



Love and Duty: J. M. W. Turner and the Aeneas Legend

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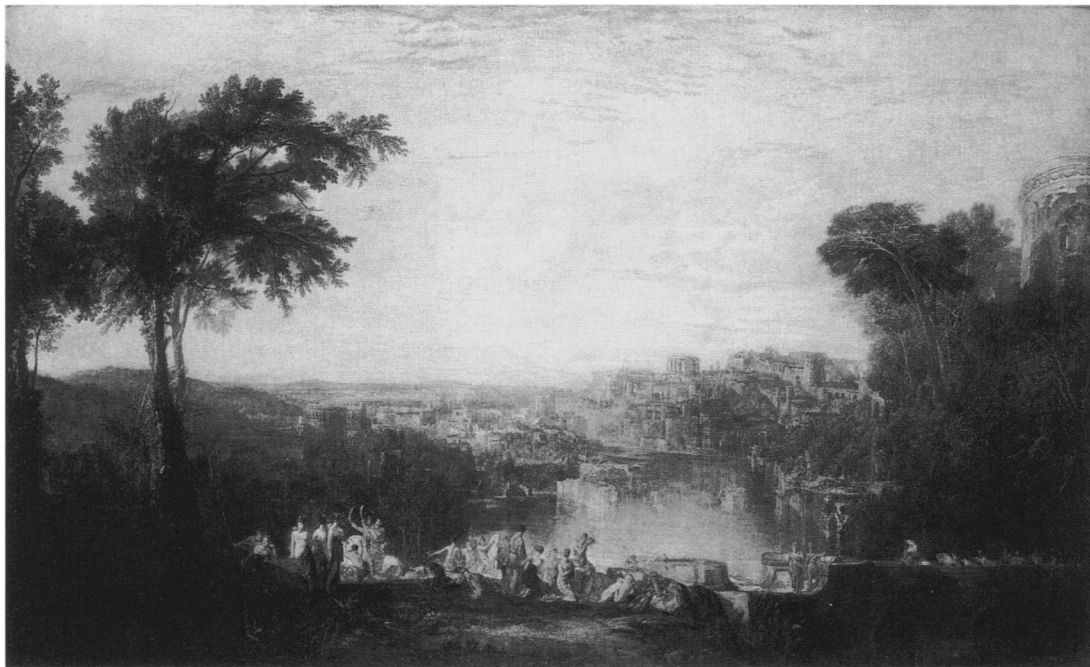
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1. J. M. W. Turner, *Dido and Aeneas*, R. A. 1814 (B. J. 129), 146 × 237, Tate Gallery, London

Gerald Finley

Love and Duty: J. M. W. Turner and the Aeneas Legend

In recent years J. M. W. Turner studies have become a growth industry. Still more recently some students of Turner have published (or have republished) articles or written in books about the artist's pictures on the Aeneas theme. They have paraded in print commentaries on these pictures in earlier literature and have supplemented and sometimes enriched these accounts with analyses and assessments of their own. Some interpretations are cogent and informative but few come close to understanding, I believe, Turner's essential attitudes to the Aeneas legend and therefore, to these pictures' central meanings. The following essay, part of a larger investigation, attempts to reveal through a study of his pictures on the Aeneas theme some of these attitudes and meanings, to furnish insights in this particular instance into the ways that his complex mind worked, and to provide possible

reasons why he mined repeatedly Virgil's *Aeneid* for artistic inspiration¹.

The legend of Aeneas which Turner knew mainly from Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid* – and I shall argue especially from its early illustrated editions² – possesses qualities that would have at-

¹ I wish to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the financial assistance that permitted me to undertake this study.

² *The Works of Virgil: Containing His ›Pastorals‹, ›Georgics‹, and ›Aeneis‹. Translated into English Verse; By Mr Dryden...*, 2nd ed., London, 1698. The engraved plates used in these early illustrated editions of Dryden's *Aeneis* were adapted from those designed by Cleyn and engraved by Hollar for Ogilby's 1654 edition of Virgil's works. Jacob Tonson, who was responsible for the changes to the plates, ›In most cases... had Aeneas's features altered – to those of King William!‹ (J. D. Stewart, ›William III and Sir Godfrey Kneller‹, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*,

tracted him. As a Romantic he was probably drawn to the wanderings of this hero, Aeneas, as he was similarly attracted to the peregrinating hero of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a modern poem which he had read and much admired. The epic theme of the *Aeneid* would have attracted him since it was a subject eminently suited for history painting, considered the most elevated category of painting. Further, the *Aeneid's* allusions to or descriptions of Troy, Carthage and Rome, great civilizations of the past, that developed, prospered, and eventually declined and disappeared, would have fascinated him. Turner was aware of, and interested in, the well-known and often repeated relationship drawn between Britain and Rome, and especially during the tense period of the Napoleonic Wars, those between Britain and Carthage, and France and Rome³. In addition he would have been familiar with the traditional association of Aeneas with Britain; it was believed that British kings were descended from Brutus, Aeneas's grandson⁴.

But legends such as that of Aeneas are never more absorbing than when linked with an historical event of far reaching significance, and Turner would have been especially attracted to Aeneas's fulfilment of a great prophecy that had led to the establishment of Rome, symbol of western civilization and centre of universal history. This may explain Turner's creation of so many dramatic pictures concerned with the Aeneas legend.

