Rewriting Dido: Flavian Responses to Aeneid 4

The epics of the Flavian period, Silius Italicus’ Punica, Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica and Statius’ Thebaid, are remarkable for their rewriting of their literary forebears. In the past, this has been the basis for harsh criticism of the so-called Silver Age epics, but more recently, these Flavian rewritings have become the place for close examinations that reveal a complex relationship with the preceding tradition. Hardie’s analyses of the post-Virgilian epics draw attention to the importance of imitation in Flavian poetry, which allows the author to comment upon and interpret his sources.¹ Thus, Hardie suggests similarities, rather than differences, among the three Flavian poets reveal their shared tradition of imitation, and that post-Virgilian epic can be used as a critical aid to our own readings of Virgil.² This paper aims to examine

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² Hardie, The Epic Successors of Virgil (as in n. 1), 3.
the response of each one of the Flavians to a particular aspect of Virgil’s *Aeneid*—that is, the character of Dido and events that surround her—and to demonstrate that there are significant similarities among the Flavian epics in their rewriting of *Aeneid* 4.

Although Silius is the only one of these authors who directly rewrites the story of Dido in his *Punica*, Valerius in the *Argonautica* and Statius in the *Thebaid* create female figures who are strongly linked to the representation of Virgil’s Dido, namely Hypsipyle and Argia respectively. Therefore, the first part of this paper will be concerned with showing the relationship between these female characters in each of the Flavian epics and their Virgilian model. Through parallel situations and verbal echoes of Dido in the *Aeneid*, especially Book 4, the Flavian poets indicate their rewriting of Virgil’s Dido, yet each of the later poets creates marked differences from their shared source. Strikingly, the deviations of these rewritings of Virgil bring to light similarities among the Flavian poets in their response to their model. The second part of this paper proposes that these similarities reveal contemporary ideologies bearing not only on the Flavians’ reading of Dido in the *Aeneid*, but also on our own readings of the female figures in the Flavian epics. Are we to read these Flavian female figures simply as contemporary critical responses to Virgil’s characterization of the Carthaginian queen? Or, perhaps, it is more complex. I will suggest at the end of this paper that, in addition to their attempts to subvert Virgil’s Dido, Silius, Valerius and Statius also end up subverting their own rewritings of the Virgilian Dido-figure and reassert their allegiance to their model.

**PART 1: REWRITING DIDO**

**Anna in Punica 8**

Dido is a significant figure in the first half of Silius’ *Punica*, which narrates the rise of Carthaginian power leading up to the battle of Cannae. For the most part Silius is faithful to his model in his

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3 For Cannae as the center of the poem, see Frederick Ahl, Martha Davis and Arthur Pomeroy, ‘Silius Italicus’ *ANRW* II.32.4 (1986), 2505-2511.
evocation of Virgil’s Dido. It is Dido’s vengeance and fury that fuel Hannibal and therefore the narrative of the poem, as Silius makes clear in the first Book. In his proem he traces the origins of the hatred between Carthage and Rome to Dido’s foundation of the city:

Iamque adeo magni repetam primordia motus. 
Pygmalioneis quondam per caerula terris
pollutum fugiens fraterno crinme regnum
fatali Dido Libyes appellituir orae.

(Punica 1.20-23).

And now I will trace back the origins of such great turmoil. Dido, escaping the kingdom polluted by fraternal crime, was driven across the sea from the lands of Pygmalion to the fatal shore of Libya.

In the early books of the Punica Silius continues to remind readers of the mythical background to the Punic wars through references and allusions to Dido in the Aeneid, for example in the oath that the young Hannibal takes to the shade of Dido\(^4\) and on the shield given to Hannibal that includes images of Dido and her suicide.\(^5\) Thus in the opening books of the Punica, Silius uses the story of Dido from the Aeneid to emphasize the close connection between the Hannibalic wars he is narrating and the mythological past.\(^6\)

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\(^4\) Punica 1.119

\(^5\) Ipsa, pyram super ingentem stans, saucia Dido/mandabat Tyriis ultricia bella futuris (‘She herself, standing above a huge pyre, wounded Dido, was entrusting avenging wars to future Tyrians,’ Punica 2.422-3).

\(^6\) Cf. Ahl, Davis and Pomeroy, ‘Silius Italicus’ (as in n. 3), 2495-6. See also Carlo Santini, Silius Italicus and His View of the Past (Amsterdam, 1991), 61, who, interested in showing history illuminated through myth, concludes ‘Silius asks the reader to meditate on the “Great War” of the Roman people, which can only be understood if the prime movers of the conflict between the two peoples are sought out, in a return to the past which overlaps into myth.’
In a longer passage in *Punica* 8, however, Silius rewrites *Aeneid* 4 directly and changes the point of view to that of Dido’s sister, Anna. He introduces Anna into the *Punica* in Book 8 on the eve of the battle of Cannae as part of the divine intervention of Juno. Juno approaches Anna telling her to encourage Hannibal because Anna is in the unique position of being a Carthaginian goddess worshipped in Italy. In her address to Anna, Juno stresses Anna’s Carthaginian connections and, to introduce the episode, Silius explains the reasons Anna is found in Italy at all.

Silius then breaks the account into three parts. The first part (*Punica* 8.50-78) narrates Anna’s flight: first from Carthage, where Iarbas has usurped the throne, to Cyrene, where Pygmalion seeks her out; then, from Cyrene to Italy, where she encounters Aeneas and Iulus. The second part of the episode (*Punica* 8.80-159) is told in the voice of Anna herself. When Aeneas has brought Anna to his palace and asks her about Dido, she describes Dido’s reaction to Aeneas’ departure and her preparations for suicide. Anna’s account of Dido generates guilt and pity in Aeneas, who welcomes Anna into his home. In the third part of

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8 *sanguine cognato iuvenis tibi, diva, laborat/ Hannibal a vestro nomen memorabile Belo* (‘Hannibal - a remarkable name called after your Belus - a youth with blood related to you, goddess, is worried’ *Punica* 8.30-31).

9 *cur Sarrana dicent Oenotri numina templo,/regnisque Aeneadum germana colatur Elissae* (‘why Italians sanctify a Phoenician spirit with a temple and the kingdom of the descendants of Aeneas cultivate the sister of Dido,’ *Punica* 8.44-47).


11 Lines 144-224 are missing from the early manuscripts and are supplied by the 1523 Aldine edition from Venice. W. Heitland, 'The “Great Lacuna” in the Eighth Book of Silius Italicus' *Journal of Philology* 24 (1896), argues persuasively to include this emendation.
the episode (*Punica* 8.160-201), Dido appears to her sister in a dream and warns her against Lavinia’s jealousy. Anna runs from Aeneas’ palace, flinging herself into the river Numicius where Aeneas’ men find her living among the nymphs. After she has addressed them, Aeneas’ men worship her as a goddess.

