” and is found in various “memoirs and novels of the period.” Lovers who are gifted or beset with this style of lovemaking enact a kind of fashionable, very public parody of what is thought of as the real thing (that is, Love): they follow an erotic script which is shaped by “the demands of etiquette, good taste and delicacy.” Whereas “passionate love carries us away against our real interests,” this café-society variety of eros never does; what matters here is good theater and a plausible, nuanced, and decorous imitation of sincere passion. 3) *l'amour-physique* (43), sheer carnality, called 'love' by the very shy or the very hypocritical. Stendhal describes it thusly: “You are out hunting, you come across a handsome peasant girl [*belle et fraîche paysanne*] who takes to her heels through the woods, and however desiccated or miserable [*sec et malheureux*] you may be, there is where your love begins when you are sixteen.” Pure animal spirits, then, casual, brief, serendipitous, utterly satisfying. It hardly deserves the connotations that 'lust' in the mouth of a puritan would confer on it, but Love it isn't either. Finally, there is 4) *l'amour de vanité* (43–44), vanity love. This imposter sometimes entails some sort of carnality, “but not always.”

Though Stendhal doesn't say so, vanity love sometimes resembles *l'amour goût* since often it will, apparently, also make its appearance in public places: the term trophy-beloved can perhaps capture what is at stake here: "the great majority of men, specially in France, both desire and possess a fashionable woman, much in the way that one might own a fine horse." As an example of such a 'lover' from the distaff side he cites a "pretty young woman from the Hague who was quite unable to resist the charm of anyone who happened to be a duke or a prince, but if a prince came her way while she was enamored of a duke, she fell for the prince (she was rather like an emblem of seniority in the diplomatic corps!)." This 'insipid' species of love gains a certain degree of authenticity when physical love becomes habitual and gives rise to "memories, which in turn produce something that resembles true, passionate love." When this state is reached, "the atmosphere of romantic fiction catches you by the throat, and you believe yourself love-sick and melancholy, for vanity will always pretend to be grand passion." But sometimes, through "habit or despair" vanity love turns into a "friendship of the least attractive sort, which will boast of its *stability*, and so on" (emphasis in original).

If one were to evaluate the four species of love and rank them in respect of their worth, clearly passionate love, which will dominate the rest of this book, would win hands down. It would be followed by physical love, which is as harmless as it is healthy (at least as Stendhal represents it here at the outset) and which does not claim to be or even to resemble passionate love. Somewhat below natural carnality would come mannered, fashionable love, which is artificial, insincere, trivial, and (for Stendhal and his kind) deadly boring. But it, too, has the virtue of a sort of sincerity: it is transparently disengaged from the genuine emotions that constitute passionate love, and there is probably something admirable to be found in its devotion to the disciplined enactment of its fantasies, in its strict adherence to the rules of its game. That leaves the last place to vanity love, which is a perversion of genuine love in that, in order to achieve its ambition, it does its best to be mistaken for the real thing.

True love, then, shares some attributes with these other erotic categories which dispute with it the name of love, but it distinguishes itself from them by virtue of its intensity, its durations, its total willingness, its need, to persist, to grow and thrive despite any and all rejections, despite its utter failure to achieve the consummation it craves (and in fact rejection and failure are close to being its life's blood). When

Stendhal is trying to sum up his preliminary analysis of these varieties of 'love' at the end of his first chapter, he is driven to confess that his fourfold schema is too crude even to gesture toward the myriad subspecies of eros: "one might as well admit eight or ten distinctions. There are perhaps as many ways of feeling as there are of seeing." He insists that "every variety of love mentioned henceforth is born, lives, dies or attains immortality according to the same laws" (44). This conclusion suggests that a certain equality obtains among these four species and their countless subspecies, all of which can then be subsumed under the single word, 'love.' This notion is exactly contrary to what Stendhal has been arguing as he carefully distinguishes the characteristics of his four major categories. In fact his second chapter is devoted to his famous doctrine of crystallization, an explanation of the origins and evolution of love that is truly suitable only for passionate love.

"Here is what happens in the soul," says Stendhal. The lover admires a woman and fantasizes about kissing her, his fantasies inspire him with hope that they might somehow become realities, he begins to think that this splendid creature might come to reciprocate his desire. This is the moment of the first crystallization. By which he means: In the mines at Salzburg, when a tree branch is tossed into the diggings and is recovered a few months later, it is found to have been transformed beyond recognition. Each of its twigs has been covered with glittering crystals, as if by an infinity of diamonds that shift and dazzle as the light hits them. For the lover, crystallization is a process that takes place in his mind, a process in which everything that happens to him, everything that he experiences, produces for him new evidence of his beloved's perfection.

The first crystallization clearly has no essential connection with physical love (beyond those imaginary kisses), nor will it really manifest itself in the operation of mannered love or vanity love. In these 'loves,' the 'lovers' may pretend or imagine that they have undergone something like crystallization, but they have not. In passionate love, however, the process, though it might seem to the skeptic to be an illusion, actually takes place: that is to say, the passionate lover does not pretend that his perception of the beloved (and his identity and consciousness along with it) has been transformed (like the crystal bough); he really does think of nothing else but her, wherever he goes, whatever he sees or hears. He does not fake his responses, nor does he delude himself when he discovers that his idea of the beloved is constantly enduring a sort of automatic exponential magnification (and dazzling clarification). The

physical lover will have no need of this elaborate mechanism in order to achieve the quick satisfaction he has in mind. The mannered lover is too interested in how he is doing (how he looks to his cultivated fellow players) to be worried about his feelings. And the vanity lover is not going to be dazzled or transformed by the value of the current trophy-prey he has fixed his sights on. These three categories of lover are immune to the doubt and anxiety that produce in the passionate lover a second crystallization, one in which, poised on a precipice, just in sight of the promised land, he finds himself “torn between doubt and delight” and “convinces himself that his beloved could give him such pleasure as he could find nowhere else on earth” (47) Only the passionate lover is consumed by these three ideas: 1) She is perfect; 2) she loves me; 3) how can I get the strongest proof of her love? After this first crystallization is complete, a second occurs: the passionate lover becomes subject to a dreadful moment when he realizes that he may in fact be mistaken about the truth of his passion or about the worth of his beloved, and he therefore decides that the crystal bough must be smashed to pieces, all his faith in the process of crystallization having been (temporarily) lost. But once this grave danger has passed and the second phase of crystallization is complete, this (true) love will persist (forever), for the lover knows that he must win the woman’s love or perish: the thought of life without her is intolerable; indeed, the very thought of such an existence is all but unthinkable. True (*véritable*) love (so Stendhal is now willing to call it, 96) “pervades the whole consciousness and fills it with pictures, some wildly happy, some hopeless, but all sublime; the love which blinds one to everything in the world.”

Thus, despite his careful mappings of the spectrum of erotic behavior, Stendhal insists that there is one variety of ‘love’ that surpasses all others in value, in authenticity. This kind of love (passionate, true, real) is *not*, no matter what the merchants of roses and candy would have us believe as February 14 approaches, universal, nor, apparently, is it all that common at any time, in any place (though we may firmly believe that it is because we have been trained to confuse it with one or another of the erotic behaviors that seem to resemble it).

