DIDO 'AVERSA' IN AENEID IV, 362 AND VI, 465-471

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It is the purpose of this article to show that scholars have failed to perceive what Vergil was doing in Aeneid IV, 362 and VI, 465-71. In the former line they have not seen that he juxtaposed 'aversa' with 'tuetur' in order to force the reader to understand 'aversa' as meaning something other than its primary, literal meaning. Conversely, in the latter passage they have been misled because they have not seen how crucial is the fact that Dido is literally 'aversa' (469). That has caused the misinterpretation of two clauses: 'vultum . . . movetur' (470) and 'ardentem et torva tuentem . . . animum' (467-8).

I will also show that in the case of 'aversa tuetur' and 'torva tuentem . . . animum' commentators have committed a basic error in approach. Vergil often employed words that are ambiguous and, therefore, thought-provoking. He also frequently used ordinary words in a manner that is puzzling at first reading, thus requiring a thoughtful re-reading of the passage for it to be completely understood. So he had a very strong inclination to produce telling effects by the means Horace recommends: 'dixeris egregie, notum si callida verbum/ reddiderit iunctura novum' (Ars, 47-8). Sometimes he did this to produce surprising but easily intelligible combinations [e.g. 'spem fronte serenat' (A. IV, 477)] or incongruities which are explained [e.g. 'cruda deo . . . senectus' (A. VI, 304)]. Many similar examples will immediately occur to anyone who is familiar with Vergil's works. But more often than is recognised he created verbal combinations which are impossible when taken literally, as are the two mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph. His intention must have been to startle the reader so that he 'caecos volutat eventus animo secum'. If he does that, the reader will be able to determine the meaning or impression Vergil wants, and these 'eventus' are then imprinted in his mind. Scholars, however, although theoretically accepting Aulus Gellius' judgement (II, 26, 11) that Vergil is 'poeta verborum diligentissimus', in practice have frustrated his purpose by untenable interpretations which neutralize or explain away the stunning effect of his words.

The full force of the startling oxymoron 'aversa tuetur' in A. IV,362 has been appreciated by only R. Williams among modern scholars. He calls it 'a very striking paradox' and translates it as, 'she had been watching him without looking at him'. Other modern commentators simply gloss 'aversa' with 'askance'. Earlier scholars tended to explain it as indicating hostility in Dido's look. They all assume that 'aversa' describes the manner in which Dido is looking at Aeneas. This is true even of Pierius and Williams, who note its incongruity. Williams is a
partial exception, since he says, 'the literal meaning (askance) merges with the metaphorical meaning: she rejects his very word.' Similarly Ruaeus gives as a second alternative 'vel aversa animo'. This was nearly certainly caused by the influence of D.S., whom he quotes among his Varii. But the fact is that what all these scholars regard as the primary or 'literal' meaning of 'aversa' is impossible here. If it is a physical description of Dido, which would be its most common use, it means 'Having the back turned, facing the opposite direction.'

D.S. did realize that 'aversa tuetur' 'incipit esse contrarium', so he explained 'ad animum referendum est'; and he and Servius glossed 'aversa' with 'irata'. That is a possible, indeed not an uncommon, meaning of 'aversus'. But it cannot be applied here for two reasons. First, it would have been absurd for Vergil to employ such a startling oxymoron as 'aversa tuetur' merely to inform the reader of what is so obvious: that Dido is angry at Aeneas. Second, philologists have a tendency (culminating in the OLD) to treat the different connotations of a word as being separate and discrete. But all the connotations of 'aversus' obviously derive from its primary meaning. Thus, to take 'aversus' = 'hostile', Ti. Cl. Donatus commented on A. I,481 ('diva solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat'), 'quod faciunt irati, ne respicient quos oderunt'. That is also true of VI,469, which is identical except for the first word. The literal meaning of 'aversus' is felt to be present even when this derivative connotation is used metaphorically: by being applied to parts of the body (the mind, ears, stomach, etc.) or a collective group, and/or having as its object a collective or abstraction. But the primary meaning must be felt especially strongly when the subject and object are both people, because their 'turning away from' is literally possible.

