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Petrarch's *Aeneid*
Critical Assessments of Virgil in the *Africa*

a thesis submitted

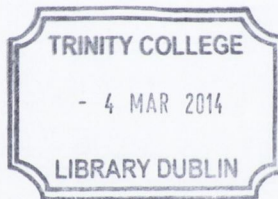
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for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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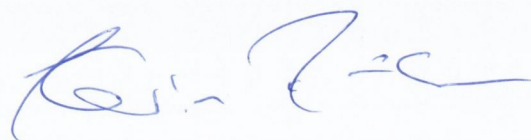
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SUMMARY

Petrarch's *Africa* is often read as an attempt to recreate the style and manner of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Because of Petrarch's frequent expressions of praise for Virgil, his epic is considered as a kind of homage to an admired predecessor. This study examines the possibility that Petrarch's admiration for Virgil's style does not extend to the actual content of the *Aeneid*, that the *Africa* in particular expresses some disquiet about Virgil's achievement, and that Petrarch is in fact offering a canon of epic poetry which excludes Virgil and nominates Petrarch himself as the natural successor to Homer and Ennius.

Even Petrarch's laudatory references to Virgil reveal some ambivalence about the *Aeneid*. Aeneas is an unworthy hero and the Dido narrative a libel on the real queen of Carthage. In the *Africa* Petrarch draws on a long tradition of anti-Virgilian commentary and on his own sophisticated poetics of intertextuality to present a corrective reading of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas may be implicated in the fall of Troy and the fictional Dido is subjected to a compulsion which absolves her of blame and offers a symbolic mirror of Virgil's misuse of historical epic for the promulgation of fiction.

A brief survey of the *Africa's* critical reputation is followed by an exploration of Petrarch's ambivalent praise of Virgil. An outline of intertextual theory in the field of Latin poetry introduces an examination of the particular complexities of the *Africa's* relationship to the *Aeneid*, and of Petrarch's own development of classical and medieval thinking on imitation. The application of intertextual theory to a key

passage of the *Africa* sees Petrarch's reuse of Virgilian material sideline Virgil from the history of epic in favour of Ennius and ultimately of Petrarch himself.

This is followed by a detailed examination of the history of anti-Aeneanism, which places the *Africa's* elision of Aeneas and reordering of the Troy narrative in the context of the poem's possible contemporary reception. A close reading of the Sophonisba episode uncovers Petrarch's detailed critical engagement with book IV of the *Aeneid*. A short conclusion revisits the theme of poetic succession and investigates Petrarch's exclusion of Virgil from the epic canon.

A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Sources for all translations are noted on the first quotation of a work. Where no source is given, the translation is my own. Although I have generally preferred published translations where they are available, I have made small adjustments when necessary.

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CHAPTER 1: READING PETRARCH'S *AFRICA*

1. After Virgil

There are several ways to read Petrarch's engagement with Virgil's *Aeneid* in the *Africa*. One is to take at face value his famous letter to Boccaccio, in which he decries the practice of overt allusion to the works of the classical poets:

Utendum igitur ingenio alieno utendumque coloribus, abstinendum verbis;
illa enim similitudo latet, haec eminet; illa poetas facit, haec simias.

[*Fam.* XXIII.19.13]

Thus we may appropriate another's ideas as well as his coloring but we must abstain from his actual words; for, with the former, resemblance remains hidden, and with the latter it is glaring; the former creates poets, the second apes.¹

Pierre de Nolhac notes the disparity between Petrarch's continual nods to Virgil in his prose works, with over 120 direct citations in the *Familiares* alone, and the apparent absence of such citation in his Latin verse. He attributes this to a deliberate application of the policy suggested in Petrarch's letter to Boccaccio:

P. évite les réminiscences trop directes de Virgile dans ses œuvres poétiques latines. Très soucieux de garder l'originalité de son style, on le voit retoucher un vers de son *Eclogue X*, pour l'unique raison qu'il ressemble trop à un vers virgilien (*Fam.* XXII.2).²

¹ Text of the *Familiares* is from Dotti, 1991. Translations are from Bernardo, 2005. For a full discussion of *Fam.* XXIII.19, see Chapter 2.

² Nolhac, 1907a: 123, n. 2.

Petrarch avoids overly direct reminiscences of Virgil in his Latin verse. Jealously guarding the originality of his style, he can be seen retouching a line of his tenth Eclogue, for the sole reason that it is too similar to a Virgilian line.

Nolhac's position became less tenable in 1976, when Richard Seagraves devoted a doctoral dissertation to verbal reminiscences of Virgil in the *Africa*,³ and it was put to bed for good with a short but thorough examination of the same topic by Jonathan Foster three years later.⁴ The presence in the *Africa* of overt verbal reminiscence of Virgil's work is now difficult to deny, but opinion is divided as to whether these resemblances enrich or degrade Petrarch's achievement. Even before the heavy philological lifting had been done by Seagraves and Foster, and to a lesser extent by Guido Martellotti,⁵ some commentators noted and disapproved of the *Africa's* classical echoes.

Gilbert Highet provides the classic statement of the position that Petrarch's epic was ruined by his awe of Virgil:

His main effort was spent on his Latin epic, *Africa*, its hero being Scipio Africanus and its model Vergil's *Aeneid*. But he made the mistake which Dante did not, the mistake of so many Renaissance authors... He believed that the more closely he followed the exact formal outlines of the classical poet he admired, and the more exactly each incident or image or speech corresponded with similar elements in his Latin model, the better the poem must be.⁶

This unwise policy, in Highet's view, doomed Petrarch's poem to inferiority:

Imitation is for hacks, not for good authors.⁷

³ Seagraves, 1976.

⁴ Foster, 1979. For Virgilian presence in *Africa* IV, see also Masi, 2006: 164-8.

⁵ Martellotti's useful annotations in the *Rime, Triomphi e Poesie Latine* deal only with selections from the poem. See Neri et al, 1950.

⁶ Highet, 1949: 85. See also Hainsworth, 2010: xxiii.

⁷ Highet, 1949: 86.

For Philip Hardie the poem is impressive as a work of “scholarship and imitation.”⁸ Some of the poet’s deployment of classical learning in the *Africa* is also an artistic success. Petrarch can bend his inspirations to his own literary ends, in a “canny combination of fidelity to model with pertinence to his own poetic and cultural interests.”⁹ At other times, however, Hardie sees Petrarch’s use of Virgil through a psychological rather than a strictly literary lens. There are “anxieties”¹⁰ in the letters to Boccaccio on imitation, including the one quoted above. He is “obsessively cautious” of quoting other poets, and “worries” at his manuscript to eliminate verbal echoes of classical Latin verse.¹¹

While Hight judges the poem a failure because Petrarch fails to live up to his own policy on imitation, Hardie’s position is more nuanced. He allows that the poem does successfully draw on ancient sources, particularly Virgil, but he sees difficulties for Petrarch in reconciling this with his disapproval of poetic imitation. Hight admires the precept, and dislikes the poetry. Hardie views the matter through a largely psychological lens, and finds the poem most successful when it breaks free from the precept.

There is a another path, however. This study will suggest that Petrarch’s undoubted allusions to the *Aeneid* are not at odds with his letter to Boccaccio or his general thinking on imitation. Neither are they a failure of editorial policing. A close examination of Petrarch’s statements on imitation, against a background of the ancient and medieval thinking to which he was heir, will suggest that his policy allows for direct verbal echoes of a predecessor poet, as long as those echoes are not purely decorative. Petrarch generally prefers the resemblance to be subtle –

⁸ Hardie, 1993b: 295.

⁹ Hardie, 1993b: 296.

¹⁰ Hardie, 1993b: 295.

¹¹ Hardie, 1993b: 296.

present to the intellect rather than the eye – but he will employ a naked verbal similarity as long as its meaning is complex and unexpected. Petrarch's works are studded with praise of Virgil, but that praise tends to fall almost exclusively on the elegance of his verse. Even that elegance is often viewed warily, as a potential snare for the reader. For all his admiration of Virgil's stylistic gifts, Petrarch is not impressed with the *Aeneid's* divergence from historical truth, or with its dubious elevation of the irascible and sexually incontinent Aeneas to the status of epic hero. When we come to deal with the *Africa's* many echoes of the *Aeneid* we will see that their complexity is largely derived from their deployment as part of a critique of Virgil and his epic achievement.

This view of the *Africa* as a corrective reading of the *Aeneid* sees Petrarch's poem as an invitation to his readers to revisit Virgil's work with a their critical senses refreshed. The first step is to show that Petrarch's poetic evocations of Virgil are not a violation of his advice to Boccaccio, but a good working illustration of the subtlety of that advice. Petrarch's approach to poetic intertextuality with the ancients is more complex than anything in his immediate critical inheritance, and can in fact be seen as an anticipation of the post-structuralist approaches to intertextuality as they were teased out and modified in the theoretical exchanges within the classical community in the 1980s and after.

The complexity of Petrarch's allusive strategies allows him to range from direct criticism of Virgil, in the voice of the Numidian bard of Book III, to the less overt but more thoroughgoing corrective reading exemplified in the Sophonisba episode. If Petrarch's *Africa* is occasionally fearless in its criticism of Virgil, however, it is not ploughing an entirely new furrow. A detailed examination of the historical criticism first of Aeneas and later of Virgil himself will uncover a healthy

counter-tradition on which Petrarch could call. This not only influenced Petrarch's thinking, but allowed him to exercise considerable subtlety in his critique. Assured of an audience attuned to anti-Virgilian sentiment, he could move beyond the full-frontal assaults of Tertullian and Lactantius (and of his own religious prose) in the assurance that even his most glancingly allusive shots at the *Aeneid* would be seen to hit their target.

Some of those shots are glancing indeed. Petrarch's own critical precepts encourage us to weigh even the briefest or most delicate of allusions for corrective content. This allows us to follow the poet into some difficult territory, where great weight can hang from slender branches. Thus the reported death of Scipio's uncle in *Africa* I sends us back through Virgil to a passage in Homer that even Petrarch knew only in translation. An evocation of Ovid's *Heroides* opens into a condemnation of Aeneas' abandonment of Creusa, an event which falls far outside the scope of Petrarch's own narrative.

In the episode of Sophonisba and Massinissa we will see Petrarch's engagement with Virgil at its most critical and sustained. We will see how Petrarch found the outline in Livy of a Didonian seduction, how he expanded that brief narrative to make it unmistakably Virgilian, and how he reoriented it to exculpate Dido from any guilt in either the affair with Aeneas or in the suicide to which it led. Petrarch's extended concentration on the Sophonisba story allows him to supplement the *Africa*'s explicit criticism of Virgil for his libel on the historical Dido with a moral defence of even that libellous Dido. Nowhere is his disapproval of Virgil's failures, both historical and moral, made more plain.

We will have seen the context for that disapproval in Petrarch's letters and elsewhere. His raptures over Virgil's eloquence are often modified by disquiet

about the use to which that eloquence was put. A beautiful style can give wings to a lie. After the *Africa's* exploration of that process in action, we will see Petrarch apply himself to a direct consideration of the proper task of epic poetry. Once again he will focus on truth as the defining feature of a good epic. Confirming Ennius' nomination of himself as a new Homer with a reconstruction of the vision of Homer in which it had occurred, Petrarch goes on to offer himself as the third incarnation, with the imprimatur of Homer himself.

Some have quarrelled with Petrarch's decision to end the *Africa* not just on the glorious deeds of its epic hero but on a consideration of his own place within the epic tradition.¹² Having read the preceding events of the *Africa* as at least partly a critique of the *Aeneid*, however, we can rescue the end of the poem from any charges of oddity or irrelevance. From the very opening of the poem Petrarch has been concerned with the nature of historical epic, and with the flaws in Virgil's contribution to the genre. In the light of the evidence he has presented, it makes perfect sense to relegate Virgil to the second rank of epic poets. That he places himself with Ennius and Homer in the first rank may be an act of "supreme egotism,"¹³ but it follows naturally from a reading of the poem as critical of Virgil. Such a reading not only enriches several of the central incidents of the *Africa*, as we shall see. It also provides a perspective which guarantees the structural unity of the work, and fits the overt discussion of epic poetry in Book IX into a discourse that the poem has been preparing and presenting all along.

¹² See Chapter 5.

¹³ Foster, 1979: 277.

2. The Current Standing of the *Africa*

Petrarch's star has hardly dimmed since his coronation as Poet Laureate in 1341, an event which Ernest Wilkins calls "one of the most spectacular tributes to poetry ever paid and witnessed anywhere."¹⁴ The poem for which Petrarch received his laurel crown was the *Africa*, and it was the *Africa* that represented for Petrarch his greatest claim on posterity. It was his "chief hope of fame."¹⁵

For many years, that hope seemed doomed to frustration. The history of the *Africa's* reception is largely one of either neglect or disappointment.¹⁶ Petrarch's popular reputation has rested almost entirely on his lyrical work in Italian. Within a century of his death Petrarch and his younger contemporary Boccaccio "were no longer seen as sons of the ancients but as avatars of the vernacular."¹⁷ The Latin poetry makes no appearance in the selections of his work currently available to an English-language readership,¹⁸ and with Bergin and Wilson's 1977 version long out of print, no complete English-language translation is currently available. There has been no new Latin edition since Nicola Festa's in 1926. Critical opinion has until recently tended to justify the neglect. Fifty years ago, Morris Bishop found posterity's judgement on the *Africa* almost universally negative. Though he acknowledged that "posterity still has a long time to go,"¹⁹ his own judgement on the poem was not calculated to encourage new readers:

¹⁴ Wilkins, 1943: 155.

¹⁵ Grandgent, 1918: 24.

¹⁶ For a detailed history of the publication and reception of the poem, before and after printing, see Bergin and Wilson, 1977: xiii-xvii. See also Seagraves, 1976: 3-8.

¹⁷ Kirkham, 2009: 3.

¹⁸ Musa, 1985; Roche, 2005; Hainsworth, 2010.

¹⁹ Bishop, 1963: 181.

It would be pleasant to announce that ... the *Africa* is about to burst forth on the world in glory. But the fact is that to this heedless generation the book is balefully, Cyclopeanly dull. It is duller than Voltaire's *Henriade*, duller than the *Faerie Queene*. Even those who are accustomed to reading unreadable books in the line of business have to fight their way through it.²⁰

As late as 1976, Richard Seagraves could introduce his pioneering dissertation on the poem with these defiant words:

This study needs no further rationale than the universal neglect to which the *Africa* has been subjected during the past 600 years; the English-speaking world of scholarship is particularly remiss in the proper recognition and study of this epic poem.²¹

Up to our own time, the steady drip of disdain has continued in some quarters. Albert Ascoli finds the project of a Latin epic "inherently anachronistic;"²² the *Africa* is "Petrarch's attempt to reproduce the poetic achievements of Virgil in his own Latin epic based on Roman history," and it is an "inevitable failure."²³

Recently the poem has been made available to a wider readership than ever before, with one further translation into English of the first four books, published online,²⁴ a new German translation with commentary,²⁵ and two translations (one as yet incomplete) into French.²⁶ Neither is the scholarly position as bleak as that outlined by Seagraves and by Bergin and Wilson, even in the English-speaking community. In the almost four decades since their work the world has seen considerations of the *Africa*, with varying degrees of sympathy, by Thomas Greene,

²⁰ Bishop, 1963: 179-80. For similar verdicts see Foster, 1984: ix; Giordano, 1890: 142; Jerrold, 1909: 192-8; Whitfield, 1943: 67; Whitfield, 1966: 719.

²¹ Seagraves, 1976: i. For a contemporary survey of Petrarchan studies, see Fucilla, 1975.

²² Ascoli, 2009: 126.

²³ Ascoli, 2009: 145.

²⁴ Ellis, 2007.

²⁵ Huss and Regn, 2007

²⁶ Laurens, 2006; Lenoir, 2002.

Craig Kallendorf, Philip Hardie, J. Christopher Warner Victoria Kirkham and Andrew Laird.²⁷ A recent Italian collection of papers on Petrarch devotes five of its forty-four chapters to the *Africa*.²⁸ There is still a notable shortage of book-length studies, but we are travelling in the right direction. The first full English translation of Petrarch's letters provides a valuable context in which the poem may be studied.²⁹ Andrew Laird's forthcoming prose translation of the poem for Harvard's *I Tatti* will represent a further acceleration of the rate at which the work is being made available to an English-language readership, and will surely encourage a parallel flourishing of secondary work in the English-speaking world and elsewhere.³⁰

This surge of work will open the *Africa* to new appreciation. Whether it will reverse the long tradition of disregard and disappointment, however, is more doubtful. The current study will attempt to present a new view of the *Africa* as a poetic success in which Petrarch not only assimilates the influence of Virgil, but puts that influence to distinct and systematic critical use. It will suggest that the *Africa* sets out not to imitate the *Aeneid* but to surpass it, that it carries on a continual dialogue with the earlier poem which is designed to identify the flaws in Virgil's epic achievement, and that it presents Petrarch himself as a worthier heir than Virgil to the epic crown of Homer.

The *Africa's* revisionary reading of Virgil, as we shall see, is relentless in its disapproval of the earlier poet. This does not necessarily contradict the praise of Virgil which Petrarch so often expressed in his other works, however. In his lifelong study of Virgil, Petrarch certainly finds much to admire, but that

²⁷ Greene, 1982; Kallendorf, 1989; Hardie, 1993b; Warner, 2005; Kirkham, 2009; Laird, 2010.

²⁸ Tarugi, 2006.

²⁹ Bernardo, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Bernardo, Levin and Bernard, 2005a, 2005b.

³⁰ Laird's homepage promises "a substantial introduction." Laird, 2012.

admiration is complicated by frequent hints of disapproval or outright scorn. Petrarch's assessment of Virgil is often split between unqualified commendation of his eloquence and a more troubled view of his veracity. That disquiet will culminate in the *Africa's* bold attempt to exclude Virgil from the epic canon, but it is visible throughout his utterances on the earlier poet.

It will be fruitful to examine some of these for the context they give to the *Africa's* Virgilian critique.

3. Petrarch and Virgil: The Ambivalent Disciple

We have seen Virgil invoked by Boccaccio and others in their consideration of the *Africa*, and it is no surprise that the figure of Virgil is always at hand when Petrarch's Latin poetry is discussed. It would be easy to assume, as we have seen suggested by several commentators from Giordano to Bergin and Wilson and beyond, that Petrarch is a devoted follower of the earlier poet. Indeed, Petrarch's works are festooned with laudatory references to Virgil. Petrarch remembers his love for Virgil in a letter to the cleric Francesco Nelli, his principal correspondent and the dedicatee of the *Seniles*,³¹ even as he embraces the religious writers in place of the secular. The letter (*Fam.* XXII.10) is a thorough exploration of Petrarch's changing relationship with the ancients, and one of his major statements on the balance in his life and work between the sacred writers and the secular classics.³² In the third book of the *Secretum* Petrarch has struggled to justify his love of the secular writers, and even his devotion to his own epic.³³ Now he

³¹ *Sen.* I.1.

³² *Fam.* XXII.10.6-7 below. See Marsh, 2009: 217.

³³ *Secretum* III. For the chronology of the *Secretum's* composition and revision see Baron, 1963.

turns again to the question of the relative position of the sacred and classical authors. He begins with a declaration of the passion he has brought to his study of the ancient writers in general, and Cicero and Virgil in particular:

Amavi ego Ciceronem, fateor, et Virgilium amavi, usqueadeo quidem stilo delectatus et ingenio ut nihil supra; alios quoque quam plurimos ex illustrium catherva, sed hos ita quasi ille michi parens fuerit, iste germanus. In hunc amorem me amborum duxit admiratio et familiaritas cum illorum ingeniis longo studio contracta, quantam visis cum hominibus vix contrahi posse putes.

[*Fam.* XXII.10.5]

I have loved Cicero, I admit, and I have loved Virgil; I was taken by their style and genius more than by anything else; many others, too, from that band of illustrious writers I have loved, but these two were such for me that the first was like a father, the latter like a brother. Admiration for and intimacy with their genius achieved through lengthy study led me to such love that you would think this kind of affection scarcely possible toward living men.

That Cicero and Virgil should appear as the primary classical objects of Petrarch's admiration is no surprise. In the fly-leaf of his manuscript of Cassiodorus and Augustine, Petrarch made two lists of his favourite works of secular antiquity.³⁴ Chief among the prose works were the philosophical treatises of Cicero. Virgil tops the ranking of poets, followed by Lucan, Statius, Horace and finally Juvenal.³⁵ In the letter to Nelli, Virgil retains his priority among the poets. Here, however, we have a hint of hierarchy. Cicero is a father, with all the claims of duty and piety that such a relationship suggests. Virgil is a brother: worthy of respect and love, but not necessarily a leader to be followed.³⁶ This distinction occurs in the context of the

³⁴ See Ullman, 1923 for presentation and detailed discussion of the lists.

³⁵ Ullman, 1923: 29.

³⁶ For Virgil as the father of poets, however, see the *Collatio Laureationis* III.1 below.

larger division of sources into spiritual and secular. Petrarch declares he will turn for moral content to the writers of the Christian tradition:

Sed iam michi maius agitur negotium, maiorque salutis quam eloquentie cura est; legi que delectabant, lego que prosint; is michi nunc animus est, imo vero iam pridem fuit, neque enim nunc incipio, neque vero me id ante tempus agere coma probat albescens. Iamque oratores mei fuerint Ambrosius Augustinus Ieronimus Gregorius, philosophus meus Paulus, meus poeta David.

[*Fam.* XXII.10.6-7]

But now I must think of more serious matters, for I am more concerned with salvation than eloquence; I used to read works that gave me pleasure, now I am reading books that are good for me. This is my present state of mind, and it has been so for some time. Nor am I just beginning, and from my graying hair I can see that I began none too soon. Now my orators shall be Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, my philosopher shall be Paul and my poet David.

Eloquence will remain the province of the secular:

Ad orationem, si res poscat, utar Marone vel Tullio. [*Fam.* XXII.10]

If circumstances demand it, I shall make use of Maro and of Tullius for style.

This distinction between salvation and eloquence is crucial to Petrarch's turn towards the sacred, but he has no intention of abandoning classical authors. His distinction between use and ornament allows him to elevate the writers of the Christian tradition without dismissing the classical writers. He emphasises the point with a succession of homely images: even a prudent householder may devote some of his furniture to practical use and some to pleasure; a father may assign some servants to educate his son and others to divert him.³⁷ If the classics are

³⁷ *Fam.* XXII.10.9.

primarily the province of pleasure, however, they may still offer some useful instruction. They are prone to error, but they have taught Petrarch some valuable lessons:

etsi multa apud illos utilia noverim. [*Fam.* XXII.10.10]

much that is useful has come [to me] from the ancients.

This may provide the reason for Virgil's placement on a lower rung than Cicero. Both are stylists, but the paternal standing of Cicero suggests that he may have more wisdom to offer.

The hint that Virgil suffers in comparison to his fellow classics, and not just in comparison to the revelations of the Bible and the Church Fathers, is borne out in several of Petrarch's works. The restricted praise of Virgil as a source of eloquence rather than utility recurs repeatedly in contexts where religion is barely considered. In Petrarch's epistle to Virgil, the only specific eminence he accords to his addressee is stylistic:

Eloquii splendor, Latine spes altera lingue,
clare Maro, tanta quem felix Mantua prole
Romanum genuisse decus per secula gaudet... [*Fam.* XXIV.11.1-3]³⁸

O luminary of eloquence, other hope of the Latin tongue, illustrious Maro, whom Mantua rejoices to have begotten as a Roman offspring who will be an ornament to the Roman name throughout the centuries...

Petrarch's speech on his coronation bears directly on the *Africa*, in that the laureateship it commemorates was awarded chiefly for his work on that poem. It

³⁸ For echoes here of the epitaph which Virgil reputedly composed for himself, see Laird, 2010: 154.

takes as its text a line and a half of the *Georgics*, and builds from them into a discussion of the nature and value of poetry:

“Sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis / raptat amor.” Verba hec ab illustrissimo et omnium maximo poeta, Georgicorum tertio, scripta sunt; quorum prima pars indicat propositi mei non facilem laborem, secunda subiungit non mediocrem studiose mentis ardorem. [*Collatio* II.1.]

“But sweet desire sweeps me over the lonely heights of Parnassus.” These words are written in the third book of the *Georgics* of the greatest and most illustrious of all poets. The first part suggests the difficulty of the task I have set myself; the second suggests the ardent eagerness of the studious mind.³⁹

Petrarch’s oration announces its radical nature with this unprecedented choice of a pagan rather than a scriptural text as its subject.⁴⁰ In the context of his coronation at Rome there is a double edge to Petrarch’s choice of these specific lines from Virgil. The heights of Parnassus cannot be as deserted for Petrarch as they were for Virgil (even after Homer and Hesiod). The idea that a poet must displace his predecessors from the territory they have occupied is one to which we will return in Chapter 2, but it may be significant that Virgil’s image of a deserted mountain-top is evoked by Petrarch at precisely the moment of his own elevation at Rome.⁴¹

If Petrarch wanted to make a definitive public statement about the importance of Virgil, particularly in relation to the *Africa*, he could have found no more prominent place and no more resonant occasion than this public oration on the nature and value of poetry. Praise here is praise forever; and Virgil is duly

³⁹ Text from Bufano, 1975. Translations from the *Collatio* are from Wilkins, 1955: 300-13.

⁴⁰ See Ziolkowski and Putnam, 2008: 138. For the *Collatio* as a fundamental marker of the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, see Wilkins, 1953: 1241.

⁴¹ Petrarch may also be thinking of his journey to the peak of Mt. Ventoux, the central incident of his *Letter to Posterity* (*Sen.* XVIII.1). For the allegorical resonance of that ascent, see Durling, 1974.

praised. He is “the greatest and most illustrious of poets” (*illustrissimo et omnium maximo poeta*).⁴² He is “the very father of poets” (*ipso poetarum patre Virgilio*).⁴³ Petrarch expands on the opening text, citing Virgil as an authority for the difficulty of the poet’s life and for love as the root of poetic endeavour. Later he cites him as an authority on the power of patriotism and the intensity of a poet’s desire for praise. He quotes the *Aeneid* on the scent and the sacred nature of the laurel. There is no doubt that Virgil is important to him, but he must take his place among the parade of Latin authors: Juvenal, Horace, Lucan, Statius, Claudian and Ovid are also cited. Towering above them all, however, is Cicero. His works receive substantial citation throughout the speech.⁴⁴ The ceremony itself is inspired by Cicero,⁴⁵ and Petrarch evokes his physical presence in the same hall where the oration is being delivered.⁴⁶

It is possible to read too much into this. Cicero is a philosopher and a writer of prose. The theme of Petrarch’s disquisition is poetry, and Cicero has more to say about poetry (directly at least) than Virgil. But there is another factor at play, and it is introduced in the second section of the oration:

Veruntamen decere arbitror ut, ante verborum finem, pauca de poetice professionis qualitate, necnon et de petendi premii conditionibus interseram. De primo duo verba sufficient. Scire decet preclarissimi viri, poete officium atque professionem ... quam multi, immo fere omnes, opinantur; nam, ut eleganter ait Lactantius, *Institutionum* libro primo: “Nesciunt qui sit poetice licentie modus, quousque progredi fingendo liceat, cum officium poete in eo sit ut ea, que vere gesta sunt, in alia specie, obliquis figurationibus, cum decore aliquo conversa

⁴² *Collatio* II.1.

⁴³ *Collatio* III.1.

⁴⁴ At II.7 (twice), IV.1, VI.2, X.10, XI.12, and XII.1.

⁴⁵ See Looney, 2009: 135.

⁴⁶ VII.3. Wrongly, as it turns out. See Looney, 2009: 136.

traducat. Totum autem quod referas fingere, id est ineptum esse et mendacem potius quam poetam." [Collatio IX.2]

But I judge it fitting that before I close I should say something of the nature of the profession of poetry, and as to the character of the reward that is sought. With regard to the first of these matters a few words will suffice. You must know, illustrious sirs, that the office and the profession of the poet are not by any means what they are commonly believed to be. For as Lactantius says so well in the first book of his *Institutes*: "They know not the limits of poetic licence or how far they may go in fictional composition. For the office of the poet consists in this, that he should take things that have really come to pass and transform them by means of subtle figures into things of a different sort. To make up all that one writes is to be a fool and a liar rather than a poet."

This is the nub of the matter for Petrarch, or at least for Petrarch the composer of historical epic. His praise of Virgil routinely confines itself to admiration for his eloquence, for the style of his verse. On the narrative to which that style was applied he is often silent. Virgil's eloquence has no moral content in itself, and the poet is to be praised morally only insofar as the content of his epic is true.

It is not that poetry must deal exclusively with fact, although that is a large part of the purpose of a historical epic:

Fortes autem et bellicosi, vel alias eternitatem nominis promeriti, in oblivionem abierunt quia non contigit eis scriptor ydoneus. [Collatio X.11]

Many mighty men and warriors, and those otherwise deserving of eternal memory have passed into oblivion simply because they had not the good fortune to be recorded by capable authors...

Poetry can reach truth, even historical truth, by other means than simple factual accuracy:

possem facile demonstrare poetas, sub velamine figmentorum, nunc fysica, nunc moralia, nunc hystorias comprehendisse, ut verum fiat quod sepe dicere soleo: inter poete et ystorici et philosophi, seu moralis seu naturalis, officium hoc interesse, quod inter nubilosum et serenum celum interest, cum utrobique eadem sit claritas in subiecto, sed, pro captu spectantium, diversa. [*Collatio IX.8*]

I could readily prove to you that poets under the veil of fictions have set forth truths physical, moral, and historical – thus bearing out a statement I often make, that the difference between a poet on the one hand and a historian or a moral or physical philosopher on the other is the same as the difference between a clouded sky and a clear sky, since in each case the same light exists in the object of vision, but is perceived in different degrees according to the capacity of the observers.

That poetic fictions can hold deeper truths would have struck few of Petrarch's listeners as a novel idea.⁴⁷ Allegorical readings of Homer had existed for as long as the poems had been read, and continued throughout antiquity.⁴⁸ Although Greek scholarship was largely unavailable to Petrarch, it did inform a tradition in which epic in particular was read for a figurative truth that lurked behind the events of the narrative. Neoplatonist allegorical readings of the Homeric epics were part of the common heritage of medieval poetic exegesis,⁴⁹ and Petrarch called directly on that tradition in the third book of the *Africa*.⁵⁰ Christian writers as early as Origen in the third century had promulgated readings of scripture which distinguished between the literal and figurative meanings of a given passage.⁵¹ Shortly before Petrarch began work on the *Africa*, Nicholas of Lyra had attempted to formalise allegorical reading of scripture into a search for the four "senses" of the text

⁴⁷ For the ancient and medieval history of allegory, see Whitman, 1987; Boys-Stones, 2002; Copeland and Struck, 2010.

⁴⁸ Obbink, 2010: 16.

⁴⁹ For the transmission of Neoplatonist allegorical readings of Homer to the Latin middle ages, see Lamberton, 1986: 249-82.

⁵⁰ See Seznec, 1953: 173-6.

⁵¹ For varieties of allegorical exegesis in the early Church, see Chance, 1994: 30-4.

(literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical).⁵² This approach had an influence far beyond the reading of scripture,⁵³ but it did not supplant the less schematic conception of allegory drawn from the ancient world, and it is this tradition in which Petrarch drew.⁵⁴ By the early sixth century, Fulgentius had provided a large-scale Christianised reading of the *Aeneid* which was familiar to Petrarch.⁵⁵ Fulgentius reads Virgil's epic as the allegorised story of a man's life, from birth to death, with the poet providing moral instruction appropriate to each stage.⁵⁶ In a letter to Federigo Aretino, a younger poet who had asked for advice about a reader's best approach to Virgil's *Aeneid*, Petrarch suggests a similar method:⁵⁷

Ad ipsum de quo quaeris Virgilium revertar, cuius finis ac subiectum, ut ego arbitror, vir perfectus est. Quae perfectio vel sola, vel praecipua ex virtute conficitur, apud eum quidem, inquisitionem moralem utilissimam censeo, tum quia vitae unicum ornamentum, tum quia primam scribentis intentionem sequitur. [*Sen.* IV.5.20]⁵⁸

I shall return to Virgil, the very one you ask about, whose goal and subject, as I see it, is the perfect man. Such perfection consists either solely or primarily in virtue. I deem a moral consideration of his work very useful because this is the most matchless jewel in life, and because it follows the writer's main intention.

Though his method may owe something to Fulgentius, the specific interpretation which Petrarch offers is a complete departure from his predecessor. Fulgentius views the storm scene of *Aeneid* I as an allegory of the dangers of childbirth, the

⁵² For the formation and impact of Nicholas' thought, see Turner, 2010. For varieties of allegorical exegesis in the early Church, see Chance, 1994: 30-4.

⁵³ For the possible impact of Nicholas on Dante, for example, see Ascoli, 2010.

⁵⁴ See Laird, 2010: 153-5.

⁵⁵ See Nohac, 1907a: 169-71. For Fulgentius and Virgil, see Coffin, 1921; Whitbread, 1971: 15-37 and 105-18.

⁵⁶ See Coffin, 1921.

⁵⁷ For some specific echoes of Fulgentius in Petrarch, see Whitbread, 1971: 26.

⁵⁸ Text of the *Seniles* is from Rizzo and Berté, 2006 and 2009. Translations are from Bernardo et al, 2005.

opening scene of the poem's representation of the entire span of an emblematic human life.⁵⁹ Petrarch is unconcerned with the infant years of the "perfect man," however, and his letter to Aretino depicts the tempest as a trial of the adult hero besieged by the darker human passions.⁶⁰ He identifies Aeolus' mastering of the storm winds in the opening book of the *Aeneid* as the victory of reason over the soul's appetite for lust and rage:

Eolus autem ipsa ratio regens frenansque irascibilem et concupiscibilem appetitum animae, quod "ni faciat," ut Virgilius ipse ait, "maria ac terras caelumque profundum / quippe ferant rapidi secum." [*Sen.* IV.5.21-2]⁶¹

Aeolus is reason itself, controlling and restraining the soul's appetites toward wrath and lust. As Virgil himself says, "If he did not, [the winds] ... would snatch / the seas and land and lofty Heaven above."

Now his reading grows more detailed and elaborate. The caverns in which the winds reside are man's chest and vital organs, where the passions have their home. The mountain whose pressure keeps them in check is the head, the seat of human reason. And who is the human exemplar of this rational restraint of the wilder emotions?

Eneas vir fortis ac perfectus, de quo paulo supra dixi. [*Sen.* IV.5.24]

Aeneas is the strong and perfect man of whom I spoke a little earlier.

Petrarch's epideictic view of epic could hardly be clearer. The purpose of the epic poem is to identify and depict a hero who can stand as a moral exemplar.⁶² If

⁵⁹ See Fulgentius *EVC* 91.5ff. in Whitbread, 1971.

⁶⁰ For other allegorical uses of seafaring and storms at sea, see Whitman, 1987: 7, n. 5.

⁶¹ Petrarch is quoting *Aen.* I.58-9.

⁶² For Petrarch's view of the epic as a poem of praise, see also Kallendorf, 1989: 19-57.

Aeneas is a worthy hero, however, there may be a worthier. In his heavily allegorical first *Eclogue*, Petrarch has identified Scipio Africanus as a worthy epic hero:⁶³

Carmine fama sacro caret hactenus, et sua uirtus
Premia deprecit; pauitans ego carmina cepi
Texere: tentabo ingenium, uox forte sequetur
Orpheus, promeritum modulabor harundine parua. [*Bucolicum Carmen* I.120-3]

His reputation lacks as yet its sacred song, and his virtue demands its prize.
Nervously I have begun to weave the verse. I will try my skill. Perhaps the voice of
Orpheus will aid me, and I will hymn his glory on a slender reed.

A letter explicating that poem clarifies that this desire to present Scipio to the world is the urge behind the genesis of the *Africa*:

De hoc igitur utcunque canere institui, quia scilicet de eo liber meus est qui
inscribitur *Africa*. [*Fam.* X.4.34]

I therefore undertook to sing about him in some fashion, and thus my book the *Africa* indeed deals with him.

Another letter again proposes Scipio as an exemplar. This time he is clearly meant not to stand alongside Aeneas as a model but to replace him:

... ego id uni omnium Africano tributum memini, ut scilicet et fama mirabilis et
presentia mirabilior haberetur. Idem sacris in literis tribuitur Salomoni. Quere
alium; forte non inuenies; etsi Virgilius, immodico studio Eneam suum exornandi,
hoc ad eum glorie genus transferre contendat. Sed immobile verum est; excusant
tamen quasi non Eneam, sed sub Enee nomine virum fortem perfectumque
describat. [*Fam.* I.2.21-2]

⁶³ For allegory in Petrarch's *Eclogues*, see Carrai, 2009: 167-77.

Only of Africanus, I recall, could it be said that he was extraordinary through reputation but even more so through his presence. The same tribute was paid to Solomon in sacred scripture. Think of another, but I doubt that you will. Virgil, through his excessive zeal to embellish his Aeneas, tried to endow him with this kind of glory, but the truth is unshakable; and too many excuse him by maintaining that he was describing not Aeneas but under his name the strong and perfect man.

The problem that Petrarch identifies here is one to which an epideictic allegory is particularly prone. In presenting a hero who is both a human character and an emblem of virtue, the poet has two choices. Neither is perfect. He may constrain his narrative by limiting the hero to acts which are not only virtuous in themselves but representative of the particular virtue the hero is meant to embody, or he may allow the character more freedom to act at the risk of muddying the allegory. Jon Whitman identifies this problem in both the simple form of allegory, in which a virtue or vice is directly personified, and in the more complex kinds of allegory which do not depend on personification. He takes as his example the figure of the storm at sea:

On the one hand, in order to preserve the correspondence between sound thinking and thoughtful sailing, we must restrict the narrative to brief parallels, such as reason and the rudder – and even they may seem strained. On the other hand, should we seek to expand the narrative, we risk an increasing divergence from the story's original point.⁶⁴

This is a problem for the self-conscious composer of an allegorical narrative. The difficulties are perhaps more acute when we supply an allegorical interpretation of an existing text, particularly when it may not have been written as an allegory.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Whitman, 1987: 7.

⁶⁵ See Whitman, 1987: 3-4 for the strain this can place on the interpretation of a text.

Now we must either explain any apparent divergences from the allegorical burden of the narrative, or attribute them to the artistic or moral failings of the writer.

Petrarch left no allegorical explications of the *Africa*, on the lines of his letter to Aretino or the detailed key to his own first *Eclogue* which he provided for his brother Gherardo.⁶⁶ This does not mean that he did not intend the poem to be read allegorically, of course, and Robert Seagraves and J. Christopher Warner have each provided such a reading.⁶⁷ There is a sense in which Petrarch can be said to exemplify the dangers of both an allegorical composition and an allegorical interpretation of an existing epic. A certain lack of shading in the presentation of Scipio as a hero may be a consequence of Petrarch's desire to hold him up as the *vir perfectus*. For Bergin and Wilson, this is enough to scupper the *Africa* as an artistic enterprise. The hero is so stultifying good that the narrative dies from a lack of vigour.⁶⁸ Petrarch's reading of Aeneas as Virgil's attempted depiction of the *vir perfectus*, on the other hand, encourages him to read any flaw in the character as a failure of his creator.⁶⁹

One of Petrarch's clearest engagements with Virgil is in a Latin hexameter epistle, one of ten letters which he addresses directly to ancient writers.⁷⁰ These are all writers whom Petrarch admires, but the tone of his letters is occasionally chiding. The undertaking was inspired by Petrarch's discovery of Cicero's personal letters to Atticus and others, with their revelation of a flawed and unguarded figure whom Petrarch found difficult to reconcile with the Cicero of the

⁶⁶ *Fam.* X.4. For Petrarch's key to his *Eclogues* see Mazzotta, 1993: 153-5 and Carrai, 2009.

⁶⁷ Seagraves, 1976; Warner, 2005. See also Kallendorf, 1989: 28.

⁶⁸ Bergin and Wilson, 1977: xvi. See Chapter 3.

⁶⁹ This possibility will be explored further in Chapter 3.

⁷⁰ *Fam.* XXIV.3 and XXIV.4 to Cicero; *Fam.* XXIV.5 to Seneca; *Fam.* XXIV.6 to Varro; *Fam.* XXIV.7 to Quintilian; *Fam.* XXIV.8 to Livy; *Fam.* XXIV.9 to Asinius Pollio; *Fam.* XXIV.10 to Horace; *Fam.* XXIV.11 to Virgil; and *Fam.* XXIV.12 to Homer.

philosophical, forensic and rhetorical works.⁷¹ His first of two letters to Cicero was written in what Petrarch himself later characterised⁷² as a mood of anger, and he is forthright in his criticism of Cicero's vanity, poor judgement and failure to live up to his own moral counsel.⁷³ His second letter to the same correspondent begs indulgence without withdrawing the accusations. Petrarch has established his willingness to reproach the ancients, so the absence of any overt criticism in the letter to Virgil cannot be attributed to decorum. But the epistle offers little in the way of praise. We have seen the opening lines, where Virgil is hailed as a master of style and an ornament to the Roman name. Two lines suggest respect for Aeneas, or at least a pleasure in his celebrity:

tuus Aeneas vivit totumque per orbem
et placet et canitur. [*Fam.* XXIV.11.57-8]

Your Aeneas lives, gives pleasure and is sung all over the world.⁷⁴

Context robs the compliment of its force. The fuller passage distances us from any praise of Aeneas by first submerging the character into mere synecdoche for the poem which bears his name, and then restricting its focus to the fact and manner of the poem's survival rather than to any commendation of its content:

tuus Aeneas vivit totumque per orbem
et placet et canitur, tanto quem ad sidera nisu
tollere conanti mors obstitit invida magnis
principiis; miserum Aeneam iam summa premebant
fata manu iamque ore tuo damnatus abibat,

⁷¹ For the circumstances of the discovery see Cosenza, 1910: 5-9.

⁷² In *Fam.* I.1.42.

⁷³ *Fam.* XXIV.3.

⁷⁴ Translation from Laird, 2010: 156.

arsurumque iterum pietas Augusta secundis
eripuit flammis, quem non morientis amici
deiecti movere animi, meritoque supremas
contempsisse preces evo laudabitur omni. [*Fam.* XXIV.11.55-65]

Your Aeneas lives, and throughout the world he gives delight and is celebrated. With much effort you strove to raise him to the stars, but death, envious of such solid foundations, opposed your attempts. Already the Fates were pressing upon your unhappy Aeneas, and he was about to depart, condemned by your own lips, when the mercy of Augustus once again snatched him on the brink of destruction from these second flames. Augustus was not moved by the dejected spirits of his dying friend, and justly will be praised for all time for having denied your last wishes.

Andrew Laird considers this a stinging rebuke to Virgil, noting that the dejection of spirit which Petrarch attributes to the poet would, in Christian terms, command “reproach more than sympathy.”⁷⁵ He also notes a disproportion in between Petrarch’s tributes to Virgil as the poet of the *Aeneid* and Augustus as the guarantor of its survival:

The praise lavished upon Augustus for preserving the work seems almost to match the credit due to the poet for composing it.⁷⁶

An earlier passage in Petrarch’s letter deals directly with Virgil as a poet. He opens by considering which poets may accompany Virgil in the afterlife. Homer and Orpheus, of course, are possibilities. Lucretius and Lucan are both barred by reason of suicide. The notional emissary from Petrarch’s time brings Virgil news of Naples and its late king, and the news is no endorsement of the accuracy of Virgil’s

⁷⁵ Laird, 2010: 156.

⁷⁶ Laird, 2010: 156-7. See also Smarr, 1982: 134.

vision. As we shall see again and again, Petrarch's praise of Virgil's eloquence is followed by a cooler assessment of the truth of his verse. The tone here is mild:

quantum vero tua somnia distent [*Fam.* XXIV.11.21]

How far from the truth were your dreams?

Petrarch's description of the current state of Mantua provides a piquant answer. Virgil's Jupiter had promised Rome a new world of order, of *imperium sine fine* (*Aen.* I.279). Now, however, Virgil's birthplace stands as a living refutation of his own prophetic power:

optima finitimo quatitur sine fine tumultu
Mantua. [*Fam.* XXIV.11.30-1]

Excellent Mantua is shaken by the endless disturbances of her neighbours.

The echo of *imperium sine fine* underlines how far the course of history has diverged from the prophecy in *Aen.* I.279.

In this letter, then, Virgil has been praised for the style of his verse but not its content, presented as a threat to the survival of the *Aeneid*, and revealed as a poor judge of the future. While this is hardly a ringing denunciation, it is not the warmest of eulogies. But Petrarch also raises the question of his own place in the poetic pantheon, and he does it in a way which echoes the sidelining of Virgil we shall see in the *Africa*. The epistle ends with Virgil himself conscripted as an emissary, this time from Petrarch to the writers of Greek epic:

Eternum, dilecte, vale nostrosque rogatus
Meonium Ascreumque senes salveres iubeto. [*Fam.* XXIV.11.66-7]

Farewell forever, O beloved one; and greet for me our elders, the Maeonian and the Ascrean.

With this abrupt farewell,⁷⁷ Petrarch has reached across Latin epic to greet his Greek poetic forebears.⁷⁸ The nod to a previous generation places Petrarch as Virgil's contemporary and equal, with both of them labouring in the shadows of Homer and Hesiod. This joint belatedness is underlined by the invocation of Hesiod, which reminds us that it is not just the *Aeneid* which works a seam first opened by the Greeks. The *Georgics* are also belated, and we do not need a mention of Theocritus to bring Virgil's *Eclogues* into the same long shadow of Greek priority.⁷⁹ Petrarch's reconfiguration of himself and Virgil, in the light of eternity, as contemporaries is bold enough. The glancing recollection of Aeneas' *aeternumque uale* to the youthful Pallas (*Aen.* XI.98) goes even further, making Petrarch the more mature party to the transaction. In his letters to living poets, as we will continue to see, Petrarch adopts an air of regal condescension. He does not go so far with Virgil, but the effect of his greeting to the Greeks is to level the ground between Virgil and himself. It is worth noting the different tone of the farewell to Homer in *Fam.* XXIV.12. He too is enjoined to carry salutations to other inhabitants of the underworld, but the greeting to Euripides, Linus and Orpheus is preceded by a respectful re-establishment of the temporal distance that separates Homer from Petrarch:

⁷⁷ See Laird, 2010: 156.

⁷⁸ Not for the last time. See Chapter 3.

⁷⁹ *Fam.* XXIV.12 will make the point repeatedly, mentioning Hesiod, Theocritus and Homer himself among several other Greeks to whom Virgil owes a debt.

Multa dixi quasi ad presentem; sed iam ab illa vehementissima imaginatione rediens, quam longe absis intelligo. [*Fam.* XXIV.12.43]

I have said many things as though you were present, but now upon emerging from these vivid flights of the imagination, I realise how far removed you are.

Virgil receives neither the reverence accorded to Homer throughout *Fam.* XXIV.12 nor the intimacy of the two letters to Cicero.⁸⁰ He is not openly criticised, as Cicero was, but this is perhaps an indication of the more distant stance Petrarch takes in the letter to Virgil. There is a coolness which falls short of the affection he displays to Cicero.

The letters to Cicero are useful not only as a tonal contrast to the letter to Virgil, but as a further glimpse into Petrarch's thinking about the *Aeneid* and its author. The second of these letters is frank in its praise of both authors, and frank in its limits. Virgil is the master of Latin verse, just as Cicero is the master of Latin prose, but each of them fails when he moves outside his proper medium.⁸¹ The verdict is equal, but the portrayal of Cicero and Virgil in the letter is dominated by images of succession, with the already accomplished Cicero conferring high praise on a Virgil who has yet to begin the *Aeneid*:

quoddam eius opusculum miratus, quesivisses auctorem eumque iuvenem iam senior vidisses, delectatus es. [...] Dixisti enim: "Magne spes altera Rome."

[*Fam.* XXIV.4.7-8]

Struck by one of his youthful works, you sought the author's name; you, already advanced in years, saw him while he was still young, and expressed your delight with him. [...] For you called him "the second hope of great Rome."

⁸⁰ Cicero is also referred to warmly as a friend at *Fam.* XXIV.2.4.

⁸¹ *Fam.* XXIV.4.4-5. Petrarch cites Seneca the Elder as an authority for Virgil's halting speech. See Hinds, 2004: 162-5.

Virgil is so delighted with the compliment that twenty years later he reproduces it word for word in the *Aeneid*, where Ascanius is seen as a future successor to Aeneas.⁸²

Two elements here deserve comment. The first is the effort which Petrarch makes to apply Cicero's praise to the *Aeneid*. The poem had not been begun when Cicero died, but Petrarch assures Cicero now that Virgil would go on to justify his hope and praise.⁸³ He also adduces the lines from Propertius which praise the nascent *Aeneid* as the foremost epic of antiquity.⁸⁴ It is not hard to link this to Petrarch's own position at the time of writing. He dates his letters to Cicero to June 1345, a little over four years after his coronation. The *Africa*, for which he has been awarded the laurel crown at Rome, is still unfinished. In the *Triumphus Cupidinis* Petrarch is conscious that he had been crowned before the appropriate time:

colsi 'l glorioso ramo,
onde forse anzi tempo ornai le tempie. [*Triumphus Cupidinis* IV.79-80]

I seized the glorious branch, with which – perhaps too soon – I decked my brow.⁸⁵

The garland was given in hope, like Cicero's and Propertius' praise of Virgil, as a reward for future achievements. Virgil is a poet whose promise was recognised early and subsequently fulfilled. Petrarch obviously hopes to follow the same trajectory.

Stephen Hinds suggests that in Petrarch's emphasis on Virgil as the *spes altera* of Rome, here and at *Fam.* XXIV.11.1, he is also turning the anecdote of

⁸² *Aen.* XII.168.

⁸³ *Fam.* XXIV.4.8.

⁸⁴ *Fam.* XXIV.4.9. See Propertius II.34.59-60.

⁸⁵ Text from Neri et al, 1950. My translation.

Cicero's encounter with the young bard into a "proto-Petrarchan story about *his own* status as *Virgil's* post-antique *alter*."⁸⁶ This brings us to the second notable element of the letter. As Hinds points out, the attention which Petrarch's repetition of the *spes altera* formula brings to the *Aeneid* creates interesting tensions around the ideas of epic succession:

With the Servian anecdote and *Aen.* 12.68 superimposed on one another, the oddity is that Virgil (Cicero's *spes altera*) finds himself identified not with his epic hero, Aeneas, but with the son of his epic hero, Ascanius: the text of the *Aeneid* is thereby opened to some sense of its own displacement into a post-Virgilian epic future.⁸⁷

That post-Virgilian epic future is dominated, for Petrarch at least, by the *Africa*. Hinds links Petrarch's concern with succession in the second letter to Cicero with the same concern in the ninth book of the *Africa*, which "puts Petrarch in the place of Virgil as the post-Homeric poet of record."⁸⁸ This brings us to the area which is excluded by Petrarch's continual praise of Virgil's eloquence: the factual content of his poetry. Much of the *Africa's* critique of Virgil will centre on his handling of the historical material of the *Aeneid*, particularly in relation to the fall of Troy and the Dido episode. Before we turn to the substance of that critique, however, it will be fruitful to examine how Petrarch views the relationship between the *Africa* and the *Aeneid*, and to see how that relationship may be explored using not just the critical techniques of modern philology, but the rhetorical tradition of *imitatio* which Petrarch adapted to his own poetic ends.

⁸⁶ Hinds, 2004: 169. Hinds' italics.

⁸⁷ Hinds, 2004: 170-1. Hinds' italics.

⁸⁸ Hinds, 2004: 172-3.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERTEXTUALITY, *IMITATIO* AND PETRARCH

1. Intertext, Allusion and Classics

The *Africa*, at a fundamental level, is made up of other literature. As a historical epic set largely outside Italy it concerns events, people and usually locations of which Petrarch could have had no direct first-hand information. His knowledge of the subject of his poem comes from a reading of classical Latin texts. Petrarch's distance from the heyday of the Latin hexameter epic also increases his reliance on the generic models to which he has access. Every line of dactylic hexameter is informed by the long and particular history of that metre. The decision to write his *Africa* in Latin puts Petrarch's text immediately into the arena of other Latin verse, and it will inevitably be read against the network of expectations that the reader has drawn from other Latin verse.¹

We will see Petrarch talk at length about the difficulty of producing Latin verse which is not plagiaristic. He is steeped in the works of his predecessors, and that work inevitably leaves traces in his own compositions. Vincenzo Fera's work on the *Africa* manuscript shows evidence that Petrarch rewrote certain lines and passages explicitly to remove or muffle the echoes of previous texts, and this must necessarily raise the significance of those echoes which Petrarch left untouched.² The poem was subject to a lifelong process of redrafting, and that process has left us much in the *Africa* that is recognisably Virgilian.³

¹ For the concept of a "horizon of expectations" see Jauss, 1970. See also Schmitz, 2007: 86-91.

² Fera, 1984: 25-6. On the compositional history of the poem, see Festa, 1926b: 15-18; and Wilkins, 1955: 248-50.

³ Wilkins, 1961: 30; Bergin and Wilson, 1977: xii.

A study of the relationship between two Latin epics can hardly dodge the debates around intertextuality which gripped the discipline of classics in the 1980s and after, but a brief look at those debates will lead us to an approach accessible to all shades of theoretical opinion. Applying this to one richly suggestive passage of the *Africa* will illustrate the value of an intentionalism which is conscious of, but not deterred by, the theoretical difficulties at its foundation.⁴ It will also provide a context for a more detailed consideration of Petrarchan intertextuality, both as it is outlined in the letters and as it works in practice in the *Africa*.