Having invoked Stendhal’s help in approaching Propertius, it pains me to admit that he would doubtless disapprove of the use I am putting him to. For him, the kind of love he prizes came to Italy and to Provence from the Arabs by way of Moorish Spain (both its theory and its practice having been transported thence by music, poetry, lyric song; for a recent corroboration of his belief, see Goody, 125–26). Any

occurrence of passionate love in modern times must, for Stendhal, have its roots in that complex of sources: Arabia, Spain, Provence. Even in the nineteenth century, just as Romanticism is gathering full force, True Love was still rare, in Stendhal's view, outside Italy and Spain (for instance, in France, Germany, England, and America, the national temperaments throw up huge obstacles against its development). In ancient Greece, moreover, Homer was ignorant of it, and for Sappho eros was purely physical (though somehow rendered sublime in her poetry by a strange sort of crystallization she can't be bothered to ponder: fragments 35 and 36 in Sales' translation, 223). As for ancient Rome, Stendhal seems willing to allow something like True Love in the poetry of Vergil (he cites Dido and Corydon), and, as an afterthought, he gives the nod to Dido's primary model, the Medea of Apollonius' *Argonautica* (fragment 94 in Sales' translation, 242).

When Stendhal turns to Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid, he praises them for having "better taste than our poets" (by which he presumably has in mind what he regards as the deficiencies in form, restraint and clarity that he finds in the poetry of his Romantic contemporaries?), and he congratulates the Romans for showing "love as it could have existed among the proud citizens" of ancient Rome. He seems to feel that Augustus subverted the erotic program of these poets when he sought to reduce (*ravaler*) Roman citizens to being mere subjects of his monarchy. Such an observation seems to suggest that these elegists had some experience with True Love and Real Passion, but as Stendhal continues his description of their poetry it turns out that the objects of their eros were "unfaithful and venal coquettes" from whom "they sought only physical pleasure, and I am inclined to believe that they never had an inkling of the sublime feelings which throbbed thirteen centuries later in the heart of tender Heloise" (236).

Stendhal then goes on to provide his readers with lively, not inaccurate sketches of the elegies of the three poets in question. Like Ovid, in his elegy for Tibullus, *Amores* 3.9, he is careful to ignore Tibullus' youthful male beloved, Maranthus, and, believing that Book 3 was written by the poet who wrote Books 1 and 2 (as was the received opinion in his time), he includes Neaera among Tibullus' "inconstant" female beloveds. In summing them all up, he awards first place (reasonably, to my mind) to Propertius' Cynthia (*parait la plus aimable*) "of all these women immortalized in the verse of the three great poets" (241). Charming she may be, and talented (for like the other elegiac ladies of her kind she knows how to sing, dance, and read poetry), but what

interested her most were fun, wine, and money, whereas what interested Propertius, what enslaved him to her, was sheer carnal hankerings. Like Tibullus and Ovid, he was, aside from his lovely verses, just another well-off gentleman lusting after expensive whores, and he misses by miles the real passion that Abelard (whom Stendhal fails to mention) so perfectly incarnates.

In the erotic paradigm that Stendhal finds unsatisfactory and that he is busily engaged in replacing with his paradigm of crystalline love, the Roman elegists had provided powerful support for the existence of a universal (or at least European) tradition of romantic love, one that extended from ancient Greece, through ancient Rome, through the (Latin) Middle Ages, down to modern times. By demoting the Roman exponents of such a tradition to ordinary whoremongers (with a genius for versifying), Stendhal seeks to confirm the validity of his fourfold scheme: these three famous, now notoriously lecherous poets convince us, by the counterexample they furnish, that Stendhal's category of physical love is not identical with passionate love; thus bereft of its Roman linchpin, the European erotic tradition must give way to the Arabian tradition that Stendhal champions. In his eyes that tradition is not strictly European, nor is it universal (he takes no interest in erotic models in India, China, or Japan). Moreover, to call it a tradition is misleading because, after its emigration to Moorish Spain, it shows little in the way of development or evolution. Instead, there are rare and random occurrences of passionate lovers in times and places that are conducive, or at least not hostile, to the appearance on the scene of someone like the man whose life and work and soul would be crystallized by the ravishing and indifferent Méthilde Dembowski.

In that man, erotic matter and erotic mind were in perfect balance, had somehow achieved a dialectical harmony in which each renewed and strengthened the other. This equilibrium contrasted starkly with other erotic modes in which such fortunate symbiosis was defective or absent. In mannered love erotic instinct was put in the service of an intellectual enjoyment that had little or no need of carnal consummations. An exact reversal of this equation is displayed in physical love, where qualities of mind or spirit find themselves banished along with any concern that might intrude on the body's sexual gratification. In vanity love the spirit and the flesh are involved only incidentally, that is, only in so far as they are needed to assist in the pursuit of the trophies that will slake the social climber's ambitions (no matter whether the trophy is a duchess or a ballerina, a king or an actor) or that will con-

firm the aristocrat's claim to being the best by his or her having the best (the loveliest chorine, the hunkiest fullback). Only in passionate love do flesh and spirit, body and soul, matter and mind, discover a union that is at once possible and ideal. Needless to say, this union does not always (or ever) produce what the world calls happiness. But the ecstasies and sorrows of true love are both sublime. They and the refulgent identities they confer have no need of mere happiness.

I have paraphrased and commented on Stendhal's paradigm at such length because its subtle demystifications (and remystifications) of Love remind us to exercise some caution when we use the (for him) sacred word that is constantly on our lips and in our ears, particularly when we are talking about something as remote (yet seemingly graspable) as Roman love elegy. It would be cumbersome perhaps to talk of lust poetry or to constantly find ourselves distinguishing poetry produced about amorous games played in high society (or the freshman quad) from poetry produced about status seekers who enlarge their egos and their reputations by seducing living status symbols. But better to nitpick than to lump all the styles of love poetry together.

In the case of the Roman love elegists, when attempting to distinguish Propertius from the other poets who wrote various kinds of love poems, I will be making use of something like the erotic spectrum designed by Stendhal. I will be arguing that in his poems something like the mechanics of crystallization can be observed. I don't mean that these poems record the poet's actual experience (though I'm not entirely sure we have any valid proofs that they in no way make use of aspects of his own erotic identity), but rather that they record, comment on, and critique the fashions in erotic behavior that I have sketched in my previous chapter.

ST. AUGUSTINE READS DIDO

Another reader, much earlier than Stendhal, also singled out Dido as an emblem of Passionate Love. Augustine was an exquisite close reader of poetic texts, and he was also a fervent and indefatigable investigator of erotic phenomena. He encountered Dido—as many of us have—in the classroom (*Confessions*, 1.13). Looking back on that encounter, he describes and passes judgment on the memories of his emotions when he engaged with her. Who can be more wretched,

Augustine asks himself, recalling the ignorant (and sinful) young reader that he had been. Who could be more miserable than a reader who bewailed the fate of Dido, she who died for the love of Aeneas, yet would shed not a tear for himself as he sat there dying for his want of loving God? Apparently this tearful lamentation took the form of a successful recitation, for even as he committed fornications against God by loving Dido too much and God not at all, his audience (teacher, fellow students) commended him with cries of *euge, euge*, bravo, bravo! Augustine does not, he continues, weep for this vile and complex sin, the shutting out of God, sorrowing for an erotic female suicide, basking like a ham actor in the adulation of his fellow sinners. Instead he weeps for Dido, who surrendered her life to Aeneas' phallic sword. But that is not the worst of this dreadful Dido business: at times when he was forbidden to read the *Aeneid* and other such books he grieved at being unable to peruse what caused him grief, that grief being his obsession with the sublime—and abysmal—erotics that mark his late adolescence and early manhood, the obsession for which Dido had presented him with a forceful, enduring, and cruelly seductive model.

