

# Womanly wailing? The mother of Euryalus and gendered reading

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Feminist reading of the classics is a project the history of which is one of a struggle to be heard modulating into a struggle to avoid such appropriation as becomes another form silencing. The aim of this paper is to explore some few words of Virgil and of his readers through the ages, as a paradigm case of a wide theoretical and philosophical issue in feminist literary criticism<sup>1</sup>. In the first part of this paper, it is necessary to look rather closely at a small number of Virgilian lines, in order to establish the practical relevance as well as the theoretical urgency of the wider questions considered in the second half of the paper.

When *Fama*, the monstrous female Rumour<sup>2</sup>, brings to the Trojan camp the news that the boy soldiers Nisus and Euryalus have failed in

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1 — I am grateful to the editor and the Journal's anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions. One reader usefully commented: 'From my perspective, one remedy for the increasing investigative tendency to ignore women – both as individual subjects/agents and collective social entities – especially in projects that privilege masculinity in the name of illuminating gender and sexuality, is a closer focus on the literary, historical and cultural contexts in which females figure'. That puts it in a nutshell.

2 — See Hardie (1994) 159 on the association between *Fama* and 'wild and uncontrolled emotion, particularly female'.

their madcap plan to take a message to Aeneas at Pallanteum and have been killed by the Rutulians, the unnamed mother of the younger boy falls into a paroxysm of grief, screaming her cries of raw anguish, as the poet says, *femineo ululatu*, ‘with womanly wailing’. How different this from the dignified response of Evander to the loss of his adolescent son, which, with no less grief, he accepts as the hazards of war and political necessity<sup>3</sup>. On the one hand, the rational structures of Logos; on the other, the inarticulate noises of pathos. Male and female, reason and emotion, right and wrong.

But just a moment – critics from Servius on have seen that what comes out from the mouth of the mother of Euryalus is not inarticulate screaming but rather *paene omnes partes habet de misericordia commouenda a Cicerone in rhetoricis positas* (‘it has almost all those parts prescribed by Cicero in his rhetorical works for moving people to pity’, Servius *ad* 9.479; indeed, he says the speech is full of the art of rhetoric, *et est conquestio matris Euryali plena artis rhetoricae*, by implication, the sorts of thing an orator says not that a mother says). While it is certainly not surprising that Servius should link Virgilian speeches with Ciceronian, the best with the best, nor indeed is it surprising that the commentary tradition, of which our ‘Servius’ is a paradigm case, should contain some inconsistency, what is remarkable is the extent to which this composite early commentary accurately, if not perhaps always entirely consciously, acknowledges the uncomfortable truths of the *Aeneid’s* complexity<sup>4</sup>. Other critics have called the speech ‘a carefully constructed representation of violent emotion’ (Hardie 1994, 161, a nice hint at the contradictions with which I am concerned here), ‘a long and impassioned speech of lamentation’ (Nugent 1992, 272), ‘a tirade of grief and despair’ (Highet 1972, 153). Even those, the majority, who are sympathetic to the mother range in their assessment from seeing the speech as pitiable madness (for example, Highet 1972, Egan 1980) to a voice repressed (for example, Fowler 2000, Nugent 1999). And yet Virgil designates it with the phrase *femineo ululatu*. What is going on here? As Sullivan puts it, ‘[t]he critical challenge ... is to explain why [Virgil’s] portraits of women are often so unexpectedly subtle’<sup>5</sup>. For my part, I think the mother makes a good, if implicit, case against the war, and appropriately maternal objection to

3 — The comparison has been made many times, beginning with Servius. There is a good account in Nugent (1999) 245-8. Lee (1979) 113 describes our heroine as ‘almost the only mortal mother who figures in this long epic of fathers and sons’.

4 — The importance of contradiction as a poetic device and critical tool in epic and the reading of epic has recently been explored by O’Hara (2007). Our particular inconsistency, however, is often sadly invisible even to its critics.

5 — Sullivan (1992) 64. This essay is a good straightforward account of the perennial problem in the interaction between what he calls ‘Virgil the artist’ and ‘the propagandist’ (71).

male behaviour, even if she expresses it in conventionally<sup>6</sup> suicidal terms. My primary concern, however, is with what Virgil might be doing with the gendered signifiers he employs in the presentation of the mother. Virgil's negotiation of the clash between the masculinist agenda of epic and empire and sensitivity to women's perspectives, including those of mothers, is one of the great stories of the *Aeneid* and its reception, from at least as early as the famous story in the *Vita Vergili* 32-3, of Octavia fainting at the prophecy of her recently-dead son, Marcellus, during the royal family's preview of parts of the poem. That Virgil was acutely sensitive to human, including female, emotion is well-known. What is more problematic is how the poem as a whole, rather than what we might like to imagine was the real Virgil's own attitude, sets up huge barriers in the way of simplistic sympathetic readings both of suffering and of women – as the history of criticism is all too powerful a witness.

Let us be clear first of all that the authorial comment on the speech before it takes place is not one which we would expect to herald something out of the rhetorical textbooks of Cicero, or, indeed, to herald any speech in epic at all; that is, in effect, that there is a conflict between 'feminist' speech and 'chauvinist' frame. The marked phrase *femineo ululatu*, its hiatus self-referentially enforcing a catching of the breath before the onomatopoeic howl<sup>7</sup>, occurs elsewhere in the *Aeneid* applied to Dido's servants in Book 4.667, while in a similar phrase during the destruction of Troy, at 2.488-8, the wailing women are not even granted direct agency of the cry: *plangoribus aedes/ femineis ululant*<sup>8</sup>. Without the adjective, *ululatus* is used of the deeply ambiguous cries of the nymphs who witness Dido and Aeneas' marriage in the cave, of Hecate at the crossroads (4.609, in the speech of the dying Dido: in this case it is the cognate participle *ululata*), of the Latin women who follow Amata in her bacchic madness (7.395), and finally of the Trojans as they bury the dead in the truce for that purpose in Book 11 (at 190). Only the last case is not over-determined with femininity, while even its occurrence in this scene is one which presents the Trojan warriors in ritual grieving for the dead, notoriously both a feminine role and one in which the power of the female voice may be dangerous enough to need to be controlled<sup>9</sup>. In none

6 — Hardie (1994) 165: '[t]his appeal is related to the conceit that the mourner has to be restrained from suicide'.

7 — Noted also by Highet (1972) 153. He describes this speech as 'far less restrained and far closer to insanity than its chief extant model, the lament of Andromache after seeing Hector's body dragged behind his slayer's chariot'. The speech is 'hysterical with shock' and 'rises to a peak of frenzy at the end, so that she has to be carried away screaming'. To be fair, he does say that it is 'not incoherent', and that 'it might almost be a consolation reversed' (154).