Thus the juxtaposition of 'aversa' with 'tuetur' makes the meaning 'hostile' impossible at A.IV,362.

There are, however, several common connotations of 'avertere' which are possible here because they do not derive from the subject being turned away from its object but by its object: 'To deprive . . . of sanity' (OLD 'averto', 7; see A. IV, 376); 'To cause to desist (from a purpose . . .)' (OLD 8 and many in ThLL II, 1323, 31–47); 'repellere' (ThLL 'averto', III and 'aversus', 2,1323, 62–67); and 'surripere, in suum usum convertere' (ThLL 'averto', II). All these meanings are appropriate to A. IV, 362, and undoubtedly Vergil meant for them all to occur to his reader. But it is a subgroup of the last which he nearly certainly intended to be its primary connotation here: 'avertit [is] the regular word for driving or carrying off spoil'. Two factors make this meaning especially apt here. Dido's relationship with Aeneas is constantly described in terms of a captured and plundered city, and Carthage in particular; and in contemporary erotic language a lover was often referred to as his or her beloved's plunder. In fact, the last line that Dido speaks before this is 'non equidem omnino capta ac deserta viderer' (330). Then, after Aeneas makes it clear that he will definitely go on to accomplish his Roman mission, her (Dido's = Carthage's) fears have become a reality. It is possible that the Ciris, which is saturated with Vergilian reminiscences, conflated lines 330 and 362, whether consciously or not, in 'capta atque avecta' (290).
The possible connotations of 'aversus' in this passage show that it is an extreme case of Vergilian ambiguity and compression. Therefore, no single English word or even phrase can translate it accurately. These possible connotations, however, all reinforce each other. So IV, 362 can be paraphrased as '[Dido] now for a long time having been deflected from her original goal by Aeneas, stealthily used by him, indeed driven off [mentally] as plunder by him, and then repulsed by him, and thus driven insane . . .' I do not claim that Vergil intended these ideas to occur to his reader in exactly this order. But I think that he did intend for more or less these ideas at least to fit through the reader's mind as he wrestles with the initially incomprehensible 'aversa tuetur'. They summarise Dido's situation at the point where it is most appropriate to do so: right after she has told Aeneas how he has destroyed what she had had and was trying to build and how he has ignored the commitment she thought he had made, and Aeneas replied that her help to him really was beyond calculation but he must leave anyway. They also explain what follows: how she looks at him and the *furiosus* manner and substance of her last speech to him.

It might be objected that Aeneas destroyed Dido precisely by not taking her away as plunder, or in any other way, and she would not have consented to follow him as plunder even if he were willing to take her (IV, 537–43). But he destroyed her equally by plundering her mentally, by depriving her of her purpose in life (IV, 321–3, 653–8) and self-respect (IV, 424–35) and thus left her ‘capta ac deserta’ (IV, 330). This terrible contradiction produced by the use of words which describe an action that is not done literally and physically but is done mentally and metaphorically also underlines the next passage that will be considered.

Most modern commentators on *A*. IV, 362 refer to VI, 469 as a parallel, and earlier commentators' use of 'torvus' also points to that passage (VI, 467). But the entire emphasis of VI, 469, and what precedes and follows it, is that Dido does not look at Aeneas. Aeneas is forced to break off his self-justifying speech to Dido at 466, before it is finished. That is made explicit by Vergil's description of it as 'inceptus' in line 470, with which Wagner (note 6) aptly compares 'inceptus clamor' (VI, 493). The reason is that she withdraws and flees from his sight ('aspectu'), so that he can no longer speak to her ('ad-loquor': 465–6). This does not mean that she begins to walk away from him. That only happens 'at last' ('tandem') with a sudden motion in 472. The full horror of the scene in 465–71 is that Dido stood there, but refused to listen to Aeneas by remaining ('tenebat': imperfect tense) with her back towards him ('aversa') and her eyes fixed on the ground (469). There is a parallel to this in Dido's use of the third person to refer to Aeneas during her furious denunciation of him in IV 369–375. But in Book VI Vergil makes her refusal to interact with him total and the basis of a terrible situation. However, because commentators have not seen the point Vergil is making, they have misconstrued two crucial clauses.