In *Punica* 8, Silius is clearly dependent on Ovid’s account of Anna Perenna in *Fasti* 3, and indeed, Silius’ use of Ovid here has generated scholarly interest. Although most commentators focus on the similarities between Ovid and Silius, there are some critical differences. Whereas Ovid avoids narrating Dido’s death in *Fasti* 3, Silius interrupts the Ovidian episodes and inserts the middle section into his narrative, inspired by Virgil’s account of Dido’s suicide in *Aeneid* 4. For example, Anna’s version of Dido’s suicide includes most of the same elements seen in Virgil’s description of the funeral pyre and Aeneas’ sword:

\[\text{Iliaco postquam deserta est hospite Dido, et spes abruptae, mediam in penetralibus atram festinat furibunda pyram: tum corripitensem}\]

12 *Punica* 8. 197-8.

13 *Punica* 8. 199-201.

14 See R. T. Bruère, ‘Color Ovidianus in Silius *Punica* 8-17’ *CP* 54 (1959), 228-9, for parallels with *Fasti* 3. See also James Frazer, *The Fasti of Ovid* Vol. 1 (London, 1929), 523, ‘Such as it [the Anna Perenna episode in the *Fasti*] is, it is repeated at full length by Silius Italicus, except that he substitutes Cyrene for Melite.’

15 Ovid foreshadows Dido’s suicide in *Heroides* 7.181-194, culminating in her epitaph at 7.195-6, and devotes only three lines to her death in the *Metamorphoses* (14.78-81).

16 Bruère, ‘Color Ovidianus’ (as in n.14), 228, suggests that the temptation to tell *Aeneid* 4 was too great for Silius to pass up.

certa necis, profugi donum exitiale mariti.

(Punica 8.50-53)

After Dido was abandoned by the Trojan guest and all hope cut short, raging, she hurried to the ill-omened pyre in the middle of the inner chambers: then, fixed on death she snatched up the sword, the fatal gift of a fugitive husband.

Silius shifts the perspective from which Dido’s death is narrated so that the reader (and the internal audience—namely, Aeneas) is sympathetic to Anna. By reshaping the story of Dido from Aeneid 4 from the perspective of her sister Anna, Silius makes the Dido figure of Punica 8 not Dido at all, but Anna. Silius often refers to Anna as Sidonis or ‘the Phoenician’ in this passage—as indeed Virgil does to describe Dido. When Anna first encounters Aeneas in Italy, she keeps her eyes fixed to the ground—much like Dido does in the underworld at Aeneid 6.469. Silius’ Anna also experiences visions similar to those of Dido at Aeneid 4.460. Silius may also be playing with a variant tradition in which it was Anna, not Dido, who was the lover of Aeneas. Although Ovid’s Fasti is an important model for Silius’ creation of Anna in Punica 8, it is the Flavian poet’s rewriting of Aeneid 4 that reveals the Dido figure in this passage to be Anna herself.

19 Cf. Aeneid 4.564.
20 Punica 8.70 and 8.199.
21 Cf. Sidonia Dido (Aeneid 1.446; 1.613; 9.266; 11.74).
22 Anna has a vision of her sister who warns her to leave Aeneas’ palace (Punica 8.164-186).
23 Miniconi and Devallet, Silius Italicus La Guerre Punique (as in n. 10), 168 ‘Ce songe d’Anna est ici la replique des visions nocturnes de Didon.’
24 The Servian corpus says that Varro argued that it was Anna, not Dido, who loved Aeneas and threw herself on the pyre (Servius ad Aeneid 4. 682).
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Dido is not a character in the other Flavian epics, but the Dido figure need not be Dido herself, as Silius demonstrates in Punica 8. Valerius Flaccus and Statius also create female characters that strongly evoke Dido in the Aeneid, but the established epic tradition of the Argonautica and tragic background to the Thebaid complicate the close connection of such female figures to Virgil’s Dido. The figure of Hypsipyle and her association with Jason in the story of the Argonauts goes back to Homer25 and she figures prominently in Apollonius’ Greek epic, also an important model for Valerius. Apollonius’ Argonautica raises difficulties for analyzing the nature of imitation in Flavian epic since the Greek epic is also an important source for Virgil. Thus Apollonius’ Hypsipyle must also be considered a model for Virgil’s Dido,26 but while it may be simpler to argue that Valerius’ Hypsipyle looks back only to her Greek counterpart and any similarities with Vigil’s Dido are the result of a common influence, there is evidence that Valerius was responding directly to Aeneid 4.

Hypsipyle in Argonautica 2

Valerius’ Hypsipyle is characterized as the leader of her community on Lemnos and welcomes a travelling stranger into her home, which connects her to both Apollonius’ Hypsipyle and Virgil’s Dido.27

25 Iliad 7.467-71. Hypsipyle also figures in lost tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The fragments of Euripides’ play indicate that the action takes place after the Argonauts have left Lemnos.

26 See Damien Nelis, Vergil’s Aeneid and the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius (Leeds, 2001), 180-182, for relationship of Apollonius’ Hypsipyle and Virgil’s Dido.

27 There is a comparison as well as contrast between the description of Hypsipyle leading the Lemnian women in their political functions in the empty city and Dido’s appearance in the Aeneid as ruler of thriving Carthage. Cf. Argonautica 2.306-10 (arcem nata petit, quo iam manus horrida matrum/congurerat. rauco fremitu sede parentum /natorumque locis vacuaeque in moenibus urbis/iura novant; donant solio sceptrisque paternis/ut maritam redeuntque piae sua praemia menti, ‘the daughter sought the citadel where already the disheveled band of matrons gathered. With a harsh cry in the seat of their fathers and in the places of their sons, within the walls of the empty city,
Although Apollonius indicates that banquets were held to honor Jason and the Argonauts’ entry into the city, there is no scene of the female leader falling in love with a male stranger during a banquet and questioning him about his travels as there is in the Aeneid and Valerius' Argonautica. In Argonautica 2, Valerius clearly demonstrates the influence of Virgil as he describes Hypsipyle falling in love with Jason. Both poets begin the episode with a conversation beginning at a banquet and lasting into the night: *dapibus coeptis mox tempora fallunt/noctis et in seras durant sermonibus umbras,* ('the banquets having begun, soon they while away the time of night and hold out into the late shadows with their conversations,' Argonautica 2.349-350) and variò noctem sermonem trahebat ('she protracted the night with conversation on many matters' Aeneid 1.748). Valerius also follows Virgil by having Hypsipyle ask the hero a series of questions, repeating interrogers: *praecipueque ducis casus mirata requirit/Hypsipyle, quae fata trahunt, quae regis agat vis./ aut unde Haemoniae molem ratis,* ('Hypsipyle, especially marveling at the fortunes of the leader, asks him what fates drew him, what power of the king drove him and from where the might of the Haemonian ship came,' Argonautica 2.351-353). So Dido too asks Aeneas several questions, each introduced by an interrogative: *nunc quibus Aurorae venisset filius armis,/ nunc quales Diomedis equi, nunc quantus Achilles* ('now with what arms the son of the dawn has come, now what kind of horses Diomedes had and how great Achilles was,' Aeneid 1.751-2). Finally, each poet describes the heroines’ feelings of