In later years, when he is beginning to move toward God, Augustine will, paradoxically, shirk all his allegiance to the grand and fatal passions as they are represented by Dido (and, more obliquely, by Aeneas himself) and will instead content himself with embracing the grand renunciation of Aeneas. The nameless woman with whom he had lived for seven years (4.2) and who had borne him a son is finally sent packing (6.15). As his mother, St. Monica, sees it, his concubine is the real obstacle to the marriage she yearns for her too wayward son to contract with someone suitable, some decent Christian girl from the right background, of the proper social standing (and gifted with a decent bank account: this speculation, witty, malicious, and shrewd is that of West, 49). When Augustine first describes how this misalliance came into being, he suggests that his reason for choosing to take up with this woman was all but happenstance: she was a convenience he had stumbled on when searching for something to ease his itch. But out of the aftermath of his random lust there developed a surprising (and for St. Monica an irritating) monogamy, from which in turn was produced a son. Against all odds, he finds himself ensconced in something very like a loving wedlock with the woman who had taught him how to be a father.

St. Monica was not of the same mind. When she sends her son's common-law wife back where she came from ("she was torn from my side," *avulsa a latere meo*, 6.15; trans. Pine-Coffin, 131), Augustine

confesses that this “was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly,” *cor ubi adhaerebat, concisum et vulneratum mihi erat et trahebat sanguinem*. He does not leave her, then; rather, she, forced by her mother-in-law to leave him, goes back to Africa, alone, without her son, vowing never to give herself to another man. Augustine has no such strength of character and soon finds he cannot wait out the two years until his fiancée is ready to marry him. Not a lover of marriage but a slave to lust, he takes a new mistress, but this remedy proves useless. “The wound I had received when my mistress was wrenched away showed no sign of healing. At first the wound was sharp and searing, but then it began to fester, and though the pain was duller, there was all the less hope of a cure” (6.15).

Note here the fascinating ambiguity in Augustine’s medical imagery. The wound that cannot heal by sustained application of further fornication is, on one level, his propensity to lust, but, on another, deeper level, the wound is the wound of Dido: because “I loved her dearly.” The wound is lust, but it is also his banished, his murdered love. In regretting that he could not follow his beloved’s virtuous vow of chastity, he says, *at ego infelix nec feminae imitator*, “unhappy I, who had not the heart to imitate a woman” (6.15; in the charming translation by William Watts, 1631). But in a peculiar way, of course, he is imitating his mistress (and Dido) even as he finds himself in the awkward situation of Aeneas (a man who is also forced to give up the woman he loves for the sake of God’s plan and the city of God). To give up all for love, to yield oneself to another is (in ancient Greece and Rome) a female failing (or prerogative); the same behavior (or choice) in a man is effeminate. A real man must do the manly thing and accept, among many losses, the loss of the woman he loves (even as Aeneas did). But in his man’s body, Augustine bears a never-healing wound (never, until God’s love heals it), a woman’s kind of love. It was Dido who taught him, as she was to teach countless others through the centuries, that love, even, especially, luckless love, is forever.

In Augustine’s case (nor is his case all that rare), what began as lust ended as love. Very much of the power of Augustine’s memoirs of his journey to God derives from the honesty with which he portrays the violence of his sexual needs, and not a little of that power, in turn, is furnished by that peculiar transition from horny guy to sober, loving, almost-married man. Though Augustine himself might want to deny it, he passed, unconsciously, imperceptibly, from being a feckless addict of physical love to becoming an adult male blessed by passionate

monogamy (a category ignored by Stendhal, who regards it as something of an oxymoron, since in his eyes passion and marriage are incompatible goods). That was the saint's jagged progress toward earthly happiness until God and Monica rescued him from the path onto which Dido had helped divert him. But what concerns us here is that Augustine, this peculiar fusion of Dido and Aeneas, is among the earliest and best of Dido's close readers, reminding us, in unforgettable prose, of the role that Dido would play down through the ages, whenever poets and their readers set about reconfiguring the nature of passionate (reckless, lawless) love for themselves and their own times.

WHERE DIDO CAME FROM: PHAEDRA AND MEDEA

Before Dido there were countless legends (in Greek life and literature) of beautiful, passionate, faithful (and faithless) women. How did this Roman latecomer to the long catalogue of 'women in love' manage to command and keep the supreme rank Vergil obtained for her?

She was, in a very simple sense, in the right place at the right time. Vergil's epic concerns itself with the exploits of Aeneas, founding father of the Roman empire, but its core, its pervasive subtext, is the triumph of Augustus Caesar over his rivals, a victory that brought lasting peace to the world that Rome had conquered and that, in its later transformations, provided Christian Europe with some of its most essential ideologies. Vergil and his Augustus were lucky to have found one another, the one having been inspired (or coerced) by a monumental topic, the other, perhaps the luckier of the two, having been blessed with the arrival of a monumental poet. Dido and her love story found themselves, then, in a poem that bore witness to a crucial hinge of European history, and they hitched a ride with Vergil's world-historical epic, a poem destined to endure through the centuries, as heirs of Augustus, the kings and popes who patterned their reigns on his, saw to it that the guardians of language and culture kept the *Aeneid* at the center of their curricula and their endeavors. Bad example though she was as a spectacular advertisement for the glamorous subversion of erotic taboos (a fact that did not escape the notice of young Christopher Marlowe), Dido was part and parcel of the imperial manifesto. As long as rulers offered Aeneas and Augustus as their warrants for power, the ruined queen would continue

to represent the dangers (and exaltations) of loves that were illicit and attractive in equal measure.

Before Vergil got hold of her, Dido was no more than a name from an obscure, all but mythical moment in the history of Carthage. Neither myth nor history provided her with any of the vitality that Vergil was to endow her with. Much of that vitality he borrowed from the Medea of Apollonius' *Argonautica*; she in turn had lifted some of her intensity and some of her conflicted self-scrutiny from the Phaedra of Euripides. Or from some of his other erotic heroines (whom Aristophanes sniggers at in his *Frogs*, 849f., 1042f.), all but a few of whom have disappeared, leaving behind them little more than their names. What we do know is that in Phaedra, grievously and fatally smitten with her stepson, Hippolytus, we encounter a woman who displays something new in Greek literature.

What was new about Phaedra? The Helen of the *Iliad* is the disenchanted victim of a passion whose destructive powers she became the instrument of, whose sinister influence she knows well and loathes. In her great scene in Book 3 (379–417), when she attempts to withstand the force of Aphrodite's will even as we see her succumbing to it, she mirrors, in her shame and confusion, the strong disapproval that her elopement with Paris has occasioned both in the city she left behind and in the city to which Paris has brought her. What she has met with is the insuperable force that Sophocles describes in his Fragment 94: Cypris, Aphrodite, mother of Eros, a power and a presence ubiquitous throughout the world of nature, an entity that appears in many disguises, has many names (Hell, immortality, insanity, unmitigated lust); she eats at the innards of anything that breathes, fish in the sea, animals on dry land, even the gods in heaven; she is truly omnipresent and omnipotent; she is beyond good and evil. That is the pitiless power that takes hold of Helen. Yet when we encounter her later in the *Odyssey*, back home in Sparta, safe and contented, her shame now all but vanished, she mentions the goddess' intrusion into her life (long ago) almost in passing, a sort of charming footnote to her story, her adventures abroad. The goddess Calypso (*Odyssey* 5.118–44) gives no evidence of being ashamed of her love for the hero whom Zeus forces her to let go of. She grieves at his going, but quickly assents to Zeus' commands, helps her lover prepare for his departure and sends him, almost serenely, on his way. But dispossessed of her will, forced to return to the bed of Paris by Aphrodite, what the *Iliad's* Helen feels is impotence and shame; what she does not feel is guilt.