8 — On the related occurrence at 11.662-3, see below.

9 — On this point see Holst-Warhaft (1992), especially chapter 4. Occurrence of *ululatus* elsewhere in Latin literature contributes to its feminine associations. The two occurrences in Catullus

of these cases are any words to be heard within the cry – that is, there is no recorded speech which is framed by such a description. At the primary narrative level of the *Aeneid*, then, whether we conceive of this level as representing (an inconsistency in) Virgil's own mind or as an unreliable narrator created by the divine author in order to expose the inconsistency, *ululatus* means inarticulate, wordless, feminine wailing, which is pitiable but highly emotional and probably therefore bad<sup>10</sup>.

This is not just wailing, however, this is womanly wailing. The adjective *femineus* is regularly applied, particularly by the poets, to material and immaterial things belonging or pertaining to women, often with a slightly, sometimes highly, pejorative implication<sup>11</sup>. Although the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (ThLL) describes the word as 'sometimes' having negative connotations, it seems to me that it is rarely even neutral, while the only example quoted in ThLL when *femineus* could, in my judgment, be held of itself to have any positive association is Ovid *Ars* 3.286, (*risus puellae*) *sed leve nescio quid femineumque sonet*, 'but let its sound be as something light and feminine', perhaps not the most powerful argument for a positive evaluation of the feminine<sup>12</sup>. As regards the *Aeneid*, all the examples of the word have either the minor disparagement of 'women's grief' (the examples mentioned above, 11.878) or 'women's work' (7.806), or they have some more explicitly negative connotation, such as Aeneas' thoughts about punishing a woman (Helen, 2.584, assuming the passage is to stand as authentic), or Amata's *curaeque iraeque* at the arrival of Aeneas, just as Allecto is about to attack her (7.345),

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are both in the gender-bending poem 63 (24 and 28). The 16 occurrences in Ovid are all associated with the female, the wild, the bestial, and the feminine, feminised, and gender-ambiguous deities of the ecstatic traditions, or with similar anti-rational contexts. Particularly interesting is the howl of Lycaon the wolf, who in his moment of metamorphosis tries to speak but *exululat* instead (*Met.* 1.233). Of the seven occurrences in Livy, several are associated with ecstatic worship, but at least three relate to barbarian war cries (5.39.5, 21.28.1, 38.17.4), which fits with the anti-rationalism and unintelligibility, as well as the gendered significance, of the term.

10 — One reader of this paper wondered whether 'we should attribute the comment about *femineus ululatus* to an unreliable narrator reporting in free indirect discourse on the way in which the other Trojans perceived the poor woman's speech'. This would indeed be a possible way of 'saving' the consistency and the (modern) moral credentials of Virgil himself, but it seems to me both that it matters less which of the various voices of the poem expresses this view than that such a voice is heard (and, indeed, in the relatively unmediated form of direct narrative), and also the most insidious chauvinism is precisely that which comes from the sympathetic.

11 — ThLL *femineus* c: *res maxime incorporeae ad feminas pertinentes: a de feminarum actionibus, moribus, affectibus, natura (adi. pro genetiivo subiectiuo). et generaliter et de singulis: interdum etiam cum nota uitii. ... β de actionibus, affectibus sim. ad feminas spectantibus (adi. pro genetiivo obiectiuo)*. The negative implications apply to many cases also in ThLL's group d, *de rebus corporeis a feminis tractatis uel adhibitis*. The word also has a substantial role (ThLL *femineus* B) applying to 'men who follow women's ways', therefore usually pejorative.

12 — It may actually be a play on a musical sense of *femineus* from the technical discourse of music, with regard to which ThLL quotes Isid. *eccl. off.* 2.11.5 *nihil ... femineum sonans uox lectoris*, and Mart. Cap. 9.964 *cum a uirili cantilena transitus in femineos modos fit*, as well as our passage.

or Turnus' disparaging comment on the '*femineus*' cloud (12.53) in which Venus previously hid the (from his point of view) cowardly and effeminate Aeneas. Two further examples apply to the warrior woman Camilla (11.663 and 782)<sup>13</sup>. One might almost say that it is hard for something to be described as belonging or pertaining to a woman, where that belonging is either inherent or, from the point of view of the speaker, is necessarily connected with the specific gender, without it having a negative connotation. Even to find a positively valued English translation for *femineus* is almost impossible. There is a difficulty that the argument may become circular, since, once we have said that *femineus* has negative connotations, even its association with a positively valued noun could be held to create a mildly negative sense (even without further context, that is – with further context it might be strongly negative), such that it becomes impossible for the positively valued noun to lend positive association to the adjective. I suspect that this is in fact the case, and that in most examples where the woman in question is not actually being vilified, the adjective *femineus* serves as a surprise to expectation and a contrast with accepted norms, rather than any positive evaluation of the feminine. The situation is the result not only of the long history of the disparaging of women, but perhaps more importantly of one cause of that disparagement, which is the way in which women are treated as a class, such that anything that can be said about one person who happens to be female is a comment about women as a whole.

Servius shows, in his gloss on the phrase, how one reader of Latin would interpret *femineo* here: *impatienti*. In his reading, 'womanly' is broadly equivalent to 'unable to bear it', used in the negative sense of the inability to control the emotions, such as you would expect of a woman<sup>14</sup>. Servius' comment on the mother makes explicit a connection in his mind with Camilla, since he follows the gloss with the quotation [*ut*] '*femineo praedae et spoliolum ardebat amore*'. On that reference itself, 11.782, Servius links up the poem's connotations of the word even more clearly. *FEMINEO: impatienti, inrationabili, ut femineae ardentem iraeque curaque coquebant*', his cross-reference being to 7.345, of Amata, men-

13 — A final example in the *Aeneid* of *femineus* is at 9.142, on which Hardie (1994) 101 says that 'the heavy pause after *femineum* lends it misogynistic emphasis'.