Virgil's *Aeneid* tells a compelling story of divine guidance and obstruction, and it is to this aspect of the *Aeneid* that many of Turner's pictures on this subject allude. The Trojan hero, Aeneas, during the destruction of Troy by the Greeks, left by sea with his father, Anchises, his son, Ascanius, Aeneas's Trojan followers, and also ›the Deities of Troy and his own Penates‹ who appeared to him during his voyage and advised him. He was informed by the spirit of his dead wife (who had been killed on their flight from Troy) that his goal was to reach Italy where the gods ›had promis'd to his Race the Universal Empire‹⁵. Aeneas sailed west but on the way his father died. Juno, who hated the Trojans and who, intent on preventing

Aeneas from realizing his destiny, requested that Aeolus create a storm to drive the Trojans off course. In consequence, the Trojans landed on the African coast where Dido, the Tyrian queen, was building Carthage. Knowing of Juno's powerful influence over Carthage, Venus (Aeneas's mother) had Dido fall passionately in love with this Trojan hero in order to protect her son from Juno. To accomplish this, Venus sent Cupid – her other son – in the guise of Ascanius; Dido soon felt the effects of Cupid's intervention, and Aeneas himself came under spell of the Tyrian queen. Dido showed him the rising city of Carthage and prepared a royal hunt for his entertainment during which Juno, with Venus's consent, commanded up a storm causing Dido and Aeneas to seek refuge in a cave, where they consummated their love.

Dido's passionate love for Aeneas blinded her to her responsibilities as queen and she likewise forsook her vow to remain faithful to the memory of her dead husband, Sichaeus. Aeneas, similarly, was so enchanted by his regal mistress that for a time he forgot his mission to lead his followers to Italy. Mercury, the messenger of the gods, was sent by Jupiter to remind Aeneas that his destiny lay in Italy. It was following Mercury's visitation that Aeneas and his men prepared to leave for Italy, without Dido's knowledge: Dido learned of their plan, but too late. Aeneas and his men sailed away leaving behind Dido embittered and forlorn, believing that she had been betrayed. After the departure of Aeneas's fleet, Dido in dark despair committed suicide. Aeneas eventually reached Italy where, at Lake Avernus, south of Naples, he met the Cumaean Sibyl who led him to the underworld where he encountered the shade of his dead father, Anchises. It was his father who informed him of his future role in the founding of Rome, the new Troy.

XXXIII, 1970, p. 335.) In this article I shall refer to the second [1698] edition.

³ See Walter Thornbury, *The Life of J. M. W. Turner, R. A.*, London, 1877, pp. 433, 434; John Gage, ›Turner and Stourhead: The Making of a Classicist?‹, *The Art Quarterly*, XXXVI, i, 1974, pp. 76–7, 78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76; *Aeneis*, ›Dedication‹, p. 213.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 221.



2. J. M. W. Turner, *Dido building Carthage; or the Rise of the Carthaginian Empire*, R. A. 1815 (B. J. 131), 155.5 × 232, National Gallery, London

Turner painted eleven pictures concerned directly or obliquely with the Aeneas legend. In them he devised compositions, lighting effects and atmosphere that reflect the influence of the classical landscape tradition. All but one of these (an early work in the manner of the eighteenth-century British painter, Richard Wilson) reflect qualities of the landscapes of the seventeenth-century French painter, Claude Lorrain, of whose work Turner, by the second decade of the nineteenth century, had begun to develop an increased understanding⁶. Turner was attracted to the Claudean format for his Aeneas pictures in part because Claude himself had often selected episodes from the *Aeneid*⁷, and because this French master displayed in many of his landscapes, a rising or setting sun. Turner sometimes adapted these particular daylight effects in order to suggest the rise or decline of a race or civilization⁸, to heighten the naturalism of his landscapes⁹ and to furnish some of them with a temporal framework which, for

example, the *Aeneid* contains¹⁰. Another reason for Turner's choice of the Claudean model may have been that Claude's pictures were early associated with literary ideas, indeed, were considered eminently poetical, and had even been compared specifically with the poetry of Virgil¹¹. As Turner possessed an intense interest in the relationship

⁶ See for example, John Gage, *J. M. W. Turner: A Wonderful Range of Mind*, New Haven/London, 1987, p. 110.

⁷ See Turner's note on landscape (c. 1810?) in which reference is made to some of Claude's pictures depicting the Aeneas legend; John Gage, *Colour in Turner: poetry and truth*, London, 1969, pp. 213–14.

⁸ See, for example, Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, New Haven/London, 1984, cat. no. 135. (Henceforth the initials of the authors' surnames will indicate this publication, followed by a (catalogue) number, viz., B. J. 135); see also M. Kitson, 'Turner and Claude', *Turner Studies*, II, ii, 1983, p. 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ See especially J. Ziff, 'J. M. W. Turner's Last Four Paintings', *Turner Studies*, IV, i, 1984, pp. 48, 51.

¹¹ See, for example, *New Ladies Magazine*, 1786, p. 458, as quoted by Elizabeth Manwaring, *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England*, 1965, p. 23; also p. 20.



3. J. M. W. Turner, *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire – Rome being determined on the Overthrow of her Hated Rival, demanded from her such Terms as might either force her into War, or ruin her by Compliance: the Enervated Carthaginians, in their Anxiety for Peace, consented to give up even their Arms and their Children*, R. A. 1817 (B. J. 135), 170 × 238.5, Tate Gallery, London

between painting and poetry, and yet at the same time recognized the limitations of each, he would have been attracted to such an association¹².

Eight of Turner's pictures illustrating the story of Aeneas concern directly or obliquely the tale of Dido and Aeneas, one of the great love dramas of all times. Turner appears to have considered painting a number of pictures on this theme before he exhibited his first painting at the Royal Academy in 1814¹³, to which he appended lines from Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid*¹⁴.