In the 1997 edition of *Materiali e Discussioni* which aimed to crystallise and advance the debates around intertextuality in classics, Don Fowler provides a useful table (visibly indebted to Pasquali and Conte)⁵ of the terms that typified respectively the older and the newer approach:⁶

Allusion	Intertextuality
In the author's mind	In the (system of the) text(s)
Private	Public
Single	Multiple
Additional extra	Inescapable element
Special feature of 'literature'	General feature of language and other semiotic systems
Difference from model significant significant	Difference and similarity ('traces')
Extratextual act (pays homage etc.)	Intratextual act (creates meaning) ⁷

⁴ My approach owes an obvious debt to Stephen Hinds, particularly Hinds, 1998; for more on intertextuality in the classics, see Edmunds, 2001; for literary theory in a wider context see Genette, 1975 and 1982; Worton and Still, 1990; Allen, 2000; Orr, 2003; Eagleton, 2008; and Lodge and Wood, 2008.

⁵ See particularly Pasquali, 1951: 11-20; Conte, 1986: 29-31.

⁶ Schmitz, 2007 provides a good survey of the progress and varieties of literary theory in the discipline of classics. Farrell, 2005 has a useful survey of recent attitudes, many of them responding explicitly to Hinds, 1998.

⁷ Fowler, 1997: 15.

Fowler is juxtaposing the language typical of each side of the debate⁸ rather than itemising the areas of contention. The limits of the present study, in any case, render some of these distinction uncontroversial. Even if we hold that intertextuality is an inescapable feature of any linguistic or other utterance, for example, that fact that we are dealing only with literature renders the theoretical discussion irrelevant. Other distinctions hold little practical difference, or stand now as memorials to arguments already won. In the words of Joseph Farrell, “we are all intertextualists now.”⁹ Would any classicist deny that an allusion may be multiple, rather than single? Would any modern reader assert that only the differences between texts are worth considering, and ignore the similarities?

Those of Fowler’s headings which are both valid and germane to the present study cluster around the areas of intention and significance. The battle for intertextuality may have been won, as Farrell suggests, with the almost universal adoption of the term; but as he also points out, the question of authorial intention is still open.¹⁰ The problem of linking a reader’s interpretation of a text to a meaning or meanings that its author intended to produce has not proved amenable to definitive and theoretically validated procedure. But this does not stop us from feeling occasionally that we have understood somebody else’s text, or from producing our own texts with some degree of confidence that they will convey what we intend them to. Farrell considers the “theory gap” a problem for epistemology rather than literary criticism:

⁸ For the “Cold War” between devotees of allusion and of intertextuality, see also Kennedy, 1995: 86.

⁹ Farrell, 2005: 98.

¹⁰ Farrell, 2005: 98-9.

We cannot prove, beginning from first principles, that an interpretation is consistent with an author's intentions. This is certainly an obstacle, but it should not be the end of the story. We cannot fully account, after all, for how any verbal communication ... takes place. [...] The fact that theory cannot fully account for how this happens does not mean that it does not happen.¹¹

He goes on to distinguish the two central questions we must ask of any apparent confluence between texts. Is the confluence marked enough for us to attribute significance to it, and was that significance a part of the author's intention?¹²

Allowing for changes of vocabulary and emphasis, these are the core questions for any reading of literary intertextuality. Don Fowler's gleeful embrace of literary theory and Richard Thomas' equally vehement disdain have this one large area of overlap. Thomas takes a rigid intentionalist position:

Methodologically there is one chief danger in a study such as this, that is, the problem of determining when a reference is really a reference, and when it is merely an accidental confluence, inevitable between poets dealing with a shared or related language.¹³

The "real reference" here is one which the author intended, and which a competent reader would recognise. The obvious difficulty lies in distinguishing between references (intentional allusions) and accidental similarities. Accidental similarities are particularly likely between texts in the same genre. There is a danger of misreading as a specific Petrarchan allusion to the *Aeneid*, for example, something which is better considered part of the common generic heritage of all Latin epic. This is the distinction that Gian Biagio Conte and Alessandro Barchiesi make between the *modello-esemplare* and the *modello-codice*, and it must be borne

¹¹ Farrell, 2005: 99-100.

¹² Farrell, 2005: 99-102.

¹³ Thomas, 1986: 174.

in mind when we consider the significance of any textual context between works in the same genre.¹⁴

Thomas' central concern is to sketch out a method for distinguishing between an accidental confluence of texts and an intentional reference by a later writer to an earlier. With due acknowledgement of the limits of scientific rigour in the slippery field of poetry, he offers two decisive factors:

In part the resolution of this problem lies in that most perilous quality of the mind, judgment, but at the same time two absolute criteria will be applied in what follows: the model must be one with whom the poet is demonstrably familiar, and there must be a reason of some sort for the reference – that is, it must be susceptible of interpretation, or meaningful.¹⁵

This is a clear summary of the intentionalist position. Don Fowler outlines the literary-theoretical position in a way which maintains his philosophical differences from the intentionalist approach, but emphasises the methodological similarities:

Earlier criticism might have phrased its concerns in terms of whether a particular allusion was in the author's mind or not, but the criteria for deciding whether it was authorial are the same as critics might now use to decide whether to accept as readers a correspondence: markedness and sense.¹⁶

If we narrow our scope from the wider theoretical area to the particular study of the relationship between the *Africa* and the *Aeneid*, some of the remaining differences tidily exit the stage. Thomas' initial criterion for assigning weight to an apparent reference is that the poet referred to "must be one with whom the [later]

¹⁴ See Barchiesi, 1984: 91-121; Conte, 1986: 141-51.

¹⁵ Thomas, 1986: 174.

¹⁶ Fowler, 1997: 19.

poet is demonstrably familiar.”¹⁷ This would prove an undoubted sticking point for those of the Conte-Fowler persuasion, who prefer to see not a later poet referring directly to the work of an earlier, but a “system of texts”¹⁸ within which intertextuality is a necessary condition of an intelligibility that is validated by or realised in the reader as much as (or more than, or instead of) the writer. When we come to deal with Petrarch, the difficulty disappears. We are in no doubt at all that he is familiar with Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

This is enough to satisfy, for any resemblance between the texts, Thomas’ first criterion of markedness. Neither will it cause difficulties with the more modern school. The *Africa* no doubt works within a matrix of texts, epic and otherwise, but even the most revolutionary rejection of pre-eminence or centrality will do little to diminish the omnipresence of Virgil’s poem within that matrix. Latin epic after Virgil cannot but be read in the light of the *Aeneid*. (“What would it mean,” Fowler asks, “for a Western not to be intertextual with High Noon?”¹⁹)

Thomas’s second criterion is “sense”: for a textual echo to be considered a real reference it must hold some significance. But to whom? Already we are in the realm of the reader’s judgement and the theorist’s familiar matrix of texts. Thomas himself has exemplified, whether he intended to or not, Fowler’s shift from an old-fashioned discourse of allusion to a more intellectually self-conscious discourse of intertextuality.

Even if we do not share this evolutionary view, we can derive a great deal of value from the range of terms which scholars of every philosophical hue have brought to the debate. Any debate in which scholars adumbrate their distinctions

¹⁷ Thomas, 1986: 174. See above.

¹⁸ Fowler, 1997: 15. See also Conte, 1986: 29.

¹⁹ Fowler, 1997: 17.

from each other becomes a terminological battle as well as a philosophical one. The terminological field in this case is easily mapped. There are terms which presuppose or embody some kind of advertence on the part of the poet (allusion, reference, evocation when used of the poet) and terms which neither presuppose nor exclude such advertence (intertextuality itself, echo, confluence, evocation when used of a passage). When it comes to reading a particular poem in the light of its predecessors, the questions for both approaches come back to markedness and significance: are the confluences between the poems compelling, and do they illuminate our reading of the later poem?

Raising some of the *Africa's* textual or other confluences with the *Aeneid* to the status of willed allusion enables us to exploit the vocabularies of intertext and allusion not as alternatives to each other, but as indicators of a degree of certainty or openness as to whether Petrarch's authorial intention can reasonably be asserted. To call something an *allusion* will be to propose that its author intended it as such. To call it an *echo* will allow us to leave the question open. Scholars who cling to the Barthesian position,²⁰ that it is erroneous to attribute any phantom intention gleaned from a text to a named author, will prefer to think of our Petrarch not as the historical resident of Vaucluse but as "Petrarch," an authority reconstructed from the texts here considered. The practical difference, in a study which makes no biographical deductions, will be minimal.

²⁰ See Barthes, 2008; Makaryk, 1993: 245-6.

2. Assessing the Intertext

Having agreed that the markedness of an intertext can reach a level of certainty which makes it available to all shades of interpretive approach, we must attempt to place that level as carefully as we can. In his exploration of the kinds of references employed by Virgil in the *Georgics*, Thomas identifies a kind of intertextual moment which we will see continually in the *Africa*. It is an excellent starting-place for the search for criteria of allusive markedness in a poet with Petrarch's avowed reluctance to quote his predecessors, depending as it does on the smallest possible confluence of texts:

Sometimes a single and apparently unexceptionable word is intended to refer us to the model and to apply its situation in the new context.²¹

We are dealing not with the inevitable confluence or ordinary words, or Conte's generic vocabulary, but rather "the use of a morphological oddity, rhetorical figure, metrical or rhythmic anomaly, or even... numerological criteria."²² All of these devices are available to Petrarch, despite the loss of so many monuments of classical poetry in the years after Virgil.

For Harold Bloom, every poet is dominated by the overwhelming presence of a particular predecessor. The later poet's revisionary reading of this dominant figure is the central dynamic of poetic history. Although Bloom deals mainly with poetry after Milton, his picture of the influenced poet as "clearing imaginative space"²³ for his own work may call on and certainly revivifies the classical topos of

²¹ Thomas, 1986: 179.

²² Thomas, 1986: 179.

²³ Bloom, 1973: 5.

chopping down trees for material. Stephen Hinds gives a detailed reading of an intertextual moment noted by Macrobius at *Sat.* VI.2.27, and therefore available to Petrarch from 1337 at the latest.²⁴ A passage of Ennius, which itself recalls *Iliad* XXIII.114-20, is revisited by Virgil in a description of the Trojans searching for material for a pyre.²⁵ First Ennius:

Incedunt arbusta per alta, securibus caedunt,
Percellunt magnas quercus, exciditur ilex,
Fraxinus frangitur atque abies consternitur alta,
Pinus proceras pervortunt: omne sonabat
Arbustum fremitu silvai frondosai. [*Ann.* 175-9]²⁶

They pass among the high groves, and hew with axes; they strike down great oaks; the ilex is chopped; the ash is shattered and the high fir laid low; they overturn lofty pines: the whole grove echoed with the leafy forest's din.²⁷

The common metaphorical use of *silva* (or the Greek *hyle*) to denote the raw material of composition²⁸ cues the reader to pay attention to Virgil's echoes of the earlier passage. So does the opening phrase, which represents what Hinds calls "a programmatic gesture of reflexive annotations": *itur in antiquam silvam*. The journey for the Trojans leads into an ancient wood; the poet's destination is the material of ancient poetry:

itur in antiquam silvam, stabula alta ferarum;
procumbunt picas, sonat icta securibus ilex
fraxinaeque trabes cuneis et fissile robur
scinditur, advolvunt ingentes montibus ornos. [*Aen.* VI.179-82]

²⁴ See Nohac, 1907a: 42.

²⁵ For a full discussion see Hinds, 1998: 11-4.

²⁶ Available to Petrarch in Macrobius *Sat.* VI.2.27.

²⁷ Text from Skutsch, 1985. Translation at Hinds, 1998: 12.

²⁸ For a suggestion of the same use in Dante, see Freccero, 1986b: 11.

Then into the primeval forest, the deep lairs
Of wild things – and down fell the pines,
The ilex rang with the axe, ash logs and oak
Were split with wedges, and enormous trunks
Rolled down the mountainside.²⁹

Hinds offers alternative readings of this passage's obviously metapoetic relationship to the passage from Ennius:

Two ways of reading the allusion: which is to be preferred? Aeneas' intervention in an ancient Italian landscape as a metaphor for Virgil's intervention in archaic Roman poetry, or Virgil's intervention in archaic Roman poetry as a metaphor for Aeneas' intervention in an ancient Italian landscape?³⁰

His answer is to reject the choice. Intertextuality is open-ended.

Hinds goes on to complicate the moment further, invoking a reading of the passage by Richard Thomas.³¹ Thomas sees the antiquity of the woods combining with the position of Ennius as a hallowed predecessor of Virgil to give a kind of divine aura to the grove which Aeneas (and Virgil) have entered. It is an air of divinity which would have been readily present to Virgil's Roman readers, who were "aware of the reverence in which groves, sacred or otherwise, are held in the normal world."³² This opens the possibility of a negative reading of the *Aeneid's* penetration of the grove:

Apart from the suggestion of excessive action in 179-82, there is in the words *itur in antiquam siluam, stabula alta ferarum* [179] a note of empathy and animism not found in Virgil's models, and the words *antiquam siluam* imply that the woods could be numinous, and that we are dealing with the disruption of an old order.

²⁹ Text of Virgil from Conington, 2007. Translations from the *Aeneid* are from Lombardo, 2005.

³⁰ Hinds, 1998: 13.

³¹ Thomas, 1998: 268.

³² Thomas, 1998: 270.

Narratively, Virgil is describing an action which has previously been described by Ennius.³³ The poetic space, as Bloom would have it, is already crowded. This is bound to irk the later poet:

Can the truly strong poet bear only to be an elaboration of the poet who forever holds priority over him?³⁴

In this light, the chopping down of the Ennian trees is a poetic analogue of the violation that Thomas describes. Virgil has broken up the earlier work, and put it to a new use. The very fact of re-use invites us to think of the new instance as an improvement on the old. The fact that the pyre the Trojans seek to build is for Misenus, who died as a direct result of challenging the gods to a musical contest (*Aen.* VI.162-5), keeps the image of emulous rivals before us.³⁵

A similar function is performed by the imagery of names and titles which acts as prelude to another grove, this time in the second book of the *Africa*. Rome will endure, Scipio's late father tells him:

diu durabit eritque
Has inter pestes nudo uel nomine mundi
Regina. Hic nunquam titulus sacer excidet illi;
Qualiter annosum uires animusque leonem
Destituunt, sed prisca manet reuerentia fronti
Horrificusque sonus, quamquam sit ad omnia tardus.
Vmbra sit ille licet, circum tamen omnis inermi
Paret silua seni. [*Afr.* II.314-21]³⁶

³³ For Ennius himself as an ancient grove, see Quintilian *Inst.* X.88 in Russell, 2001.

³⁴ Bloom, 1973: 122.

³⁵ Ennius and Virgil are both reusing an image of tree-violation from Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*, particularly 50-5; but Callimachus was unknown to Petrarch. See Hopkinson, 1984.

³⁶ Text of the *Africa* is from Festa, 1926a.

[Rome] shall endure
and in her time of wretchedness to come
shall still be the world's queen, if but in name
alone. This title she shall never lose.
Even so an aging lion, long bereft
of strength and courage, may well still possess
his venerable mien and fearsome roar,
and though, a shadow of his former self,
he totters as he goes, yet all the jungle
obeys its feeble lord.

Petrarch has reached back past Virgil to Ennius, whose *exciditur ilex* at the end of a line is glancingly recalled in the *excidet illi* of *Afr.* II.316. The antique sanctity of the grove is plentifully present in *silua*, *seni*, *annosum* and *prisca... reuerentia*, and the *ferae* of *Aen.* VI.179 are represented in the aged lion, still roaring as his powers fade. If we are inclined to doubt the hint of *arma virumque* in the *uires animusque* which the elderly lion now lacks, Petrarch hands us a helpful *inermi* to clinch the allusion. This is an Ennian grove with a Virgilian lion in it. If the lion is still respected, however, his powers are fading. Just as the elder Scipio hands on the keeping of Rome's name to the younger Scipio, the old lion seems ready to give way to a fresher breed. There is no doubt about Petrarch's nominated successor. Lions, of course, suggest Africa, but the poet gives us more than that to work with. One later passage of the *Africa* shows the action as it happens. Scipio is sweeping into battle against the Punic army:

Scipio magnanimus uiolenti more leonis,
Qui catulis festinet opem siluasque ferasque
Obruat, in medios stricto penetrauerat ense. [*Afr.* VII.950-2]

And like a lion when it seeks out prey
to feed its young and falls on trees and beasts,
great-hearted Scipio with flashing blade
drives deep into the Punic host.

We have another grove and another lion. This time it is Scipio in the strength of his youth, and the grove is under fierce attack. The nameless *ferae* of Virgil are demolished by a lion in the form of Scipio. This one is not deficient in *uires animusque*: his *magnanimus* energy contrasts sharply with the tottering lion of Book II, and Scipio's penetration of the enemy ranks, sword drawn, is a picture of rampant masculine force.

Virgil as Aeneas has entered the grove of Ennius. Petrarch as Scipio has followed and torn him apart. The new tenant of that sacred poetic space now receives the strongest possible imprimatur. Sailing back to the Rome his valour has preserved, Scipio bends an ear to Ennius, who recounts the awestruck words he has addressed to a vision of Homer:

Quos colles, que rura colit, que uallibus imis
Antra tenet, quenam frondosa cacumina siluis... [*Afr.* IX.191-2]

[You have portrayed for me] the hills, the well-tilled fields,
the caves in hidden dells, the wooded peaks.

The sacred grove, of course, predates Ennius. Macrobius saw the Homeric intertext behind Virgil's allusion to the *Annales*,³⁷ and Petrarch's Ennius claims that intertext here. The *silvai frondosai* of *Ann.* 179 did not originate with Ennius, as Petrarch makes clear. It was Homer who first revealed to him the *frondosa cacumina siluis* (*Afr.* IX.192). Homer responds to Ennius with his own vision. This time it is a poet

³⁷ *Sat.* VI.2.27.

of the future who will occupy the woods, now linked explicitly to poetic glory (and to Petrarch's coronation) in the reiterated presence of the laurel. The poet is Petrarch himself, named openly as Francisco at *Afr.* IX.232, and described in tender terms:

Hinc modo tantus amor, tanta est reuerentia lauri.
Omnibus ex siluis iam nunc sibi gratior una est
Delphica; iamque nouas discit connectere frondes
Serta gerens; iam uenturi presagia mulcent. [*Afr.* IX.242-5]

Already in his heart the green frond stirs
so great a love, a reverence so deep
that in the Delphic grove alone he finds
his true content. See how he practices
to fashion garlands of the tender leaves,
already comforted by prophecies
of things to come.

The Petrarch who is finishing the *Africa* relates Ennius' past report of the words of Homer about a vision he had earlier been vouchsafed of a younger Petrarch taking comfort from a prophecy of his then-future greatness – a greatness which has now been guaranteed by his composition of the *Africa*.³⁸ It is a dizzying moment. Petrarch has reached back through Virgil, through Virgil's Ennian model, through the Homeric text which inspired them both, and found himself. Mann points out that Petrarch, in Homer's description, is "like Virgil in Simone Martini's miniature."³⁹

³⁸ For religious aspects of poetic prophecy in Petrarch see Boyle, 1991: 22ff.

³⁹ Mann, 1984: 106. For the miniature, commissioned by Petrarch for his manuscript of Virgil, see the fontispiece to Martindale, 1997.

The notes of anxiety in Virgil's irruption into the sacred grove, identified by Thomas, can now be read not as a consciousness of his invasion of Ennian space, but as a dim foreboding about his usurpation of a poet yet to be born. That poet will break the pattern of spoliation, with a proper genuflection to the numinous nature of the trees: *tanta est reuerentia lauri* (*Afr.* IX.242).

Where the Virgilian visit felled pines, split the oak and rolled dismembered tree-trunks down the mountain (*Aen.* VI.179-82), Petrarch's impact will be both lighter and more productive of poetic fame. He will weave the leaves into garlands (*Afr.* IX.244-5).

All these passages are linked by the word *silva* or variations thereof. Despite the other verbal similarities, at various levels of markedness, the reuse of that one word has now magnetised its every appearance in the *Africa*. We have seen Thomas suggest that a single word can accrue this power, and it is a point on which Gian Biagio Conte would agree:

A single word in a new poem will often be enough to condense a whole situation and to revive its mood.⁴⁰

We end the *Africa* with an appreciation of the thickened significance which has accrued to *silva*. When we are sent again to the opening of the poem, as we inevitably are by Homer's premonition of the young Petrarch about to begin its composition, we bring this new consciousness with us. It does not take Petrarch long to exploit it. As early as the opening passage, the poet pictures himself returned safely to his native groves and fields:

⁴⁰ Conte, 1986: 35.

Iam ruris amici
Prata quidem et fontes uacuisque silentia campis
Fluminaque et colles et apricis otia siluis
Restituit Fortuna michi. [*Afr.* I.6-9]

Now a favouring Fortune has once more
Restored to me clear springs and pleasant meads,
the welcome shelter of the sun-bathed hills,
and the soft stillness of the lonely fields.

Fortune has restored this bucolic landscape to Petrarch. This raises the question of who had occupied the territory before him. Tuned as we now are to the resonances of *siluis*, it is not too fanciful to catch among these glades and fountains the echo of the goats and singing-contests of Virgil's *Eclogues*. Here is Meliboeus addressing the lucky Tityrus, who reclines in the shade at the gift of Augustus:

Fortunate senex, hic inter flumina nota
et fontis sacros frigus captabis opacum;
hinc tibi, quae semper, vicino ab limite saepes
Hyblaeis apibus florem depasta salicti
saepe levi somnum suadebit inire susurro. [*Ecl.* I.51-5]

Happy old man! Here, amid familiar streams and sacred springs, you shall enjoy the cooling shade. On this side, as of old, on your neighbour's border, the hedge whose willow blossoms are sipped by Hybla's bees shall often with its gentle hum soothe you to slumber.⁴¹

As well as the general bucolic notion of rural *otium*, Petrarch has given us a sufficiency of cues to look specifically at the words of Meliboeus.

⁴¹ My translation.

Afr. 1.6-9

flumina

fontes

apricis

Fortuna

michi

Ecl. 1.51-5

flumina

fontis

apibus

fortunate

tibi

Now that Petrarch's *silua* is enriched, by a first reading of the *Africa*, with notions of the displacement of a poetic predecessor, it is hard not to see a hint of Virgil in the departing Meliboeus and a smile of Petrarchan victory in the leisured tenancy of Tityrus. The similarities are even plainer when Petrarch aligns his own patron and addressee, Robert of Naples, with the generous benefactor who has allowed Tityrus to stretch out here in the sunshine: the *lentus in umbra* of *Ecl.* 1.4 returns as the *mitis in umbra* of *Afr.* 1.34. This time around, however, Petrarch cherishes the bold hope that the wheel of poetic succession has come to an end with him:

Quantum tua clara fauori

Fama meo conferre potest! modo mitis in umbra

Nominis ista tui dirum spretura uenenum

Inuidie latuisse uelis, ubi nulla uetustas

Interea et nulli rodent mea nomina uermes. [*Afr.* 1.33-7]

How greatly then might your effulgent fame
avail me, if within the gracious shade
of your renown my verse might scorn the bane
of odious envy, there where neither years
nor gnawing maggots might erode my name.

Thomas Greene speaks of the “enormous anxiety”⁴² imposed on Renaissance humanists by the rediscovery of the ancient past, and of Petrarch’s particularly piquant consciousness of living out of his proper time. This is that anxiety at work: the emphatic assonance of the line endings (*uenenum, uetustas, uermes*) underlines the implacable force of time even as his poetic fame attempts to stop it in its tracks.

Petrarch’s evocation of Homer and Ennius through an allusion to Virgil is a perfect instance of what Thomas calls multiple reference: “a practice which allows the poet to refer to a number of antecedents and thereby to subsume their versions and the tradition along with them, into his own.”⁴³ The fact that Petrarch used it to fundamentally anti-Virgilian ends is perfectly in tune with ancient practice as it is outlined by Thomas:

As will become clear, this type may include within it the category of correction, and like that category its function is ultimately polemical – that is, its function is to revise the tradition.⁴⁴

We have seen Petrarch attempt not only to revise the tradition, but to inoculate it against further revision. It is just one indication of the scale of ambition we may be dealing with in the *Africa*’s rereading of Virgil.

For Thomas the corrective reference is characterised by a combination of scholarly and polemical urges. The referring poet evokes a passage of another poet’s work with an explicitly critical aim. It is hardly safe, however, to found a category of reference so firmly on the intention of an author. Corrective intertextuality is more properly viewed as the reader’s interpretation of a given

⁴² Greene, 1982: 31.

⁴³ Thomas, 1986: 193. For the similar but not identical “window reference,” which also has a corrective function, see Thomas, 1986: 188. See also Hardie, 1989: 3-4.

⁴⁴ Thomas, 1986: 190.

reference. Indeed, Thomas's description of the corrective reference is so broad as to cover every kind of reference or allusion short of wholesale quotation:

The process is quite straightforward, at least in its working principles: the poet provides unmistakable indications of his source, then proceeds to offer detail which contradicts or alters that source.⁴⁵

We have established that when a poet refers us to a passage of an earlier work, he intends us to read the referring passage in the light of that earlier work. But we are also now reading the earlier text with the newer passage in mind. Evoking the figure of Odysseus while describing the quotidian adventures of a middle-aged Dubliner can elevate the lowly Dubliner to something like heroism, but it can also banalise or domesticate the legendary Greek. Comparison works both ways. If Leopold Bloom's tipsy squabble with the Citizen is comparable to Odysseus' triumph over the Cyclops, then that epic triumph is necessarily also comparable to a squabble in a Dublin pub.⁴⁶

Bearing in mind the latent double-readings of Michael Riffaterre⁴⁷ and Stephen Hinds, we might class the attitude of these readings as one of either citation or revision. If the primary purpose of an allusion is to buttress a point in the referring passage by calling to witness an earlier work, then the allusion is citative. If the primary purpose is to guide our reading of the evoked text in the light of the referring work, the allusion is revisionary.

It is important to note that the categories are not mutually exclusive. The other reading is always present. The task of deciding what weight to allow each

⁴⁵ Thomas, 1986: 185.

⁴⁶ The squabble in question can be found in the twelfth chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

⁴⁷ See Riffaterre, 1990: 73-5.

reading is down to that “perilous quality of the [reader’s] mind, judgment...”⁴⁸ A new interpretation of a particular intertextual relationship will often involve a simple reinterpretation of the kind of allusion involved from one category to another, from citative to revisionary or vice versa. I will suggest that the undoubted allusions to Aeneas and Dido in Petrarch’s depiction of the last days of Sophonisba are revisionary, for example, rather than citative. They invite us to re-read the behaviour of Aeneas as less heroic than we might have thought, rather than bathing the actions of Massinissa in a reflected Aenean glow. This is a contrast, as we shall see, to previous readings of the same scenes. In general terms, my suggestion that the *Africa* is more critical of Virgil’s *Aeneid* than has previously been thought is an invitation to read Petrarch’s allusions to Virgil as corrective of the *Aeneid* rather than supportive of the *Africa*.

For an allusion to be read in either way, however, the allusion must first exist. Even in the short example above we have seen five kinds of verbal similarity which can point us from one passage to another:

<i>Afr.</i> I.6-9	<i>Ecl.</i> I.51-5
flumina	flumina
fontes	fontis
apricis	apibus
Fortuna	fortunate
michi	tibi

The first is simple repetition of a word in the same form: *flumina* begets *flumina*. The second and third involve a change of inflection or a cognate word: *fontes* leads easily to *fontis*, and the personified *Fortuna* leads no less easily to *fortunate*. The

⁴⁸ Thomas, 1986: 174.

fourth type is a simple echo of sound between two words which are not otherwise related. This type of confluence is remote enough that it can only really be awakened by the presence of other, clearer echoes the passages: *apricis* recalls *apibus* in a context which also includes *flumina/flumina* and the rest, just as Petrarch's *illi* recalled the *ilex* of Ennius only in the recurring presence of *exciditur/excidet*.

The fifth kind of verbal similarity is readily understood in terms of the Saussurean availability of one word to replace another in the same context.⁴⁹ *Michi* and *tibi* are closer than words which have no relation whatever:

To do just the opposite is also a form of imitation, and the definition of imitation ought by rights to include both.⁵⁰

We have seen Petrarch use synonymy or near-synonymy to point up an allusion, in his evocation of Virgil's *lentus in umbra* in his own *mollis in umbra*. This example also shows an allusion strengthened by its rhythmic placement at the end of a line.

Another factor that strengthens an allusion is the prominence of the word in the text alluded to. After Virgil, any use of the word *arma* will raise the suspicion of an allusion to the *Aeneid*, although that suspicion may not be lifted into certainty without the reinforcing presence of other verbal echoes. In the next chapter we will see Petrarch use the word *pius* to evoke Aeneas, but he is careful to link it to another overt allusion.

The crucial point about all these types of allusion is that they support each other, and we must therefore take into account the density with which they are placed together. *Mollis* recalls *lentus* because it is connected to *in umbra*. If it were

⁴⁹ See Saussure 1983: 121-4.

⁵⁰ G.C. Lichtenberg, quoted in Bloom, 1973: 31.

fifteen lines away, the echo would dissipate into silence. Even the casual reference identified by Richard Thomas depends on some supportive “oddity”⁵¹ of the context to give it life: to take an example from Petrarch, we could make a case for his use of the word *naufragium* at *Africa* III.497 as a reference to Lucan, precisely because it is a non-Virgilian word which occurs frequently in the *Bellum Civile*.⁵²

Given that Petrarch both counselled sternly against the practice of alluding to earlier poets, and also studded his work with such allusions, we must look with a cold eye at precisely what he says and what he does. Does his poetry fail to meet the standards of his criticism? Does his criticism struggle to grasp the complexity of his poetic technique? Or is there a third space where we can reconcile his precepts with his practice, and resolve their apparent contradiction into a richer complexity? To attempt that we will need to turn to the long tradition of thinking on the subject that Petrarch inherited, and examine what he did with that inheritance.

3. *Imitatio*: The Intertextual Ancients

We have seen the high regard in which Petrarch held Cicero. His manuscript of Cicero’s dialogue the *De Oratore* was incomplete, but it did have several passages on imitation, two of which the poet had obviously considered closely (they are asterisked in his manuscript).⁵³ The first discusses the value of practice for the aspiring orator, and how the student may be guided to the best models to follow:

⁵¹ Thomas, 1986: 179.

⁵² See *Bell. Civ.* I.503, III.662, III.690, IV.87, V.455, V.494, V.521, V.573, V.699 and VII.313. The muddier moral world of Lucan may be precisely what Petrarch means to evoke for Aeneas at that point in Laelius’ narrative. For Lucan and the *Africa*, see Bruère, 1961.

⁵³ McLaughlin, 1996b: 23.

Ergo hoc sit primum in praeceptis meis, ut demonstreremus, quem imitetur atque ita ut, quae maxima excellent in eo, quem imitabitur, ea diligentissime persequatur. Tum accedat exercitatio, qua illum, quem delegerit, imitando effingat, atque ita exprimat, non ut multos imitatores saepe cognovi, qui aut ea, quae facilia sunt, aut etiam illa, quae insignia ac paene vitiosa, consectantur imitando. [*De Oratore* II.90]

Let this then be my first counsel, that we show the student whom to copy, and to copy in such a way as to strive with all possible care to attain the most excellent qualities of his model. Next let practice be added, whereby in copying he may reproduce the pattern of his choice and not portray him as time and again I have known many copyists do, who in copying hunt after such characteristics as are easily copied and even abnormal and possibly faulty.⁵⁴

The second annotation, at II.152, indicates that Aristotle had enunciated similar principles, an imprimatur which Petrarch obviously welcomed.

Cicero's symposiasts deal with imitation purely as a training technique, and it is into this category that most ancient discussion of rhetorical imitation falls. This is certainly the case with Quintilian, whose work was also available to Petrarch.⁵⁵ Quintilian's tenth book has a great deal to say about imitation, with the second chapter devoted entirely to the subject. His pedagogical interests are never far away, but here they shade into a realisation that imitation is not strictly a childish thing:

Sic litterarum ductus, ut scribendi fiat usus, pueri secuntur, sic musici vocem doctentium, pictores opera priorum, rustici probatam experimento culturam in exemplum intuentur, omnis denique disciplinae initia ad propositum sibi praescriptum formari videmus. [*Inst.* X.2.2]

⁵⁴ Translations from *De Oratore* are from by Sutton and Rackham, 1948.

⁵⁵ Partly through his own discoveries. See Nolhac, 1907a: 52.

Children follow the outlines of letters so as to become accustomed to writing; singers find their model in their teacher's voice, painters in the works of their predecessors, and farmers in methods of cultivations which have been tested by experience. In a word, we see the rudiments of every branch of learning shaped by standards prescribed for it.

There is a progression from schoolboy to singing student to artist to mature farmer, and imitation remains useful even for those at the older end of the scale. When it comes specifically to writing, Quintilian addresses himself not to the young but to his fellow writers. Even for the mature writer, imitation is unavoidable:

Atque omnis vitae ratio sic constat, ut quae probamus in aliis facere ipsi velimus.
[Inst. X.2.2]

Moreover, it is a principle of life in general that we want to do for ourselves what we approve in others.⁵⁶

Having provided a canon of good stylistic models, he suggests combing their work for vocabulary and images, as well as for the moral lessons they can impart:

Ex his ceterisque lectione dignis auctoribus et verborum sumenda copia est et varietas figurarum et componendi ratio, tum ad exemplum virtutum omnium mens dirigenda. Neque enim dubitari potest quin artis pars magna contineatur imitatione. [Inst. X.2.1]

It is from these and other authors worth reading that we must draw our stock of words, the variety of our Figures, and our system of Composition, and also guide our minds by the patterns they provide of all the virtues. It cannot be doubted that a large part of art consists of imitation.

⁵⁶ All translations of Quintilian are from Russell, 2001.

When it comes to this adult artistry, Petrarch will have found fuel for both his precepts and his practice. Quintilian has already warned against the attempt to strike out alone, without the use of literary models:

Nam neque solida atque robusta fuerit umquam eloquentia nisi multo stilo vires acceperit, et citra lectionis exemplum labor ille carens rectore fluitabit.

[*Inst. X.1.2*]

Eloquence will never be mature and robust unless it develops strength by much practice in writing. Without the models supplied by reading, the whole effort will be adrift, and there will be no one at the helm.

On the other hand, he allows that the newer artist should not be hemmed in by the discoveries of the older. We may build on our predecessors, but we must strive to surpass them:

Quid enim futurum erat temporibus illis quae sine exemplo fuerunt si homines nihil nisi quod iam cognovissent faciendum sibi aut cogitandum putassent? Nempe nihil fuisset inventum. [*Inst. X.2.4-5*]

What would have happened in the days when there were no models, if men had decided to do and think of nothing that they did not know already? Nothing of course would have been discovered.

There is room for manoeuvre too in Quintilian's views of which artist has the greater achievement, the creator who originates or the disciple who perfects. Earlier in Book X, as we will see, it is suggested that Virgil is in some regards superior to Homer because his task was more difficult. Petrarch's concern for his own poetic ranking among his contemporary Italian poets is visible in *Sen. V.2*, a

late letter to Boccaccio.⁵⁷ This focus on his place in the canon might be expected from a poet nearing the end of his life,⁵⁸ but an earlier letter to Robert of Naples, recalling Petrarch's then recent coronation, openly declares the poet's intention to be ranked alongside the great poets of Augustan Rome. He sees his contemporaries crippled by comparison anxiety. It is a feeling Petrarch shares, but he will use it to drive himself to greatness:

Sane illos desperatio sua retrahat, nos impellat, et unde illis frenum ac vincula, nobis impetus ac stimuli accesserint, ut studeamus fieri qualem illi nullum opinantur, nisi quem antiquitas illustravit. [*Fam.* IV.7.8]

Doubtless the despair which holds them back motivates us, and the bridle and chains which affect them are goads and spurs to us so that we try to become what they believe no-one can become except one of the ancients.

This hunger, which will also inform the *Africa's* re-ordering of the epic canon,⁵⁹ was not widespread among Petrarch's contemporaries, and it remained unusual:

Petrarch is the first modern Latin author to demand admission to the canon of great Latin writers. No Latin author of the Renaissance was so explicit about his desire to rival the ancients; no writer after him attempted by quite so heroic a *coup de main* to create works that could stand next to those of Virgil, Livy and Cicero.⁶⁰

The concern for poetic ranking will have combined with Petrarch's interest in imitation to make Quintilian's thoughts on Homer and Virgil doubly resonant:

Utar enim verbis isdem quae ex Afro Domitio iuvenis excepi, qui mihi interroganti quem Homero crederet maxime accedere "secundus" inquit "est Vergilius, propior

⁵⁷ He also mocks Lucan for daring to compare himself, however humbly, to Virgil.

⁵⁸ The letter was probably composed in 1364. See Kirkham and Maggi, 2009: 347, n. 1.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 3.

⁶⁰ Hankins, 2004: 1.

tamen primo quam tertio." Et hercule ut illi naturae caelesti atque immortalis cesserimus, ita curae et diligentiae vel ideo in hoc plus est, quod ei fuit magis laborandum. [*Inst.* X.1.86]

Let me quote the words I heard from Domitius Afer when I was a young man. I had asked who he thought came nearest to Homer; "Vergil is second," he replied, "but nearer to the first than to the third." Indeed, though we must yield to Homer's divine and immortal genius, there is more care and craftsmanship in Vergil, if only because he had to work harder at it.

Neither Afer nor Quintilian goes into greater detail about the precise factors which made it more difficult for Virgil, but in the context it is hard not to attribute some of the difficulty to the simple fact of his belatedness. Homer had already achieved so much in the epic form that the great scope had narrowed. The ground was cleared. This interpretation will have presented itself readily to Petrarch, with his consciousness of the cramping effect of the classical achievement on his contemporaries.

Quintilian may also have buttressed Petrarch's determination to compete with the ancients rather than be cowed by them. The general attitude which Quintilian encourages in aspiring poets is characterised by Thomas Greene as an "emulative rivalry towards the great models which is also nourished by them."⁶¹ This is the benign aspiration Petrarch outlines in *Fam.* IV.7, where he speaks of joining rather than displacing the ancient writers. But Quintilian also holds out the prospect of a harsher outcome, where the poetic emulator supplants his model not just as a poet but as a poetic model for future generations:

⁶¹ Greene, 1982: 79.

Nam erit haec quoque laus eorum, ut priores superasse, posteros docuisse dicantur. [*Inst.* X.2.28]

These masters will acquire another glory too: that of being said to have surpassed their predecessors and taught their successors.

These are Quintilian's final words on the subject of imitation.

For a longer and more detailed consideration of imitation in epic, Petrarch will have turned to Macrobius, who considers the role of imitation not in the work of a generalised figure of the mature poet, but in the specific work of Virgil himself. The dialogue format of the Saturnalia allows Macrobius to subject Virgil's imitative practice to both praise and blame. In formulating his own ideas, Petrarch will have had voices from both sides to bolster whichever case he chose to make. He will certainly have noted Eusthatus' admiration for Virgil's concealment of his borrowings:

Eusthatus deinde: Maxime, inquit, praedicarem, quanta de Graecis cautus et tamquam aliud agens modo artificii dissimulatione modo professa imitatione transtulerit. [*Sat.* I.24.18]

I, added Eusthatus, should give the highest praise to his use of Greek models – a cautious use and one which may even have the appearance of being accidental, since he sometimes skilfully conceals the debt, though at other times he imitates openly.⁶²

Macrobius' Furius traces poetic borrowing back to the greatest Greek poets,⁶³ and reverses Quintilian's caution about the inevitably lacklustre air of the imitator. For Furius, a successor poet may make a greater use of what he borrows than the poet

⁶² All translations of Macrobius are from Davies, 1969.

⁶³ *Sat.* V.1.2.

whose text he is plundering. Of course the successor poet most immediately in question is Virgil:

Quod si haec societas et rerum communio poetis scriptoribusque omnibus inter se exercenda concessa est, quis fraudi Virgilio vortat, si ad excolendum se quaedam ab antiquioribus mutuatus sit? Cui etiam gratia hoc nomine est habenda, quod nonnulla ab illis in opus suum, quod aeterno mansurum est, transferendo fecit ne omnino memoria veterum deleteretur... Denique et iudicio transferendi et modo imitandi consecutus est ut quod apud illum legerimus alienum aut illius esse malimus aut melius hic quam ubi natum est sonare miremur. [*Sat.* V.1.5-6]

But if all poets and other writers are allowed to act among themselves in this way, as partners holding in common, what right has anyone to accuse Vergil of dishonesty, if he has borrowed from his predecessors to embellish his poems? We may even say that they owe him thanks on this account, since by transferring something of theirs to his own immortal work he has ensured that the memory of these old writers ... should not wholly perish. In fact, Virgil showed such judgment too in his borrowings, and such was the manner of his imitation, that when, in our reading of him, we come across another's words, we either choose to regard them as Vergil's own or else realize with surprise that they sound better now than they did in their original context.

With some qualifications, therefore, what Petrarch found in his Latin sources was a respect for poetic borrowing which refuses to put the borrowing poet in a subordinate position to the poet borrowed from. A predecessor can be surpassed even as he is pillaged.

To leaven all this precept, there was also the practice of the medieval poets in Latin, who were enthusiastic imitators of classical verse.⁶⁴ Although there is no evidence that Petrarch looked on their work with particular favour, or indeed

⁶⁴ See Greene, 1982: 81.

looked on it at all, these medieval pasticheurs at least provided a precedent for the production of literature in a classical vein.

Petrarch was aware, however, as these earlier writers were not, of the changes in Latin style since antiquity. In this he differed from even his most immediate predecessor in the field of Italian, if not Latin, epic poetry. For all that the *Inferno* is “basically a Christian rewriting and expansion of *Aeneid* 6, an imitation of and dialogue with Virgil,”⁶⁵ Dante has nothing like Petrarch’s keen consciousness of the distance that European language and literature have travelled since antiquity:

The Latin employed by Dante in his various works is the educated language of the schools and the *magistri dictaminis*: unlike the humanists who succeeded him, Dante does not set out to imitate the Latin of any one classical author. Indeed for Dante ... Latin is an artificial and immutable construct with no historical development.⁶⁶

Perhaps because of this absence in Dante of the tragic conception of a great chasm between antiquity and his own time which stimulated so much of Petrarch’s thought, Dante’s thinking on imitation is not as subtle or as wide-ranging as the younger poet’s. But his views on the relationship between modern vernacular poets and their classical forebears will have loomed large for a poet like Petrarch, celebrated as he was for both his vernacular and his Latin work.

Dante turns in the second book of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* to the imitation of Latin poets, particularly Horace and Virgil, by poets who write in the various European vernaculars. Hampered by their alienation from the Latin language, the best way for them to achieve true eloquence is to copy the Latin masters diligently.

⁶⁵ McLaughlin, 1996b: 18.

⁶⁶ McLaughlin, 1996b: 17.

Petrarch's decision to write in Latin would have placed him beyond such counsel, and we cannot even be certain that he read the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.⁶⁷ We may suspect that the humility with which the modern poet is advised to approach his ancient counterpart would not have sat comfortably, in any case, with a man to whom an attitude of obeisance did not come readily:

Eos qui vulgariter versificantur ... differunt tamen a magnis poetis, hoc est regularibus, quia magni sermone et arte regulari poetate sunt, hii varo casu, ut dictum est. Idcirco accidit ut, quantum illos proximius imitetur, tantum rectius poetemur. [*De Vulgari Eloquentia* II.4.2]

Those who write in the vernacular ... differ from the great poets, that is, those who obey the rules, since those poets wrote their poetry in a language and with a technique, governed by rules, whereas these write at random, as I said above. Thus it comes about that, the more closely we try to imitate the great poets, the more correctly we write great poetry.⁶⁸

For Martin McLaughlin, the last sentence here is so generalised as hardly to constitute advice:

How one should model the poetry of the *volgare* on the Latin literary tradition is not specified here: it is a rather vague *imitatio*, possibly restricting itself to the inculcation of moral themes.⁶⁹

Petrarch, however, may have read something more subtle into Dante's point. The older poet is clearly not talking about direct translation into the vernacular languages, but about the production of original poetry which owes a debt to the classical. The change of language means that the debt to Latin poetry cannot easily

⁶⁷ But, Foster asks, "would Boccaccio not at least have told him about it?" See Foster, 1984: 25.

⁶⁸ Text and translation from Botterill, 1996.

⁶⁹ McLaughlin, 1996b: 14.

be expressed in direct allusion. This thought sits comfortably with Petrarch's assertion, to which we will shortly come, that while direct verbal allusion is wrong, there is a kind of allusion which does not depend on obvious textual echoes.

If Petrarch has taken Dante's first thought here and developed it, however, he subjects the second to a witty reversal. Dante encourages emulation of the classics, so it is perfectly appropriate for him to invoke the works of classical poetics as a foundation for his project. This he glancingly does:

The second sentence suggests that Dante is himself imitating Horace here in writing an *ars poetica* for the vernacular.⁷⁰

Having first suggested that the classics should be imitated, Dante then aligns his own thought with that of a classical forebear. The allusion is plain, easily read, and not particularly resonant. Petrarch uses Seneca in precisely the opposite way, to much richer effect. As one of his most complete statements on intertextuality, the letter to Boccaccio on the subject is worth exploring at length.

The immediate spur for the letter is the case of Giovanni Malpaghini,⁷¹ a young writer who cemented his place in Petrarch's affection by memorizing and reciting his *Bucolicum Carmen*. Petrarch presents the young man as a paragon of every virtue. He is very similar to Petrarch, more even than a son. He is also more to be cherished than a son, because among his other virtues he bends himself without resistance to the older poet's will:

His me moribus sic promeruit, ut non minus michi quam filius quem genuissem
carus sit, et fortassis eo carior, quod filius, ut mos est adolescentium nostrorum,
imperare vellet, hic parere studet, nec suis voluptatibus sed meis vacat obsequiis,

⁷⁰ McLaughlin, 1996b: 14.

⁷¹ See Antognini, 2007: 205.

et hic quidem nulla cupidine seu spe premii, sed solo amore tractus et fortasse sperans nostro fieri melior convictu. [*Fam.* XXIII.19.6]

His character has so recommended him to me that he is no less dear to me than a son, perhaps even dearer, since a son – such are the ways of our young men today – would wish to rule, while this one is eager to obey and to follow not his own inclinations but my will, doing all this without self-interest or expectation of reward, but simply out of love and perhaps the hope of becoming a better person out of our friendship.

The better person that the young man hopes to become sounds increasingly like a modest new version of Petrarch. He is also a little more organised. Petrarch has almost abandoned his project of collecting for posterity his prose letters to friends and to the great men of his own and former times. The newcomer has not only revived the project, but taken it upon himself to transcribe the letters:

Iste unus ad exitum perduxit, non quidem omnes, sed eas que uno non enormi nimium volumine capi possent; que, si hanc illis inseruero, numerum trecentarum et quinquaginta complebunt. Quas tu olim illius manu scriptas, prestante Deo, aspicias, non vaga quidem ac luxurianti litera – qualis est scriptorum seu verius pictorum nostri temporis, longe oculos mulcens, prope autem afficiens ac fatigans. [*Fam.* XXIII.19.7-8]

This young man by himself has now brought to completion, indeed not all, but enough to form a volume of modest dimension; and if I insert this letter, they will number 350. God willing you will see them sometime, written in his hand, not with that pompous and fancy lettering so typical of contemporary scribes or rather painters that from a distance appeals to the eye but up close confuses and wearies them.

Petrarch thus emphasises the importance of the current letter by announcing its inclusion in the collection. This is not simply a gossipy screed from a friend to a

friend. It is a letter from one writer to another, apparently about a third. The fact that Petrarch does not name the nominal subject of the letter directs our attention to its general themes rather than its specific application to the young man's poetry. This encourages us to view the long preamble not as the idle enjoyment of a flattering or promising protégé, but as a preface to the main theme of the letter. Indeed, Petrarch emphasises that he has had one guiding thought in his mind all along:

Ut vero in his ultimum sit literis quod primum in animo meo fuit, est hic quidem in primis ad poeticam pronus, in qua si pergit usqueadeo ut cum tempore animum firmet, ad certum aliquid et mirari te coget et gaudere. [*Fam.* XXIII.19.9]

To arrive finally at what was first in my thoughts, the young man has a decided leaning for poetry; if he continues along his present path and eventually realizes his potential, he will compel your admiration and delight.

It is not certain that this potential will be realised, however. That danger is what links the two halves of the letter, the biographical and the theoretical. Malpaghini is not just a promising copy of Petrarch, or a diligent copyist of Petrarch's correspondence. He also harbours poetic ambitions. These are inchoate as yet, but he has hit with glee upon a technique for improving his work. It is the technique, of course, of copying.⁷² Familiar as we have become with his filial devotion and his happy immersion in Petrarch's works, we may be inclined to expect that the young poet's host would be his ideal literary model. But Malpaghini has another candidate in mind:

⁷² *Fam.* XXIII.19.10.

In primis sane Virgilium miratur; iure id quidem: cum enim multi vatum e numero nostrorum laudabiles, unus ille mirabilis est. Huius hic amore et illecebris captus, sepe carminum particulas suis inserit; ego autem, qui illum michi succrescentem letus video quique eum talem fieri qualem me esse cupio, familiariter ipsum ac paterne moneo, videat quid agit. [*Fam.* XXIII.19.11]

He admires Virgil above all, appropriately enough; for though many of our poets are praiseworthy he alone is supreme. So enamoured of Virgil's charms is he that he often inserts bits taken from him into his own works; but I who see him developing before my eyes and becoming the type of poet that I should like to be, warn him in a friendly and fatherly fashion to watch what he is doing.

The personal imitation which has delighted Petrarch, even down to the transcription for the *Familiars* of the letter in hand, is obviously a very different matter from the literary imitation of Virgil. The easy psychological reading here is that the young man's mistake is to choose for a poetic model not just someone other than Petrarch, but someone at the root of Petrarch's own anxiety as an imitator. The hapless house-guest may have paid Petrarch's *Eclogues* the honour of committing them to memory, but he has also unpicked the bucolic proem to the *Africa*, in which Petrarch supplants Virgil as both a poet and a teacher of poets. Petrarch has anointed his visitor as son and heir. When the young man turns to Virgil for a father-figure, the freeze comes down: friendly and paternal Petrarch may claim to be, but there is something almost comically threatening in that *videat quid agit*.

The psychological reading, then, is compelling. But we would be mistaken to imagine that this reading of his own text is not available to Petrarch too. The whole letter calls on a discourse of paternity, of family resemblance as a metaphor for emulation. Petrarch may well have feelings of rivalry with Virgil for the young

man's literary affections, and the fact that he is writing all this to another junior writer and protégé gives the rich emotional stew another stir. But Petrarch is capable of subordinating these feelings to a larger literary point, and this is the point he has been preparing all along:

Curandum imitatori ut quod scribit simile non idem sit, eamque similitudinem talem esse oportere, non qualis est imaginis ad eum cuius image est, quae quo similior eo maior laus artificis, sed qualis filii ad patrem. In quibus cum magna saepe diversitas sit membrorum, umbra quaedam et quem pictores nostri aerem vocant, qui in vultu inque oculis maxime cernitur, similitudinem illam facit quae statim viso filio, patris in memoriam nos reducat, cum tamen si res ad mensuram redeat, omnia sint diversa; sed est ibi nescio quid occultum quod hanc habeat vim. Sic et nobis providendum ut cum simile aliquid sit, multa sint dissimilia, et ad ipsum simile lateat ne deprehendi possit nisi tacitae mentis indagine, ut intellegi simile queat potiusquam dici. Utendum igitur ingenio alieno utendumque coloribus, abstinendum verbis; illa enim similitudo latet, haec eminet; illa poetas facit, haec simias. [*Fam.* XXIII.19.11-13]

An imitator must take care to write something similar yet not identical to the original, and that similarity must not be like the image to its original in painting, where the greater the similarity the greater the praise for the artist, but rather like that of a son to his father. While often very different in their individual features, they have a certain something our painters call an "air," especially noticeable about the face and eyes, that produces a resemblance; seeing the son's face, we are reminded of the father's, although if it came to measurement, the features would all be different, but there is something subtle that creates this effect. We must thus see to it that if there is something similar, there is also a great deal that is dissimilar, and that the similar be elusive and unable to be extricated except in silent meditation, for the resemblance is to be felt rather than expressed. Thus we may appropriate another's ideas as well as his colouring but we must abstain from his actual words; for, with the former, resemblance remains hidden, and with the latter it is glaring; the former creates poets, the second apes.

It is a rousing climax, and Petrarch has ensured that its message is both clear and forceful by drawing together the strands of imagery from the prefatory half of the letter. We have seen the young man as a kind of son, we have seen transcription as a kind of painting, and we have seen the father-son relationship unhitched from biology and recruited to the cause of literary emulation. Now all three come together in what appears at first sight to be a defiantly different take on imitation from the one that Petrarch has inherited both from the ancients and from his immediate literary forebears. Those sources have of course suggested that the imitator should bring something new to his models, and not simply mimic their phraseology. Here is Quintilian:

Imitatio autem ... non sit tantum in verbis. [Inst. X.2.27]

Imitation ... should not be restricted to words.

