

*MORE FERAЕ AND SINE CRIMINE:  
THE PORTRAYAL OF DIDO  
AT AENEID 4.550–552*

Abstract: This paper discusses Aeneid 4.550–552. It first suggests that *ferae* (551) translates Ἀγροτέρα(η), a cult-title of Artemis which could by itself denote her; hence *ferae* = *Dianae*. It then, on this basis, examines *sine crimine* (550), and studies how over the three lines the significance of that phrase develops *pari passu* with Dido's changing perceptions of her plight. Finally, it details some conclusions about the *Aeneid* which derive from what has been proposed.

Keywords: *ferae*; Ἀγροτέρα(η); *sine crimine*; Dido; *Aeneid*

*non licuit thalami expertem sine crimine uitam  
degere more ferae, talis nec tangere curas;  
non seruata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo.*

(Aeneid 4.550–552)

This paper discusses three problematic lines of *Aeneid* 4 (550–552): § I proposes a new interpretation of *ferae* (551); § II then studies – in the light of that interpretation – the significance of *sine crimine* (550) as it develops within the three lines along with Dido's changing awareness of her situation; and § III considers the implications for the *Aeneid* of the conclusions reached in §§ I and II, viz: a more symmetrical divine interaction, a confirmation of a major theme, and a further pointer to a literary indebtedness.

*I. more ferae*

From at least the first century AD on there has been speculation about the meaning and import of Dido's pronouncement at Aeneid 4.550–551 that “it was not granted to her ... to live *more ferae*”. Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.64) and Servius *ad loc.* both understood the phrase to mean “in the manner of a wild

beast”, and this has been the rendering accepted by the majority of those who have subsequently engaged with the problem; a minority has argued instead for “in the manner of a wild woman” (e. g. Camilla). Nappa 2007, 303–308 may be consulted for a detailed account of earlier debates and proposals about *more ferae*,<sup>1</sup> and for summaries of the different interpretations of the surrounding lines (especially of *thalami expertem sine crimine*, 550), and of Dido’s entire speech, which have resulted from scholars’ different views of the problematic *more ferae*.

Nappa himself, without wholly abandoning the “wild beast” view,<sup>2</sup> moved closer to the “wild woman” view, influenced in part by DeWitt 1924. But in doing so he introduced a novel and fruitful concept. He began by highlighting two relevant factors: Virgil’s Greek learning (307–308 n. 31), and (307–309) the simile with which Virgil had earlier introduced Dido (Aeneid 1.498–503, which compares Dido to Diana), along with its Homeric antecedent (Odyssey 6.102–109, which compares Nausicaa to Artemis). Next Nappa noted that in the *Odyssey* passage Artemis is accompanied by νύμφαι ... / ἄγρονόμοι (Odyssey 6.105–106), and, picking up (308 n. 32) the idea of DeWitt 1924, 177–178 that *ferae* might refer to a devotee of Diana, Nappa proposed that “Dido’s phrase is ... an interpretative translation of Homer’s ἄγρονόμος” (307 n. 31), and that Dido wishes she had been a virgin huntress. Nappa then formulated his view in broader terms:

The *fera* Dido wants to resemble is not – or not only – an animal, but one of the virginal huntresses of Diana’s band, perhaps even Diana herself (308).

Our lines might then be paraphrased ‘I was not allowed to live my life as a virgin without being thought immoral or selfish, like a wild female (nymph, huntress, Diana) ...’ (309).

All this, I believe, is along the right lines. But there is a simpler and clearer solution to the dilemma posed by *more ferae*, one which does not involve hedging bets or hypothesising ambivalence; it as-

1) Adkin 2019, 29 n. 78 assembles the few early emendations of *more ferae*, none of which have gained support.

2) “She <Dido> says, perhaps without awareness of the implications, “like a beast”, but Vergil points to a greater complex of meanings also” (Nappa 2007, 307); and see too the quotations from Nappa 2007, 308 and 309 below.

sumes only Virgil's understanding of the interpretative techniques of Hellenistic lexicography. There exists a closer Greek equivalent to *fera* than ἀγρονόμος, and a better analogue for Dido than “a follower of Diana”, etc.: *fera* can be rendered precisely in Greek by the adjective ἀγροτέρα(η) – not, incidentally, a comparative form – which is frequently used as a cult-title of Artemis. So Dido, in her fantasy about what her past life might have been, wishes to have lived, not like a huntress or attendant nymph of Diana, but like the hunting goddess Artemis / Diana herself, the comparand of Virgil's simile about Dido and of Homer's about Nausicaa:

*qualis in Eurotae ripis aut per iuga Cynthi  
exercet Diana choros ...*

(Aeneid 1.498–499)

οἴη δ' Ἄρτεμις εἴσι κατ' οὔρεα ἰοχέαιρα,  
ἢ κατὰ Τηϋγέτον περιμήκετον ἢ Ἐρύμανθον,  
τερπομένη κάπροισι καὶ ὠκείησ' ἐλάφοισι·

(Odyssey 6.102–104)

ἀγροτέρα(η) is frequently combined with Ἄρτεμις in the goddess' official designation Ἄρτεμις Ἀγροτέρα(η): cf., e. g., Homer, *Iliad* 21.471, Bacchylides, *Epinicia* 11.37, and Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae* 115. But Ἀγροτέρα(η) can also be found alone in place of Ἄρτεμις from the fifth century BC on. In this period there was still a possibility of ambiguity: for example, Pindar uses παρθένον ἀγροτέραν to refer to the huntress Cyrene (*Pythian* 9.6).<sup>3</sup> Hence in the first surviving examples where Ἀγροτέρα(η) appears alone, clues are added which confirm that Artemis is the referent. Thus her mother's name clarifies the situation in:

... οὐ γάρ πω δαίφρων  
[παῦσεν] χόλον ἀγροτέρα  
Λατοῦς θυγάτηρ

(Bacchylides, *Epinicia* 5.122–124)

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3) In Augustan Latin too *fera* could refer to a deity other than Diana: cf. *Cybebe, fera montium dea* (Maecenas 5 Courtney).

as does the name of Artemis' comrade nymph Dictynna (if 'Dictynna' is not a further cult-title of Artemis here) in:

πολλοῖς μὲν ἐνάλου,  
 ὄρειου δὲ πολλοῖς ἄγρας ἀκροθινίοις  
 ἀγλαΐσας τὴν Ἀγροτέραν ἅμα θεὸν καὶ Δί κτυνναν  
 (Pindar, dub. fr. 357)

But from then on fifth- and fourth-century Attic writers could use Ἀγροτέρα alone without an accompanying confirmatory clue; cf.:

τῇ δ' Ἀγροτέρα κατὰ χιλίων παρήνεσα  
 εὐχὴν ποιήσασθαι χιμάρων εἰς αὐρίον  
 (Aristophanes, Equites 660–661)

Ἀγροτέρα σηροκτόνε, μόλε δεῦρο, παρσένε σιά,  
 ποττὰς σπονδάς  
 (Aristophanes, Lysistrata 1262–1264)<sup>4</sup>

οὐκέτι δὲ στάδιον ἀπεχόντων, σφραγισάμενοι οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τῇ  
 Ἀγροτέρα, ὡσπερ νομίζεται, τὴν χίμαιραν, ἠγοῦντο ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐναντί-  
 οὺς ...

(Xenophon, Hellenica 4.2.20)

This trend continues, and we find more writers employing Ἀγροτέρα(η) alone to refer to the goddess, mainly without concomitant clues.<sup>5</sup>

Virgil, I propose, expected his Augustan readers, guided by their knowledge of Homer and by their experience of learned Hellenistic allusivity, to understand *ferae* as a nominal adjective equivalent to Artemis' / Diana's cult-title Ἀγροτέρα, and hence as a reference to the goddess. The failure of Quintilian and Servius to comprehend *ferae* in this way is perhaps partly attributable to declining Roman interest in Hellenistic Greek poetry from the post-Augustan period

4) The speaker here is, however, Spartan.

5) E. g. Ael. Var. Hist. 2.25; SH fr. 983.4; Pausan. 7.26.11; Plut. Amat. 757D6; De Malig. Herod. 862B12; Philostr. Mai. Imag. 1.28.6; Pollux 9.12.8; Orph. Argon. 938; Liban. Orat. 5.40.

on.<sup>6</sup> Another factor is probably the uniqueness (at least in surviving Roman poetry) of Virgil's use of *fera* to translate ἄγροτέρα: without parallels this feature simply escaped notice. The notion of humans acting 'after the fashion' of a god is, however, well paralleled in Latin. Virgil himself employs it of Saturn in:

*ne fugite hospitium, neue ignorete Latinos  
Saturni gentem haud uincolo nec legibus aequam,  
sponte sua ueterisque dei se more tenentem*  
(Aeneid 7.202–204)

and Ovid actually compares a woman to Diana (possibly with the *Aeneid* in mind):<sup>7</sup>