This exhibited picture, *Dido and Aeneas* (Pl. 1), shows a quiet Claudian landscape with a river, and the towers of Carthage rising in the background; Dido and Aeneas are on the bridge to the right. Dido had previously shown Aeneas the grandeur of her rising city and attempted to impress him with her wealth; as Virgil indicated,

›This Pomp she shows to tempt her wand'ring Guest...¹⁵. However, there was further activity to distract and involve Aeneas. He, Dido, and her court were ›to shady Woods, for Silvan Game, resort¹⁶. Indeed, Turner shows them just before

¹² For Turner's concept of poetic painting, see Eric Shanes' comprehensive *Turner's Human Landscape*, London, 1990.

¹³ A. J. Finberg, *A Complete Inventory of the Drawings of the Turner Bequest*, 2 vols., London, 1909, I, T. B. XC (c. 1805 – c. 1806), pp. 234, 236; a watercolour for the painting exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1814 is on p. 21; see also T. B. XCIII (c. 1805 – c. 1807), p. 242; T. B. XCVIII (c. 1807), p. 253; T. B. CIII (c. 1808), p. 270.

¹⁴ › »When next the sun his rising light displays,/ And gilds the world below with purple rays,/ The Queen, Aeneas, and the Tyrian Court,/ Shall to the shady woods for Sylvan games [*sic*] resort.« 4th Book of Dryden's *Aeneis*«. See. B. J. 129.

¹⁵ *Aeneis*, IV, p. 349.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

they depart on the royal hunt that Dido had arranged, the event that under the direction of Juno, aided by Venus, was to lead to the consummation of the love of Dido and her Trojan hero. To the left of his picture, Turner has depicted the other, courtly participants of the hunt with their hounds¹⁷.

The landscape setting of this picture is unusual for a scene purporting to represent the coastal city of Carthage since it is shown on the banks of a river that seems some distance from its mouth. The topography has certain characteristics reminiscent of the verdant countryside of the Thames in the vicinity of Richmond¹⁸, a locus that had traditionally been thought to possess strong classical associations¹⁹ which a poem on Richmond Hill had recently (in 1807) strengthened²⁰. In this poem the author, Thomas Maurice, speaks of the countryside about Richmond as being the ›fair Parnassus of the British isles‹ where ›many a goddess haunts the Elysian shade‹²¹. Reference is also made by him to the ›noblest bards‹ of the place who were inspired by classical poetry: Thomson and Pope²². Maurice mentions the latter's ›plunder'd, faded Grot‹ at Twickenham: ›No more, sweet bard, the pointed crystals gleam,/ Nor glittering spars reflect thy much-loved stream‹²³. Turner was certainly aware of Richmond's classical associations²⁴; this may have led him to consider the district as a suitable setting for the poem which

he drafted in a sketch book (c. 1810–12)²⁵ on the theme of Aeneas and his Tyrian queen, Dido.

There are several drafts of this poem in which clear allusion is made to the consummation of Dido's and Aeneas's love that occurred on the day of the hunt, the hunt to which the picture exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1814 alludes. As it has been observed that Turner referred to Pope as the British Virgil²⁶, surely it is significant that in his drafts of this poem Turner places the love-making of Dido and Aeneas not in a cave but in Pope's celebrated Grotto!

That Turner in his first exhibited picture on the subject of Dido and Aeneas (R. A. 1814), intended to associate his protagonists with the verdant countryside of Richmond thus seems probable, though the second picture exhibited in the next year (1815) also on the Dido and Aeneas theme, clearly does not. This second painting entitled *Dido building Carthage* (Pl. 2), which was also shown at the Royal Academy, has as its setting what appears to be the mouth of a river, suggesting more appropriately, a coastal location for Carthage. This picture is compositionally associated with another, its complement and sequel, *Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* (Pl. 3) which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1817, two years later. Both pictures reveal the influence of Claude Lorrain again, and more forcefully, though it is now Claude's seaport composition with its stage-

¹⁷ This painting was engraved by W. R. Smith in 1842 with the title, *Dido and Aeneas: the Morning of the Chase*. The original has been recently restored.

¹⁸ Turner was strongly attached to the area. He bought land at Twickenham in 1807 and built Sandycombe Lodge there between 1812 and 1813. Thornbury reported (*op. cit.*, p. 119) that the Reverend H. S. Trimmer had considered the landscape at Twickenham where Turner lived as ›decidedly the basis of ›The Rise of Carthage‹. If Thornbury's recollection is accurate, could it be that Trimmer was thinking of *Dido and Aeneas* rather than of *Dido building Carthage*?

¹⁹ James Thomson's poem, *The Seasons* (1726–30), which was known to Turner early in his career, had helped to establish the classical associations of the Richmond area; see ›Summer‹, lines 1424–36. See also J. Golt's fascinating article on Turner's later, Claude-inspired landscape painting, *England: Richmond Hill, on the Prince Regent's Birthday* (R. A. 1819) (B. J. 140): ›Beauty and Meaning on Richmond Hill: New Light on Turner's

Masterpiece of 1819‹, *Turner Studies*, VII, ii, 1987, p. 16.

²⁰ Thomas Maurice, *Richmond Hill; A Descriptive and Historical Poem*, London, 1807.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²² Two of Turner's early classical landscapes concern these poets and use the Richmond area where they lived as the setting: *Thomson's Aeolian Harp* (Turner's gallery, 1809) (B. J. 86) and *Pope's Villa at Twickenham* (Turner's gallery, 1808) (B. J. 72).