In line 470, 'vultum' can be either an accusative of respect, in which case it has the *OLD's* first meaning: 'facial expression, look, countenance'; or it is a direct
object of ‘movetur’, used transitively. In that case it has the OLD’s third meaning: ‘the face (as the part involved in looking, especially in phrases indicating the direction of one’s gaze)’. Most scholars prefer the first alternative. 16 R. Austin asserts that the second alternative is correct, but provides no support for this view besides an apt reference to Sen. Med. 800f. 17 The crucial consideration is that the first interpretation leaves ‘vultum . . . movetur’ with no connection with what precedes, to which reference is explicitly made by ‘incepto . . . sermone’, nor with what follows. By the second interpretation, however, Dido’s action reinforces what precedes it and is congruent with the immobility (‘stet’) of the ‘dura silex’ and ‘Marpesia cautes’ in the next line, with which it is equated. Furthermore, the second interpretation is consistent with related Vergilian constructions. 18

The second passage which has been misconstrued is what Norden (note 16) calls ‘die kühne Personifikation torva tuens animus’ (467–8). Many scholars have argued that that is not what Vergil really wrote, or at least not what he intended to have written. In 1746 Jortin proposed the emendation ‘animam’. 19 Another scholar with as great a libido emendationis, P. Hofman-Peerlkamp, in his edition of the Aeneid (1843), wrote ‘ardenti et torva tuenti’. Heyne (note 6) ‘strongly suspected’ that Vergil wrote only ‘lenibat dictis’ in line 468 and the rest ‘male expletum est’. Similarly, Fletcher (note 16) argued that the words after ‘dictis’ are an example of Vergil’s ‘tibicines’ since “‘grimeyed’ cannot be said of the mind, and both participles have to be taken in sense with ‘Didonem’ understood’. Wagner (note 6) also thought ‘Fortasse haec inter emendanda a Virgilio relicta’.

Heyne thought that the best explanation for the manuscript reading is to interpret ‘animum’ as the equivalent of ‘animo’ on the Homeric analogy κατά θυμὸν/φρένας. As he observed, this requires the actual object of ‘lenibat’ to be an understood ‘eam’. However, Wagner pointed out that there is no support for such an interpretation in Latin usage. James Henry, who accepted Heyne’s explanation as a pis aller (‘for peace sake’), adduced three parallel passages in the Aeneid for this construction (X,698–9; V, 291–2; 750–1). 20 However, as Henry admits, these passages are similar to VI, 467–8 only if one is ‘to understand the sentence exactly as if the self-willed and troublesome poet had written’ ‘eam’ in 467. Moreover, these passages do not personify the bodily organs mentioned. A different interpretation was offered by Conington (note 5): ‘the mind may naturally be said to look out through the eyes’. 21 But he gave as supporting passages Henry’s last two. He mentions them after asserting, “‘animus’ is sometimes used in apposition with a person’, which is true, but irrelevant to VI, 467–8. In answer to these attempts at re-writing Vergil’s phraseology, it is apt to quote Wagner’s observation, ‘quum omni difficiitate facile remota ita scribere liceret: ardentem torva tuentis . . . animum; vix dubito, quin de industria aliter loqui voluerit poeta.’