The feelings and thoughts she may have had as she left Sparta for Troy Homer leaves unrepresented. The speech or scene that would have represented Helen in that crucial moment of her existence is merely a transparent backstory in the *Iliad*, and beyond that such a speech or scene was alien to Homer's art and to his audience's interests. Helen had done a bad thing, a thing of which she was (quite properly) ashamed (bad but perfectly comprehensible: a goddess made her do it). What she had thought or felt while doing the bad thing (whatever qualms or hesitations might have flickered through her mind as Paris unfurled the sails of their loveship) was beside the point, uninteresting, irrelevant.

The scene that is missing from Homer turns up, magnified and magnificent, in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. For just over four hundred lines (121–534) Euripides not only dramatizes the grim dilemma confronting Phaedra (she has fallen in love with her stepson), but he also contrives to put us inside the workings of her mind at the same time as we are watching her as she tries to communicate with (and escape from) the world outside her (the Nurse, the Chorus). We are able to see her, then, from without and from within. This means that we can steadily understand (and feel) her conflicts from her perspective (until, as the play progresses to its catastrophe, the sufferings of Theseus and Hippolytus compel us to add their perspectives to hers). Loving her stepson (more than a stepmother should) means, if she cannot shake this passion from her, the ruin of her own life, of the lives around her, and, probably of the realm whose queen she is. Phaedra feels shame about the situation she finds herself in, to be sure, but she feels other emotions as well, and it is her complex and brave struggle to work through that mess of incompatible needs, desires, and values that makes her so suitable a pattern for Dido.

When we first encounter her, Phaedra is speaking (and singing and dancing?) a lyric poem about her desire to join her stepson as companion, to hunt out in the pure, natural, green world where, ardent devotee of the chaste goddess of the hunt, Artemis, that he is, he hunts wild beasts. This lyric delirium (she is sleepless, she refuses food) allows Phaedra to displace—or try to—her forbidden lust with chaster, healthier desires (but of course she wants to be out there, in the unspoiled, unpeopled wilderness, alone, with the object of her affections: a complex, oxymoronic sublimation that only the intricacies of lyric song can permit her to attempt). When she wakes from her delirium the Nurse and the Chorus, anxious for what seems to them a severe sickness, try to question her as to its causes. Phaedra attempts to fend off these questions,

but she finally allows the Nurse to squeeze the unspeakable truth out of her. Then commences her effort to ‘explain’ to the Nurse and the Chorus (and herself) the causes of her sickness and to speculate on its progress and its possible remedies. But before she offers them a lengthy summary of the intellectual probings that have issued in her decision to kill herself (373–440), while still trying to evade the Nurse’s interrogations, she says a curious thing. The Nurse, by now suspecting that Phaedra may be guilty of some terrible crime, asks her: “But, my child, your hands—your hands are not stained with blood?” (316). Phaedra’s answer is famously ironic and somewhat obscure: “My hands are clean, but my *phren* (my heart, my mind, my reason: my bodysoul) has been polluted” (with worse than blood). This may not yet be the language of guilt (Europe would have to wait for Christians to supply it with that addition to its moral toolkit in its perfected form), but it is not the language of shame either. (Compare this moment with a similar one, *Orestes*, 396, where the hero fumbles to invent the idea of ‘conscience,’ *sunesis*—and with it the idea of guilt—as he tries to explain to his uncle how he feels about killing his mother.)

Phaedra has not yet done anything wrong (had she done so and it had got about, her feeling shame would be inevitable). But she still feels as if she had done the bad thing and she is fearful that she will do it. Furthermore, she does not live in Helen’s world (or Sappho’s where Aphrodite, though still terrifying, can be supplicated to become one’s ‘ally’ in the bittersweet battle of love²). Or rather, she thinks she doesn’t live in Helen’s world. She thinks she lives in a rational society where good women make rational choices and know how to keep their instincts strictly under control. In other words, Phaedra thinks that she has real choices that she can really make (good ones, bad ones), and she feels that she has the capacity to make the good (right) choice. But she also thinks (she *knows*) that “we mortals understand and know what is good and proper, but we don’t succeed in doing what we know we should do” (380–81). She proceeds to offer an elaborate, rather messy, and unconvincing explanation for this general failure of rational humans to put their knowledge at the service of their behavior. She wants to sleep with her stepson, and she knows that she mustn’t (shouldn’t), and she also knows that unless something stops her she will probably try to do just that.

2. See Goff’s elegant sketch of Greek erotic theory for this period in Greek culture, 28–29.

What Phaedra—she who prizes rational morality so highly—doesn't know is that she does in fact live in the same world that Helen (and Sappho) lived in, the exhilarating and perilous world in which Aphrodite and her son Eros were, at many times and in all places, the most powerful of gods. She doesn't understand that the rational morality she reveres and trusts in is essentially illusory when Aphrodite enters the equation.³ In this tragedy Aphrodite is even scarier than she was in the *Iliad*. In the tragedy's opening speech the goddess reveals her plan to punish the puritanical stepson for dishonoring her (while overvaluing her rival, Artemis) and, using an economy of effort, she has decided to force Phaedra to accomplish her vengeful design. Though Phaedra worships her and has even built a temple for her, and though Aphrodite herself feels rather friendly to Phaedra, she does not care enough for her to exempt her from the ruin she is about to inflict on Hippolytus.

Ignorant of what Aphrodite has done to her, Phaedra nevertheless has more than an inkling that her passion for Hippolytus will occasion some sort of ruin for her or others whether she acts on it or not. In order to ward off that ruin or to mitigate it she had pondered several solutions to her 'problem' (391–402): 1) to keep silent about it; 2) to master it through self-discipline; 3) to kill herself. The first solution she dismisses because she sees that it doesn't help, indeed it aggravates, the mental torment her passion causes her. The second solution (another attempt at repression) is dropped because she has learned through bitter experience that she is wholly incapable of such self-reform. The third, suicide, is all that is left to her. And that is why she has embarked on self-starvation. All these remedies have been examined, Phaedra says, with an eye to keeping her good name good, for she would, she claims, be overwhelmed with shame if her secret should get out. Many of her readers seem take her at her word, finding that her reputation is more important to her than her chastity. But Phaedra's worries are manifold. It bothers her that she is the daughter of Pasiphae, who mated with a bull, and that she may therefore be, like her mother, inclined (inevitably) to illicit couplings. She frets about what will happen to the children she bore to her husband, Theseus (she doesn't want them to share her punishment or her shame or to be somehow denied their royal prerogatives). Given all these worries, no wonder she has elected self-extinction.

3. For a different, interesting reading of Phaedra's self-deceptions, see Hartigan, 44–51, 67.

But what makes Phaedra argue with herself (and try to explain herself to the world) is the guilt she feels for a passion that frightens her, sickens her, and exalts her. And something else rankles, deeper than shame or maternal anxieties or concerns for the body politic or even guilt. She cannot give up the idea of loving (and being loved by) her stepson. When the Nurse offers her the alternative to the suicide that would preserve her reputation (whether it is a love charm to drug the young man into submission or a remedy for Phaedra's sickness is unclear), after a brief effort to stop her, Phaedra lets her Nurse go off in order to carry out her fatal scheme. Torn, shredded by her conflicts with world, self, and a power she cannot comprehend, Phaedra wants to live and love in spite of everything that tells her she must not. Her excruciating self-analysis reveals the anomalies and the ferocious power of the erotic imperative more fully and more forcefully than anything that had gone before it. It is ready for Dido, but not quite.