²³ Maurice, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Turner's poem, ›On the demolition of Pope's Villa at Twickenham‹ (associated with his painting, *Pope's Villa at Twickenham* – see above n. 22) contains specific reference to the destruction of Pope's Grotto; see Jack Lindsay, *The Sunset Ship; The Poems of J. M. W. Turner*, London, 1966, p. 117; also see Jack Lindsay, *J. M. W. Turner: His Life and Work*, London, 1969, p. 116.

²⁴ See above notes 19, 22.

²⁵ T. B. CXXXIX, pp. 6a–7.

²⁶ Gage, *J. M. W. Turner*, p. 192.



4. J. M. W. Turner, *Mercury sent to admonish Aeneas*, R. A. 1850 (B. J. 429), 90.5 × 121, Tate Gallery, London

like setting that attracted Turner²⁷, and to which he was to allude in his subsequent pictures representing Carthage.

Dido building Carthage and *Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* are of especial interest because of their paired, sequential relationship. Turner, familiar with the tradition of *ut pictura poesis* and therefore with the difficulties faced by the painter who is confined by the ›single moment‹ in his pictures, probably had come to the realization that pairing of pictures could be poetical insofar as it could expand this ›moment‹. The particular lapse of time shown in these Carthage pictures perhaps demonstrates what one artist (whose writings Turner had carefully studied²⁸) had observed, that pictures which suggest the passage of time are ›often more than equivalent to all the successive energies of the poet‹²⁹. The idea of pictorial pairing was of course not new. For example, during the

Renaissance and Baroque periods contrasting and complementary pairs of pictures were not uncommon, and this practice was continued. In the eighteenth century, paired pictures sometimes depicted vice and virtue, or contrasting human emotions, but also, sequentially related subjects such as those representing different stages in particular human activities or of human life, or conditions of civilizations.

Turner's *Dido building Carthage* and *Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* significantly link times of day with states of society³⁰, providing an effica-

²⁷ See especially Kitson, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.

²⁸ John Opie, *Lectures on Painting*, London, 1809; see B. Venning, ›Turner's Annotated Books: Opie's ›Lectures on Painting‹ and Shee's ›Elements of Art‹ (I)‹, *Turner Studies*, II, 1, 1982, pp. 36–46.

²⁹ Opie, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

³⁰ Gage, ›Turner and Stourhead‹, p. 76; see also Kitson, *op. cit.*, p. 11.



5. J. M. W. Turner, *The Visit to the Tomb*, R. A. 1850 (B. J. 431), 91.5 × 122, Tate Gallery, London

cious association between natural processes and civilization and thereby, perhaps, suggesting the helplessness of man in the determination of his fate. It may not be fortuitous that verses from Turner's unpublished poem, ›Fallacies of Hope‹ – lines from which first appeared in 1812 in the Royal Academy catalogue entry for his *Hannibal crossing the Alps* – were attached to both Carthage pictures. Indeed, this poem furnished the only poetical lines to be attached to his subsequent Aeneas pictures, suggesting that in the themes of these works he considered fate to play a particularly significant role.

The bright optimism and activity which characterizes *Dido building Carthage* is contrasted with the lethargy and purposelessness, fed by the pessimism of submission, to which the title and verses of *Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* allude and which establish this picture's negative mood.

However, the contrasting and complementary relationships which unite these two pictures are reinforced in other ways. Turner has strengthened the links between these two pictures by reminding his viewers that Carthage had been a great mercantile nation. Ruskin observed, in *Dido building Carthage*, the boys sailing toy boats in the estuary, rightly noting that they furnish a metaphor for Carthage's promising future. It has not been noted, however, that in the companion picture the statue of Mercury standing against the building on the left was intended to show this messenger of the gods in his role as the god of commerce, and therefore as a sad reminder of Carthage's former maritime greatness. A still more important link between these two pictures is established by the story of Dido and Aeneas that the subject of *Dido building Carthage* supplies. In the companion picture, *Decline of the Carthaginian Empire*,

it has not been observed that the Dido and Aeneas theme is sustained – specifically – in the central foreground by the representation of a crown encircling an oar, a powerful and poignant metaphor for the tragic love affair between Dido and Aeneas, the tragedy that Virgil considered responsible for the enmity that developed between Carthage and Rome and which resulted, eventually, in Carthage’s decline and defeat, the subject of this painting.

Carthage is considered again in Turner’s art of the later 1820s. There are two pictures that furnish this setting, *Regulus* (British Institution 1837, reworked from an earlier state; B. J. 294)³¹ and *Dido directing the Equipment of the Fleet* (R. A. 1828; B. J. 241), both of which were directly or indirectly influenced by the companion pictures of Carthage mentioned above; though only *Dido directing the Equipment of the Fleet* is concerned, albeit obliquely, with the Aeneas legend. It has been suggested that this picture may have been inspired by an opera (on the theme of Dido) performed in London in 1827³². The discovery of the libretto almost certainly confirms this. I suggest that the picture was inspired by an episode in the opera concerning Dido and her suitor Iarbus, the latter who, when rejected by Dido, attempted to set fire to Carthage, and then fled by sea. Dido, on hearing of Iarbus’s act of vengeance, ordered the preparation of her fleet for the chase; this preparation appears to be the subject of Turner’s picture³³.