14 — On the day I wrote this paragraph, there was a fuss in the British press about the Prime Minister saying 'calm down, dear' as a putdown to the (female) shadow treasury secretary. Apparently this is a reference to an advertisement, but in the advertisement it is ironic, whereas it appeared not to be from the Prime Minister. In an article on the subject in the Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/28/calm-down-dear-david-cameron>, Libby Brooks says about language that it 'is fundamental to how we construct and convey meaning. And when that meaning is: «I am expressing paternalistic concern at your inability [*as a woman*] to rein in your emotion» then yes, that is sexist and yes, it is a big deal. To undermine her anger as hysteria, to reference her femaleness, is a particularly male way of putting a woman down'. Exactly.

tioned above. This time, ‘womanly’ means not only ‘impatient’ (unable to bear things), but also explicitly ‘irrational’. Ruth Morello has shown, in a brilliant article<sup>15</sup> on Camilla and Servius’ reading of her, how inappropriate is the critical disparagement of this Italian soldier, and what disjunction there is between the (negative) adjective *femineo* and not only the rest of the phrase (which accurately describes epic heroism, albeit of the ‘Homeric’ rather than ‘Virgilian’ variety) but also with the rest of the representation of Camilla in the poem. Morello’s judgement is that Camilla is a fine soldier who enjoys her job and is well regarded by her superiors, equals, and subordinates. (But she is a woman).

The occurrence of *femineus* at 11.782 is in fact the second time the word has been applied in the context of this warrior maiden/woman soldier. At 11.662-3, in the description of Camilla’s followers which falls into the utterly predictable representation of these Italian women as ‘Amazons’, there is an equally predictable comparison with Penthesilea: *magnoque ululante tumultu feminea exsultant lunatis agmina peltis* ‘and with the great crowd howling the womanly battle line exults with its curved shields’. Another example, then, of the two words in close proximity, of wordless howling, and of the disparaging use of ‘womanly’<sup>16</sup>.

I hope to have established, in this discussion of *femineo ululatu*, that Virgil has introduced the mother of Euryalus in at best a paternalistic and at worst a negative and dismissive light, which provides a stark contrast with her actual words. This is not our first experience of the mother, although it is the first actual appearance. Her reaction has been prepared for, perhaps even over-determined, first by Nisus’ reluctance to take Euryalus with him for fear of her reaction should the boy not return, then by Euryalus himself in his request to Ascanius that he should take care of the mother in that circumstance, a request received with extravagant promises by the Trojan prince. In this discussion it transpires that Euryalus has not informed his mother of his intended departure, being unable to bear (*impatiens?*)<sup>17</sup> her grief. With all this foreshadowing, we can guess exactly what is going to happen when the heads of the dead boys are paraded on stakes by the Rutulians to taunt the Trojans shut up in their camp (9.465-72). A narrative marker of change of scene, *interea*, also leads us to expect a change of scene:

15 — Morello 2008.

16 — Although there is undoubtedly admiration for Camilla, the point here is that representation of her followers as Amazons and the jarring congruence of *feminea ... agmina* of themselves point to a disparagement of women who step outside the roles, and by implication designation of their natural roles as inferior.

17 — What he says is *quod nequeam lacrimas perferre parentis*, 9.289, but I am suggesting that the thought is remarkably similar to the accusation against women.

interea **pauidam** uolitans pennata per urbem  
 nuntia Fama ruit matrisque adlabitur auris  
 Euryali. ...

*Aen.* 9.473-5

*Meanwhile Rumour the winged messenger rushes flying through the **fearful**<sup>18</sup> city, and glides to the ears of the mother of Euryalus.*

When we first read the second word, *pauidam*, I would suggest that we might be primed to hear a turn to the mother herself, who has been so firmly placed in the back of our minds throughout the episode. The feminine gender of the adjective would not, of itself, make a Roman reader expect a noun signifying female biology, rather than simply feminine gender, but the agreeing noun when it comes is something of a surprise: *urbs* is a rather odd word to apply to the makeshift Trojan camp. From the beginning of book 9 (9.8, 9.48), the narrator has been working to represent the Trojan camp in such a way as to suggest its role as a city, thus creating a space for it in the chain from Troy to Rome, although indeed intertextually the camp also represents the Iliadic Greek camp on the Trojan shore. *urbs* is a highly loaded term within the *Aeneid*, signifying The City, Lavinium which is proto-Rome, at 1.5, and then its great enemy, Carthage, at 1.12, then in competition throughout the early books between versions of Troy and Carthage<sup>19</sup>. Among the many connotations of the word's use here, one element of the characterisation of the camp as a fearful city, especially with the feminine adjective *pauidam* so prominently placed, is to overturn gender norms. The point is that the mother we thought was, in womanly way, fearful, turns out to be fearless, while the Trojan leaders are the ones who are afraid.

Virgil has led us down a blind alley and set us up to read the mother in a paternalistic way:

euolat infelix et femineo ululatu  
 scissa comam muros amens atque agmina cursu  
 prima petit, non illa uirum, non illa pericli  
 telorumque memor, caelum dehinc questibus implet: *Aen.* 9.477-80  
*She, unhappy, flies out and, with womanly wailing, her hair torn, out of her mind, she first seeks the walls and the battle lines by running, not mindful of men, not of danger nor of weapons, and from there she fills heaven with her complaints.*

18 — A translation which reflects the Latin word order would require too much violence to the original, so I have emboldened the operative word.

19 — It is also the case, as one reader points out to me, that there is considerable connection in the Roman imaginary between the topography of a military camp and of the town. This emotive line from *Aeneid* 9 was quoted in a letter found at Vindolanda, in reference to the fortification there: see Hallett 2002b.

The mother's torn hair, the adjective *infelix* (unhappy/unlucky but also childless)<sup>20</sup>, together with her womanly wailing, all make her into the embodiment of the grieving woman, that force of disorder which must be controlled by masculine reason. Even the verb *euolat* contributes, indicating wild action and hinting at the link with *Fama uolitans*. We may be tempted to bring *amens* into the same condemnation, especially with its contribution to the murmuring alliteration of *coMaM Muros aMens atque agMina* (if we pull out only the 'm' and 'a' sounds, we might even hear 'mama', but in fact the other vowels and at least the 'n' sounds also contribute)<sup>21</sup>. This is just female hysteria. But if we look at the distribution of *amens* through the *Aeneid*, we may see that its association is not in fact straightforwardly gendered. Of the 13 occurrences of the word in the poem, the only other one to apply to a woman is 3.307 *arma amens uidit*, of Andromache at the sight of Aeneas and his men, an instance which closely parallels the most famous example of the word in the poem (2.314, below). Of the 11 times the word is applied to a man, it is assigned once each to the Trojan priest Panthus (2.321), to the African king Iarbas (4.203), and to Nisus just before the death of his young friend (9.424). Five instances apply to Turnus, three of them, unsurprisingly, near the end of Book 12 (622, 742, 776)<sup>22</sup>. The remaining three occurrences all apply to Aeneas himself: 2.314 *arma amens capio* ('madly I seize arms'), Aeneas throws himself into the fight; *quem non incusauī amens hominumque deorumque* ('whom among gods and men did I not accuse in my madness'), Aeneas at the loss of Creusa; 4.279 *At uero Aeneas aspectu obmutuit amens* ('but indeed Aeneas in madness was struck dumb at the sight'), after the visit from Mercury telling him to leave Dido<sup>23</sup>. The description of someone being out of his or her mind, then, is associated strongly with men in the poem, rather than being a sign of female hysteria.