they renewed laws. They presented her as worthy with the throne and scepter of her father and her rewards return to a pious mind.') and Aeneid 1.505-8 (*turn foribus divae, media testudine tempti,/ saepta armis solioque alte subnixa resedit./iura dabat iegesque viris, operumque taborem/partitibus aequabat iustis aut sorte trahebat,* 'then at the doors of the temple, in the middle vault of the temple, she, surrounded by arms, settled herself, propped up on the high throne. She gave rights and laws to men and apportioned the work and tasks in fair shares or drew it out by lot.‘)


attraction and attributes it to the intervention of a god: unius haeret/adloquio et blandos paulatim colligit ignes/iam non dura toris Veneri nec iniqua reversae,/et deus ipse moras spatiumque indulget amori ('she clings to the speech of this man alone and little by little gathers the seductive flames no longer insensitive towards the bed of Venus nor hostile to returned affection and the god himself conceded delay and time for love,' Argonautica 2.349-356) and haec oculis, haec pectora toto/ haeret et interdum gremio fovet inscia Dido/insidat quantus miserae deus ('she with her eyes and her whole heart clings and sometimes caresses him in her lap, not knowing how great a god sits there to her misfortune,' Aeneid 1.717-719).

Argia in Thebaid 12

Hypsipyle is also a figure in Statius' Thebaid, but she is not the Virgilian Dido figure—nor the Valerian Hypsipyle for that matter. Rather, in his epic Statius makes Argia, the daughter of Adrastus, the Dido figure. Statius is clearly alluding to Dido's first encounter with Aeneas in which she is likened to the goddess Diana with her quiver when he compares Argia and her sister to Minerva and Diana: Pallados armisonae pharetrataeque ora Dianae/ aequa ferunt, terrore minus ('they bore faces similar to war-sounding Pallas and quivered Diana, but less scary,' Thebaid 1.535-536). When the sisters are engaged to

30 Jason leaves Hypsipyle as Aeneas does Dido in order to pursue his fate and greater glory. Hercules chides Jason into leaving (Argonautica 2.378-84) just like Mercury urges Aeneas at Aeneid 4.265-78. See also Garson, 'Some Critical Observations' (as in n.29), 273-4 for verbal echoes between Argonautica 2 and the Aeneid. Ovid's Heroides will be considered below, pg. 22.

31 David Vessey, Statius and the Thebaid (Cambridge, 1973), 176-7, argues, based on Heroides 6 and 7 that 'It was quite natural for Dido to be in Statius' mind, for there is a similarity between Hypsipyle's encounter with Jason and Dido's with Aeneas.' But Vessey ignores the significant differences from Dido in Hypsipyle's own version of this encounter. Statius' Hypsipyle, unlike Valerius' Hypsipyle or Virgil's Dido, maintains that she was unwilling (non sponte [Thebaid 5.454]) to marry Jason.

32 Cf. Dido's entrance wearing a quiver on her shoulder (illa pharetram fert umero. [Aeneid 1.500]).
Polynices and Tydeus, Fama travels through cities (Fama per urbes [Thebaid 2.205]), to announce the double wedding. In Aeneid 4 Fama also makes public the consummation of the relationship of Dido and Aeneas in the cave (Fama per urbes [Aeneid 4.173]). Statius uses this association of Fama in Aeneid 4 to foreshadow the negative potential of the alliance between Polynices and the Argives, culminating in the battle between Polynices and his brother, Eteocles.

Statius returns to Argia in Thebaid 12 after the death of Polynices in the previous book and continues to establish a close connection to Virgil’s Dido. Argia is twice called regina recalling the opening of Aeneid 4: at regina. When Argia resolves to go to Thebes to bury her husband she is so driven that she cannot tell the difference between day and night and does not stop her journey to sleep. Argia’s wakefulness may look back to Dido who also spends a sleepless night when she is tormented by thoughts of Aeneas. This distraction also manifests itself in Argia’s wandering through the wilds and on the slopes of Cithaeron, which echoes Virgil’s description of Dido when she hears the rumors of Aeneas’ departure and runs through the city like a Maenad on Cithaeron. Argia is also closely associated with Juno, because Juno is

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33 hospitia et thalamos et foedera regni/permixtumque genus-quae tanta licentia monstro/quis furor-et iam hella canit. (‘she recounts the guest friendships and the marriages, alliances of a kingdom and mixed royal houses—what monstrous license, what madness—she already recounts wars,’ Thebaid 2.211-13).

34 Thebaid 12.111 and 12. 280.

35 Aeneid 4.1 as well as 4.296 and 4.504.

36 Cf. cum tamen illa gravem luctu fallente laborem/nescit abisse diem (‘since she, nevertheless did not notice that they day had gone, her grief disguising her serious mission,’ Thebaid 12.230-1) and non infelix animi Phoenissae, neque umquam/ solvitur in somnos oculisve aut pectore noctem/ accipit (‘nor did the Phoenician, sick at heart, ever release into sleep or accept the darkness to her eyes or breast,’ Aeneid 4.529-531.

37 Cf. Thebaid 12. 240-244 and Aeneid 4.300-303.
the patron goddess of Argos\(^{38}\) and in this passage Juno shows a special relationship with Argia.\(^{39}\) The patronage of Juno is another connection between Argia and Dido, who is also closely identified with the goddess.

Upon reaching Thebes and finding the body of her husband, Argia first recognizes the cloak of Polynices, which she herself made.\(^{40}\) It is in her address to the corpse of her husband on the battlefield of Thebes that Argia casts herself as an abandoned wife, thus firmly establishing her connection to Dido: Argia asks herself *heu quid ago?* (Thebaid 12.328). Dido asks herself the same question—*en, quid ago?* (Aeneid 4.534)—when she realizes that Aeneas has left her. Argia's echo of Dido prepares the reader for a violent outburst, which does in fact occur in Argia's curse on Eteocles.\(^{41}\) Then, however, Argia's speech changes its course by not giving full play to blame, but instead Argia acknowledges her own role in bringing Polynices to Thebes.\(^{42}\) Statius raises the readers' expectations for a feminine display of emotion by evoking Dido in Aeneid 4, yet seemingly undercuts the association by deliberately moving in a different direction. Statius sets up possible models for Argia through verbal echoes of Virgil in her speech,\(^{43}\) but contrasts her

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38 Cf. Thebaid 1.259ff.

39 Juno watches over the Argive women throughout the book and convinces Cynthia to provide the moonlight by which Argia finds the body of Polynices.

40 Thebaid 12.312-313. The appearance of the cloak in the passage also continues the connection of Argia to Dido, who is both given the cloak of Helen by Aeneas, and more importantly, wove the cloaks that are used in the burial of Pallas (Aeneid 11.72-5).