*altera succinctae religetur more Dianae,  
ut solet attonitas cum petit illa feras*  
(Ars Amatoria 3.143–144)

Later Seneca employs the trope in prose:

*ceterum omnibus dignis proderit et deorum more calamitosos propitius respiciet*  
(De Clementia 2.6.3)

while the author of *Octavia* introduces it into his tragedy:

*Se. Implebit aulam stirpe caelesti tuam  
generata diuo, Claudiae gentis decus,  
sortita fratris more Iunonis toros.*  
(533–535)

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6) With, of course, notable exceptions: the Hellenistic Greek poets preferred by Tiberius; the Greek writers read by Statius' father's pupils, who included his son; Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*; and the philhellenism of the age of Hadrian.

7) Not only is this couplet reminiscent of Venus disguised as a huntress in *Aeneid* 1 – cf. *succinctam* (Aen. 1.323, of one of Venus' supposed 'sisters') – but Ovid's *feras* (ars 144) might be a snide comment on Virgil's *ferae*.

## II. sine crimine

The understanding of *more feræ* as a direct reference to Diana does not immediately clarify Virgil's *sine crimine*, another phrase which has been found problematic. The problems arise in part because *sine crimine*, a not uncommon combination, admits of several non-specific renderings: "with no accusation", "with no crime / offence", "blameless(ly)", "innocent", "beyond reproach", and so forth; and whether or not *sine crimine* is further informative depends entirely on its context or lack of context. Sometimes it is impossible to identify the accusation, crime / offence / wrong-doing, or blame which *sine crimine* denies exists: cf., e.g., *quem absentem non modo sine crimine et sine teste, verum etiam sine accusatore damnasti?* (Cicero, In Verrem 2.2.110) and *it, redit et narrat, Vulteium nomine Menam, / praeconem, tenui censu, sine crimine ...* (Horace, Epistles 1.7.55–56). In these and similar cases questions such as "Who committed the crime?", "What was the crime / offence / wrong-doing?", and "Who was to blame?" are irrelevant. In these situations not only has the person done nothing wrong, but (s)he may not even have been blamed / accused of doing wrong.

The reverse state of affairs is when, as occasionally happens, the nature of the *crimen* is made totally explicit: for example, in *his lacrimis contentus eris sine crimine mortis* – addressed to Amor at Ovid, *Remedia Amoris* 37 – *mortis* reveals that the *crimen* is killing lovers, and that Amor was (potentially) the guilty party. Similarly, at Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 12.7.9, *caecis hoc, ut aiunt, satis clarum est, nec quisquam, qui sufficientia sibi (modica autem haec sunt) possidebit, hunc quaestum sine crimine sordium fecerit*, the *crimen* imputed is *sordes*. But there are intermediate examples where a broader context must be consulted before the *crimen* involved in *sine crimine* can be pinned down. A group of Ovidian passages featuring various sexual *crimina*, some of them relevant to Aeneid 4.550–552, will illustrate this process:

1. *at nulli cessura fides, sine crimine mores  
nudaque simplicitas purpureusque pudor.  
non mihi mille placent, non sum desultor amoris*  
(Ovid, *Amores* 1.3.13–15)

Ovid says, *inter alia*, that his own character is “blameless” (13); line 15 claims that one *crimen* of which Ovid is free is philandering.

2. *rusticus est nimium, quem laedit adultera coniunx,  
et notos mores non satis Urbis habet,  
in qua Martigenae non sunt sine crimine nati  
Romulus Iliades Iliadesque Remus*  
(Ovid, *Amores* 3.4.37–40)

In line 37 Ovid is concerned with the *adultera coniunx* – the adulterous wife, not the adulterous husband; but, when line 39 arrives, the *crimen* is Mars’ violation of Ilia, a virgin and a Vestal. This swift transition of thought is typical of such subject-matter: Aeneid 4.550–552 is similar in this respect.

3. *si tamen ille prior, quo me sine crimine gessi,  
candor ab insolita labe notandus erat,  
at bene successit, digno quod adurimur igni*  
(Ovid, *Heroides* 4.31–33)

Phaedra declares that her previous conduct was “free of *crimen*”; by implication her current adulterous passion for Hippolytus is a *crimen*.

4. *me quoque cum multis, sed me sine crimine  
amasti*  
(Ovid, *Heroides* 9.137)

Deianira (speaking as Hercules’ legitimate wife) tells him that his intercourse with her was “without *crimen*”, whereas, by implication, his relations with other women were illicit, and indeed were often rapes.