Part elegantly condensed epic, part witty burlesque of Homer and of a recently expired, no longer feasible heroic genre, the *Argonautica* presents us with a teenage girl who, struck by an arrow from the bow of Eros, falls in love with Jason, a gorgeous, bumbling young man who has voyaged to her country to fetch the Golden Fleece and take it back with him to Greece. Medea's dilemma, her need to choose between filial devotion to her father, the king, and her new passion (if she uses her witchcraft to aid her feckless lover get hold of the fleece, she must defy her father), is compounded by her total inexperience in matters erotic. Much of the fascination and verisimilar power of Apollonius' portrait of the conflicted young virgin in love derives from how he converts her initial naïveté, through carefully modulated stages, into the final clarities of her self-awareness when she claims her beloved and betrays her father. Her wounding by the love god Eros, which is depicted with a deft artifice that calls emphatic attention to itself, is essentially a plot device conjured up from epical and mythological conventions. It does not explain Medea's passion; it merely sets it in narrative motion. The poet's main concern is with inventing a plausible psychological evolution of his inexperienced heroine's feelings—and her thoughts about her feelings. Once he has established the depth and intensity of her attraction to Jason and his masculine beauty (she has no interest in his mind—one thinks here perhaps of the Julie Brown song, "I Like 'Em Big and Stupid") what concerns Apollonius most is Medea's anxiety about filial devotion endangered by the idiocentric desire that threatens it. These desires are clearly erotic on the surface, but they are fueled by

needs at once more complex and more hidden than those that physical passion can account for.

As the narrative unfolds, as Medea flees her native land with Jason and the fleece, as she voyages away to Greece (finding it necessary, on the way, to murder, in a very nasty way, the brother who pursued her), it becomes ever more apparent that what Jason symbolizes to her is escape from her country and from parental authority. What Jason and Greece offer her is emigration from a barbarous backwater and entrance into a civilized society worthy of her intelligence and gifts. What leaving Colchis behind means to Medea is the promise of freedom and a new identity. This theme, in which the erotic merges into and is replaced by the desire, the need, for individuation, for freedom to become what one is, will become in the hands of Ovid a powerful meditation on the meaning of authentic selfhood. In the stories of Scylla, Medea, Byblis, and Myrrha, tragic though they are (except for Ovid's young Medea), a young woman's transgressive passion, though it ends by propelling her toward ruin, illumines for her the possibility of freedom and validates the truth, the rightness, of her desire. The erotic in these stories is revealed as being selfish, but at the same time it is approved of: it reveals the narrowness of a female's life in a patriarchal home and it gestures toward feminine (read, human) life somewhere (as yet undiscovered) outside, beyond, the patriarchal circumference.

These are the two chief literary sources for Vergil's portrait of a woman passionately in love (and one who meets the stringent criteria of Stendhal). Unlike Medea, Dido does not sail off with her beloved, alone, alienated from the society that had become too small for her. A queen in her own right, possessed of an independence and an authority that Phaedra lacks, she is nevertheless circumscribed by a patriarchal sign system that has grown too small for her and her desire.

CATULLUS AND ARIADNE (AND LESBIA AND JUVENTIUS AND MELEAGER)

Dido has one final forebear, one who stands for a class of 'lost ladies' from the poetic generation just before Vergil's, one of those 'neurotic' women in love (to use a now rather old-fashioned label that connotes well enough a quality crucial to this species of dysfunction which comprises the women, and the men, who appear in Parthenius' *Erotika*

Pathemata). A few decades before Dido, when Vergil was just emerging from adolescence, Catullus invented his Ariadne (poem 64). In passing, I must note that Stendhal doesn't include Catullus and his Ariadne among the Roman purveyors of erotic poetry, probably because, in his time, Catullus was only beginning to be thought of as a writer of love lyric. Until the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, the Renaissance model, which Stendhal would have been most familiar with, was firmly in place: Martial's Catullus, writer of epigrams, was acerbic, elegant, political, filthy. The fact that both Propertius and Ovid give him a prominent place, along with Calvus, in their list of elegiac models, was ignored by his readers from the time of his late medieval recovery down to the time when he was pried loose from the clutches of textual critics by Byron and the poets who followed his lead. Emphasizing Catullus' tender broken-heartedness, they began to trace the progress of his passion and his entire life from a handful of what they regarded as his lyric effusions.⁴ Only once the hierophants of the Higher Criticism have lost their prey do Ariadne and her erotic sufferings begin to take stage center, where she will remain, even after Romantic Catullus and his opaque life story begin yielding to Alexandrian Catullus, the art-for-art's-sake poetic dandy who, in his metapoetic incarnation, still fascinates us.

Ariadne, abandoned by her treacherous lover, Theseus, whom she had saved from the Minotaur in the fatal labyrinth, is allotted sixty-nine shimmering verses, about a third of the poem (64) whose center she is. In these verses she declaims (to no one in particular) the depth of the despair into which her perjured passion has made her plummet. Unlike Dido, she is less a representation of a human female caught in extreme circumstances than a richly mannered, exquisitely crafted composition of *topoi* that suit what the kind of woman in this kind of situation would say. What she did for Vergil was to provide him with a superb pattern for what this new kind of (operatic) tirade should sound like when fitted to the new style of 'modern' Latin verse. When Vergil had perfected the verse form Ariadne used, given it greater polish, more fluency, a subtler register, what she says and how she says it could easily be purloined by his Dido.⁵

4. For the pre-romantic Catullus, see Gaiser, *passim*; for a thorough defabrication of 'tender' Catullus, one that focuses on his talent for macho invective, see Wray, *passim*; for Byron and the nineteenth century Lesbia, see Vance, 115–18; see also Arkins 2007, 461–78.

5. For the erotic significance of Catullus' other long poems, see Skinner 1997 and Johnson 2007, 183–86, 188.

Catullus' Lesbia, on the other hand, famous though she is as erotic icon, is of little help to Dido. For us Lesbia is, as she has been for two centuries, a beguiling image, the more seductive for being so evasive, so indistinct, of the femme fatale. Helped by the lingering gossip that identified her with Clodia, the aristocratic lady notorious by virtue of Cicero's indelible malice, for Vergil's contemporaries Lesbia was, except perhaps her evocation in the haunting poem 68, mostly a creature of epigram, a female charming and vitriolic by turns, one whom they recreated—as we do—out of the emotions that the poet represented himself as suffering or enjoying because of her whims and moods. Lesbia doesn't talk in Catullus' poems, she doesn't act, she figures only obliquely in scenes that suggest an indistinct story, though many of us can't resist evoking sturdier narratives for her to stride or saunter through. We do this because we want her to make a narrative for Catullus to inhabit along with her, because we want those poems to gather themselves up into a satisfying unity, thus helping to rescue Catullus' poems from what seems the botched, random ordering of the text we have. That decomposition, paradoxically, is part of their charm, for they seem such vivid slices of *la vie romaine*, so persistently and ostentatiously 'in the moment'—rather like the snapshots offered by Frank O'Hara of cosmopolitan life in New York City and its version of Hollywood.⁶ But when we read and reread them, we strive to find the pattern they seem bent on hiding, and such efforts provide us with a sort of entertainment beyond that offered by the poems themselves. Lesbia has, in short, no depth to her, she is at least as vague (and addictive) as Marcel's Albertine, and therefore, because she has no story, because we have no notion whatever of *her* perspective on Catullus, she gives Dido no help, because, in a sense, Dido is all story, all stream-of-(un)consciousness. In large measure, though they may have ignored his long poems unfairly, Renaissance readers were correct in assessing where his center lay. If you set aside the long poems and concentrate at their beginning and their end, what Catullus writes is a sort of *vers de société*. What that means is, when he is not producing pictures of the passing scene or commenting on poetry or politics but is instead talking of love, he is, erotically speaking, essentially a poet of *amour de goût* and *amour de vanité*. And that means that, even for a well-bred, well-heeled young man from the provinces Clodia was the most glittering of trophy-mistresses, a very top prize