41 Thebaid 12. 340.

42 See William J. Dominik, *Speech and Rhetoric in Statius' Thebaid* (Hildesheim 1994), 130-132, for an analysis of Argia's lament.

43 Euryalus' mother in Aeneid 9 is another important model for Argia's speech.
with these potential models by changing the effect of her own words—her emotion transforms into *fides* (*Thebaid* 12.347), not *furor*.

### Flavian Rewritings: Changing the Outcome

Just as Statius evokes Virgil’s Dido as a model for Argia in *Thebaid* 12 and then seems to alter the outcome by not giving full play to the emotion and violence at the end of *Aeneid* 4, Silius and Valerius Flaccus also seem to retreat from the expected violent conclusion generated by their Dido figures. Silius’ *Anna* describes Dido in a way that plays on Aeneas’ feelings of guilt. In the *Punica* Aeneas does seem to admit more responsibility, or at least regret for his treatment of Dido. He says that he was sick at leaving, and would not have deserted Dido except for the threats of Mercury:

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respiciens aegerque animi tum regna reliqui
vestra nec abscessem thalamo, ni magna minatus
meque sua ratibus dextra imposuisset et alto
egisset rapidis classem Cyllenius Euris.
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(*Punica* 8.107-111)

looking back and sick at heart, I then left your kingdom and I would not have departed the bedroom had not Mercury, threatening greatly, placed me on the ships with his own right hand and drove the fleet onto the deep with swift winds.

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44 Statius effects a similar outcome earlier in the epic with Argia’s first appearance. Unlike Virgil’s Dido (and Valerius’ Hypsipyle) Argia does not perceive her abandonment when Polynices leaves to pursue his destiny and reclaim his throne at Thebes, saying to her husband: *nil foedere rupto/conubiiisve super moveor viduaque inventa* (*Not at all am I moved by a broken bond concerning our marriage nor by young widowhood,* *Thebaid* 2.339-340). In fact, out of concern for her husband, she facilitates his departure by seeking help from her father. See Vessey, Statius (as in n. 31), 159-160, for an account of Argia’s plea to Adrastus.

45 Cf. Ahl, Davis and Pomeroy, *‘Silius Italicus’* (as in n. 3), 2497.
Anna’s retelling of the death of her sister is constructed not to blame Aeneas, with whom she is seeking asylum, but to ingratiate herself with him. And Silius’ Aeneas also seems to welcome the opportunity to justify his actions. This reunion of Anna and Aeneas in Silius dispels the element of vengeance that is so strong in *Aeneid* 4. But Anna is more than a stand-in for Dido here. She rewrites *Aeneid* 4 by de-emphasizing the element of vengeance, seemingly creating a happy ending in which the Trojan Aeneas and Carthaginian Anna can coexist in Italy.

Valerius’ Hypsipyle also differs from Virgil’s Dido in a number of ways. In her confrontation with the departing Jason she does not condemn him or threaten violence as Dido does in *Aeneid* 4. In fact, when she presents Jason with the sword of her father Thoas at *Punica* 2.418, she reverses Dido’s action of taking Aeneas’ sword and committing suicide with it. Hershkowitz concludes that Hypsipyle’s more moderate character and behavior averts the disaster of *Aeneid* 4. She claims that the difference between Hypsipyle and Dido, as well as the differences between Valerius’ and Apollonius’ Hypsipyles, fuel the Valerian characterization of Hypsipyle and reinforce her image as a self-controlled, properly behaving woman. By ‘correcting’ the character flaws, as it were, of Virgil’s Dido, then, Valerius changes the outcome of *Aeneid* 4 and suggests a possible future for Hypsipyle and Jason.

**Flavian Rewritings: Heroic Male**

I will return at the end of this paper to an examination of whether these Flavian rewritings of Virgil’s Dido do indeed restrict and remove the negative implications of Dido’s vengeance or if, in fact, the Flavians reinforce their Virgilian model, but first I will consider the ways in which the later poets engage with their source in order to effect this transformation of end result. Strikingly, each of the Flavian epicists rewrites the figure of Dido and the events of *Aeneid* 4 in a similar

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46 For example, Dido’s ‘curse’ at *Aeneid* 4.381-87.

manner, differing from their model in two significant ways that serve to control and contain the negative associations of female behavior manifested by the Carthaginian queen in Virgil. Firstly, the female aspects of these Flavian characters are combined with characteristics of the heroic male, specifically Aeneas. In the *Punica* Anna seems to share as much with the figure of Aeneas as she does with Dido. The storm that drives Anna to Italy connects her to many epic heroes including Aeneas and Odysseus. In addition, as Ahl has shown, the site of Anna’s cult, the Numicius, is linked with that of ‘Indiges’, which may represent an ancient cult of Aeneas. Silius links Anna to this cult when he says that she neighbors the sacred grove of the native god. In the *Argonautica* Valerius’ Hypsipyle also resembles the figure of Aeneas by demonstrating *pietas* in saving her father Thoas during the women’s killing spree at Lemnos. In the *Thebaid* Argia’s lament for Polynices evokes Aeneas’ lament for Pallas in *Aeneid* 11, especially by evincing the tone of regret and responsibility that Aeneas expresses over Pallas. Aeneas’ bitterly ironic remark at Pallas’ return to his father is explicitly echoed by Argia. Both Argia and Aeneas take responsibility for the existing situation and the deaths they face. As Aeneas acknowledges his failure to prevent the death of Pallas so Argia recognizes her role in facilitating the war between Argos and Thebes; thus Argia embodies the compassionate aspects of Aeneas’ character, especially seen in his lament for Pallas.


49 *indigetis contermina castis lucis* (*Punica* 8.39).

50 See Herschkowitz, *Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica* (as in n. 47), esp. 136-8, for Hypsipyle as a hero. Garson, ‘Some Critical Observations’ (as in n.29), 272, also recognizes Hypsipyle’s *pietas*.

51 Cf. *talisque tuis occurro triumphis?* (*Thebaid* 12.324) and *hi nostri reditus exspectatique triumphi* (*Aeneid* 11.54).


53 See Vessey, *Statius* (as in n. 31), 131-133, for Argia’s *pietas*. 
In the *Aeneid* Dido also displays characteristics that could be considered masculine. As a ruler Dido acts within the political sphere identified with men and male behavior. Dido's masculine actions as ruler, however, are compromised by her emotional female nature after Aeneas' arrival at Carthage. Whereas Virgil's Dido represents the incompatibility of these aspects of her character, for the Flavian heroines, the combination of characteristics displayed by the male hero Aeneas with those of a typically female role (wife, mother) create a new kind of *virtus* and epic conduct.