The specific theme of Dido and Aeneas, however, reappears in Turner’s last four exhibited pictures, only three of which survive, that were shown at the Royal Academy in 1850, the year before his death. To each of these he attached lines from his ›Fallacies of Hope‹. The critical response to these pictures was, on the whole, favourable, despite their vagueness of form. The reviewers of the exhibition remarked on their colour effects and broad handling. One critic considered them ›great pictorial schemes, abounding in rich stores of Nature and deductions from Art – great pictorial ideas, in fact, the principles of which the student will do well to investigate‹³⁴. Of similar size, style and composition, these works were probably intended



6. Engraving illustrating Dryden’s *Aeneis* III, 415

to be shown as a group³⁵ and depict episodes from the story of Dido and Aeneas that occurred shortly after Aeneas’s arrival in Carthage and up to his departure for Italy. Thus, intentionally or not, these pictures present yet another way of challen-

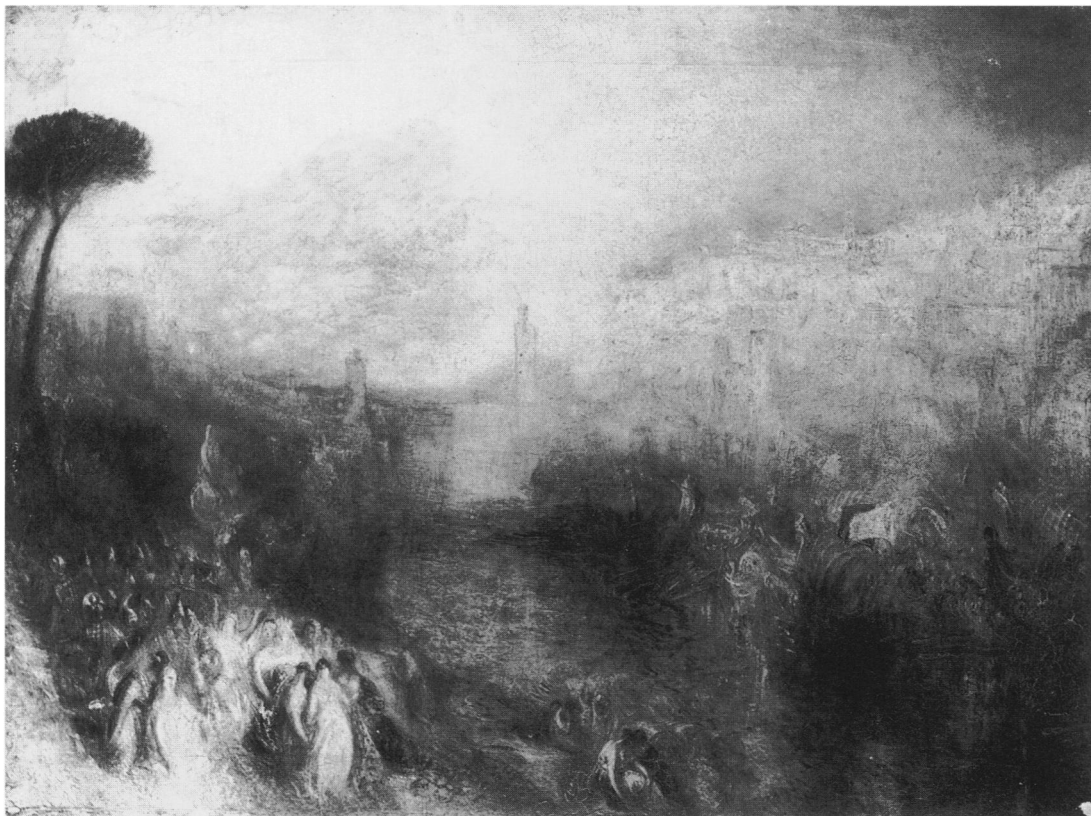
³¹ See my forthcoming article, ›Illuminated and Illuminating Vistas: J. M. W. Turner’s ›Vision of Medea‹ and ›Regulus‹‹, *Revue d’art canadienne/Canadian Art Review*.

³² C. Powell, ››Infuriate in the wreck of hope‹‹: Turner’s ›Vision of Medea‹‹, *Turner Studies*, II, 1, 1982, p. 17, n. 15.

³³ See above, n. 31.

³⁴ *Athenaeum*, 18 May 1850. For part of this quotation, see Butlin and Joll, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

³⁵ These were painted when Turner lived in Chelsea. Mrs Booth observed Turner painting them as they were ›set in a row and he went from one to the other, first painting on one, touching on the next, and so on, in rotation‹, J. W. Archer, ›Reminiscences‹, *Once a Week*, 1 February 1862, p. 166 (reprinted *Turner Studies* I, 1, 1981, p. 36); Gage, *J. M. W. Turner*, p. 251, n. 102; Ziff, *op. cit.*, p. 48.



7. J. M. W. Turner, *The Departure of the Fleet*, R. A. 1850 (B. J. 432), 89.5 × 120.5, Tate Gallery, London

ging pictorially the poet's ability ›to lead the mind on‹, by presenting a sequence of major events spanning Aeneas's sojourn in Carthage³⁶.

The first of the four pictures (which was destroyed) is *Aeneas relating his story to Dido*³⁷. In the *Aeneid* immediately before the event which Turner depicts, Venus had expressed concern for the safety of Aeneas, knowing of Juno's powerful influence over Carthage. She therefore summoned Cupid, instructing him to make Dido fall in love with Aeneas. However before Cupid had shot his magic dart, Venus perceived that Dido and Aeneas were already entranced with each other. Dido, Venus observed, ›now [Aeneas] with Blandishment detains³⁸. I believe that Turner, in presenting Aeneas telling his story to Dido, interpreted this scene as expressing the detention that Venus had noticed; and Turner presents his subject in an imaginative way. Dido appears, I suggest, as an exotic

temptress³⁹: she and Aeneas are seated in a magnificent galley in a watery setting reminiscent in some ways of Venice⁴⁰.