But even Quintilian at his most cautious does not counsel the complete avoidance of verbal similarity. How could he? Literature is made of words. If the words of two texts are not similar, how can one be in any way an imitation of the other?

There are two answers to this question which free Petrarch from the charge of absurdity, and the first is simply to note that his approach here is more complex than it first appears. The first hint is in the passage immediately following, where Petrarch once again invokes the father-son relationship, but this time adduces some classical authorities to his counsel:

Standum denique Senece consilio, quod ante Senecam Flacci erat, ut scribamus scilicet sicut apes mellificant, non servatis floribus sed in favos versis, ut ex multis et variis unum fiat, idque aliud et melius. Hec dum sepe secum agerem et ille semper intentus ceu patrios monitus audiret... [Fam. XXIII.19.13-14]

It may all be summarized by saying with Seneca, and Flaccus before him, that we must write as the bees make honey, not gathering flowers but turning them into honeycombs, thereby blending them into a oneness that is unlike them all, and better. I often speak thus to him since he is ever as attentive as though listening to a father's advice.

We have seen Dante support his stance in favour of imitation with a reference to Horace (*arte... poetate*). He has made a simple point, simply buttressed or ornamented with classical allusion. Petrarch does something which at first glance makes less sense. In asserting that modern literature should be free of unmistakable allusions to the literature of the past, he cites not one but two classical writers as authorities, and goes on to employ an image which alludes unmistakably to their work. Petrarch is speaking primarily of poetry, of course, but to cite two writers as a source for a ban on outright citation seems designed to arrest the attention.

The image of the bees is one Petrarch has taken primarily from Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*:

Apes ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vagantur et flores ad mel faciendum idoneos carpunt, deinde quidquid attulere, disponunt ac per favos digerunt. [...] Nos quoque has apes debemus imitari et quaecumque ex diversa lectione congegimus, separare, melius enim distincta servantur, deinde adhibita ingenii nostri cura et facultate in unum saporem varia illa libamenta confundere, ut etiam si apparuerit, unde sumptum sit, aliud tamen esse quam unde sumptum est, appareat. [*Ep. Mor.* 84.3-5]

We should follow, men say, the example of the bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing honey, and then arrange and sort in their cells all that they have brought in. [...] We also, I say, ought to copy these bees, and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading, for such things are better preserved if they are kept separate; then, by applying the supervising care

with which our nature has endowed us – in other words, our natural gifts – we should so blend those several flavours into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from that whence it came.⁷³

In warning against verbal imitation, Petrarch reuses this image in substantially the same words. The inevitability of verbal confluence from one passage to another makes it dangerous to read too much into the similarities: Latin does not have a wealth of synonyms for *apis* or *mel*. At the very least, however, we can see that Petrarch has not exerted himself to silence the echoes:

... ut scribamus scilicet sicut **apes mellificant**, non **servatis floribus** sed in **favos** versis, ut ex multis et **variis unum** fiat, idque **aliud** et **melius**.

[*Fam.* XXIII.19.13-14]

Apes ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vagantur et **flores** ad **mel faciendum** idoneos carpunt, deinde quidquid attulere, disponunt ac per **favos** digerunt.... nos quoque has **apes** debemus imitari et quaecumque ex diversa lectione conguessimus, separare, **melius** enim distincta **servantur**, deinde adhibita ingenii nostri cura et facultate in **unum** saporem **varia** illa libamenta confundere, ut etiam si apparuerit, unde sumptum sit, **aliud** tamen esse quam unde sumptum est, appareat. [*Ep. Mor.* 84.3-5]

A passage from *Fam.* I.8 lends considerable weight to the view that Petrarch is doing something quite complex here. He has been asked for advice on poetic originality, and he passes on the image of the bees from Seneca. He takes a moment, however, to question Macrobius for his manner of passing on Seneca's advice:

⁷³ Text and translation of Seneca's *Epistles* from Gummere, 1920.

Eius autem non sensum modo, sed verba Macrobius in *Saturnalibus* posuit; ut michi quidem uno eodemque tempore quod legendo simul ac scribendo probaverat, rebus ipsis improbare videretur; non enim flores apud Senecam lectos in favos vertere studuit, sed integros et quales in alienis ramis invenerat, protulit. [*Fam.* 1.8.3]

Macrobius in his *Saturnalia* reported not only the sense by the very words of Seneca, so that to me at the very time he seemed to be following this advice in his reading and his writing, he seemed to be disapproving of it by what he did. For he did not try to produce honey from the flowers culled from Seneca, but instead produced them whole in the very form in which he had found them on the stems.

A writer may reproduce the insights of the ancients, but he should do it in different words. If he reproduces the words, he must put them to a different purpose. This is made clear in Petrarch's attribution of the advice to Seneca, followed as it immediately and wittily is by a reattribution to Horace (*Seneca consilio, quod ante Senecam Flacci erat*).⁷⁴ Petrarch follows Seneca in advising against covering the traces of one's borrowings, but turns this into the simplest possible instance of corrective reading by pointing out that Seneca has not followed his own advice.

This kind of corrective reading is Petrarch's contribution to the study of imitation. Although Macrobius allows that borrowed finery may be nipped and tucked into even greater elegance, he does not expand this into a wider consideration of corrective intertextuality, where the later poet draws attention not to the strengths but to the weaknesses of the earlier. It is in this gap that we can find a consistency in Petrarch, a small area where his prose precept and his poetic practice can coincide.

When the *Saturnalia's* Eusthatius praises Virgil for the subtlety of some of his borrowings, while viewing the cruder borrowings with less pleasure or

⁷⁴ For Horace's poetic bee, see *Odes* IV.2.27-32.

approval,⁷⁵ he takes a critical stance which values intertextual echoes more the more dimly they present themselves to the ear. This has difficulties for both the poet and the commentator. At what point does an echo become so subtle that it is indistinguishable from the simple monophonic voice of the poetry which surrounds it? Thomas Greene thinks that Petrarch has solved the question:

Petrarch seems already to see that this kind of assimilation must occur if the modern text is truly to recall its paternal model imprecisely but unmistakably. Only this profounder and more secret act of "imitation" permits the authentic subreading of a latent otherness in the modern work and invests it with unique historical depth. The alien text has been absorbed so thoroughly that its presence *haunts* the polyvocal modern text, slowly reveals itself to the silent searching of the mind, resonates faintly in the third ear.⁷⁶

This search for a kind of "secret" allusion brings us to the second answer to the question Petrarch raises about the similarity of dissimilar texts. This is the possibility of a kind of non-textual intertextuality. That possibility is exploited in the *Africa*, where several scenes refer back to the *Aeneid* even without the support of overt textual confluence at the level of the line or phrase, as we shall see in chapter four.

Before we get to that narrative intertextuality, however, two tasks remain. The first is to relate the letter to Boccaccio specifically to the question of Petrarch's Virgilian borrowings, and happily this is a job that Petrarch has already done. In an unusually self-deprecating moment at the end of that letter, Petrarch recounts his challenge to his young friend to find anything in Petrarch's works which had been filched from Virgil. The younger poet immediately draws on his rote learning of the

⁷⁵ See particularly *Sat.* V.11-13.

⁷⁶ Greene, 1982: 99.

Bucolicum Carmen to point out that one of its lines ends on a phrase from the *Aeneid*.⁷⁷

Petrarch chides Boccaccio jokingly for having let such a theft go unnoticed. The tone of self-deprecation lasts for fully three sentences, but the real culprit is soon in the dock, and it is neither Petrarch nor Boccaccio but Virgil himself. If Petrarch approaches him first in the posture of a suppliant, the beggar's cloak is soon thrown off for something more befitting a prosecutor:

postremo et mecum ipse Virgilium ores, det veniam nec moleste ferat si, cum Homero, Ennio, Lucretio multisque aliis multa sepe rapuerit, ego sibi non rapui, sed modicum aliquid inadvertens tuli. [*Fam.* XXIII.19.17]

Lastly, I ask you to pray to Virgil with me for forgiveness, asking him not to be annoyed if, just as he stole many things from Homer, Ennius, Lucretius, and others, I inadvertently took, but did not steal, a little something from him.

Petrarch has been absent-minded, and let down by his friend's lax editorial oversight. Virgil is a calculating thief.⁷⁸

The second task is to see how exactly Petrarch's concealment of verbal allusions from the casual reader might work in practice. He is good enough to provide us with an example of the strategy in action, and to place it in the most prominent part of his poem. The opening of an epic furnishes an author with several tools which are nowhere else so freely available to him. This depends on three specific features of openings. One of them is its simple familiarity. In general, the best-known and most-read section of any epic will be the opening lines. No

⁷⁷ *Buc. Carm.* VI.193: *atque intonat ore*. Cf. *Aen.* VI.607.

⁷⁸ See *Fam.* XXII.2 for a similar disapproval of Virgil's borrowings.

allusion a poet makes to a predecessor's work can be more certain of reader recognition than an allusion to an opening.⁷⁹

This quality intensifies and is intensified by a second feature of openings, which is that they carry a high expectation of intertextuality. Petrarch knew from Servius that the first line of the *Aeneid* picked up two cues from the first lines of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and was itself referred to frequently in subsequent Roman poetry. Its fame, therefore, is not just as a line of Virgil but as a locus of intertextuality with both earlier and later poets.

The third feature of an opening is simply that it is remembered specifically as an opening. Epic poets and other readers of epic poetry will generally carry a stock of remembered lines or phrases. Most of these will not come with a line number, or a memory of the passage's exact place in the text. The opening line is crucially different: we remember it as an opening. Reading the opening of a later Latin epic, we are already alive to the possibility not just of any Virgilian intertext, but of a specific reference to the opening of the *Aeneid*. As we begin to read the *Africa*, therefore, we are keyed to expect a nod to Virgil's foundational account of the first Roman hero.⁸⁰ For Petrarch to confute this expectation would be perhaps as profound a statement as a definite allusion. At first glance, that is what he seems to be doing:

Et michi conspicuum meritis belloque tremendum
Musa, virum referes... [*Afr.* I.1-2]

⁷⁹ See Conte, 1996: 70. For indirect citation in epic proems, see Barchiesi, 2001: 129.

⁸⁰ Macrobius decisively rejects the purported preface (*Ille ego...*) as un-Virgilian. Servius is perhaps less definitive (see Austin, 1968: 107-8), but he too begins the poem with *arma virumque*.

Petrarch's proem contains several distinct reminiscences of the first line of the *Aeneid*, as we will see, but these are pointedly deferred until after the *Africa's* opening line. That opening reaches back defiantly past Virgil, to the opening of the *Odyssey* of Livius Andronicus:

Virum mihi, Camena, insece versutum...⁸¹

Remarkably, Petrarch's first line writes Virgil out of the picture in three distinct ways. The echo of Andronicus' *mihi* (or, more fully, *mihi c...*) reminds us that, while Virgil may have written the epic of Rome's founder, he is not himself the founder of Roman epic. That priority belongs to Livius Andronicus. To acknowledge him in this way can easily be read as a snub to Virgil. The impression is confirmed by two other factors.

The first is Petrarch's deferment of *virum*, the first word of Livius Andronicus' line. Petrarch obviously cannot replicate in hexameters the positioning of *virum* at the head of the verse, where it would work as an unambiguous evocation of Livius Andronicus and of Homer. To use it elsewhere in his opening line would make it equally, or even primarily, an evocation of the *Aeneid's virumque*. By deferring it until his second line, Petrarch once again turns his face away from Virgil.

The last gesture of elision is complex but particularly piquant, given that it recalls Virgil's allusive opening not to make him present, but to dismiss him more effectively. It is not enough to refuse him admission; we must be made to notice that he is barred.

⁸¹ Petrarch will have found the line in Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* XVIII.9.5. See Nohac, 1907b: 103.

Virgil's recall of both Homeric epics in the opening words of the *Aeneid*, *arma virumque*, has several effects. One of the most basic is to position his own poem as a successor to both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He will not confine himself to one wing of the Homeric achievement, but further a tradition which calls on both.

Petrarch usurps this notion by also referring to both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in his opening line, but without evoking a single word of Virgil's opening line. We have seen him recall the *Odyssey*, through the Latin version of Livius. *Belloque* places us as squarely as *arma* in the military world of the *Iliad*. Petrarch has recalled Virgil's Homeric gesture, but emptied it of Virgilian content. In the very opening of Petrarch's poem we have a gesture of self-alignment with Homer, to the exclusion of Virgil. This will be expanded, as we shall see, in Book IX.

This is not the end of the story. Petrarch's injunction is not against any kind of evocation of a previous poem, but against an un-nuanced similarity, a quotation or homage too literal-minded and easily read. His opening line is free of such similarities, but the *Aeneid* is not absent. For the hidden allusions we need only widen our scope to include the next few lines:

Et michi conspicuum meritis belloque tremendum,
Musa, uirum referes, Italis cui fracta sub armis
Nobilis eternum prius attulit Africa nomen.
Hunc precor exhausto liceat michi sugere fontem
Ex Elicone sacrum, dulcis mea cura, Sorores,
Si uobis miranda cano. [*Afr.* I.1-6]

Muse you will tell me of the man, renowned
for his great deeds, redoubtable in war,
on whom first noble Africa, subdued

by Roman arms, bestowed a lasting name.
Fair sisters, ye who are my dearest care,
if I propose to sing of wondrous things,
may it be given me to quaff full deep
of the sweet sacred spring of Helicon.

At first glance there may not seem to be much textual correspondence between this opening and the famous first line of the *Aeneid*:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris... [*Aen.* I.1]

Arms I sing – and a man,
The first to come from the shores
Of Troy...

But if we apply Petrarch's strategies of deviousness, we can see that no single word in the *Aeneid*'s opening line is without a corresponding word in Petrarch's poem. He has disguised his references with elaborate dislocation, but for his ideal reader, attuned to the strategies he outlines in his letter to Boccaccio, the *Aeneid* is presented to the intellect rather than the senses, to be discerned rather than parroted.

Petrarch's desire, as stated in his letter, is not just to avoid direct quotation but to withhold from the reader the flash of recognition that presents itself to the emotions when a similarity is immediately obvious. He wants to break up his references to earlier poets so that they are available to the reader, but not in the form of a blatant citation. This is not his invariable practice, but he provides no clearer example of it than here. For two passages which have so little in common to the casual eye, the intellect can discern a quite remarkable congruence:

arma	is present in <i>Africa</i> I.2 as	armis
virum	is present in <i>Africa</i> I.2	virum
-que	is present in <i>Africa</i> I.1	(bello)que
cano	is present in <i>Africa</i> I.6	cano
Troiae	is an exotic place name like	Africa
qui	is present in <i>Africa</i> I.2 as	cui
primus	is present in <i>Africa</i> I.3 as	prius
ab oris	chimes with the end of <i>Africa</i> I.2	sub armis

With the exception of *cano*, these correspondences are clustered in two lines of the *Africa*, a density of reference which acts as a guarantor of intent. The fact that Petrarch's allusions to Virgil's first line are relegated to his own second and third lines acts as a potent symbol of demotion, particularly when we recall the overt nod to Livius Andronicus in *Africa* I.1. Chronologically, at least, Virgil has been put in second place. If we follow Jonathan Foster in noting an evocation of Ennius,⁸² Virgil has been even further denied, and again in a way which links the opening lines of the *Africa* to the direct consideration of epic poetry in the poem's closing book.⁸³ But denying Virgil a place at the head of the Latin epic tradition is not enough, especially for a poet as conscious of his belatedness as Petrarch was. If Petrarch is to cast doubt on the substance of Virgil's achievement, rather than its timing, he must turn a critical light on the matter as well as the timing of the *Aeneid*. In doing so, he did not have to strike out alone. By the time Petrarch began his work, there was already a long anti-Virgilian tradition to call on. The next chapter will explore that tradition, and suggest some ways in which it may challenge the reading of Virgil's Aeneas as a suitable epic hero.

⁸² Foster, 1979: 281.

⁸³ See Chapter 5.

CHAPTER THREE: AGAINST AENEAS

1. The Case Against Virgil

To suggest that Petrarch's work is open to an anti-Virgilian reading is not to pitch him as a lone voice in the pre-modern wilderness, railing against an idol which goes otherwise unquestioned. In fact there was a rich tradition of anti-Aenean scepticism which sometimes shaded into active hostility to Virgil. The anti-Virgilian strain can be said to have emerged with Livy, while the *Aeneid* was being born, and it continued with varying force up to and beyond the time when Petrarch was composing his *Africa*. Karl Galinsky has argued against the "two voices" reading of the *Aeneid*, the most vigorous modern strain of anti-Aeneanism,¹ on the grounds that it is ahistorical. He sees it as a movement born out of the social turmoil of the second half of the 20th century, one that has no precedent in antiquity, at least as far as secular writers are concerned:

We cannot ignore ... the total absence of any criticism of Aeneas' actions in the non-Christian ancient *Aeneiskritik*, which was rather copious.²

In limiting himself to the secular sources, or to the sources which look secular to a modern eye, Galinsky has already thinned the evidence. It is by no means obvious that we should discard the Christian commentators simply because their avowed purpose is religious. Even a sermon may say something valuable about poetry. In any case, there is a quiet chorus of anti-Virgilian voices to be heard in classical and

¹ Parry, 1963. Craig Kallendorf offers a useful survey of responses to Parry, pro and contra. See Kallendorf, 1999: 391.

² Galinsky, 1988: 322.

secular literature if we listen for them. They may not always bay in the full-throated style of a Tertullian or a Jerome, but we can discern in them a wide range of critical tones from disquiet to outright condemnation. Craig Kallendorf has explored a sequence of pre-modern critiques of Virgil and the *Aeneid*, starting with Petrarch's *De Otioso Religioso*. His focus on the Renaissance commentators is carefully chosen:

Unlike many medieval readers, they understood the concept of historical distance and regularly, though perhaps inconsistently, tried to interpret the literature of antiquity from within the cultural norms of its own day.³

Placing Petrarch at the head of this tradition is, from this point of view, perfectly intelligible. But whatever originality we wish to attribute to Petrarch, we should not imagine him inventing secular condemnation of Virgil out of nothing. This chapter will highlight some of the anti-Virgilian voices which he encountered and which will have informed and tested his own opinions on his great predecessor.

There are several aspects to the tradition, and if they are sometimes hard to disentangle it is nevertheless worth noting their presence. At the most basic level, the criticism in question can be levelled at either Aeneas or at Virgil himself. Petrarch's idea that an epic poem should be centred on a wholly admirable hero, as we have seen, compels him to elide the distinction between these kinds of criticism. For others, Virgil disappears from the picture, and the criticism of Aeneas is based not on passages in the *Aeneid*, but on the tradition of a historical Aeneas who may be considerably more flawed than his Virgilian counterpart. For many writers, the distinction is not clearly drawn; the Virgilian Aeneas, the historical

³ Kallendorf, 1999: 395.

Aeneas, or some combination of the two is subject to accusations ranging from charges of treachery, cowardice, rage, impiety and lust to the relatively minor offence of failing to dodge a flung rock.

Other negative responses to the *Aeneid* include Virgil as a target for their scorn. Often they impugn him as a liar. Sometimes they see the heroic Aeneas depicted by Virgil as a falsification of the historical record. More often, usually in the case of the Dido episode, the incidents he recounts simply did not happen.

The anti-Aenean tradition, although it long predated Virgil, fell into an unsurprising moribundity in the Augustan era, when many of Petrarch's favourite writers flourished:

The authority of Virgil and the weight of the claim of descent of the imperial family from Aeneas were strong enough to put into the shade the unheroic aspects of the Aeneas legend. Even Lucan ... despite his anti-Virgilian posture, does not depreciate the image of Aeneas.⁴

After this period of languor, the critical strain burst into renewed life with the early Christian Fathers. It took hold of the secular imagination with the Latin versions of the Trojan story circulated under the names of Dictys and Dares, and with the vernacular romances on which they had so much influence. By the time Petrarch conceived his epic, the counter-tradition of an unheroic Aeneas was so healthy as to obscure or even topple the monumental portrait in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

From the very beginning of the mythopoeic tradition of Troy ... there existed an ambivalent portrait of Aeneas, blending both heroic and inglorious outlines. This dual strand persisted throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, the pejorative aspects being gradually overshadowed by the Virgilian magic and the imperial

⁴ Reinhold, 1966: 200-1.

propaganda. In the Middle Ages the portrait of a self-seeking, ambitious Aeneas became the dominant one.⁵

We will see the direct influence on Petrarch's thinking of this counter-tradition, at least in its more literary aspect. The popular songs and romances which formed part of the ferment of cultural life in the period are so remote from Petrarch's classical priorities as to minimise the possibility of direct impact on his work, but even if he was immune to their influence, the strong anti-Aenean faction in the culture of his time will have helped to form the character of any likely audience for the *Africa*. The fact that Petrarch could expect a ready ear for a critique of Virgil's hero will have allowed him a greater degree of subtlety in his treatment of the *Aeneid*. With so many voices already drawing attention to the Emperor's nakedness, Petrarch had no need to shout to make his case.

These criticisms are not confined to one type of literature or discourse. Petrarch will have found rejections of the Virgilian version of Aeneas in both religious and classical literature, ranging from the mild ironies of Livy to the spittle-flecked outrage of some of the Christian Fathers. There was also a third arena, that of the vernacular Trojan romances. Although Petrarch shows little evidence of direct engagement with this tradition, and is dismissive even of his own work in Italian,⁶ he will have known that there were many readers out there who did not view Aeneas through the largely rose-hued lens of the *Aeneid*. If the Christian and classical doubts about Virgil's Aeneas gave him an important precedent for scepticism, the presence of a Europe-wide ferment of popular anti-

⁵ Reinhold, 1966: 195.

⁶ Kirkham, 2009: 3. But see McLaughlin, 1996a: 226.

Aeneanism will have guaranteed a ready audience for those elements of the *Africa* which can be read as similarly sceptical of Virgil's inadequate paragon.

In the succeeding sections I will look first at the tradition of anti-Aenean commentary to which Petrarch had access, and then examine how that may have helped to shape the only scene in the *Africa* in which an Aeneidic episode is specifically revisited: Laelius' account of Aeneas and the fall of Troy. First we will ground that tradition in two strands of thought which had particular resonance for Petrarch at various times in his life: the secular narrative of Homer and the Christian commentary of the early fathers of the Church.

2. The Anti-Aenean Tradition in Homer and the Church Fathers

Having identified the purpose of the *Aeneid* as the presentation of a singularly admirable hero, a *vir perfectus*⁷ or perfect man, Petrarch's simplest recourse in denting the majesty of Virgil's achievement is to discover and emphasise any imperfections of its hero. We have seen in Petrarch's praise of Virgil what Craig Kallendorf identifies as "some hesitation, not about Virgil as a stylist but about the content of his poetry."⁸ In some of Petrarch's work even Virgil's style is subject to disapproval, not on aesthetic but on moral grounds. The beauty of Virgil's verse can be used to questionable ends. In the *De Otio Religioso*, Petrarch mounts an energetic prosecution of Aeneas for impiety and for cowardice, but the attack quickly shades into an assault on Virgil. There is none of the hesitation which Kallendorf finds elsewhere:

⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁸ Kallendorf, 1989: 29.

Quanto id rectius nobis ille pater celestis, quam apud Virgilium Eneas filio: "Disce puer virtutem ex me": Quam, queso, virtutem, Anchisiades? An patrie prodicionem, quamvis utcunque hic virgiliana te excuset eloquentia, quam secuti poete et historici quidam non citata domo Priami sentiis absolutam dimiserunt? An sacrificia demonum amicorum cedibus et sanguine peragenda?

[*Opere Latine* 1.740]

How much nobler in this is our heavenly father than Virgil's Aeneas, who says to his son: "Child, learn virtue from me." What virtue is that, O son of Anchises? Is it the betrayal of your country, although Virgilian eloquence makes some plea here on your behalf (under which influence some poets and historians have absolved you, with no place in their thoughts for the house of Priam)? Is it in sacrifices to demons in the bodies and blood of your friends?⁹

Apart from the attack on Aeneas, to which we will return, two other elements here are worthy of attention. The first is the suggestion that Virgil has misused his gifts of eloquence in lavishing them on an unworthy hero. The second is that Virgil's beautiful style has successfully clouded the perception of his hero's true nature, both for his successor poets and for his commentators.

The first of these positions serves to bind Virgil's success as a poet even more closely to the character of Aeneas. Petrarch has already sketched out the simplest grounds for arraigning the poet: if Aeneas is unworthy, the *Aeneid* fails in its fundamental purpose as a poem. But he goes further here. If Aeneas is unworthy of our admiration, then Virgil has failed not only poetically but morally. He has become the smooth-talking lawyer, perverting his gifts in defence of the indefensible.

To read this in the context of the *Letter to Posterity* underlines the seriousness of the charge. Petrarch himself had studied to be a lawyer, and he is

⁹ Text at Bufano, 1975. My translation.

eager to tell us how bright his legal future seemed. But as soon as he was free to go against his father's wishes, he abandoned the profession:

Ego vero studium illud omne destitui, mox ut me parentum cura destituit. Non quia legum michi non placeret autoritas, que absque dubio magna est et romane antiquitatis plena, qua delector; sed quia earum usus nequitia hominum depravatur. Itaque piguit perdiscere quo inhoneste uti nollem, et honeste vix possem, et si vellem, puritas inscitie tribuenda esset. [*Sen. XVIII.1*]

Not that I did not like the dignity of the law, which is doubtless great and replete with Roman antiquity which delights me, but that practising it is perverted by men's wickedness. It therefore irked me to master something I did not want to use dishonestly, and could scarcely use honestly.

The legal metaphor in the *De Otio Religioso* (*excuset ... absolutam dimiserunt*) is not at innocent one. Petrarch abandoned the dishonesty of legal advocacy for a career in poetry. In personifying the stylistic eloquence of the *Aeneid* as a defence counsel for Aeneas, he makes Virgil travel in the opposite direction. From the noble calling of epic poetry, and its presentation of the perfect man, Virgil has slipped into the role of the dishonest legal hack.

This ambivalence about the lure of style is also reflected a little earlier in the *Letter to Posterity*. Petrarch is talking about conversational polish rather than poetic style, but the attitude of plain candour he advocates meshes neatly with his suspicion of Virgil's elaboration:

Ego, modo bene vixissem, qualiter dixissem parvi facerem: ventosa gloria est de solo verborum splendore famam querere. [*Sen. XVIII.1*]

As long as I lived well, I would care little how I had spoken; to seek fame merely from verbal elegance is but empty glory.

For all the bluntness of his personal manner, and for all his distaste for the legal profession, Petrarch's background in the rhetoric of the law serves him well in the brief jab at Virgil. No sooner has he expressed his awareness of a moral failing in Virgil than he has summoned some shadowy witnesses to his side. His doubts about the use to which Virgil put his stylistic eloquence, he is careful to point out, are not unprecedented. It is not every poet and historian who has been deceived into exculpating Aeneas, but *poete et historici quidam*. He also presents the charge of impiety against Aeneas in language that is strongly reminiscent, as we shall see, of similar attacks by the Church Fathers. This effectively calls to his side as silent witnesses such unimpeachable figures as Tertullian, Lactantius and Jerome.

As noted above, some of the material for an argument against Aeneas predates the *Aeneid*. For Meyer Reinhold, Homer's Aeneas is a pallid figure:

The earliest source for the "other" Aeneas is Homer. While it was Vergil's purpose to extract from the ancestral collective of Troy (which harboured both good and evil) the pure remnant that was to be the bearer of the seeds of a new people in Italy, he did not find in Homer's *Iliad* a "pure" Aeneas... Aeneas is a second-rater among the epic giants, a hero who achieves little in the action of the *Iliad*.¹⁰

For Petrarch to be influenced by the Homeric picture of Aeneas, of course, he must have some access to the Homeric poems. This was not a straightforward matter. Homer in 14th century Italy was viewed as a colossus of narrative poetry, but his work was almost entirely unread in its original form. It was not until more than two decades after Petrarch's death, and largely under his influence, that the revival of Greek learning took hold in Italy.¹¹

¹⁰ Reinhold, 1966: 197.

¹¹ See Loomis, 1908: 250-3.

One impact of the unavailability of the Homeric poems was to keep Homer's reputation unassailably high. As David Scott Wilson-Nakamura points out, the advent of Homeric readers brought in its immediate wake the first grumbles of Homeric dissent:

The results, for Homer were not entirely favourable: in gaining readers, he also gained critics. Prior to this, Homer and Virgil could only be compared on the basis of their reputations... Beginning with Boccaccio, readers could compare Homer and Virgil on the basis of their merits. Few of them could read Homer's Greek with the same fluency they brought to Virgil's Latin; nevertheless it was now possible – even respectable – to express a preference for Virgil.¹²

But that was in the future. Like almost all of his Italian contemporaries, Petrarch could not read Greek. His ambition to learn was fierce and persistent, however, and he made at least two concerted efforts to master the language.¹³ For several months in 1342 he took lessons from a Calabrian monk called Bernard Barlaam, whom he befriended in Avignon.¹⁴ Though they parted on good terms, Barlaam's efforts were in vain:

Petrarch arranged to exchange with him lessons in elementary Greek for advanced Latin. The two met daily for a time, but Petrarch did not learn much beyond the elements of Greek. He could hardly have learned much, without a grammar or dictionary and with an unskilled teacher talking bad Latin.¹⁵

With such a paucity of pedagogical materials, solitary study was not an option. When the Byzantine ambassador Nicholas Sygeros sent Petrarch a copy of Homer's *Iliad* twelve years later, he could make no progress with it. The lack of a teacher

¹² Wilson-Okamura, 2010: 127.

¹³ See Bisaha, 2004: 118.

¹⁴ Mann, 1996: 15.

¹⁵ Bishop, 1963: 185.

was the decisive factor.¹⁶ Petrarch had owned (even allowed himself to “dandle and caress”)¹⁷ the unread manuscript for more than a decade when he played host to another Greek teacher, Leontius Pilatus. This took dedication:

The notion of Leontius to be gathered from Petrarch ... and from Boccaccio, again illustrates the difficulty of finding tolerable Greek teaching in Italy. Leontius evidently knew little beyond the Byzantine Greek of the day; he was stupid and pretentious; his temper appears to have been morose, and his personal habits were repulsive.¹⁸

Petrarch endured this for three months. When he finally bid farewell to Leontius, he encouraged him to produce a full interlinear translation into Latin of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This Petrarch had in his hands by 1367.¹⁹ The translation was “bald and faulty,”²⁰ and the evidence of the manuscripts suggests that Petrarch was never able to secure all the necessary corrections.²¹ But despite their imperfections, Petrarch did what he could to preserve the texts:

Towards the end of the following year he finally received his copy of the complete *Odyssey* and *Iliad* in Latin and had fair copies made of them by his amanuensis Giovanni Malpaghini two years later.²²

Given Petrarch’s lifelong interest in Virgil and his determination to write a Latin heroic epic, the figure of Aeneas in Homer will have stimulated his particular interest. That figure gives him an unimpeachable source for Aeneas as an imperfect

¹⁶ See *Fam.* XVIII.2.10-11.

¹⁷ Bishop, 1963: 186.

¹⁸ Prothero et al, 1909: 541.

¹⁹ Toynbee, 1901: 208.

²⁰ Prothero et al, 1909: 541.

²¹ Sowerby, 1996: 163. According to Rudolf Pfeiffer, he was annotating the translation when he died. Pfeiffer, 1976: 14.

²² Mann, 1996: 16.

man. The *Iliad* furnishes him with an alternative to the Virgilian Aeneas, one with the gleam of greater antiquity than even Virgil can provide. Homer's Aeneas is not unambiguously weak or reprehensible. He is no Thersites. But he is outshone by Hector and by many of the Greeks.

Homer first mentions Aeneas in the catalogue of warriors in Book II:

The strong son of Anchises was leader of the Dardanians,
Aineias, whom divine Aphrodite bore to Anchises
in the folds of Ida, a goddess lying in love with a mortal:
not Aineias alone, but with him were two sons of Antenor,
Archilochos and Akamas, both skilled in all fighting. [*Iliad* II.819-23]²³

Although his origin is divine, the first and last active appearances of Aeneas in the *Iliad* are marked by battle behaviour that seems questionable to some of the other characters, and to the anti-Aenean strand of literary posterity.

In Book V he tangles with Diomedes at the height of that warrior's berserk *aristeia* and displays what Falstaff would recognise as the better part of valour. Diomedes is cutting a bloody swathe through the Trojan army. Aeneas seems to consider tackling him, but soon thinks better of it. He leaves Diomedes' raging slaughter unimpeded, and goes looking for reinforcements (V.166-9). Joined by Pandaros, he pursues the wounded Diomedes in a chariot. Pandaros is soon transfixing through the face with a spear, and he falls dead in the dust. This time the reaction of Aeneas is unequivocally heroic:

But Aineias sprang to the ground with shield and with long spear,
for fear that somehow the Achaians might haul off the body,

²³ All translations from Homer are by Richmond Lattimore. Line numbers are the same as in the Greek.

and like a lion in the pride of his strength stood over him
holding before him the perfect circle of his shield and the spear
and raging to cut down any man who might come to face him... [*Iliad* V.297-301]

He does not get the chance to cut down anyone, however, much less Diomedes. The Greek warrior fells him with a rock, and he falls unconscious. It is important to recognise, given the criticism we will see levelled at Aeneas for this fall, that it is no pebble that lays him low, but the full bulk of a Homeric boulder:

Tydeus' son in his hand caught
up a stone, a huge thing which no two men could carry
such as men are now, but by himself he lightly hefted it. [*Iliad* V.302-4]

His mother Aphrodite now attempts to spirit him away, but Diomedes wounds her with a spear-thrust. Aeneas suffers the loss of his horses, but Aphrodite trusts his person to the protection of Apollo. The readiness of the lone Diomedes to tackle even a god, so soon after Aeneas has thought better of an unequal fight, is easy to read as a reproach:

... Diomedes of the great war cry made for Aineias.
Though he saw how Apollo himself held his hands over him
he did not shrink even from the great god, but forever forward
drove, to kill Aineias and strip his glorious armour. [*Iliad* V.432-5]

Apollo drives Diomedes away, for all his courage. Aeneas is granted an interval of recuperation in the temple at Pergamos, under the tender ministrations of Leto and Artemis. The absence of Aeneas would presumably be noticed by his fellow Trojans, but the god is not eager to rush him back into action:

But he of the silver bow, Apollo, fashioned an image
in the likeness of Aeneias himself and in armour like him,
and all about this image brilliant Achaians and Trojans
hewed at each other, and at the ox-hide shields strong-circled
guarding men's chests and at the fluttering straps of the guard-skins.

[*Iliad* V.449-53]

The scene is recalled in the tenth book of the *Aeneid*, when a simulacrum of Aeneas is again paraded in battle. This time the uncanny figure is crafted by Juno:

tum dea nube caua tenuem sine uiribus umbram
in faciem Aeneae (uisu mirabile monstrum)
Dardaniis ornat telis, clipeumque iubasque
diuini adsimulat capitis, dat inania uerba,
dat sine mente sonum gressusque effingit euntis,
morte obita qualis fama est uolitare figuras
aut quae sopitos deludunt somnia sensus. [*Aen.* X.636-42]

Then the goddess fashioned a phantom
Out of mist and shadow, a strengthless image
Of Aeneas, and she counterfeited
Trojan weapons – a shield and a plumed helmet –
For this wondrous apparition. Then she gave it
Empty words, a voice without thought,
And an imitation of Aeneas' gait.

The goddess is still implacable in her hatred of the Trojans, however, and her aim is not to save Aeneas but to lure Turnus away from the fighting and into safety. The ersatz Aeneas makes a brave impression at first, drawing the attention of the Latin fighters:

at primas laeta ante acies exsultat imago
inritatque uirum telis et uoce lacessit. [*Aen.* X.643-4]

The phantom stalked the front ranks, exultant,
And defied the enemy to come forth and fight.

As soon as the phantom has caught Turnus' eye, it turns and flees. Juno is not tender of the Trojan fighter's reputation, and Turnus is urged into ever fiercer pursuit by the cowardice of his prey. The real Aeneas is blameless, of course, but the scene inescapably recalls the pampered Aeneas of *Iliad* V, recovering far from the front line while his companions fight and die, or his unmanly scramble down to slope of Mount Ida to escape from Achilles, which we shall explore below:

huc sese trepida Aeneae fugientis imago
conicit in latebras... [*Aen.* X.656-7]

The phantom of a terrified, fleeing Aeneas
Hurried onto the ship to hide...

Of all the images of Aeneas in battle which Virgil presents, this feeble-hearted ghost is the one that Petrarch chooses to evoke as a prelude to his own epic's first depiction of heroism in battle. The elder Scipio and his brother have been abandoned by their Celtic auxiliaries. The hero's uncle makes an appeal to the suborned Celts in words which recalls Juno's manufacture of the false Aeneas:

Obicit ille deos, ius, fas et inania uerba! [*Afr.* I.249]

Vainly my brother appealed to oaths and justice and the gods...

Petrarch cannot refer verbally to the *Iliad*, but the repetition of *inania uerba* from *Aen.* X.639 (in the same position at the end of a line) serves to remind us, through Virgil's Homeric borrowing, of the artificial Aeneas in *Iliad* V. The two unheroic

notes in that Iliadic Aeneas, his absence from battle and his reliance on the magical intervention of the gods, are both recalled twelve lines later in the *Africa*. Scipio's father is surrounded by enemy troops, but plunges bravely forward to certain death:

spes nulla fuge [*Afr.* l.263]

We had no hope of flight

The undisguised verbal reminiscence points us to two passages in the *Aeneid*. Later in the chapter we will see Petrarch employ an unusually direct allusion for the purpose of evoking one of two similar passages in the *Aeneid* while suppressing the memory of the other. Here he does nothing to privilege either allusion, but ensures that the clarity of his echo (*spes nulla fuge* for Virgil's repeated *spes ulla fugae*) will awaken the memory of both passages.

In the first of these, Aeneas is away from the battle receiving his divine armour. In his absence the Latins under Turnus have flourished in battle, so much so that they are on the verge of firing the Trojan fleet. The ships are protected by the mother of gods, however, and they rise like mermaids in the water and fly from the danger. Turnus is not disheartened by this tilting of the balance in the Trojans' favour. He rallies his troops with a confident misreading of the situations:

his Iuppiter ipse

auxilium solitum eripuit: non tela neque ignis
exspectant Rutulos. ergo maria inuia Teucris,
nec spes ulla fugae ... [*Aen.* IX.128-31]

Jupiter himself has taken away

Their usual crutch. They're as good as dead,

Even without Rutulian sword and fire.
With no escape by sea, no hope of flight ...

The strong verbal recurrence in the *Africa* underlines the bravery of the Scipios in fighting on without the hope of the divine aid that constantly rescues Aeneas. With the text of the *Aeneid* before us, the irony of Turnus' *auxilium solitum eripuit* is redoubled. The gods in the *Aeneid* have not removed the *auxilium* from Aeneas, but intervened to help him. In the *Africa*, the brothers Scipio choose to fight on without their suborned *auxiliari* [Afr. I.244], a force which has resisted the Romans' invocation of the gods.

The second Aeneidic intertext again reminds us of Aeneas' penchant for absence. He has yet to return from his expedition of Book IX, and the Latins are taking courage from the leaderless state of their Trojan enemy:

at legio Aeneadum uallis obsessa tenetur
nec spes ulla fugae. [*Aen.* X.120-1]

The Trojans

Were penned inside with no hope of escape.

Another unmistakable reference to the *Aeneid* ensures that the bravery of the older generation of the Scipios is a better model for the future Africanus than the battle-shy Aeneas. It comes in the course a long simile of bees, clearly recalling the simile at *Aen.* XII.587-92.²⁴ This ensures that even the most casual readers will not lose sight of the *Aeneid* as they read on. For anyone who has read *Fam.* XXIII.19, or

²⁴ For detailed correspondences see Seagraves, 1976: 306.

the Senecan epistle on imitation on which it draws, the passage also functions as a kind of Alexandrian footnote.²⁵

If bees signify stealthy allusions to one's poetic predecessors,²⁶ the eleven-line depiction of a veiled herdsman raiding the hives cannot help but alert us to the intertextual possibilities of the surrounding lines. Within those lines we have another glancing reference to Aeneas and the events of the *Iliad*. The hives are pictured mock-heroically as *piae cunabula gentis*, the cradle of a pious people. If any single word can direct us to the character of Aeneas, it is *pious*, and the idea of the cradle of a people connects us immediately to the central concern of the *Aeneid*. In this sense the competition between the *Africa* and the *Aeneid* is deeper than just the choice of a hero. Each poet chooses a hero who is intended to be admirable in himself, but also representative of something greater:

At a deeper level, however, the protagonist [of the *Africa*] is the 'people of Mars'. The Roman race itself, the race *par excellence* of soldiers, conquerors and rulers...²⁷

But the reference is more direct and more specific than that. In Book III of the *Aeneid*, Anchises is speaking at the shrine of Apollo. In directing the Trojans to where they should lay anchor, he describes Crete in the following terms:

Creta Iouis magni medio iacet insula ponto,
mons Idaeus ubi et gentis cunabula nostrae. [*Aen.* III.104-5]

Crete, the island of great Jupiter, lies
In the middle of the sea. Mount Ida is there,
And there too is the cradle of our race.

²⁵ Michael Riffaterre identifies something similar to an Alexandrian footnote as typical of most, if not all, allusion. Riffaterre, 1990: 58.

²⁶ As they do with specific reference to Virgil, in *Fam.* I.8.17ff.

²⁷ Foster, 1984: 1443.

Petrarch, by evoking the Cretan Mount Ida in the new context of a battle where the Scipios stand and fight against superior forces, reminds us of Aeneas' flight on another Ida from the fury of Achilles. These are glancing blows at the reputation of Aeneas, but it is no small achievement for Petrarch to repurpose the *Aeneid* as a tool to direct our attention to specific passages of the *Iliad*.

We last saw the Iliadic Aeneas having his wounds tended at Pergamos. When he returns to the battle, he immediately despatches two Greeks,²⁸ but flees from the combined forces of Menelaus and Antilochos (*Iliad* V.571-2).

Thus Aeneas' first adventure on the battlefield begins with his recruiting a second warrior to fight the lone Diomedes and ends with his flight from two Greeks who have reversed the numerical advantage. No overt criticism is made here of his reliance on the protection of the gods. That is not the case in his second and final battle, as we shall see.

Before that next period of action, Aeneas is referred to several times. In Book VI he is with Hector when both are addressed in terms of the highest praise by Priam's son Helenus (*Iliad* VI.77-9). In Book VIII we are reminded briefly of his horses, driven away by the Greeks.²⁹ At his next appearance the Trojans make no reference to any possible unheroic implications of that loss. On the contrary, his divine origins are invoked again, and we see him revered by his compatriots (*Iliad* XI.56-60). We catch a fleeting glimpse of Aeneas at XII.98-100, but there is a more detailed and nuanced view in Book XIII. The scene mirrors Aeneas' first appearance, where he shies away from combat with a single Greek hero, and recruits another Trojan to his side. This time it is Deiphobus who seeks the help of

²⁸ *Iliad* V.541-9.

²⁹ *Iliad* VIII.105-11.

Aeneas for an encounter with Idomeneus. He finds the hero's thoughts far from the battle:

... He found him at the uttermost edge of the battle
standing, since he was forever angry with brilliant Priam
because great as he was he did him no honour among his people.

[*Iliad* XIII. 459-61]

Roused back to his duty by a report of the death of his brother-in-law, Aeneas masters his resentment and returns to the thick of the battle. We will see his anger at Priam's family mentioned again by Achilles in Book XX. We will also see it echoed and expanded in later retellings of the story of Troy.

Aeneas is still in a slaughtering mood when we glimpse him at XV.332, and his battle-anger has not softened when we get our next full view of him in the following book. Again he is included with Hector in an address from a Trojan warrior, but this is not the unblemished praise of Book VI. Sarpedon has just succumbed to Patroclus, and Glaucus is full of reproach:

[He] went to Aineias and to Hektor of the brazen helmet
and stood near them and addressed them in winged words: "Hektor,
now you have utterly forgotten your armed companions
who for your sake, far from their friends and the land of their fathers,
are wearing their lives away, and you will do nothing to help them..."

[*Iliad* XVI. 536-40]

If Aeneas is associated with the reproach, however, he is also associated with the change it stimulates in the Trojan mood. He and his compatriots respond in a soldierly fashion and soon Aeneas is tangling inconclusively with Meriones (*Iliad* XVI.608-25).

His next appearance is unambiguously heroic. The Trojans are inclined to fall back, but Aeneas is inspired by a visit from Apollo to rally their fading energies. Words come readily, but he does not rely on words alone. He follows his speech of exhortation by taking up a position where the fighting is most lethal. It is a moment of exemplary leadership, and the Trojans are quick to respond:

He spoke, and with a long leap stood far before the front fighters,
and the Trojans turned and held their ground against the Achaians.

[*Iliad* XVII. 342-3]

As the Trojan effort picks up pace Aeneas is once again by Hector's side in the thick of the fighting, and even ventures as his companion on a mission to capture some horses from the Greeks. This is not explicitly presented as an attempt to make good the loss of his own team in Book V, but the effect is clearly to balance that earlier incident.

We see Hector and Aeneas together again at the end of the book, not quite breaching the Greek line, but doing much to restore Trojan pride after the loss of Sarpedon with one of their most successful periods on the battlefield (*Iliad* XVII.753-9). Aeneas has one more battle to fight before the *Iliad* ends, and unfortunately for his subsequent reputation it is closer to the clouded glory of his initial appearance than it is to the unmixed military verve of his penultimate showing. It begins and ends with taunting, and some of the barbs find their target. Apollo in the guise of one of Priam's sons reminds Aeneas of his earlier braggartry, which we have not witnessed:

"Aineias, lord of the Trojans' counsels. Where are those threats gone
which as you drank your wine you made before Troy's kings, solemnly,

that you would match your battle strength with Peleian Achilleus?"

[*Iliad* XX. 83-5]

The Trojan hero's answer is doubly weak. In the first place, he will not fight Achilles now because he is chary of his "too great fury" (XX.89). In the second place, as he recounts, he has already met him in battle once before. That time Aeneas survived only by grace of what he calls divine intervention. His actions were hardly typical of a hero:

"Since this will not be the first time I stand up against swift-footed Achilleus, but another time before now he drove me with the spear from Ida, when he came there after our cattle the time he sacked Lyrnessos and Pedasos. But Zeus rescued me when he put strength inside me and made my knees quick. Otherwise I should have gone down at Achilleus' hands... [*Iliad* XX. 89-94]

It is no great boast to have run away from a fight, even if a God inspired the sprint, and Achilles himself remembers the encounter in terms that are even less flattering. He taunts Achilles for his behaviour then and since in words that call his manliness in battle into question and recall his moment of brooding dissatisfaction with the house of Priam in Book XIII:

"Aineias, why have you stood so far forth from the multitude against me? Does the desire in your heart drive you to combat in hope you will be lord of the Trojans, breakers of horses, and of Priam's honour? And yet even if you were to kill me Priam would not because of that rest such honour on your hand. He has sons, and he himself is sound, not weakened. Or have the men of Troy promised you a piece of land, surpassing all others, fine ploughland and orchard for you to administer if you kill me? But I think that killing will not be easy.

Another time before this, I tell you, you ran from my spear.
Or do you not remember when, apart from your cattle, I caught you
alone, and chased you in the speed of your feet down the hills of Ida
headlong, and that time as you ran you did not turn to look back.”

[*Iliad* XX.178-90]

Aeneas responds with a refusal to bandy words like two women squabbling in the street, a refusal whose proper manliness is called slightly into question by the fact that it comes at the end of a threnody of word-banding that stretches to a full fifty-nine lines (XX.200-58). This is the longest utterance of Aeneas in the poem, but if his flight from taciturnity is unprecedented, his flight from battle is all too familiar. In a scene that can be read after Virgil only as a prologue to the *Aeneid*, Poseidon recognises that Aeneas is to be the vessel of Trojan destiny, and sweeps him once again to safety.

This rescue is not at quite as bathetic as Aeneas' unheroic dash down the slopes of Ida, but it does tend to confirm the mocking charges of cowardice with which Achilles prefaced the encounter. The impression that Aeneas may harbour a somewhat unheroic concern for his own skin is reinforced by the advice that Poseidon gives him when he has landed safely at the edge of battle, far from any risk.

And Poseidon, shaker of the earth, came and stood very near him
and spoke to him and addressed him in winged words: 'Aineias,
which one of the gods is it who urges you to such madness
that you fight in the face of Peleus' son, against his high courage
though he is both stronger than you and dearer to the immortals?
Give back rather, whenever you find yourself thrown against him,
lest beyond your fate you go down into the house of the death god.

[*Iliad* XX.330-6]

This is pragmatic advice. Even on an allegorical reading, it makes sense that Aeneas' own instincts would counsel retreat in the face of a stronger foe. But is it the kind of sense we want a hero to make? It is certainly far from the glorious instincts of Scipio's father, who if he cannot defeat his enemies in battle will at least clog their progress with cadavers:

Ergo age, si Latio quicquam de sanguine restat,
Morte palam facito; nam dum Fortuna sinebat,
Vicimus et nostris exhibant funera dextris.
At modo corporibus, – cedunt quando omnia retro –
Sit satis obstruxisse uiam. Per pectora nostra
Perque truces oculos uultusque in morte tremendos
Transcendant! talem libet his opponere montem,
His claustris uallare aditus! [*Afr.* 1.299-306]

Wherefore do not regret this sacrifice,
and if the blood of Rome runs in your veins
let death reveal it. Nay, while Fate so willed,
we too with arms victorious have slain
full many a foe, Now, since 'tis otherwise,
let our dead bodies break their battle line;
let breasts, fierce staring eyes, and faces grim
provide a dour impediment; let mounds
of piled up corpses hinder their advance
and form a barricade against their charge.

The Scipionic notion of military glory has no place for the risk-assessment and retreat that place Aeneas so far from the sword-points of his foes, and so far from the heroic deaths of his patriots.

Poseidon counsels Aeneas to place a higher value on his destiny, which is as yet unfulfilled, than on personal heroism. This encapsulates the second factor that

makes this scene a likely cue for Petrarch's reading of the *Aeneid*: it is not the last time we will see Aeneas flee Greek destruction with barely a backward glance. From his headlong flight down the hills of Ida, through the god-assisted escape from combat with Achilles, to his ultimate abandonment of Troy in *Aeneid* I (and in *Africa* III), it is easy to read this less as a pious cradling of destiny and more as a cowardly pattern of retreat.

This is one of the main charges that will recur in the post-Homeric tradition. The other is that Aeneas betrayed Troy to the Greeks out of some combination of avarice and a desire to replace Priam's family as the rulers of Troy.³⁰ In this version of the story, he is universally coupled in treachery with Antenor. This casts a bleaker light even on the scene from *Iliad* XI, where the Trojans gather in admiration around their leaders. The fact that Antenor's sons are grouped with Aeneas around Priam's doomed heir carries a note of dramatic irony that is inescapable for a fourteenth-century reader schooled in the tradition of Aenean collaboration with Antenor in a plot to usurp Priam.

This anti-Aenean tradition throbs on darkly through the epic cycle and elsewhere among the Greeks, with Aeneas variously implicated in the meeting of Paris and Helen, tainted by an apparently unseemly haste in withdrawing from Troy, or actively plotting to replace Priam's family on the Trojan throne with his own. Petrarch had no direct access to these fragmentary sources,³¹ but they contributed to a Roman debate of which he could not help but be aware, leaving traces as it did in both Livy and Servius.

³⁰ This is the tradition that Petrarch invokes directly in the *De Otio*. See above.

³¹ For which see Reinhold, 1966: 198.

When Livy planned his history of Rome, his sources presented him with a choice of foundation tales. He could take the path of his contemporary Virgil and concentrate on Aeneas, facing up to the difficulty that Aeneas died several generations before the founding of the city. Alternatively, he could concentrate on Romulus as the founder of the city and either incorporate or sideline the Aenean version.

Livy faced the choice squarely. The legend of Aeneas is introduced, encapsulated and dismissed in the first three sections of the first book of his *Histories*. The opening of the story, as it appears in Livy, would go on to provide some ammunition to the anti-Aenean camp.

Iam primum omnium satis constat Troia capta in ceteros saevitum esse Troianos, duobus, Aeneae Antenorique, et vetusti iure hospitii et quia pacis reddendaeque Helenae semper auctores fuerant, omne ius belli Achiuos abstinuisse... [Livy I.1]

There is general agreement, first of all, that when Troy fell the Greeks punished the other Trojans mercilessly but refrained from exercising any right of conquest in the cases of two men, Aeneas and Antenor, who were connected to them by long ties of guest-friendship and had always advocated the return of Helen.³²

Aeneas and Antenor's position as soldiers who escape the collapse of their city and the massacre of their people is inherently questionable, and Livy's explanation does nothing to settle that question. Servius certainly sees an implication that Aeneas betrayed Troy to the Greeks, as his note on the escape of Antenor makes clear. Here is Virgil's account:

³² Text of Livy I-V is from Foster, 1919. Translation is from Luce, 1998.

Antenor potuit, mediis elapsus Achivis,
Illyricos penetrare sinus, atque intima tutus
regna Liburnorum, et fontem superare Timavi,
unde per ora novem vasto cum murmure montis
it mare proruptum et pelago premit arva sonanti. [*Aen.* I.242-6]

Antenor was able to escape the Greeks,
Cross safely over the Illyrian gulfs,
Pass the Liburnians' inmost realms
And skirt the springs of the Timavus
Where it bursts through nine roaring mouths,
And floods the fields under a sounding sea.