6. For a stimulating commentary on the poems, see Le Sueur's eyewitness account of their contexts and their composition.

in the game of love as it was being played just as Caesar and Pompey were getting ready to square off against each other, just as a teenage Gallus was reading Catullus and Calvus and dreaming of someone like Volumnia/Cytheris, who would presently become his Lycoris, his toy, his trophy and his *vita mea*.

Still less helpful to Dido than Lesbia was Catullus' Juventius. The poems to and about Juventius transform their Greek models (about beloved boys) by making the beloved in question, Juventius, a Roman citizen, a young man about to become an adult citizen. If the poet's adolescent erotic (penetrated) partner had been a slave or a foreigner, there would have been no transgression of the Roman code. Juventius, however, is not Greek, not a slave, but a Roman, perhaps from a distinguished family, and he is, such is the play on his name, in possession of, or about to be in possession of, a beard. What these poems said to Catullus' contemporary male readers is: "I'm going to screw your son—in fact, we're already lovers, just the way the great Greeks of ages past were lovers (and as today's Greeks still are). He may seem a bit young for this sort of thing, but that's better than if he were a bit older, when you come to think of it. I know this relationship—my fervent attraction to your son, a Roman male on the verge of becoming an adult Roman male—may strike you as surprising, even as shocking, but it's a new style of living and loving that's just come to town. It's probably here to stay. Get used to it."

How fashionable it was in fact (or not) is unknowable and, for our purposes, beside the point. But by the time that Catullus and his poetic companions had come on the scene, Meleager's delicate, erotic emphasis on inwardness and rapturous union with the beloved and applicable to love objects of either sex, was ready waiting for them.⁷ In its same-sexual guise, this borrowing from Greek culture (and Alexandrian poetics) has become so visible that (as we saw in Cicero's attacks on Antony) it has become part of the common erotic repertoire and figures prominently in both Horace and Tibullus (but it is worth noting that both Propertius and Ovid will acknowledge, almost apologetically, that they are not smitten with boys). In Catullus, however, the delicacy that tends to grace Meleager's pederastic love epigrams, its penchant for soulfulness, gives way to something edgier, more purely carnal. Catullus' poems to and about Juventius depict not so much desire as jealousy; he seems as much

7. See the subtle and precise readings of Meleager and his predecessors by Garrison, especially 74–87.

interested in competing for Juventius as he is in possessing him.⁸ This gentler side of pederasty, which Catullus ignores and Meleager refines, owes something perhaps to Plato's charming cartoon in the *Symposium*, where lovers learn to lessen their lechings in order to fatten their spirits, but it is taken very seriously by Aristotle when he uses same-sex sexual devotion as an example of what best defines the intensity and the rarity of true friendships: "Presumably . . . it is not well to seek out to have as many friends as possible, but as many as are enough for the purpose of living together; for it would seem impossible to be a great friend to many people. This is why one cannot love many people; love is ideally a sort of excess of friendship, and that can only be felt toward one person; therefore great friendship can only be felt towards a few people" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 9.10; 1171a; trans. Ross). Aristotle then proceeds to remark that "the famous friendships of this sort are always between two people."

The species of super-friendship that Aristotle describes, its all-consuming intensities and its tenderness, was ignored by Catullus when he imported pederasty into the repertoire of Roman poetry. But, tinged with some of Meleager's delicate yearning for erotic harmony, it found its perfect (and incongruous) poetic incarnation in Vergil's muted celebration of the Roman Empire. His Nisus and Euryalus, the feckless young warriors who rush off into the night to seize glory only to discover their shared doom, are nothing if not fervent in their commitment to one another. Same-sex passion has seldom enjoyed a more successful artistic representation than the one that the poet of the *Aeneid* bestows on it when he provides it with the glamorous (and sentimental) catastrophe that these lovers disappear into. But doomed though they are, their love is not anguished or unrequited. In this they differ emphatically from the other men or women in love whom Vergil imagines.

CORYDON (AND GALLUS)

The poet who created Dido knew a lot about thwarted or unrequited love (which is probably why Stendhal singles him out from all the ancients, except for Apollonius and his Medea). When I say that he *knew* about such love I don't mean to imply that such knowledge came to

8. See Arkins 1982, 107; Wray, 73.

him from his personal experience of which we know, aside from gossip we cannot trust, nothing. Poets tend to get much of what they know from other poets whose work they are always pillaging and hoping to improve on—such is that blend of theft and rivalry that perhaps best defines the poetic career. Having granted all that, one is left with the fact that Vergil is remarkably fascinated with those who are unlucky in love and is also remarkably skillful in portraying such lovers. He likes to depict, he likes to imagine, what it feels like to lose what one loves; he likes to contemplate, to meditate on, what it is like to put all one's eggs in the erotic basket, and then to drop that basket or have it snatched out of one's hands (a situation whose significance Dryden cleverly italicized when he revised Shakespeare's sublime version of Antony and Cleopatra as *All for Love, Or The World Well Lost*). Dido is the greatest of Vergil's creations in this mode, but she has predecessors and analogues elsewhere in his poetry, and these are worth a brief glance before we try summing her up, before we attempt to evaluate how she and her beloved reflect both the social milieu in which they appeared and the elegiac project to which they contributed some of their torment and their sparkle.

As we saw, Stendhal eschews notice of Corydon's sexual preference. He ignores the fact that Corydon's model, Theocritus' Polyphemus (*Idyll* 11), is straight. Vergil's shift in the sex of his obsession intensifies the erotic suffering that the original captures so artfully by adding transgression (Romanly speaking) to what was sufficiently bizarre: excessive grief over sexual frustration is funny in the Greek version where the monster's naive misunderstanding of his severe handicaps in the game of love provides his laments with a charming dissonance since we feel for him even as we smile at his delusions and his plight. In Eclogue 2, though we are manipulated into feeling some empathy for poor Corydon, we are aware that his complaints issue from a situation that is not only *contra mores* (real men are not supposed to get that upset over a mere turn-down since there are plenty more where that came from) but also *contra naturam* since Roman men don't screw that way, romantically rather than lustfully (the names and the genre are Greek, but the language is Latin and the puritan codes embedded in it are Roman). Some readers may not feel pity for Corydon, but few will mock his desperation. His excess is irremediable, and his anxiety seems likely to push him steadily toward despair. Polyphemus will probably never quite give up hope of someday being loved by some girl, hopeless though his present case may be. But we don't believe Corydon when he echoes Polyphemus' brave trust in the future: when he cries out, *invenies alium*,

si te hic fastidit, Alexim, “You will find another Alexis if this one scorns you.” Corydon’s monologue, unlike its model, has no framing narrator to insist that, whatever Polyphemus’ future luck with the ladies may be, his song, his poetry, brought him relief no money could buy. But Corydon’s song, or his tirade, does not put an end to his pain. The line we most remember from his poem is not the final one in which he states his impossible dream (another Alexis), but his cry of anguish four lines before: *a, Corydon, Corydon, quae te dementia cepit*, “O Corydon, Corydon, what madness has taken over you?” He looks about him and sees that his work—and his life—is undone. His love is transgressive (in Rome), and that transgression, instead of liberating him from a meaningless, banal existence (which is the promise of the elegiac ideology), has ruined what life he had and left him in despair. He has all the grief of crystallization, and none of its rewards. In his intensity, his isolation, his obsession, he foreshadows not a little of what Dido will perfect.