The second picture, *Mercury sent to admonish Aeneas* (Pl. 4), like the first, alludes to the past, but also to the future. Aeneas is presented with Cupid by his side (not in the guise of Ascanius!), on the left of the composition. Martin Butlin has

³⁶ Opie, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

³⁷ A photograph of this picture was discovered by Eric Shanes; see *Turner Studies*, I, i, 1981, p. 49. This picture was formerly in the Tate Gallery, London; see B. J. 430.

³⁸ *Aeneis*, I, p. 279.

³⁹ I have suggested that in *Rome from the Vatican* (R. A. 1820) (B. J. 228) Turner considered Raphael's mistress in a similar light, as a temptress; see ›J. M. W. Turner's *Rome from the Vatican: A Palimpsest of History?‹, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 49, 1, 1986, p. 66.*

⁴⁰ See B. J. 430; Ziff (*op. cit.*, p. 47) rightly notes that Turner was stressing ›the opulence and sensuality of Carthage's affair, à la Anthony and Cleopatra in Egypt‹.



8. J. M. W. Turner, *Aeneas and the Sibyl, Lake Avernus*, c. 1798 (B. J. 34), 76.5 × 98.5, Tate Gallery, London

not identified Mercury in this picture and indeed suggests that he may not be present⁴¹. However, the absence of Mercury seems unlikely since the picture's title (provided by Turner) and its accompanying verse (also by him) presume Mercury's presence⁴². Moreover it seems improbable, acknowledging Turner's poetic and dramatic interests, that he would relinquish the opportunity to illustrate what is perhaps one of the most highly-charged and significant episodes of the *Aeneid*: when Aeneas's fading thoughts of his destiny in Italy are given sudden, fresh intensity as a result of Jupiter's reprimand transmitted by Mercury.

But if Mercury appears in Turner's picture, then where is he? The only adult male figure shown close to Aeneas and Cupid is seated, facing Aeneas, sporting what seems to be a helmet (of the type that Mercury traditionally wears) and a red cloak.

Further, this figure assumes a pose similar to that (though reversed) of a seated Mercury depicted in one of the engravings that embellish the earliest editions of Dryden's *Aeneis*,⁴³ engravings which, as I shall suggest, Turner had studied and from which he borrowed poses for other figures in his pictures on the Aeneas theme. Hence I believe that this seated figure is Mercury, and that pictorially his relationship with Aeneas and Cupid furnishes a dialectic that the story of the *Aeneid* demands. Thus in his arrangement of these three figures Turner suggests the epic struggle of the hero who must choose between personal happiness and the performance of his duty – between his love for

⁴¹ B. J. 429.

⁴² »Beneath the morning mist,/ Mercury waited to tell him of his neglected fleet« – MS *Fallacies of Hope*.

⁴³ *Aeneis*, I, opp. p. 261.



9. J. M. W. Turner, *Lake Avernus: Aeneas and the Cumaean Sibyl*, 1814–15 (B. J. 226), 72 × 97, Yale Center for British Art, Mellon Collection, New Haven

Dido and the fulfilment of his destiny⁴⁴. In this configuration there is also, perhaps, an echo of the well-known theme of Hercules between Pleasure and Virtue.

The third picture, *The Visit to the Tomb* (Pl. 5), also alludes to past and future events and contains a theme that had long fascinated Turner: deception and betrayal associated with love⁴⁵. The tomb referred to in the title of the picture is that of Si-

chaeus (shown on the left) who was Dido's deceased husband, which Turner had much earlier represented in *Dido building Carthage*⁴⁶. However, in this late picture Aeneas is shown (he is not certainly present in the earlier picture) in the company of Cupid and Dido. Dido's pose here is based on the figure of Dido in an engraving (Pl. 6) (in which, on the left, a tomb is shown!) that occurs in the early illustrated editions of Dryden's *Aeneis*

⁴⁴ That Turner consulted Christopher Pitt's edition of the *Aeneid* as has been suggested (see below n. 59) seems likely, and the interpretation of this particular episode by Turner certainly chimes with Pitt's: 'The struggle in Aeneas's mind between his passion for Dido, and his regard to the commands of Jupiter, are here pointed out. However Aeneas may be blamed, conquering a passion that retarded his grand design, is a useful one; and I have frequently wondered on this account that his forsaking Dido should be made an objection to our hero's conduct' (*The Works of Virgil... The Aeneid*

Translated by the Rev. Mr. Christopher Pitt, 4 vols., London, 1778, II, p. 348n).

⁴⁵ See for example, references to Undine and Masaniello, Judith and Holofernes, and Delilah and Samson, in my 'Turner, the Apocalypse and History: »The angel« and »Undine«', *The Burlington Magazine*, November, 1979, pp. 685–96; more recently, see reference to Medea in C. Powell's *Turner in the South*, New Haven/London, 1987, p. 156, and in my 'Illuminated and Illuminating Vistas', *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ B. J. 131.



10. J. M. W. Turner, *The Golden Bough*, R. A. 1834 (B. J. 355), 104 × 163.5, Tate Gallery, London

(III, opp. p. 329)⁴⁷. The poetic line from the ›Fallacies of Hope‹ attached to Turner's picture presents a clear indication of his intention: ›The sun went down in wrath at such deceit...‹⁴⁸. As has been observed, there is a two-fold meaning here involving betrayal and deceit: the poetic line and picture strongly allude to Dido's neglect of her vow to remain faithful to the memory of her late husband, and an adumbration of the betrayal that Dido herself was to experience later when Aeneas departs for Italy⁴⁹.