Servius' gloss on the first of these lines offers a reading of Livy's opening passage which redounds to the discredit of Aeneas as well as Antenor:

Hi enim duo Troiam prodidisse dicuntur secundum Livium, quod et Vergilius per transitum tangit, ubi ait "se quoque principibus permixtum agnovit Achivis," et excusat Horatius dicens ardentem sine fraude Troiam, hoc est sine proditione: quae quidem excusatio non vacat; nemo enim excusat nisi rem plenam suspicionis.³³

These two are said by Livy to have betrayed Troy. Virgil himself touches briefly on this, when he says "se quoque principibus permixtum agnovit Achivis." Horace offered an excuse, saying that "Troy [had] fallen without deceit," that is without treason. The excuse is itself significant, for no-one justifies that which is above suspicion.

The further reference here is to Aeneid I.487. Aeneas is gazing on the frieze of the Trojan war:

³³ Servius, at I.242. Text from Thilo, 1884. The Horace reference is to *Carmen Saeculare* 42ff.

Se quoque principibus permixtum agnovit Achivis,
Eoasque acies et nigri Memnonis arma. [*Aen.* I.487-8]

And now Aeneas recognizes himself
In close combat with the foremost Achaeans
And sees the eastern ranks, dark Memnon's armor...

What Servius has given Petrarch here is a way to read Aeneas as a traitor to Troy, and he has recruited Livy to do it. It is easy to imagine the weight this might have carried with the poet, whose reverence for the historian, as for Homer, showed none of the ambivalence he displays towards Virgil. Livy, indeed, is never far from the *Africa*. Petrarch's epistle to Livy specifically thanks him for plunging him into the company of the Scipios and other heroes of Rome:

nunc vero tibi potius tempus est ut gratias agam cum pro multis tum pro eo nominatim, quod immemorem sepe presentium malorum seculis me felicioribus inseris, ut inter legendum saltem cum Cornelius, Scipionibus Africanis, Leliis.

[*Fam.* XXIV.8]

Now it is rather the time for me to express my gratitude to you for a number of things, but especially for the fact that you often make me forget present evils by transferring me to happier centuries. As I read I seem to find myself with the Cornelii, the African Scipios, the Laelii.

In the same letter Petrarch mentions several times the story from Pliny the Younger of the Spanish gentleman who walked to Rome to gaze in awe on the great historian, ignoring the marble monuments and the other delights of the city. It may not be too fanciful to see a small nod to Livy in the text of the *Africa* itself, when Hasdrubal praises Rome in terms evocative of Pliny's anecdote:

“Quodque libens longinqua petam super equora, Romam
Et mundi uidisse caput.” [*Afr.* VIII.855-6]

In truth I'd gladly cross the widest sea
to gaze on Rome, the whole world's capital.

Petrarch was also familiar with Ovid's *Heroides*, and indeed drew on them as a model.³⁴ We will look more closely at Petrarch's treatment of the Dido story in the next chapter. For the moment it is worth remembering that the Dido of the *Heroides* does not reserve her all harsh words for Aeneas' treatment of her. She also has severe reproaches for his behaviour during the fall of Troy, and she is sceptical about the pious image of his departure from the city. She openly rejects the version so familiar from Aeneas' own account in the *Aeneid*:

quid puer Ascanius, quid di meruere Penates?
ignibus ereptos obruet unda deos?
sed neque fers tecum, nec, quae mihi, perfide, iactas,
presserunt umeros sacra paterque tuos. [*Her.* VII.81-84]

What has little Ascanius done, or what your Penates, to deserve ill fate? Have they been rescued by fire but to be overwhelmed by the wave? Yet neither are you bearing them with you; the sacred relics which are your pretext never rested on your shoulders, nor did your father.³⁵

Ovid's Dido is a considerable challenge to the Virgilian portrait of Aeneas, as we shall see later. For the moment it is enough to recognise the impact this evidence of an anti-Aenean tendency in the Roman sources will have had on Petrarch. In particular, the hints of scepticism in the unimpeachable Livy do much to legitimise the suspicion Petrarch felt about the reputation of Virgil's hero. When he turned

³⁴ Philippy, 1995: 129. Petrarch refers explicitly to *Heroides* VII at *Trionfo d'Amore* II.181-3.

³⁵ Text and translation of the *Heroides* are from Showerman and Goold, 1977.

from the classics to the early Christian writers, those hints will have become a cacophony of gleeful catcalls.

Tertullian repeats the charge of perfidy and adds a pungent accusation of habitual cowardice. He also mocks the Homeric Aeneas for being knocked down with a rock, and criticises the Romans for elevating such an all-round reprobate to the status of hero.

Patrem diligentem Aenean crediderunt, militem numquam gloriosum, lapide debilitatum. Quod telum quantum uolgare atque caninum, tanto ignobile uolnus. Sed et proditor patriae Aeneas inuenitur, tam Aeneas quam Antenor. [...] Pius Aeneas ob unicum puerum et decrepitum senem Priamo et Astyanacte destitutis? [...] Quid aliud Aeneae gloriosum, nisi quod proelio Laurentino nusquam comparuit? Rursus forsitan solito more quasi desertor e proelio fugerit. [*Ad Nationes* II.9]

They put their faith in the loving father Aeneas, a soldier of no distinction, downed with a rock. How vulgar a weapon, fit for a dog, and the wound just as ignoble. But this Aeneas is found to be a traitor to his country: Aeneas as much as Antenor. Is he “pious Aeneas on account of his only son and decrepit old father, while Priam and Astyanax were deserted? What is the other glory of Aeneas, but that he was nowhere to be seen on the battlefield of Laurentum? Perhaps he turned deserter again, in his old style, and fled from the battle.³⁶

This is Tertullian in full flow. He does not simply denounce or regret the pre-Christian morality within which Aeneas necessarily operates. He attacks him as a man, in terms which crucially do not depend on Christianity for their power. Aeneas is an ignoble coward and a traitor to Troy. These charges would sting just as sharply in pre-Christian Rome as they presumably did for Tertullian’s Christian readers. It is worth noting too that Tertullian’s assault embraces both the Homeric

³⁶ Text from Semler, 1828.

Aeneas, who is felled with a rock, and the Virgilian Aeneas of the fall of Troy. This is a reading of the *Aeneid* as much as it is of Homer.

Lactantius concentrates on the Virgilian Aeneas, and his judgement is even harsher. Starting by acknowledging that Aeneas has become a byword for piety, he proceeds to tear that reputation to shreds:

Apud Maronem rex ille,

Quo justior alter

Nec pietate fuit, nec bello major et armis,³⁷

Quae nobis documenta justitiae protulit?

Vinxerat et post terga manus, quos mitteret umbris

Inferias, caeso sparsurus sanguine flammis.³⁸

Quid potest esse hac pietate clementius, quam mortuis humanas victimas immolare, et ignem cruore hominum tanquam oleo pascere? [*Inst.* V.10]

In Maro, that king

Than who

The breath of being none e'er drew,

More brave, more pious, or more true, –

what proofs of justice did he bring forward to us?

There walk with hands fast bound behind

The victim prisoners, designed

For slaughter o'er the flames.

³⁷ *Aen.* I.544-5.

³⁸ *Aen.* XI.81-2.

What can be more merciful than this piety? what more merciful than to immolate human victims to the dead, and to feed the fire with the blood of men as with oil?³⁹

This is not the historical Aeneas, or the Homeric Aeneas, or the Aeneas of a parallel non-Virgilian tradition. This is explicitly the hero of the *Aeneid*, and Lactantius supports his prosecution with quotations from that poem and nothing else. He goes on to implicate Virgil in the deficiencies of his hero. The approach dovetails neatly, despite the difference of tone, with the “vir perfectus” strategy of Petrarch. If Virgil’s hero is morally deficient it is his poet who must take the blame:

Sed haec ... culpa non illius fuit, qui litteras fortasse non didicerat, sed tua, qui cum esses eruditus, ignorasti tamen quid esset pietas, et illud ipsum, quod nefarie, quod detestabiliter fecit, pietatis esse officium credidisti. [...] Quisquamne igitur hunc putet aliquid in se virtutis habuisse, qui ei furore tamquam stipulo exarserit, et manium patris, per quem rogabatur, oblitus, iram frenare nequiverit? [*Inst.* V.10]

But this was not his fault but yours; for, though you were learned, yet you were ignorant of the nature of piety, and you believed that that wicked and detestable action of his was the befitting exercise of piety. [...] Can any one imagine that there was any virtue in him who was fired with madness as stubble, and, forgetful of the shade of his father, by whom he was entreated, was unable to curb his wrath?

It is not only in his reproaches for the intemperate ire of Aeneas that Petrarch follows Lactantius. We have seen the poet take the opportunity afforded by his *Coronation Oration* to offer to his peers and to posterity his thoughts on the nature of poetry. Lactantius is the first witness he cites, and he has typically little sympathy for the poet as a purveyor of historical untruths. Petrarch’s endorsement of this position is not so hard-edged as to rule out a veil of allegory, but he is much closer to Lactantius than to his friend and contemporary Boccaccio, whose

³⁹ Translations from Lactantius are by Fletcher and Knight, 2012.

definition of poetry specifically defends poetic fiction from the accusation of deceit:

Dico poetas non esse mendaces... Poetarum fictiones nulli adherent specierum mendacii, eo quod non sit mentis eorum quenquam fingendo fallere...

[*Genealogie Deorum Gentilium* XIV.13]

I maintain that poets are not liars... The fictions of poets have nothing in common with any variety of falsehood, since it is not the intention of poets to lead anyone astray with their inventions.⁴⁰

Although the theme of Lactantius' rebuke to Virgil was recapitulated in the *Coronation Oration*, its substance is even more clearly echoed in the *Africa* itself. The terms used by Petrarch's Ennius are close to those employed by Boccaccio, but his position is diametrically opposed:

Qui fingit quodcumque refert, non ille poete
Nomine censendus, nec uatis honore, sed uno
Nomine mendacis. [*Afr.* IX.103-5]

One who invents what he relates should not
be honored by the title of a poet
nor deemed a seer – but rather called a liar.

These passages in Petrarch, whether implicitly or explicitly critical of Virgil, are presented in tones that range from academic moderation to blunt unemotional censure. Petrarch's engagement with Lactantius may have influenced the far different tone with which he we have seen him arraign Aeneas for impiety:

⁴⁰ Text from Romano, 1951. Translation from Tatarkiewicz, 2005: 12.

Quam, queso, virtutem, Anchisiades? An patrie prodicionem...? An sacrificia demonum amicorum cedibus et sanguine peragenda? [*Opere Latine* l.740]⁴¹

The sarcastic tone, the unrestrained outrage, the hectoring insistence of rhetorical question after rhetorical question: we could as easily be reading Lactantius, Jerome or Tertullian as Petrarch the avowed lover of classical literature.

The failure of Aeneas to control his anger is one of the major ways in which he diverges from Petrarch's supremely stoical Scipio. Petrarch's admiration for Scipio is a recurrent theme in his work, as Aldo S. Bernardo thoroughly demonstrates.⁴² Scipio was not only the finest exemplar that history had to offer. He was also a mirror of the virtues that the young Petrarch valued most:

From the very beginning of the *De viris*, there emerged the figure of an illustrious Roman whose life seemed not only to recapitulate all that Rome and antiquity stood for but to epitomize the very values that Petrarch had prized since an early age.⁴³

Petrarch's major historical work, the *De Viris Illustribus*, is a series of biographies of admirable Romans.⁴⁴ The prose biography of Scipio was one to which Petrarch returned repeatedly.⁴⁵ It is not the longest narrative in his biographical compilation,⁴⁶ but it is unique among the twenty-three in that it has survived in three distinct versions.⁴⁷

⁴¹ For fuller selection and translation, see above.

⁴² Bernardo, 1962.

⁴³ Bernardo, 1962: 8.

⁴⁴ One version also included twelve biographies (one incomplete) of Biblical and mythological figures. See Witt, 2009: 106.

⁴⁵ For Bernardo, "the *Africa* is basically a poeticizing of the biography." See Bernardo, 1962: 21.

⁴⁶ Witt, 2009: 104.

⁴⁷ Bernardo, 1962: 12.

For some readers, as we have seen,⁴⁸ this unquestioned adoration of Scipio makes him an unfortunate choice as the hero of an epic. It also diminishes his effectiveness as an exemplar with which Petrarch can chide Aeneas. Virgil's hero may fall morally short of Scipio in both love and war, but Scipio's standards are so unattainably high that there is little shame in failing to meet them. Where he is deployed most usefully as a better version of his Virgilian predecessor is when that predecessor's behaviour is already so questionable that we need only to be reminded of it. We have seen Petrarch's jeremiad against Aeneas' indulgence in human sacrifice. It is a safe ground for criticism. When Petrarch recalls the scene to the reader of the *Africa*, as he does in Book IV, he is presenting Aeneas at his worst.

The vehicle for that presentation is Laelius, one of the *Africa's* many internal narrators. Early in the narrative we have been prepared by the endorsement of an unimpeachable judge to respect Laelius as a model of the trustworthy Roman. The climactic advice of Scipio's departed father to his dreaming son is to overlook the lowly birth of Laelius and exalt him for his loyalty and wisdom (*Afr.* II.519-22). Now Laelius is recounting Scipio's mercy after the siege of Cartagena. The Roman leader has been furious in battle, but the fury melts away as soon as the suppliants approach. Where Aeneas had marked his captives out for doom, Scipio spares the Carthaginian prisoners and offers a proper sacrifice of animals:

Iam uictor ad arcem
Tranquillus uoluebat iter, Romanaque celsis
Turribus affigi uictricia signa iubebat.
Post hec sacra deis meritasque rependere grates

⁴⁸ For example Bergin and Wilson, 1977: xvi. See Chapter 1.

Institut. [*Afr.* IV.320-4]

And so in peace
the conqueror approached the citadel,
gave orders that its towers should bear the seals
of Roman victory, and bade the fee
of sacrifice be paid and to the gods
due thanks be rendered.

Petrarch sharpens the implicit criticism of Aeneas by evoking two other scenes, one each from the start and end of the *Aeneid*. The combined effect is to show Aeneas not only failing by the standards of a fourteenth-century reader, with all his access to the dictates of Christianity, but failing by the standards that the *Aeneid* itself sets out.

In the first storm scene of the *Aeneid* we are shown an example of proper Roman leadership in action when Neptune emerges from the waves and calms the storm by the sheer moral force of his presence.

Sic ait, et dicto citius tumida aequora placat,
collectasque fugat nubes, solemque reducit. [*Aen.* I.142-3]

Thus Neptune – and no sooner said than done –
He calmed the sea, chased off the massed clouds,
And brought back the sun.

The general tendency of the scene is recalled in Petrarch's comparison of Scipio to the calming presence of Jupiter. There are scattered verbal echoes. None are marked with the oddity or specificity that would put the allusion beyond doubt, but we can see that Petrarch has redistributed the last four words of Virgil's I.143, or something very like them, across four of his own lines: *fugat* becomes *fugiunt*,

nubes nubila, solemque sol, and reducit redit. We also have a repetition of *conspexere, silent* from *Aen.* I.152 in the *continuoque silent* of *Afr.* IV.318, and a glancing evocation of *prospiciens* (*Aen.* I.127 and I.155) in Petrarch's *despectans* (*Afr.* IV.317):

Sic atra serenat

Nubila pacifico **despectans** Iupiter ore,
Continuoque silent uenti **fugiuntque** procelle
Sol nitet, emergunt fuscis sua noctibus astra,
Et mundo sua forma **redit.** [*Afr.* IV.316-20]

This Jupiter will thrust his visage clear
and peaceful through a heavy cloud, and all
the winds are stilled, the storm abates, the sun
shines forth, or stars, if it be night, emerge,
and earth resumes its mien.

Scipio's godlike status is confirmed by the intertwined evocation of Virgil's Jupiter, who calms the sky with a magisterial *serenat* at *Aen.* I.255.

The role of Neptune in the storm is compared to that of the ideal Roman statesman, who pacifies a mob into laying down the weapons that anger so readily supplies:

furor arma ministrat [*Aen.* I.150]

Fury always finds weapons.

Scipio too has laid aside arms and anger, the Carthaginians' and his own respectively:

Verum arce reclusa,
Hostis ubi ad ueniam proiectis concidit **armis**,
Ilicet extinctus cecidit **furor**, iraque cessit
Pulsa animo ferrumque manu. [*Afr.* IV.313-16]

But when the citadel
was forced and, downing arms, the enemy
knelt to beg mercy, fury fled away;
the wrath of battle vanished from his heart
as swiftly as the sword fell from his hand.

But it is not enough for Petrarch that Scipio be as noble as the gods. He must also be nobler than Aeneas, and to that end he has evoked the questionable wartime behaviour of Aeneas not just in the matter of the hostages, but in the very final act of the *Aeneid*. Turnus kneels with arm outstretched, in the typical suppliant posture which has worked so well for Scipio's prisoners at Cartagena:

ille, oculis postquam saeui monimenta doloris
exuuiasque hausit, furiis accensus et ira
terribilis: 'tunc hinc spoliis indute meorum
eripiare mihi? Pallas te hoc uulnere, Pallas
immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit.'
hoc dicens ferrum aduerso sub pectore condit
feruidus; ast illi soluuntur frigore membra
uitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras. [*Aen.* XII.945-52]

Aeneas' eyes drank in this memorial
Of his own savage grief, and then, burning
With fury and terrible in his wrath, he said:
"Do you think you can get away from me
While wearing the spoils of one of my men? Pallas
Sacrifices you with this stroke – Pallas –
And makes you pay with your guilty blood."

Saying this, and seething with rage, Aeneas
Buried his sword in Turnus' chest. The man's limbs
Went limp and cold, and with a moan
His soul fled resentfully to the shades.

The *ferrum* that Scipio dropped in mercy (*Afr.* IV.316) Aeneas buries in his vanquished enemy's torso (*Aen.* XII.950). The strongest reminiscence, however, points at Aeneas' loss of the control which Scipio demonstrates so masterfully.

First Scipio:

cecidit **furor**, **ira**que cessit [*Afr.* IV.315]

Now Aeneas:

exuuiasque hausit, **furiis** accensus et **ira** [*Aen.* XII.946]

The *furor* and the *ira* are explicitly present, and the contrast between Scipio's ability to quell his anger and Aeneas' surrender to his darker passions is intensified by the echo from *accensus* to both *cessit* and *cecidit*. If Petrarch's allegorical reading of Aeneas' first scene has shown the hero assailed by passions which he cannot control, his depiction of a measured and temperate Scipio underlines how little self-mastery Aeneas has learned by the end of the *Aeneid*.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For suggestive verbal parallels between the violent despatch of Turnus and the death of Sophonisba, see Foster, 1979: 292. For Petrarch's allegorical reading of the storm scene in *Aeneid* I, see *Sen.* IV.5 and Chapter 1 above.

3. Dictys, Dares and the Fall of Troy

The canon of classical literature in Petrarch's day made room for two works which have since fallen far out of favour. Both were strongly anti-Aenean. Both were plentifully available to Petrarch. He wrote little about the Trojan romances attributed to Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian, but he was aware of both. One of his copies of Livy also contained the *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani* of Dictys of Crete.⁵⁰ We cannot attach too much significance to the fact that this further assault on the integrity of Virgil came as a companion of Livy, Petrarch's great exemplar of truth, but we know that the poet read both of the Trojan romances:

Pétrarque lit en effet le *De Bello Troiano*, car il s'en sert, sans le mentionner, dans sa petite biographie d'Hercule, et il doit l'avoir parmi ses livres, à côté de Dictys.⁵¹

Petrarch surely read the *De Bello Troiano*, for he uses it without acknowledgement in his little *Life of Hercules*, and he must have it among his books, next to Dictys.

He mentions Dictys in one of his marginal annotations to a manuscript of Horace⁵² and cites Dares in his *Invectives*, in a passage which we shall examine later in this chapter. Ullman suggests that Dictys belongs with Isidorus in the class of writers for whom Petrarch "has little use."⁵³ But his work will at the very least have offered the poet another non-Virgilian view of Virgil's hero.

The narratives attributed to Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian were translated into Latin, during the medieval period, from Greek originals which have

⁵⁰ Billanovich, 1951: 157-8.

⁵¹ Nohac, 1907b: 43.

⁵² Nohac, 1907b: 183.

⁵³ Ullman, 1923: 37.

been almost completely lost.⁵⁴ Each author purported to be a survivor of the war between Greece and Troy (Dictys on the Greek side, Dares on the Trojan) and thus their accounts laid claim to greater accuracy than the later account of Homer. Their reach in the middle ages was considerable, both directly and through the legion of vernacular works they inspired. The impact they had on medieval perceptions of Troy's fall was enormous:

Though the literary merits of the Latin versions of Dictys and Dares are negligible, their influence upon the epic romances of mediaeval Europe both in the East and West and upon the Renaissance was far reaching.⁵⁵

The survival of two eyewitness accounts of the Trojan war may now seem fanciful, but there was nothing in the middle ages to discredit them. As we have seen with the manuscript of Dictys appended to Petrarch's manuscript of Livy, there was every encouragement to take these accounts as seriously as anything in the other ancient authors. Indeed, their status as genuine antiquities lasted until long after Petrarch's day.⁵⁶

Meyer Reinhold gives rather a jaundiced reading of the presentation of Virgil's hero in the account of Dictys of Crete. Aeneas accompanies Paris on his mission to carry Helen away from Sparta, he kills Protesilaus and, perhaps most damning of all, he is overtly cowardly:

During a battle he remained in the city, refusing to fight.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Frazer, 1966: 3ff.

⁵⁵ Young, 1948: 58.

⁵⁶ See Frazer, 1966: 7.

⁵⁷ Reinhold, 1966: 202.

A closer inspection of the text reveals that Dictys displays a neutral attitude to several of these incidents, rising to implicit approval in the case of Aeneas' refusal to fight.

Aeneas is present with Paris in Sparta, but he is not depicted taking any part in the abduction of Helen. He is not mentioned as a party to any plot; in fact Dictys presents the actions of Paris (here referred to, as always in Dictys, as Alexander) as an improvised response to an unexpected circumstance:

Per idem tempus Alexander Phrygius, Priami filius, Aenea alisque ex consanguinitate comitibus, Sparta in domum Menelai hospitio receptus, indignissimum facinus perpetraverat. is namque ubi animadvertit regem abesse, quod erat Helena praeter ceteras Graeciae feminas miranda specie, amore eius captus ipsamque et multas opes domo eius aufert... [Dictys 1.3]

During the same time the home of Menelaus welcomed Alexander the Phrygian, the son of Priam, who had come with Aeneas and other of his relatives. Alexander, taking advantage of Menelaus' absence, committed a very foul crime. Falling desperately in love with Helen, the most beautiful woman in Greece, he carried her off, along with much wealth...⁵⁸

We may infer from the silence of the text that Aeneas offered no strong objections, and certainly no physical resistance, to Alexander's plan. This is a thin enough platform for a prosecution, but it is perhaps strengthened by a passage almost immediately following. Alexander and his party, of which Aeneas is still a member, are blown off course by a burst of inclement weather. They land in Cyprus, where they obtain some ships, and then sail to Phoenicia. Here they commit another outrage against the laws of hospitality:

⁵⁸ Text and translations of Dictys and Dares are from Frazer, 1966.

eum namque properatione navigii inconsulte usum venti ad Cyprum appulere, unde sumptis aliquot navibus Phoenicem delapsus Sidoniorum regem, qui eum amice susceperat, noctu insidiis necat, eademque, qua apud Lacedaemonum, cupiditate universam domum eius in scelus proprium convertit. ita omnia, quae ad ostentationem regiae magnificentiae fuere, indigne rapta ad naves deferri iubet. [Dictys 1.5]

... for when he had sailed from Sparta, hastily and taking no thought of the weather, the winds had forced him to Cyprus. After obtaining some ships, he had then gone on to Phoenicia, where the king of the Sidonians received him kindly. But he treacherously slaughtered the king at night and, venting again that criminal lust he had shown at Sparta, pillaged the palace. He shamelessly ordered his men to seize everything the purpose of which was to show the royal magnificence, and carry it off to the ships.

The Sidonians are outraged by these depredations. They storm the sea-port, where Paris is preparing to flee. The Sidonians fight for honour; the Trojans for greed. Two ships are lost to fire, but finally the Trojans escape.

It cannot have escaped Petrarch that Dictys is offering a scene which functions as both an elaboration of the abduction of Helen and a prevision of the less violent, but no less disastrous, seduction of Dido by Aeneas. The correspondences with the abduction of Helen are immediately apparent. Again Paris violates the honour and the welcome of a king, and before long the soldiers of both sides are fighting and dying by the ships. But if we remember that Aeneas is also present, the scene works equally well as a foretelling of his actions in Carthage. He is blown off course by a storm and lands on the island of Cyprus. The fact that there is no strong narrative reason for this brief sojourn forces us to look elsewhere for its significance, and it is surely no accident that Cyprus is the home of Venus: driven by winds which Petrarch's allegorical bent will have led him

automatically to parse as representative of the sailors' ungoverned passions, Aeneas lands on an island sacred to his mother, the goddess of lust. After a brief period of quiescence, which is devoted to refitting the fleet, he travels to Phoenicia, the home of Dido. Here he is involved in the murder of the king and the violation of the palace. He escapes with most of his fleet intact, leaving behind him smoke and the weeping of women. We will see Petrarch take pains to establish Aeneas' treatment of Dido not as an aberration, but as part of a pattern that begins in the flames of Troy. This passage in Dictys does much to bolster such a reading.

The next battle faced by Aeneas in Dictys is not so discreditable. Reinhold blames him for the killing of Protesilaus, but this is hard to sustain. Aeneas does indeed kill Protesilaus, but his actions are evidence of courage and energy in battle rather than anything treacherous or ignoble. The Greeks are harassed as they attempt to disembark, but it is not until they have armed and assembled a counter-attack that Aeneas is depicted in action against them:

ad postremum tamen, hi quibus in ea festatione armandi semet potestas fuit, confirmati inter se invicem, acriter hostes incurrunt. sed in ea pugna Protesilaus, cuius navis prima omnium terrae admota erat, inter primos bellando, ad postremum telo Aeneae ictus ruit. [Dictys 2.11]

Finally, however, some, in spite of the terrible pressure, were able to arm and, banding together, fiercely counter-attacked. In this battle Protesilaus, whose ship had been first to land, fell among those who were fighting up front, struck by Aeneas' weapon.

Dictys also takes pains to point out that there were losses on both sides in this battle, including the death of two of Priam's sons. Everything serves to clear Aeneas of any culpability in the death of Protesilaus. Indeed the picture of a soldier

eagerly plying his weapons in the front rank of the fighting redounds to his credit. Homer does not name the specific slayer of Protesilaus, beyond the unsurprising information that it was one of the Trojans (*Iliad* II.701-2). Far from Dictys casting any aspersion on the behaviour of Aeneas in this opening battle of the war, it is possible to read his account as a corrective of Homer's less noble portrait in *Iliad* XX. In Homer's account of the battle with Achilles, Aeneas is taunted for cowardice, hurls a javelin which lodges fruitlessly in Achilles' divine shield, and is then whisked by a convenient Poseidon to a place far from the front line. Dictys aims at a more naturalistic account of the action of the *Iliad*, placing no narrative reliance whatever on the actions of the gods. What we have here is the behaviour of Aeneas unmediated by divine intervention, and it is an effective answer both to the taunting of Achilles and to his unheroic depiction in *Iliad* XX. In this account he is at the forefront of the battle, unreliant on the gods for protection, and his spear-cast is true.

If Dictys has provided us here with firm evidence of Aeneas as a doughty warrior, then his later refusal to fight is in no sense a contradiction. Dictys goes out of his way to deflect any blame from Aeneas, and perhaps to draw a contrast with the sullen withdrawal of Achilles to his tent in Homer's *Iliad*. According to Dictys, this is the first time that Aeneas has turned down an opportunity to fight, and he does so for a very good reason:

tum primum Aeneas aspernato certamine intra muros manet, execratus quippe Alexandri facinus commissum in Apollinem, cuius sacra is praecipue tuebatur.
[Dictys 4.17]

Aeneas stayed behind in the city and, for the first time, refused to fight; he was a devoted worshiper of Apollo and detested the crime Alexander had committed against this god [i.e. polluting his temple with the killing of Achilles].

So far what Petrarch finds in Dictys is an Aeneas who is a reliable warrior in battle, whatever questions he may have to answer about his conduct towards his hosts and their women. When it comes to his relations with the house of Priam, however, the picture turns much darker. In the *Iliad* we saw Aeneas' resentment of Priam and his heirs both depicted by the narrator and focalised through Achilles, but even this can hardly prepare a reader of Dictys for the open and outright treachery of Aeneas towards Priam and towards his own city of Troy.

The war is going badly for the Trojans. Hector and Paris are dead. Even with the murder of Achilles to balance the body-count, the tide has turned against them:

ceterum Troiani, ubi hostis muris infestus magis magisque saevit, neque iam resistendi moenibus spes ulterius est aut vires valent, cuncti proceres seditionem adversus Priamum extollunt atque eius regulos: denique accito Aenea filiisque Antenor's discernunt inter se, uti Helena cum his, quae ablata erant, ad Menelaum duceretur. [Dictys 4.22]

All the Trojan nobles, since they saw the enemy raging more and more fiercely around their walls and knew that their own resources were failing, felt that further resistance was hopeless. Accordingly they plotted sedition against the princes and Priam. Having summoned Aeneas and the sons of Antenor, they were planning to return Helen to Menelaus, along with the things that had been carried off.

On the face of it, the plan to make reparations to Menelaus seems not only pragmatic but rather laudable. It has shaded into sedition, however, for two reasons. Helen has already been married to another of Priam's sons, and the nobles are meeting in a council of state at which Priam is not present. The *lèse-majesté*

grows more pronounced when he does arrive, and this time there is no ambiguity about who is at fault:

ceterum ingressus concilium Priamus, ubi multa ab Aenea contumeliosa ingesta sunt... [Dictys 4.22]

When Priam entered the council, Aeneas heaped insults upon him.

Priam bows to the wishes of his nobles, and sends Antenor as an emissary to the Greeks to bring the war to an end. But Antenor has his own plans. In secret meetings with the Greeks, he agrees to betray the city in return for half of Priam's possessions and the allocation of the throne of Troy to his choice of heir. The Greeks insist on linking Aeneas to the plot:

electique Agamemnon Idomeneus Ulixes atque Diomedes, qui secretoque ab aliis prodicionem componunt. praetera placet, uti Aeneas, si permanere in fide vellet, pars praedae et domus universa eius incolumis... [Dictys 4.22]

Thereupon these plotted together, in secret, and decided, among other things, that Aeneas, contingent upon his remaining faithful, should share the spoils, nor should his house be harmed in any way...

Dictys is careful to lend this the weight of close personal testimony. He claims to have been one of the party that chose Agamemnon and the other Greek representatives to deal with Antenor. In the world of its medieval readership, where the account of Dictys has the status of a genuine eyewitness report from the frontline, this will have carried enormous weight.

Although Antenor remains the main villain, things do not get any better for Aeneas. When the Trojans send Antenor back to the Greeks to clarify the terms of

the peace, he insists on accompanying them. Although their actions are designed to benefit his own Greek side in the conflict, Dictys is plain in his disapproval of Aeneas and his fellow traitor:

et ad postremum confirmant inter se prodicionis pactionem. [Dictys 5.4]

... and finally they agreed on how best to betray their city.

Peace is agreed between the Trojans, with Antenor and Aeneas punctiliously counting out the precise tribute of gold and silver the Trojans must pay. The Greek withdrawal, however, is a ruse. Soon the Trojans have succumbed to exhaustion and relief after a long war and a night of celebration. At a signal from Sinon, the Greeks return and visit devastation upon the sleeping city. The carnage is indiscriminate. In homes and temples, in their beds and on the streets, Aeneas' compatriots are put to the sword. Dictys matches his prose to the pitiless assault of the Greeks. The soldierly bluntness of his narrative can hardly mask his horror at the behaviour of his fellow Greeks:

Prorsus nulla requies stragis atque atque funerum, cum palam et in ore suorum liberi parentesque magno inspectantium gemitu necarentur moxque ipsi, qui spectaculo carissimorum corporum interfuerant, miserandum in modum interirent. neque segnius per totam urbem incendiis gestum positus prius defensoribus ad domum Aeneae atque Antenor. [Dictys 5.12]

There was, in short, no end to death and slaughter. Parents and children were killed, while loved ones watched and lamented, and then the latter were killed – a pitiable sight. With equal dispatch, the buildings of the city were set on fire and destroyed; the only homes to be saved were those of Aeneas and Antenor, where guards had been posted.

Aeneas has proved so useful to the deadliest enemies of his own nation that they plead with him to accompany them back to Greece. Antenor attempts to be a moderating influence on the Greeks, urging them to abandon revenge and think of their homeward journey, and reinforcing his urgings with magnificent gifts (Dictys 5.16). There is one more twist to come from Aeneas, however. Unlike Antenor, who seems determined as far as possible to redeem himself by turning trouble away from the Trojans, Aeneas has contracted the habit of treachery. Priam is dead, the Greeks are out of the way, and Antenor holds the throne of Troy. It is time not for peace, but for the final phase of Aeneas' plan:

Aeneas apud Troiam manet, qui post Graecorum profectionem cunctos ex Dardano atque ex proxima peninsula adit, orat uti Antenorem regno exigerent. quae postquam, praeverso de se nuntio, Antenori cognita sunt, regrediens ad Troiam imperfecto negotio aditu prohibetur. ita coactus omni patrimonio ab Troia navigat, devenitque ad mare Adriaticum, multas interim gentes barbaras praetervectus... [Dictys 5.17]

After our departure, Aeneas, who had been left behind at Troy, tried to drive Antenor out of the kingdom. Leaving the city, he approached all those who were inhabitants of Dardanium and the peninsula nearby, and begged them to help him, He was unsuccessful, however; and when he tried to return to Troy, Antenor, who had learned what was happening, refused him admittance. And so Aeneas was forced to set sail. Taking all of his patrimony, he departed from Troy and eventually arrived in the Adriatic Sea, after passing many barbarous peoples.

This makes self-serving nonsense of the account of the city's fall that Aeneas gives to Dido in the *Aeneid*. It also assails Virgil's honesty in glossing over the truth of his hero's imperfect war record. Finally it calls the very root of Aeneas' celebrated piety into question. This Aeneas does not leave Troy with his son at his side and his ancient father on his shoulders, exiled by a fate he is too noble to refuse. He is

driven out by a co-conspirator whom he has cheated, having failed to summon any new supporters to his selfish cause, and he leaves with no thought for anything but his inheritance.

He does not even arrive in Italy. In the last glimpse Dictys gives us of the despised traitor, he and his band of followers have founded a new colony on an island with the inauspicious name of Corcyra Melaena: Black Corfu.

The Aeneas we saw initially in Dictys was not an irredeemable villain. He may or may not have complicit in the abduction of Helen. He was probably involved in the reprehensible attack on the Sidonians, but even in that instance his guilt was subordinate to that of Paris. He was brave in battle, except when the greater claims of devotion to the god Apollo compelled him to stay his sword. But as the account goes on, and Dictys gains closer first-hand knowledge of him, Aeneas is revealed to be morbidly greedy for the throne of Troy. It is the opposite pattern to that identified by Maurice Bowra in Virgil's depiction of a hero who gradually comes to nobility. Bowra sees the weakness of Aeneas at the opening of the *Aeneid* as a necessary prelude to the moral strengthening he must undergo to become an acceptable Stoic hero:

Aeneas is a Stoic, but like all Stoics he has to go through a period of probation, and during this his temptations and difficulties are often too much for him, and he fails.⁵⁹

For Virgil to demonstrate convincingly the process by which a man attains moral strength, he must necessarily begin with that man in a position of moral weakness.

⁵⁹ Bowra, 1931: 11.

[Virgil] takes his hero through a course of tests and trials, which are the indispensable condition of his moral development, and it is only after he has passed through them and found in them his moral weaknesses that he is allowed the vision of the destined glories of Rome.⁶⁰

Aeneas in the narrative of Dictys follows the opposite pattern. Starting out with at least a modicum of personal piety and bravery in battle, he gradually declines into a lout. He curses and betrays Priam, tricks his fellow Trojans into a devastating defeat, and crowns his degradation by turning on his fellow traitor. If we look at this progression intertextually, we see a gradual shift in Dictys. At first he corrects Homer's account by presenting a more courageous Aeneas, as we see particularly clearly in the Protesilaus episode. As his tale continues, however, he moves on to supplementing the Homeric account with events which Homer did not cover. In these, he shows Aeneas to be even worse than his depiction in the *Iliad*. Whether this represents a character progression in Aeneas, or a corrective urge in Dictys that will contradict whatever lies closest to hand, it does make him an interesting precedent for Petrarch's project. In an account which is not in itself inconsistent, Dictys has both corrected an epic predecessor and downgraded one of that predecessor's characters.

One of the primary corrections of Homer in both Dictys and Dares is the removal from the narratives of brawling and lustful gods who intervene directly in the human action:

The events of the war were either challenged altogether ... or were reduced to a series of incidents in a cause-and-effect chain, motivated by human ambitions and reactions. There is no euhemerism in the strictest sense of the term: gods are acknowledged as figures of worship, appearing in dreams and in prophetic

⁶⁰ Bowra, 1931: 11.

visions... Direct divine intervention of the type familiar from heroic poetry and tragedy is avoided, but the motifs of human dilemma from both genres are still present.⁶¹

This policy of both writers, to provide a credible narrative of the events around the fall of Troy without the introduction of godly interference, is also fatal to the whole Aenean project as set out by Virgil. Aeneas abandons Troy, loses his wife, and turns his back on Dido, with cataclysmic results for her. If this is done in obedience to the gods, the mantle of piety can cover his blushes. Remove that, however, and he is revealed not only in the narrative of Dictys, but in the "later" account of Virgil, as a miscreant of the deepest hue.

I have dealt at length with the *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani* of Dictys because of its unfamiliarity, the enormous range of its influence, and the fact that we can be certain that Petrarch had read it. The *De Excidio Troiae Historia* of Dares was no less influential, and Petrarch both read and referred to it. It has little to add to the *Excidio* in terms of content, however, and nothing in terms of style. As we have seen, the prose of Dictys is "simple and fairly good."⁶² The efforts of Dares, however, display "extreme simplicity, verging on stupidity."⁶³ We know that Petrarch is willing to overlook a certain poverty of style if the content is worth his attention, and we have seen his wariness of the ease with which an elegant style can beautify material of dubious morality. It seems nonetheless appropriate not to rehearse the entire journey of Aeneas through the narrative of Dares, but only to focus on those sections which contradict or supplement the account given by Dictys.

⁶¹ Farrow, 1992: 343-4.

⁶² Frazer, 1966: 15.

⁶³ Highet, 1949: 51.

Like Dictys, Dares claims to be giving a first-hand account of events surrounding the siege of Troy. Dares goes further, however, in using the name of a minor character in Homer; Dares is the name of a priest of Hephaistos mentioned briefly in *Iliad* V.9-10. Initial divergences from the story as laid out in Dictys are insignificant. Aeneas is numbered among the friends of Priam who are summoned together to deal with the coming Greek conflict. So is Antenor (6). Aeneas is named with Deiphobus and Polydamas as officers under Paris on his mission to Sparta, rather than simply as companions, and the consequent implication that he is involved in the abduction of Helen is that much firmer (9-10). Priam accuses him directly of having been involved in the ill-starred ravishment of Helen, but the charge is spoken in anger after Trojan fortunes have taken a sharp downward turn (38).

Aeneas is just as brave in battle as he is in the account of Dictys, taking a position of leadership alongside Hector and Paris and later shepherding a wounded Paris off the battlefield under protection of his shield (20-1). When Priam, at the urging of Andromache, withdraws a furious Hector from his combat role, Aeneas is one of the four warriors among whom he chooses to split the command (24).

As with Dictys, the portrait of Aeneas darkens considerably as we approach the fall of Troy. First, Antenor enlists him into a conspiracy against the city. This is in response to a perceived threat from Priam, who is enraged at the suggestion from Antenor, Aeneas and others that the time has come to sue for peace with the Greeks (38-9). Antenor takes the lead, but Aeneas does not demur even when the nature of the plot is unfolded in the plainest terms:

Eodem die clam conveniunt Antenor Polydamas Ucalegon Dolon, dicunt se mirari regis pertinaciam qui inclusus cum patria et comitibus perire malit quam pacem facere. Antenor ait se invenisse quod sibi et illis in commune proficiat, quod quo pacto fieri possit dicturum si sibi fides servaretur. Omnes se in fidem Antenori obstringunt. Antenor ... mittit ad Aenean, dicit patriam prodendam esse et sibi et suis esse cavendum. [Dares 39]

During the same day, Antenor, Polydamas, Ucalegon, and Dolon met in secret. They were amazed at the stubbornness of the king, who, when surrounded by the enemy, preferred to die rather than sue for peace, thus causing the destruction of his country and people. Antenor had a plan for solving their problems, and if the others would swear their allegiance, he would reveal it.

When all had sworn as he wished, he first sent word to Aeneas, and then told them his plan. They must, he said, betray their country, and in such a way that they might safeguard themselves and their families.

There are three elements worth noting here. The first is the recourse to treachery, which is embraced with unbecoming alacrity by Aeneas. This is very similar to the sequence of events in Dictys, and is just one illustration of the way in which the two purported eyewitness accounts buttress each other in their elaboration or contradiction of both the Homeric and Virgilian accounts. The second is the incredulity expressed by the chorus of conspirators that a leader would prefer to die rather than cede his city to the conquerors. This will obviously have had particular resonance, for a reader of Virgil, with the escape of Aeneas from Troy.

The third point is also applicable to Aeneas. The conspirators are eager to secure safety not just for themselves, but for their families. This may make them less reprehensible, or at least more human, but it also brings them closer to the Virgilian picture of Aeneas rescuing Anchises and Ascanius from the flames of Troy. When we read the *Aeneid* in the light of Dares' purportedly historical

account, in other words, the fact that Aeneas rescues his father and son from the falling city gives us no guarantee that he was not implicated in its fall.

The implied reproach is even keener when we remember the rather significant family member he left behind. We will return to the unfortunate Creusa, but she is absent from the narratives of both Dictys and Dares. In the latter account, it is Polyxena who accompanies Aeneas on his flight from Troy [41], and she is eventually the cause of the falling-out between him and Antenor. Aeneas gives her up to the Greeks, who slit her throat, but Antenor cannot forgive Aeneas for having offered her a haven, however temporary. He orders Aeneas to leave, and Aeneas obeys (43).

Dares is silent on the further adventures of Aeneas, confining himself as he does to events that he might plausibly have witnessed, so we hear nothing of the hero's ultimate settlement or the "barbarous" encounters hinted at in Dictys. The reader must let Virgil take up the story, but to come to the *Aeneid* after Dares is to read with a distanced sympathy for the hero.

The popularity of the narratives of Dictys and Dares up to and during the period in which Petrarch worked can hardly be overstated. Several factors account for this, and their combined effect is to make either account seem more plausible to a medieval readership than what will have been seen as the much later account given by Virgil.

The first factor is the skill with which both writers maintain the fiction that they were present at the events they describe. For all the plainness or worse of their prose styles, both Dares and Dictys cleave fairly scrupulously to the points of view they have established for themselves.

All particulars which, in the nature of the case, could have fallen under the observation neither of Dares nor Dictys nor their informants are, for the most part, rigorously excluded.⁶⁴

This brings with it a kind of naturalism which strains credulity less than the narratives of either Homer or Virgil. Horses do not suddenly gain the power of speech in Dictys or Dares, and nobody rides into battle with sparks streaming from his head.⁶⁵ Allied to this is a second factor: neither author attributes any events in their narratives to the agency of the gods, and they even go out of their way to expunge such supernatural interventions from the Homeric record:

Our authors ... use none of the divine machinery typical of epic poetry, and they tend to describe supernatural occurrences in rationalistic terms. Sometimes Dictys openly flouts the traditional account by offering the reader a choice between rational and supernatural explanation.⁶⁶

This obviously had an impact on Petrarch, and it is the element of Dares he refers to in his *Invectiva Contra Medicum*. The *De Bello Troiano* came with a forged introduction by Cornelius Nepos, which praised the work for its decorous portrayal of non-interventionist divinities.⁶⁷ It is this to which Petrarch refers, and it is notable that the company in which he presents Dares is comprised of figures no less eminent than Homer and Virgil. Homer is there by virtue of the fact that he is named explicitly in the preface to the *De Bello*. It is Petrarch who summons Virgil to stand in the dock beside him:

⁶⁴ Griffin, 1908: 39.

⁶⁵ As at *Iliad* XIX.404ff. or *Aen.* XII.101-6.

⁶⁶ Frazer, 1966: 6.

⁶⁷ For the importance of Lucan as an epic precursor who dispensed with divine machinery see Hardie, 1993a: 295.

Belligerantes deos invicem Homerus et Virgilius fecerunt; propter quod Athenis
Homerum pro insano habitum Cornelius Nepos refert.

[*Invectiva Contra Medicum* 138]

Homer and Virgil portrayed the gods as warring with each other, and Cornelius tells us that for this very reason the Athenians thought Homer was mad.⁶⁸

The widespread ignorance of Homer, except by reputation and in summary, makes the debunking of the Iliadic version of events less important to the middle ages than it must have been to a Greek readership. Nevertheless, the claim of greater antiquity is a powerful one. Benoit de Ste. Maure, one of the prime tributaries through which the work of Dictys and Dares poured into the vernacular mainstream of medieval literature, allows that Homer is a fine clerk, but suggests that his not being born until a century after the events he describes makes him a less trustworthy source than either prose account.⁶⁹ N.E. Griffin lists several medieval commentators who go so far as to chastise Homer, when he differs from Dictys or Dares, for a lack of fidelity to the his historical sources.⁷⁰

Virgil is at least as vulnerable as Homer to a comparison of his work with these perceived strengths of Dictys and Dares. The time of composition of the *Aeneid* is even more remote from the events it describes than that of the *Iliad* was, and his work bristles with divine machinery and supernatural events. The dawn of humanism may have increased scholarly scepticism about ancient forgeries, but the accounts of Dictys and Dares would not be challenged until long after the *Africa* was composed. A full two centuries after the death of Petrarch, Sir Philip Sydney

⁶⁸ Text and translation from Marsh, 2003.

⁶⁹ Lines 55ff., cited in Griffin, 1908: 40.

⁷⁰ Griffin, 1908: 40-1.

compares the “fayned Aeneas” in Virgil unfavourably to the “right Aeneas in Dares Phrygius.”⁷¹

We have seen in his *Coronation Oration* that Petrarch was deeply concerned with the truth of poetry. He allows for allegory, although he does not accept with Boccaccio that poetry may be counter-factual and still possess a kind of shimmering fictive truth. In a historical poem, certainly, he demands historical accuracy. Homer’s *Iliad* is a historical poem, and Petrarch gives it credit as such. But his reading of Homer must be seen in the light of the corrective accounts supplied by Dictys and Dares. This is especially so when we remember his own awareness that the poetry of Homer was not available to him. He could read for story only, and any account which laid claim to greater veracity than that of Homer would inevitably recommend itself to his attention.

That Petrarch had read the work of Dictys and Dares, as we have seen, is beyond question. That he was writing for an audience which was steeped in their work, even at second- or third-hand, is an inescapable feature of the period in which he worked. The ubiquity and adaptability of Dictys and Dares was astonishing, and they proved a ready and regular resource for the fabulists and romancers who dominated medieval vernacular literature. Jon Solomon offers an exhausting, but far from exhaustive, catalogue:

Eventually replacing the now lost poems of the Cyclic Epics, the accounts of Dares and Dictys continued to engender numerous imitations and adaptations for centuries through the end of the Renaissance. Along with the anonymous, fifth-century AD, vulgar Latin prose account known as the *Excidium Troiae*, the accounts of Dares and Dictys inspired the eleventh-century Irish *Tógáil Troí*, the anonymous mid-twelfth-century Latin hexameter adaptation *Historia Troyana Daretis Frigii*,

⁷¹ Sydney and Jonson, 1787: 27.

Joseph of Exeter's (Josephus Iscanus) Latin *Frigii Daretis Ylias* (c. 1188), the Middle High German *Der Götterweiger Trojanerkrieg* attributed to Wolfram von Eschenbach as well as the thirteenth-century *Troilus* by Albert von Stade, the anonymous Icelandic *Trójumanna Saga* of c. 1263, an extensive insertion into the thirteenth-century Spanish account of the life of Alexander the Great (*Libro de Alexandre*), and several other lengthy poems, but especially Benoît de Sainte-Maure's innovative, twelfth-century, Old French verse romance.⁷²

The idea that Petrarch might have curled up in his study with a manuscript of the *Tógáil Troí* or the *Trójumanna Saga* is of course absurd. The case is less clear with the *Roman de Troie* of Benoit de Sainte-Maure, although we may doubt that Petrarch's reading in the classics and in Christian literature left much time for even the more ubiquitous popular works. Despite his long sojourns in Provence, his reading time was devoted largely to the Latin authors:

Italian authors, beginning with Petrarch and Boccaccio, once they discovered and gained possession of the cultural heritage of their Latin ancestors, then proceeded to turn their backs to the French.⁷³

For all that, Boccaccio was "in all probability familiar with ... the *Roman de Troie*."⁷⁴ If it seems conceivable that Petrarch would have evinced some interest in this alternative tale of Troy's fall, he will in any case have gleaned nothing from it that was not already present in the Latin accounts on which Benoit scrupulously draws.⁷⁵ In any case, the continued strength of a tradition which accorded Aeneas neither admiration nor respect will not have been lost on him. It is a tradition with which the *Africa* will align itself as early as its opening book.

⁷² Solomon, 2007: 508-10.

⁷³ De Filippis, 1943: 76.

⁷⁴ Wilkins, 1913: 45

⁷⁵ See Griffin, 1908: 40.

4. Aeneas Leaving Troy

The narratives of Dictys and Dares, and the many medieval narratives which branched off from them, concentrated particularly on the fall of Troy, and left Aeneas at or shortly after his escape. The main reason for this is presumably the stance of Dictys and Dares as participants in the Trojan war. As neither of them accompanied Aeneas into exile, and as there is no ready source for them to receive second-hand news of his adventures, they are limited to events that happened before the opening of the *Aeneid*. They can have no opinion, and offer no alternative account, of Aeneas in Carthage or Italy.

This lack of narrative overlap also functions as a limit on Petrarch, though it is one that he is cunning enough to circumvent. Just as he cannot easily show us a scene which directly contradicts a passage of Virgil, his narrative offers no immediate opportunity to discuss the possibility, for example, that Aeneas was complicit in or responsible for the betrayal of Troy. It is hard enough to reinterpret the events of the *Aeneid* in a narrative which is set many centuries later than those events; to propose a wholesale alternative history, in which Aeneas strikes bargains with the Greeks or unbars the gates to their advance, might tax both the poet's ingenuity and the decorous progression of his history.

What he can do is to reflect the behaviour of Aeneas by offering alternative courses of action in the *Africa's* heroes.⁷⁶ There are two aspects of Aeneas' conduct in the fall of Troy which raise questions, even filtered through his own self-

⁷⁶ In reverting so often to Troy, Petrarch may also be reminding us of Virgil's debt to Ennius: "Virgil's description of the fall of Troy seems to have been closely modelled on Ennius' description of the destruction of Alba Longa..." (Keith, 2007: 62.) See Servius on *Aen.* II.313 at *Aen.* II.486-90.

exculpatory account in *Aeneid* II. The first is the abandonment of Creusa on the road to his survival. The second is the very fact that he survives.

To modern eyes the failure of Aeneas to bring his wife to safety is a shocking blemish. This attitude has very little precedent in antiquity. We have seen Tertullian rail against Aeneas' abandonment of his wife, as well as of Priam and Astyanax, but he is almost a lone voice. Augustine famously reproaches himself with shedding tears for Dido while ignoring his own desperate estrangement from God;⁷⁷ the suffering of Creusa appears to him in a somewhat different aspect, as part of the exciting spectacle of Troy, which is so much more enthralling than the dull routine of his studies:

iam vero unum et unum duo, duo et duo quattuor odiosa cantio mihi erat, et
dulcissimum spectaculum vanitatis equus ligneus plenus armatis, et Troiae
incendium, atque ipsius umbra Creusae. [*Conf.* 1.13]

"One and one, two"; "two and two, four"; this was to me a hateful singsong: "the wooden horse lined with armed men," and "the burning of Troy," and "Creusa's shade and sad similitude," were the choice spectacle of my vanity.⁷⁸

She receives more sympathy from a female fellow-sufferer, albeit a fictional one. There is no shortage of reproaches for Aeneas, understandably enough, in Ovid's portrait of Dido in the *Heroides*. One of the more striking is her conjuration of the image of Creusa as the first in a line of women whom Aeneas has betrayed:

omnia mentiris; neque enim tua fallere lingua
incipit a nobis, primaque plector ego:
si quaeras ubi sit formosi mater Iuli –
occidit a duro sola relicta viro!

⁷⁷ *Conf.* 1.13.