**Flavian Rewritings: Marriage**

It is this typical female role, specifically of wife and mother, that also distinguishes the Flavian Dido figures from their Virgilian model. Thus the second difference in the Flavian texts from *Aeneid* 4 is the emphasis on legitimate marriage. In the *Aeneid* there remains the large question of whether or not a real marriage took place between Aeneas and Dido. Dido clearly thinks that she and Aeneas are legally wed (*coniugium vocat [Aeneid 4.172]*), yet there is doubt (*hoc praetexit nomine culpam [Aeneid 4.172]*) and Aeneas claims that there has been no legal ceremony: *nec coning is umquam/praetendi taedas aut haec foedera veni* ('I did not ever hold out the torches of marriage nor entered into these pacts,' *Aeneid* 4.338-339). Virgil's text leaves the question of a marriage between Dido and Aeneas open, an ambiguity that has generated a great deal of modern scholarship. The Flavian poets

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54 See, for example, Barbara McManus, *Classics and Feminism: Gendering the Classics* (New York, 1997), 91-118, for an analysis of Dido as 'transgendered.'

55 Francis Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic* (Cambridge, 1989), 39-57, analyzes Dido as a 'good king' who is undone by lack of self-control and emotion.

56 Richard Monti, *The Dido Episode and the Aeneid: Roman Social and Political Values in the Epic* (Leiden, 1981), 49, argues that this is a moot point—regardless of what Aeneas says, he is acting in a way which indicates that he considers himself Dido's consort: 'Aeneas' actions give the observer no choice but to assume that he has taken Dido as his wife, that he has undertaken the administration of Carthage and consequently foresworn the political mission in Italy.' However, Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil* (as in n. 1), 90 argues
consciously and deliberately focus their attention of this question of marriage.

In the *Punica* Silius addresses the question of marriage through Anna who indeed characterizes Dido’s relationship with Aeneas as marriage. In *Punica* 8 Dido’s final speech, as recounted by Anna, recalls her final direct speech to Aeneas at *Aeneid* 4.365-87. Anna’s version of Dido’s speech in the *Punica*, however, contains a striking difference. Dido speaks of herself as Aeneas’ wife: *Aeneae coniunx* (*Punica* 8.143). In the *Aeneid* she does not refer to herself as a ‘wife’ after her speech at *Aeneid* 4.323 when she discovers Aeneas’ preparations to leave Carthage.\(^{57}\) In Silius, Anna describes Dido’s suicide with the sword of her husband, *mariti*,\(^{58}\) referring to Aeneas. After her final speech to Jason, Valerius describes Hypsipyle falling on the neck of her husband, *mariti*.\(^{59}\) Both Valerius’ Hypsipyle and Statius’ Argia strengthen their relationships by the promise of children. In the *Aeneid* Dido wishes for Aeneas’ progeny: *si quis mihi parvulus aula/ luderet Aeneas* (‘if only I had some little Aeneas to play in my halls,’ *Aeneid* 4.327-8), but Hypsipyle confidently swears by the

that the marriage between Dido and Aeneas is not representative of, but parodies, Roman marriage: ‘Earlier at Carthage the union of Aeneas and Dido (which would have produced the wrong dynasty) is sealed in an elemental and demonic parody of the Roman marriage ceremony (4.165-8). Marital stability in the *Aeneid* is achieved through a deficiency rather than excess of physical sexuality.’ For the moral implications of Dido’s *culpa* see also Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford, 1964), 76-84, Cairns, *Virgil’s Augustan Epic* (as in n.55), 46-57 and Niall Rudd, ‘Dido’s *Culpa*’ in S. J. Harrison, (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Vergil’s Aeneid*, (Oxford, 1990), 145-166.


\(^{58}\) *Punica* 8.53.

children she will bear Jason: *per hunc utero quem linguis Iasona nostro* ('I swear by this Jason which you leave behind in my womb,' *Argonautica* 2.424). Argia’s last comment to her husband that she will take comfort in his son (*parvoque torum Polynice fovebo* ['I will keep my bed warm with a little Polynices,' *Thebaid* 12.348]) also recalls Dido’s wish that she had conceived a son by Aeneas. These Flavian Didos then are carefully constrained by their roles as wives and mothers.

Thus far, I have demonstrated that through Anna in the *Punica*, Hypsipyle in the *Argonautica* and Argia in the *Thebaid*, each of the Flavian epicists alludes directly to Dido in the *Aeneid* through parallel situations and verbal echoes. Furthermore, in raising Virgil’s Dido as a possible model, the Flavian writers raise the potential for a violent outcome, which is subverted, however, by each of the poets in the same way—that is by attributing male heroic virtues to their female figures and eliminating any doubts as to the question of legitimate marriage. This notable similarity among Silius, Valerius and Statius suggests a response to contemporary Flavian values and ideology, and in the second part of this paper, I will situate the epics in their cultural context and examine them as responses to imperial ideology in order to determine whether or not the Flavian epics achieve control over the negative implications of Virgil’s Dido and to consider how the later poets may further subvert their own rewritings and revert to a Virgilian perspective. First, however, it is necessary to investigate how their model, Virgil, was read in the first century C. E.

**PART 2: DIDO IN ANTIQUITY**

**Dido in Augustan Rome**

It should be noted, first, that Virgil himself had rewritten the so-called ‘historical’ Dido.60 These historical versions of Dido’s story,

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60 See Marilynn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis, 1994), 24-27, for an account of the ‘historical Dido’.
preserved in the fragments of Timaeus of Tauromenium and in Justin’s epitome of Pompeius Trogus, show Dido as a model of piety and chastity and emphasize the queen’s political agency. It is impossible to know to what extent the love affair between Dido and Aeneas is Virgil’s invention, but it is clear that Virgil’s rewriting of Dido in the *Aeneid* reveals much about his use of gender in his epic project.

In her investigation of women in Latin epic, Keith begins her analysis with the role of epic poetry in Roman education, that is to reinforce cultural norms, in particular the construction of masculine identity in Roman society, in order to suggest a possible ancient response to Virgil’s Dido. The *Aeneid* certainly became a canonical school text shortly after its appearance and Virgil’s ancient commentators, such as Servius and Donatus, indicate the ways in which the *Aeneid* was used to emphasize gender differentiation. There is a

61 In this brief version, the queen flees her homeland for Libya when her treacherous brother kills her husband. To avoid marriage to a Libyan king, Dido commits suicide by throwing herself on a pyre built as an altar to her dead husband.

62 Cf. Desmond, *Reading Dido* (as in n. 60), 24: ‘Her suicide is an act of defiance that testifies to the nobility of her nature.’