The fourth and final picture of this group is the *Departure of the Fleet* (Pl. 7) which represents Aeneas's ships leaving the harbour of Carthage. It has been noticed that Turner depicts Dido on her pyre about to take her life⁵⁰. However, this is not her only appearance here: Turner presents her in the left foreground as she falls into a swoon after discovering that her beloved Aeneas is about to abandon her. These sequential actions are comparable to those that Turner had earlier employed in his *Vision of Medea*⁵¹. The rage and rancour that

consume Dido on Aeneas's departure are implied in the verses that accompanied this picture when it was exhibited: ›The orient moon shone on the departing fleet,/ Nemesis invoked, the priest held the poisoned cup‹⁵². It was Dido's fury that was translated into the permanent enmity that developed between Carthage and Rome which Virgil stressed in the opening lines of the first book and at the end of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*.

⁴⁷ Dryden's *Aeneis* does not include an event precisely as Turner depicts it in this picture though a scene is certainly described (IV, p. 366) with Dido visiting Sichaeus's tomb: ›A Marble Temple stood within the Grove,/ Sacred to Death, and to her murder'd Love;/ That honour'd Chappel she had hung around/ With snowy Fleeces, and with Garlands crown'd:/ Oft, when she visited this lonely Dome,/ Strange Voices issu'd from her Husband's Tomb:/ She thought she heard him summon her away;/ Invite her to his Grave; and chide her stay‹.

⁴⁸ B. J. 431.

⁴⁹ Ziff, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵¹ Thornbury, *op. cit.*, p. 447; see especially ›Illuminated and Illuminating Vistas‹, *op. cit.*

⁵² B. J. 432.

The second subject from the *Aeneid* that Turner chose to depict was the account of Aeneas and Deiphobe, the Cumaean Sibyl, whom Aeneas had encountered when he landed in Italy. Similar to the paintings of Dido and Aeneas, those of Aeneas and the Sibyl (of which there are three) were painted at different times in his career. In certain of his pictures depicting Dido and Aeneas, I have suggested that Dido as an instrument of the gods is presented as an obstruction to the fulfilment of Aeneas's destiny⁵³, but in those depicting Aeneas and the Sibyl, it is clear that the Sibyl, to the contrary, facilitates its fulfilment. She commands Aeneas to find and bring the Golden Bough that will protect him on his journey to the underworld; further, she guides him there. However, unlike Turner's paintings on the theme of Dido and Aeneas, those concerning Aeneas and the Sibyl do not depict different aspects of the story, but rather concentrate on a single episode: Aeneas's preparation to accompany the Sibyl into the underworld where he will be introduced to the shade of his father and learn about his future. Yet, as we will see, through subtle but significant changes in iconography these pictures allude to other events associated with the episode that have not yet taken place.

Turner's first picture representing Aeneas and the Sibyl dates from about 1798 and was painted in the manner of Richard Wilson. Entitled *Aeneas and the Sibyl, Lake Avernus* (Pl. 8) it was based on a drawing by Turner's early admirer and patron, Sir Richard Colt Hoare and, as has been suggested, may have been painted for him as a companion for Richard Wilson's *Lake Nemi* which was in this patron's collection⁵⁴. Wilson's picture and a second, later painting by Turner of *Lake Avernus* (c. 1814–15) – possibly a substitute for the earlier one by Turner, mentioned above – hung together in Colt Hoare's cabinet room at Stourhead⁵⁵. There is evidence, I believe, that strengthens the suggestion that Turner's two pictures at different times were intended as companions for Wilson's *Lake Nemi*. *Lake Nemi* was associated with the Temple of Diana (goddess of the moon) and *Lake Avernus*, with the Temple of Apollo (god of the sun, and

brother of Diana); such a relationship – that implies a darkness and light opposition – would, I suggest, have appealed to Turner.

In the first (c. 1798) version of the subject the Sibyl, centre stage, holds aloft, in her left hand, the magical Golden Bough to be given to Proserpine which will grant Aeneas safe passage through the underworld. With her right hand she points towards the shore of the lake where the entrance to Hades is located. To the right of Aeneas (who is standing next to the Sibyl) are Aeneas's Trojan followers, and a smouldering altar fire on which Aeneas has sacrificed to the infernal deities before entering the underworld. The second picture, mentioned above, and painted c. 1814–15, *Lake Avernus: Aeneas and the Cumaean Sibyl* (Pl. 9), is the work that may have been painted for Colt Hoare as a replacement for the earlier (c. 1798) picture. It is remarkably close in composition, though it shows the influence of the style of Claude rather than of Wilson⁵⁶. It is possible that at this time he began to associate the epic theme of the *Aeneid* with the Claudean landscape model since in all subsequent pictures by him on the Aeneas theme he makes allusions to Claude.

Though this second picture is close in composition to the first, Turner has added fresh ingredients which place greater emphasis on certain aspects of the episode and which also serve to embellish it. Aeneas's impending subterranean journey is alluded to, as has been noted, in the relief sculpture on the right where a figure (Aeneas?), sword unsheathed, is preparing to do battle with a many-headed monster that appears to be Cerberus who guards Hades⁵⁷. Also included in this picture, apparently, is Chryses, the priest of Apollo who, however, had no legitimate place in the Aeneas legend. As has been persuasively suggested, by introducing Chryses, Turner may have wished to establish the opposition between Apollo, god of light, and Hades, the realm of darkness, in order

⁵³ See n. 39 above.

⁵⁴ See Gage, 'Turner and Stourhead', p. 73.