⁷⁸ Text of Augustine is from Watts, 1912. Translations are from Pusey, n.d.

haec mihi narraras, sat me monuere! [Ovid, *Her.* VII.81-5]

You are false in everything – and I am not the first your tongue has deceived, nor am I the first to feel the blow from you. Do you ask where the mother of pretty Iulus is? – she perished, left behind by her unfeeling lord! That was the story you told me – and it was enough to warn me!

Such sympathy would fall out of fashion. In the middle ages and beyond, the image most readers retained of the flight of Aeneas was that of the noble hero with his father on his shoulders and his son by his side, and few spared a thought for the wife lost in the flames:

The fondness of Renaissance authors for Aeneas' rescue of his father as an exemplum of piety is well known. But... [as to] what becomes of his wife Creusa, who was lost in the brave escape: she is not even mentioned.⁷⁹

We have already seen that even Dictys and Dares, who both display sensitive noses for any whiff of obloquy concerning Aeneas, have nothing to say about Creusa. The general subsequent failure in the middle ages to recruit Creusa to the anti-Aenean cause may be one more example of the breadth of those writers' influence. It may also be evidence of the prevalence of male-centred readings, in which the noble renunciations of Aeneas were easier to empathise with than the fiery sufferings of the renounced.

It is largely through male eyes that Virgil's account of the events will have been read. In Petrarch's time, the easy availability of the story of Aeneas in the vernacular had not eroded interest in Virgil's telling, and Petrarch will have assumed that any reader of his own epic would be familiar with the *Aeneid*:

⁷⁹ Schleiner, 1975: 98.

Virgil's original poem was throughout this period one of the most read and studied of all texts, from school upwards; indeed in some circles it was more popular even for leisure reading than the various rewritings of the Middle Ages.⁸⁰

But this readership was largely male, and their viewpoint will have been steeped in an inheritance of masculine commentary which long predated Petrarch and which prevailed for long after his death:

Not only have readers of Virgil historically been men, but the reading of the *Aeneid* – as part of Latin training – has been associated with a class-specific performance of masculinity. As a school text used to instruct male students in the Latin language, Virgil's *Aeneid* was, until the last century, an important part of the initiation rite schoolboys underwent in their acquisition of a public language basis to a mature masculine identity.⁸¹

Marilynn Desmond suggests that the predominant masculinity of the tradition of *Aeneid* readership has worn such a groove in Virgilian studies that even female readers find it difficult to escape:

Not surprisingly, twentieth-century interpretive approaches to Virgil's *Aeneid* tend to reflect this aspect of its historical readership. In modern literary studies, this gender-specific readership has resulted in reading Virgil as a man – that is, even readers who otherwise identify as female are culturally constructed as male readers...⁸²

This affects most obviously, or egregiously, the reading of scenes between men and women. Christine Perkell discusses modern interpretations of Aeneas' conduct towards the women he is linked with sexually or by marriage. She finds that his

⁸⁰ Everson, 2002: 45.

⁸¹ Desmond, 1994: 8.

⁸² Desmond, 1994: 8.

culpability in this regard has been touched on lightly if at all, even in discussions of the more negative aspects of his character:

The women's deaths are at least partially attributable to the manner of Aeneas' departure, although Aeneas does not acknowledge this. To Creusa Aeneas is fatally inattentive. To Dido he is also irresponsible, even treacherous...⁸³

The persistence of this gendered discourse even into the twenty-first century perhaps makes it less surprising that Aeneas' abandonment of Creusa was so rarely discussed in medieval and Renaissance responses to the poem. Winfred Schleiner notes a shift in attitude, dating from before the pessimistic assessments of Desmond and Perkell, but long after the time of Petrarch. It is probably consequent on a general change in social attitudes to family and marriage:

In the Renaissance "pious Aeneas" displays pre-eminently the virtues of filial piety and shows little or no concern for the ideal of marital love or care, but in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there is a tendency to stress the domestic pathos of the episode.⁸⁴

Even before those shifts in the societal view of marriage, however, Tertullian is not quite alone. The other notable exception to the near-absolute silence on the subject of Creusa's pain crops up in the third book of the *Africa*.

Scipio's emissary, the ever-reliable Laelius, is engaged in the formal exchange of gifts and fine talk that usually attends the reception of an embassy from one great leader to another. King Syphax asks him to recount the tale of Rome's great leaders. Laelius does his duty as guest, and entertains the table with a history lesson.

⁸³ Perkell, 1992: 370.

⁸⁴ Schleiner, 1975: 97.

This will be the only one of the *Africa's* four parades of great Romans to refer to Aeneas. Just as the *Africa's* canon of epic poets rolls from Homer to Ennius to Petrarch himself, and finds no place for Virgil, so the *Africa's* catalogues of Roman heroes tend to omit Aeneas. He is never mentioned directly by name in the poem. (He is *Anchisiades* once, at III.502). Romulus, by contrast, is named eight times: at I.508, I.538, IV.327, VI.173, VI.818, VII.73, VIII.682, VIII.816, IX.225 and IX.259. Several of these references are to the Roman people, rather than to Romulus himself, but even their designation in those terms (e.g. *Romuleo ex populo* at VII.73) can be read as a reminder of Romulus as the true founder of the race and a silent rejection of Aeneas' claims.

The last of these references explicitly mentions Petrarch's plan to commemorate the great line of Roman heroes from Romulus down to Scipio, the most important of them all:

Hic quoque magnorum laudes studiosus auorum
Digeret extrema relegens ab origine fortes
Romulidas, uestrumque genus sermone soluto
Historicus, titulosque urbis et nomina reddet.
In medio effulgens nec corpore paruus eodem
Magnus erit Scipio; seque ipse fatebitur ultro
Plus nulli debere uiro. [*Afr.* IX.257-63]

Zealous in study, he
will sing the glories of the men of old
and trace from their first origins the sons
of Romulus; a faithful chronicler,
in syllables unfettered he will tell
of your great race, its titles and its clans.
Wherein, resplendent and by no means least,
great Scipio will stand, and he who writes

will openly admit indebtedness
to him above all heroes of the past.

If Aeneas is to remain nameless, Scipio will certainly not.

Given Petrarch's reluctance to name Aeneas in the *Africa*, which we will touch on again in the final chapter, the context and content of his one appearance in the poem deserve some examination. The first noteworthy aspect is the appearance, equally veiled, of the equally nameless Virgil. The court minstrel of Syphax has opened the transaction with an account of Dido, betrayed by not one Roman, but two. First she is abandoned by Aeneas. Then, in a daring proleptic invocation of the *Aeneid*, she is traduced by a hypothetical future poet. It is a key passage in the *Africa*, and provides an unusually open condemnation of both Aeneas and Virgil:

Post regina Tyro fugiens his finibus ampla
Mena construxit magnam Carthaginis urbem.
Ex re nomen ei est. Mox aspernata propinqui
Coniugium regis, cum publica uota suorum
Vrgerent, ueteris non immemor illa mariti,
Morte pudicitiam redimit. Sic urbis origo
Oppetiit regina ferox. Iniuria quanta
Huic fiat, si forte aliquis – quod credere non est -
Ingenio confisus erit, qui carmine sacrum
Nomen ad illicitos ludens traducat amores! [*Afr.* III.418-27]

Later a queen came hither, fugitive
from Tyre and closed within its lofty walls
great Carthage, named after its origins.
Then, having spurned the hands of neighbouring kings,
flouting her people's wish to see her wed,
forever mindful of the cherished face

of her dead spouse, by her own death she chose
to assure her virtue. In this fashion then,
the fierce queen, founder of the city, died.
What cruel injustice will be done to her –
But who will believe it? – if it should yet be
that some detractor, trusting in his art,
will, in his verses, tarnish her fair name
with taint of shameless passion!

In the minstrel's version of the tragic story, Dido is blameless. She embraces death to avoid dishonour, perhaps at the hands of Aeneas. It is a provocative opening to the exchange of histories, and Laelius has a number of options available to him in response. Two of them are obvious. He can rise to the bait, and reply with a defence of Aeneas. Alternatively, he can pass on in diplomatic silence, concentrating his narrative efforts on the many other exemplary Romans. He is a guest, after all, and one who has been sent here to request a favour.

Given that Laelius is a steadfast and self-effacing deputy, and the poem itself is not reluctant to pass over Aeneas, it seems clear that Laelius will choose silence rather than risk a diplomatic incident. But Laelius manages to find a third option, which is more surprising than either silence or rebuttal. It is also hard to explain unless we accept both that Aeneas is culpable in the story of Dido and that the good Roman Laelius is well aware of his guilt.

Having modestly denied the Romans any gift as chroniclers of important events, and less modestly attributed their deficiency in this regard to a greater love of manly action, Laelius begins:

Nunc quantum nocturna patet sermonibus hora,
Principia expediam. Teucrorum a sanguine longe
Gentis origo uenit, uictrix quem Grecia bello

Dicitur ad patrios muros sparsisse bilustri:
Et fortasse aliquis iam tanti criminis ultor
Natus in Italia est. Sed nunc ad cepta reuertor. [*Afr.* III.491-6]

However, for such time the tardy hour
permits me I am willing to discourse.
Our early fathers came from distant Troy
whose walls, men say, in ten long years of war
the Grecian conquerors befouled with blood;
and now perhaps in Italy is born
one to avenge that ghastly crime. But I
would not digress.

Laelius' first response is to match the story of an African city's founder with the story of his own city's foundation. Dido, the *urbis origo*, is matched with the origin of the Roman people, the *gentis origo*. But where we might expect the match to be a one-for-one pairing of Dido and Aeneas, that is not what Laelius gives us. Instead the *gentis origo* is a more general evocation of Trojan blood. To the degree that he does trace that origin to an individual, Laelius guides our eyes back past Aeneas to the figure of Teucer, who gave his name to the Trojan people.

This sidelining of Aeneas is rendered unmissable by the close echo from *urbis origo* to *gentis origo*. It is sharpened by some cunning misdirection in the latter phrase. Aeneas did not turn one clod of Roman earth, and therefore could not literally be regarded as the city's founder, but he has a high claim to be regarded as the founder of the Roman people. This indeed is part of the role attributed to him by Virgil in the proem to the *Aeneid*, a passage which is echoed persistently in Laelius' account:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram;
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem,
inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum,
Albanique patres, atque altae moenia Romae. [*Aen.* I.1-7]

Arms I sing – and a man,
The first to come from the shores
Of Troy, exiled by Fate, to Italy
And the Lavinian coast; a man battered
On land and sea by the powers above
In the face of Juno’s relentless wrath;
A man who also suffered greatly in war
Until he could found his city and bring his gods
Into Latium, from which arose
The Latin people, our Alban forefathers,
And the high walls of everlasting Rome.

As Conington points out, Virgil provides a tri-partite bridge from Aeneas to the building of Rome’s walls:

‘Genus Latinum,’ ‘Albani patres,’ ‘altae moenia Romae,’ denote the three ascending stages of the empire which sprang from Aeneas, Lavinium, Alba, and Rome.⁸⁵

This makes literal sense, and faces squarely the fact that Aeneas did not directly found Rome. The commentary of Servius, which Petrarch will have read with interest, picks a different quarrel with Virgil’s claim that Aeneas is the source of the Latin people:

⁸⁵ Conington, 2007.

GENUS UNDE LATINUM si iam fuerunt Latini et iam Latium dicebatur, contrarium est quod dicit ab Aenea Latinos originem ducere.⁸⁶

“From which arose the Latin people”: If the Latins already existed and Latium already had that name, it is a contradiction to say that the Latin people derive their origin from Aeneas.

He goes on to cast further doubt on the claim that Aeneas is the fountainhead of the Latin people, pointing out that *unde* properly refers to places rather than people. Whether Petrarch followed this reading or not, he certainly has Syphax’ Numidian minstrel give Dido a foundation claim which is more concrete (in both senses) than that of Aeneas. Where Trojan Aeneas is more or less the ultimate source of the rising walls of Rome, though at several removes, Phoenician Dido is actively involved in the building of Carthage’s walls:

Post regina Tyro fugiens his finibus ampla
Mena construxit magnam Carthaginiis urbem. [*Afr.* III.418-9]

Later a queen came hither, fugitive
from Tyre and closed within its lofty walls
great Carthage...

Dido is *Tyro fugiens* rather than *fato profugus*. Like the contrast from the earthily active *construxit* to the more remote *conderet*, the minstrel’s phrase carries the suggestion that Dido is somehow more real than the airier Aeneas. She flees one city and builds another: he flees an abstraction into a subjunctive.

The minstrel’s brief description of Carthage being built cannot fail to put any reader in mind of the description of the same event in the *Aeneid*. Despite his strictures against direct quotation, Petrarch does not struggle to suppress the

⁸⁶ Servius at *Aen.* I.6.

memory of those earlier lines. First there is an inescapable reminiscence of Venus' description of Dido's work-in-progress:

Devenere locos, ubi nunc ingentia cernis
moenia surgentemque novae **Karthaginis arcem**... [*Aen.* I.365-6]

They arrived at the place where now you see
The soaring walls of a new city – Carthage.

Word-choice and word-order combine to recall the second of those lines:

Menia construxit magnam **Carthaginis urbem**. [*Afr.* III.419]

The case is much less clear when we come to Aeneas' first view of the burgeoning city:

'O fortunati, quorum iam **moenia** surgunt!
Aeneas ait, et fastigia suspicit **urbis**. [*Aen.* I.437-8]

"Happy are they whose walls are rising."
Thus Aeneas, as he surveyed the city's heights.

Petrarch's lines do have a repetition of *moenia*, and they place *urbem* in the same line-ending position as Virgil's *urbis*, but these may be the low-level echoes we would expect of any hexameter poet describing essentially the same activity. There is a less obvious poetic forebear whom Petrarch does work to bring more forcefully to our attention, however, and that again is Ovid in his *Heroides*. First Dido speaks:

urbem constitui lateque patentia fixi
moenia finitimis invidiosa locis. [*Her.* VII.119-20]

I establish a city, and lay about it the foundations of wide-reaching walls that stir the jealousy of neighbouring realms.

And now the court minstrel:

Post regina Tyro fugiens his **finibus** ampla
Moenia construxit magnam Carthaginis **urbem**. [*Afr.* III.418-9]

From *finitimis* to *finibus*, from *urbem constitui* to *construxit ... urbem*, from *moenia* to *moenia*: Petrarch's lines recall the broadly anti-Aenean account of Ovid's *Heroides* more than the Virgilian account of the progress of Dido's city, either in the words of Venus or as it presents itself to the eyes of Aeneas. It is less a gesture towards writing Virgil out of poetic history, perhaps, than it is an appeal to a truer account of Dido than the *Aeneid*'s. In the context of the *Africa*'s repeated exclusion of Virgil from the canon, however, it seems a knowing demotion.

The minstrel aims another dart at Aeneas in his praise of Dido's fidelity to her departed husband. She dies with her thoughts still on her marriage: *ueteris non immemor illa mariti*. Laelius picks this up with his image of Aeneas leaving behind both Troy and Creusa:

Naufragio ex tanto uixque ex tot milibus unus
Integer enaut sine crimine. Namque ubi Troie
Matris adhuc Frigio fumabat litore bustum
Iamque cinis facilem incipiens glomerare fauillam,
Inclitus et claris multum spectatus in armis
Dux Anchisiades, cui non uia prona salutis
Viribus aut propriis aut urbibus esset amicus,

Destituit patriam lacrimans caramque cubilis
Consortem, et passus terra casusque tremendos
Erroresque uagos et mille pericula ponti,
Impiger Ausonias tandem tamen attigit oras:
Isque, ubi belligerum Latii sensere coloni
Troiu genam, externoque uiro Lauinia pactos
Reddidit amplexus, sacro pia flumine membra
Deseruit moriens. [*Afr.* III.497-511]

In that calamity

thousands were brought to ruin and scarce one
escaped unharmed. There, on the Phrygian shore,
where ashes from the pyre of Mother Troy
rained down to cover the defenseless dead,
Anchises' son, the illustrious chief renowned
afar for feats of arms, when he could find
among his folk nor yet in friendly towns
no hope of safety, was constrained to flee
in tears, abandoning his fatherland
and the long-cherished partner of his bed.
After long wanderings, many trials by land
and all the thousand perils of the sea,
he came at length, impoverished, to land
on the Ausonian shore. There, when the clans
of Latium, vanquished by this son of Troy,
had yielded and when from Lavinia's lips
he had obtained the kiss of peace –
at last, entrusting to the venerated stream
his sacred mortal part, the hero died.

The tone of this, as of much of what Laelius says about Aeneas, is not overwhelmingly sympathetic. *Destituit patriam ... caramque cubilis consortem*: he abandoned his fatherland and the beloved partner of his bed. *Destituo* does not

occur in the Aeneid, but it is reminiscent of the tones in which Aeneas curses his own position as his life in Troy collapses around him:

At me tum primum saeuus circumstetit horror.
obstipui; subiit cari genitoris imago,
ut regem aequaeuum crudeli uulnere uidi
uitam exhalantem, subiit deserta Creusa
et direpta domus et parui casus Iuli. [*Aen.* II.559-63]

I stood in a daze, and there rose before me
The image of my dear father, the same age
As the wounded king whom I was watching
Gasp out his life. Before me rose Creusa,
Abandoned, the pillaged house, and the plight
Of little Iulus.

Whatever the similarities, there is a necessary tonal difference between self-reproach and the reproach of others. It is understandable for Aeneas, in the throes of catastrophe, to extend his negative feelings even to his own actions. For Laelius to cast the same jaundiced eye, so many generations later, demands another explanation. Whether through diplomacy or from simple honesty, he cannot bring himself to praise his city's notional founder.

The picture of Aeneas leaving Troy is perhaps the most interesting aspect of Laelius' narration. This is not an exile driven by fate to seek a new fatherland, tearing himself away from his wife and his country in obedience to a burdensome piety. This is a more human and less admirable figure. For all his fame in arms, when the city falls he is driven from door to door to seek his own safety. We might expect a warrior with the achievements of Virgil's hero behind him to find ready allies, but to this Aeneas every door is closed. There is a clear evocation of the

opening of the *Aeneid*, with Aeneas suffering by land and sea and coming at last to shore:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab **oris**
Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit
litora, **multum ille** et **terris** iactatus et **alto**
vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram;
multa quoque et bello **passus**... [*Aen.* I.1-5]

et **passus terra** casusque tremendos
Erroresque uagos et **mille** pericula **ponti**,
Impiger Ausonias tandem tamen attingit **oras**... [*Afr.* III.507]

The general tendency of the lines Petrarch gives to Laelius is obviously towards a brief summary of the *Aeneid*, and one which leans heavily on Virgil's proem. If we allow *ponti* to parallel *alto* and we accept the chime of both meaning and sound from an elided *mult' ille* to *mille*, then the simple reiteration of *oris/oras*, *passus*, and *terra/terris* gives us five verbal cues from three lines of the *Africa* to take us back to this short section of the *Aeneid*.⁸⁷

The differences, however, are even more suggestive than the similarities. These are not simple divergences of vocabulary. Laelius has kept the suffering, the wandering, the eventual landfall and the dangers on land and sea. What he has denied to Aeneas is any divine or supernatural motivation. There is no place in his account for the relentless hatred of Juno, or the irresistible pull of a higher fate. This Aeneas has only his own character to motivate him. Naked of any celestial camouflage, his character is a pitiful thing. Having begged his neighbours for refuge, he finally leaves his city and his wife, weeping as he goes.

⁸⁷ The *casus* of *Afr.* III.505 also points us back to the same word in *Aen.* I.9.

Andrew Laird identifies the tendency of the *Africa* here to either exclude or actively disparage Virgil, and points out the cleverness with which Petrarch takes advantage of the chronological location of the events of the *Africa* between the events that will form the basis of *Aeneid* and the composition of the *Aeneid* itself:

The constraints of chronology which prevent Laelius from knowing of Virgil facilitate a strategic occlusion of Petrarch's clear model... [C]loser examination shows that these verses, even though their organization owes much to Virgil's poem, do not yield a particularly precise summary of it. Dido is absent. Aeneas' Trojan wife and his Latin wife Lavinia are given an emphasis which is disproportionate in comparison with the Virgilian version of events. No gods are involved, there are no prophecies, and there is no *katabasis*. What Laelius relates has a natural, historical quality.⁸⁸

To account for Laelius' rigorous exclusion of the divine machinery, and the consequent flattening into relative banality of the travails of Aeneas, we need only look back to the strategy adopted by Dictys and Dares in their revisions of Homer. In rewriting the old epic narrative more naturalistically, however, Laelius is not simply rendering it credible for his immediate audience. Laelius is responding here to the song of the minstrel in Syphax' court. Unlike the astronomical and meteorological delights to which Iopas treats his listeners in the model scene from the *Aeneid*,⁸⁹ the song of Syphax' minstrel has not confined itself to natural events. It also dwells on the achievements of the demi-god Hercules.⁹⁰ Laelius in his response could expatiate without indecorum on the pull of fate and the motives of the gods. In choosing not to, he is exposing Aeneas to the same criticisms that the hero faces in the prose narratives of the fall of Troy.

⁸⁸ Laird, 2010: 150.

⁸⁹ See Laird, 2010: 148, n. 42.

⁹⁰ Hercules, of course, is associated in Petrarch's work with Dares.

The one aspect of the story which Laelius adds to the narrative of Virgil is the image of Aeneas asking for help from his friends and neighbours. This is quite a divergence from the picture in *Aeneid* II of a kind of *aristeia* of despair in which Aeneas rushes from battle to battle, hoping all the time to die. Here he addresses the band of followers he has assembled:

excessere omnes adytis arisque relictis
di quibus imperium hoc steterat; succurritis urbi
incensae. moriamur et in media arma ruamus.
una salus uictis nullam sperare salutem. [*Aen.* II.351-4]

“All the gods
Who sustained this realm are gone, leaving
Altar and shrine, you are fighting to save
A city in flames. All that is left for us
Is to rush onto swords and die. The only chance
For the conquered is to hope for none.”

The desperation of Aeneas in Laelius’ account has nothing of the warrior. More than anything in Virgil, it recalls the reprehensible conduct of Aeneas which we saw towards the close of the *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani*. This is the Aeneas who helped to betray Troy, in return for which the Greeks offered him a haven.

The safety Aeneas craves in the account of Laelius refers us back to one passage of the *Aeneid* with which it does not, on the surface, have much in common. The *via prona salutis* at the end of *Afr.* III.501, a line about Aeneas, directs us inescapably to the *via prima salutis* of *Aen.* VI.96, when the Sibyl is offering oracular pronouncements to Aeneas from the mouth of the cave. Here the words are also referring to a possible future for Aeneas, and they also occur at the end of

a line. The happy ending the Sibyl predicts will sound strangely familiar to the readers of Dares and Dictys:

tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito,
qua tua te Fortuna sinet. uia prima salutis
(quod minime reris) Graia pandetur ab urbe.' [*Aen.* VI.95-7]

"Do not yield, but oppose your troubles
All the more boldly, as far as your fate
And fortune allow. Salvation will come first
From where you least expect it –
A Greek city will open wide its gates."

Whether or not Petrarch intends this image of Aeneas finding safety in a Greek city to awaken a reminiscence of the hero's alleged complicity with the Greeks in the fall of Troy, his subsequent adventures still need to be motivated if Laelius' story is to make sense. Even if his Aeneas is driven from the city by fear rather than fate, Laelius needs some explanation for his long wanderings and his wars in Italy. There is a hint that he finds it in the treatment of Creusa.

If we look again at the opening of his tale of Troy, we see a downbeat portrayal of the catastrophic collapse of a city in war, when people are driven to actions which fall far short of the moral standards of peacetime:

Naufragio ex tanto uixque ex tot milibus unus
Integer enauit sine crimine. [*Afr.* III.497-8]

In that calamity
thousands were brought to ruin and scarce one
escaped unharmed.

The translation of Bergin and Wilson seems to me to lose something of the desperation of the original here. It is not that few people can escape unscathed. Few can escape *sine crimine*: this can certainly mean “undamaged,” but it carries easily the alternative meaning of “without the stain of a crime.” This is how Virgil uses the phrase:

non licuit thalami expertem sine crimine uitam
degere more ferae, talis nec tangere curas. [*Aen.* IV.550-1]

It was not my lot
To live a blameless life as a widow, as free
As a wild thing, untouched by these cares.

The speaker here is Dido, who is in the throes of abandonment by Aeneas, which strengthens that case that Petrarch is not only hinting at moral culpability rather than physical injury, but nudging us slyly towards the source of that sin. If Aeneas has committed any crime against nature or morality in his haste to flee the city, it is surely to be found in his abandonment of Creusa. That this is followed by his abandonment of Dido does him little credit, and perhaps contributes to his end in Laelius:

Isque, ubi belligerum Latii sensere coloni
Troiu genam, externoque uiro Lauinia pactos
Reddidit amplexus, sacro pia flumine membra
Deseruit moriens. [*Afr.* III.508-511]

There, when the clans
of Latium, vanquished by this son of Troy,
had yielded and when from Lavinia's lips
he had obtained the kiss of peace –

at last, entrusting to the venerated stream
his sacred mortal part, the hero died.

It is a tender marital moment for Aeneas. He dies in peace, and in place of the flames that engulfed Creusa and Dido in turn, he floats serenely away. Is this an ironic escape for Aeneas from the troubles he has inflicted on others, or has he achieved some kind of expiation for his crimes against women? In either case it does not come from Virgil, as Andrew Laird points out, but from Livy and Ovid.⁹¹ It is another sidelining of Virgil's contribution to the history of Aeneas, but perhaps the main impact of this ending is to underline the single most startling omission from the narrative of Aeneas according to Laelius. Surely it is in deference to the sensibilities of the Numidian bard that Laelius has responded to his account of Dido with an account of Aeneas which does not mention her.

How we are to read this depends on our reading of that first bardic song. Does the singer intend to suggest that Dido is dying because of Aeneas?

Mox aspernata propinqui
Coniugium regis, cum publica uota suorum
Vrgerent, ueteris non immemor illa mariti,
Morte pudicitiam redimit. [*Afr.* III.421-4]

Then, having spurned the hands of neighbouring kings,
flouting her people's wish to see her wed,
forever mindful of the cherished face
of her dead spouse, by her own death she chose
to assure her virtue.

⁹¹ Laird, 2010: 150-1.

If Aeneas is one of the neighbouring kings, then Laelius has politely made no effort to refute the implicit charges against him. If he is not, there are still two possibilities. Either the Numidian singer is unaware of Aeneas' involvement in Dido's death, in which case Laelius is rather comically tiptoeing around the one transgression of Aeneas which is most relevant to his hearers, or Laelius does not mention the affair with Dido and its consequences because the affair simply did not happen. If that is the case, he has confirmed the bard's precognition of a vile future poet who will traduce the queen's memory (*Afr.* III.424-27, quoted above).

One last aspect of Laelius' Aeneas narrative is worthy of note. This is the image of an avenger, already born, who will exact long-overdue reprisals for the destruction of Troy:

Et fortasse aliquis iam tanti criminis ultor
Natus in Italia est. [*Afr.* III.495-6]

and now perhaps in Italy is born
one to avenge that ghastly crime.

Bergin and Wilson⁹² and Laird⁹³ both identify this figure as L. Mummius Achaicus, who will defeat the Achaeans and destroy Corinth in 146 BC, the same year as the ultimate destruction of Carthage by Scipio Aemilianus. That is far outside the scope of the tale Laelius wants to tell. Laelius is speaking before the battle of Zama, which happened 56 years before the fall of Corinth, so his hopeful guess at the future feats of Mummius is almost as egregious a violation of chronology as the Numidian minstrel's condemnation of a Virgil who is yet to be born. This is surely one of the "ungrammaticalities" of which Michael Riffaterre speaks: a moment that stands out

⁹² Bergin, 1977: 352, n. 620.

⁹³ Laird, 2010: 159, n. 46.

for its oddity or unexpectedness, and thus invites particular interpretive attention.⁹⁴ So how are we to explain it? Laelius and Petrarch are going out of their way, I think, to remind us that nowhere in the *Aeneid* does it occur to Aeneas to seek vengeance for the fall of his city. Is this because some treachery of his was responsible for the fall, as in Dictys and Dares? Or is it simply an unheroic oversight? It is, for one thing, decidedly unScipionic. The father of Petrarch's hero classes revenge for the fallen as one of the primary duties of filial piety:

Is tibi, nate, labor superest, ea gloria iusto
Marte parem factura deis. Hec uulnera iuro
Sacra michi merito, patrie quibus omne rependi
Quod dederat, quibus ad superos Mauortia uirtus
Fecit iter: non ulla, meos fodientibus artus
Hostibus atque abeunte anima, michi multa dolenti
Occurrisse prius tanti solamina casus,
Quam quod magnanimum post funera nostra uidebam
Ultorem superesse domi. Spes ista leuabat
Inde metus alios, hinc sensum mortis amare. [*Afr.* I.189-98]

The task shall fall
to you, my son, and all the honor too
which by the waging of a righteous war
will make you equal to the gods. I swear
by these most justly sacred wounds, through which
I paid the debt I owed the fatherland
and which laid open to my martial soul
the way to Heaven – solemnly I swear
that as the foeman pierced my limbs and while
my soul took flight, no other balm I found
save that I knew that in my house survived
a glorious avenger. And this hope

⁹⁴ See Schmitz, 2007: 80.

at once allayed the fears that filled my heart
and made more sweet the bitterness of death.

If the *mens pia* with which his son replies (at I.201) is intended to recall Aeneas, the whole characterisation of the young Scipio as a dutiful avenger takes us back to an earlier passage. There we find Scipio's war against the Carthaginians specifically painted as revenge for a fiery assault on Rome, an obligation owed to the ashes of the slain:

Nam sanguine seuo
Cesorum cineresque sacros umbrasque parentum
Placari, atque Itala detergi fronte pudorem,
Hic amor assiduum pulsabat pectora clari
Scipiade, in frontem eliciens oculosque iuuenta
Fulgentes calido generosas corde fauillas. [*Afr.* I.146-51]

... and by horrendous slaughter to appease
the sacred ashes of ancestors slain
and cleanse of shame the face of Italy.
This was the lasting hope that fed the heart
of noble Scipio; upon his brow
and in his shining youthful glance there gleamed
the glorious flame that burned within his breast.

This dutiful devotion to revenge for his fallen countrymen and his threatened city is a strong contrast to the failure of Aeneas to avenge his city or his Trojan comrades. We might plead that Aeneas is driven by fate to a different destiny, but Petrarch's Laelius has already removed fate from the stage. In any case, the omission is hard to excuse with the importunate urgings of any higher entity, given that Virgil's Aeneas could defer his destiny long enough to dally in Carthage.

That dalliance in Carthage makes the fourth book of the *Aeneid* not just one of the most celebrated, but one of the most reviled. Nowhere does the anti-Aenean tradition receive more vociferous support than in its condemnation of the hero's behaviour in Carthage. This tradition, and Petrarch's response, will form the basis of the next chapter and provide the firmest evidence yet for the *Africa* as a corrective reading of Virgil's epic.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANOTHER DIDO

1. To Carthage

A military leader sails to a Carthaginian city, where he falls in love with a beautiful widow. After a questionable marriage, the warrior is reminded by a higher power of his neglected duty to Rome. Hardening his heart, he turns his back on his bride, who kills herself and descends in anger to Hades.

Even in outline, the parallels between Virgil's story of Dido and Aeneas and Petrarch's story of Sophonisba and Massinissa are impossible for a modern reader to ignore.¹ This is partly due to the continuing presence of the Dido story in our culture. This familiarity is neatly summed up by Roger Savage:

She has been celebrated, pitied, criticized, vindicated, anatomized and generally made an icon and an example of, from the time of the emperor Augustus Caesar (and possibly earlier) up to the present.²

It is widely recognised that some of Petrarch's most obvious engagement with the *Aeneid* is in the episode of Massinissa and Sophonisba. "Sophonisba is an unmistakable Dido figure,"³ says Craig Kallendorf, and no-one who has read both poems can fail to see the similarities. These are not simply pictorial. Though both episodes can be read flatly as a diversion from the main narrative thrust of their respective epics, a more nuanced reading reveals each of them to be vital to the moral core of the narrative. "Like Vergil's representation of Aeneas and Dido..."

¹ Similar parallel outlines can be found at Foster, 1979: 284-5; Gilman, 1997: 125-6; and Kallendorf, 2007: 40.

² Savage, 1998: 3.

³ Kallendorf, 1989: 40.

says Donald Gilman, “the Massinissa-Sophonisba episode details a battle between virtue and vice.”⁴ If we are to read an epic, as Petrarch suggests, for its exemplary qualities, then our reading of his poem and our reading of the *Aeneid* must give careful attention to the morality on display in the love stories at their heart.

To understand this section of the *Africa* as it relates to the *Aeneid* we must read it in the context of the tale told by the Numidian bard at the court of King Syphax. His picture of a libellous future poet who tars Dido’s reputation with the imputation of a wholly fictional unchastity has set the frame for our perception, at any other point in the *Africa*, of Virgil’s Dido narrative. Any reminder of either a chaste historical Dido or her lustful fictional counterpart serves to flesh out that charge against Virgil. Such reminders come at their thickest in the Sophonisba narrative which spans the central part of the *Africa*. It occupies all of Book V and the opening of Book VI, but it is also prefigured, as we shall see, at the end of Book IV.

In the chronology of the *Africa*, the bard’s song predates the Virgilian version of Dido’s love and death by a couple of centuries. His evocation of a future Virgil is a clear nod from Petrarch to the reader, the significance of which neither the minstrel nor his immediate audience could possibly understand. But while the song is anachronistic with regard to the possible future travesty of Dido, it is perfectly realistic that the bard would have a version of her story to offer. Dido was an important character in literature long before Virgil. Just like Aeneas, the figure of Dido predates the *Aeneid* by centuries. As with him, a parallel version of her life and character continued to flourish, sometimes in direct and even furious contradiction of Virgil, long after the *Aeneid* was written. It is no surprise, therefore, that there is considerable conflict about the course of Dido’s life, and

⁴ Gilman, 1997: 112.

about the fundamental questions of her character. What may be surprising is that all of these questions are clustered around the brief last period of her life, and that the questions resolve themselves with relative ease into one simple choice: did Virgil get it right or wrong? Roger Savage again sums it up neatly:

Among her remembrancers in the Arts from Ancient Rome to now, there has been no widespread agreement as to what in the end became of Dido-Elissa, or what attitude we should take to the events that are variously thought to have climaxed and concluded her career. There has been pretty broad agreement as to how that career *began*. In history or legend or myth, she was Elissa, a Phoenician princess from Tyre who married happily; was unhappily widowed; resolved to keep faith with her late husband (known variously as Acherbas and Sychaeus); fell foul of the Tyrian king her brother, who probably had a hand in the death of her husband; avoided his stratagems by slipping away on a colonizing expedition to North Africa; quibbled brilliantly with an African coastal chieftain about her derisory allowance to her of a piece of land to colonize that could be “covered by an ox-hide”; and founded the city of Carthage (etymology “New Town”), adding there a further name to her own Elissa, “Dido” (possible etymology: “The Wanderer”).⁵

This is more or less the story as Venus gives it to Aeneas in Book I of the *Aeneid*. Her husband is named as Sychaeus, her wicked brother is Pygmalion, and she is spurred by a dream to leave Tyre with her ships laden with treasure. Venus alludes to but does not elaborate on the folkloric ox-hide tale, and adds what may be some sisterly appreciation of the fact that that the adventurous escape from Tyre was achieved by a woman:

Dux femina facti. [*Aen.* I.364]

A woman was the leader of the deed.

⁵ Savage, 1998: 4.

The Numidian bard's song, as we have seen, goes into less detail. It does not name her husband or mention her brother or the ox-hide. Where it does elaborate on her story is in her death. In what Craig Kallendorf calls "a most un-Virgilian turn"⁶ the bard's Dido spurns the marriage proposals of neighbouring kings and dies with her faithful heart still set on her former husband. The question of Dido's marital status, of course, is central to the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. It is also woven tightly into the narrative of Sophonisba and Massinissa in the *Africa*. Through confluences of this kind, both narrative and thematic, Petrarch returns us constantly to the earlier poem.

If the Sophonisba episode is to function as an anti-Virgilian device, its first and simplest task is to bring the parallax between Virgil's Dido and the virtuous Dido insistently to mind. This will have worked on Petrarch's potential readers only if they had a clear image of that chaste historical Dido. A survey of the sources for Dido's life which were available to Petrarch and his audience will demonstrate that, despite the prominence of Virgil's account, this alternative Dido was widely acknowledged in both Christian and secular literary discourse. Indeed, anyone familiar with Petrarch's other works will have seen him take an anti-Virgilian line there, and we even have some evidence of the effectiveness of Petrarch's advocacy: it seems that his passionate defence of Dido in the *Africa* and elsewhere may have influenced Boccaccio to join the anti-Virgil camp, at least in this one regard.

But even if Virgil's Dido is unchaste, is her error culpable? Is the affair her fault or does she succumb to pressures that no human being could resist? Petrarch's account of Sophonisba's story is superficially similar to Virgil's Dido story, as we have seen, but at every stage of Sophonisba's journey from solitude to

⁶ Kallendorf, 1989: 42.

death and beyond, Petrarch seeks to shift the responsibility from his queen onto forces beyond her control. This tends to remind us of the forces that worked on the unknowing Dido. By making some of those divine or abstract forces resurface in Sophonisba's world as concrete inescapable realities, he compels us to think of even Virgil's Dido less as a lustful virago and more as a helpless victim of Aeneas and his divine allies. Virgil has not only travestied the real Dido, he has misrepresented his fictional one.

Petrarch employs a glancing metapoetic strategy to explore the nature of this second travesty. Having introduced Dido in Book III through the words of a poet, and warned against the fictions of a future poet, Petrarch will now attempt to show us how such fictions as Virgil's can come about. First he shows us Massinissa in objective terms as a brutal abuser of his power and position, and then he allows us a glimpse into Massinissa's mind. There we find him represented to himself as first snared by a wanton queen and then summoned reluctantly back to duty. Massinissa's image of himself, in other words, functions almost as a parody of Virgil's presentation of Aeneas in Book IV. The hero's decision to leave Carthage follows immediately on Mercury's divine reveille, and this has been taken to suggest that he has no internal struggle whatever:

The poet ... does not show Aeneas, genuinely torn, deliberating over whether or not to leave Dido. Aeneas' vision of Mercury affects him powerfully and his decision to leave Carthage is instantaneous.⁷

Petrarch has no truck with divine motivation, however, and he will presumably be more open to a reading in which Mercury's call represents the outcome of the

⁷ Perkell, 1992: 363.

hero's deliberations rather than an alternative to them. By furnishing a glimpse of Massinissa's inner life, he allows us to project that onto the Aenean canvas that Virgil has left blank.

To begin with, then, we will look at the image of a historical Dido as it was both inherited and promulgated by Petrarch. A brief discussion of the lineaments of the more obviously fictional Dido, as she appears in both Virgil and the popular romances, will show that Petrarch is determined to respond explicitly to the Virgilian version. An examination of the course and aftermath of both affairs will uncover the similarities and differences between Dido's progress and Sophonisba's, and discuss what this might mean for Petrarch's reading of the Dido story. Finally, a brief look at Massinissa's long night will offer a glimpse into the process of poetic libel, and show how a fictional travesty of a chaste woman can replace the truth. This is a reminder that the stakes are higher with the Aeneid's representation of Dido than they were even with Aeneas. If Virgil did libel the queen, as the Numidian bard suggests he will, there will have been little doubt in Petrarch's mind or the minds of his contemporaries that Virgil was libelling a real woman.

2. The Historical Dido

The first thing to be said about the historical Dido is that there may have been one. James Davidson traces her back to a fragment of Timaeus, which even in bald outline contains the elements of the flight from Tyre, the foundation of Carthage,

and her death on a flaming pyre.⁸ This textual fragment was not directly available to Petrarch, but it does inform the tradition on which his central criticism of Virgil's treatment of Dido is predicated. Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, to which we shall return, shares enough details with Timaeus to suggest that they may have a common source.⁹ She is mentioned in Naevius and Ennius, both of whose fragmentary remains had come down to Petrarch through Aulus Gellius.¹⁰

That there was a historical Dido makes it possible for Virgil to play false with her memory, and this is the case that is made repeatedly in the literature that Petrarch inherited, and which he repeats in his own work both overtly and by implication:

A central part of the Dido tradition has been the story of how Virgil traduced her, transforming a virtuous bereaved matron who would die rather than betray her dead husband into a widow who verges at times on the merry if not the gay, who does actually succumb to her visitor's charms, who deceives herself with the marriage label and who kills herself partly out of revenge because she could not tag along with her new-found lover.¹¹

Petrarch's response to Dido, therefore, draws on centuries of precedent. Much as he did with the story of an unheroic Aeneas, he will have found this precedent across the range of classical literature, Christian literature, and the romantic vernacular literature of the middle ages.

Pompeius Trogus was a Roman historian of the 1st century BC. His work survives only in an epitome made by Marus Iunianus Iustinus, more commonly

⁸ Davidson, 1998: 65.

⁹ Davidson, 1998: 67.

¹⁰ Nohac, 1907a: 188. See also *Fam.* IV.15, where Petrarch refutes the charge that Naevius is his own invention.

¹¹ Davidson, 1998: 79-80.

known as Justin, about whom little is otherwise known.¹² He wrote perhaps as early as the 2nd or as late as the 4th century AD. Whenever precisely he made his epitome, the work survived into the middle ages. Petrarch, as we shall see, cites it as an authority. On the subject of Dido's sexual continence or otherwise, Justin is clear. After the growth of Carthage has brought the new city to the attention of the neighbouring monarchs, one of them demands the hand of its queen in marriage. This is Iarbas, who will recur as a threat to Dido in *Aeneid* IV. She is tricked by the guileful ways of her fellow Carthaginians into accepting his proposal, but her loyalty to her late husband and her current chastity lead her to exercise some guile of her own:

In hoc trium mensium sumpto spatio, pyra in ultima parte urbis exstructa, uelut placatura uiri manes inferiasque ante nuptias missura multas hostias caedit et sumpto gladio pyram conscendit atque ita ad populum respiciens ituram se ad uirum, sicut praeceperint, dixit uitamque gladio finiuit. Quamdiu Karthago inuicta fuit, pro dea culta est. [*Justin* XVIII.6.6-8]

Taking three months for the accomplishment of her resolution, and having raised a funeral pile at the extremity of the city, she sacrificed many victims, as if she would appease the shade of her husband, and make her offerings to him before her marriage; and then, taking a sword, she ascended the pile, and, looking towards the people, said, that "she would go to her husband as they had desired her," and put an end to her life with the sword. As long as Carthage remained unconquered, she was worshipped as a goddess.¹³

Livy does not mention Dido, either in his account of Aeneas or in his later discussions of Carthage. We have seen Ovid's first-person recreation of Dido in the *Heroides*, and heard some of the harsh questions she has for Aeneas. Dido appears

¹² See *OCD* s.vv. Pompeius Trogus and Justin.

¹³ Text and translation from Selby, 1853.

again in *Fasti* III and in the “little Aeneid” of *Metamorphoses* XIII-XV. As far as the events are concerned, all three retellings are in thrall to the Virgilian version. Whatever subtle aspersions may be cast on the character of Aeneas, the broad outlines of the story are the same:

It would be a difficult task to sift from Ovid any fact, other than a most minor detail, not found also in Vergil. The treatment of details varies, but Ovid is, for all general purposes, completely comprehended in Vergil.¹⁴

The love affair between Aeneas and Dido seems to have been an invention of Virgil's.¹⁵ It was early understood to owe a greater debt to the amorous adventures of Medea as she appears in Euripides and in Apollonius of Rhodes¹⁶ than to any historical event. Criticism was immediate:

Virgil's changes to the script accumulated adverse comment very quickly. Epigrams were written in which Dido defended herself by means of chronology: “Neither did I ever set eyes on Aeneas nor did I reach Libya at the time of the sack of Troy, but to escape a forced marriage with Iarbas I plunged the two-edged sword into my heart...”¹⁷

The epigram comes from a Vatican manuscript of the fifteenth or sixteenth century.¹⁸ But as the manuscript is “derived from an original, now lost, emanating from the Northern Italian monastery of Bobbio,”¹⁹ and as Petrarch “may have visited the Pavian monks of the abbey of Bobbio,”²⁰ it is within the bounds of

¹⁴ Means, 1929: 42.

¹⁵ DeGraff, 1950, examines and rejects the suggestion that Naevius had also brought the couple together. See also Sage, 1920.

¹⁶ Davidson, 1998: 77-8. For the *Aeneid*'s considerable debt to Apollonius, see Nelis, 2001.

¹⁷ Davidson, 1998: 80.

¹⁸ MS Vat. Lat. 2836: See Ziolkowski and Putnam, 2008: 522.

¹⁹ Ziolkowski and Putnam, 2008: 522.

²⁰ Nolhac, 1907a: 260: “des moines du voisinage de Pavie qu'il a peut-être visités, ceux de l'abbaye de Bobbio.”

possibility that he had read the brief poem in question. If he did, he will have found the anonymous author (in the character of Dido) specifically enjoin his or her readers to place their faith in historians rather than poets, and rehearse the now-familiar argument against poets who attribute human faults to the gods:

Invida cur in me stimulasti, Musa, Maronem,
fingeret ut nostrae damna pudicitiae?
Vos magis historicis, lectores, credite de me,
quam qui furta deum concubitusque canunt
falsidici vates, temerant qui carmine verum
humanisque deos assimulant vitiis. [*In Didonis imaginem ex Graeco* 13-18]

Why, envious Muse, did you urge Maro against me, that he fabricate my loss of chastity? O readers, rather place your belief concerning me with writers of history than with those mendacious bards who sing of the stolen pleasures of the gods, who defile the truth in poetry, and represent the immortals with the vices of men.²¹

If Petrarch has seen the manuscript, he clearly has this passage in mind when he is relating the horror of the Numidian bard at the prospect of future poetic mendacity. Its *qui carmine verum* is certainly recalled, intentionally or not, in the *qui carmine sacrum* of *Afr.* III.426.

Petrarch read Macrobius assiduously, and quoted him in annotations on his manuscript of Virgil.²² As Petrarch did in the *De Otio Religioso*, Macrobius' Eusthatus blames Virgilian eloquence for lending wings to a lie:

Tantum valuit pulchritudo narrandi, ut omnes Phoenissae castitatis conscii, nec ignari manum sibi iniecisse reginam, ne pateretur damnum pudoris, conniveant

²¹ See Ziolkowski and Putnam, 2008: 523 for text and translation.

²² Nohac, 1907a: 260: 149.

tamen fabulae, et intra conscientiam veri fidem frementes malint pro vero celebrari quod pectoribus humanis dulcedo fingentis infudit. [*Sat.* V.17.6]

Indeed, the beauty of Virgil's narrative has so far prevailed that, although all are aware of the chastity of the Phoenician queen and know that she laid hands on herself lest her chastity be called into question, still they shut their eyes to the fiction, suppress in their minds the evidence of the truth, and extol as true the tale which the charm of a poet's imagination has implanted in the hearts of mankind.

Augustine weighs in with the apparently universal opinion of the educated that Virgil had erred in ever picturing Aeneas in Carthage:

non clament adversus me venditores grammaticae vel emptores, quia, si proponam eis interrogans, utrum verum sit quod Aeneas aliquando Carthaginem venisse poeta dicit, indoctiores nescire se respondebunt, doctiores autem etiam negabunt verum esse. [*Conf.* 1.13.22]

Let not either buyers or sellers of grammar-learning cry out against me. For if I question them whether it be true that Aeneas came on a time to Carthage, as the poet tells, the less learned will reply that they know not, the more learned that he never did.

Jerome also accepted the non-Virgilian account of Dido's end, praising her for maintaining her chastity.²³ The praise of Dido for her sexual continence was understandably common among the Christian writers,²⁴ but it was not universal. One of the few writers who held out against the general disapproval of Virgil's Didonic fiction was Dante, who placed the queen in Hell's circle of the lustful.²⁵ As we shall see in the last chapter, the Florentine's word might not have carried much weight with his young challenger.

²³ *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.43.

²⁴ See Desmond, 1994: 58.

²⁵ *Inf.* V.61-2.

The same cannot be said for Petrarch's close friend Boccaccio, who unusually has a voice in both choirs, and offered both praise and blame for Virgil's depiction of Dido. Which stance weighed more heavily with Petrarch will be obvious when we consider the division of Boccaccio's pro- and anti-Virgilian accounts among his Latin and his Italian works:

Boccaccio, following Petrarch, used *both* Didos: the Virgilian model appears in the secular Italian writings such as *Fiammetta*, *Filocolo*, and *Commedia Ninfe* as an *exemplum* of a tragic subjection to love or even excessive sexuality. In his Latin writings, however, Boccaccio used the pre-Virgilian Dido.²⁶

Thus his *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* relates Virgil's version, but cites Justin as a source for the orthodox non-Virgilian version:

According to Justinus, Iarbas, king of Mauretania, threatens to destroy Carthage unless Dido agrees to marry him. She asks for and receives a brief delay, then announces that she is "ready to go to her husband," which she does by stabbing herself and joining Sychaeus in the underworld. This is, as Boccaccio announces drily, "quite different from Virgil's account" (*longe aliud ... a descriptione Maronis*).²⁷

In his *De Mulieribus Claris* Boccaccio not only enlists Dido as an exemplar of chastity, but specifically announces that part of his purpose is to remove the stain of Virgil's libel:

Dido, cui prius Elyssa nomen, Cartaginis eque conditrix et regina fuit. Huius quidem in veras laudes, paululum ampliatis fimbriis, ire libet, si forte paucis literulis meis saltem pro parte notam, indigne obiectam decori sue viduitatis, abstergere queam. [*De Mulieribus Claris* XLII.1]

²⁶ Heller, 2003: 172.

²⁷ Kallendorf, 1989: 59.

Dido, formerly called Elissa, was both founder and queen of Carthage. I should like, in genuine praise of this woman, to embroider somewhat on my account, and I hope that my modest remarks may cleanse away (at least in part) the infamy undeservedly cast on the honor of her widowhood.²⁸

The tale as Boccaccio tells it hits the standard narrative notes that extend back to Justin's epitome. Boccaccio's account might function as an expansion of the versions sketched out by Venus in the *Aeneid* and the Numidian bard in the *Africa*. After she has demonstrated resourcefulness and wit in her escape from Tyre and in the ox-hide property market, Boccaccio's Dido becomes the object of some unwanted attentions. Boccaccio allows himself a little ethnographical editorialising that is not present in Justin, but will cohere well with a reading of Petrarch's characterisation of Massinissa.

Quam ob rem, cum in libidinem pronissimi homines Affri sint, factum est ut Musitanorum rex in concupiscentiam veniret eiusdem eamque quibusdam ex principibus civitatis sub belli atque desolationis surgentis civitatis denunciatione, ni daretur, in coniugium postulavit. Qui cum novissent vidue regine sacrum atque inflexibile castitatis propositum...

[*De Mulieribus Claris* XLII.10-11]

In consequence, the king of the Massitani lusted after Dido (Africans being much inclined to sensuality) and besought the elders of Carthage that he might marry her, threatening war and the destruction of the growing city if she were not given to him. These men knew of the widowed queen's sacred and inflexible resolve to maintain her chastity.

Betrayed and tricked by her compatriots, the only virtuous decision left open to the queen is to take her own life. In an aside Boccaccio preserves her proto-saintliness by insisting that her suicide was undertaken in defence of her chastity,

²⁸ Text and translation from Brown, 2003.

not (as the *Aeneid* would have it) as a response to the consequences of her sexual incontinence. This also allows him to clarify the precise identity of the nameless traducer in his opening paragraph:

... atque adveniente Enea troiano nunquam viso, more potius quam infringendam fore castimoniam rata... [*De Mulieribus Claris* XLII.14]

Thus, even before the arrival of the Trojan Aeneas (whom she never saw), Dido had already resolved to die rather than violate her chastity.

Craig Kallendorf identifies a chronological factor in Boccaccio's varying attitudes to Dido, rather than strictly a simple division into praise in his Latin works and censure in the vernacular. Ascertaining the dates of composition or first circulation of texts produced in a period before printing is always vulnerable to error and uncertainty, and Boccaccio's habits resemble Petrarch's enough to make the problem even thornier:

Dating Boccaccio's literary works with any degree of precision is difficult, both because reliable documentation for what he was working on at any given time is often unavailable and because he sometimes worked on the same book sporadically for years.²⁹

Nevertheless, Kallendorf's analysis identifies a turn toward Latin after about 1344, and a change to a favourable assessment of Dido "sometime in the late 1340s or early 1350s."³⁰ This is the period during which Boccaccio fell under the spell of Petrarch. A burgeoning friendship between the two drew much of its fire from literary discussion, and they began to exchange manuscripts of their works,

²⁹ Kallendorf, 1989: 60.