But this is another double-bind – the word belongs to 'crazy, dangerous' Turnus, to Aeneas *before* he learns to be a 'Roman hero', to people associated with the past rather than with the great Roman future. *amens* may apply to men more than to women, but it shows precisely the characteristics which make the traditional epic hero 'both defined and undone by his thumos'<sup>24</sup>. Just as there is no way to make *femineus* a positive

20 — *ThLL infelix I de mala fertilitate*. The mother, no longer mother, reflects the situation of *infelix Dido*.

21 — Hardie (1994) 161: 'Elaborate patterning of *cs, ms, as* and *ps*.'

22 — The other two times when Turnus is described as *amens* are 7.460 and 10.681.

23 — That *amens* especially applies to Aeneas is noted by Lossev (1971) 207. He argues that we should not see the poem as the embodiment of classical rationality, but rather one of mad passions, violence, and blood. The Sibyl offers a good example of a character 'qui allie également en lui la volonté rationnelle des dieux et des moyens purement irrationnels pour manifester cette volonté' (206). And this applies to Aeneas just as it does to Dido or Turnus.

24 — Hardie, private communication, as recorded in Sharrock (2002) 104.

attribute, likewise saving *amens* from negatively designating a womanish characteristic by showing that it most often applies to males also fails, because it applies to people and situations at risk of falling on the wrong side of the great gendered dichotomy, even if they are biologically male<sup>25</sup>.

The mother's immediate reaction to the news of Euryalus' death is told in conventional and heavily gender-marked terms:

... at subitus miserae calor ossa reliquit,  
excussi manibus radii reuolutaque pensa. *Aen.* 9.475-6  
*But suddenly warmth left the poor woman's bones, the shuttle fell from her  
hands and the wool rolled away.*

In dropping the traditional markers of respectable femininity, wool-working equipment, the mother stands in a clear tradition of the good woman shocked<sup>26</sup>. In Ovid's elaboration of Livy's account of Lucretia in *Fasti* 2, the Roman wife is clearly evoking Homer's Andromache as well as the wider tradition: she is busy at feminine wool work, surrounded by her maids, to whom she is chatting about what they are making for her husband and about all her anxieties for him, when she breaks down and drops her wool work (2.755). Cue entry of Collatinus.

It is commonly noted that the mother's speech is modelled on the laments of Andromache for Hector (*Iliad* 22.477-541), of Hecube for the same hero (*Iliad* 22.82-9, 431-6), and of Electra for her supposedly dead brother Orestes (Sophocles *Electra* 1126-70)<sup>27</sup>. It is the first of these which is most directly signalled by Virgil, not so much by the speech itself but by the gendered signifiers which surround it. When the Homeric scene moves to Andromache, she had not yet been told by any 'true messenger' (ἐπίτυμος ἄγγελος, 22.438) of the disaster, (un)like the rather less trustworthy *Fama* who brought the news to the mother: indeed, we

25 — *Demens* has a related meaning in the *Aeneid* (16 occurrences, 11 of them applying to men), but it is more overtly negative, being used for example by Sinon deceptively of himself (2.94), by Dido berating herself for accepting Aeneas (4.374), and of Misenus challenging the gods to a conch-blowing contest (6.590).

26 — Hardie (1994) 160: '[s]hock causes the woman to abandon the instruments of woman's work and then force a way into the world of men'. He compares Camilla (someone who rejects womanly weaving), and the good woman Andromache from both *Aeneid* 3 three and *Iliad* 22. It is worth remembering what a lot of spinning and weaving Dido does in the poem. The garment in which the body of Pallas is wrapped for his funeral procession is one of two which Dido, happy in her work, had made for Aeneas (11.72-5), presumably while he was laying the foundations of the city, wearing another of her creations. Contrary to the much-repeated calumny of Iarbas, the couple were not spending the winter in debauchery and neglecting their kingdoms, but behaving like a normal married couple. Apropos Euryalus' mother's complaint at 488-9 that the garment on which she was working for her son cannot now be used even as his shroud, Hardie starkly compares Dido's garment given to the body of Pallas. With regard to the mother dropping the tools, see Reed (2007) 30 on this passage having been noted in antiquity as an example of *enargeia*.

27 — Hardie (1994) 161; Highet (1972) 153-5.

might see Virgil's indirect report of the work of *Fama* as a commentary on Homer's narrative of Andromache's process of hearing the foreboding cries, recognising the voice of her mother-in-law, and wondering whether Hector, whom she knows to be about to face Achilles, might be in trouble. In the same way as it is clear that the mother was working at her wool when the news arrives, although we are not told so directly, so Andromache is surrounded by symbols of feminine propriety: weaving, the depths of the house, handmaids, fire, water, hot bath (22.440-4). When she leaves the house, Andromache does not leave the feminine sphere, because although she does go to the walls and throng of men (πύργον τε καὶ ἀνδρῶν ... ὄμιλον, 22.462), she remains surrounded by her handmaids (461), and her quintessentially feminine faint (even if it is told in the formulaic language of Homeric death) is accompanied by reference to the feminine headgear which defines her position as the wife of Hector (469-72), and she is appropriately accompanied by her sisters-in-law and the wives of her brothers-in-law (473). 'Women' always go around in groups. The mother, by contrast, rushes out of the feminine sphere on her own and stands on the walls alone<sup>28</sup>. Both Andromache and the mother drop their tools of weaving (*Iliad* 22.448, *Aeneid* 9.476), and suffer a physical reaction (*Iliad* 22.448, 541-3, 461, 466; *Aeneid* 9.475). I suggest, however, that, as usual, Virgil contrives the connections partly in order to highlight the differences. Not only are there those differences of situation and emotional impact which critics have noted, but also a crucial development is precisely the different functioning of gendered signifiers in the two scenes. Andromache, however pitiable, is not complex; the mother of Euryalus throws into question the tidy division between the male and female worlds.