⁵⁵ See B. J. 226, and particularly *A Description of the House and Gardens at Stourhead*, Bath, 1818, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Gage, 'Turner and Stourhead', p. 73.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

to establish the light/dark contrast and conflict inherent in classical myth⁵⁸. If this is so, then this opposition would augment the complementary and contrasting dark and light relationship that I have proposed exists between Wilson's *Lake Nemi* and Turner's first and second versions of Lake Avernus.

Further amplification and embellishment of the Aeneas and the Sibyl episode is contained in Turner's third and final picture on this subject, *The Golden Bough* (Pl. 10), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1834. Composition and setting as in the second painting are influenced by the Claudian model, though in this picture Turner now has extended the foreground so that the setting in consequence is made more spacious and the figures have become smaller in size. However, Chryses no longer appears, and Aeneas is missing. The Sibyl, to the left, commands this ample stage; she also seems more energetic than before, and the magical bough that she grasps is more prominently displayed. That Aeneas is missing, at first seems curious. Yet just as Chryses was an unusual addition in the earlier picture, probably intended to create a distinctive emphasis and meaning for the episode, so Aeneas's absence here also suggests that Turner wished to vary his interpretation.

By emphasizing in this picture the Golden Bough which the Sibyl holds aloft, Turner intended to draw still more attention to its magical properties and role in the story⁵⁹. It serves as a metaphor for Aeneas's journey to Hades which is further suggested by the presence of foxes, a snake, sarcophagi, and the tombs to the right⁶⁰ the latter two alluding, not simply to death as has been suggested⁶¹, but to the souls of the dead that Aeneas in Hades will encounter. The Fates, which Turner originally included in this picture⁶² and which he



11. Engraving illustrating Dryden's *Aeneis* VII, 290

may have associated with the underworld⁶³, were probably intended, I believe, to indicate the powerful role that destiny plays in this epic tale. It is Aeneas's journey to the underworld that provides him with a glimpse of his future: of his role in the founding of Rome, the new Troy.

A significant element of this picture has been given only slight attention and never explained. Centred in the composition is a large fire round which young women dance. This group was in-

summoning up the powerful forces of the underworld. The presence of the Fates in this picture and, originally, in *The Golden Bough* may suggest their association in Turner's mind with the underworld. Hesiod had called them daughters of the night and sisters of the goddesses of death. In L'Abbé de Tressan's *A History of the Heathen Mythology; or The Fables of the Ancients*, 2nd ed., London, 1806, they are directly associated with Hades (p. 266).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ As Gage has observed (›Turner and Stourhead‹, p. 74) Dryden's translation does not ›explicitly‹ state ›Golden Bough‹, which Christopher Pitt's does; see above n. 44.

⁶⁰ Gage, ›Turner and Stourhead‹, p. 74.

⁶¹ C. Powell, *Turner in the South*, p. 58.

⁶² Gage, ›Turner and Stourhead‹, p. 74.

⁶³ In Turner's *Vision of Medea* (exhibited Rome 1828, R. A. 1831) (B. J. 293) Medea is shown casting a spell and

spired by a similar dancing group in an engraving (Pl. 11) that illustrates the early editions of Dryden's *Aeneis*⁶⁴. Dryden refers, in his ›Dedication‹, to Aeneas's piety, attributable to his obligation ›to search an *Asylum* for his Gods in *Italy*› who had ›promis'd to his Race the Universal Empire‹⁶⁵. It seems probable that this fire which most likely represents the sacred fire of Hestia (Vesta, the Roman equivalent), goddess of the hearth and maintainer of the public reverence for gods, was intended by Turner to serve as a metaphor for the revelation to Aeneas – in the underworld – of his future role in the founding of Rome, the new Troy. Coals from the sacred fire of Hestia were transported by colonists from the mother city to the new community's sacred hearth. That this blazing fire in Turner's picture alludes to the new fire that is to be established and tended at the foundation of Rome appears to be supported by the evidence of published references to Hestia contemporary with Turner. It was believed that Aeneas and his Trojan followers had brought the sacred fire with them to Italy, and that Aeneas was the original institutor of the vestals⁶⁶. If this fire is indeed an allusion to the sacred fire, then the five young women dancing round it, and the one tending it, are probably meant to represent the six vestals who maintained it.

Throughout Turner's long artistic career he had felt the emotional pull of the legend of Aeneas. He would have been fascinated by its historical and geographical context, and by the dynamic role in it, of prophecy. Aeneas's struggle to fulfil his destiny was of especial interest to Turner and the main theme of many of his pictures concerned with Aeneas. The majority of these pictures represent episodes from the Dido and Aeneas story and some of them allude to the delaying and diverting role that Dido plays in this epic drama, as well as to her despair and death when Aeneas leaves her. The remaining pictures concern Aeneas and the Sibyl in Italy. The Sibyl acts as a foil for Dido insofar as she is instrumental in fulfilling Aeneas's destiny, by directing him to find and fetch the Golden Bough which will protect him on his journey through the underworld, and also by leading him there, where his future role in the foundation of Rome is revealed.

⁶⁴ The engraved illustration appears in *Aeneis* VII, opp. p. 466. The female figure on the far left of the engraving, and the one whose back is showing immediately to her right, furnished Turner with aspects of the poses of the two figures in similar positions in his painting. The red chalk study in Turner's sketch book (T. B. CCLXXIX) illustrated by Gage (*J. M. W. Turner*, p. 37) is palpably unrelated to the figures in Turner's picture.

⁶⁵ *Aeneis*, ›Dedication‹, pp. 216, 221.

⁶⁶ See for example, de Tressan, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

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