5. *et pariter matres et quae sine crimine castos  
perpetua servant virginitate focos*  
(Ovid, *Tristia* 4.2.13–14)

Line 14 shows that the “blamelessness” of the Vestal Virgins consists in observing their vow of chastity: they are “beyond reproach”.<sup>8</sup>

Dido’s lament that she was not able *thalami expertem sine crimine vitam / degere more ferae* (550–551) can now be interpreted on the basis of this contextual approach – with the warning that contexts can shift rapidly, and hence that contextual meanings can mutate rapidly, especially within highly emotional discourse such as lines 550–552. The immediate context in which Dido utters the phrase *sine crimine* is “having no share of the marriage-chamber”<sup>9</sup> and “living like Artemis / Diana”. Artemis’ / Diana’s most salient characteristic is virginity: the first request the infant Artemis makes of her father Zeus in Callimachus, Hymn 3 is for perpetual virginity: δός μοι παρθενίην αἰώνιον, ἄππα, φυλάσσειν (6). The context in which Dido says *sine crimine* therefore shows unequivocally that she is thinking in the same set of terms as Ovid at *Tristia* 4.2.13 (no. 5 above), where he is discussing the Vestal Virgins’ chastity in office: Dido’s fantasised life as a perpetual virgin, the life which was not granted to her, would have been “without reproach”.

This does not, of course, mean that in lines 550–551 Dido is blaming her father for giving her to her husband Sychaeus, or that her loss of her virginity to her husband was a *crimen* for which she is reproaching Sychaeus or herself. Dido is speaking excitedly and incoherently, and at this point she is not thinking about her marriage to Sychaeus: instead her affair with Aeneas is at the forefront of her mind. That is why in the middle of line 551 she moves straight from her fantasy of having lived as a perpetual virgin to the notion that, had she done so, she would not be experiencing her present *curae* – these *curae* are the love she feels for Aeneas and the suffering which her impending loss of Aeneas brings her. So up to, but only up to, the end of line 551 the proximate context of *sine crimine*, i. e. *thalami expertem ... vitam / degere more ferae* (550–551), continues to prevail, and ancient readers will have continued to understand *sine crimine* as a reference to virginity.

8) Cf.: *eodem anno Postumia virgo Vestalis de incestu causam dixit crimine innoxia, ab suspicione propter cultum amoeniorem ingeniumque liberius quam virginem decet parum abhorrens* (Livy 4.44.11, where *crimine innoxia* = *sine crimine*).

9) Pace Griffith 1988, 71 (who follows Austin ad loc.), I assume that *thalami expertem* means the same as *nuptiarum experts* (Hor. Od. 3.11.11) and *expers conubii* (Stat. Theb. 10.62).



But in line 552 everything changes: in the sentence *non seruata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo*, which also refers to sexual activity, Dido recollects the vow of chastity which she had made to her dead husband Sychaeus, a vow which, by engaging in her affair with Aeneas, she has breached. With this redirection of Dido's thoughts the sense of *crimen* changes, or rather expands: before Aeneas' arrival it was not granted to Dido to live a life of perpetual chastity and so be beyond reproach (*sine crimine*) – i. e. to live the life of the Vestal Virgins of no. 5 above – but there was no question of Dido being personally guilty. However, now that she has broken her vow of chastity to Sychaeus by engaging in her relationship with Aeneas, Dido regards herself as no longer *sine crimine*, but as guilty and blameworthy. This is the factor which will drive her to suicide.

### III. Three Implications for the Aeneid

#### 1. Venus and Diana in Books 1 and 4

The proposal that Diana / Artemis emerges in person in the phrase *more ferae* prompts further reflection on the balanced roles of Venus and Diana in the first major episode of the *Aeneid*. Although, where female deities are concerned, the main conflict of Books 1–4, and indeed of the *Aeneid* as a whole, is between Venus and Juno, nevertheless Venus and Diana are also paired antithetically in the epic, especially in relation to Dido and Camilla.<sup>10</sup> In Book 1 Venus disguises herself as a huntress in order to advise and direct her son, who is newly arrived at Carthage (1.314 ff.), and she is mistaken by Aeneas for Diana (1.329). Dido is then compared directly to Diana when Aeneas first sees her (1.498–502); and in the central scene of Aeneas' stay in Carthage Dido dresses as a huntress and hunts in company with Aeneas (4.136 ff.). If the equation ἀγροτέρα(η) = *fera* is accepted, Diana reappears at 4.551, towards the end of the Carthage episode, when Dido laments that it was not granted to her to live as a virgin like Diana. Diana's reappearance enhances the symmetry and balance of the narrative of Books 1–4.

