Venus, Thetis and the Social Construction of Maternal Behavior
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VENUS, THETIS AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MATERNAL BEHAVIOR

Anthony van Dyck’s mythological painting “Venus in the Forge of Vulcan” exemplifies the graceful courtly manner that the artist acquired through his study of Venetian masters (Figure 1). Regrettably we do not know for whom, or on what premises, the piece was commissioned, but the combination of wit and elegance in an animated scene suggests that the master of formal aristocratic portraits was enjoying the freedom offered by mythological subjects in which his elite patrons themselves took a cultivated interest. At the same time the particular subject allowed play with moods of passion and attraction.

A viewer who recalls his Vergil will observe that the moment represented does not occur in the narrative of Aeneid 8, where Venus is never described as entering Vulcan’s forge. Rather the conjugal pleading by which she obtains arms for her hero son transpires in the bedchamber, the aureus thalamus, where blandishments are

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1 During the year 1992-93, when I was a Fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, I had the opportunity to renew personal contact with Nan Michels. Saturday afternoon teas at her Carol Woods apartment brought forth her great resources of learning and seasoned ideas, her delightfully opinionated reminiscences of Bryn Mawr College, the American Academy in Rome, the American Philological Association, Kirssopp Lake’s Harvard and a host of famous classicists, not to mention her unfailing interest in the career and projects of a former student. During this time I was writing, among other projects, an invited conference paper whose guidelines were to approach the contemporary critical issues surrounding Vergil’s Aeneid within a context of comparison between Vergil and Homer. Nan liked my idea of focussing on Venus as a Roman mother; we discussed it on several occasions, and so I am happy to present as a tribute this only slightly altered version of the paper.

At the same time I must offer thanks to the conference hosts and organizers, Leon Golden and Nancy DeGrummond of Florida State University, as well as to hosts on other occasions when the paper was presented: Niall Slater of Emory University and Robert Rabel, Hubert Martin and Jane Phillips of the University of Kentucky at Lexington. Changes and additions to the original paper are largely in response to discussions with this triad.

counterpointed against voyeuristic glimpses of a sensuous embrace (8.370–406). Next morning Vulcan himself rises, like a sedulous housewife in the grey dawn, and journeys to his Aeolian workshop where he sets the Cyclops to work (8.407–453). When he has got the bellows breathing and the molten metals pouring, Vergil cuts to the site of Rome where Aeneas himself, as a guest of King Evander, is concluding his negotiations for allies (8.454–57). Where Venus herself might be while both the armor and the treaty are in process is not supplied, but we do indirectly learn that she has picked up her order at the moment when she uses the arms themselves to create a celestial sign solemnizing the treaty (8.520–40). To Aeneas this signal recalls his mother’s previous promise of divine armor—actually news to the reader at this point—and shortly after, in a valley of Caere, he receives the gift (8.608). Thus van Dyck’s painting, unlike much contemporary cinematography, does not outright falsify Vergil’s narrative but supplements the action by the imaginative interpolation of a scene that had to have occurred backstage. The point becomes even clearer if we look at the painter’s second version of the visit (Figure 2). While identical representations of Vulcan suggest that the two could be stages in continuous narrative, fancy has here taken a Rubenesque direction making the details, such as the Erotes sporting with pieces of the hero’s armor, overtly humorous.

The humor of this painting, however, belittles epic dignity, which is not the case with the other, in which we can recognize the painter’s contribution by a conflation of scenes from multiple epic sources. Venus’ arresting entry, which does not occur in the Aeneid, all the same recalls Thetis’ arrival at Vulcan’s forge in the Iliad where the nymph, come to plead for arms on behalf of her short-lived son, is cordially welcomed on the strength of her past kindnesses to Vulcan (18.395–98). Homer’s scene, however, is not erotic, so that we might think that the erotic coloring of van Dyck’s epiphany is transferred from Vergil’s conjugal bedchamber scene, which plays upon the sensuous power of the goddess over her rough-cut spouse, an interaction that every gesture of van Dyck’s principal figures dramatizes. Since the arms are already in progress here, there is no call for persuasion, and indeed the goddess seems more likely to interrupt than to further the work. One may note that the complex

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3 Wheelock (n. 2 above) 233–35, # 59, “Venus at the Forge of Vulcan.”
4 Wheelock (n. 2 above) 234 cites as precedents Rubens’ “Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes” and Botticelli’s “Mars and Venus.”
shield of Aeneas with its dynastic iconography has been reduced to a minor position, and the armor, anachronistically, is that worn by the elegant cavaliers of the painter’s own time. The drapery of the goddess, if not her posture, suggests a classical statue, but classicism is not the chief aim. What van Dyck has conspicuously rendered by his epiphany is the expense of erotic energy in contrast with the mechanical force that enables the action of the heroic world.

This dissonance precisely epitomizes the impression many readers have conceived of Venus’ conduct as one of the unsettling elements in the Aeneid. Her conjugal appeal to Vulcan is of course only one of the actions she undertakes that readers have found disturbing. Both in her role as mother of the epic hero and in her function as one of the divine machinators traditional to epic, the goddess has, in recent years, provoked a dubious, when not outright negative response. Historically this judgement arises from the critical observation that the goddess falls short in her provision of maternal comfort. Thus Brooks Otis’ emphasis on the heroic loneliness manifested in Aeneas’ sentimental attachment to the past and his initial alienation from his mission places an ambivalent construction on those actions by which the goddess directly intervenes in the hero’s progress. When the disguised mother accosts her son in the wilderness outside Carthage, Otis finds a qualitative moral discrepancy in the ironies attending Aeneas’ ignorance, a difference between long and short range purposes that is often a cause of mortal sorrow. Similarly Antonie Wlosok, whose monograph comprises the most thoroughgoing study of literary models and religious associations surrounding Venus, acknowledges a tension between the goddess’ personal and dynastic aspects: “a painful distance between mother and son” very different from the affectionate interactions of Thetis and Achilles which correspond, Wlosok observes, to what mothers in European society are conventionally expected to do.6