³⁰ Kallendorf, 1989: 61.

including works in progress.³¹ Petrarch was enormously influential on the younger writer, and guided him towards an intense appreciation of Virgil in every regard but one. Boccaccio was now a Virgilian up to a point, and that point was the chastity of Dido. This he asserted vociferously, but his stance was more in favour of Dido than it was against Virgil. With the liberal attitude to truth in poetry that we have already noted, Boccaccio was inclined to be sympathetic to Virgil's revisions of the Dido story, even while maintaining his admiration for the real Dido's chastity:

Quid autem Virgilio obiciunt, falsum est. Noluit quippe vir prudens recitare Didonis historiam; sciebat enim, ut talium doctissimus, Didonem honestate precipuam fuisse mulierem, eamque manu propria mori maluisse, quam infixum pio pectori castimonie propositum secundis inficere nuptiis. Sed, ut artificio et velamento poetico consequeretur quod erat suo operi oportunum, composuit fabulam in multis similem Didonis historie; quod ... veteri instituto poetis conceditur. [*Genealogie Deorum Gentilium* XIV.13]

But their objection to Virgil – that no wise man would ever consent to tell the story of Dido – is false. With his profound knowledge of such lore, he was well aware that Dido had really been a woman of exceptional integrity, who would rather die by her own hand than taint the vow of chastity fixed deep in her pious heart by a second marriage. But that he might attain the proper effect of his work by artifice and the mantle of poetry, he composed a story in many respects like that of the historic Dido ... according to the privilege of ancient poets established by ancient custom.³²

However thoughtfully Boccaccio preserved his admiration for Virgil in the face of what he now recognised as the misrepresentation of Dido's sexual integrity, his new acceptance that a misrepresentation has taken place does demand some

³¹ For the progress and importance of the friendship, see Kallendorf, 1989: 61ff.

³² Text and translation (from Osgood, 1956, revised by Michael Putnam) at Ziolkowski and Putnam, 2008: 538-40.

explanation. Kallendorf suggests that exposure to Petrarch's critique of Virgil was crucial, and the *Africa* itself may have supplied some of the ammunition which swayed him:

During those same initial visits, Boccaccio read what Petrarca had written up to that point on the *Africa*. That material included much of Book III, where, as we have seen, Boccaccio had the chance to learn about the chaste Dido tradition in lines 418-24 and presumably to ask the author about it.³³

It was not just the *Africa*, however, in which Boccaccio could have found fuel for his conversion to the cause of Dido. She also appears in Petrarch's vernacular work. Unlike Boccaccio, Petrarch maintains his favourable attitude to the queen even as he moves from language to language:

poi vidi, fra le donne pellegrine,
quella che per lo suo diletto e fido
sposo, non per Enea, volve ire al fine:
taccia 'l vulgo ignorante; io dico Dido,
cui studio d'onestate a morte spinse,
non vano amor com'è 'l publico grido. [*Triumphus Pudicitie* 1354-9]

Then I saw, among the pilgrim women, she who chose to meet her fate for her faithful beloved husband, not for Aeneas. Let the ignorant mob be silent. I speak of Dido, driven to death by her zeal for virtue, and not (as the common tale has it) by an empty love.

It is worth noting the company that Dido keeps here. She is preceded by Hersilia, the wife of Romulus:

³³ Kallendorf, 1989: 63.

poi vidi Ersilia con le sue Sabine,
schiera che del suo nome empie ogni libro. [*Trionfo della Pudicizia* 153-4]³⁴

Then I saw Hersilia with her Sabine women, a host who with their names fill every book.

The Sabine women are, of course, the most famous victims of rape in Roman mythology. Hersilia has one distinction which brings her closer to Dido: unlike any of the other Sabine women, she was already married at the time of the abduction.³⁵ We will see the care with which Petrarch introduces Sophonisba too as a married woman.

Following Dido in the pageant of virtuous women comes another heroine who chose for herself a life of chastity, but was subjected to a marriage against her will.

Al fin vidi una che si chiuse e strinse
sopra Arno per servarsi; e non le valse,
ché forza altrui il suo bel penser vinse. [*Trionfo della Pudicizia* 160-2]

Finally I saw one who had entered close confinement by the Arno, for her salvation. But in vain: others used force to overcome her noble wish.

This is the tragic real-life figure of Picarda, a nun who was forced to yield to marriage and died shortly thereafter:

A woman of exceptional physical beauty, she entered the convent of Santa Chiara at Monticelli just outside Florence, where she joined the Order of the Minors founded by Chiara Sciffi, a follower of St. Francis, shortly after 1212. Subsequent to her becoming a nun and a devotee to poverty, her brothers Corso and Forese

³⁴ The lines about Dido are repeated almost verbatim at *Trionfo della Pudicizia* 11-12.

³⁵ Information available to Petrarch in Servius, Macrobius and elsewhere. See Wiseman, 1983: 449.

arranged to marry her to Rossellino della Tosa, a nobleman of Florence known for his extremely violent temperament, in order to secure a politically advantageous alliance. Corso, having a similar reputation for violence, entered the monastery, forcibly removed his sister, and delivered her up to marriage with Rossellino entirely against her will and the will of the sisters of the convent.³⁶

Reminiscence of Dido and Sophonisba is again inescapable. The key element here is not just chastity overcome, but marriage. Dido clings with exemplary fidelity to her late marriage, with no recourse but death to escape her importunate suitors. Picarda has dedicated herself to convent life, but is dragged out and forced to marry. For any reader of the *Africa*, the figure of Sophonisba falls neatly into the sequence. She too pleads to be allowed to remain loyal to her husband, is married anyway and dies shortly afterwards.

Petrarch's own defence of Dido, which we have seen in his Latin poetry (albeit in the voice of the anonymous Numidian bard) and in his vernacular *Triumphs*, was also argued in his prose work. We have noted his suggestions to Federigo Aretino for an allegorical reading of the *Aeneid*. In the same letter he cites a battery of sources for his disagreement with Virgil's story of Aeneas and Dido, and recapitulates the assertion of Augustine that it is a mark of the educated reader to disagree with Virgil's story about Dido, while the ignorant accept it as true. His refutation is long and detailed. This is not an argument that he intends to lose:

Nunc ad ea quae supersunt redeo, Troiae scilicet incendium, et convivium Didonis, atque ut ab ultimo ordiar, unde orsus est Maro, primum omnium Didonem reginam conditricem Carthagini, castam feminam fuisse, si aliunde nesciremus, magnus testis est Hieronymus, non sacrarum modo, sed et secularium literarum

³⁶ Lansing, 1987: 69.

peritissimus, in eo libro, quem adversus Iovinianum hereticum scripsit, mille compactum confertumque historiis, neque vero Aeneam ac Didonem coaetaneos fuisse, aut se videre potuisse, cum trecentis annis, aut circiter haec post illius obitum nata sit, norunt omnes, quibus aut ratio temporum, aut Graiae Punicaeque historiae notitia ulla est, non hi tantum, qui commentarios in Virgilium, sed qui libros Saturnalium legerunt, neque Aeneam aliquando Carthaginem venisse, secundo Confessionum Augustinus meminit, totam aut Didonis, originemque Carthaginis, Trogus Pompeius, seu Iustinus explicuit, libro historiarum XVIII. Sed quid rei manifestissimae testes quaero? Quis enim nisi pars vulgi sit, quis usquam, quaero, tam indoctus, ut nesciat Didonis et Aeneae fabulam confictam, verique locum inter homines, non tam veri avidos, quam decore, et venustae materiae et dulcedine, atque arte obtinuisse, fingentis usque adeo, ut iam tristes et inviti verum audiant, ac perscripta dulcis possessione mendacii spolientur?

[*Sen. IV.5.58-61*]

Now I return to what remains, namely the conflagration of Troy and Dido's banquet. To begin with the latter where Maro started, even if we did not know first of all that Dido, from other sources the founder and queen of Carthage, was a chaste woman, Jerome provides good authority, thoroughly familiar not only with sacred writings, but with secular ones in that book, crammed and packed with a thousand stories, which he wrote against the heretical Jovinian. But Aeneas and Dido were not contemporaries, nor could they have seen one another, since she was born three hundred years, or thereabouts, after his death. All of those who have any acquaintance with chronology or with Greek or Punic history know this, not only those who have read commentaries on Virgil, but those who have read the books of the Saturnalia. In the second book of his Confessions Augustine remarks that Aeneas never went to Carthage. The entire story of Dido and the origin of Carthage is told in the eighteenth book of the history of Pompeius Trogus, or Justin. But why am I seeking authorities for something so clear? For who, except some of the multitude, who anywhere, I ask, is so uneducated as not to know that the tale of Dido and Aeneas is fictitious, and that it has gained the status of truth among men, eager not so much for truth as for beauty, through the loveliness of the subject, and the poet's sweetness and art, to the point that sadly and unwillingly they hear the truth and are deprived of the forbidden possession of the sweet lie?

It is a definitive statement, argued with passion and garlanded with authoritative citations, of the position from which Petrarch never wavered. The account that Virgil gives of the story of Dido and Aeneas is false. The two could never have met. If they had met, Dido's devotion to chastity was such that no sexual affair with Aeneas would have ensued. Petrarch also returns to the distinction between eloquence and truth which is never far away when the *Aeneid* is in question.

He puts the case so forcefully because people are reluctant to let go of a cherished belief, however false it proves. They are also unwilling to hear ill spoken of Virgil. If Virgil was happy to dip into mendacity, however, Petrarch is not. He has suffered for his devotion to the truth:

Scio quid loquor; ego enim primus, immo solus hac aetate et his locis mendacium hoc discussi, quod sic animos occuparat, ut contrarium audire non ut novam modo heresim, sed ut iniuriam convitiumque aliquod delicate respuerent multorum aures. [...] Itaque cum adhuc novus et ignotus hec dicerem, exclamabant, quasi ego Virgilium ignorantie damnarem. [*Sen. IV.5.63-4*]

I know whereof I speak. For I was the first to shatter this lie. So entrenched was it that the delicate ears of many ... scorned to hear the contrary, as not only heresy, but an affront and mockery. Therefore, when I said this as a young and unknown man they screamed as though I were accusing Virgil of ignorance.

In fact, he is accusing Virgil of something worse than ignorance. The failure in the *Aeneid* is not a failure of learning. Virgil knowingly misrepresented the true nature of Dido. For a moment Petrarch seems to verge on Boccaccio's position, that Virgil veered into fiction for sound moral reasons. But he does not quite get there:

Cumque, non hec illum nescisse, sed scientem lusisse contenderem, mirabantur et quaerebant facti causam. Et sane cur poeta doctissimus omnium atque optimus –

nam finxisse constat – hec finxerit, cur, cum vel aliam quamlibet heroidum ex numero eligere, vel personam formare novam suo iure licuisset, unam hanc elegerit sempiterno elogio notandam, ut quam studio castitatis ac servande viduitatis extinctam sciret, hanc lascivo amore pereuntem faciat, et quieri potest et dubium valde est. [Sen. IV.5.65-6]

And when I maintained that he was not ignorant of this but knowingly playing, they were astonished and asked the reason. Of course, why should the poet who is the best and most learned of all have invented this – for it is certain that he did – why, when he could by all rights have chosen anyone else from the number of heroines or easily formed a new character, would he choose this one woman, worthy of eternal praise, who had laid down her life to preserve her chastity and widowhood? Yet he made her out to be obedient to lustful love. One can ask, but doubt will still remain.

It is quite a crescendo of blame, and it begs to be resolved with a triumphant vindication. But vindication comes there none. Having raised so many questions, Petrarch bows out with a vague promise of future conversation and an unconvincing plea of shortage of space:

Quid tamen hinc sentiam quid ve opiner, quod ex me presens audieris, ne plura nunc his aggeram, omitto... [Sen. IV.5.66]

What I feel or think about this, because you will hear it from me personally, I omit here so as not to pile up more now.

The praise of Virgil with which the Petrarch opens, and which continues throughout the letter as it did throughout his career, is rendered a little hollow by this silence. He has first outlined the personal consequences of criticising Virgil, then expatiated freely on some charges against him, and finally bowed out with no hint of a refutation. The image of Virgil “toying” (*luisse*) with Dido’s reputation

will recur in the *Africa* not only in the words of the bard (*ludens* at III.427) but in Sophonisba's plea at *Afr.* V.102 to be spared the mockery of the Roman public: *Eripe ludibrio miseram* ("snatch this wretch from their mockery").³⁷

Petrarch's charge against Virgil, then, is clear. He is a purveyor of untruths and a traducer of the fair name of Carthaginian womanhood, or at least this one queenly instance of it. But what of Aeneas? The historical Aeneas plainly has no case to answer, as he had never met Dido. But the fictive Aeneas cannot be excused on points of fact. Virgil paints an affair between the Trojan wanderer and the Punic queen. Even though it is fictional, it can be conducted well or badly within the terms of the narrative.

This is where Sophonisba comes in. Petrarch has carried out the first stage of his project to rehabilitate Dido in Book III, when the minstrel absolves the real Dido of any sin against chastity, and the Roman Laelius finds no place for her in his narrative of the life and adventures of Aeneas. He still has another, more complex task to attempt. We have seen Boccaccio exculpate Virgil for his fiction on the grounds that he is portraying a moral truth behind the veil of poetry. Virgil's Dido is not the real queen, but she is nonetheless a convincing picture of a lustful temptress. To cement his disapproval of Virgil's account, therefore, Petrarch must develop a convincing absolution of even the fictional Dido. It is to this task that he now devotes the dominant narrative at the centre of his epic. A close look at the ways in which that narrative differs from or elaborates its source in Livy will show Petrarch crafting a Sophonisba who echoes the behaviour of Virgil's Dido, but with one significant difference. Where Virgil paints Dido as willing participant in her affair with Aeneas, Petrarch retrojects the military compulsion to which the

³⁷ See below for the full context. See also *Dido's inluserit* at *Aen.* IV.591.

conquered Sophonisba is subject into our reading of Dido's helplessness before the machinations of the gods. In emphasising the degree to which both queens are the playthings of forces outside their control, Petrarch will exculpate the Virgilian Dido, and thus strip Virgil's creation of the exemplary moral purpose which Boccaccio attributes to it. If Sophonisba is innocent, then the fictional Dido is innocent; and if even the fictional Dido is innocent, Virgil has libelled her real-life counterpart for nothing.

3. Introducing the Queen

In the narrative portions of the *Africa*, as is often noted, Petrarch leans heavily on Livy. Perhaps most modern scholars would not go as far as Wilfred Mustard, who views the poem as almost a versification of Livy, with an early leavening of Cicero:

That is, the first two books are a very clever adaptation, and development, of Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, while the remainder of the poem follows very closely the narrative of Livy.³⁸

Bergin and Wilson make a more nuanced assessment:

Petrarch set for himself the goal of integrating Livy's history, Cicero's philosophy and Virgil's poetry: the *Africa* is his great heroic statement on history and poetry and the *studia humanitatis*.³⁹

Even so, they are at pains to point out the "scrupulous fidelity" with which Petrarch "transcribed the truth" of Livy's histories.⁴⁰ This makes it all the more

³⁸ Mustard, 1921: 118. See also Giordano, 1890: 82-4; Seung, 1976: 141; and Highet, 1949: 588, n. 22.

³⁹ Bergin and Wilson, 1977: xvi.

pointed when Petrarch diverges from Livy, either by contradicting his account or (more frequently) by elaborating existing scenes or interpolating new material. We shall see these tactics at work frequently in the Sophonisba narrative.

Livy's "romantic tragedy"⁴¹ of Sophonisba and Massinissa occupies three sections of Book 30. Her first significant occurrence in the narrative happens in the previous book, however, when her father Hasdrubal the Carthaginian makes arrangements for her politically convenient marriage to Syphax:

... sed mentio quoque incohata adfinitatis ut rex duceret filiam Hasdrubalis. ad eam rem consummandam tempusque nuptiis statuendum – iam enim et nubilis erat uirgo – profectus Hasdrubal ut accensum cupiditate – et sunt ante omnes barbaros Numidae effusi in uenerem – sensit, uirginem a Carthagine arcessit maturatque nuptias... [Livy XXIX.23]

But there had also been some preliminary mention of a marriage connection, of the king marrying Hasdrubal's daughter. To bring this to fruition, and fix a date for the wedding, the girl being already of marriageable age, Hasdrubal set off to visit the king. Now, Numidians are particularly sensual people, more so than all other barbarians, and when Hasdrubal noted that Syphax's libido was aroused, he sent for the girl from Carthage and pushed the wedding ahead.⁴²

Sophonisba's sexuality is thus introduced as a bargaining chip in the power-games of her husband and her father. Later in the same section her blandishments are reported to have reinforced the arguments of her father to keep Syphax loyal to the Carthaginian side, and when she next appears it is under the same sexual aspect.

This time the point of view is Scipio's:

⁴⁰ Bergin and Wilson, 1977: x.

⁴¹ Hoyos, 2006: xxiii.

⁴² Text of Livy XXIX and XXX is from Moore, 1943 and 1949. Translation is from Yardley, 2006.

inter haec ne Syphacis quidem reconciliandi curam ex animo miserat, si forte iam satias amoris in uxore ex multa copia eum cepisset. [Livy XXX.3]

Meanwhile Scipio had not lost sight of his plan of making up with Syphax; and he wondered whether, with regard to his wife, there had been a cooling of his passions from too much enjoyment of her.

Evidently either Sophonisba's charms or the passions of Syphax are inexhaustible, and we hear no more of this speculation. Things go badly in battle for Syphax, however, and we now see Sophonisba for the first time as an agent of her own destiny rather than simply a strategic tool in the negotiations of her father, her husband and the Romans. The picture Livy paints is brief, but its queenly tears and its evocation of Carthage in flames are likely to rouse the attention of anyone who is familiar with Dido. Syphax is preparing to mount another attack against Scipio, at the urging of his wife Sophonisba:

inde dilectus in urbe agrisque haberi coeptus, et ad Syphacem legati missi, summa ope et ipsum reparantem bellum cum uxor non iam ut ante blanditiis, satis potentibus ad animum amantis, sed precibus et misericordia ualuisset, plena lacrimarum obtestans ne patrem suum patriamque proderet iisdemque flammis Carthaginem quibus castra conflagrassent absumi sineret. [Livy XXX.7]

After that a troop-levy got underway in the city and the countryside, and envoys were despatched to Syphax, who was also vigorously preparing for a renewal of hostilities. It was Syphax' wife who had prevailed on him to do this, and no longer with sweet nothings, as before – though these were themselves powerful enough to sway the lover's heart – but with entreaties and appeals to his compassion. Her eyes swimming with tears, she would implore him not to let down her father and her country, and not to allow Carthage to go up in the same flames that had destroyed his camp.

In this first appearance we already have a loyal Carthaginian queen, whose readiest recourse when she needs to influence her husband's actions is to tears and sexuality. We even have a slight permeability at the edges of her marital status. She is clearly *uxor*, a wife, but her husband is designated by the less marital *amantis*. Ambiguity about marital status will be a feature of both Virgil's Dido and Petrarch's Sophonisba.

Syphax's ardour is again in play as Massinissa, his former ally and now a deputy of Scipio, arrives to confront him.

Syphax pulsus inde praefectis praesidiisque suis uetere se continebat regno, neutiquam quieturus stimulabat aegrum amore uxor socerque... [Livy XXX.11]

Syphax, whose officers and garrisons were driven from the kingdom, now kept to his old realm, though he had not the slightest intention of remaining inactive. Lovesick, he was under constant pressure from his wife and father-in-law...

Syphax is defeated, and Massinissa visits his inland capital Cirta. It is a piquant pleasure, as Cirta was also the capital of Massinissa's ancestral realm. His mission now is to spread panic and disorder, and the sight of Syphax in chains is an enormous help:

sed apud ignaros regis casus nec quae acta essent promendo nec minis nec suadendo ante ualuit quam rex uinctus in conspectum datus est. tum ad spectaculum tam foedum comploratio orta... [Livy XXX.12]

While [the leading citizens of Cirta] were still unaware of what had befallen the king, Massinissa made no progress with them either by informing them of what had happened, or by threats or persuasion – until the king was brought, in irons, into their sight. The shameful spectacle provoked an outburst of lamentation.

This is the stage that Livy has set for the tragedy of Sophonisba, and this is the context in which Petrarch introduces her to the *Africa*. But Petrarch is more than willing to depart from Livy's narrative when it suits his larger purpose, and that is what he does now. In the first place, Livy's story of Sophonisba occupies only four sections of Book XXX, whereas Petrarch's account takes up the entirety of Book V and the first eighty lines of Book VI, more than one eighth of his narrative. Nor does Livy give the story anything like the weight it sustains in the *Africa*:

Livy's narrative of the tragedy of Sophoniba is completed in a few hundred lines, and is certainly not a major episode in his account of the Punic Wars.⁴³

Even if Petrarch had planned for a much longer poem, and the lacunae in the *Africa* were to be copiously filled, the story of Sophonisba is still a significant sub-narrative within the poem, and one which he obviously regarded as congenial enough, or important enough, to finish before returning to those lacunae. We will observe some of the changes Petrarch wrought on Livy's narrative as we proceed through the story, but it is quickly apparent that Petrarch's selection and supplementation of the details from Livy have two major effects. One is to increase our sympathy for Sophonisba. The other is to align her story more closely with that of Dido in the *Aeneid*.

This latter is the element of Petrarch's Virgilian revision in the *Africa* which draws the attention of Craig Kallendorf:

Book 5 of the *Africa* functions as Petrarch's rewriting of the Dido-and-Aeneas story in the *Aeneid*. [...] The key change here, of course, is that the new Aeneas, Scipio, is

⁴³ Haley, 1989: 171. Haley's spelling of *Sophonisba* omits the second s.

not the lover but a moral hero whose self-control, as Massinissa notes, is godlike (II.555-6).⁴⁴

But we should not underestimate the subtlety of the *Africa* here. Petrarch has indeed reproduced the triangle at the heart of Virgil's story, and in considerable detail, but his more immediate analogue for Aeneas is not Scipio, but Massinissa. Aeneas is spurred by Mercury's intervention to leave Dido. Massinissa abandons Sophonisba at the bidding of Scipio. The god Mercury and the godlike Scipio each call a warrior hero away from the side of his lover. The sexual restraint of Scipio may point up the flaw of unchastity in Aeneas, but unchastity is not the central plank of Petrarch's anti-Aenean platform. Petrarch's criticisms of Aeneas are more likely to focus on his impiety or his tendency to rage than they are on his sexual misbehaviour. Perhaps he was inclined to forgive in Virgil's hero a peccadillo to which he himself was no stranger,⁴⁵ but whatever the reason, he tends to spare the lash when it comes to Aeneas' amorous dalliance:

Ipsa quoque nonnunquam flectitur quia difficile est etiam perfectis excellenti
rerum specie non moveri, praesertim ubi se amari senserit, atque appeti.

[*Sen.* IV.6.35]

At times he too is tempted, for it is difficult even for a perfect man not to be swayed by the preeminent beauty of things, especially when he realizes that he is loved and desired.

Petrarch is here talking of the poetic character rather than any historical Aeneas.

If the unchaste Dido is a creation of Virgil, then so is her seducer. Scipio's chastity is a clear reproof to this fictional Aeneas, and Petrarch could have chosen to make

⁴⁴ Kallendorf, 2007: 40.

⁴⁵ For some of Petrarch's children out of wedlock, see Bernardo, 1974: 78, 184.

that the centre-piece of his attack. But Petrarch's target is less on the *Aeneid's* weak hero than on its libellous poet. To keep that libel in our minds he sets out to redistribute the material of Virgil's Dido story among the characters of Sophonisba, Massinissa and Scipio.

The poetic shadow of the Virgilian Dido is central to the doomed love story that occupies the bulk of books 5 and 6 as Petrarch simultaneously preserves and reorients the narrative, displacing it from fiction to history. In Petrarch's allusive rewriting, mechanisms of condensation and substitution are at work, affecting principally the characters and the value system that had attached to the Virgilian narrative.⁴⁶

The effect is to guide our reading of the original Dido episode through three clear stages: the beginning of her relationship with Aeneas; her grief and anger at their separation; and her suicide. At each of these stages Petrarch offers us a way to read Virgil's story which tends towards the exculpation of the queen. To do this he needs an Aeneas figure who will indulge in a sexual liaison, and he finds him in Massinissa rather than the chaste and blameless Scipio.

A schematic look at the progress of both narratives will confirm Massinissa as the real Aeneas figure. It will also reveal how closely Petrarch has packed the material he found in Livy around the spine of Virgil's Dido story, and how he has not hesitated to add to it when such additions were necessary to fill out the Virgilian parallels. It will also illustrate Petrarch's deployment of a narrative intertextuality which functions at the level of the incident rather than that line or phrase.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Marchesi, 2009: 120.

⁴⁷ See Noonan, 1993: 123ff. for a similar breakdown of Book XII of the *Aeneid* into Propertian mythemes.

Aeneid I and IV**Africa V and VI**

A warrior	A warrior
from the East	from Africa
in the service of Rome's future	in the service of Rome
comes to Carthage	against the Carthaginians
and meets a Carthaginian queen	meets a Carthaginian queen
who is mourning her late husband.	who is mourning her husband's fate.
They embark on a sexual relationship	They embark on a sexual relationship
which she characterises as a marriage	which he characterises as a marriage
and he subsequently forsakes	and he subsequently forsakes
at the insistence of Mercury	at the insistence of Scipio
for the sake of Rome.	for the sake of Rome.
The queen commits suicide	The queen commits suicide
uttering curses against him and Rome	uttering curses against him and Rome
and departs for the underworld.	from the underworld

Even though Petrarch was not obliged to deal with it at such length, or with such gusto, much of this material does come from Livy. A similar schema will show how much the poet has added, and how much he found in his source. I have highlighted the major divergences.

Africa V and VI**Livy XXX**

A warrior	A warrior
from Africa	from Africa
in the service of Rome	in the service of Rome
against the Carthaginians	against the Carthaginians
meets a Carthaginian queen	meets a Carthaginian queen
<i>who is mourning her husband's fate.</i>	<i>who minimises her connection with Syphax.</i>
—	<i>She seems to attempt a seduction</i>

*They embark on a sexual relationship
which he characterises as a marriage*

—
and he subsequently forsakes her

at the insistence of Scipio
for the sake of Rome.

The queen commits suicide

—
*uttering curses against him and Rome
from the underworld*

—

They are married

And Syphax bewails her treachery.

Massinissa subsequently repents of the
marriage

at the insistence of Scipio

—

The queen commits suicide

And Massinissa mourns.

—

—

On a simple enumeration of incidents, clearly, Petrarch's account has more of Livy than it does of Petrarch's invention. One reason for this may be that Livy's account too owes something to Virgil. Books XXIX and XXX of his histories were possibly written some few years after the circulation of the *Aeneid*.⁴⁸ Another possibility is that Virgil and Livy are both consciously drawing on the then-recent liaison between Cleopatra and Anthony. Livy had less freedom than Virgil to invent his stories, but the similar outlines of the recent events in Egypt and the more distant ones in Cirta may well have influenced his telling. Shelley P. Haley unfolds the similarities among the three female protagonists:

Specifically, each is a foreign queen, most notably from North Africa, who through passion and charm keeps a man (Roman or closely associated with Rome) from his duty. The use of passion as a means to gain power or independence is a parallel which dominates the characterizations of all three queens, although courage in the face of death existed as well.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See Haley, 1989: 180, n. 29.

⁴⁹ Haley, 1989: 180.

There is no doubt that these elements appealed to Roman taste, as we can see in Horace's admiration for Cleopatra in the period immediately after her death.⁵⁰ But Petrarch's tonal shifts cannot be underestimated, and these differentiate his account from that of Livy even on some of the occasions when the narrative schemata are identical.

The first tool he uses here is silence. The context in which Sophonisba is introduced in Livy, as we have seen, both diminishes her agency and establishes her as a woman whose sexuality is used for political ends. At first this is at the instance of her father, but by XXX.11 she is a willing participant. This colours our reading of her dealings with Massinissa, however inclined to be sympathetic we may be, insofar as it gives her a history of sexual manipulation. Livy, indeed, goes further than his main source, Polybius, in the effort to implicate Sophonisba:

When Livy first mentions Sophoniba (29.23), it is clear that Hasdrubal is the architect of the scheme to win over Syphax; Sophoniba is a pawn. Hasdrubal is relying on his daughter's beauty and Syphax's passionate nature. So far Livy is in agreement with Polybius. However, a marked difference occurs when the characters speak. Sophoniba's speech to Massinissa makes the possibility of her own seductive influence plausible. After one short speech, Livy's Sophoniba demonstrates that she has the persuasive power to obtain whatever she wants.⁵¹

Petrarch removes this context, so that the Sophonisba to whom we are introduced does not come trailing clouds of questionable conduct. She does mention the Roman belief that she is responsible for the war between the Numidians and Rome, and even acquiesces in the charge:

⁵⁰ *Ode* 1.37. For the date, see Hendry, 1993: 139-40.

⁵¹ Haley, 1989: 174.

Michi sed Romana fuisse

Scis odia, armorumque solent me dicere causam

Materiamque unam belli; nec falsa queruntur. [*Afr.* V.99-101]

Towards me, as you well know, the Romans bear
deep hatred; me alone they deem the cause
of armed invasion, the sole source of war.
Nor is the accusation false.

The circumstances make her guilty plea questionable, however. She is a defeated woman, fearful of vengeance, appealing to a fellow African to save her from Roman mockery:

Eripe ludibrio miseram, manibusque superbis

Eripe; deque mee specie, rex inclite mortis

Tu cui fata fauent, cui mens se deuouet ultro,

Videris. Hec inter lacrimis perfundere terram

Ceperat, auratis suffigens oscula plantis. [*Afr.* V.102-106]

“I pray you,

put me safely past the reach of those
who now would mock me, and beyond the grasp
of those who look for arrogant revenge.

And by the manner of my death, great king,
whom Fate has favoured and who yet aspire
to greater things, you shall be known and judged.”

Her tears bedewed the earth while her lips pressed
repeated kisses on his gold-shod feet.

These are no idle fears, and Petrarch ensures that we take them seriously. Later in the poem he will again depart from Livy's narrative, this time to place the humiliated Syphax in a Roman triumph:

Tum parte alia spectacula magni
Siphacis: miseranda habitu namque obruta uinclis
Maiestas lacrimis pectus terramque rigabat
Flensque retro ad magnum referebat lumina crebro
Humida uictorem: qualem spreuisset amicum
Mente notans tacita. Preter tot dura ruine
Angebat miserum pudor. Ingens turba suorum
Regia consequitur tremulo uestigia gressu. [*Afr.* IX.347-54]

Beyond, behold the moving spectacle
of once-great Syphax; his high majesty
in bondage is a sight most pitiful;
great floods of tears bedew his breast and fall
upon the ground he treads, and as he weeps
his eyes turn towards his noble conqueror's face
and with unspoken bitter thoughts he marks
the manner of the man he scorned as friend.
So shame – unhappy man – comes to increase
the anguish of his ruin. A huge crowd
of his cohorts upon his traces comes
with feeble, faltering stride.

The picture of Syphax in Scipio's triumph is a contradiction of the historian's account, although one for which Livy himself gives sanction with a gentle nod towards Polybius:

morte subtractus spectaculo magis hominum quam triumphantis gloriae Syphax est, Tiburi haud ita multo ante mortuus, quo ab Alba traductus fuerat. conspecta tamen mors eius fuit quia publico funere est elatus. hunc regem in triumpho ductum Polybius, haudquaquam spernendus auctor, tradit. [*Livy* XXX.45]

Syphax's death meant that he was missing from the public spectacle, but it did not diminish the glory of the triumphing Scipio. Syphax had died shortly before at Tibur, to which he had been transferred from Alba; but his death did, in fact,

receive public attention because he was given a state funeral. (Polybius, who is by no means a source to be disregarded, attests that this king was led along in the triumphal procession.)

Such humiliation would presumably have been Sophonisba's destiny, and her lamentations at the prospect are echoed in her husband's reaction to the reality. Both wet the ground with tears: her *lacrimis perfundere terram* (V.105)⁵² is picked up unmistakably in his *lacrimis ... terramque rigabat* (IX.347). We are alerted to the possible intertext by a dense clustering of terms, in the description of Syphax and his fellow-captives, that condition us to look for textual echoes in what has gone before: *parte alia, retro, referebat lumina, notans, consequitur, vestigia*. Any one of these might escape our attention, but when Petrarch gives us six distinct hints to look elsewhere in one eight-line passage, the invitation is overwhelming. This is the public abasement that we will see Sophonisba attempt to stave off with a more private abasement to her conqueror. It is Sophonisba's only acceptance in the *Africa* of the guilt which Livy had attributed to her, and Petrarch works to rob it of any credibility while maintaining all its pathos.

Petrarch also suppresses, as we will see, the suggestion that Sophonisba takes any active part in seducing Massinissa. More than that, he introduces her in a way which not only eliminates any suggestion of the *femme fatale*, but does everything to emphasise a vulnerability that owes more to Petrarch's sensitive reimagining of the context of her encounter with Massinissa than it does to anything in Livy.

Petrarch lays the ground for the Sophonisba story before she enters his narrative, by giving us a glimpse of the context in which she lived and the

⁵² See below for the full context.

expectations she might entertain as a woman defeated by Rome. This consideration of male sexual attitudes to the women of fallen cities is established with Scipio's entrance into Cartagena in Book IV, when he takes pains to prevent the mingling of his soldiers with the defeated women:

Interea lacrimosa cohors, miserabilis, ingens,
Feminea audita est gemitu sua menia complens.
Hic pius infremuit iuuenis gessitque patronum
Ipse pudicitie. Tute committitur arci
Omnis ab incursu metuens sibi sexus et etas,
Indigus auxilii populus. Custodia sanctis
Est mandata uiris. [*Afr.* IV.373-9]

Meanwhile a sound of sobs and lamentation betrayed within the city's walls a throng of frightened, *tearful women*. *Hearing which*, the righteous and compassionate youth assumed the role of Virtue's guardian and straightway gave his commands: all who because of sex or age might fear assault, and likewise all in need of aid were in the citadel securely sheltered and a guard was set of sober men.

This is all very creditable on Scipio's part, but there is a note of bleak realism in the telling. Gentleness and restraint may be the hallmarks of Scipio's conduct, but these are explicitly presented as untypical of a conquering army. This is one of the ways in which Petrarch's account differs from that in Livy. Scipio does not respond there to the wailing of a throng of women, but to the pleas of one elderly lady. Emerging from the crowd of hostages, she begs him to instruct his guards to take greater care of the women. Scipio is at first ignorant of the threat to which she

refers, and needs to be guided towards an understanding of what the women might face:

Cum Scipio nihil defuturum iis profecto diceret, tum rursus mulier: "Haud magni ista facimus" inquit; "quid enim huic fortunae non satis est? Alia me cura aetatem harum intuentem – nam ipsa iam extra periculum iniuriae muliebris sum – stimulat." [Livy XXVI.49]

When Scipio replied that the women would certainly go short of nothing, the woman replied: "What you are talking about matters little to us – for how important, in a plight like this, is not having enough? It is another worry which torments me as I consider the tender years of these ladies, for personally I am now out of danger of such assault as is made on a woman."

Enlightened thus to the sexual threat, Scipio places the women in the care of a trusted deputy, who is to ensure that they are treated with respect.

Petrarch's retelling makes Scipio more proactive and less naïve. He notices without prompting that the women are afraid, and does not need to be told why. His response also gives greater weight to the threat than it receives in Livy. Rather than simply appoint a man of integrity to watch over the women, Petrarch's Scipio has to herd them into the citadel and supply them with a bodyguard. In Livy, Scipio returns a female hostage undamaged to her fiancé, boasts of his sexual restraint towards captive women, and claims that restraint as typically Roman:

... seruata tibi est, ut inuiolatum et dignum me teque dari tibi donum posset... si me uirum bonum credis esse quales patrem patruumque meum iam ante hae gentes norant, scias multos nostri similes in ciuitate Romana esse..."

[Livy XXVI.50]

She has been kept intact for you so that she could be given to you as a gift, inviolate, as befits my dignity and yours... And if you think that I am a good man,

with the sort of personality that the tribes here earlier came to know in my father and my uncle, then rest assured that there are many like us in the Roman state.

In Petrarch the chaste hero makes no extrapolation from his own virtue to that of the wider nation. On the contrary, he sets Roman soldiers as guards to prevent a mass rape by their fellow Roman soldiers.

This will have struck a medieval readership as a very real threat, and one which perhaps did not carry the tingle of sexual excitement which the depiction of rape was often designed to arouse in a male audience. Diane Wolfthal's study of representations of rape in art from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries found a range of attitudes which were sometimes positively heroising of the rapist, and sometimes ambivalent at best towards the suffering of the victim. In that cavalcade of cold and prurient representations, however, there was one category of rape which invited sympathy for the victim:

Images of rape shown in the context of war constitute a category of art that is generally sympathetic to the victim and critical of her assailant.⁵³

Wolfthal quotes a vivid account of rape by soldiers in a conquered city during the Fourth Crusade. Coming as it does from the annals of Niketes Choniates, a Byzantine chronicler who wrote in Greek, this will have been unavailable to Petrarch. It is worth quoting at length, however, not just as a representative of the accounts of similar atrocities which must certainly have been circulated orally all through the medieval period, but because of its striking similarity to the events that Scipio fears in Cartagena. The Crusaders have just taken Constantinople, and as Choniates leaves with his wife he surveys the ravaged city:

⁵³ Wolfthal, 1999: 60.

Many of our friends and relatives and a crowd of other people collected, when they saw us ... [Of the enemy] troops who came out to meet us ... some were loaded down with booty and others searched the captives who were passing through to see if they had wrapped a splendid garment inside a torn tunic or hidden silver or gold in their bosoms. Still others stared at the women who were of an extraordinary beauty, fixed them with a desirous look as if they wanted immediately to seize and ravish them. We trembled for the women, took them in our midst and formed a sort of fence around them. We commanded the young girls to smear dirt from the street on their faces, to conceal the blush of their cheeks so that they should not, like a beacon's fire in the night, signal wayfarers who would first become spectators, then admirers and finally rapists, viewing their own pleasure as guiltless.⁵⁴

What Scipio is intent on preventing after the taking of Cartagena is precisely this sequence of events. First, the quest for material plunder grows to include the desire for sexual possession of the defeated women. In Byzantium the invaders are loaded down with plunder. In Cartagena, the Roman soldiers have just received their material rewards, their *debita premia* (III.330-1). Now, in both cases, the beauty of the women is seen as a spur to rape:

uetitumque sub ora uenire
Femineum uulgus, quod lumina blanda pudori
Insultant, castique oculis flos carpitur oris. [*Afr.* IV.381-3]

The women were denied
access to the gates and windows, since bold eyes
mock shame and the fair bloom of a chaste face
is plucked by brazen glances.

⁵⁴ Translation by J. Magoulias, quoted at Wolfthal, 1999: 64.

Again, the first assault is through the gaze, and the potential rape is put forward as a response, however reprehensible, to the temptation presented by female beauty. This is a common notion in the middle ages. Wolfthal recalls the accounts given by Gregory of Tours of Frankish rapes perpetrated against nuns, and the terrible stratagems to which the nuns resorted to render themselves less visually appealing to the invaders:

Holy women like Ebba, who knew that they might be violated, devised a strategy to avoid rape: they mutilated their faces, generally slicing off their noses, so that they would no longer appear attractive to marauding soldiers. This action was adopted by a diverse group of women, who lived in a wide range of geographic areas and in markedly different times.⁵⁵

The perceived chastity of the women is also a factor, and the *lumina blanda pudori* of the women of Cartagena is not far from the blush of the young girls in Byzantium. Both function as a light to draw the eyes of the lustful soldiery, and both must be dimmed by concealment.

Linked though it may be to real accounts of mass rape in wartime, Petrarch's portrait of the risks of a fallen city also evokes the *Aeneid*. If the epithet *pius* at IV.375 inescapably aligns Scipio with Aeneas, then the wailing and tears of the women at IV.373-4 recall the lamentations with which the Carthaginian women in *Aeneid* IV greet the death of Dido:

lamentis gemituque et femineo ululatu
tecta fremunt, resonat magnis plangoribus aether... [*Aen.* IV.667-8]

The houses ring with lamentation

⁵⁵ Wolfthal, 1999: 63.

And the wails of women. Great dirges
Hang in the air.

The similarity of the scenes may already be enough to turn our minds back to Virgil, but Petrarch deploys some gentle verbal reminiscences to ensure that we make the connection. The *Aeneid's magnis* and *lamentis* become the *Africa's ingens* and *lacrimosa*. Other words are directly repeated:

lamentis **gemituque** et **femineo** ululatu [*Aen.* IV.667]

Feminea audita est **gemitu** sua menia complens. [*Afr.* IV.374]

While the unchastity of Aeneas caused, or at least contributed to, the lamentations in old Carthage, the restraint of Scipio in this new Carthage saves the day. His refusal to countenance the sexual violation of the vanquished women is presented as an exceptional act, one which out-tops the morality of the Olympian gods and draws a gasp of amazed admiration even from the staunch Laelius:

Proh, superi, mortali in pectore quanta
Maiestas ! spectate senem iuuenilibus annis.
Nam simul etatis stimulos formeque uirentis
Blanditias perferre graue est. [*Afr.* IV.385-8]

Now mark, Olympians, what majesty
dwells in a mortal's breast! In youthful prime
behold maturity! For it is hard,
in truth, at one time to resist the spur
of youth and lure of beauty's fragrant flower.

The spared citadel has become a visible symbol of Scipio's heroic chastity. Just as the tempting beauty of the young women is ringed off by a guard of venerable men,

so the hero's youthful impulses are reined in by his precocious maturity. In this he has already marked himself off from the behaviour of Aeneas, who yields so readily to the lure of beauty.

Book IV ends with the praise of a young man who averts his eyes, and his underlings, from the temptations of beauty. Book V opens with another young man, Massinissa, whose reaction to female beauty provides a suggestive contrast. There is a lacuna between these points. A lacuna is the vacuum that scholarship most abhors, and every effort has been made to fill this one with speculation.⁵⁶ While Festa⁵⁷ and Martellotti⁵⁸ both see the gap as a vast one, J. Christopher Warner makes a strong effort to minimise it. This is largely so as to underline the thematic link between the end of one book and the start of another:

We are looking at a two-part but single segment of the *Africa*, comprised of the last episode of book 4 and the first episode of book 5, whose function is to alert us to the theme of sexual temptation and renunciation that will be developed in the coming books and that is central to the poem's Christian meaning.⁵⁹

This is made even more convincing by the reminiscence of Dido at the end of Book IV and throughout Book V. But there is a sense in which the intended contents of the lacuna are irrelevant. The passages as we have them are linked thematically in any case, as differing pictures of a victorious general's treatment of conquered women, and no inserted sequence of whatever length and theme could disrupt this symmetry. The risks to the conquered women of Cartagena furnish a menacing context for Sophonisba's prospects after the fall of Cirta. It is that context in which she meets and succumbs to Massinissa.

⁵⁶ See Bergin and Wilson, 1977: 255-6 for a brief survey.

⁵⁷ Festa, 1926a: lxxv-lxxviii.

⁵⁸ Neri et al, 1950: 638.

⁵⁹ Warner, 2005: 26.

It is necessary at this point to clarify that we are dealing with a conqueror's treatment of a captive, rather than the clash of motives in a meeting of equals. Massinissa is the agent here. He has conquered Sophonisba's army and taken her captive. She is powerless to determine her own destiny. It would take a harsh moralist to condemn any attempt of hers to barter sex for survival, or for some other advantage, but in fact Petrarch's Sophonisba (in contrast to Livy's) makes no such attempt. I will look in detail at the devices the poet employs to absolve Sophonisba of complicity in her relationship with Massinissa, but the pattern of events is stark even in outline:

Afr. V.1-14: Massinissa enters the fallen city of Cirta. He finds Sophonisba distraught and hoping for something to lighten the heavy burden of her fortune.

Afr. V.15-76. Sophonisba's beauty is described at length. Massinissa's passions are ignited.

Afr. V.77-106: Sophonisba identifies Massinissa as the soldier in command. She approaches him in the typical posture of a suppliant. She acknowledges that the Romans blame her for the war, and accepts their judgement. Begging that she be killed rather than subjected to mockery and revenge in a Roman triumph, she rains tearful kisses on Massinissa's feet.

Afr. V.107-23: Aflame with passion, Massinissa tells her not to fear. He will maintain her as a queen and bedmate. Her response is a renewed fit of weeping. Massinissa lifts her to her feet.

Afr. V.123-41: Sophonisba meekly rejects Massinissa's offer. Fortune, she says, will not favour her. She asks again for death.

Afr. V.141-51: Rejecting her plea, Massinissa promises that Fortune will indeed go her way. If not, he will grant her death.

As a powerless captive, Sophonisba is offered the chance to escape death through a sexual liaison with her conqueror. Rejecting the offer twice, she is finally overruled, and given the promise of death as a sort of consolation prize. Yet the image of Sophonisba as a wily siren to whose blandishments Massinissa succumbs has retained a currency astonishing in the light of how little support for it can be gleaned from the text. Warner provides a useful review of critical attitudes:⁶⁰

Most of [the critics] seriously misrepresent the episode by condemning Sophonisba as an evil temptress. She has been compared to Circe,⁶¹ interpreted allegorically as “the embodiment of lust,”⁶² and called “an earthly demon” who, like “her model Dido,” is one of the “evil forces in the world.”⁶³ Craig Kallendorf similarly comments that she is “an unmistakable Dido figure,” and he asserts that she is “pure evil, the incarnation of an all-consuming passion.”⁶⁴ Even Donald Gilman, who states his intent to read her character sympathetically “within the contexts of patriarchal prerogatives and the limitations of liberty,” declares that Sophonisba “embodies attributes of the stereotypical seductress.”⁶⁵

That Sophonisba is in no position to exercise wiles of any kind is clear at the beginning of Book V. The power balance in Cirta is visible in the opening line, when Massinissa strides through the gates of the trembling city and surveys his booty:

Menia magnanimus uictor trepidantia Cirthe
Ingreditur, patriosque lares et auita tuetur
Tecta libens, generis cara incunabula primi. [*Afr.* V.1-3]

The great-souled conqueror through the shattered walls
of Cirtha passed, surveying joyfully

⁶⁰ Warner, 2005: 26-7.

⁶¹ Bernardo, 1962: 151.

⁶² Seung, 1976: 145.

⁶³ Wilhelm, 1976: 588-9.

⁶⁴ Kallendorf, 1989: 40, 47.

⁶⁵ Gilman, 1997: 111-2.

the effigies of his ancestral gods
and the old dwellings, cradles of his clan.

The geographical picture vividly symbolises the relative positions of conqueror and conquered, and Petrarch makes sure that no careful reader can misread the relationship involved. The great-souled hero's entrance between the walls of Cirta is mirrored in the careful placement of the words, with *menia* and *trepidantia* literally pushed apart by the *magnanimus victor*. The unmistakable sexual element of this invasion is noted by Thomas M. Greene, who links it to a pattern of threshold-crossing in Massinissa.⁶⁶ We have a strong linking too of Massinissa with the founder Aeneas in *generis ... incunabula primi*, which recalls the *gentis cunabula nostrae* of *Aen.* III.105.⁶⁷

The lines also send us to Book IX of the *Aeneid*, where Turnus is stirring up the Latins for battle. He has just reminded them of the tottering walls of Troy, and the habitual Trojan disrespect for women:

peccare fuisset
ante satis, penitus modo non genus omne perosos
femineum. [*Aen.* IX.140-2]

One offense would have been enough -
If only they didn't deeply despise
Every woman on earth.

Now he bids them join him in an assault on the Trojan camp:

sed uos, o lecti, ferro qui scindere uallum
apparat et mecum inuadit trepidantia castra? [*Aen.* IX.146-7]

⁶⁶ Greene, 1982: 53.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 3.

But which of you,
My chosen troops, is ready to chop down
This fence with me and terrorize their camp?

Petrarch's lines place *moenia* at the beginning of the phrase, with the effect we have seen, and reproduce the sounds and the position of *trepidantia castra* in *trepidantia Cirthe*. The effect is twofold. It aligns the conquering Romans with the villainous Turnus, and it posits the idea of Cirta as another Troy. Both of these images, introduced gently here, will recur with increasing force as the Sophonisba narrative progresses.

Ingreditur in *Afr.* V.1-3. is followed swiftly by *tuetur*, and this deployment of the victorious gaze will be repeated and amplified in the response to Sophonisba of both Massinissa and Scipio. The posture of military victor is reinforced by the suggestion of an inheritance passing from generation to generation: from *avita* to *patrios* to Massinissa and on to the suggestion of children in *incunabula*. While the literal import of this is to underline Massinissa's entitlement to the city he has taken – it is his birthright – there is to modern nostrils an unmistakeable whiff of patriarchy. In a context where the sexual threat to the women of a captured city has been so visible, the images of cradles and the begetting of children take on an air of disquiet. Here are the *sexus* and *etas* of IV.377 together, and the effect is disturbing.

The presence of the *lares* and the enumeration of generations may also be designed to remind us of Aeneas' departure from Troy, with his father on his shoulders, his household gods in his grasp and his young son at his side. If so, the conqueror's prerogative towards captive women, which was feared at Cartagena

and is palpable in Cirta, sends us back to *Aeneid* II with a vivid image of the dangers which Creusa was left to face alone.

The lines that follow provide no reassurance about the fate of the queen under Massinissa. Where Scipio provided guards to protect the conquered, Massinissa sets guards so that he can plunder undisturbed.

Milite confestim ad portas custode relicto,
Ipse altam cupidus raptim tendebat ad arcem [*Afr.* V.4-5]

then, posting sentinels around the gate,
he made his way towards the high citadel
with eager step.

This recalls the citadel in which Scipio had offered sanctuary to the vulnerable. Massinissa's rapacity is a cruel parody of Scipio's kind act. The chiming of lines in each episode makes the contrast inescapable. The virtue and self-command of Scipio:

Hic pius infremuit iuuenis gessitque patronum
Ipse pudicitie. Tute committitur **arci** [*Afr.* IV.375-6]

are recalled to bitterly ironic effect in the motives of Massinissa:

Milite confestim ad portas custode relicto,
Ipse altam cupidus raptim tendebat ad **arcem** [*Afr.* V.4-5]

Any lingering doubt about Massinissa's intentions is conclusively banished in the simile of the wolf which follows directly:

Sic stimulante fame lupus amplum nactus ouile,
Intima dum penetrat, socium prede atque laboris

Linquit in ingressu, quo tutior abdita fidis
Corpora deducat latebris mergenda palato. [Afr. V.6-9]

even as the prowling wolf
by hunger driven that spies a well-stocked fold
of fattened sheep will straightway enter in,
leaving behind the sharer in his toil
and booty to stand watch so, undisturbed,
he may from out the now well-guarded store
safely bring forth the stolen carcasses
to be devoured.

This recalls the simile of Turnus as a wolf at *Aeneid* IX.59-66:

ac ueluti pleno lupus insidiatus ouili
cum fremit ad caulas uentos perpessus et imbris
nocte super media; tuti sub matribus agni
balatum exercent, ille asper et improbus ira
saeuit in absentis; collecta fatigat edendi
ex longo rabies et siccae sanguine fauces:
haud aliter Rutulo muros et castra tuenti
ignescunt irae, duris dolor ossibus ardet.

A wolf lies in wait by a crowded sheep pen,
Growling through midnight wind and rain.
Huddled beneath their mothers, the lambs
Keep bleating, and the wolf rages and snaps
At the prey it cannot reach, tormented
By long hunger, its jaws thirsting for blood.
So too the Rutulian...

From the opening line of the simile, which echoes Virgil's *lupus insidiatus ovili* in its *lupus amplum nactus ovile*, Massinissa is linked with the premier villain of the *Aeneid*. The reason for the overt textual resemblance is clear. Turnus is not the

only antagonist in the *Aeneid* who is compared to a wolf. We also have Arruns at XI.809-13:

ac uelut ille, prius quam tela inimica sequantur,
continuo in montis sese auisus abdidit altos
occiso pastore lupus magnouae iuueno,
consciis audacis facti, caudamque remulcens
subiecit pauitantem utero siluasque petiuit...

Having killed a shepherd, or a great steer,
A wolf will run before men can come after him
With their hostile spears. Aware
That he has done something reckless,
He loses himself in the trackless mountains,
Tucking his quivering tail beneath his belly.

Apart from the unavoidable *lupus*, Petrarch avoids every other possible echo of the Arruns simile. He clearly wants to evoke Turnus rather than Arruns, and not only because Turnus is actively predatory while Arruns is struggling to escape. The source of Arruns' trouble is Camilla. To evoke him here would align Massinissa with a male character who is pursued by a woman, which is precisely the opposite of the picture he wishes to paint of the relationship between Sophonisba and her conqueror.

But what Massinissa displays is worse than mere equivalence with the Latin leader. The wolfish desires of Turnus are perfectly legitimate expressions of martial ardour. He is frustrated not to see a way to flush the Trojans out into the open, where he can unleash his proper military ferocity. The precise initial target of Massinissa's wolfishness, in contrast, is not specified. It may begin as a

generalised desire for plunder, but the moment he breaches the citadel a new object for his passion suggests itself in the figure of the unfortunate queen.

This is the setting for our first glimpse of Sophonisba, and it is no surprise to find her mistrustful of the future.

Ventum erat ad miseri felicia tecta tyranni,
Que merso malefida uiro regina tenebat. [*Afr.* V.10-1]

In like way he approached
the splendid palace of the luckless tyrant,
where after his downfall his queen abode
uneasy in her heart.

The pattern apparent in both of the rape-threat scenarios we have seen, in factual Byzantium and in Petrarch's Cartagena, is repeated here. Material riches are introduced and explored briefly before we turn to the physical attractions of the defeated women. Thus a brief glimpse of the splendour of the invaded palace is followed by a description of Sophonisba's beauty. We have been conditioned by the menace at the end of Book IV to regard the beauty of the defeated as a source of danger. The catalogue of Sophonisba's physical qualities is introduced with a note of similar anxiety. Petrarch disrupts the tone at several key points, making it impossible for an attentive reader to take the eulogy as an expression of benign romantic longing. The first note of warning comes with the very first attribution of beauty:

Ille nec ethereis unquam superandus ab astris
Nec Phebea foret ueritus certamina uultus
Iudice sub iusto. [*Afr.* V.20-2]

That face

Unrivalled by the very stars of heaven
need fear not – if the arbiter were just –
comparison with Phoebus.