Andromache's speech is described by Highet 1972 (153) as 'far more rational'. I do not understand in what sense he means this to be the case. His discussion continues: 'indeed, more than half of her speech is taken up with a description of the future unhappiness of her son Astyanax as an orphan friendless and outcast. Even this, although pathetic, seems a little forced ...' Highet goes on to point out, rightly, that Astyanax, as the grandson of Priam, would hardly end up begging for scraps. In that case, in what sense is Andromache more rational? And in what sense is it more rational for her to spend more than half of her speech on her son, rather than on the deceased? Perhaps what Highet is noticing is that Andromache's scene here does nothing to destabilise the hierarchy of gender and the role of a wife-and-mother. When Virgil replaces the lament of a wife for her husband which concentrates on her son, with the lament

28 — Hardie's note on 9.479-80 (1994, 161) includes the comment that the repetition of *non illa* 'forces our attention to the figure of this woman trying to enter the world of *arma uirumque*'.

of a mother directly for her son, perhaps he intends a comment on this odd aspect of Andromache's speech. When Virgil models the lament of a royal wife for her hero-husband (killed in the war which she knew he was fighting, even if she did not like him going) which concentrates mostly on their son, the grandson of the reigning king, and her worries about his position in the hierarchy, with the lament of an unnamed but apparently widowed mother, who has no part in the politics of the situation, for her son, whom she did not know to be fighting, perhaps he intends to make more sharp the distinction between the male-dominated public world (in which the grief of women has its proper place) and the female private world (in which the wars of men have *no* proper place)<sup>29</sup>. Let me stress the point that the distinction here is not simply between men, war, and politics on one side (public) and women, loss, and grief on the other side (private). Important work has elucidated the extent to which public grief creates possibly the most societally legitimated forum for women's voices in the ancient Greco-Roman world (perhaps Greek even more than Roman)<sup>30</sup>. The perennial problem with such a role for women is that it is extremely difficult for it to avoid appropriation as simply part of the masculinist agenda. This is what I am suggesting is the case with Andromache's scene in the *Iliad*, and many other instances of female expression of public grief. I would suggest that even Virgil's Andromache, in *Aeneid* 3, for all its complexity, is bound up in the structures of male politics in a way that Euryalus' mother is not.

On the speech itself, which has been well studied, I do not have a great deal to add. I would only note that, while the speech takes respectable masculine form in the manner described by Servius, and can rightly be seen as a woman entering a man's world in order to speak, what she says in no way compromises her female, specifically maternal, perspective. She is not concerned about the mission, whether that is the foundation of Rome or the boys' attempt to reach Aeneas, but rather perceives her whole purpose as being to follow her son (492); her conventional opening address to the lost beloved soon crystallises into reference to a perennial maternal lesson about not going without saying goodbye:

'hunc ego te, Euryale, aspicio? tune ille senectae

29 — See Wiltshire 1989, esp. ch. 2.

30 — See for example Alexiou 1974 (second edition, 2002); Holst-Warhaft 1992; Parca and Tzanetou (eds) 2007, especially the chapter by Panoussi; Suter (ed) 2008, especially the chapters of Perkill, Keith, and Dutsch. The chapters by Greene, Fantham, and Murnaghan, in the section entitled 'Epic and Lament' in Beissinger et al. (1999), are particularly valuable for the exploration of how far woman's traditional role in lament can and does destabilise the 'capacity of the poem to function as an epic' (introduction, re Fantham's chapter). Loraux 1998 (French original, 1990) offers a particularly subtle account of the interactions of 'public' and 'private' as regards mourning in the ancient, particularly Greek, world.

sera meae requies, potuisti linquere solam,  
 crudelis? nec te sub tanta pericula missum  
 adfari extremum miseræ data copia matri? Aen. 9.481-4

*Is it as this that I see you, Euryalus? You yourself, the late repose of my old age, have you been able to leave me alone, cruel one? Has no opportunity been given to your poor mother to speak her last word to you as you were sent into such danger?*

While it is true, as noted by Hardie 1994, that Andromache also complains at not having had a final word from Hector (*Iliad* 24.743-5), it is a death scene which is envisaged, whereas the mother is complaining that her son did not speak to her before he left on the mission, denying her any role, dissuasive or otherwise, in the prosecution of the military purpose. The implication of the mother's complaint is that the aphorism 'war is the business of men', in ignoring the female perspective, is the source of great suffering. Hallett 2002a has made the attractive suggestion that we might see behind the speeches of the mother, Amata, and Dido the famous letter of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, to her surviving son Gaius. While I find this suggestion very plausible, I would note that it throws the unusual gendering of the mother's scene into starker perspective. On the one hand, Cornelia involves herself in political matters, unlike the mother; on the other hand, Cornelia uses the traditional channels for female political involvement in the Roman world, which is by private influence on male family members who are themselves politically powerful, while the mother eschews the strategy of domestic influence (for which in any case she has apparently no surviving family members) and goes straight out into the public world. Perhaps it is in part precisely in order to throw into relief the mother's unusual status that Virgil creates the oddity of the mother's presence in the poem and the expedition at this stage. The reader's mind in book 9 will be constantly sent back to book 5, linking the two places where Nisus and Euryalus appear, where ships are burned, and where ordinary women bewail the losses of war and attempt to make a difference<sup>31</sup>. In the earlier book, the women were left to mourn Anchises (and themselves) with lament both ritual and heartfelt, while the

31 — Many critics have considered the question of how the mother comes still to be with the Trojans, rather than having stayed behind with the other women in Sicily. Babcock 1992 argues, in my view convincingly, that the mother of Euryalus is not literally the only Trojan woman still with the Aeneadae in Italy – after all, a large number of Iliades join the funeral procession for Pallas. But Virgil has certainly created a situation for the mother in which she is utterly alone: the 'only one' to follow her son through to the end, according to Nisus (9.216-18), apparently a widow, and now childless with the loss of Euryalus. For Egan 1980, the main point of the mother's scene is about the nature of *pietas*, and in particular the challenges that following its dictates may bring. He argues that the Rutulians are failing in true *pietas* because they are not brave enough to do what the mother wants and kill her, which would be truly in keeping with *pietas*. This leads up to the challenge of killing Turnus, which is required by *pietas*. It sounds to me like the arguments for euthanasia.

men and boys sublimated their grief through ritual games which affirmed the continuity of the patriarchal line and offered *kleos* as recompense for loss. Nisus and Euryalus starred in the footrace, their desire for glory at all costs a dark prophecy of their end in book 9. When the women intervene in political affairs by setting fire to the ships, the result is silence and shame as they are suppressed even more violently than the mother is, by being left behind. Somehow the mother escaped that suppression and was still in place to break out onto the walls in book 9. Her lonely situation emphasises the oddity of her representation.