6 Wlosok, Die Göttin Venus in Vergils Aeneis (Heidelberg 1967) 86–88; 110–11: “For him she is no goddess, but a mother.” As she observes, each mother plays the role of mediator between her son and the gods, but in very different ways. Thetis interacts with Achilles always on a personal level and answers to his immediate needs and grievances. Because Venus does not supply this form of emotionally directed attention, but only intervenes indirectly through her influence on a supernatural plane, Wlosok notes that her conduct as guardian has more in common with that of Athene in the Odyssey, yet also with significant differences. Of course it has been demonstrated by any number of scholars, but most thoroughly by Georg Knauer, that the single figure of Thetis did not supply the sole model for all of the
Both Otis and Wlosok couch these observations within the framework of generally pro-nationalistic readings that take for granted Vergil’s wholehearted espousal of Aeneas’ mission as the ideological basis of the poem. In Wlosok’s long-range evaluation, the tension between personal and dynastic pressures surrounding Venus is ultimately resolved by the goddess’ role as the bestower of transcendence. Her role in Roman affairs is a kind of cumulative one combining social functions as a figure accessible through propitiation to a Republican patroness acquiring the epithets Victrix and Genetrix to the ultimate symbol of the prosperity of Augustan rule. Finding this latter premise itself dubious, a number of more recent interpreters have converted Otis’ and Wlosok’s ambivalent evaluations into negative ones. While the ideological construction placed upon Venus’ actions is scarcely a determinant of any reader’s approach to the poem in its entirety, it is a reliable index of the direction of sympathies represented by that interpretation.

Let me illustrate briefly with reference to two recent books on the Aeneid. Both Venus’ ancestral and her creative roles are emphasized in Philip Hardie’s Cosmos and Imperium with its broad, philosophically based vision of Rome as a focus of cosmic order. Essentially Lucretian in her origin, Hardie’s Venus has been translated into Roman culture in a philosophically conceptualized role. Although her function as ancestress of the Julian family is important, this is secondary to her significance as mother of the nation and a sponsor of Rome’s wide-reaching power. Hardie is not concerned with the specifics of Venus’ role as participant in the drama of the Aeneid, except for the one scene where she follows the precedent of Thetis in procuring armor made by Vulcan to enhance the heroism of her son.⁷

A dramatic difference appears when we turn from this constructive vision to listen with Oliver Lyne to the “further voices” that offer the reader an option of disquieting moments and disturbing opinions.⁸ Here, with a major shift in the qualitative status of the goddess, her actions pass from ambiguous to negative. Notably this happens within an interpretive framework that is very different from Hardie’s. Where the one scholar concerns himself primarily with broad perspectives and the Roman world within its

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⁷ Philip Hardie, Vergil’s Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium (Oxford 1988).
contemporary context, the other focuses on actions and scenes, or specifically on words. But in fact words have always foregrounded these questions of Vergil’s intention. As Putnam once brought out the manner in which Aeneas in Book 12 yields to *ira* in his killing of Turnus,

Lyne notices the infectious influence of *ira* in the language of Venus’ first plotting against Dido, when the goddess shows herself motivated by the same destructively antisocial passions as her rival Juno and the agent Allecto. But, just as an angered Aeneas is more disturbing than an angry Turnus, so a violent Venus is more unsettling than a demonic Juno whose hostilities will finally be placated and whose force will ultimately be redirected in support of Roman rule. According to Lyne, an imical Venus compromises the very goal of the poem itself. “Venus,” he reminds us, “was the reputed ancestor of the Julian *gens*. The dictator Julius had honored her with a temple in his new forum. She was exploited in the propaganda of Augustus. One might expect Rome’s great epic to defer to her and assign to her dignity, benevolence, magnificence. . . . [Instead] the explicit action (the epic voice) as well as the further insinuating voices present her in roles that are traditional but hardly flattering.”

His chief example of unflattering portrayal is the scene of Venus’ negotiation with Vulcan that underlies van Dyck’s painting. However, unlike the painter, Lyne does not imaginatively track the goddess into her husband’s workshop but rather performs his between-the-lines reading in the opulent bedchamber (*aureo thalamo*) that represents the difference between the somber world of human affairs and frivolous gods. “Vergil is not fond of this goddess,” he contends, “in spite of her illustrious associations.”

The political nature of Lyne’s reading forms my own point of departure in this essay. The proposition I want to investigate is not whether we find Venus a sympathetic or unsympathetic character, or whether we like the things that she stands for, but instead whether the social structure within which she is framed can explain aspects of her conduct. What I mean by social structure involves points of reference different from its political background and merits consideration of a different kind. Social analysis does not invite the literary critic’s ethical judgement upon events or circumstances. Furthermore, deeply rooted social patterns, although they may be modified or altered by political circumstances, do not

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10 Lyne (n. 8 above) 35.
11 Lyne (n. 8 above) 35.
tend to change with that same mobility with which political ideologies can change. Nor do they necessarily change at all. Roman ideas about maternal conduct, for instance, show much more consistency from Republic to Empire than notions of senatorial conduct. So by considering the Roman social implications of Venus’ activities I am appealing to norms that bridge the transition between politically defined periods, and that should, for this reason, have a bearing on our view of the poem.

Naturally, as a literary scholar, I am aware that certain limitations apply to the interface between poetic texts and the material of social history. Generally we assume that the events in a poem are imaginative constructs and not to be cited as direct evidence for the creation of historical paradigms. It is, however, a different proposition, as I see it, in this current theoretical climate, when social history has come to focus on customs and practices that can be said to affect literary representation in the form of cultural horizons, to employ its discoveries and formulations as a guide to historically informed readings of poetic fictions. As always, when cultural reconstructions are enlisted as interpretive guides, these can prevent us from relying, however innocently or involuntarily, upon cultural assumptions of our own. Therefore I want to look specifically at the concerns and interests of this Roman mother as she differs from her Homeric predecessor. This difference is visible especially in two areas that might be generalized as material and personal: in the mother’s long-term conceptualization of goals in the light of her personal interests, and in the specifics of her interaction with her son. Among the many recent studies concerning the Roman family, Suzanne Dixon’s *The Roman Mother* is particularly straightforward in its premise that the ethical values attributed to maternity in any society are rationalized out of existing social and economic circumstances. Dixon’s demonstrations of this principle have contributed the basis for my discussion here.

Let me begin by comparing the two scenes occurring in the first books of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, in which both aspects of maternal conduct I have mentioned figure prominently. In these scenes the two mothers, Thetis and Venus, intercede with Zeus on behalf of their sons. The appeal staged by Thetis follows in consequence of Achilles’ angry response to the loss of Briseis, and sets in motion the action of the *Iliad* since the goddess requests Trojan success that will make Achilles’ absence regretted by the Greeks (*Iliad* 1.453–510).