Petrarch's placement of the phrase *iudice sub iusto* adds nothing to the praise of Sophonisba. What it does achieve is to call into question the gaze to which she is about to be subjected, and it does so in a manner that is designed to complicate the expected smoothness of the praise. *Ille nec ethereis unquam superandus ab astris / Nec Phebea foret ueritus certamina uultus* is already a completed thought. *Iudice sub iusto* comes not as closure, but as a forced reopening, another parallel to Massinissa's invasion of Sophonisba's space. Casting this doubt on the integrity of the judge cannot but remind us that Massinissa, whose assessment of Sophonisba is the only one in play, is far from a disinterested arbiter. He is bent on plunder, and the soldierly urge to plunder does not restrict itself to mere things. The phrase *iudice sub iusto* is a reminder of his position in relation to Sophonisba as the one who assesses, and her passivity as the object of that assessment. It lays bare the power realities that underlie the scene, and casts a shadow over the praise to which it serves a prelude.

The praise itself occupies forty-seven lines. It is the longest and most lavish description of an individual character in the *Africa*, but it is not a simple rhapsodic picture of an elegant queen. For one thing, it almost suppresses the fact that Sophonisba has a husband, and struggles to present her as a tearful virgin. It begins in an image of chastity.

Stabat candore niuali

Frons alto miranda Ioui, multumque sorori

Zelotipe metuenda magis quam pellicis ulla
Forma uiro dilecta uago. [*Afr.* V.22-5]

And that brow,
as white as snow, might stir almighty Jove
to wonder and his jealous sister find it
more dangerous than any concubine
her errant spouse might cherish for her charm.

The evocation of the peak of Soracte in Horace, *Ode* IX.1-2⁶⁸ is an ominous pre-echo of Sophonisba's nightmare at V.262-72, but the depiction of the queen as a maidenly creature who might appeal to Jupiter would be double-edged in any context. No-one of Petrarch's wide acquaintance with ancient literature could have been in any doubt about the danger of catching Jupiter's amorous eye. The resulting rape is regularly followed by the brutal revenge of Juno on the victim, and the reminder here of the jealousy of the goddess is surely designed to vivify that threat. Again, Petrarch underlines the absolute powerlessness of Sophonisba in the face of Massinissa's presence.

That presence is deferred until line 64, and with it comes a change of tone:

Hac igitur forma nulli cessura dearum
Occurrit iuueni mulier: nec cultus in illa
Segnior effigie; uariis nam purpura gemmis
Intertexta tegit regine pectora meste. [*Afr.* V.64-7]

In beauty that no goddess might surpass
the woman meets the youth, as well prepared
in art as charm; a purple bodice graced
with divers jewels swathes her heaving breast.

⁶⁸ *Vides ut alta stet nive candidum / Soracte*, "you see how high Soracte stands, bright with snow" (my translation).

Until now the praise has been presented as that of the disinterested narrator, and it has focussed entirely on the natural endowments of Sophonisba. Directly upon the introduction of Massinissa, a new note is sounded: that of Sophonisba as a temptress. It is sounded mildly enough in Petrarch. He goes no further than to say that she has not ignored the decorum of her dress, and even that notice of her first advertent embellishment of her beauty is focalised through Massinissa. Petrarch's Sophonisba is irreproachable here, unlike the version we see in Livy. She is characterised in the *Africa*, with regard to her attitude to the victorious general, by the stately dignity of a conquered epic queen. In the words of J. Christopher Warner, she "kneels before him, and, clasping his knees and right hand, begs to be killed rather than turned over to the Romans."⁶⁹ As Warner points out, the poet takes pains to minimise any suggestion that Sophonisba is attempting to seduce Massinissa.

In Livy a single comment after this scene suggests it might be Sophonisba's intention to seduce Massinissa: at the conclusion of her tearful prayer, he says that "her speech was now more like blandishment than entreaty" (*propriusque blanditas iam oratio esset quam preces* [30.12.17]). But Petrarch does not include that comment. He gives no indication that her pleas are insincere or designed to ensnare her captor's heart, and more important, both authors stress that it requires no machinations on her part for Massinissa to become inflamed with desire and resolve to make Sophonisba his queen.⁷⁰

Petrarch adds two telling details which is absent in Livy, where we are given no details of Sophonisba's beauty and no indication of which of her qualities appealed to her captor. First he mentions the jewels at her breast, the closest linkage yet of potential plunder and female sexuality. Then he leaves no doubt about the threat

⁶⁹ Warner, 2005: 27.

⁷⁰ Warner, 2005: 27.

to which Sophonisba is subject, capturing her vulnerability to Massinissa's desires even as he makes that vulnerability part of what Massinissa finds attractive. Sophonisba weeps, but weeping will not deflect the conqueror from his wolfish purpose. The opposite occurs: Massinissa is aroused by her tears.

Et dolor ipse decet miseras, nec compta placere
Tempore felici poterat magis. [*Afr.* V.68-9]

and grief itself is her adornment. Aye,
distress enhanced her beauty, lending her
a charm more irresistible than that
of happier moments.

Massinissa's arousal in response to Sophonisba's tears is a telling contrast to Scipio's consideration in Cartagena. Scipio saw the suffering in the captive's eyes; Massinissa sees only the sheen.

It is also interesting to compare this sequence with Virgil's portrayal of Aeneas and Dido on their first meeting. She is the figure of power, and it is in the archetypal exercise of this power that Aeneas first sees her. She enters the temple as Aeneas contemplates the carved relief of the fall of Troy.

Tum foribus divae, media testudine templi,
saepta armis, solioque alte subnixa resedit.
Iura dabat legesque viris, operumque laborem
partibus aequabat iustis, aut sorte trahebat. [*Aen.* I.505-8]

Then, under the temples vaulted entrance
And flanked by guards, she ascended her throne.
She was making laws for her people,
Distributing duties or assigning them by lot...

He is the suppliant, she the reigning monarch. Again we have a woman surrounded by soldiers, but this time they are there at her instance. Dido does not need the protection of a Scipio, and she need not fear the desires of a Massinissa. But that assurance and command will not last. Indeed, it is almost the last glimpse in Virgil of Dido in command of her feelings.

Dido [in *Aeneid* IV] appears before the reader as an undisciplined and unstable woman who makes little or no attempt to curb or conceal her emotions. [...] Throughout the book tears are a prominent and inseparable feature of Dido's behaviour; they form an essential ingredient of her supplications.⁷¹

With the intervention of Venus and Amor, Dido has become the weeping, raging hysteric of *Aeneid* IV, the Dido whom Petrarch considered such a libel. It is hard to believe that in his attention to Sophonisba's tears in her encounter with Massinissa, Petrarch is not sending us back to the tearful Dido of *Aeneid* IV, and inviting us to look more deeply at the origin of her tears. If the Dido of *Aeneid* I resembles Sophonisba as we must imagine her to have been before the conquest of Circa, the Dido of Book IV is as powerless as Petrarch's Sophonisba. Over-mastered by the trickery of the gods, Dido has as little choice in her relationship with Aeneas as Sophonisba has in her marriage with Massinissa. Aeneas has left her with no recourse but tears, and if the tears of Dido are not so arousing as those of the luckless Sophonisba it is because Aeneas has already enjoyed his sexual encounter with her and moved on. Sophonisba's tears are an attempt to push Massinissa away, Dido's an attempt to draw Aeneas back. They are equally unavailing.

Most of Petrarch's work in this first stage is contextual. He presents Sophonisba as a second Dido, and shows her being misread as lustful. This alerts

⁷¹ Hudson-Williams, 1978: 17.

us to the possibility, well established in the anti-Virgilian tradition on which he drew, that Dido too has been misread as lustful. Some verbal parallels point our attention to the root of the Virgilian Dido's lust, reminding us that even in the *Aeneid's* jaundiced account there is scope for the defence case. Venus instructs Amor on the tactics to adopt for his corruption of Dido:

Tu faciem illius noctem non amplius unam
falle dolo, et notos pueri puer indue voltus,
ut, cum te gremio accipiet laetissima Dido
regalis inter mensas laticemque Lyaeum,
cum dabit amplexus atque oscula dulcia figet,
occultum inspires ignem fallasque veneno. [*Aen.* I.683-8]

"For a single night, no more, feign his looks.
Boy that you are, wear the boy's familiar face.
And when amid the royal feast and flowing wine
Dido, her joy knowing no bounds, takes you
Onto her lap, embraces you and plants
Sweet kisses on your mouth, breathe into her
Your secret fire and poison her unobserved."

Petrarch picks up the image of the embrace, but what is empty of real love in the *Aeneid* becomes literally empty in Petrarch. We see Massinissa racked and sleepless, embracing his bedding and whispering sweet nothings to the absent Sophonisba:

Sepe etiam absentem lacrimans dum stringit amicam
Sepe thoro dedit amplexus et dulcia uerba. [*Afr.* V.531-2]

Repeatedly he would embrace the bed
as if it were his absent love he held,
murmuring endearments.

The verbal parallels draw our attention to the scene of Dido's enchantment by Amor in *Aeneid* 1:

cum **dabit amplexus** atque oscula **dulcia** figet... [*Aen.* I.687]

Sepe thoro **dedit amplexus** et **dulcia** uerba. [*Afr.* V.532]

But they also send us to the result of that rapture three books later:

Sepe **thoro** dedit amplexus et **dulcia uerba**. [*Afr.* V.532]

incubuitque **thoro** dixitque nouissima **uerba**:

dulces exuuias, dum fata deusque sinebat,

accipite hanc animam meque his exsoluite curis. [*Aen.* IV.650-2]

She lay upon the couch and spoke her final words:

"Love's spoils, sweet while heaven permitted,

Receive this soul, and free me from these cares."

It is in the fruit of Massinissa's long night of elegiac suffering that Petrarch offers his clearest signpost to our reading of the seduction of Dido. The young general wakes to the sound of soldiers in the camp, and remembers with fear the commands of Scipio to untangle himself from Sophonisba. His love, like Amor's disguise, has endured for one night. Now we revisit the Virgilian scene of the treacherous Venus. She summoned her child Amor and instructed him on how to ensnare Dido. Massinissa summons a servant, and gives him (in the name of that same *Amor*) instructions designed not to bind Massinissa closer to Sophonisba, but to disentangle him from her embrace. As Venus enjoined Amor to breathe poison

into Dido, so Massinissa furnishes the servant the means by which Sophonisba is to poison herself.

horrendum dictu et miserabile sumit
Consilium, quod tristis Amor dabat: aurea fido
Pocula dat seruo, custodia dira ueneni
Credita cui fuerat. [*Afr.* V.699-702]

Wherefore he carries out a base design,
dreadful to tell of, born of love's despair.
He gives a golden goblet to the slave
entrusted with the poison.

Just as Petrarch has removed the divine machinery of classical epic from his narrative and replaced it with human wants and weaknesses, so now the metaphor of divine poison in Virgil is made bleakly literal. The plan which Massinissa arrives at is the same that occurred to Venus. (His *consilium* at V.699, in other words, is the same as her *consilia* at *Aen.* I.655.) *Amor* will carry poison to the queen. In the fate of Sophonisba, Petrarch has collapsed the Dido story into a short and brutal sequence of cause and effect: a false love gives her poison, and she dies.

There is another factor that links Sophonisba to Dido here, and the manner in which Petrarch works it through can be seen as a response to the vexed question of the precise status of the relationship between Dido and Aeneas. Just as there are questions about the legitimacy of what Dido but not Aeneas refers to as their marriage, there are serious questions about the status of the marriage contracted between Massinissa and his captive queen.⁷² The answers that Petrarch

⁷² Sophonisba's position, for Foster, echoes "Dido's delusion that she is married to Aeneas." Foster, 1979: 284.

gives to those questions suggest that he is once again in dialogue with the *Aeneid*, and once again views Dido as the victim of forces beyond her control.

4. The Marrying Kind

Book V of the *Africa* is concerned to the point of obsession with marriage. *Maritus* in its various grammatical forms is used seven times (at 129, 170, 218, 257, 357, 607 and 775). *Uxor* appears once, at 658, and *vir* is used unambiguously in the sense of husband six times, at 11, 25, 51, 263, 584 and 661. Petrarch's recurrent recourse, however, is to *coniunx* and its forms and cognates. These are used eighteen times in the rest of the *Africa*, an average of once every 331 lines.⁷³ In Book V, they occur an astonishing twenty-six times, or once every thirty lines.⁷⁴ If we include the other words that indicate a spousal relationship, the total rises to forty, and we have an unmistakable reminder of a character's marital status every nineteen lines or so.

Obviously this is the one book in an otherwise largely masculine epic of war which is most concerned with the relationship between a man and a woman, so some kind of skewing would be impossible to avoid. But the effect is nonetheless to remind the reader at every turn that the relationship between Massinissa and Sophonisba is not simply one of an importunate suitor and an available amour. Sophonisba is married to Syphax, and Petrarch will not let us forget. Whatever the other details involved in Massinissa's pursuit of her, this one factor renders it unequal. The union he pursues is a marriage of conquest, not of collaboration.

⁷³ At I.515, II.258 and 522, III.194, 203, 260, 424, 432, 711, 760 and 773, VI.64, 272 and 547, VII.827, and VIII.973 and 1083.

⁷⁴ At 19, 203, 234, 240, 255, 275, 279, 366, 367, 430, 447, 498, 514, 519, 579, 590, 610, 615, 669, 676, 685, 710, 731, 745 and 760.

Sophonisba is in the position of the Trojan women after the fall of the city and the death or capture of their husbands:

Quod manet fatet, dominusque quis te,
Aut quibus terris, Hecube, videndam
Ducet? In cuius moriere regno? [Seneca, *Tro.* 858-60]

What fate, what lord waits for thee, Hecuba, or to what land will he lead thee to be a public show? In whose kingdom shalt thou die?⁷⁵

We have already seen Petrarch's introduction of Sophonisba make her helplessness clear. He is also careful to foreground the fact of her marriage, and the fact that her husband is in no position to defend her:

Ventum erat ad miseri felicia tecta tyranni,
Que merso malefida uiro regina tenebat. [*Afr.* V.10-11]

In like way he approached
the splendid palace of the luckless tyrant,
where after his downfall his queen abode
uneasy in her heart.

I follow Bergin and Wilson in taking *malefida* here to be a representation of Sophonisba's mental state rather than an unsupported comment on her marital fidelity. The single occurrence of *malefida* in Virgil refers to a treacherous bay:

nunc tantum sinus et statio male fida carinis [*Aen.* II.23]

Now just a bay with a poor anchorage for ships

⁷⁵ Text and translation from Miller, 1918.

The bay in question is on Tenedos, the island to which the Greeks withdrew before the sack of Troy. The faint memory of that other fallen city, one of many such evocations in the Sophonisba episode, does nothing to justify any vilification of the queen, and everything to increase our fears for her safety.

Sophonisba's thoughts are not on herself, but on her husband, and her priorities are vindicated by the text. Our eye is introduced to *viro* before it comes to *regina*, and the intermingling of partners in *merso malefida viro regina* reinforces the supposed indissolubility of the marital bond.

The knowledge of her married state does nothing to deter the attentions of Massinissa. Her beauties are catalogued as if they were in play, as we have seen. The single acknowledgement in that catalogue of Sophonisba's married status is no relief from the implicit threat of Massinissa's gaze. Rather it presents her husband as another man driven beyond sexual control by her beauty and her soft words:

tum pectus apertum

Lene tumens blandoque trahens suspiria pulsu,
Cum quibus instabilem potuit pepulisse precando
Unde nequit reuocare uirum; [*Afr.* V.49-52]

Her bosom's curve, exposed and softly swelling
in tender palpitation, brought forth sighs
which, with enticing blandishments conjoined,
had often driven her unsettled spouse
beyond where she could bid him to return.

The husband whose overthrow she was so concerned about while her conqueror arrived has been reconfigured, in the praise of a beauty we now see through Massinissa's eyes, as one more man who cannot master his sexual impulses in the

presence of female beauty. If Sophonisba was so powerless to control her sexual destiny as a wife, how much less choice she must now have as Massinissa's captive.

At first it seems that Sophonisba sees no sexual threat from her conqueror. She can imagine no future beyond immediate death or imprisonment:

Utere iure tuo: captivam mortis acerbe,
Carceris aut duri licet hanc absumere sorte. [*Afr.* V.83-4]

Enjoy your rights,
do with your captive as you will, mete out
a bitter death or dark imprisonment.

But these fears are dwarfed by a third prospect. More than anything, she begs that she will not be made a slave:

Tu quodcumque libet iubeas, genus elige digne
Mortis; et hoc unum prohibe, ne viva maligno
Servitio calcanda ferar. [*Afr.* V.87-9]

Wherefore command
as you desire; I only beg you, choose
a worthy death for me and, above all,
I ask I be not sadly borne away
to live in slavery.

It is sexual slavery she fears, the lot of so many wives who were distributed as booty after the fall of Troy.⁷⁶ Massinissa gives it another name, however. She will be his wife, and retain the title of queen (V.114-15). He does not name her current husband, but instead alludes to him with a lightness that confirms his breathtaking callousness while evoking the widowed constancy of the chaste Dido:

⁷⁶ See Tetlow, 2005: 18.

Ni renuis nostroque nocet vetus ardor amori. [*Afr.* V.116]

“Say me not nay, I beg you, nor permit
past ardours to infringe upon our love.”

Sophonisba consents. The nature of that consent will bear closer examination, but for the moment it will be useful to turn to another queen who overcame her fealty to one husband to embrace a newcomer: Dido in the first and fourth books of the *Aeneid*. The *vetus ardor* which Massinissa here hopes to overturn is an obvious successor to the *veteris vestigia flammae* (traces of a bygone flame) that Dido still feels for Sychaeus at *Aen.* IV.23.⁷⁷ This is a *vetus ardor* in more ways than one: Petrarch has relit the flame that burned in the *Aeneid*, and the triangle of a queen, a former husband and a potential new lover is the same in both cases.

There are differences, of course. The first husband in Dido’s case was already dead, rather than merely doomed like Syphax, and there remains for many scholars a question about whether Dido’s new relationship with Aeneas reaches the status of a marriage.⁷⁸ Given the importance of this topic in the *Africa*, its discussion in the *Aeneid* will be worth examining in some detail.

For Dido, there is no question at all about the legitimacy of her marriage. Marriage is what she reluctantly desired, resisted and ultimately embraced. Although there is something hysterical in her insistence to a departing Aeneas that it is a wife he is abandoning, her concerns have been marital almost from the start. At the end of Book I, bowled over by the intervention of Venus’ agent Amor, she has begun to blot out the memory of her former husband with a new passion for a

⁷⁷ See Martellotti in Neri et al, 1950: 645.

⁷⁸ See Quinn, 1963: 38.

living man, *vivo ... amore* (I.721). As soon as she begins to contemplate the possibility of acting on this passion, however, her thoughts run into strictly marital channels. When she flirts with the still near-unthinkable prospect of surrendering to his charms, it is the surrender not of unsanctioned sex but of marriage:

si mihi non animo fixum immotumque sederet
ne cui me uinco uellem sociare iugali,
postquam primus amor deceptam morte fefellit;
si non pertaesum thalami taedaeque fuisset,
huic uni forsant potui succumbere culpae. [*Aen.* IV.15-19]

“If I were not unshakable in my vow
Never to pledge myself in marriage again
After death stole my first love away –
If the mere thought of marriage did not leave me cold,
I might perhaps have succumbed this once.

Her sister Anna takes her at her word, rejecting Dido’s resistance to a new marriage which might offer not just love and companionship, but the prospect of children (IV.31-3). It is hardly conceivable that Anna could envision a non-marital relationship that offered not only these boons, but the prospect of cementing a military alliance with the Trojans. Carthage is surrounded by potential or actual enemies, including the spurned Iarbas. A conjugal alliance with Aeneas would do much to consolidate her position, and Anna is excited by the possibility:

quam tu urbem, soror, hanc cernes, quae surgere regna
coniugio tali! [*Aen.* IV.47-8]

With a husband like this, what a city, Sister,
What a kingdom you would see rise!

They make sacrifice to Juno as goddess of marriage, *cui vincla iugalia curae* (“who watches over the bonds of marriage,” IV.59),⁷⁹ and as Dido falls deeper in love with Aeneas there is no hint yet that she has even contemplated any illicit outlet for her passion. Horsfall notes that “it is Juno, goddess of marriage, to whom, above all, a lovestruck Dido prays,”⁸⁰ and when Juno in turn approaches Venus, it is with the suggestion of marriage (IV.99-100). Venus may be amused by the treachery (*dolis*, IV.128) of Juno, and we may accordingly doubt her sincerity when she promises a marriage (*Hic Hymenaeus erit*, “this will be their wedding,” IV.127). But when Aeneas and Dido finally come together in the cave, there is no evidence of crossed fingers. It is under the same marital aspect of Juno that their consummation is achieved:

speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem
 deveniunt. Prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno
 dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius aether
 conubiis summoque ulularunt vertice Nymphae. [*Afr.* IV.165-8]

Dido and the Trojan leader make their way
 to the same cave. Earth herself and bridal Juno
 Give the signal. Fires flash in the sky,
 Witness to their nuptials, and the Nymphs
 Wail high on the mountaintop.

Their coming together is characterised without ambiguity as a marriage (*connubiis*), in a narrative voice which is not focalised through any character. The only two ascriptions of emotion to any character on this day of the narrative have

⁷⁹ See Farron, 1980: 38 and n. 4.

⁸⁰ Horsfall, 1990: 131.

been to Ascanius. He is happy both times: *laetus* at IV.140 and rejoicing (*gaudet*) at IV.157.

This is the high-point of marital legitimacy for Dido, but there are already some notes of disquiet. If we look more closely at the mythological presences, we notice the proximity of Tellus and Aether: parents of Luctus, the great waster of man's energies, who is next to be encountered by Aeneas in Book VI at the doorway of a darker, deeper cave. It is hardly a happy guest-list for a wedding, and it reinforces the idea of Aeneas' sojourn in Carthage as a distraction from the task he has been set by fate.

In this light it is no surprise to find that Aeneas never displays any kind of spousal commitment. As T.R. Bryce points out, he is "very much a passive participant in the whole affair."⁸¹ He makes no marital overtures to Dido, and expresses no hopes or fears for their future together. His reaction to the vision of Mercury which recalls him to his duty is not what Dido, or anyone, would have wished for in a husband. His ardour is certainly aroused, but it is an ardour to be gone:

ardet abire fuga dulcisque relinquere terras,
attonitus tanto monitu imperioque deorum. [*Aen.* IV.281-2]

And he burned with desire to leave that sweet land,
In awe of the commandment from the gods above.

This awe of the gods is perfectly proper, of course, but Aeneas shows no evidence that he finds their compulsion particularly burdensome. Where we might expect

⁸¹ Bryce, 1974: 262.

him to express some regret or pain at having to break off his relationship with Dido, he turns instead to practical considerations. How will he break the news?

heu quid agat? quo nunc reginam ambire furentem
audeat adfatu? quae prima exordia sumat? [*Aen.* II.283-6]

But what should he do? What can he say
To the Queen in her passion? How will he choose
His opening words?

He is aware, despite his own lacklustre passion, of the emotional investment Dido has made in their relationship. He does not imagine a tranquil parting, but sees Dido already *furentem*, and wonders what he might dare to say. We have to read this internal monologue as an honest assessment by Aeneas of the nature of the relationship. He expresses neither passion for Dido nor bitterness at the forced separation. He is stepping away from a liaison, not abandoning a wife.

Dido's thoughts, in contrast, return obsessively to the notion of marriage. Almost her first response to Aeneas is a claim that they have undergone a marriage:

nec te noster amor nec te data dextera quondam
nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido? [*Aen.* II.307-8]

Does our love mean nothing to you? Does it matter
That we pledged ourselves to each other?

She bitterly calls him a guest now, rather than husband: *hospes... coniuge* (IV.324). She imagines her old suitor Iarbas carrying her off (IV.324). Even as she

relinquishes the dream of marriage to Aeneas, she insists that a marriage is what it was:

non iam coniugium antiquum, quod prodidit, oro... [*Afr.* IV.431]

I am no longer asking for our marriage back –
The marriage he betrayed...

As her grip on sanity loosens, she haunts the shrine she has built to her late husband, and hears his ghostly voice calling out to her (IV.457-61). She resolves to die, but in the midst of that resolve she is still tortured by connubial images:

“en, quid ago? rursusne procos inrisa priores
experiar, Nomadamque petam conubia supplex,
quos ego sim totiens iam dedignata maritos?” [*Aen.* II.534-6]

“What am I doing? Should I entertain once more
My former suitors – and hear them laugh at me?
Go begging for a marriage among the nomads,
After scorning their proposals time and again?”

With a final lament that she has been untrue to the ashes of Sychaeus (IV.552), Dido sets about building the pyre which will allow her to join him in death.

Responsive as it is to the Virgilian Dido narrative, it is not surprising that much of Book V of the *Africa* is so taken up with a consideration of Sophonisba's marital state. We have seen that she is first introduced in the *Africa* as a sorrowing wife, whereas Livy had introduced her as a tempting lure for a strategic marital alliance. Once this marital note is sounded, it is struck repeatedly throughout Book V, in ways that make it all but impossible to think of Sophonisba's consent to marry Massinissa as meaningful or voluntarily given. Even if we were to take the

marriage as legitimate, Massinissa's attitude to it is characterised by two factors which seem contradictory. He is overwhelmingly insistent that the marriage take place, but when he is urged to abandon it he does so with alarming ease.

A simple view of this in the light of the *Aeneid* would suggest that while his passion burns like Dido's, his easy abandonment of the match is redolent of Aeneas. Massinissa does indeed express himself in terms that markedly recall Dido's erotic *furor*. The intensity of his feelings, elaborated in the very metaphors of burning and the hunt which Virgil's Dido has taught us to expect from the female party, emphasises the fact that Sophonisba does not share his passion. In reminding us that the Dido-like Sophonisba is compelled into the marriage, Petrarch underlines the element of compulsion in what Dido herself underwent. Her overwhelming insistence on marriage did not come from a free heart. It was planted by outside agencies in a woman helpless, like all mortals, in the face of malignant divinity.

The first note of doubt about Sophonisba's marriage is sounded by the queen herself. She recognises Massinissa as the leader of the invading Romans by his armour, his aspect, and the deference of the other troops. She adopts the posture of a suppliant, gripping his hand and knees, and introduces herself as a widow.

"Si michi victricem fas est attingere dextram
Captive vidueque tuam, per numina supplex
Cuncta precor, miserere mei, nec magna rogaris." [*Afr.* V.80-2]

"If I, a captive and a widow, may
touch your victorious hand, let me implore
by all the gods your pity and your grace."

In this we see the lacuna between Books IV and V at its most unhelpful. We know from Livy XXX.12 that Syphax is still alive. We will find out, as we persevere with the *Africa*, that he survives to be paraded as part of Scipio's triumph at Rome. We know that Massinissa is extremely unlikely to think him dead, given that he has just defeated him in battle and seen him captured. But what is the state of Sophonisba's mind? Does she genuinely believe herself a widow, or is she acknowledging the reality of her situation in a way that emphasises her sexual availability to Massinissa? Boccaccio's account of the queen offers no help.⁸² He follows Livy's narrative of the meeting closely, and in Livy neither Sophonisba nor Massinissa makes any reference to whether Syphax is still alive.⁸³

We have already seen Petrarch take pains to disinfect Livy's account of any suggestion that Sophonisba is exercising sexual wiles, however. To read this passage of the *Africa* in the light of that strategy suggests that Sophonisba genuinely believes Syphax to be dead. She was indoors in the palace as Massinissa entered the city, and did not see him until he crossed the threshold (V.1-14). Her awareness of her husband's downfall (*merso ... viro*) is keen, but it is ambiguous as to whether he has been killed or simply deposed. Petrarch will answer the question of what Sophonisba believes before long, but the fact that he is willing to leave it open here cautions us to read behind the lines for a true picture of Sophonisba's emotional and moral state. Petrarch raises the possibility that the Livy version of a seductive adulteress is true, only to shut it conclusively down.

Another interpretation of the Sophonisba's marital state arises in Massinissa's long nocturnal monologue, when he claims that the queen is legally

⁸² *De Mulieribus Claris* LXX.

⁸³ See Livy XXX.12.

rendered a widow by the defeat of her husband in war.⁸⁴ This was not a provision of Roman law, however. Indeed, even if Sophonisba had been a widow, the freshness of her loss would have rendered an immediate second union invalid:

A person could not legally be party to two marriages at the same time... A widow could not marry within ten months ... of the death of her husband.⁸⁵

In any case, Massinissa has made no legal case to Sophonisba. His view here seems difficult to square with her unambiguous description of herself as a widow. That self-characterisation is not part of any pattern of seduction. The last thing on Sophonisba's mind is an announcement of her own availability. Her claim to be widowed comes before her repeated requests to be allowed to die and her repeated refusal of Massinissa's proposal (V.80-9).

If Sophonisba's assertion of her widowhood has a melancholy sincerity, Massinissa's later claim of marriage smacks of self-justification. It comes after Scipio's criticism of his liaison with the queen. Even as he claims marital legitimacy for that liaison, however, Massinissa acknowledges to himself that Sophonisba's main feeling about the business is one of fear:

Simul hic possessor iniquus
Regna gemens reuomit, nitidisque simillima Nimphis
Femina preterea primo spoliata marito –
Bellorum sic iura uolunt – occurrit et ardet,
Si liceat, sed multa timet sibi conscia sortis. [*Afr.* V.216-20]

At one same stroke
the foul usurper, groaning, is cast down

⁸⁴ *Afr.* V.220. See below.

⁸⁵ du Plessis, 2010: 121.

and a fair woman, like the shining nymphs
in beauty, widowed of her spouse (for so
the laws of war decree) before you stands
and seems disposed to love you if it be
permitted, though yet fearful, mindful yet
of Fate.

Given Sophonisba's belief that she is a widow, it is a huge omission for Massinissa not to clarify that her husband is still alive. In fact, he does not even seem to consider it. His mind is on his desires:

Igitur regina manebis
Et nostri memoranda thori per secula consors,
Ni renuis nostroque nocet uetus ardor amori. [*Afr.* V.114-6]

You shall remain
a queen and be the sharer of my couch,
and through the centuries your fame will live.

The phrase Massinissa uses here to describe the status he is offering to Sophonisba is *thori ... consors*, an openly marital usage familiar to Petrarch from the blameless pairing of Deucalion and Pyrra in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁸⁶ We have already seen the only other occurrence of the word *consors* in the *Africa*, also in the context of the marital couch, in Laelius' account of Aeneas abandoning Creusa and Troy:

Destituit patriam lacrimans caramque cubilis
Consortem [*Afr.* III.504-5]

... abandoning his fatherland
and the long-cherished partner of his bed.

⁸⁶ *Consorte tori* at *Met.* I.319. See Lewis and Short s.v. *consors*.

The one occurrence in the *Aeneid* is neither marital nor very likely to fill Sophonisba with optimism about the future. Mezentius has been defeated. Like Sophonisba, he prays not to be saved but to be spared an assault on his dignity. Then he is consigned (or consigns himself)⁸⁷ to an eerily Didonian death:⁸⁸

hunc, oro, defende furorem
et me consortem nati concede sepulcro.
haec loquitur, iuguloque haud inscius accipit ensem
undantique animam diffundit in arma cruore. [*Aen.* X.904-8]

“Guard me from their rage;
Let me join my son in the tomb.”
Mezentius said these things and did not flinch
When the sword entered his throat
And his life sluiced out in streams of blood.

Back in Cirta, however, Sophonisba arises at length from her knees. It seems at first that she is accepting Massinissa’s offer:

Vultu tandem illa remisso
Incipit: “O regum decus, auxiliumque,
Dum meruit, patrie, nunc terror maximus idem,
Si mea post tantos unquam consurgere lapsus
Fata queant, spesque una foret post damna superstes,
Quid michi uel longa potuit contingere uita
Letius, ad talem quam si translata maritum
Diceret et fausta subito creuisse ruina? [*Afr.* V.123-30]

She, now more at ease,
made answer: “Glorious King, the comfort once,

⁸⁷ See Gotoff, 1984: 210, n. 49.

⁸⁸ On the linkage of Dido’s and Mezentius’ ends as deaths “caused by Aeneas,” see Fratantuono, 2005: 147. See also Gotoff, 1984 and Duckworth, 1956: 359.

when it was worthy, of my fatherland
and now its greatest terror, if it be
that after such dark days my fortunes rise
again and hope survive so many blows,
what greater joy could life, though many years
it span, reserve for me than to be bidden
to turn to such a spouse and so arise
auspiciously from ruin?"

If Massinissa is paying attention, however, he will observe the shadows begin to gather with her invocation of the fallen city, *ruina*. The *sed* inevitably follows.

Sed quia fata premunt et nostris debitus annis
Finis adest michi, care, animos attollere fractos
Desine: non tali pelago conuulsa ratis nat.
Fortune michi nota fides: sat magna petenti
Dona dabis mortem, que libertate retenta
Perferat hanc animam directo tramite ad umbras. [*Afr.* V.131-6]

"Yet since Fate
moves on and nearer draws the end appointed
to my life's course, my dearest, strive no more
to raise my broken spirits. On such seas
fares not a shaken bark. I know full well
the faith that Fortune keeps. It will suffice
that you bestow on one who seeks but death
this greatest gift: that she, with freedom kept,⁸⁹
may by the straightest path convey her soul
to shelter 'mongst the shades. "

Her gentle words have sugared a rejection. While acknowledging as she must how wonderful it would be to marry Massinissa, she would prefer to die. The delicacy of

⁸⁹Bergin and Wilson's original reads "with freedom lost." The change of import, however, is minimal.

her phrasing here reminds us of her powerless position. Eloquence is her only plea, and her flattering address of Massinissa as *care*, beloved, is bitter in its irony. She has chosen death over marriage, but her only passage to death is through the goodwill of the man who wants to wed her.

Sophonisba's first fear was slavery. She now characterises Massinissa's offer of marriage as a threat to her *libertas* (V.135). The way to maintain her liberty is through death, not through marriage to Massinissa. In expressing her doubts about the vagaries of fortune, she obviously means him to understand that his protection may not be sufficient to ward off the wrath of his Roman commanders and to spare her the humiliation of Scipio's triumph. But given that it comes as the climax of her rejection of a Roman commander as suitor, there is some small irony in her summary of her hopes:

Romanum fugisse iugum michi meta precandi est. [*Afr.* V.137]

All I would ask
is to escape the yoke of Rome.

Massinissa offers a compromise. If through marriage he can protect her from the humiliation she fears, he will be her husband. If not, he will allow her to die. Sophonisba's reply is not recorded. It is not that she has been rendered speechless, as well she might be, but simply that she is dropped from the narrative. We hear nothing of her response, and there is no farewell from her eager swain. We simply switch focus to Massinissa's plight, with the briefest of segues. Having announced his decision, he moves from the scene. He takes possession of the empty citadel, an image which recalls his initial irruption into the city (*ad arcem* in final position is

repeated from V.5), and can hardly fail to carry for a sensitive reader the tang of violation:

Talia uix tremula confusus uoce peregit,
Hinc sese uacuum tulit irrequietus ad arcem. [*Afr.* V.152-3]

With trembling voice he ended and with heart
disturbed entered the empty citadel.

His quivering voice and restless heart sound the theme for Massinissa's second act. He entered Book V as the warrior in his panoply, striding into the city surrounded by deferential troops. Now Petrarch gives us Massinissa the lover, fretting the night away on his restless bed. Before we turn to his night of amorous torture, however, we must fill in the gap in the narrative as far as it concerns Sophonisba.

The latest stage in her swift journey from wife to widow to wife again are determined with even less consultation of her feelings than the last. Massinissa decides that Scipio will accept the marriage, in pity for the folly of a fellow youth. He may even accept its sanctity, Massinissa reasons, and in the image of thievery we see our only indication that he may be dimly aware of the compulsion to which he has subjected Sophonisba:

Coniugium fortasse sacrum, non furta uocabit... [*Afr.* V.240]

He may well deem it no stolen sweet but sacred troth.

The darker reading seems more likely, however. Massinissa is thinking not of the theft of Sophonisba's future, or of anything that allows her some agency as an autonomous individual, but of his own unsanctioned use of a Roman prisoner.

Once again Sophonisba is seen by men of power as little more than a bargaining chip in their dealings with other powerful men.

Trusting in the slender hope that Scipio will be swayed from both Roman rectitude and Roman property rights, Massinissa summons his friends and begins the preparations for the marriage ceremony. It is a grim affair:

Modico conuiuia culta paratu.
Atria non reboant, non Tuscus ad ethera clangor,
Non comitum fremitus, non arcta palatia turmis,
Non crebre micuere faces; fax ussit amantes
Vna duos, lacrimis mox extinguenta duorum. [*Afr.* V.244-8]

... a modest wedding feast, no Tuscan clang
of brass, no compliments of friends, the hall
but sparsely filled. No frequent torches flared;
one torch alone, soon destined to be quenched
by their own tears, inflamed the loving pair.

Richard Seagraves points out⁹⁰ the evocation of Book VIII of the *Aeneid*, when Venus sends some celestial signals to Aeneas, including the martial recall to duty of a trumpet:

Tyrrhenusque tubae mugire per **aethera clangor** [*Aen.* VIII.526]

A Tuscan trumpet pealed through the sky.

The trumpet of Venus echoes clearly in Petrarch's line:

Atria non reboant, non **Tuscus** ad **aethera clangor** [*Afr.* V.245]⁹¹

⁹⁰ Seagraves, 1976: 333.

⁹¹ See also Martellotti in Neri et al, 1950: 652.

The brass in *Aeneid* VIII is a kind of reveille. Aeneas recognises it as a promise of aid from Venus and takes it as his cue to return to battle. Massinissa has furnished no music for his wedding, but the call of duty will be sounded soon enough.

The newlyweds do have one night together, however. During their repeated embraces, Petrarch suggests, Massinissa may have fantasised about his posterity, and the line of children and grandchildren to come. No such new life quickens in Sophonsiba's thoughts, where the cradles of Massinissa's dreams are replaced by tombs:

Illi non blanda mariti
Oscula mille noui, non regni iura uetusti
Per cuntos promissa deos, de corde pauorem
Funditus expulerant: semper tremefacta sepulcrum
Ante oculos mortemque tulit. Nec somnia letum
Portendere aliquid. Visa est sibi nempe, secundo
Rapta uiro, sentire minas et iurgia primi... [Afr. V.257-63]

Ah, but for her,
not her new husband's countlessly renewed
caresses nor the ancient kingdom's power
promised by all the gods could cast out fear
still dwelling in her heart. Before her eyes
all trembling she called up death and tombs.
No respite came in dreaming: there she saw
herself reft from her second spouse, the first
voicing reproachful taunts.

The image of the her first husband clearly recalls Dido's similar vision at *Aen.* I.353-9, and the ghostly voice of Sychaeus at IV.460-1. This cements the similarity between the two couples, but it also shows the queen maintaining her loyalty to her first husband even while she is subject to the irresistible embraces of the

second. The atmosphere of tombs and death also closes off definitively the question of whether Sophonisba believes Syphax to be dead. Her earlier self-description as a widow is revealed to have been honest, and Massinissa's failure to contradict her seems all the more nakedly manipulative.

Immediately *Fama* or rumour begins to move through the neighbouring towns and villages, just as it did after the coming-together of Aeneas and Dido in *Aeneid* IV. *Fama* in Petrarch's Cirta follows exactly the same pattern as it did in Virgil's Carthage. First the furtive connection is dignified by one of the principals with the name of marriage:

nec iam **furtium** Dido meditatur amorem:
coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam. [*Aen.* IV.171-2]

No more
Does [Dido] contemplate a secret love. She calls it
Marriage.

We have already seen the echo of these words in Massinissa's nocturnal fretting at *Afr.* V.240:

Coniugium fortasse sacrum, non **furta vocabit**... [*Afr.* V.240]

Now rumour picks up the news and spreads its wings. First it flies to the neighbouring towns:

Extemplo Libyae magnas it Fama per urbes,
Fama, malum qua non aliud uelocius ullum: [*Aen.* 173-4]

Rumor at once sweeps through Libya's great cities,
Rumor, the swiftest of evils.

Publica finitimas subito perlabitur urbes
Fama gradu. [*Afr.* V.273-4]

Soon through the neighbouring town the rumour ran.

The news of Dido's attachment flies through the towns, descends to the level of the people, and settles at last on the other claimant for her hand:

haec tum multiplici populos sermone replebat
gaudens, et pariter facta atque infecta canebat:
uenisse Aenean Troiano sanguine cretum,
cui se pulchra uiro dignetur iungere Dido;
nunc hiemem inter se luxu, quam longa, fouere
regnum immemores turpique cupidine captos.
haec passim dea foeda uirum diffundit in ora.
protinus ad regem cursus detorquet Iarban
incenditque animum dictis atque aggerat iras. [*Aen.* IV189-97]

Exultant now, she fills the people's ears
With all kinds of talk, intoning fact and fiction:
Aeneas has come, born of Trojan blood;
Dido, impressed, has given him her hand,
And now they indulge themselves the winter long,
Neglecting their realms, slaves to shameful lust.
The loathsome goddess spreads this gossip
Far and wide. Then she winds her way to King Iarbas,
And with her words his rage flares to the sky.

In Cirta and its environs, rumour goes into a little more detail. This is an adulterous union, rendered invalid by the continued legitimacy of Sophonisba's marriage to Syphax, and it was consummated with an indecorous haste:

uicte uictorem sponte secutum
Coniugia, et bello indomitum seruire puelle.
Vulgas adulterii signabat nomine factum,
Quod neque legitimis arsissent ignibus inter
Armorum strepitus, alioque superstite rege
Coniuge; captiue uictori forma quod uno
Visa die et dilecta prius, subitoque recepta
Federe, non inter patrios ex more penates,
Iudicio ne quid, sed cuncta libidine sanas
Precipitante moras fierent. [*Afr.* V.274-83]

The vanquished had subdued the conqueror;
a hero undefeated on the field
was servant of a girl. The common herd
judging their love fanned by unworthy flames,
amid war's tumult cried "adultery!"
Did not the other king, her lawful spouse,
yet live? What more? A captive beauty seen
by a victorious chief, at once desired
and by intemperate ceremony seized –
not by the rites of the ancestral gods,
and with calm judgment, rather all was done
for lust, delaying not for decency.

Petrarch's narratorial voice holds itself aloof from this description of the events he has just depicted. This is not the neutral author's voice, but the thinking of a mean-minded rabble:

Sic omnia uulgus
In peius torquere loquax. [*Afr.* V.273-4]

So everything the wordy gossipers
twisted to its worse sense.

In this we have the first glimpse of a gap opening between the sympathy for Sophonisba that the narrative expresses and a kind of editorial position which evinces some disapproval of the queen. The gap will complicate the reading of the remainder of the narrative, particularly when the introduction of the heroic Scipio monopolises Petrarch's admiration, but there is always at least a low him of sympathy for Sophonisba.

Rumour flies through Cirta, and rumour is ugly. In the *Africa* as in the *Aeneid*, however, rumour is substantially correct.⁹² This is not the way to conduct a marriage, and even in a war Sophonisba's marriage to Syphax should have protected her from the victorious king's attention. The same *Fama* will spread posthumous admiration of Sophonisba at VI.74-80.⁹³ For the moment, the sour turn of popular obloquy castigates the couple for adultery rather than denounce Massinissa for rape. But Scipio knows who to blame. His thoughts are centred on Massinissa, and like a disappointed father (*pater offensus*, V.290) he is prepared to berate him for his rashness:

Multaque in absentem tacitus conuicia finxit. [*Afr.* V.279]

Inwardly he planned to chide the absent one.

Rumour is not finished, however. It has one more target, and that target is Sophonisba's husband. Syphax is brought to Scipio in chains. Scolded for his treachery, he heaps reproaches on the absent Sophonisba. She stirred him up to make war on Rome, she furnished the weapons, she lit the palace with funeral torches. The *funereas ... faces* of V.353 recall the single pitiable wedding torch of

⁹² See Cairns, 1989: 49.

⁹³ See Hardie, 2012: 473.

V.247, and it soon becomes clear that it is the wedding to Massinissa that has fuelled Syphax's savage denunciation of his wife. Rumour has reached the shackled king, offering an unlovely foretaste of the taunting he will receive at Rome:

placuisse prophanos
Amplexus fuerant huius primordia casus
Coniugioque hesisse fero. Proh! regia, vere
Regia et innumeris nuptura sine ordine coniunx
Regibus! [*Afr.* V.365-9]

I joyed
excessively in impious blandishments
and loved a savage wife. A queen indeed –
a queen disposed to wed a train of kings
past counting, all in fickle faith espoused.

While the mob and her husband both hold Sophonisba and Massinissa equally culpable for their liaison, the clear-eyed Scipio is the only one to read the events as a wrong inflicted on her. The denial of Sophonisba's autonomy continues, however. We have seen her overmastered in the events of the narrative, and then dropped precipitously from the stage in favour of Massinissa. Now even Scipio's thoughts runs more to sorrow for his strayed male friend than to the immediate victim of that friend's wrongdoing:

Hinc magis atque magis cari scelus horret amici:
Iustus amor regi; quoniam si digna querele,
Massinissa, tibi fuerat, non iusta rapine
Causa: furor stimulisque repens impulsa libido
Turpibus. [*Afr.* V.375-9]

And more

and more he grieved and shuddered at the thought
of his friend's crime: "For the king's love had been
lawful and right, and if your plaint was just,
yet, Massinissa, it might not excuse
rapine and rage and lust so rashly roused."

His words to Massinissa confirm Sophonisba's status as Rome's possession, and vindicate her fears of the Roman triumph. The thin justification for parading her before the mob is that she caused the war, but the references to her husband and father shows that her value as a prize predates and remains independent of any possible actions of hers:

nostro quoque nomine parta est
Romano hec presens populo uictoria; nec te
Preterit et regem et regnum suaque omnia nobis
Deberi. Romam patere hic inimicaque coniunx
Regis eat, precibus que bellum pauit, et hostis
Filia tam magni est et pars non parua triumphi. [*Afr.* V.427-32]

... all that we have won belongs to Rome.
Forget not that the captured king himself,
his kingdom and all that it may contain
are ours. And so to Rome the king must go
with his fierce consort. She it was who prayed
for war; moreover she is daughter to
a famous foe. Her presence will adorn
our triumph.

Massinissa is crushed, of course. He feels the verdict of Scipio like a death sentence. The trumpet that failed to sound at his nuptials sounds out at last in simile:

Sic audita reum postquam sententia morti
Addixit, grauiterque tube uox nuncia fati
Intonui. [*Afr.* V.452-4]

As when a sentence read
has marked a criminal for death, the blast
borne from the tuba's mouth sounds the decree.

He toys with suicide, fashioning knots and half-drawing his sword in another obvious echo of the doom of Dido. But the resemblance falters. Massinissa lacks her resolve. Balking at the stain of self-murder, he nevertheless finds himself able to encompass the death of Sophonisba.

Like Aeneas, he has been called away from his lover by a higher power (Scipio is again explicitly godlike at V.555-6, where Massinissa imagines his apotheosis). While Aeneas had disputed Dido's classification of their relationship as a marriage,⁹⁴ however, Massinissa has no such doubts about his relationship with Sophonisba:

Ergo ego, Romano placitum quia, sancta reuellam
Federa coniugii? [*Afr.* V.578-9]

Shall I, to please a Roman, violate
the sacred marriage bond?

But his refusal to countenance the merest scintilla of doubt about his own behaviour in this is undercut in one key moment. Apostrophising Charon, Massinissa tells him what a wonderful woman he is about to be privileged to ferry

⁹⁴ At *Aen.* IV.338-9.

across the Styx. Reaching into myth and history for her equal, he sees her take her place among a catalogue of famous heroines:

Fortunate Charon! utinam michi flectere clauum
Contingat, neutramque diu contingere ripam;
Tuque mei interea serues moderamina regni!
Inuidiose senex, quando hec tibi monstra uidere
Contigit, aut ullo posthac continget in euo?
Vidisti Ethneo raptam sub uertice nigri
Vxorem transire thori, nec uultus Elisse
Te latuit nostre, facies nec Gorgonis horrens,
Nec que fatiferum laqueo pendente secuta est
Laodomia uirum, nec te, pulcerrima Procris,
Nec Teucrum pestis, Minoisque altera proles –
Altera nam celum tenuit stellante corona. [*Afr.* V.652-63]

Ah, happy Charon, would it were my task
to steer your skiff; I'd linger between shores
and leave to you the ruling of my realm.
O enviable ancient, have you seen
a paragon like this, and can you hope
hereafter ever to look on its peer?
'Tis true you saw the bride reluctantly
ravished and borne off to her sombre bed
from Aetna's slopes, nor were your eyes denied
the sight of our Elissa. You have seen
the dreadful Gorgon, awesome to behold,
and Loadamia following in the steps
of her ill-fated husband, noose in hand,
and winsome Procris, and the bane of Troy
and one of Minos' daughters (for the other
with starry crown now dwells in Heaven above).

The parade is notable for how many of the women have been raped, abandoned or otherwise mistreated: Proserpina, abducted by Hades and held in a half-marriage; Laodamia, who committed suicide rather than live without her husband Protesilaus; Procris, killed by a hunter husband who mistook her for an animal; Helen, stolen from her first husband by her second; Ariadne, abandoned by her first husband and committed to eternity by her second.

Some of the women do not fit the tidy pattern: Medusa is hardly a victim; Phaedra is not blameless in any version of her story, and she is unique among the women of Ovid's *Heroides*, for example, in being neither abandoned by nor even separated from her partner.⁹⁵ But one woman who has hovered behind the narrative of Sophonisba is now named at last. In his invocation of Dido as Elissa at V.658, even Massinissa recognises, however dimly, that something in the last day and coming death of Sophonisba recalls that earlier tragedy. That it is a tragedy of compulsion is hinted at in the company he gives her. Dido is linked here not just with Sophonisba, but with the forcibly married Proserpina.

The catalogue shares some similarities, and some personnel, with Petrarch's vernacular *Triumph of Love*, but the main model is in *Aeneid* VI.⁹⁶ There Aeneas encounters Dido in the underworld, and seems to grasp for the first time his role in her death. While that recognition gives a context to the underworld evocation of the *Africa*, however, it is not the passage that Petrarch chooses to echo. There is instead another glancing reference to Troy. Massinissa imagines himself received into Hades one day, to follow behind Sophonisba. He addresses Charon:

⁹⁵ See Davis, 1995: 43.

⁹⁶ See Bergin and Wilson, 1977: 258 n. 861.

me forsitan illac
Coniugis infauste uestigia cara sequentem
Tardius excipies. [*Afr.* V.668-70]

Soon it may be that you'll receive me too,
close following on the footsteps I adore
of my unhappy wife.

The image is reminiscent not of Aeneas and Dido, but of Aeneas and Creusa in the fall of Troy. He announces his plan for the disposition of his household in the escape:

et longe seruet uestigia coniunx. [*Aen.* II.711]

... and my wife
Will walk in my footsteps some distance behind.

Alerted to intertextual possibilities as we must be by the image of following, we hardly need the chime of *coniugis... vestigia... sequentem* with *seruet vestigia coniunx* to be put in mind of the earlier couple.⁹⁷ Even Petrarch's reversal of the words' initial sounds, from *s... v... c...* to *c... v... s...*, may be said to direct our attention back to Troy. Once again Petrarch is conflating Creusa and Dido, and the implication for Aeneas is clear. He is practised in leaving women behind. In the light of his past behaviour, to view Aeneas as the victim and Dido as the villain of *Aeneid* I and IV is as absurd and distasteful as Massinissa's dalliance with the language of captivity while the woman he claims as his wife languishes in a cell:

⁹⁷ For the metapoetic possibilities of *vestigia* in Petrarch, see Hardie, 2012: 480-2.

Veniam, nec tempore multo
Hic michi carcer erit. [*Afr.* V.670-1]

Nay, not for long
shall I lie captive here.

Petrarch rounds out the sequence of Aeneas' women in the underworld with a brief recall of Lavinia in Book VI. Turnus is still seething at the wrong that he has suffered at the Trojan's hands. He is accompanied by Helen, another reminder of Troy and another hint of how much destruction can be wrought with the violation of marital boundaries:

Tum regia virgo
Et mundo matrona nocens, tot causa dolorum,
Turnus et ipse dolens rapta de coniuge campis
Errabant; [*Afr.* VI.62-5]

There the royal maid
and matron, bane of earth and source of woes
past count, and Turnus, for his spouse's rape
resentful, roamed the plain.

This is not sympathetic to Helen, of course, but neither does it offer any justification of Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia. Aeneas had wives before and after Dido, and just as Laelius gave them "disproportionate"⁹⁸ attention in Book III, so Petrarch is determined to bring them forth from the shadows here. He goes further than Laelius, by essentially placing Dido in their company. It leaves little doubt as to his verdict on her claims of marriage.

⁹⁸ Laird, 2010: 150.