Another literary ingredient in the concoction from which Dido will be distilled is the figure of Gallus, as he appears in Vergil’s Eclogue 10, the poem that provides his pastorals with their valedictory closure. Judging from the next to nothing we have, Gallus is the pivotal figure in the evolution of the genre, the forms and feelings, of Roman love elegy.⁹ Taking what he needed from Catullus and Calvus, and combining those materials with the themes and emotions that he found in Parthenius’ little collection of tales of miserable love affairs, he constructed around his beloved Lycoris (who figured so prominently in our previous chapter) a series of poems (very probably not designed as a chronological narrative) in which the spectrum of a lover’s experience (from splendor to misery) with a beautiful woman who was as desirable as she was capricious and unkind. This production becomes the model for the poets who take up the genre a half-generation later, in the 20’s BCE, just as Gallus, taking a holiday from poetry, goes off to Egypt on the emperor’s business and manages (the details here present a tantalizing blank) to make so much of a mess of his career that he decides, perhaps at the emperor’s suggestion, to fall on his sword rather than return to Rome and explain himself.¹⁰ In the poem that Vergil shapes around him, he is still an elegiac love poet of mythic stature, suddenly transported from the gaudy, bawdy city where elegy thrives best to Vergil’s version of the pastoral landscape, where shepherds bewail their amorous misfortunes

9. See the helpful discussion by Crowther, 1639–44.

10. See Dettenhofer, 93–95; Janan, 51–52.

sweetly. So an elegant pastiche of Gallus' complaint to Lycoris is transformed into pastoral measures, with pastoral pictures and pastoral moods to fill them. The result is a delightful, delicately amusing evocation of the elegiac project and the erotic delights and erotic anxieties that sustain it. Gallus, the warrior-lover, becomes a creature of complex artifice, one that his creator both admires and adoringly mocks. When he ends his plaint with the famous *omnia vincit amor, et nos cedamus amori*, 69 ("Love conquers all things, and let us also surrender to Love"), we don't quite believe the solace that the warrior's capitulation offers himself and us, but we have a strong sense of the ideal, the anxious ideal, of self-abnegation that Roman elegy is rooted in (anxious, because men, Roman men, and Roman soldiers in particular, are not supposed to surrender themselves to anyone, least of all women). But if we are not persuaded by Gallus' concluding testament, we feel more confidence in Vergil's own admission which follows immediately on Gallus' final word. Vergil has been writing this poem (and perhaps this entire collection) for Gallus, for his approval, perhaps as a kind of love gift (for which, see Johnson 1984):

haec sat erit, divae, vestrum cecinisse poetam
 dum sedet et gracili fiscellam texit hibisco,
 Pierides. vos haec facietis maxima Gallo,
 Gallo, cuius amor tantum mihi crescit in horas,
 quantum vere novo viridis se subiecit alnus.

For the time being, Holy Muses, it will be
 Sufficient that I, your poet, have sung these
 Verses as I sat here, weaving from delicate hibiscus
 This little basket. And these verses you will make
 Splendid for Gallus, for Gallus whom I hourly
 Grow to love as surely as the green alder begins
 Its flourishing with the coming of spring. (10.70–74)

The gift of the basket holding all these verses is small but exquisite. The poet begs the Muses to enlarge them in the eyes of Gallus, make them great, because Gallus is worthy of the love that grows (crystallizes) in the poet's mind, as surely as the world each spring grows green. Did Gallus return that love? We hardly know whether he did, or in what degree or in what kind. What we sense, though, is that the poet's love is so sure and so pure that it requires no reciprocation. That is a love well beyond, or at least different from, Dido's, of course, but perhaps there is, for all

its calm self-effacement, some hidden ache in it, a love that couldn't happen or be returned. (It is also hidden perhaps not far beneath the surface of Vergil's definitive retelling of the story of how Orpheus lost his Eurydice forever; this brilliant version of the primal poet's tragic loss was rumored to have replaced the celebration of Gallus which originally closed his fourth *Georgic*, a celebration that Gallus' contretemps with Augustus rendered impossible.) In any case, the theme and the tone, the undersongs, of this final eclogue signal that, against the grain of its pastoral genre, it is, like the poet-lover whom it addresses, at once a product and a reflection of the erotic fashion I have sketched in my first chapter. But, aside from the love elegies that represent that fashion more directly, it finds its most vivid and most unforgettable incarnation in the figure of Dido.

DIDO (AND AENEAS) IN LOVE

She passes every test that Stendhal could set for her, she embodies ScrySTALLIZATION. This perfection results from a complex configuration of several dissimilar ingredients. For one, she is the culmination (in antiquity) of the literary models that she borrows from; of these, those provided by Euripides and Apollonius are the most powerful, but she draws also on hints that Meleager, Catullus, and Calvus (and probably Gallus) offered her. Second, she is designed, to no inconsiderable extent, with her contemporary readers in mind, Roman men and women who know both her literary sources and who have some direct experience, in their own erotic encounters, of the erotic codes that she herself relies on. Finally, there is the question of her place (her somewhat anomalous, curiously central place) in an epic that uses Homeric forms to glorify Roman imperialism and the patriarchal virtues and values that called it into existence; a poem that contradicts, at every turn, her erotic identity, and that wants nothing so much as her annihilation. In this it succeeds, for of course she does away with herself—exactly as the poem's plot and Rome's destiny require her to do. But it also fails of its desire, because she has proved herself as forceful (and as perdurable) as the curses she hurls at Rome just before she takes hold of her lover's sword and climbs onto her funeral pyre. She bestows on the first third of Rome's national epic its heartbreaking and dazzling finale, and the concise acceleration of her story, through all its states of exaltation, anxiety, anger, and grief,

together with the severe elegance of its construction, gift the poem with perhaps its most finished, most satisfying section. Playwrights and composers (Marlowe and Purcell chief among them) are naturally attracted to *Aeneid* 4 because it begs for dramatic performance, and no other part of the poem better lends itself, even today, to being read aloud when Vergilians gather to share their poem with one another. We see much of the action of this book through Dido's eyes when we are not watching what she does or listening to what she says; and even when she does not stand at or near the primary perspective in any given episode, most of the rest of the book, like filings to a magnet, somehow envelopes her, until, finally, Book 4 entire, her book, seems something like her stream of consciousness, all the actions, scenes, and speeches that she is not party to, being somehow part of what she knows or feels. This aesthetic effect, our constant pull toward the center where Dido herself revolves, goes a long way toward explaining her peculiar triumph, the way she more or less steals the poem before it is half over.