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Neither the substance of this request nor the motivation to deliver it stems from Thetis' own invention. Not only has Achilles himself solicited his mother's intervention but he has also devised the plan she unfolds. Achilles complains how Agamemnon has deprived him of his deserved honor (timē) and Thetis embraces the cause of honor as the essence of her son's desire. Honor is also at issue on other occasions when Thetis intervenes in Achilles' fortunes. She is aware that a short life is the price to be paid for lasting glory (kleos; 9.410–16), but the crux of her fear, in accordance with Achilles' own fear, is that his cause might be so thwarted that even this short life will lack its merited respect.

This point is reiterated with reference to the forging of Achilles' armor (18.428–61), and Zeus also invokes it when he sends Thetis at the end of the poem to resolve the stasis of anger blocking the return of Hector's body to Troy (24.77–140). I am not suggesting that Homer's portrayal of interaction between mother and son is historically accurate for the 12th century, yet it is worth considering, as Laura Slatkin has done, that Homer has altered the traditional mythology of Thetis to serve the purposes of his poem.13 In the Iliad Thetis' particular exercise of maternal solicitude is a consequence of her frustrated desire to preserve her son's life. Emphasis on motherly affection serves to foreground mortality as a larger issue of the poem. If traditional mythology may have invested Thetis with stronger protective powers and also with erotic attractions, Homer has converted her position within his Olympian society to that of a minor deity with restricted powers whose solicitude for her son overshadows her erotic appeal. Thetis herself represents her secondary status and the practical limitation of her power with reference to that forced union with a human partner that has imposed mortal limitations upon her son. Her primary purpose is always to ease the distress Achilles must suffer because of these mortal limitations (18.429–37). Helpless as she may be in the face of mortality, Thetis is all the same powerful in terms of the poem because her request is for no less than for Achilles "to become the hero of the Iliad; to create the terms by which heroism will be redefined."14 Son and mother share an awareness of the choices of

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13 Laura Slatkin, The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad (Berkeley 1991) 6–7; 20–23. Specifically, she notes the similarity in the Aethiopis between Eos who obtains immortality for Memnon and Thetis who carries Achilles to the "White Island." A powerful Indo-European dawn goddess who takes a mortal lover is the model for these patterns of mother-son interrelationship.

14 Slatkin (n. 13 above) 40.
destiny, and she can instinctively predict his choices. To view this Homeric background as Slatkin does, with an emphasis on the linkage between maternal care and the hero’s mortality, shows the very impossibility of Vergil’s replicating the sentimental tenderness of Homer’s mother-son relationship, but also the challenge that he faced in creating a situation that can provide effective divine support for the hero without depriving him of an heroic life.

Venus, in her interview with Jupiter, also shows knowledge of a predicted destiny for her son. Having nothing to do with his projected life span, it looks forward to the end of his journey and the future greatness of his race. Unlike Thetis who goes to Zeus at Achilles’ behest, Venus obeys only the prompting of personal anxiety in suddenly seeking Jupiter’s presence (Aeneid 1.227–53). This vicarious action has as precedent Athena’s complaint in the Odyssey about the unreasonable delay in the hero’s homecoming caused by Neptune’s anger. Venus also complains of delay. Aeneas is being held from the Italian territory promised to him, and his descendants do not appear to be on the verge of a significant historical future. Later we will learn that Aeneas himself knows at least half of this destiny since he had learned at Crete that the place of his resettlement was to be his ancient paternal home. He is claiming a familial inheritance, and Venus’ entire conversation with Jupiter concerns property and a promised inheritance.

Jupiter’s response to her is wholly paternal. In the manner of a Roman paterfamilias he kisses his daughter’s lips before assuring her that her son’s fate remains unaltered in his mind. Ultimately his descendants will gain both land and unending power sanctioned by the good will of Juno. Because Jupiter’s promise is only a reaffirmation of his own long-range plans, Venus does not, like Thetis (Iliad 1.511–15), need to plead for it twice. Already, before her approach, the reader has seen the “ruler of gods and men” looking down upon the Carthaginian kingdom. If Venus’ intervention has any immediate effect on the plot of the poem, it is only in serving to remind Jupiter of the obstructive potential of human agencies so that he

15 That Aeneas will not have many years to live following his Italian victory is obliquely intimated by Jupiter’s reference to a third summer and a third winter (1.265–66), but neither brought to the surface of the poem nor apparently acknowledged by Venus.

16 Servius on Aen. 256 comments on the kiss (oscula libavit) as a religious kind of salutation, appropriate for a father to give to a child. One might, however, wonder if it is not the kind of test that Roman males are said to give their women to assure that they have not been drinking wine.
dispatches Mercury as messenger to ensure a hospitable reception for Aeneas at Carthage.

The second pair of scenes in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* demanding close comparison are those with which we began: Thetis and Venus enlist the assistance of Vulcan in providing armor for their sons. Here also we find a contrast between the concern for honor and for the claim of a rightful inheritance. As a preliminary to this scene Homer again shows us a complex interaction between mother and son, again a turning point of the poem since it witnesses Achilles’ final election of an heroic and immortal destiny as against an inglorious old age. He is the sole determiner of his conduct, but Thetis duly facilitates the choice that entails her own commitment to his mortality (*Iliad* 18.94–96). Only in one matter does she command her son; pointing out his need for suitable armor to replace that lent to Patroklos, she orders him to refrain from battle until her return (18.128–37). Achilles is obedient even to the point of denying Iris’ injunction to join battle without his promised armor (18.187–95). As Thetis presents her case to Vulcan, the purpose of the armor is to compensate for the losses and griefs inflicted upon Achilles as a mortal (18.428–62). Armor cannot change his fate, but it does allow him to confront it in the most appropriate manner.

No such loss compels the forging of Aeneas’ divine armor, but rather Venus represents the occasion as a deferred advantage that she, as the wife of Vulcan, has the right to confer upon her son (*Aeneid* 8.374–86). Within these parameters, she pleads anxiety in the face of Laurentian hostilities, but she also claims credit for not having made the request before. The new circumstance by which she justifies her request at this moment is Aeneas’ completion of the first part of his mission, his arrival on Rutulian shores with Jupiter’s sanction. That she is soliciting favors for her son by a different father is not so strange in the light of the Roman custom where a mother is expected to give first priority to the property rights of her son irrespective of her current marital circumstances.