Shortly after Massinissa's self-pity has led him to picture the whole earth as a prison, his gift of poison makes its way to the real prisoner. Sophonisba's tears and terror remain constant. They are joined now, however, by a new assessment of her status. Even as she takes the goblet, she refers to Massinissa as her loving husband. She uses the same terms with which she first rejected his proposal. The ironic *care* of V.132 is expanded now, but the irony comes from the situation rather than from Sophonisba, who has lost even that control. Massinissa is referred to as *coniugio caro* at V.731, and even as she outlines his bleak future with Scipio Sophonisba addresses him in his absence as *coniunx carissime* (V.760). The dominant narrative intertext, of course, is Dido's dying curse on Aeneas:

Tu quoque finitimo semper quatiare tumultu,
 Si secum posthac, coniunx carissime, firmum
 Fedus habes: uideas abeuntes funere natos
 Intempestiuo, et fedatos cede nepotes
 Alterna. Veniens illa de gente cruentus
 Rusticus insultet generi per uulnera uestro,
 Et trahat ante rudem uinctos per menia currum, [Afr. V.759-65]

"And you, dear spouse, if you hold fast to him
 as his ally, will endlessly be vexed
 by turmoil of your neighbours; you shall see
 your children die untimely and their sons
 dishonored in the brawls of civil strife.
 And from that very stock a bloody churl
 shall rise to harry and revile your heirs
 with insolence and drag them through the walls
 in bonds before cruel chariots; aye, that Rome
 you love will crown her triumphs with your kin."

This is Sophonisba's last reference to her marital state, and it may be no accident that it echoes two images of the doom of Troy and the violent compulsion which falls to the inhabitants of a defeated city. At *Aen.* VII.377, Venus recalls her refusal to bring aid to Priam's family in the tottering city, addressing her husband Vulcan as *carissime coniunx*. But the earlier echo expands on that context. In Aeneas' memory of Troy, as he relates it to Dido, Hecuba addresses Priam for the last time. Moments before his death, and her future as a consort of the invader, she calls him *miserrime coniunx* (*Aen.* II.519). We should not place too great a burden on one repeated word and a superlative, perhaps, but whether we see Sophonisba as another Hecuba or not, it is clear that she has been portrayed as another Dido. Like the original, she leaves the world by suicide.

Petrarch's last departure from Livy's Sophonisba story is one of the most radical, and it is yet another evocation of Virgil's Dido narrative. The *Africa* follows Sophonisba into the underworld, where we see her condemned as a suicide by Minos and Rhadamanthus in terms which apply even more clearly to Dido's violent death by the sword than to Sophonisba's stoical death by poison:

"Iniecit sibi seva manum" canentia Minos
Ora movens dixit; [*Afr.* 12-3]

Minos moved his hoary beard in speech
and uttered his decree: "Madly she turned
upon herself."

But Minos and Rhadamantus are not the ultimate arbiters. The final judgement is given to Aeacus. In a voice which rings out across the Stygian marshes, he declares her innocence and decrees that she has suffered enough:

“Mortis amor causa est, lucemque coacta reliquit.
Tertia claustra sibi sunt, legibus abdita nostris:
Huc eat, immerite neque hec iniuria nostra
Accedat nunc uoce recens: satis aspera uite
Mansit apud superos fortuna et mortis acerbe.” [Afr. VI.20-4]

“She died for love; she was cast forth from light
by force; the third precinct of my domain
claims her by right. And thither let her go
and suffer at our hands no further hurt
that she has not deserved. Her lot in life
and manner of her death were harsh enough.”

Two echoes of the *Aeneid* make it clear that the view of the final arbiter in Sophonisba’s case is also applicable to Virgil’s Dido. The first places Sophonisba in precisely the same part of the underworld as Virgil has positioned Dido. The similarity of context is inescapably present – both women have arrived in the underworld after a suicide which is related to the abandonment of a lover – But Petrarch underlines the similarity with verbal allusion. To the recurrence of *mors* and *amor*, pointed out by Seagraves,⁹⁹ we might add the repetition of *relinquo*. This is Sophonisba’s place in Hades:

“**Mortis amor** causa est, lucemque coacta **reliquit**.
Tertia claustra sibi sunt, legibus abdita nostris:
Huc eat, immerite neque hec iniuria nostra
Accedat nunc uoce recens: satis aspera uite
Mansit apud superos fortuna et **mortis** acerbe.” [Afr. VI.20-4]

This is Dido’s:

⁹⁹ Seagraves, 1976: 337.

nec procul hinc partem fusi monstrantur in omnem
Lugentes campi; sic illos nomine dicunt.
hic quos durus **amor** crudeli tabe peredit
secreti celant calles et myrtea circum
silua tegit; curae non ipsa in **morte relinquunt**. [*Aen.* VI.440-3]

not far from here the Fields of Lamentation,
as they are called, stretch into the vastness.
Here those whom love has cruelly consumed
Languish concealed in sequestered myrtle glades,
Sorrow clinging to them even as they wander
These lost paths to death.

There is an even more obvious reminiscence, however, and it is one of the most clearly motivated intertextual moments in the *Africa*. The point at which Dido resolves to die is described thus in the *Aeneid*:¹⁰⁰

Tum uero infelix fatis exterrita Dido
mortem orat; taedet caeli conuexa tueri.
quo magis inceptum peragat lucemque relinquat...[*Aen.* IV.450-2]

And now Dido, in awe of her doom,
Prays for death. She is weary of looking upon
The dome of heaven, and, furthering her resolve
To leave the light...

Sophonisba would have nothing to fear from a comparison with Phoebus, Petrarch told us on her introduction to the *Africa*, *iudice sub iusto* – if the arbiter were just. In Scipio’s dream of heaven we have already been assured of the justice of posthumous reward:

¹⁰⁰ Virgil here provides another link from Dido to Mezentius in the warrior’s “lucemque relinquo” at *Aen.* X.855. See above.

Una manere potest occasus nescia uirtus.

Illa uiam facit ad superos. Hac pergite fortes... [*Afr.* II.424-5]

Virtue alone, that heeds not death, endures.

Virtue alone prepares the way to Heaven.

Assured as we are of the justice of heaven's assessments, we have to assume that Aecus is a just arbiter, and that his assessment of Sophonisba is therefore shared by the poet.

But Aecus' assessment is not just of Sophonisba. We have seen Petrarch rewrite Livy's story of Sophonisba to clarify that she was not a willing partner in the marriage to Massinissa, and we have seen the parallels that suggest a similar revisionary reading of Virgil's Dido. Now the objective judicial voice of Aecus gives its verdict on Sophonisba in terms which go to exculpate both queens. Sophonisba is innocent of blame in her own death. Her death was caused by love, and her suicide was not voluntary:

"Mortis amor causa est, **lucemque** coacta **reliquit**..." [*Afr.* VI.20]

quo magis inceptum peragat **lucemque** **relinquat**... [*Aen.* IV.452]

The echo of Dido is clear, but Petrarch has wrought a significant change. Into the Virgilian phrase, Petrarch has inserted the word "coacta." It is a classic instance of Richard Thomas' corrective reference, where "the poet provides unmistakable indications of his source, then proceeds to offer detail which contradicts or alters that source."¹⁰¹ The assertion that Sophonisba's death was caused by Massinissa is plain. Hardly less plain is the retrospective assertion that Dido's death too was caused by forces outside her control.

¹⁰¹ Thomas, 1986: 185.

We could read those forces as the gods, or her passions, or the behaviour of Aeneas. A brief look at the long nocturnal travails of Massinissa will suggest that Petrarch leans towards the charge against Aeneas. It will also suggest that Virgil should stand in the dock beside him.

5. Massinissa the Poet

We have seen Sophonisba in tears at V.105 and V.119, and we have seen the effect of those tears on her conqueror. At V.142 the baton of lachrymosity is passed to Massinissa, and he runs with it. His long nocturnal plaint furnishes tear after tear. He weeps in simile at V.181 and in reality at V.183. When he is not weeping himself, he glories in the memory of Sophonisba's misery:

gemitu sic longam concitus horam
Exegit uario: nunc ora nitentia coram
Cernere regine, nunc dulces fingere uoces
Ipse sibi, pedibus nunc oscula pressa manusque
Leniter apprensas, lacrimosaque pectora flentis,
Dulcibus undantesque oculos arsisse fauillis. [*Afr.* V.183-8]

So for some time with lamentation long
and varied he continues; now he sees
before him the bright visage of the queen,
now he calls back to mind her honeyed words,
feels once again her humble kisses pressed
upon his feet, the soft touch of her hand,
recalls the teardrops falling on her breast,
her dewy eyes yet glowing with sweet fire.

He plans to move Scipio's heart with weeping:

Propera, nec enim tibi forte timendum est
Ne tua condemnet thori iuuenilia furta
Scipio: quin iuuenem iuuenis miserabitur ultro,
Viderit et lacrimas, ueniam prestabit amori. [*Afr.* V.236-9]

So haste
and have no fear lest Scipio condemn
your plan of marriage, for he is too young
and will take pity on another's youth.
Seeing your tears, assuredly he'll grant
full pardon to your passion.

In the event, Scipio is moved only to embarrassment at his comrade's lapse. Massinissa weeps like melting snow (V.438-42), pauses long enough to ask permission to kill Sophonisba, and sets off again six lines later.

Singultibus istas
Liquit inexpletas rauco sub murmure uoces,
Inque tabernaculum sese intulit, ora genasque
Mestus, et infestis tundens sua pectora palmis. [*Afr.* V.448-51]

Then, breaking off
his speech with raucous sobs and murmurs, he
retired into his tent, there to remain
with sombre mien, while with self-hurtful hands
he beat his breast.

All of this is designed to remind us of Dido in Book IV of the *Aeneid*. This time the woman bides in silence while the man weeps and laments and suffers the pangs of love. To ensure that so daring a reversal does not escape our attention, Petrarch

frames the sequence with some open verbal reminiscences of Virgil. This is Massinissa's initial response to Sophonisba:

Ilicet ergo

Vulnus inardescens totis errare medullis
Ceperat: estiuo glacies ceu lenta sub estu,
Cera uel ardenti facilis uicina camino,
Liquitur ille tuens, captiua captus ab hoste,
Victaque uictorem potuit domuisse superbum. [*Afr.* V.69-74]

Massinissa felt

a flame consume his marrows, even as ice
melts in the heat of summer or as wax
dissolves in the proximity of fire,
so as he looked he melted, captive prey
of captive foe, a haughty conqueror
subdued by conquered victim.

Massinissa's *vulnus* at V.70 has nothing to distinguish it from Dido's wound, which Virgil launches into prominence with the image of the wounded deer in at the opening of Book IV and then reverts to some sixty lines later in the image of the queen as a wounded deer. First the opening:

At regina graui iamdudum saucia cura
uulnus alit uenis et caeco carpitur igni. [*Aen.* IV.1-2]

But the Queen, long sick with love,
Nurses her heart's deep wound
With her pounding blood, and dark flames
Lick at her soul.

Then the recurrence:

est mollis flamma medullas
interea et tacitum uiuit sub pectore uulnus. [*Aen.* IV.66-7]

Meanwhile, the flame
Eats her soft marrow, and the wound lives,
Silent beneath her breast.

Massinissa *inardescens* recalls both the *igni* of *Aen.* IV.2 and the *flamma* of IV.68. It also evokes Dido's *ardet* later in the same book:

ardet amans Dido traxitque per ossa furorem. [*Aen.* IV.101]

Dido burning with love, her very bones enflamed.

Petrarch's *medullis* points us to Virgil's *medullas* in the image of the wounded deer, an allusion underlined slyly by a pun on *cera* and *cerva*, and more openly by *liquit* / *liquitur* and several other verbal recurrences. If we highlight the words or images which glance back at Virgil's image of the deer, we can see how much work Petrarch has done to enforce the connection in the mind of an alert reader. This is Dido:

est mollis flamma medullas
interea et tacitum uiuit sub pectore uulnus.
uritur infelix Dido totaque uagatur
urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerua sagitta,
quam procul incautam nemora inter Cresia fixit 70
pastor agens telis liquitque uolatile ferrum
nescius: illa fuga siluas saltusque peragrat
Dictaeos; haeret lateri letalis harundo. [*Aen.* IV.66-73]

Meanwhile, the flame
Eats her soft marrow, and the wound lives,
Silent beneath her breast. Dido is burning.
She wanders all through the city in her misery,
Raving mad, like a doe pierced by an arrow
Deep in the woods of Crete. She is unwary,
And the arrow, shot by a shepherd who has no idea
Where it has landed, finds the animal,
And as she runs through all the Dictaeon forest
The lethal shaft clings to her flank.

This is Massinissa:

Illicet ergo

Vulnus inardescens totis errare medullis

Ceperat: estiuo glacies ceu lenta sub estu,

Cera uel **ardenti** facilis uicina camino,

Liquitur ille tuens, captiua captus ab hoste,

Victaque uictorem potuit domuisse superbum. [*Afr.* V.69 -74]

Massinissa felt

a flame consume his marrows, even as ice
dissolves in the proximity of fire,
so as he looked he melted, captive prey
of captive foe, a haughty conqueror
subdued by conquered victim.

If we look again at Petrarch's V.70, we can see the astounding allusive burden these five words shoulder. The line has already sent us three times to the opening image of *Aeneid* IV. Now we see that every word in the line is a signpost to the image of Dido as a wounded deer:

Massinissa

vulnus
inardescens
totis
errare
medullis

Dido

vulnus
flamma, uritur
tota
vagatur, peragrat
medullas

Dido's *uritur* here at IV.68 also recurs in the same position with Massinissa later in the same book, in another explicitly Didonian passage:

Voluitur inde thoro: quoniam sub pectore pernox
Seuit amor lacerantque truces precordia cure,
Uritur; inuigilant meror, metus, ira furorque. [*Afr.* V.527-9]

Thus on his sleepless couch he turned and writhed
through the long night, and passion racked his breast
and fierce desire gnawed at his heart, and grief
and wrath and madness gave him no repose.

Sleeplessness, the flames of love, *furor* mixed with *metus*: as Martellotti points out, Petrarch presents in the sufferings of Massinissa a clear picture of the stricken Dido.¹⁰² Typically, though, Petrarch complicates the picture with a telling change. Dido is aflame with a passion that can never die, coming as it does from the venomous dart of Amor, and will end only with her own consumption by fire. For all Massinissa's sleepless agonising, his passion is deflected almost as soon as it is consummated. It will end not in his death, but in the death of his lover. This inconstancy is suggested by the images which follow immediately on the notion of Massinissa aflame. Dido's molten flame will outlive her. Massinissa's is weakened,

¹⁰² "Certo è che nel descrivere il dolore di Massinissa, il P. ebbe presente Didone." Neri et al, 1950: 668-9.

as soon as it arises, into melting ice and wax. Ice suggests a coldness which calls his display of passion into question, and the accusation of insincerity is strengthened by the etymological link of *cera* to *sincerus*.¹⁰³ The images of fire and water will recur in the wedding torch at V.247-8.

Suggestions of inconstancy in love turn us ineluctably towards Aeneas, but in truth he has never been far from the scene. Petrarch has presented Massinissa in love as a Dido figure in the intensity of his emotions, but hints of the transience of his feelings are present throughout. Braided into the Didonian strand of Massinissa's amorous flailings is another strand, almost equally vivid, in which Massinissa is presented as Aeneas. It is again the Aeneas of the allegorical storm, overmastered by emotion and terrified of the future.

Massinissa has withdrawn to the empty citadel. Petrarch assumes a neutral narrative voice to link once again the image of a storm-tossed sailor to the loss of emotional control. The travails of love are maritime in nature:

Quis queat instabiles animorum noscere fluctus,
Quos ferus urget amor? Non illos turbidus equet
Euripus, non Scilla fremens, non dira Caribdis. [*Afr.* V.154-6]

Ah, who can comprehend the ebb and flow
of tides lashed by the Tempest blasts of Love?
Nay, turbulent Euripus may not vie
with such great storms, nor roaring Scylla nor
savage Charybdis.

This is another instance of the same link that Petrarch makes in his letter to Federico Arezzo between the turbulence of the wind-lashed ocean and the human

¹⁰³ The etymology, accurate or not, goes back at least as far as Donatus. See Ross, 1975: 258, n. 62.

character under assault from ungovernable passions. The victim there was Aeneas, of course, and it is a very Aenean Massinissa who presents himself as the specific instance of Petrarch's general point:

Ceu uictus in alto

Nauita, qui mestus scopulos Sirtesque uadosas
Ante oculos uidet ipse suos, nec flectere proram
Arte ualens solita, uentoque impulsus et undis,
Omnia desperans, Fortune mandat inique
Et clauum et remos et uela fluentia nimbo,
Ac lacrimans in puppe sedet. [*Afr.* V.175-81]

And, as a pilot, lost

on the deep main, may see before his prow,
up-looming, great gaunt rocks or shallow sands,
and yet, for all his skill, be powerless
to veer away, so falls into despair
and, yielding to capricious chance his ship,
the oars, the rain-soaked canvases and all,
sits helplessly lamenting in the stern,
the prey of wind and wave.

Several key elements of the Aenean storm are here: the waves pulling back to reveal the sandy sea floor, the sailor protagonist succumbing to despair. If we discard as hardly avoidable the mention of wind and waves and the scattered oars and sails, we still have some textual reminiscence to link this metaphorical storm to the actual storm on *Aeneid* I. This is Massinissa's despair, rooted in his loss of emotional control:

Ceu uictus in alto

Nauita, qui mestus scopulos **Sirtesque uadosas**
Ante oculos uidet **ipse** suos, nec flectere proram

Arte ualens solita, uentoque impulsus et undis,
Omnia desperans, Fortune mandat inique
Et clauum et remos et uela fluentia nimbo,
Ac lacrimans **in puppe** sedet: [*Afr.* V.175-81]

And here is the despair of Aeneas amid the pounding waves and winds which
Petrarch has encouraged us to read as emblematic of uncontrolled emotion:

tris **Eurus ab alto**
in brevia et **Syrtis** urget, miserabile visu,
Unam, quae Lycios fidumque uehebat Oronten,
inluditque **vadis** atque aggere cingit harenae.
ipsius ante oculos ingens a vertice pontus
in puppim ferit... [*Aen.* I.110-15]

The East Wind pushed another three ships
Into the shallows and ground them onto
The Syrtes' shoals, bedding them down
In pockets of sand. Another ship,
Which carried the Lycians and trusted Orontes,
Sank before Aeneas' own eyes. A wall of water
Crashed onto the deck...

Petrarch first portrays Sophonisba and Massinissa as a kind of Dido and Aeneas, and then shows Massinissa besieged by ungovernable desire. Petrarch seems to be filling a gap in the narrative of the *Aeneid*, and suggesting again that the storm which drove him to Carthage was more to do with a lack of emotional control than an accident of the weather. In the *Aeneid*'s Dido narrative we hear remarkably little of how *Aeneas* feels. Here we are treated to a voluminous account of the heartsick Massinissa. Fluent as it is about his feelings, however, Book V is also about Massinissa's power to reorder the facts about Sophonisba. Her long silence is as

eloquent of her powerlessness as his lachrymose threnody is of his emotional incontinence.

In picturing Massinissa rewriting the events of the first portion of the book, Petrarch has also offered a suggestion of how the libel on Dido may have arisen, and indicated where the blame may lie. In Book III the Numidian minstrel warned Laelius and us against poets with a taste for fiction. In the story of Sophonisba, Petrarch shows us how such poetic fiction can supplant the truth. The central section of Book V shows Massinissa reconfiguring as a love affair what we have already seen fall far short of mutual passion. This is a mirror of what Virgil has done to Dido, and Petrarch points up the comparison by presenting Massinissa now in the figure of a sleepless Roman love poet:

At misero multum diuersa fluebat amanti
Nox ea cum lacrimis. [...]
Voluitur inde thoro: quoniam sub pectore pernox
Seuit amor lacerantque truces precordia cure,
Uritur; inuigilant meror, metus, ira furorque. [V.510-11, 527-9]

But for the hapless lover those dark hours
were drawn out in another, sadder style. [...]
Thus on his sleepless couch he turned and writhed
through the long night, and passion racked his breast
and fierce desire gnawed at his heart, and grief
and wrath and madness gave him no repose.

Sleeplessness, like the imagery of wounding we have already seen Massinissa share with Dido, is not unusual in the context of Latin love poetry. Ruth Rothaus Caston outlines some of the major symptoms of love in Lucretius and in the elegiac poets:

First, the lover's pain is like a sore, *ulcus*, or a wound or blow, *vulnus, ictus*. His desire is unquenchable and is compared to an undying flame or thirst. He experiences two contrasting moods, one passive and miserable, and characterized by terms like *cura, miser, dolor, vinctus*. The second is more active and wild, and is denoted by *insania, demens, rabies* and *furor*. When under the influence of the second of these two moods, the lover is also described as "lost," literally "wandering" (*errans* or *vagans*).¹⁰⁴

It is a neat encapsulation of the emotional movement of Book V. The feelings which we see Dido suffer in *Aeneid* IV are transferred to Massinissa, the conqueror of the *Africa's* Dido figure. For however clearly Massinissa's feelings recapitulate the vocabulary of the elegiac lover, in the epic context of the *Africa* is impossible not to think of Dido as we see her at the opening of *Aeneid* IV:

At regina graui iam dudum saucia cura
uulnus alit uenis et caeco carpitur igni. [*Aen.* IV.1-2]

But the queen, long sick with love,
Nurses her deep heart's wound
With her pounding blood, and dark flames
Lick at her soul.

Colin Hamilton identifies "the elegiac topos of the sleepless lover" as a primary constituent of Virgil's portrayal of the wakeful Dido in *Aeneid* IV.¹⁰⁵ Petrarch's vernacular love poetry shows his comfort with elegiac topoi, of course,¹⁰⁶ but there may be another factor at work in his depiction of Massinissa here. As Francis Cairns points out, the inclusion of elements of erotic elegy in the *Aeneid* was part of Virgil's project for a totalising epic:

¹⁰⁴ Caston, 2006: 281.

¹⁰⁵ Hamilton, 1993: 249. For similarities between Dido and the elegiac lover, see also Allison, 1980 and especially Cairns, 1989: 146-9.

¹⁰⁶ See Wilkins, 1917: 193-6, Stuart, 1917: 3, 13-14.

His overall aim in the *Aeneid* was to be the Roman Homer and here, as everywhere, he was engaged in an *aemulatio* of Homer. Ancient scholarship believed that Homer had invented and generated all the literary forms... Virgil was trying to reabsorb into his epic all the diverse forms of literature which had originated from the Homeric epics.¹⁰⁷

In covering the same ground, Petrarch may have been asserting for his epic a claim to the same breadth of scope as Virgil's.

The elegiac beloved, of course, is often either married to or romantically involved with someone other than the poet.¹⁰⁸ When last we see Sophonisba, she has lent retrospective assent to the bigamous marriage with Massinissa, a marriage which she was powerless to reject. The power of poetry to reconfigure the past is shown in parallel with the power of conquest to impose its reading of events on the defeated. Like Virgil's travesty of Dido, Massinissa's portrait of Sophonisba has lent eloquence to a lie.

At the beginning of her encounter with Massinissa, Sophonisba expressed three fears: that she would be imprisoned, that she would be killed, and that she would be compelled into slavery. Massinissa, in the guise of a lover, has presented her with all three. Even as she curses him, however, she refers to him as her husband. Her irony, if it is irony, can furnish no escape. The real woman is lost: Massinissa's fictional Sophonisba, like Virgil's fictional Dido, has won the day.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Cairns, 1989: 150.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Propertius III.12.

¹⁰⁹ Massinissa tells his side of the story again in *Triumphus Cupidinis* II.1-93. Sophonisba is unreconciled. See Waller, 1980: 136ff.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Virgil's travesties of truth have been most clearly exposed in Petrarch's conjuration of another Dido, but for Petrarch's ideal reader, sensitised by long study to even the most glancing of allusions, they are present whenever the *Africa* touches on the matter of the *Aeneid*. We have seen the *Aeneid* invoked directly by the Numidian minstrel, and heard Laelius respond with a brief history of a distinctly non-Virgilian Aeneas. We have been referred back to the events of the *Iliad*, where Homer's pre-Virgilian Aeneas gave early evidence of his flaws. We have traced the contours of an increasingly unheroic Aeneas as they took shape in the works of Dictys and Dares, works which stood for Petrarch's contemporaries as higher historical authorities even than Homer, and seen how the Christian critique of Aeneas and his poet of record might alert a reader of the *Africa* to the presence of a quiet but insistent anti-Virgilian voice.

But Virgil is not the only poet in the *Africa*. Petrarch speaks, of course, but so do Ennius, Homer and the court bard of Syphax. They are all concerned with the power of poetry to tell the truth, and the moral purpose for which that power should be employed. T.K. Seung summarises the poetics of Petrarch's Ennius:

The function of the poetic imagination, then, is to transmute the virtuous deeds of history-making heroes into eternal paradigms so that these virtuous deeds can stand as the source of perpetual inspiration.¹

The poetic fictions the *Africa* introduces are not all as reprehensible as Virgil's historical libel on Dido, which we have seen drive even Petrarch at his most pro-

¹ Seung, 1976: 154.

Virgilian into silence. There are also the legitimate fictions, the poetry of prophesy and hope.

The *Africa* begins in a dream. Scipio, vouchsafed a sleeping vision of the afterlife, learns the circumstance's of his father's and his uncle's death, hears of the glory of Rome's past and its coming degradation, and discovers the nature of glory. His body will lie unfeted; his epitaph will fade:

... transibunt tempora, corpus
Hoc cadet et cedent indigno membra sepulcro;
Mox ruet et bustum, titulusque in marmore sectus
Occidet: hinc mortem patieris, nate, secundam.
Clara quidem libris felicibus insita uiuet
Fama diu, tamen ipsa suas passura tenebras.
Ipsa tuas laudes etas uentura loquetur:
Immemor ipsa eadem, seu tempore fessa, tacebit
Immemoresque dabit post secula longa nepotes. [*Afr.* II.428-36]

... the years will pass, your mortal form decay;
your limbs will lie in an unworthy tomb
which in its turn will crumble, while your name
fades from the sculptured marble. Thus you'll know
a second death. Though honours registered
on worthy scrolls have long and lustrous life,
yet they too in the end are likewise doomed
to fade away. Your children's age, mayhap,
will venerate your name and your renown,
but later generations will bring forth
forgetful progeny.

It is a thorough oblivion. The physical evidence of his life and death will go first: the body, the tomb, the marble letters. The records of his public acclaim will follow. His praises will finally fade even from the unrecorded speech of the multitude.

Petrarch's own "lifelong anxiety of temporality"² could hardly be more vividly expressed.

But there seems to be answer to Petrarch's fears, as there will be to Scipio's:

The discovery of the ancient world imposed enormous anxiety on the humanist Renaissance, but its living poetry represents a series of victories over anxiety, based upon a courage that confronts the model without neurotic paralysis and uses the anxiety to discover selfhood.³

Poetry, then, will save both Petrarch and Scipio:

Cernere iam uideor genitum post secula multa
Finibus Etruscis iuuenem qui gesta renarret,
Nate, tua et nobis ueniat uelut Ennius alter. [*Afr.* II.440-2]

Far down the centuries to come I see
a youth, Etrurian born, who will narrate
your splendid story; he shall be, my son,
for our renown, a second Ennius.

Petrarch was not a modest man, and an epic poem is not a modest undertaking. We can doubt whether any poet has ever set out to write the second-greatest epic in the language. Whether Petrarch dreamed of surpassing the ancients we cannot know, but we can guess that he wanted at least to equal them.⁴ Petrarch's self-inscription into the *Africa*, which T.K. Seung found merely "strange," has been

² Greene, 1982: 125. See Chapter 2.

³ Greene, 1982: 31.

⁴ He laments to a fellow poet and to Robert of Naples that living writers are judged more harshly than the classics. See *Fam* I.2, *Fam* IV.7.

viewed in a dim light.⁵ Nicholas Mann is surely not the first to feel outraged at the poet's temerity, but few can have expressed it so pungently:

Had we no other proof of Petrarch's self-consciousness, and of the way in which he cast himself as his own hero, this remarkably arrogant conclusion to his boldest and ironically most incomplete literary enterprise would surely provide it. We are reminded once again of the dwarf who is determined to see further than the giants on whose shoulders he is perched. Petrarch's imitation of antiquity is evidently intended to transcend it.⁶

Hélène Vonner, for whom the poem is "a self-glorification of the Petrarchan ego,"⁷ has a lively awareness of the egotism that was not just native to Petrarch but inherent in the very conception of the *Africa*:

Proiettandosi in un'impresa poetica così ambiziosa, desiderava giocare il ruolo del poeta antico celebrando la gloria dell'eroe, con l'intento di conquistare per se stesso una fama eterna. Perché non avrebbe potuto incarnare il nuovo Omero della sua epoca o il nuovo Virgilio? Perché non sarebbe potuto diventare il poeta che avrebbe trasmesso alla posterità la Storia e le glorie del passato?⁸

Undertaking so ambitious a poetic project, he wanted to play the role of the ancient poet celebrating the glory of the hero, with the aim of securing his own everlasting fame. Why could not be the new Homer of his age or the new Virgil? Why could he not become the poet who would transmit to posterity the history and the glories of the past?

⁵ "Thus the *Africa* is in part a poem about the poet writing the poem. This practice is to be condemned." Bishop, 1963: 179. A more thoughtful consideration can be found at Hardie, 1993b: 296-7.

⁶ Mann, 1984: 106-7.

⁷ For the "autocelebrazione dell'ego petrarchesco," see Vonner, 2006: 176.

⁸ Vonner, 2006: 176.

But Virgil is not the poet who stands to be reincarnated, as his thorough erasure from the *Africa* suggests. Stephen Murphy sees a lacuna in Book IX which might have opened a space for Virgil and others:

There is a lacuna in the text which precedes the introduction of Petrarca; it might have contained a survey of great poets after Ennius, a survey which would culminate in the ever-modest Petrarca.⁹

Proposing explanations for possible lacunae may be a step too far into the wilderness, but it will do no harm to note in passing the dilemma in which such a plan would have placed Petrarch. To exclude Virgil from a survey of the great poets of the world would have been almost unthinkable. Such a direct challenge would have exposed him to charges of envy far surpassing his perceived resentment of Dante.¹⁰ But to include Virgil would have destroyed the pattern of subtle exclusion which we have seen throughout the rest of the poem. In such circumstances a lacuna might present itself as the least of three evils.

Ennius, in contrast to Virgil, is plentifully present. He is linked with Petrarch as a successor in the opening dream, and linked with him again in the same way in the Homeric dream of the final book. The characterisation of Petrarch as a new Ennius is thus given two positions of prominence in a frame for the narrative action, and functions as a guarantor of the structural unity of the poem.¹¹

The link with Ennius, then, is neither afterthought nor ornamentation. Sara Sturm-Maddox sees it active as early as Petrarch's coronation in 1341:

⁹ Murphy, 1991: 94.

¹⁰ See below.

¹¹ For Ennius and the structural unity of the ninth book, see Hardie, 2007: 130. Also Hardie, 1993b: 298-9.

His choice of venue in which to receive the crown would thus be unlike either that of Mussato or that of Dante, but similar to that of Scipio and Ennius...¹²

The link is reinforced in the *Africa* itself, when Petrarch ranges outside Livy's account of Scipio's triumph to include Ennius as a concelebrant:

Iipse coronatus lauro frondente per urbem
Letus iit totam Tarpeia rupe reuersus.
Ennius ad dextram uictoris, tempora fronde
Substringens parili, studiorum almeque Poesis
Egit honoratum sub tanto auctore triumphum.
Post alii atque alii studio certante secuti. [*Afr.* IX.398-403]

Wearing his crown of laurel, Scipio
comes down again from the Tarpeian rock
and traverses once more the joyous town.
Upon the right hand of so great a guide
stands Ennius, his temples also girt
with like triumphal crown, to celebrate
great learning and sustaining poesy.

The parallel with Petrarch and Robert of Naples could not be more insistent.¹³

This is the triumph of poetry that Petrarch himself will celebrate at his laureation in 1341, the public ceremony following on his *viva voce* on the nature of poetry with King Robert of Naples.¹⁴

Petrarch's immediate source for Ennius' presence at the triumph is probably Claudian,¹⁵ but Philip Hardie believes that the *Africa's* image of Ennius triumphant

¹² Sturm-Maddox, 2009: 297.

¹³ For Robert as Scipio see Bernardo, 1962: 162; Suerbaum, 1972: 306, n. 1. For Robert as the Augustus to Petrarch's Virgil, see Smarr, 1982: 134-5.

¹⁴ Hardie, 2007: 130.

¹⁵ Hardie, 2007: 137.

may be an intuitive response to something dimly present in the fragmentary remains of Ennius' verse:

Does Petrarch, in his reconstruction of antiquity, intuit the lost content of Ennius' *Annals* when he gives us the two snapshots of Ennius as a companion to the general, and Ennius as *poeta laureatus et triumphans*?¹⁶

Whether it came to Petrarch by intuition or research, it is certainly not a flight of poetic fancy. He mentions it again in the *De Viris*:

Ante omnes Ennium poetam carum habuit, quem bellis omnibus comitem suarumque testem rerum lateri semper habuit herentem. Denique triumphi die ... in Capitolium ascendens coronatus victor, laureatum secum illum retulit, alta sors humilis poete... [*Vita. Scip.* XI.13-14]

Above all others [Scipio] loved the poet Ennius, who clung to his side as a companion in all his wars and a witness of all his deeds. On the day of his triumph, indeed, as he ascended the Capitol crowned as conqueror, he brought Ennius with him wreathed in laurel – a high fate for a humble poet.

Humility came no more naturally to Ennius than it did to his successor, however. Petrarch hardly needed a classical model for vibrant self-belief, but if he felt inclined to be shy about proposing himself as a reincarnated Ennius, then Ennius himself will have offered a precedent:

Ennius ... presented himself, in the most direct way imaginable, as the reincarnation, the living replacement, of the greatest Greek poet of all time.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hardie, 2007: 131. See also Hardie, 1993b: 295, where "Petrarch does what he can with the testimonia and fragments, and that something is not a little."

¹⁷ Conte, 1994: 80.

As Sergio Casali points out, this invocation of Homer is not a matter of vague alignment with an elegant precursor. There is more at stake than style:

By claiming to be the *alter Homerus* Ennius claims for himself the highest possible authority.¹⁸

Casali means not just poetic status, but credibility as a teller of historical truth, the kind of credibility so dear to Petrarch.

The tradition of Ennius as an *alter Homerus* is strongly evoked both in Petrarch's self-description (through Scipio's unimpeachably prophetic father) as an *Ennius alter* and in the dream of Homer that Ennius himself recounts.¹⁹ Murphy shows that Petrarch was well aware both of the tradition of Homeric resurrection in Ennius and of the fact that the *Annales* began with a vision of Homer.²⁰ Even more significantly for the immediate project of Petrarchan self-positioning within the epic canon is the tradition that Ennius too would be reborn:

Ennius' survival after death is not simply in his poetry, which lives on when spoken. The breath of his *psyche* too will enter into a series of poets.²¹

The topic is addressed directly in the only fragment of Homer's address to Ennius that Petrarch can have seen:²² *memini me fieri pavum* ("I remember that I was becoming a peacock"). Murphy points out that the peacock was accepted in antiquity as "a symbol of immortality."²³

¹⁸ Casali, 2007: 107.

¹⁹ For Ennius as *alter Homerus* see Horace, *Ep.* II.1.50.

²⁰ Murphy, 1991: 94-5.

²¹ Murphy, 1991: 97.

²² Murphy, 1991: 95. The reference is to *Enn. Ann.* 11 Sk.; see also *Ann.* 3 Sk. *uisus Homerus adesse poeta* (with Skutsch ad locc.), and fr. 35 p. 31 Courtney (= *uar.* 35 Vahlen) on Ennius' dream (*Cic. Lucull.* 51).

²³ Murphy, 1991: 95. On the peacock in Ennius as a symbol of immortality, see also Skutsch, 1968: 153-4.

Using Ennius to represent the power of poetic immortality, however, is hardly the sunniest outlook. Petrarch knows that the works of Ennius have all but disappeared. The elder Scipio, viewing the matter under the aspect of eternity, knows that Petrarch's own works will follow:

Iam sua mors libris aderit; mortalia namque
Esse decet quecumque labor mortalis inani
Edidit ingenio. [*Afr.* II.464-6]

Books too soon die,
for what with futile art a mortal makes
is also mortal.

Yet poetry must continue, and it must do what it can to apportion glory correctly for as long as it lasts. The opening gesture of the *Africa* is the conferral of a name on its hero:

Et michi conspicuum meritis belloque tremendum,
Musa, uirum referes, Italis cui fracta sub armis
Nobilis eternum prius attulit Africa nomen. [*Afr.* I.1-3]

Muse you will tell me of the man, renowned
for his great deeds, redoubtable in war,
on whom first noble Africa, subdued
by Roman arms, bestowed a lasting name.

If the hero's late father is to be believed, *eternum* is an overestimate. Even poetry fades. Or is Petrarch making a more modest suggestion? Just as he, an *alter Ennius*, has renovated the work of Scipio's first chronicler, may some future poet do the same for Petrarch? When all that exists of the *Africa* is a few scattered lines, will the world bring forth an *alter Petrarca*? This view would see poetry as a never-

ending battle against the forces of oblivion, a constant renovation of glory. When one poet falls, another rises to take his place: *et michi*, the very opening words of the poem, may be an acknowledgement that the task did not begin with Petrarch. (Perhaps, Festa says, he is thinking of Ennius.)²⁴

When Petrarch thought of Ennius, however, it was not always in terms of the highest admiration, as Werner Suerbaum points out:

Petrarca selber hat sich nicht nur innerhalb der *Africa*, sondern auch in anderen Schriften von der kuenstlerischen Leistung des Ennius distanziert, wobei leitmotivisch der rudis-Begriff vorzukommen pflegt.²⁵

Petrarch kept himself at a distance from the artistic performance of Ennius, not only within the *Africa* but also in other writings, in which his “rusticity” occurs as a leitmotif.

The criticism of Ennius’ unpolished style was not aimless. Petrarch himself claimed it as part of the motive behind the writing of the *Africa*. It is not just that the fragmentary survival of Ennius work on Scipio demands supplementation. The work itself was inadequate in the first place:

Sed de hoc tam laudato iuvene nemo canit; quod ideo dictum est quoniam etsi omnis historia laudibus et rebus eius plena sit, et Ennium de eo multa scripsisse non sit dubium “rudi et impolito” ut Valerius ait, “stilo,” cultior tamen de illius rebus liber metricus non apparet. De hoc igitur utcunque canere institui, quia scilicet de eo liber meus est qui inscribitur *Africa*. [*Fam.* X.4.34]

Yet no-one is celebrating this young man, so highly praised. This I say because, while every history may be filled with his praises and his achievements and while Ennius undoubtedly wrote a great deal about him in a “rough and unpolished form” as Valerius says, there still exists no work on his accomplishments written in

²⁴ Festa, 1926a: 5, n. 1: “O pure pensa a Ennio?” See also Foster, 1979: 280; Hardie, 1993b: 298.

²⁵ Suerbaum, 1972: 339.

a sufficiently cultivated meter. I therefore undertook to sing about him in some fashion, and thus my book the *Africa* indeed deals with him.

Even the fragments of Ennius to which Petrarch had access were not gleefully hoarded and pored over. They were bracketed rather with the work of several writers far from Petrarch's heart, and viewed as a chore which did not have to be tackled twice:²⁶

Legi semel apud Ennium, apud Plautum, apud Felicem Capellam, apud Apuleium, et legi raptim, propere, nullam nisi ut alienis in finibus moram trahens.

[*Fam.* XXII.2,11]

Only once have I read Ennius, Plautus, Felix Capella, and Apuleius, and then it was done hastily and quickly, brooking no delay except as one would in unknown territory.

We might expect such a long-standing admirer of Scipio to regret the loss of an ancient work devoted to him,²⁷ but de Nolhac sees little sorrow in Petrarch at the loss of the *Scipio*.²⁸ The functions as another piece of ground-clearance, and one which may enrich even further our reading of the sacred grove Petrarch hoped to inherit:²⁹

Le vieil Ennius était, à ses yeux, le seul poète qui eût chanté Scipion; il regrettait volontiers en paroles que son héros favori eût été si mal partagé, mais non sans une joie secrète que le champ lui eût été laissé libre pour traiter ce grand et cher sujet: *Vir Homero Virgilioque precone dignior quam Ennio!*³⁰

²⁶ Jonathan Foster can only find one passage in the *Africa* in which resemblances to Ennius rise above a "general ambience." For textual echoes in *Africa* VI.345-52 of Ennius 194-201 See Foster, 1979: 281. For a thorough examination of Ennian presences in the *Africa*, see Suerbaum, 1972.

²⁷ This may not have been an epic. See Gruen, 1996: 109, n. 142; Rossi and Breed, 2006: 402.

²⁸ For which, see Foster, 1979: 281.

²⁹ See Chapter 2.

³⁰ Nolhac, 1907a: 193-4. He is quoting an unedited fragment of the *De Viris*.

The old Ennius was, in his eyes, the only poet who had sung Scipio he regretted his words gladly favorite hero would have been so badly divided, but not without a secret joy that the field would have been left free to deal with the large and dear topic: "A warrior worthy of Homer and Virgil as a herald rather than Ennius!"

However free the field, and however brilliantly occupied by Petrarch, the future of the *Africa* was uncertain. Petrarch ends his poem on the hope that it will live on, but this hope seems to elide gradually into the possibility not that the poem itself will survive intact, but that new poets will come to join the battle-line against the forces of Lethean forgetfulness, as he once did for Ennius:

At tibi fortassis, si – quod mens sperat et optat –
Es post me uictura diu, meliora supersunt
Secula: non omnes ueniet Letheus in annos
Iste sopor! Poterunt discussis forte tenebris
Ad purum priscumque iubar remeare nepotes.
Tunc Elicona noua reurentem stirpe uidebis,
Tunc lauros frondere sacras; tunc alta resurgent
Ingenia atque animi dociles, quibus ardor honesti
Pyeridum studii ueterem geminabit amorem. [*Afr.* IX.453-61]

But if you, as is my wish
and ardent hope, shall live on after me,
a more propitious age will come again:
this Lethean stupor surely can't endure
forever. Our posterity, perchance,
when the dark clouds are lifted, may enjoy
once more the radiance the ancients knew.
Then shall you see on Helicon's green slope
new growth arise, the sacred laurel bear
new leaves, and talents will spring up renewed,
and gentle spirits in whose hearts the zeal

for learning will be joined with the old love
for all the Muses will come forth again.

Earlier we have seen the suggestion that the wheel of poetic succession might stop with Petrarch.³¹ Here we have a hint that others will take up the baton. If these new poets do arise, the Muses whom they love will include Clio as well as Calliope. There have been three references to Virgil in the *Africa*, even if their periphrasis has ensured that the poem will not advance the commemoration of his *eternum nomen*. In the first, he is an example with Statius and Lucan of the writer of historical epic:

Troiamque adeo canit ille ruentem,
Ille refert Thebas iuuenemque occultat Achillem,
Ille autem Emathiam Romanis ossibus implet. [*Afr.* I.50-3]

Lo, of fallen Troy one sings,
a second tells the tale of Thebes and hides
the young Achilles, while with Roman bones
another fills up the Emathian fields.

In the second he receives harsh words, in advance, for sporting with the fair name of Dido. The third is even more concerned with names. Ennius, bidden by Scipio to beguile a long night's sailing with conversation, is expounding the proper role of a poet. The topic of poetic mendacity, which underpins the whole Sophonisba episode, is here made explicit:

Qui fingit quodcumque refert, non ille poete
Nomine censendus, nec uatis honore, sed uno
Nomine mendacis. [*Afr.* IX.103-5]

³¹ For the *Africa* itself as a bulwark against the erosions of time, see Hardie, 2012: 455-6.

One who invents what he relates should not
be honored by the title of a poet
nor deemed a seer, but rather called a liar.

Petrarch was careful about names. Kevin Brownlee examines the strategies he employs to exclude Dante from the line of succession of epic poets. Naming and refusal to name figure largely:

The Petrarchan Dante is only named, only acknowledged explicitly, in the context of vernacular lyric love poetry, which serves to define, to limit, his identity and authority within the overall context of Petrarch's *oeuvre*... Petrarch excludes explicit mention of Dante as an authorizing presence or model in the narrative epic category.³²

The charge takes on a more personal aspect for Henry Reeve, as it did for some of Petrarch's contemporaries, including the friend to whom he addressed so many of his thoughts on poetry. Petrarch read Dante, but spoke little of him:

It is certain that he never did justice to his greater countryman. For a long time he refused to read his poem, lest it should affect his own style. He would not write his name.³³

This aspect of Petrarch's reluctance is seen to unintentionally comic effect in a lengthy letter to Boccaccio, in which he defends himself against accusations of envy of the older poet. It was evidently a subject on which Petrarch was felt to be touchy:

Multa sunt in literis tuis haudquaquam responsionis egentia, ut que singula nuper viva voce transegimus. Duo ex omnibus non pretereunda seposui; ad hec breviter

³² Brownlee, 2005: 471.

³³ Reeve, 1838: 143.

que se obtulerint, dicam. Primum ergo te michi excusas, idque non otiose, quod in conterranei nostri – popularis quidem quod ad stilum attinet, quod ad rem haud dubie nobilis poete – laudibus multus fuisse videare; atque ita te purgas quasi ego vel illius vel cuiusquam laudes mee laudis detrimentum putem. [*Fam.* XXI.15.1]

There are many things in your letter needing no reply whatsoever, since we recently dealt with them in person. But I have chosen two that must not go unnoticed, and shall briefly give my thoughts on them. In the first place, you ask pardon, somewhat heatedly, for seeming to praise unduly a fellow countryman of ours who is popular for his poetic style but no doubt noble for his theme; and you beg pardon for this as though I believe that praises for him or anyone else would detract from my personal glory.

Even in this long defence, Petrarch never once mentions Dante by name.

The importance of naming in the *Africa* is established in its opening lines. It could hardly be seen more clearly than in the repetition of the word *nomine* at the opening of two consecutive lines in the *Africa*'s final reference to Virgil. The section from which the reference comes is itself given prominence by its digressive length, by its position at the head of the final book and by its unmistakably programmatic intent.

Simone Marchesi calls the whole passage a “jab aimed more at the inventive fictions of [Petrarch’s] immediate past than at the classical examples of poetic vatic excess,”³⁴ But is the case that simple? Rather than a burst of uncharacteristic modesty, surely Petrarch is justifying the exclusion of Virgil’s name from his poem, and the exclusion of Virgil himself from Petrarch’s personal canon of epic.³⁵ In this final book, as we have seen, Homer himself is recruited to trace the canonical line of epic from Homer through Ennius to Petrarch. All three are named.

³⁴ Kirkham and Maggi, 2009: 119.

³⁵ For Virgil’s habit of “preferring myth over history” see Gildenhard, 2007: 101.

But the poet who towers above the whole project of Renaissance Latin epic, all of whose work (unlike that of Homer and the fragmentary Ennius) Petrarch could actually read, is absent. He is slighted by two poets, the anonymous bard at the Numidian court and Ennius, who himself speaks with the authority of the mighty Homer.³⁶ As we have seen, Virgil himself is nowhere named in the *Africa*.³⁷

To square the *Africa*'s snubbing of Virgil with the praise that Petrarch elsewhere so freely expresses, we only have to remember how often we have seen that praise confine itself to Virgil's eloquence. That may make him the superior stylist, but it is not enough to make him the greater epic poet. Splendour of eloquence he may possess, most beautiful of bards he may be, but epic poets must tell the truth. There Virgil has failed.

quamvis poetarum more ludere delectet, sic poeta videri velim, ut non sim aliud quam poeta. [*Collatio Laureationis*, X.8]

For while poets are wont to find pleasure in a certain playfulness, I should not wish to appear to be a poet and nothing more.

In *Seniles* II.1, written like so many of his deeper mediations on poetry to Boccaccio, Petrarch reasserts the importance of historical truth in poetry. Among other remarkable passages, he defends his description of the dying repentance of Mago at *Africa* VI.1051-1199 against the charge that it is anachronistically suffused with Christianity.³⁸ Even in the *Secretum*, where Petrarch agonises about whether he should give up all study of the classics and devote himself to religious

³⁶ Casali, 2007: 107.

³⁷ Noted without explicit comment by Brownlee, 2005: 482. Smarr thinks Petrarch's naming of Homer rather than Virgil is "a fraud." Smarr, 1982: 136.

³⁸ *Sen.* II.1.6-10.

contemplation, he is introduced to his interlocutor Augustine by Truth in the form of a beautiful woman. She is not a generalised allegorical figure; she has stepped from the pages of the *Africa*:³⁹

Illa ego sum – inquit – quam tu in *Africa* nostra curiosa quadam elegantia descripsisti. [...] Vixdum verba finerat, cum michi cuncta versanti nichil aliud occurrebat quam Veritatem ipsam fore. [*Secretum*, Proem]⁴⁰

“I am she,” she replied, “whom, with a certain studied elegance, you described in *Africa*, our poem.” [...] She had hardly finished speaking when I realized that it could only be Truth who was speaking.⁴¹

Whatever else the *Africa* does, and the posterity in which Petrarch occasionally trusted may continue to revise its assessment of that achievement, Petrarch has ensured one thing. No-one can read the *Africa* without becoming conscious, glancingly throughout and relentlessly in the tale of Sophonisba, of Virgil’s divergences from truth. By characterising these as a flaw, Petrarch has configured even his possible failures of style as a virtue. We have seen the *Africa* criticised for its occasionally bare versifications of Livy, but Petrarch has answered the criticism in advance. A poet has duties to both truth and beauty. The poet of historical epic must privilege truth. That is what Petrarch has done, and that is why Ennius has chosen Petrarch rather than Virgil as his heir.

If we attempt to align this with Petrarch’s freely-expressed criticism of Ennius everywhere but in the *Africa*, we must come to the conclusion that Petrarch covets Ennius’ canonical position more than he admires his work:

³⁹ The fact that he addresses her in the words of Aeneas to Venus at *Aen.* I.327-8 may remind us of that poem’s propensity for deception.

⁴⁰ The description of the Palace of Truth does not survive, although it may have contributed to the description of Syphax’ palace at III.90-264. See Festa, 1926a: lxxv-lxxviii. For a general consideration of the *Africa* in the *Secretum*, see Baron, 1985.

⁴¹ Text of the *Secretum* in Carrara, 1955. Translations are from Nichols, 2002.

The poet Ennius is not strictly an influence at all on the *Africa*, in the sense of an object of imitation or assimilation. He is a totem figure, a means of approach to two of Petrarch's idols, Scipio and Homer.⁴²

It cannot have escaped Petrarch that the prominence of Virgil was one of the reasons for the almost total disappearance of the work of Ennius. Quite apart from the poetics of literary succession, a copyist can only work on one manuscript at a time. Ingo Gildenhard considers the loss of Ennius' works to posterity and speaks (with some gentle mockery of Harold Bloom) of Virgil's success in the "quest of the latecomer to upstage the firstling":⁴³

Virgil, then, managed to do what many authors desire but few achieve – the perfect parricide, where the corpse is not just buried in a literary underworld, but disappears, and the son lives on, at the centre of a culture and occupying the final stage in a teleological process.⁴⁴

There is a moment of real poignancy in the *Africa* when Homer introduces himself, in a dream, to Ennius. He may as well be speaking directly to Petrarch:

"Salve, care michi Latie telluris amice
Vnice! quodque diu uotis animoque petisti,
Aspice qualis erat quondam dum uixit Homerus." [*Afr.* IX.183-5]

"Here stands what your heart
and mind have so long yearned for, here behold
Homer as he appeared in living flesh."

⁴² Foster, 1979: 281.

⁴³ Gildenhard, 2007: 73.

⁴⁴ Gildenhard, 2007: 74.

The *qualis erat* with which Homer announces himself is a phrase that Virgil borrowed from Ennius.⁴⁵ Petrarch is taking it back for Ennius, but putting it in Homer's mouth. If the poetry of Ennius reveals an unpolished rusticity, the poet himself has one inestimable value. He is the closest approach to Homer.

This is the real role of Ennius in the *Africa*. His are the shoulders Petrarch must perch on to stand taller than the other giant of Roman antiquity, and that is who has been in his sights all along. Ennius is an intermediary incarnation of Homer, the vessel through which Petrarch can position himself as not just *Ennius alter* but also, necessarily, *alter Homerus*. This is the final answer to the anxiety of belatedness which troubled Petrarch all his life. History made him a successor to Virgil. His epistle to Virgil made him a contemporary.⁴⁶ But the *Africa*, his most beloved of all his works, has given him priority at last. The corrective intertextuality we have seen him deploy throughout the *Africa* invites us to read Virgil through Petrarch's eyes, and this is in some sense to read the *Aeneid* as a successor to the *Africa*. To see Petrarch now as Homer acts as a guarantor of this chronological reversal. Petrarch is the epic poet of Roman heroic history, and Virgil is his stylish but ultimately unsatisfactory successor.

⁴⁵ See Servius at *Aen.* II.274. For a brief discussion see also Houghton, 2007: 150.

⁴⁶ *Fam.* XXIV.11. See Chapter 1.

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JOURNAL ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>C&M</i>	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>G&R</i>	<i>Greece & Rome</i>
<i>HSPH</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>IJCT</i>	<i>International Journal of the Classical Tradition</i>
<i>HLB</i>	<i>Harvard Library Bulletin</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JWI</i>	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
<i>SPh</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>

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