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10) Cf., e. g., from the extensive secondary literature, Wilhelm 1987; Polk 1996; Fratantuono 2005.

## 2. *The hunting theme of the Aeneid*

The reappearance of Diana also confirms the high significance of hunting in the *Aeneid*. A Homeric scholion of Hellenistic origin identifies ἀγροτέρα(η) as meaning ‘huntress’, and as derived from ἀγρεύειν (“to hunt”): <ἀγροτέρη:> κυνηγός, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγρεύειν (Schol. Aim ad Iliad 21.471c). Eustathius’ more expansive, and perhaps somewhat confused, remarks on this cult-title (Ὅτι ἐν τῷ «πότνια θηρῶν Ἄρτεμις ἀγροτέρη» ἄδηλον εἶτε πότνια θηρῶν ἢ Ἄρτεμις λέγεται, ἤγουν ἢ εἰς τὸ θηρεύειν πότνια, εἶτε ἀγροτέρα θηρῶν, ἥτοι ἀγρευτική τῶν θηρίων, Commentarii ad Homerī Iliadem IV.540 on Iliad 21.470) imply that there was a Hellenistic scholarly controversy over the sense and derivation of ἀγροτέρα(η); and the ancient scholia and lexica enlarge and clarify the scope of the controversy by reporting further disputes:

1) ἀγροτέρη· οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄγριος· (not from ‘wild’) ἀγριώτερος γὰρ ἦν ἄν· ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὸν ἀγρὸν (from ‘field / countryside’) ἀγρότερος πεποιήται.<sup>11</sup> ἀπαρασχημάτιστον γάρ. (Philoxenus fr. 336, widely represented in the ancient lexica)

2) The scholia on Theocritus, Idyll 8.58 offer the contradictory definitions ἀγροτέροις δὲ λῖνα· τοῖς δὲ ἀγριμαίοις (‘wild’) τὰ δίκτυα (GPT) and <ἀγροτέροις> τοῖς ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ (‘in the field / countryside’) οὔσιν ... (Eg).

3) The glosses of Hesychius α 830–835 Latte / Cunningham replay some of the contradictions exemplified above, and add a misinterpretation of ἀγροτέρος as a comparative (possibly shared by Philoxenus, cf. above):

\*ἀγροτεράων· ἀγρίων (‘wild’)

ἀγρόται· θηρευταί (‘hunters’)

ἀγροτέροισιν· ἀγριωτέροισιν (‘wilder’)

ἀγρότις· ἀγροτέρα· κυνηγός (‘huntress’)

ἀγρόται· ἀγροῖκοι· ἢ θηρευταί (‘country folk’ or ‘hunters’)

ἀγροτέραν· ὀρειάν· τὴν Ἄρτεμιν (‘of the mountain’, ‘Artemis’)

This controversy is even more likely to have brought ἀγροτέρα(η) to Virgil’s attention, given his known use of Homeric scho-

11) For this derivation cf. also Schol. Eg ad Theocr. Id. 8.58 (quoted below).

lia.<sup>12</sup> The noun *fera* too caught the attention of at least one learned Augustan poet: Propertius used it at Elegy 1.12, not in its normal sense, but to render Greek φήρ / θήρ, so that Milanion goes off to encounter, not ‘wild beasts / boars’, but Centaurs.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. *The influence of Euripides’ Hippolytus*

Finally, the renewed presence of Diana in *more ferae* adds further strength to the long-standing view<sup>14</sup> that in the Dido-Aeneas episode we are seeing the influence (among many other sources) of the conflict between Artemis and Aphrodite over Hippolytus and Phaedra in Euripidean tragedy.<sup>15</sup>

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12) On Virgil’s use of Homeric scholia cf. Mühlert 1965; Schlunk 1974.

13) Cf. Cairns 1974, 97–98 = 2007, 5–6. An easy suspicion is that Virgil’s and Propertius’ experiments with the two related terms were influenced by Parthenius and/or Gallus.

14) Cf., e. g., Friedrich 1934, esp. 312–313; Foster 1973–4, 30–31; Mellado Rodríguez 2016.

15) I am indebted to Ian Du Quesnay for a critical reading of this paper; his assent should not be assumed.

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Tallahassee, Florida

Francis Cairns