17 Slatkin (n. 13 above) 45 contrasts the Iliadic powers and limitations of the two mothers: “In contrast to the rescue efforts by which Aphrodite removes her man from danger, Thetis ‘protects’ Achilles by providing him with the means to enter the battle from which he will not return.”

18 As Slatkin (n. 13 above) 46 remarks, she is “telling a mother’s story about her son.”

19 Dixon (n. 12 above) 9: 63–67 comments on this practice which, as she says, is a creation of social convention rather than of law. A notable Republican example of a mother’s adherence to familial concerns and her possible exploitation of an
even if Vergil here keeps both the actualities of Venus’ liaison with Anchises and the parentage of Cupid discreetly in the background.

That Venus phrases her request as she does may seem odd, since Vulcan himself answers that he would readily have granted it at any time, and indeed that Troy might have stood ten years longer (8.395-404), but a reader might attribute this confusion to the blurring of his judgement by passion. Within its epic context, the propriety of this particular moment in relationship to the progress of the narrative is made clear by Venus’ allusion to Thetis and Achilles’ arms (8.383-84). That she frames her request in the title of genetrix also points to a critical moment in the fulfillment of her dynamic aims. While Venus exploits her sexual fascination for Vulcan to secure her request, her husband, as he prepares to execute the commission, is cast, by means of a simile, into a feminine role. He is like a chaste housewife who stirs the fire in early morning and rouses her house slaves in a routine that demonstrates her virtue and promotes the education of her sons (8.406-416).

When Venus delivers the arms, she emphasizes their derivation as munera produced by her husband’s art (8.611-12). With this combined epic and social sanction she has done the best for Aeneas that her personal and official status could accomplish, and the kiss she receives in return for her gift pays symbolic tribute to supportive maternity. The long-term gift she has given is the fama et fata nepotum (731: “the fame and destinies of his descendants”). Hardie interprets this phrase with the useful suggestion that the shield is a concrete symbolic materialization of the initial promise Jupiter had made to Venus in Aeneid 1. Seen in this light, Venus’ gift of the shield as a donum parentis bestows property within her power in order to help her son take possession of his father’s inheritance. As Hardie points out, the scenes on Aeneas’ shield are dynastic in their references to the family derivation of the Romans. Furthermore, they are territorial in that they invoke the physical world of Rome: the Lupercal and the Capitoline as well as Rome’s contests for

amorous liaison to exercise care for her son appears in Richard Bauman’s discussion of negotiations between Brutus’ mother Servilia and Julius Caesar as her lover (Women and Politics in Ancient Rome [London 1992] 73-77).

20 Putnam (n. 9 above) 138-40 gives the simile, and indeed the entire incident, a dynastic coloring when he proposes that the “small children” of the comparison can be seen as “Venus’ descendants—Aeneas and his children—whom it is now Vulcan’s purpose not only to defend but, almost literally, to create, as he molds for Aeneas on the shield the fame and fortune of his heirs.”

21 Hardie (n. 7 above) 346-66.
domination with Sabines and Albans, ending in her defense against the invading Gauls.

These scenes of intercession show differences between the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* both in their reflection of practical material values and in the degree of initiative that mothers take independently of their sons. Similar characteristics are present in other scenes of the *Aeneid* that have no direct Iliadic precedent. In Book 5 Venus appeals to Neptune after the loss of the Trojan ships and the planting of the Erycinian colony in the shape of a new Troy (5.781–98). Venus complains that Aeneas' virtuous behavior, his *pietas*, has not deflected the hostility of opposed gods and she asks once more for the two parts of the promised legacy: the Tiber and *moenia*. Her speech at the opening of the *concilium deorum* in Book 10 again defends the legitimacy of the Trojan claim, based as it is upon directives received both from the gods and from the shades (10.18–62). Here Venus pointedly remarks that Juno, *dura coniunx*, is obstructing the *regio* of her descendants; she raises the prospect of eventual failure from which she asks only to salvage Ascanius for the equivalent of Achilles' long and inglorious life. For this purpose she is willing to cast Aeneas himself back upon the sea (10.46–49). Exaggeration is difficult to separate from proposal in this speech, in which Venus seems to argue that her claim has either been misleadingly represented or else unjustly thwarted.

The substance of all these speeches may appear comparable to the requests Thetis makes in the *Iliad*, with the difference that *timē* has been replaced by *moenia*. One particular negotiation cannot be encompassed by this comparison: the transaction that takes place between Venus and Juno concerning Carthage. Rather, its literary model appears in that episode in Apollonius' *Argonautica* where these same two goddesses, along with Athene, cooperate in influencing Medea, through the compulsion of an induced passion, to aid Jason against her father in his quest for the golden fleece (3.6–110). In both cases Venus gives the critical order to Eros, whose arrow kindles the fire of love. Likewise the two events have similar consequences of female guilt, indecision and regret, but Vergil's casting of Venus' request within a structure of family bonds and loyalties creates a very different tone.

In the *Argonautica* Hera and Athene are the hero's divine patronesses. These conspiring goddesses are well aware that their second-rate hero could never by his mere personal resources survive the trials of the golden fleece. Aphrodite and Eros, however, have only a recreational stake in the intrigue. When Hera and Athene
arrive at Aphrodite’s palace seeking cooperation, the immoral nature of the action is underlined by the manner in which the love goddess acts the part of a frivolous erotic women. Apollonius even reminds us that Jason will get no heroic armor from Hephaestus when he mentions that her husband has already left home for his forge (3.40–42). In the manner of a slipshod matron she protests that her control over her wayward son is unreliable (3.90–99), and she exhibits further immorality in using a childish material bribe to persuade him (3.129–44). While Venus in the Aeneid may call herself supplex (1.666) in addressing Cupid as the executive embodiment of her powers, still the efficacy of her auctoritas resting on the maternal tie is never called into question. Aeneas is Cupid’s frater (1.667); his endangerment calls upon familial loyalties. A further extension of the kinship structure is suggested when the same expression parere dicto is used first to characterize the obedience of Cupid directly to his mother (1.689), and then, indirectly, in his role as a false Ascanius, to Aeneas’ directions (1.695). Vergil applies the dynastic genitor and genetrix respectively to Aeneas (677) and Venus (689), but combines each term with the adjective carus to soften their formality by a coloring of familial affection. It is precisely this translation from the recreational to the soberly and sentimentally familial that entraps Dido within the network of historical determinism.