Obviously despairing of finding Latin parallels, Norden (note 16) calls this a τραγική λέξις wie Soph. Ai. 955 κελαινώπας θυμός (vgl. Aisch. Choeph. 854
But in Greek literature the Homeric practice of speaking of ῥῆν, ῥῆν, etc. as independent agents had a considerable influence. That is very different from Latin literature. There is no statement in Naevius or Ennius like ‘altius me animus continuat’ (cf. *Od.* IX, 302), nor could there be in­terminable debates over whether there is a concept of an integrated personality in early Latin literature; and there is no passage in classical Latin literature like, e.g., *Aesch.* *Agam.* 990–7. But even despite this difference between Greek and Latin, Norden’s examples are not really similar to *Aeneid* VI, 467–8. His first is the object of ἐφύζηζει . . . ἀνήρ, and its most obvious meaning is ‘dark in appearance’ (cf. *Pind.* *Pyth.* I, 13: κελανώσως νεφέλω), i.e. angry and malign. In the second, the participle clearly applies to intellectual vision (cf. *Aesch.* *Suppl.* 467); it is not a description of an actual manner of looking, as ‘torva tuens’ is. Even so, the perfect tense (‘has been given, and still has, sight’) marks it as an unusual occurrence. Austin (note 17) adds *Soph.* *Phil.* 1013–14. But its subject, ψυχή, was also commonly used as an independent organ (*L.S.J.* *LXXVII,* 1; e.g., *Soph.* *Ant.* 227ff.). Furthermore, it corresponds more to ‘anima’ than ‘animus’, which for a living person, as well as a dead one, was more comprehensive and more closely approximated his entire person than ‘animus’.23 Even allowing for this factor, *Philoctetes* 1013–14 describes the ψυχή looking διὰ μυχῶν, which refers primarily to the temperament of the agent, as opposed to the physical manner of looking conveyed by ‘torva’.

So in VI, 467–8 Vergil was using a totally unparalleled expression. Indeed, he took care to emphasize its oddity. The reader first encounters ‘ardentem et torva tuentem’ in line 467. He can only assume that the subject of these participles will be Dido or ‘ea’ or ‘anima’. ‘Animum’ is put as late as possible to heighten its naturally startling effect. This effect is also increased by the fact that up to this point the nature of Dido’s action is not totally clear. Vergil clarifies it completely only in 469–71.24 At that point the impression Vergil wanted to create should hit the reader with tremendous impact. The fact that ‘tuentem’ is literally impossible emphasizes that Dido is not looking at Aeneas.25 It was only with her defiant anger26 that he was communicating, and, therefore, his attempt had to be futile. The commentators have obscured Vergil’s intention because they approached 467–8 with the presupposition that Vergil would not use an expression that is unparalleled, confusing and jarring on the reader’s expectation (and, therefore, thought­provoking). For that reason they assume that it must be Dido who is looking this way.27 But the terrible power of 465–71 is dependent on the fact that she stood there but refused to interact with Aeneas in any way.

**Notes**


3. Vergilian scholars should always keep in mind the observation H. Munro made in the preface to the third edition of his edition of Lucretius (1873): ‘If the text of Vergil rested, like that of Lucretius, on a single manuscript, how much there is in him that we would refuse to accept as Latin!’. Cf. R. Hodge and R. Buttimore, *The 'Monobiblos' of Propertius*, Cambridge 1977, 13 (and passim): ‘the usual assumption of the commentaries is that Propertius uses words as equivalents of their synonyms’; so, ‘it is normal for a word . . . to be glossed by a more usual word . . .’. Thus, ‘Any striking qualities the language may have are simply normalised out of existence. . . .

4. *The Aeneid of Virgil: Books I–VI*, London 1972, ad loc. This contradiction was also noted by J. Mackail, *The Aeneid*, Oxford 1930, ad loc., but he called it a ‘superficial’ one, which ‘troubled minute critics’ and cited as an example Servius Daniéli, who will be discussed later. (Henceforth in this article all references by commentators will be assumed to be ad loc., unless otherwise stated; and Servius Daniéli will be D.S.)