65 For example, Keith, *Engendering Rome* (as in n. 64), 25, points to the way in which the commentators use the opening lines of Book 5 (*notumque furens quid femina possit*) to generalize about women: ‘Thus Servius glosses *Aeneid* 5.6 with the phrase ‘the well known madness of women,’ moving from Virgil’s gnomic ‘this is what a raging woman is like’ to the generalisation that takes in all women, ‘this is what women are like, viz. raging.’
tension between the aspects that make Dido a good ruler (and therefore masculine) and those traits that mark her as feminine—emotional weakness, sexual passion, and desire for vengeance. Dido is also a challenge to Aeneas’ duty and threatens to alter the course of Rome’s destiny: thus her suicide is necessary for the continuation of the epic mission.66 Keith reads the female body as the text on which male epic values are inscribed:

The death of an ‘innocent’ woman—Ilia, Iphigenia, Creusa, Polyxena, the daughters of Anius and Orion, Helle—legitimates the epic hero’s violent mission: over her dead body, he regenerates or transforms the social order. Similarly, the death of a ‘dangerous’ woman—Dido, Cleopatra, Camilla—authorises the epic hero’s establishment of a normative order imperiled by her deviance.67

Dido’s ‘deviance’ in Virgil and its resolution in her death is read by ancient commentators as the triumph of the epic, male, and Roman scope of the poem. Dido, then, in the context of the larger epic, is read as a negative example of female behavior over and against which male identity is contrasted. Yet Virgil’s account of Dido in Aeneid 4 is more subtle than what his ancient commentators read. Virgil’s text contains considerable ambiguity, but his ancient readers ‘show a tendency to try to foreclose nuances of gender-construction that call into question Roman norms of gender difference.’68 These ‘nuances of gender-construction’ leave Aeneid 4 open to the issues that Virgil’s account of Dido raise for both masculine and Roman identity, which continue to resonate through Latin poetry.

Essential to questions of masculine and Roman identity is the role of marriage, the importance of which is clear in Augustus’ legal and
social programs. On the one hand, a ‘bad’ marriage was dangerous to the stability of the state. Augustus sought to control one common threat to marriage (adultery) through legislation—the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* of 18 B.C.E. Augustus’ program may have been a reaction to contemporary events such as Antony’s rejection of his Roman wife Octavia (Augustus’ own sister) and alliance with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. Further, Augustus’ use of the mythical figures of the Danaids for his temple to Apollo on the Palatine emphasizes the violence unleashed when marriage bonds are severed.

Augustus realized that a ‘good’ marriage, on the other hand, could lend stability to the state. The alliances Augustus created through the marriages of his daughter and granddaughter ensured strong political control and the establishment of a dynasty. Again, Augustus’

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70 See Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (as in n.59), 277-298, for a detailed analysis of Augustus’ laws including contemporary reaction.

71 Bauman, *Women and Politics* (as in n.69), 92-3, constructs Octavia as a *casus belli* for the civil war between Octavian and Antony.

72 Of the Danaids, Eve D’Ambra, *Private Lives, Imperial Virtues: The Frieze of the Forum Transitorium in Rome* (Princeton, 1993), 95, says: ‘To the ancient Greek and Roman, the vision of a band of young women wielding daggers, an image as threatening as the bloodthirsty sisterhood of the Amazons, represented the failure of social institutions, such as marriage, that were intended to civilize young women and to mold them into wives and mothers.’ The reconstruction of the sculptural program at Augustus’ temple to Apollo, however, is problematic. See B. A. Kellum, ‘Sculptural Programs and Propaganda in Augustan Rome: The Temple of Apollo on the Palatine’ in R. Winkes (ed.), *The Age of Augustus*, (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1985), 169-76, for a discussion of different readings of the images of the Danaids.

73 See Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (as in n.59), 58-9, for Roman constructions of the role of marriage in political stability, and 211-215, for the triumviral period and early principate specifically.
legislation, the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* of 18 B.C.E. encouraged marriage. Its values are also reflected in monuments such as the *Ara Pacis*, with its depictions of Augustus with his family (with children prominently in the foreground), here underscoring the relationship of marriage and family to the preservation of the state.

The *Aeneid*, however, problematizes this very issue of marriage by leaving the question open. Virgil died (and the *Aeneid* was published) in 19 B.C.E., the year before Augustus’ marriage reforms became law. But this may be a mere technicality, for moral reform was clearly part of Augustus’ renewal of the Roman state from the start of his principate. What is more, these ideas would have been in play perhaps even earlier, beginning at the time of Antony’s association with Cleopatra. In addition, Virgil, as usual, is a liminal and transitional poet of the principate and his relationship to imperial propaganda remains ambiguous—which is one reason why modern readers of the *Aeneid* are often divided into optimistic and pessimistic camps. In an optimistic reading that views Virgil as supportive of Augustan moral reform, the ‘marriage’ of Dido and Aeneas can be read as an example of a ‘bad’ marriage which could destroy Rome (before it is even founded) and therefore must not occur. Yet a pessimistic reading might view the Dido episode as an example of the ways in which human emotion and personal relationships should shape and guide political destiny at the expense of the individual and/or his/her divine mission. Through the character of Dido, Virgil may be exploring the role that marriage plays

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74 See Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (as in n.59), 60-80, on this marriage law.

75 See, for example, the debate surrounding Propertius 2.7 and the ‘marriage laws of 28 BCE.’

76 Cairns, *Virgil’s Augustan Epic* (as in n.55), 56-57, also reads *Aeneid 4* through a contemporary lens ‘If love was a serious vice in a private citizen, it was many times more so in a public figure; and it was unforgivable in a king. It should not be forgotten that the Roman world had in the decade before Virgil began writing the *Aeneid* seen two conspicuous examples of rulers who like Dido—or so the propaganda of the Augustan age declared—had brought themselves and their followers to destruction through “love”, the triumvir M. Antonius and his consort Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt.’
in the foundation of the Roman state. The ambiguity in his text may represent Virgil’s understanding of the changing role that political marriage will have under the principate.

The ambiguity surrounding the marriage of Dido and Aeneas in the *Aeneid* may be contrasted with another poet of the Augustan period who begins the process of rewriting Dido almost immediately—that is, Ovid in the *Heroides*. In response to Virgil, Ovid gives Dido her voice back in *Heroides* 7, but Ovid’s Dido speaks as a woman, not as a queen. By removing the story from the larger context of the *Aeneid* and switching the generic form, from epic to elegy, Ovid creates a Dido who can ignore the political implications of her presentation in Virgil. With the focus firmly on Dido as lover, she is less threatening and therefore more sympathetic. But in presenting the story of *Aeneid* 4 from Dido’s point of view, Ovid emphasizes her conviction that her relationship to Aeneas was marriage.

Throughout *Heroides* 7, Dido refers to herself with terms of marital language. She calls herself Venus’ daughter-in-law, Aeneas’ spouse (*coniugis* [Her. 7.69]) and suggests that Aeneas is ashamed to call her his wife, *uxor*. Furthermore, Ovid’s Dido raises the possibility of a child: *forsitan et gravidam Didon, scelerate, relinquas,/ parsque tui lateat corpore clausa meo* (‘perhaps, wanton man, you leave behind a pregnant Dido and a part of you lies hidden in my body,’ [Her. 7.133-143]). Although Dido only suggests this possibility to emphasize the

77 Cf. Desmond, *Reading Dido* (as in n. 60), 33, ‘Composed within the generic demands of the love elegy, *Heroides* 7 emphasizes Dido’s role as lover in the *Aeneid* 4; her attributes as *amans* thereby eclipse her role as *dux*.’