To return to Andromache – whereas the Homeric princess is supported by her sisters, the Virgilian mother's speech provokes a response in the male audience:

hoc fletu concussi animi, maestusque per omnis  
 it gemitus, torpent infractae ad proelia uires. *Aen.* 9.498-9  
*Their spirits were shaken by this weeping, and a sad groan goes through  
 everyone; their powers grow sluggish, broken as regards battle.*

The lines create a frame with those preceding the speech, picking up especially *questibus* (480), *uirum* (479: a telling wordplay with *uires* in 499), and the military words *agmina* (478) and *telorum* (480), while *concussi* (498) echoes *excussi* in 476. The effect of the mother's words and weeping are to undermine the military morale. It is entirely possible for men in the epic world to cry, but when their *uires* (strength, force, but a word which evokes also the emotive term *uir*) grow sluggish, *torpent*, and are broken, *infractae*, the suggestion is that their masculinity is damaged by the weakening effect of emotion. There is nothing for it but to shut her up:

illam incendentem luctus Idaeus et Actor  
 Ilionei monitu et multum lacrimantis Iuli  
 corripunt interque manus sub tecta reponunt. *Aen.* 9.500-2  
*As she was kindling grief, Idaeus and Actor, on the advice of Ilioneus and  
 of the greatly weeping Iulus, snatch<sup>32</sup> her and between their hands they place  
 put her back under the roof.*

Hardie has an excellent note here (1994: 167) on the woman's place closed up deep inside the home, to which the mother must be returned, while Fowler (2000, 108-9) has shown how the closural motifs of these lines create 'a parody of the metaphorical use of enclosure-as-closure

32 — Unsurprisingly, critics have been uncomfortable with Virgil's word *corripunt* to describe the action of the men who take hold of the mother. Servius does his best to soften the blow. *SUB TECTA REPONUNT honorifice. quod autem dicit 'corripunt', non iniuriae est, sed celeritatis, id est raptim tollunt.*

scene at the end of the *Iliad*, where Hector's bones are wrapped in cloth, heaped with stones, and covered with a mound (24.795-9). The episode thus 'ends with her grief unfinished, and a closural allusion that denies closure'. As Fowler suggests, this was hardly the way in which Euryalus would have expected Ascanius to fulfil his extravagant promises to treat the former's mother as his own. Perhaps, however, it is quite in keeping with the epic treatment of mothers by adolescent sons, taking their cue from Telemachus sending Penelope back to the women's quarters because 'speech is the business of men' (*Odyssey* 1.358, cf. *Odyssey* 21.352, where he says the same thing about the bow: in each case his words echo those of Hector to Andromache, at *Iliad* 6.492, where it is πόλεμος which is the business of men).

This misogynistic closural silencing, together with the paternalistic *femineo ululatu*, creates a narratorial frame which sets up a jarring discordance between itself and the speech, with its readerly sympathy provoked by focalisation both through the mother and through her male audience. For which side we read will be a matter of choice, that choice which readers must always make, consciously or unconsciously, in the process of reading. As Casali argues, both readings are there in the text<sup>33</sup>. The discordant frame can shock us into hearing the mother's voice. If we hear it as a woman's voice, however, it takes a strong degree of resistance to stop it being appropriated for the masculinist agenda. Does this imply that it is actually more powerful if we are gender-blind? If so, that would have important repercussions for feminist criticism.

If we hear the silence more loudly, however, we should be aware also of the reason for it. What is surprising is the extent to which the mother's words have an effect on those around her, on people who are not her women friends and handmaidens, nor are they closely parallel to the epic 'model', which it would be reasonable to take as being the ritual grieving response of the Trojan people to Priam's lament for Hector (*Iliad* 22.429). There the response worked in accordance with the civic hierarchy and did not destabilise the war effort. Like so much of women's lament in the epic tradition, Priam's and Andromache's laments for Hector have remarkably little effect in derailing the epic goal, acting rather as ritualised opportunities to express the extremes of grief which the epic tradi-

33 — Casali 2004 is a brilliant display of how the contradictions in the Nisus and Euryalus episode are there in the text and its relationship not only with the Homeric and other intertexts but also with the scholarship on Homer. These contradictions mean that both Augustan and non-Augustan readings are validated by the text. 'Virgil foresees the pessimistic interpretation of the *Aeneid* and the resistance to the bias of his text. But Virgil foresees also the optimistic interpretation and the political uses of his text'. With the result that (354) 'taken literally, the apostrophe to Nisus and Euryalus says this: so long as there will be a house of Aeneas to hold power, so long as there will be a *pater Romanus* to exercise his authority, the sacrifice of the youths will not only be justified, but glorified'.

tion does not deny, but the consequences of which it does not generally pursue. Unusual in the story of Euryalus' mother is the explicit internal reaction to her – instead of being fired up for revenge, the Trojans lose their military morale.

With the reaction of the Trojan forces to the mother's grief Hardie 1994 compares Livy 22.55, when, in a dire situation for Rome after Cannae, the Senate voted to suppress lamentation and other signs of panic in the city. He notes especially the instruction *matronas publico arceant continerique intra suum quamque limen cogant* ('they should ban matrons from appearing in public and should force them all to be kept within their own household'). The mother's situation, in being shut up in the female domain, is indeed interestingly similar, but it is worth noticing the differences also. In Livy 22, there is general panic in the city to which the cries of the mothers are contributing but which they are not initiating, while the initial introduction of the issue gives the impression that the main problem is that the noise of these grieving women is annoying the senators and stopping them think (*cum in malis sicuti ingentibus ita ignotis ne consilium quidem satis expedirent obstreperetque clamor lamentantium mulierum* ...). In this case, then, the women's intervention is not actually heard by anyone, nor given any attention, unlike the situation in *Aeneid* 9. The problem with the mother's intervention in Virgil is precisely that attention is being paid to it. Perhaps similar in that regard, although different in other ways especially in outcome, is the account of the Sabine wives of the first Romans in Livy 1, when they intervene between their husbands and fathers to beg for peace, or the story of how the wife and mother of Coriolanus persuaded him not to engage in war against the city (Livy 2.40.3-10)<sup>34</sup>. On those occasions, the military authorities listened. We should note, therefore, that there is a small but not insignificant tradition of female intervention within Roman accounts of war, a tradition which is active in the *Aeneid* but subtly varied. In Virgil's poem, it seems, women's interventions have a substantial effect on men's emotional state, but no effect on policy. The burning of the ships in Book 5 is a similar case in point, where Aeneas hits his lowest emotional level but the Great Plan is unchanged. Perhaps part of the reason that Virgilian women's intervention fails, as does the mother's, is because they attempt to enter directly into the man's world, rather than using traditional domestic influence on members of their family who also have political authority.