In discussing this intrigue literary interpreters have focussed upon the language of siege and capture, highlighting its historical prolepsis virtually to the exclusion of any other implication. When Juno approaches Venus, however, the goddesses negotiate as two matronae arranging a family alliance between their offspring.22 Juno’s offer equates pax or cessation of hostility with pactos hymenaeos (4.99) and literally offers the Tyrian people as dowry in a compact of just rule (4.103–105):

communem hunc ergo populum paribusque regamus
auspicis; liceat Phrygio servire marito
dotalisque tuae Tyrios permettere dextrae.

22 Dixon (n. 12 above) 5; 62–63; 177 mentions the customary role played by mothers in arranging marriages. Susan Treggiari, Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian (Oxford 1991) 134, citing literary evidence, notes especially how such negotiations take place between matronae in cases when a son’s mother has been widowed.
This would in fact be a good offer were its covert intention not the thwarting of Roman foundations, but Venus’ mock acceptance is phrased with equally subtle prevarication. Jupiter’s authority, as she represents it, is the final sanction of the proposed union. Her consent as a mother is subject to his own will to unite the Trojans and Tyrians as one, and she urges Juno as wife to secure that consent. The promise Juno makes, mecum erit iste labor (4.115), is one that both goddesses know will not be kept. When Jupiter himself becomes aware of the unsanctified marriage contrived by his wife and nominally accepted by his daughter (4.219–37), the cause of inheritance fires his response. Even Aeneas’ potential gloria is vested in the future rather than in himself: new kingdoms and a race that will rule the world. “Does this father begrudge Ascanius his Roman stronghold (Romanas arces)?” In resuming his quest for Italy, seemingly against his own inclination, Aeneas is driven by the united will of mother, father and grandfather. That his mother was in fact responsible for the temporary marriage is never really brought home to him in the face of a higher paternal authority.

This transmutation of value from timē into palpable property that differentiates the concept of maternal concerns in Homer and Vergil also pertains to the way in which Aeneas himself as a Trojan worthy has crossed over from the Greek to the Roman epic. In the Iliad Aeneas is the warrior most often rescued from crises of combat against a stronger opponent (5.314–18; 430; 436; 20.158–317). These rescues appear to take place without the shame that attaches to Paris. When Neptune snatches Aeneas from Achilles’ onslaught amid the mêlée surrounding the body of Patroklos, he speaks of his destiny as a survivor who will preserve the race of Dardanus from extinction and replace Priam’s family as king of the Trojans (20.306–308). That Vergil wishes to establish a certain continuity with these episodes is made clear in several instances: in Book 3 where a Delian oracle predicts his future in the very wording of Neptune’s Iliadic prophecy (97–98); in Book 5 where Neptune recalls to Venus his intervention on behalf of her son (804–811), and in Book 11 where Diomedes pays tribute to Aeneas’ power in warfare and his piētas (279–95). At the same time Homer’s vague definition of kingship in terms of power has been transmuted into a question of family and future. Also a distinct elevation of Anchises’ status

23 According to Gregory Nagy, The Best of the Acheans (Baltimore 1979) 264–75, this allusion represents an alternative tradition in which Aeneas did become a Trojan ruler.
is involved. When Aphrodite in the *Homeric Hymn* offered herself to the handsome Trojan shepherd in obedience to a compulsion imposed by Zeus and Eros, divine arrogance characterized her attitude. Although she promises Anchises an heroic offspring from the union, she also imposes a condition of survival for her mortal lover; he must make himself worthy insofar as mortal restrictions allowed, by exercising self-restraint and discretion to conceal his son’s parentage (*Homeric Hymn* 5.281–90). Despite the fact that the Anchises of the *Aeneid* has suffered the physical consequences of disobedience to the goddess’ condition of secrecy (2.648–49), the alliance itself would seem to have turned out prosperously in that her consort has familial claims to a large inheritance of property. After an initial misinterpretation, Anchises recognizes the location of this property, not Cretan or Idean, but Hesperian or Italian as Cassandra had sometime represented it and something that is *generi debita nostro* (3.182–87).

One must recall that the action of the poem begins after the death of Anchises when Venus is acting in the position of widowed mother to further the enterprises of her son. In her insistence upon his possessing the property and retaining it for the use of his descendants, Venus, I propose, reinforces a very recognizable Roman pattern of maternal behavior with divine power.24 Even the acquisition of Carthage seemed to tempt her, although she was resigned to letting it go, but Italy by rights belongs to her descendants. Greek mothers would not concern themselves with these matters since the only property ever relevant to them was their own dowries, and even over these they exercised no control. Surely Vergil must have been aware of the fact that Roman women derived a certain *auctoritas* from their license, under certain circumstances, to handle and to bequeath their own family property. This effectual power was apparently no less valid because it derived from social consensus rather than from law. From this of course followed the active role that Roman mothers assumed in enforcing the traditional patriarchal values of their society in a manner that did not significantly differ from the father’s role.25 No less than fathers do mothers concern themselves with the careers

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24 Dixon (n. 12 above) 30–31 notes how many of the celebrated mothers of Rome were widows, and how this means of transmitting inheritance might serve to “redistribute wealth between generations.” Treggiari (n. 22 above) 379–86 also discusses the conservation and transmission of property through a mother’s agency.

25 Dixon (n. 12 above) 2; 89; 111; 129 stresses that “the role of the upper class mother is not clearly differentiated from that of the father.”
of their children, whose accomplishments enhance their own status. Seneca characterizes the obsessive extreme when he speaks of mothers whose ambitions for their sons can transparently be read as a substitute for civic careers and honors gained in their own right.26

To Venus’ ambition as a mother a simple tally of her interventions behind the scenes bears witness. On the basis of numerical comparison, she is, in fact, a more assiduously activist mother than Thetis. In the first book alone she takes four actions on Aeneas’ behalf; in Book 12 she turns her attention to him three times and in other books, with the exception of 3, 7, 9 and 11, she involves herself at least once. One may notice the competitive spirit in which she expresses her ambitions for her children. The speech to Jupiter begins with the comparative example of Teucer, a Trojan comparable to Aeneas, who, having slipped through the midst of the Achaeans and surmounted geographical obstacles, has created a new seat and city in Padova, there fixed Trojan arms and given a name to a people (1.242–49). Likewise, when Venus requests Aeneas’s armor from Vulcan, she makes her request competitive within the literary tradition of aemulatio by citing both Achilles and Memnon as precedents (8.383–85). Responding to Jupiter’s plea for peace in the divine council of Book 10, she challenges Juno through a transparently competitive rhetoric of defeat. Professing to have relinquished all hopes of imperium, consigning Rome’s future to Carthaginian domination and Aeneas to an indeterminate fate, she stagily begs one single favor: to rescue her grandson Ascanius for a future lacking in glory (10.55–62). At this point nothing but military victory can further her purpose. Far from Homer’s protective Aphrodite who snatches her son out of combat, she works throughout the final day of battle to promote Aeneas’ face-to-face combat with Turnus through aggressive interventions. To this end she stirs up Aeneas to turn his forces against Lavinium.27 When we last see her, she is disengaging the hero’s spear from a tree-root, full of indignation because “daring” Juturna has been given license to reequip Turnus with his father’s sword (12.786–87).