7. OLD, ‘aversus’ 1, cf. 2; and *ThLL* 2, 1323. 48ff.

8. This was also observed by several medieval scribes, who changed the reading to ‘adversa’ (mentioned by Heyne and Pierius, note 6).

9. So it was often combined with ‘ab’. Excellent examples are D.S. *ad* A. II, 243: ‘ne Didò ab his animum averteeret’; Livy XXIV, 13, 8: ‘plebs . . . aversa ab Romanis et infesta senatui suo’; and Livy XXVI, 38, 7: ‘ille, cum ab re aversus, tum aemulo potentatus inimicus’. Of course, ‘aversus = hostile’ sometimes controlled a dative. Many instances of both constructions are in ThLL 2,1324, 45–79.

10. D.S. and Servius’ explanation of IV, 362 probably stems from their explanation of ‘aversa’ in A. I, 482, (since both are identical (‘irata’) and refer to each other as parallels and this interpretation is much more appropriate to the latter, where hostility is an obvious corollary of the literal fact that ‘solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat’. But they regard that as similar to IV, 362 because ‘Nee enim enim poterat convertere se simulacrum.’ This promise conflicts with the clear implication of Vergil’s statement at I,482 and actual fact, as the ancients knew it (e.g. A. II, 172–5 and R. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Secundus*, Oxford 1964, *ad loc.*). Considering the extensive influence that Homeric scholia had on Servius and D.S. [See, e.g., E. Fraenkel’s review of E. Rand, *et al.*, Harvard edition of Servius, in JRS 39(1949) 145–54 (especially 151–4)], it is probable that their explanation of I, 482 had its origin in Scholiast T on its Homeric model (II. VI, 311): τη γνώμη δένωςν and their premise in Scholiast Α *ad loc.*: γελοια . . . ή διανέφοντα ‘Aθηνα. This is the last of a series of fallacious statements by Scholiast Α *ad loc.* (W. Leaf, *The Iliad*, London 1900–2). Scholiast Τ may be correct since nothing in II. VI, 311 suggests physical motion (as opposed to A. I, 482). So Servius and D.S., like so many modern scholars cited in this article, have relied uncritically on the authority of earlier scholars, transferred their interpretation to a passage which is dissimilar in a significant way (A. I, 482) and thence to one that is totally different (IV, 362).


12. F. Newton, ‘Recurrent Imagery in Aeneid IV’, *TAPA* 88 (1957) 31–43 (especially 31–6 and 43);

For the second factor, see R. Pichon, De Sermone Amatorio Apud Latinos Elegiarum Scriptores, Paris 1902, 238 (praedea).


14. Here several commentators (e.g. Ruaeus, note 6, and Williams, note 4, 13.26. Even 13.24. Cf. the practice common to Vergil and other Latin poets of stating first a vague, ambiguous phrase followed by a clarifying phrase in apposition (Norden, note 16, ad 7f; and A. VI, 853: Rome’s mission is to ‘de-bellare’ the ‘super-bi’, and, when they are ‘sub-lecti’ to spare them. So here Aeneas cannot ‘ad-loqui’ Dido because she is ‘a-versa’.

16. E.g. Ruaeus, note 6, paraphrases it as ‘novetur secundum faciem’. F. Fletcher, Virgil, Aeneid VI, Oxford 1941, translates it as ‘not was her look changed’. E. Norden, P. Vergili Maro; Aeneis, Buch VI, Stuttgart 1957, translates it as ‘the Aritzé bleib . . . vegungslos’. However, his reference to it in his notes (ad 281) is confusing. He gives it as an example of the Augustan expansion of the ‘indatus corpus’ construction, but gives as another example ‘lacernum . . . ora’ (495). Bellessort, note 5, translates it as ‘ces paroles n ’emuevnt pas . . . son visage’.