34 — According to Loraux (1998) 17-18, Plutarch intends to show that Coriolanus is at fault in being swayed by his mother's tears, a fault that derives from him not having had the benefit of a father to integrate him properly into civic values.

Nugent has written powerfully about women's voices in the *Aeneid*, in a pair of nuanced and sensitive essays<sup>35</sup> which illustrate the double bind of feminist criticism with which I am concerned in this paper: are these voices enabled effectively to stand up to the poem's masculinist agenda, or do they simply contribute to it as (to focalise) what women would say, as 'womanly wailing'? Nugent (1992) 272 comments briefly on the mother's speech as a voice which offers an alternative to the patriarchal mission. Because she is repressed, however, her outburst 'serves as an effective catalyst for the reassertion and reaffirmation of authoritative power' (232). In her close analysis of the women's voice in Book 5 (1992), Nugent is concerned to show how this voice does not really work as a genuine expression of a female point of view, but rather has been constructed by Virgil in such a way as to enhance the status of patriarchy. This idea was developed in her 1999 piece on the vanishing bodies of the epic, in which the female presence is there, but always undermined, by denial, by silencing and by invisibility. The question left, inevitably, unresolved is to what extent there is a genuine alternative sentiment underneath the patriarchal surface, to what extent the voice still lingers.

So does Virgil allow (a) woman's voice? There is certainly a powerful strand within the poem which is deeply misogynistic. It is best expressed by the notorious judgement on women made by the god Mercury, when he comes at night to Aeneas in order to hurry him along in his plans to leave Carthage for the great future of Rome. Mercury claims that the hero must leap up and set off at once, because *uariū et mutabile semper/ femina* ('a variable and changeable thing always is woman', 4.569-70) and she might turn on him at any moment. Just to establish the case against Mercury, even if it is obvious: he says that woman is a thing, that this thing keeps changing, that all examples of this changeable thing are the same, and that woman is a category from which to know one is to know them all. While such a comment, from the god of thieves and liars, with an obvious rhetorical purpose at hand, need not be taken as the considered assessment of the poet or the poem as a whole (if such a thing is conceivable), we should not underestimate the extent to which Mercury's aphorism resonates with the critical tradition. It is an assessment which might not be far from the judgement of many of Virgil's readers, contemporary and later. It should not, however, take too much effort of resistance to notice that Dido is in fact remarkably consistent in her behaviour and attitude towards Aeneas, while it is the great masculine hero who is constantly changing his mind. Not only has he apparently settled in Carthage (when Mercury first arrives, he is laying the foundations of the

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35 — Nugent 1992 and 1999.

city, wearing a cloak made by Dido) whereas his original plan was to find the Trojans' 'ancient mother', but as soon as he hears the message from Jupiter he suddenly and completely changes his mind, laying plans to leave. Those plans are again easily influenced by Mercury's intervention, such that Aeneas is willing at a stroke to set out in the middle of the night instead of continuing with his carefully laid preparations. If anyone deserves the designation *mutabilis* in this book, it is Aeneas.

Does this mean, then, that Virgil has set up the dissonance between authorial and divine comment on the one hand, and other aspects of the narrative on the other, in such a way as to foreshadow the feminist reading of later centuries? Such a description of the poem would not, I think, be unreasonable, especially if we accept that it is not necessary for an ancient poet to have been able to formulate an interpretation of his own work in the terms which we would now use. Mercury's disparaging reification of all women as woman expresses *in nuce* the extreme end of a perennial philosophical issue both relevant to the *Aeneid* and central to this paper: it is a question about the relationship between the category and the individual exemplars of that category. Aeneas invites Dido to learn what all Greeks are like from his account of Sinon's treachery (2.65-6), and yet the poem regularly overturns this negative assessment of the category «Greek» with a series of disruptions of ethnic stereotype. Who, or what, is a Greek, or, still more, a (proto-)Roman is a pressing though unresolved question throughout the poem<sup>36</sup>.

What I find more important than the question of whether Virgil can in any sense be said to have intended a feminist reading of his work is the question of what the strategies of such reading should be today, and in this regard also the issue of reification is highly pertinent. I intend the phrase 'should be' to be taken not only for the purposes of elucidating Virgil for a 21st-century audience but also in a political and moral sense.

A major problem in contemporary feminist criticism of the classics is whether we should argue for female specificity or for equal rights<sup>37</sup>. Should we look to identify specifically female voices, characteristics, actions, and behaviours, giving these the focus of interest in which we are explicitly conscious of gender difference? Or should we ignore all gender

36 — I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers for pointing out the need to consider ethnic reification alongside gendered.

37 — My question is not unrelated to the tension between celebrating heroic women and exposing the wrongs women suffer, an issue with which Richlin grapples in the introduction to Rabinowitz and Richlin 1993. The issues with which this article is concerned are relevant to the important essay of Julia Kristeva, easily available in Belsey and Moore, second edition 1997, chapter 15, 203-4: 'the sharpest and most subtle point of feminist subversion brought about by the new generation will henceforth be situated on the terrain of the inseparable conjunction of the sexual and the symbolic, in order to try to discover, first, the specificity of the female, and then, in the end, that of each individual woman'.

difference as potentially demeaning and as providing the opportunity for oppression? If we argue for female specificity, we risk playing into the hands of the patriarchal text which characterises all aspects of female specificity as signs of female weakness (the woman's voice can be ignored); but if we deny female specificity in the interests of equality, then we risk contributing to the female invisibility which is so prevalent in the literary tradition, and in the reading of Roman epic especially (there is no woman's voice)<sup>38</sup>. I am inclined towards female specificity<sup>39</sup>, but even that can work two ways: if we draw out what is specific about the female, especially in an ancient text, we may be giving a voice to the voiceless, but there is a great risk that we are simply playing into the masculinist agenda of the text, that 'female wailing' is always a bad thing, such that any specifically female thing becomes a specifically foolish or bad thing. In a work of feminist linguistics which is very much a product of its time, reflecting language use in middle-class America of the early 1970s, but which remains translatable into contemporary terms, Lakoff 1975 considers the double bind of female language usage (6): 'So a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn't. If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human'. A similar double bind affects feminine/feminist criticism.