78 Although perhaps not as effective—Daryl Hines, *Ovid’s Heroines: A Verse Translation of the Heroides* (New Haven, 1991), 108, remarks ‘Virgil’s queen is a more complex and appealing figure, tragic rather than merely pathetic.’


80 *Heroides* 7.167. See Knox, *Ovid Heroides* (as in n. 79), 229, for Dido’s use of this term.
Rewriting Dido: Flavian Responses to Aeneid 4

destruction that Aeneas' abandonment will cause, the mention of a child connects Dido in Heroides 7 to the heroine in the previous epistle, Hypsipyle.

In Heroides 6 Ovid goes even further than he does with Dido in constructing the legitimate marriage of Hypsipyle and Jason. Hypsipyle not only claims that Jason promised marriage to her, but suggests that the rites have already taken place. Ovid's emphasis on the marriage of Jason and Hypsipyle distinguishes his account from the inherited tradition and points ahead to the ways in which the Flavians will address the problem of marriage in their epics. Ovid's response to Virgil's Dido should certainly be considered in analyzing the Flavian rewritings of Aeneid 4, but whereas Ovid, writing elegy, deliberately avoids the ambiguities of Virgil's text with regard to the nature of Dido as a woman, the Flavian epic poets attempt to confront and correct the perceived problems in Virgil's text. The differences between the rewritings of Ovid and the Flavians do not deny the considerable influence of Ovid on the Flavians, but again attest to the different relationships of the Augustan poets to the new and evolving Augustan ideology and of the Flavian poets to their contemporary social and political programs.

81 Knox, Ovid Heroides (as in n. 79), 224.
82 in mihi promissi parte recepta tori, ('having been taken into the share of the bed promised to me,' Heroides 6.20).
83 heu, ubi pacta fides? Ubi conubialia iura/ faxque sub arsuros dignior ire rogos? ('Where is the agreed upon trust? Where are the marriage laws and the torch which is more fitting to go under a burning funeral pyre?' Heroides 6.41-42).
84 Knox, Ovid Heroides (as in n. 79), 171, 'But in one important respect O. is plainly pursuing his own course by insisting throughout the epistle that Jason was married to Hypsipyle (41-6). In Apollonius' account they were never married, although marriage is implied at some places in the text of the Argonautica and it is also suggested elsewhere in the tradition.'
Dido in Flavian Rome

The powerful position of wives, mothers and daughters in the imperial household under the Julio-Claudians is well attested in Tacitus.85 The Flavians, on the other hand, seem to have distanced themselves from emperors such as Claudius and Nero by playing down any public role for women of the imperial family. Although Flavia Domitilla, wife of Vespasian and mother of Titus and Domitian, was dead by the time her husband took power and the dynastic succession was secured,86 Vespasian’s relationship with Caenis, a freedwoman of Antonia who may have had great influence within the imperial household, indicates that women still had an important role to play in the politics of the Flavian period.87 Indeed, despite their father’s marriage to a woman of Latin rank (their mother), both Titus and Domitian made politically advantageous marriages.88 While women such as Arrecina

85 Both positive examples (Antonia) and negative (Agrippina Minor). See Judith P. Hallett, Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family (Princeton, 1984), for roles of mothers, daughters, sisters and wives in late republic and early empire. Bauman, Women and Politics (as in n.69), 130-210, discusses many Julio-Claudian women. See also Nicholas Purell, ‘Livia and the Womanhood of Rome’ PCPS 212 (1986) 78-105, and Bauman, Women and Politics (as in n.69), 124, for the extraordinary public role of Livia. Sandra Joshel, ‘Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus’ Messalina’ in Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn Skinner (eds.), Roman Sexualities (Princeton, 1997), 221-254, analyzes Tacitus’ negative construction of Messalina. None of these secondary sources treat women in the Flavian period.

86 Uxori ac filiae superstes fuit atque utramque adhuc privatus amissit (‘he outlived his wife and daughter and lost them both while he was still a private citizen,’ Suetonius Vesp. 3).

87 post uxoris excessum Caenidem, Antoniae libertam et a manu, dilectam quondam sibi revocavit in contubernium habuitque etiam imperator paene iustae uxoris loco (‘after the death of his wife, he called back to himself into concubinage Caenis, the freedwoman of Antonia, once his mistress and even as emperor, held her nearly in place of a lawful wife,’ Suetonius Vesp. 3).

Tertulla, Marcia Fumilla\(^{89}\) and Domitia Longina may have been politically well-connected, they do not seem to have been very politically active.\(^{90}\) In fact, Titus’ relationship with the politically prominent and powerful queen Berenice seems to have been cut off by the emperor himself in order to avoid unfortunate comparisons with Antony and Cleopatra.\(^{91}\)

As censor, Domitian was responsible for reintroducing Augustus’ moral legislation, the \textit{Lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis} in 85 C.E. Suetonius reports that Domitian rejected his wife because of her reputed affair with the mime Paris, but he took her back in any event.\(^{92}\) Jones suggests that Domitian did not divorce his wife, but only had her exiled.

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\(^{89}\) Titus’ first wife’s father was prefect of praetorians (Suetonius \textit{Titus} 4.3), and his second wife is described by Suetonius as \textit{splendidi generis} (Suetonius \textit{Titus} 4.3).

\(^{90}\) Jones, \textit{The Emperor Domitian} (as in n. 88), 36-7, dismisses Domitia’s role in a faction for Titus or complicity in Domitian’s assassination.

\(^{91}\) \textit{Berenicen statim ab urbe dimisit invitus invitam} (‘he, unwilling, immediately sent Berenice, unwilling, from the city,’ Suetonius \textit{Titus} 7.2). For Berenice’s active role in politics and possible involvement in conspiracy, see Jones, \textit{The Emperor Titus} (as in n. 88), 59-63 and 91-93.

\(^{92}\) \textit{eundem Paridis histrionis amore deperditam repudiavit intraque breve tempus inpatiens discidii quasi efflagitante populo reduxit} (‘he rejected the same woman [Domitia], ruined by her love for the actor Paris and within a short time, unable to bear the separation, took her back as though the people demanded it,’ Suetonius \textit{Dom.} 3). This may be evidence of Domitian’s hypocrisy because in enforcing his own morality laws, the emperor had punished a man for taking his wife back after a divorce: \textit{equiem R. ob reductam in matrimonium uxorem, cui dimissae adulterii crimine intenderat, erasit iudicium albo} (‘he removed a Roman knight from the register of jurists because he led his wife back into marriage against whom, having been divorced, he had brought the charge of adultery,’ Suetonius \textit{Dom.} 8.3.)
and thus did not violate his own legislation. The rumors surrounding Domitian and his wife as well as Julia, his niece, may simply be hostile propaganda against the emperor who reinstated Augustus’ moral reforms, but later suffered *damnatio memoriae*. Again, Jones points out that this is common negative propaganda: ‘Rumours about Julia/Domitian and Paris/ Domitia were very probably spread by the malevolent section of the court and eagerly repeated by Pliny, Juvenal and other post-Domitianic writers.’