18. Examples in Books I–VI of the Aeneid are provided by Page, note 5, pp. 505–6, in Books VI–XII by Poundre, note 11, ad VII, 505. Especially relevant are ‘vulsum demissa’ (I,561; ‘faciem mutatus et ora Cupido’ (I,658), where he did not change his expression but his entire face (I,683–4); ‘defixus lumina’ (VI,156); and ‘ad . . . reversi lumina’ (XII,172). Cf. ‘nasum nidore supinor’ (Horace, Serm. II,7,38).

19. It was accepted by Macaulay (note 4) because ‘torva uenit animus’ is . . . impossible; alleged parallels . . . from the Greek tragedians carry little weight. As I will show, both these objections are correct. This emendation is also mentioned by Geymonat (note 16) in his apparatus of M. Geymonat’s revision of R. Sabbadini and A. Castiglioni, P. Vergili Maronis Opera, Paravía 1973.


21. The same explanation was given by La Cerda (note 6), and, in essence, by Wagner (note 6).

22. Cf. the frequent conversations with one’s θέως or κορίνθι in Homer (e.g. II. XI, 403–7; XVII,97, 442; XXI,562; XXII, 98–122, 385; Od. XX,18–24) and in later Greek literature (e.g. Archil. 67a D–B; Thog. 695–6, 877–8, I69–36; Eur. Med. 1056–8; Phèbes 7). Such conversations are much less frequent and elaborate in Latin literature (e.g. Catullus LXIII, 61). The closest Ennius comes is expressions like ‘animo lamentor’ (Ann. 204 in Vahlen) or ‘cum corde suo . . . effatur’ (175–6) and ‘euffundit voces . . . cum pector e’ (540). And ‘cum’ here is probably otiose (Vahlen, ad 540). In A. VI,185 (‘mit starker Benutzung onianischer Phraseologie’: Norden, note 16), ‘cum corde’ simply reinforces ‘ipse’, as ‘animus’ does ‘secum’ in VI, 158. ‘Animus’ is slightly more independent in A. VI, 343–4. But generally it is no more an independent agent than is ‘loculi’ in, e.g., A. IV, 372 or XI, 725–6. Horace, Serm. II,2,681 is obviously meant to be ludicrous.

23. Vergil’s understanding of the difference must have been strongly influenced by Lucretius, to whom he refers metricaly on this subject with the quadrasyllabic ending of A. VI,11 (‘animumque’). This is a very rare ending for Vergil, but common in Lucretius, especially in Book III, where there are 37 such endings, of which 19 are ‘animis’ [C. Baey, Titus Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura, Vol. I, Oxford 1947, 117; cf.III, 142,228]. Although Lucretius was sometimes forced by the patri sermonis egestus to confuse ‘animus’ with ‘anima’, the former was usually a part of the latter [e.g. III, 142–3, 149–50. See J. Duff, T. Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura, Liber Tertius, Cambridge 1903, XII–XV].

24. Cf. the practice common to Vergil and other Latin poets of stating first a vague, ambiguous phrase followed by a clarifying phrase in apposition (Norden, note 16, ad 7f; and A. VI, 842–3).

25. Cf. A. II, 354 (‘una salus victis nullam sperare saltem’), where the whole point is that ‘salus’ in the literal sense is impossible.

26. Even if ‘animus’ by itself must be translated as ‘mind’; the participles give it this meaning. It was
rendered thus by Wagner (note 6), Page (note 5), Bellessort (note 5), Williams (note 4), and Norden’s translation (note 16): ‘Den starren Trutz’; although he weakened it with the unwarranted addition: ‘ihr im Busen’.

27. E.g. Heyne (note 6): ‘torvis obliquis et oculis adspicientem’; Henry (note 20): ‘there is a transition... from the outward expression of Dido, as she stood before Aeneas’; and Perret (note 16): ‘ce coeur brillant, ce regard farouche’; and all the emendations, explanations and Latin parallel passages cited above.
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