The question of female specificity versus equal rights has a parallel with the history of 20th-century feminism, which has been usefully divided into three 'waves': opposing patriarchy, gynocriticism, deconstruction<sup>40</sup>. The first involved the major political developments like the suffragette movement and its descendants, roughly paralleled in literature by identification of the patriarchal assumptions in so much of world literature; the second saw the rise of female power, of which the women-only Greenham Common Peace Camp was a major symbol, and which was roughly paralleled by an attempt to recuperate women writers (and, perhaps, in classics, where Sappho and Sulpicia offer us so little to work on, in the identification of women's voices in male-authored texts); the third questioned the very category 'woman', whether from a pragmatic point of view as a damaging generalisation or from a philosophical point of view as a false effect of language. The divisions are, inevitably, somewhat vague, overlapping, and variable in their application to different spheres of femi-

38 — Cf. the marvellous line in the epilogue to Alison Keith's excellent study of women in Roman epic, when she recounts the story of a graduate mentor who said 'there are no women in epic' (2000, 132).

39 — Formative works for me were Fetterley 1978 and Gubar 1981 whose "'The blank page" and the issues of female creativity' is something that has really impressed me.

40 — Moi 2002 (first edition, 1985) gives a useful account.

nist activity, but for all that I think they still have important implications. In particular, I am not the only observer to be concerned to note how literary criticism from a feminist perspective seems somewhat to have lost its way since the third wave took hold in the early 1990s<sup>41</sup>. Although by no means a specialist in modern sociology, I wish to make two suggestions as to why this might be the case. The first is because female specificity, which is central to second-wave thinking and was a central plank in the development of the third wave<sup>42</sup>, has become muddled by the very developments towards gender-equality which have always been (and surely must always be) the goal of the feminist movement. I hope the reader will take the point in the light of a proper understanding of statistics if I make the claim that in the last 30 years (Western) women have in some ways become more like men. More women are aggressive drivers as well as more being judges and company directors (sadly, but statistically not surprisingly, far more in absolute numbers of the first than the second two). Whereas iconic feminist works have sought, found, and developed 'writing like a woman', many young women today would not recognise themselves in Kristeva's chora<sup>43</sup>. The second reason is an unfortunate side-effect of the otherwise valuable rise to prominence of studies of gender and sexuality. In the classical sphere particularly, this has involved a flowering of interest in masculinity – a feminist project, indeed, in that it is impossible to study masculinity while treating the male as if it were simply equivalent to the human, as if it were the default position of humanity. Sadly, the study of masculinity is also a project which can have the effect of yet again sidelining the position of women.

It is such sidelining, also, which I have come to see as collateral damage caused by poststructuralist third-wave feminism and its postfeminist offspring (if that is not too awkward a metaphor). Gubar and Moi are among feminist thinkers with whom I would sympathise for their concern over these effects. According to Gubar 2000, what 'ails feminist criticism' is

41 — Gubar 2000. This is not to say, of course, that there have not been valuable contributions more recently. Spentzou 2003 is a good inheritor of gynocriticism; Lindheim 2003; Keith 2000; and the titles in the OUP series *Oxford Studies In Classical Literature and Gender Theory*. A sadly rare recent British-based volume on classics and feminist literary criticism is Zajko and Leonard 2006.

42 — An aspect of third-wave thinking with which I am particularly sympathetic is the fact that it grew partly out of a concern that second-wave feminism treated 'woman' as if a single category, but that single category looked alarmingly like a particular subtype (white, middle-class). The response was to stress the variation among women, to the extent that the category was no longer held to be useful. See Weedon 1999.

43 — Irigaray 1985 and Cixous 1991 are major works of French feminist scholarship which I still find valuable, but with which my students find it hard to relate. For a more recent (but still last century) reflection by Kristeva on the issue of gender parity and the difficulties involved in speaking up for the female without reproducing (or being accused of reproducing) oppressive masculinist structures, see Kristeva's article 'Le sens de la parité', in *Le Monde*, 23 March, 1999, an English translation of which is available in Lechte and Zournazi 2003.

partly too much fighting, self-righteous posturing, and poststructuralist obscurantism, but in particular a kind of ‘critical anorexia’, in which ‘radicalized identity politics made the word “woman” slim down to stand only for a very particularised kind of woman, whereas poststructuralists required the term to disappear altogether’ (132). Although she does appreciate valuable contributions to feminist thought from both these perspectives, she also, I think rightly, considers them part of the problem. Moi, in the 2002 afterword to the second edition of her 1985 book, summarises the problem well: ‘Let me just say that in much poststructuralist gender theory, and certainly in Butler’s, the word “gender” is substituted for the word “woman”, or rather: the words “woman” and “gender” are taken to be synonymous. At the same time “gender” is opposed to “sex”. The result is that women are divorced from their bodies, and that “woman” is turned into a discursive and performative effect. It is difficult to see what the advantage of such a convoluted view might be.’ (178) While I agree with Moi’s sense that using the term ‘woman’ to designate ‘a human being with the usual biological and anatomical sexual characteristics’ is politically useful as well as true, and that ‘the point of arguing strongly against essentialism, is to stop sexist generalizations about this class of people ... not to deny that such a class of people exists’, nonetheless I am very conscious of the difficulty involved whenever we say ‘woman’, ‘female’, or ‘feminine’<sup>44</sup>, a difficulty which is well expressed by the problems of *femineus* discussed above. Although I do not agree with Butler’s famous argument (1990) that not only gender but also sex is purely performative, the difficulties involved in finding a way of saying ‘womanly’, without all the baggage, suggest the power of discourse to create reality.

This article has been concerned with the question of how we negotiate passage between the Scylla and Charybdis<sup>45</sup> of feminist criticism. If we identify a female voice in the *Aeneid*, there is a risk that we play into the hands of the masculinist agenda (of the ancient world, of epic, and of the classical tradition), by offering up victims for suppression – since if something can be designated as female then it can be despised. If we look for equality of voices, for example by denying, or more likely ignoring, any distinctions between characters along gender lines, then we contribute to female invisibility, because the ‘equality’ we see (or attempt to create) will in fact be maleness. Even if it is just possible (I personally do not think so) for the modern world to function according to a policy of gender-blind equality, that option is not open to us who study the texts and cultures of the ancient world. If we tag along with post-feminism,

44 — Fuss 1989.

45 — Two mythic monsters who embody male fears of female power and female sexuality: do they make a good metaphor for the difficulties of feminist criticism?

lose women in gender studies and lose gender in sexuality studies (and/or identity studies), we will in effect play into the masculinist agenda of both the ancient world and the classical tradition. The only options open to us will be either to ignore women or to despise them.

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