26 Ad Helviam 14.2, cited by Dixon (n. 12 above) 175.
27 This is an intervention that most scholars would like to repudiate. Putnam (n. 9 above) 174 noted the irony of Vergil’s introduction of Venus as genetrix pulcherrima in this moment that leads to Aeneas’ own ethical downfall through furor, and even suggests that the poet may be deflecting some culpability from the hero by ascribing the impulse to his mother. Conversely Gordon Williams, Technique and Ideas in the Aeneid (New Haven 1983) 24, denied that this event implied genuine divine intervention, and put it rather to Aeneas’ own state of mind.
Admittedly Venus is not generous with personal interviews. Wlosok correctly observed the absence of any such openly expressed affection between Aeneas and his goddess mother as one sees in the intimate mother/son transactions of the Iliad that often begin with an airing of the hero’s indignation and grief. With all of Venus’ interventions, Vergil’s entire narrative incorporates only three face-to-face meetings of the Iliadic kind, none of which is genuinely conversational. Even in her most motherly mission of healing the dolor indignus of Aeneas’ wound with Cretan moly (12.411–29), she comes and goes secretly, veiling her face in a cloud and leaving Iapyx the physician to recognize the influence of divine power. Does maternal ambition then preclude maternal affection or sympathy? To a certain extent the distance between Venus and Aeneas is consonant with the general norms of conduct that Vergil establishes for relationships between divine and human personages. Denis Feeney remarks comparatively on a “shutting out of the intimacy and cooperation between men and gods which is a corollary of Homer’s technique.”28 To this we might add, as earlier mentioned, that Aeneas’ survival and mortality are not at issue in the definition of his heroic life, but submerged within the larger vision of history that the Aeneid projects. Had Vergil made Venus explicitly aware of Aeneas’ abbreviated future, he might also have felt obliged to make her more sympathetically affectionate. Given these combined circumstances—the more remote situation in which Vergil conceptualizes his gods, and their longer range vision—I submit that the Roman patterns in Venus’ conduct are actually seen by Vergil as a mode of bridging rather than enlarging the distance between divine power and the hero in a manner that clarifies the goddess’ responsibilities as the ancestress of Rome.

If in this area we follow the formulations of Roman social history, which has lately given considerable attention to the subtleties of familial interactions, we can see that the relationship between Venus and Aeneas, while deliberately non-Homeric, and also by the standards of twentieth-century western society somewhat emotionally unsatisfying, is not at all unnatural or unmatrial by Roman customs. Let me not imply that Roman parents had no affection for their children. There is much evidence to the contrary.

28 Denis Feeney, The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition (Oxford 1991) 183. From a certain perspective this phenomenon is responsible for negative impressions of the Vergilian gods as at once more forbidding and more manipulative than Homer’s.
However, the means of expressing affection are different, the concerns and involvement of parent with child focus upon a different period of life, and the rewards of parenthood are also differently conceived. As Dixon points out, these rewards are more often defined in ethical than in emotional terms. In a world where the survival of children, even among privileged aristocrats, was precarious, parents cautiously reserved their affection for promising adolescents and successfully achieving adults, but one should not imagine that they had watched their children achieve these more secure stages of life without considerable expenditure of anxiety.

In dedicating his gift of a library and *alimenta* to his fellow townsmen at Comum, the younger Pliny notes apologetically that his gift may be perceived of ambivalent value since it contributes nothing to pleasure but only enjoins the troublesome task of raising children. The heaviness of this responsibility is expressed by that ideal Augustan matron, Propertius' Cornelia, who, after reminding her surviving spouse that he must now perform maternal offices (*fungere maternis vicibus*), adds (4.11.78): *Tota domus coepit nunc onus esse tuum*. That this responsibility had appeared sufficiently troublesome as to endanger the future of upper class society seemed to have been at least the initial import of Augustus' marriage legislation and *ius trium liberorum*. But in fact the anxieties of childrearing are commonplace in Roman literature. The opening speech of Terence's *Adelphoi* details item by item the sources of worry for the father of a young man entering into adulthood, a mixture of physical, psychological and economic concerns. The paternal concerns suggested here can also be found attributed to mothers; one source is Seneca's letters to bereaved mothers, to Marcia and his own mother Helvia. So the outcome of this anxiety is that one of the most commonly expected and voiced emotions of parenthood is *cura*. Thus, for example, the proud Cornelia refers to concern for the "common pledges" of her marriage as a *cura* that will breathe forth unconsumed from her funeral urn.

*Cur* is also the designation of maternal sentiment most commonly attached to Venus in the *Aeneid*; it is employed both by the

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29 Dixon (n. 12 above) 169; 209 notes that the role of the mother becomes most important during the years of her son's transition to manhood, and remains strong throughout his mature life.

30 Dixon (n. 12 above) 73: "Where maternal happiness is mentioned in the sources, it is associated with the tokens of respect from adult children . . . rather than the delights of a small child's care and company."

31 *Epistles* 1.8.

