

The identification of **Creusa** as Aeneas' wife is not firmly fixed in the ancient sources before the *Aeneid* itself. Ancient representations of Aeneas' departure from Troy sometimes include a woman, but she is unnamed; and in the fragments of the Epic Cycle, she is called Eurydice. Her disappearance and death may well be Vergilian innovations, too, intended to allow both for Aeneas' subsequent relationship with **Dido** and for his eventual marriage to Lavinia. Dido makes her first appearance in late fourth-century BCE Hellenistic history, as the expansion of Carthage and other developments in the western Mediterranean give new prominence to the cultural and political reach of the Phoenicians. The encounter of Aeneas and Dido probably appeared in Naevius' *Bellum Punicum*, but at least according to Varro it was Dido's sister **Anna**, rather than Dido herself, who fell in love with the Trojan leader and committed suicide. The Vergilian version of the cultural confrontation represented by Dido's encounter with Aeneas and her subsequent demise is therefore likely to have been read as an innovation upon the traditional story, and is clearly informed by both contemporary political discourse about foreign, especially Eastern, peoples (of whom the Egyptian ruler Cleopatra is typecast as representative) and the status of women in the Roman world. Insofar as the conflict between Dido and Aeneas has been read as analogous to that between Carthage and Rome, furthermore, Dido has been interpreted as a stand-in of sorts for Hannibal. As with Aeneas, however, the temptation to allegorize is best avoided, at least in its simplest form; for it is clear that the historical models for Dido must share the limelight with her literary forerunners, like Ariadne, Medea, and Deianira.

Aside from these, there are **numerous other characters** in the *Aeneid* who play roles of some significance, both Trojans (e.g., Priam, Laocoon, Helenus, Palinurus, Achates, Nisus, Euryalus) and the ethnically diverse inhabitants of Italy (e.g., Latinus, Lavinia, Turnus, Evander, Pallas, Camilla, Iuturna, Mezentius, Lausus); the Greeks too are central to the narrative, although their roles are more often described by others than directly depicted (e.g., Odysseus [Ulysses], Achilles, Patroclus, Neoptolemus [Pyrrhus], Helen). All of these characters bear comparison with their Homeric and tragic prototypes; in these notes I shall attempt to indicate at least how to begin such comparative examination.

Arguably, however, **the gods**—or at least a few of them—are even more important than the humans in Vergil's epic narrative: Juno, Venus, Apollo, and Jupiter—as well as traditionally “minor” figures like Aeolus, Iris, and Mercury—are not only constant observers of human action in

the poem but also play a central role in shaping human action. It has often been asked with some skepticism whether Vergil or his first audience, the sophisticated elite of the early principate, would have taken these gods seriously, that is, whether these gods would have been believed in and believable, both because of their obviously literary origins and because of the apparent absence of religious sentiment, at least in the modern sense, from Roman life in the first century BCE. Yet if we ignore the gods in the *Aeneid*, or see them simply as some sort of epic window-dressing, we risk writing off almost half of the poem, including moreover numerous scenes whose fundamental purpose seems to be to show the crucial part played by forces outside ourselves in human affairs: indeed, it is possible to read the *Aeneid* as evidence for the deep religiosity of the Augustan era, a religiosity that is best understood not in terms of belief or morality but in terms of cultural identity. The gods are as central to this identity as is Aeneas himself.

### *Vergil's Influence*

The history of Vergil's reception as "the classic of all Europe," as T.S. Eliot called him, and indeed of all the West, can only be given in rough outline here; readers who wish to proceed further into this terrain are therefore advised to look at one or more of the many new treatments of Vergilian reception, and indeed of reception of Roman poetry as a whole, that have emerged in recent years. A few moments from Vergil's rich afterlife can nonetheless be noted here.

First witness to the Vergilian achievement is **Ovid**, who grew up reading Vergil's poetry and was undoubtedly deeply influenced by its language, its cadences, and its central themes. Ovid returns repeatedly in his poetry to Vergilian themes and characters, from the love letter written by the abandoned Dido to Aeneas (*Heroides* 7) to a rewriting of the *Aeneid*, from a new and sometimes subversive perspective, in the last books of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid even exploits the Vergilian model from his place of exile, Tomis, imagining his departure from Rome in terms that are clearly modeled on Aeneas' escape from Troy (*Tristia* 1.3).

Three centuries after Ovid, the emperor **Constantine** (in a sermon dated to the early 320s CE) would read the fourth *Eclogue* as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus and thus of Christianity, and see Vergil therefore as a proto-Christian; and **Augustine** (354–430 CE) too would look to Vergil's characters as models for understanding human behavior and emotions, even as he rejected the pagan worldview of Vergil's work.