It is Dido, not Juno nor Fortune nor Turnus, who offers Aeneas his greatest obstacle and finally his most irremediable loss. A more than competent ruler of her newly founded city (a woman doing a man's job very well), fiercely committed to preserving her fidelity to her dead husband (and successfully warding off swarms of suitors to do so), she suddenly gives way, her will and her regimen subverted by malicious divine intervention, to an irresistible and incurable passion for a handsome stranger (those who have shied away from Marlowe's Dido, having heard misrepresentations of its plentiful and substantial virtues, might be entertained by Marlowe's brilliant lyrical expansions of Vergil's heroine's response to his hero's masculine beauty). In the grand manner favored by Propertius no less than by Stendhal, her love is as illicit and unpatriotic, as opposed to patriarchal values, as it is intense and joyful (at first) and tragic (at last). In her love for Aeneas she has discovered herself, her real self, and she is therefore willing, nay compelled, to risk everything she has and is in order to obtain what is now the central, indeed the single, meaning and purpose of her existence. In its violent obsession and its ferocious needs, in its almost mystical drive toward a self-immolation wherein extreme selfishness is transformed at last into utter selflessness, this new identity stands in direct opposition to Aeneas and his Roman mission. Dido offers him and his poem their most effective foil. And in leaving her, in leaving her behind him, he becomes everything she is not. It is his rejection of her that fixes indelibly his essential identity, *pious*, pious, The (selflessly) Dutiful, another style of selflessness resulting

from a different style of self-abnegation.

Dido, in the perfection of her passion, ends by being at once a suppliant and an aggressor. She begs Aeneas' love and she also demands it. It is she then, elegiacally speaking, who, like Gallus or Propertius or Tibullus, plays the role of lover, which means that it is Aeneas who performs is cast in the role of the beloved. That is the story that Book 4 of the *Aeneid* seems to tell, but hidden on the surface is that same story very differently told. And that veiled story, one that challenges its own heroic, epical version, deepens it, subverts it, and then reinforces it, is the story of Aeneas in love.¹¹

The two great speeches that Dido addresses to her departing beloved have a clarity of emotional precision, a subtlety of shading, and a chilling resonance that only a Verdi could augment. After any rereading of them, they so stick in the mind, they so haunt the ear, that we utterly forget the speech that her speeches sandwich, that clumsy and futile effort that Aeneas makes to explain, justify, excuse his desertion of her and that goads her into her second speech, which concludes with an explosion of terrifying anger:

spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt,
 supplicia haururum scopulis et nomine Dido
 saepe vocaturum. sequar atris ignibus absens
 et, cum frigida mors anima seduxerit artus,
 omnibus umbra locis adero. dabis, improbe, poenas.
 audiam et haec Manis veniet mihi fama sub imos.

But I hope

If there is any power in heaven, you will suck down
 Your punishment on rocks in mid-ocean,
 Calling on Dido's name over and over. Gone
 I may be, but I'll pursue you with black fire,
 And when cold death has cloven body from soul,
 My ghost will be everywhere. You will pay,
 You despicable liar, and I will hear the news,
 Word will reach me in the deeps of hell. (4.382–87; trans. Lombardo,
 4.440–48)

11. In a subtle, telling discussion of what is at stake in Vergil's transgressions of the form of the epic genre he inherited, see Hinds, 232–36

Having collapsed after speaking these words, Dido is taken away by her maids, leaving Aeneas “hesitant with fear, and with much more to say.” And as he stands there, looking after her,

At pius Aeneas, quamquam lenire dolentem
solando cupit et dictis avertere curas,
multa gemens magnoque animum labefactus amore
iussa tamen divum exsequitur classemque revisit.

Aeneas, loyal and true [*pius*], yearns to comfort her,
Soothe her grief, and say the words that will
Turn aside sorrow. He sighs heavily,
And although great love has shaken his soul,
He obeys the gods’ will and returns to the fleet. (4.393–96; trans. Lombardo, 4.455–59)

Perhaps we can’t forgive Aeneas his hesitation (but he is often a hesitant hero), perhaps we want him to chase after, catch her in his arms, sob out his capitulation (as might happen, say, in romance novel or a silent film). Naturally, he does nothing of the kind, for neither his character nor the inflexible demands of the plot would permit him to do any such thing. We must, or should, be satisfied both with the grief he feels for her (and himself) and with the single line, “and although a great love has shaken his soul.” That line, and indeed the entire (very brief) passage that encloses it, slip from our memories as quickly as had his shame-faced, plodding speech just a page back from it.

The moment when we next see Aeneas should be harder to forget. As soon as she revives, Dido ascends to a high tower and watches the Trojans prepare to sail. She sends her sister Anna to plead with Aeneas to rethink his abandoning her. Twice Anna essays her mission, but Aeneas “made no response to her words: / Fate stood in the way, and a god had sealed his ears” (4.509–10). Then, describing his state of mind and heart, a superb simile unfolds: Alpine winds buffet “an ancient oak” trying to uproot it, “But the tree clings to the crag, and as high as its crown / Reaches to heaven, so deep do its roots sink into the earth” (4.515–16; trans. Lombardo).

haud secus adsiduis hinc atque hinc vocibus heros
tunditur, et magno persentit pectore curas;
mens immota manet, lacrimae volvuntur inanes.

So too the hero, battered with appeals
 On this side and that. His great heart feels
 Unendurable pain, but his mind does not move,
 And the tears that fall to the ground change nothing. (4. 447–49; trans.
 Lombardo, 4.517–20)

The force of this conflict, the pain and the tears that threaten but cannot overturn his resolve, ought to impress us; but, as in the previous passage, it somehow fails to leave much of a mark on our recollection or on the judgment we pass on Aeneas as lover. Dido is dramatized, we see and hear her vividly, we enter her mind, we see things with her eyes. Aeneas is seen mostly from without, and often by her. What Aeneas thinks and feels is here rendered by a flat narration that barely skims his inner life (elsewhere the narrator sometimes describes his hero's feelings less 'objectively'). This choice of narrative strategy by Vergil depends partly on his need to give his heroine (with whom he perhaps has a powerful affinity) throughout her book the full spotlight; and it depends partly on generic requirements that preclude a warrior hero from showing much of his crystallization. Even in Book 6, when he encounters Dido's ghost in hell and their brief encounter is dramatized (but this time it is she who cannot or will not speak), weeping when he first spots her, weeping when she spurns him and departs, even then, Aeneas is not permitted to reveal the full force of his passion. He and his creator are, both of them, determined to temper his emotions, to muffle them, scumble them: because to do otherwise would deeply mar this Roman poem, would threaten to ruin it, with anti-Roman sentiments, and with an anti-Roman (and very un-Augustan) erotic ideology.

But despite generic necessities, and despite the claims of Rome's destiny upon him, Aeneas is (almost) not only an elegiac beloved but also an elegiac lover. That is because Dido herself arises out of and, in a certain way, confirms the values and the perspectives of the new style of Roman lovers in the last century before Christ and of the poetic genre that reflected it and then helped to foster it. Timid, hesitant, otherwise preoccupied as he is (but it takes a couple of forceful divine interventions to jolt him back into full commitment to his patriotic obligations), Aeneas has been dragged by Dido to the outskirts of Boss Cupid's cosmopolis. That he finally will not or cannot enter into it along with her is as bad for him as it is for her. The fact that he hesitates at the gate but then walks away from it doesn't mean that Aeneas was not in love.