32 Dixon (n. 12 above) 191–94.
godess herself, and also by Vergil to describe her. Venus uses *amor* only one time, when she directs Cupid to capture Dido's affections (1.675 *sed magno Aeneae mecum teneatur amore*). This plan is itself prompted by anxiety, sensed particularly at nighttime with fear of the treacherous (*bilingui*) Tyrians and the memory of Juno's fierce hate (1.661–62). In the aftermath of Juno's ship-burning at Eryx, Venus approaches Neptune *excita curis* (5.779) and in Book 8 it is outright fear *(370 exterrita)* of Italian hostilities that underlies her appeal to Vulcan for arms. The ways in which Vergil as narrator attributes these sentiments are indicative of their function within the social context of the poem. When other characters address Venus' *cura* as a motive for action, they give external testimony to anxiety as an expected norm of maternal feeling. Jupiter in Book 1.261 understands the recurrent anxiety that gnaws at the goddess (*cura remordet*). He begins his prophecy with the reassurance *parce metu*. Neptune in 5.804 assures her that he has appropriated her own concern: *Aeneas mihi cura tui*. Vulcan likewise (8.396) recognizes her *cura* and promises aid to her cause by (401) *quidquid curae his art can exercise*. When Venus herself uses the word, it is with a particular emphasis on familial continuity. Thus she designates Ascanius to Cupid as *mea maxima cura* (1.678), and to Aeneas himself in Book 2 she at once explains that her *cura* for him is the cause of his safety, and that the same providence has been exercised for the protection of the house (2.595). *Cura* is both an object of pride and of reproach.

As the Roman mother experiences or exercises *cura*, she doubtless obeys the promptings of familial ambition, but she may also be responding to the socially defined pressure of duty. As Dixon points out, a Roman mother's sense of duty derives from her concept of motherhood as a kinship tie. Extending from childhood to maturity, maternal duty pertains also to women who live apart from their children.33 One mode of satisfying obligation is to give advice. While affectionate exchanges between Aeneas and his mother may be rare, Venus both directly and indirectly appears several times in the role of adviser. Aeneas' first reference to Venus as his mother, made in confrontation with the disguised goddess herself, cites her guidance as the rationale of his journey (1.382 *matre dea monstrante viam*). Retrospectively we may find it the more remarkable that he does focus his mission in this way, since the story of his Mediterranean journey he tells to Dido in Book 3 attributes information

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33 Dixon (n. 12 above) 169.
concerning his goal to different sources: to his father and to prophecy sent by Apollo. But insofar as his acknowledgement of Venus’ guidance refers not merely to the end, but also to the spirit of his mission, it can readily be seen as deriving from that moment of revelation that he will later describe in his Ilioupersis narrative, when his mother, appearing in all her celestial grandeur, had suddenly stayed his hand from vengeful murder of Helen and shown him that the collapse of his city was owing to causes far deeper than this one woman’s adultery (2.588–631). Reproving the ira stirred up by Aeneas’ dolor, she emphasizes her own protectiveness (2.595; 599 cura), and sets his feet in the line of duty to remember his family and lead them out of the doomed city. While her function here is that of divine counsellor, her expression emphasizes her maternal role: tu ne qua parentis / iussa time neu praecptis parere recusa (2.607–608). Previous epic offers no models for this maternal command— neither Penelope nor Thetis speaks so authoritatively to her son34 — but Roman history exhibits the paradigm of a mother’s powerful influence in the figure of Volumnia, who reforms her son’s inclination towards personal vendetta by asserting the claims of family and state.35 Severe counsel of this kind is clearly a function of the patriarchal support role assumed by Roman mothers and an aspect of the lifelong interest a Roman mother can take in her sons’ practice of Roman virtues. Cornelius Nepos’ “Life of Gracchus” incorporates a letter from his celebrated mother directing her son to reform his rebellious course of action and to gratify her old age by respecting quae parenta iussa. Although the text may not have been genuine, Roman readers prized it as such.36 And then, as Horace would have it (Odes 3.6.35–44), Pyrrhus, Antiochus and Hannibal met their match in a breed of country soldiers disciplined to hard labor by their stern Sabellan mothers.

Coriolanus obeyed his mother while Gaius Gracchus resisted. The force of maternal advice is purely provisional.37 What mothers have a right to expect from their sons, even when their advice is

34 Rather one remembers how Telemachus’ commands to Penelope mark his coming of age, while Thetis advises her son only twice; the first time she urges him not to show himself without armor and the second she is transmitting a message from the gods. Kenneth Reckford, “Helen in Aeneid 2 and 6,” Ar ethusa 14 (1981) 93–95, interprets within a context of Greek tragedy: “She has saved him from becoming Orestes.”
35 Dixon (n. 12 above) 90–91; 117; 129.
36 Dixon (n. 12 above) 179.
37 Dixon (n. 12 above) 168–77 notes the fine line between counsel and interference.
not followed, is pietas. Amid the complex quarrels that were tearing
apart the Cicero family during Caesar’s dictatorship, young
Quintus, as his uncle notes to Atticus, was careful to maintain his
pietas ad matrem both in writing and in personal demeanor, even
while addressing disrespectful words to Quintus senior and to
Cicero himself (Att. 13.38; 39).\(^{38}\) Certainly in the area of pietas Venus
has reason to take satisfaction in the conduct of her filius.\(^{39}\) His
ethos, as it were, constructs her ethics, but the particularly Roman
aspect of her response is the value she places upon this virtue within
a structure of performance and reward. That his observance of duty
goes unrewarded is the basis for her initial complaint to Jupiter.
“What fault has Aeneas committed?” she asks (1.231), and she ends
her speech with the expostulation (1.253) “Hic pietatis honos?” Later
(5.781–84) she will protest to Neptune that no amount of pietas has
mitigated the vehemence of Juno’s persecution.

Paradoxically, in the opinion of many scholars, the greatest
strain placed upon pietas comes not from Juno but from Venus her-
self, when she accosts her son outside Carthage, first tricking him
by disguise, then surprising by revelation, in the notoriously uneven
interview that leaves Aeneas unsettled and pleading for an open
exchange: “Is it not granted to join hands and hear true voices.”
Surely this moment when Venus’ robe cascades to her feet and her
perfumed hair swirls about her (1.401–405) must have figured in
shaping van Dyck’s interpolated image of Venus in Vulcan’s forge.
Aeneas himself calls the inequitable interview cruel, intimating that
the current instance is not the first (1.408–408: quid natum totiens . . .
falsis ludis imaginibus), and pleading for an open exchange: “Is it
not granted to join right hands and to hear and return honest
voices.” Brooks Otis keenly perceived the multifold ironies created
in this ambivalent episode by the discrepancy between Aeneas’
ignorance and the reader’s knowledge. While the hero declares
his pietas, his mother, “thoroughly amoral and short-sighted in
her designs,” is already planning the amorous trap for Dido’s own
pietas that will place Aeneas’ ethic in jeopardy. Irony is reinforced
by the difference between the goddess’ virginal disguise which ac-
tually anticipates moments in the later presentation of Dido, and
the sensuous revelation of the goddess’ true form. “Venus’ conduct,”
as Otis sees it, “is a curious blend of maternal anxiety and erotic

\(^{38}\) Keith Bradley, Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History
(Oxford 1991) 177–204, gives detailed attention to the practical and emotional
affairs of Cicero and his extended familias.