Like Augustus, the Flavians used public monuments to project their imperial ideology and so Domitianic monuments such as the temple to the Flavian gens on the Esquiline and the temple to the deified Vespasian and Titus in the *Forum Romanum* represent family and dynastic succession. The successful continuation of the family line is predicated on marriage and on controlling female behavior, and Domitian’s program also included a thematic expression of feminine virtue, as evinced by his renewal of the cult of Pudicitia. From the remaining fragments of the frieze from the Forum Trasitorium, D’Ambra speculates on a program that creates both positive models of matronly behavior through such female figures as Rumina, a deity of nursing mothers, as well as negative examples, such as Arachne.

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93 Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (as in n. 88), 35.

94 Domitian is rumored to have had an affair with his niece and caused her death by abortion (Suetonius *Dom.* 22).

95 Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (as in n. 88), 36.

96 Another Flavian poet, Martial, indicates the importance of marriage to the stability of the imperial family and therefore, the empire, by placing a poem in which the poet announces Domitian’s heir and addresses the divine Julia (*Epigrams* 6.3) between two poems concerning Domitian’s moral legislation (*Epigrams* 6.2 and 6.4).

For the Flavian poets, then, the emphasis on the legitimate marriage of their heroines fits with contemporary imperial propaganda. Perhaps one should not go so far as to posit a female audience for the Flavian epics, but Juvenal, a contemporary, suggests that women readers of the *Aeneid* were already responding to Dido:

Illa tamen gravior, qua cum discumbere coepit
laudat Vergilium, periturae ignoscit Elissae.

(Juvenal 6.434-5)

That one’s even worse, who just when she’s sitting down to dinner, praises Virgil and excuses Dido, about to die.

The examples of Anna, Hypsipyle and Argia, then, may suggest positive examples of feminine behavior as sisters, daughters, wives and mothers that support and reflect positively on their male counterparts.

But how successful are the Flavian epics in lessening the impact and negative associations of Virgil’s Dido through their rewriting? That is, do they unequivocally incorporate the ‘good marriage’, as represented by Flavian propaganda, into their texts? It is difficult to accept a reading of the Flavian epics that is merely official imperial propaganda. This position gains strength from the fact that the Flavian poets *themselves* problematize their own rewritings of Dido by connecting them very closely to the continuation of violent action in their epics. We can conclude this study of Flavian rewritings of Dido by examining this last proposition using the three examples with which this study has been concerned: Silius’ Anna, Valerius’ Hypsipyle, and Statius’ Argia.

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98 Alessandro Mezzanotte, ‘Echi del mondo contemporaneo in Silio Italico’ *RIL* 129 (1995), 357-88 at 367-9, also argues that the female characters in the *Punica* represent imperial ideals, but does not include Anna or Dido.

99 See Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta* (as in n. 64), 59-84, for the aims of education for women to create good wives, mothers, and daughters.
Silius ends his account of Anna’s role in Italy with the establishment of her cult in Italy, which is closely connected to the founder of the Roman people and so, I suggest, indicates a possible resolution between Romans and Carthaginians. But in an abrupt shift at "Punica" 8.202, Silius leaves behind his digression on the mythological past in order to return to Anna’s exchange with Juno. In response to the goddess, Anna goes to the Carthaginian troops and addresses Hannibal. It is her exhortation of Hannibal that leads to some of the bloodiest fighting of the war. Silius completely undercuts the potential for peace that he had raised through the figure of Anna by linking her so closely with the destruction of the Battle of Cannae, and reverts to the full force of Dido’s revenge and the inevitable conflict between the Romans and the Carthaginians.

In the "Argonautica" Hypsipyle’s easy acquiescence sends Jason straight into the arms of the epic’s most destructive female figure—Medea. A series of allusions to both her epic counterparts in Apollonius and Ovid, as well as to her tragic antecedents, not only Euripides, but especially Seneca’s Medea, add depth and meaning to Valerius’ portrayal of the Colchian princess, but like his Hypsipyle, Virgil’s Dido remains an important model for his Medea. Valerius introduces Medea as another Dido figure, and like Dido, Valerius’ Medea is torn by an internal struggle over her feelings, between her loyalty to her father and her love for Jason, which the poet constructs as the tension between the forces of pudor and amor. In Valerius’

100 "Punica" 8.202-225.

101 See Lars Nyberg, "Unity and Coherence: Studies in Apollonius Rhodius’ Argonautica and the Alexandrian Epic Tradition" (Sweden, 1992), 157, for connections between the Hypsipyle episode and Medea in Valerius’ Argonautica.

102 Medea is compared to Diana ("Argonautica" 5.379) and she is called regina ("Argonautica" 5.373).

103 See K.W.D. Hull, ‘Medea in Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica’ Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society (Literary and Historical Section 16/1 (1975) for Valerius’ uses of these terms.
Argonautica Medea is marked by contradiction - she is both the young girl helplessly in love for the first time and a powerful sorceress. Not only is her character itself split between these conflicting roles, but through references to Medea’s crimes beyond the events narrated by the poem, Valerius also divides his own attitude toward his character between sympathy for the young girl and horror at her future transgressions. Although the poem is incomplete, Valerius does not let his audience forget the future violence of his heroine. The images on the temple of the sun in Colchis depict the marriage of Jason and death of Creusa and Creon at Corinth (Argonautica 5.440-451). In Medea and Jason’s wedding Valerius refers again to the future events at Corinth through the jewels worn by Medea which will burn Creusa (arsuras alia cum virgine gemmas [Argonautica 8.236.])

Similarly, it is Argia’s pietas at Thebes that generates Theseus’ swift attack against Creon. In defeating Creon, Theseus destroys the legitimate male line to the Theban throne. By disrupting the line, Theseus reopens the original question of the poem - who is to be king of Thebes? Theseus does ‘resolve’ the problems in Thebes by ridding it of a tyrant, but he also prolongs the situation by claiming the throne for himself, leaving Thebes open to the next wave of violence and the return of the Epigoni. This return is foreshadowed by the appearance of the Argive women pouring out onto the battlefield, disrupting the sense of the ending, renewing the violence through the simile comparing them to Bacchants, issuing a new battle cry.

By rewriting Dido, the Flavian epic poets do seem to attempt to ‘correct’ her presentation in Virgil. Unlike Virgil’s Dido, Anna in the Punica, Hypsipyle in the Argonautica and Argia in the Thebaid are carefully constructed as wives and mothers and also display characteristics of the heroic male, which affects our reading of the female figures in Flavian epic. This close association with the male characters indicates that these Flavian creations will not generate the

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105 Thebaid 12.791-793.
same violence and vengeance as Virgil’s Dido. Yet in the end these Flavian ‘corrections’ of Dido do not soften her vengeance as the Flavian poets demonstrate in the continuation of their narratives, but in fact unleash even greater fury, perhaps because of, and not in spite of, their rewriting of Virgil.

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