\(^{39}\) As Dixon (n. 12 above) 188 notes.
Other scholars have echoed this comment with particular attention to the isolation Aeneas feels because he has been deceived. The scene is, in fact, all too human, but without any models or precedents in Roman history for mothers thus deceiving their sons, one must turn back to literary contexts.

Contrasting this first interview between son and mother with its Homeric counterpart where Thetis emerges from the waves in answer to Achilles’ call, one can scarcely ascribe the harshness of Venus’ disguise to any misconceived imitation. The sympathetic personal response of Cyrene and Aristeus in the Georgics presents a close adaptation of the Homeric interaction of Achilles and Thetis, showing that Vergil could have written such a scene had he so wished. Given that Aristeus’ cause of grief is the material loss of his bee-swarm rather than more intangible time, one cannot say that an emphasis on real property in place of mortality necessarily banishes maternal emotions. So let us imagine the meeting with Venus as Vergil might have written it.

Morning breaks on the shores of Carthage and Aeneas, with faithful Achates as listener, gives voice to those despairing sentiments he had earlier repressed in the face of his men. He calls upon Venus for reassurance, and she appears—perhaps in full splendor, or perhaps in the guise of a humble mother. When Aeneas asks her what course of action he should now take with so many ships and men lost, she tells him, just as written, the story of Dido’s arrival at Carthage, promising that the history of his sorrows will secure the good will of the queen. The omen of twelve swans and the eagle validates her promise and the hero continues reassured. But what is missing from this hypothetical cancellation of Venus’ disguise? In fact, that very opportunity to speak for himself by which Aeneas demonstrates his self-conscious assimilation of his mission with emphasis upon pietas, the Penates and his Italian patria. This self-definition comprises the substance of the irony procured by Venus’ disguise.

Additionally, and even more importantly, one must not overlook how the hero’s ingenuous response to the beautiful apparition has demonstrated his sagacity by an instinctive recognition of her presence as divine. This instinct for perceiving divinity comprises,

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40 Otis (n. 5 above) 237.
41 E.g. Charles Segal, “Art and the Hero: Participation, Detachment, and Narrative Point of View in Aeneid I,” Arethusa 14 (1981) 73, comments “The short, embittered speech is devoid of filial affection or even basic gratitude.”
I believe, a literary reminiscence that scholars have acknowledged, but never emphasized because of the very element of incongruity they perceive in it: Aphrodite’s deception of Anchises and her subsequent epiphany before him in the Homeric Hymn.\textsuperscript{42} Like Anchises, who protests that his eyes had recognized the goddess’ divine nature, Aeneas maintains that sixth sense that will not fall prey to a god’s intentional deception, even though he is powerless to control it or its effects upon himself. The reason for the goddess’ subsequent full epiphany is surely that Vergil himself wishes the first encounter of mother and son to announce the continuation of Aeneas’ story from its Greek origins by reenacting the negotiations that surrounded the hero’s birth.

Within the narrative leading to Roman foundations, Vergil’s intertextual transformation fulfills an important function as dynastic sub-text, since its temporal perspective opens the poem to events preceding Aeneas’ appearance in the Iliad where Venus actively protects the son for whom Neptune eventually predicts survival and a destiny to rule. A series of promises links the three texts. In the Homeric Hymn Aphrodite promises the Iliadic hero to Anchises, leaving room for the Aeneid to take shape as the ultimate fulfillment of Neptune’s open-ended promise. When Venus reveals herself at Carthage as the goddess-mother of epic tradition, she promises only one small benefit to Aeneas: the furtherance of his mission through discovery of the ships he believed lost. Thus her maternal action remains incomplete, but is completed in Italy when she obtains arms in the role of genetrix as mother of a race that will outlast the life of her son. In the gift of arms Aeneas also recognizes the fulfillment of a promise, one that he himself had read from a celestial sign (8.531–34), and which allows him in turn to make promises to his allies. In terms of Vergil’s narrative this promise from Venus must be considered a silent one, since it has no prior existence in the text but can only be understood intertextually by allusion to the Iliad.\textsuperscript{43} The link among the three poems is finally

\textsuperscript{42} Otis (n. 5 above) 235 cites the “fine comparison of Vergil here with the Aphrodite hymn” made by Sainte-Beuve (Étude sur Virgile [1857] 274 ff.), who seems alone “to have grasped Virgil’s mixture of sensual and maternal elements in this scene.” Kenneth Reckford, “Recognizing Venus (I): Aeneas Meets his Mother,” Arion (1995–96): 1–42 has fully explored this paradoxical mixture, adducing not merely the Hymn but a range of literary sources and considering also the erotic likenesses of mother and son.”

\textsuperscript{43} Servius on Aen. 8.531 remarks on the unvoiced nature of the promise: κατὰ τό σιωπάμενον intellegamus Venerem et promissse.
completed in Aeneas' ensuing face-to-face interview with his mother, an open interview that replaces the earlier disguised meeting. In this progress from previous texts, Venus herself has been appropriated and transformed from the sexually compelled love goddess who resented her mortal liaison and wanted no part of maternity into a figure who gains her Roman identity through stages of her maternal maturation.

In conclusion I cannot wholly disagree with Venus' critics that Vergil has shaped the goddess' persona with elements that are more human than idealizing, or that enduring the caprices of his mother's action is one price of Aeneas' nominal success. With his fama rooted in a material and historical future whose ramifications exceed the capacities of his imagination, he is a different kind of hero from Achilles whose desired kleos his mother guarantees by her facilitation of the Iliad. But it does not inevitably follow that Vergil dislikes Venus, or compromises her status as the mother of Rome. The touches of humor that color her actions are among the few places in the somber Aeneid where a little Homeric comedy carries over to lighten the new dynastic significance imposed upon the amiable goddess. But this dynastic function is neither perfunctory nor is it realized in purely symbolic terms. In becoming the mother of the Romans, Venus has also been made a recognizably Roman mother, and Vergil's audience would surely have judged her behavior in that category.

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