Can Love Alleviate the Unseen Wounds of War? 
Erotic and Therapeutic Encounters En Route “Home” from the Trojan Conflict

My paper reflects on representations of the warrior hero’s “return home” from the Trojan War in Greek and Roman epic, comparing the return of Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey* with that of Aeneas in Vergil’s *Aeneid*. I have selected my title to recognize the distinctive work and aims of Coming Home Project, a non-profit organization for military veterans based in San Francisco. The title also offers homage to the scenario and message of a film with the same name.

A few words about both Coming Home Project, and the film *Coming Home* are consequently in order. On its website, Coming Home Project (www.cominghomeproject.net) describes itself as “committed to alleviating the unseen wounds of war” by providing “compassionate care, support, education, and stress management tools” for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and those close to them. To address “the emotional, social, moral, and spiritual injuries” and challenges within personal relationships that returning warriors encounter, the Project endeavors “to rebuild the connectivity of mind, body, heart and spirit that combat trauma can unravel, renew their relationships with loved ones, and create new peer support networks.” Most important, Coming Home Project has sought to create a “safe place” for veterans to come together with their families and talk, therapeutically, about their experiences of war and its aftermath by sharing “stories, struggles, and accomplishments”.

The Project’s title evokes that of an earlier effort, also set in California, to illuminate the experiences of veterans struggling to re-enter civilian life after the Vietnam War: Hal Ashby’s 1978 film *Coming Home*, which won Academy Awards for its two leading actors—Jane Fonda and Jon Voight—as well as for its screenplay.

Voight plays Luke, a paralyzed Vietnam veteran; Fonda plays Sally, the wife of another combatant. Sally re-encounters Luke, her high school classmate, while volunteering at the veterans’ hospital where he is recovering, and eventually becomes his lover. The film portrays Voight’s character—paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a

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1 I have taken the words in quotation marks from both the project’s self-description currently posted on its website (in July 2015) as well as earlier versions of this text posted from 2013 onwards.
wheelchair— as undergoing profound emotional and spiritual, if not physical, rehabilitation. Indeed, it represents Luke as, despite his bodily disabilities, far better equipped in heart and mind to face post-war life than Sally’s traumatized husband, played by Bruce Dern. Although he has suffered minimal (and self-inflicted) injuries, he cannot come to terms with what he has done and endured in Vietnam. At the end of the film he takes his own life in despair. The opportunity, and ability, that Luke has to talk about his military experiences, in the context of the mutual, physical love he finds with Sally, make all the difference for Luke, underscoring the importance of both erotic and narrative modes of therapy.

Like the agenda of Coming Home Project, and the scenario of the film Coming Home, both the Odyssey and Aeneid utilize both love and story-sharing as key plot-elements in narrating the encounters of their respective warrior heroes after the Trojan conflict. Homer portrays Odysseus as engaging in amorous dalliance with two independently dwelling goddesses—Circe and Calypso—in the course of his arduous journey back to his native Ithaca. At Odyssey 12. 31-35, Homer’s Odysseus also recalls that after his return from the world of the dead, Circe first served him and his men food and wine, then—drawing him away from his comrades—made him sit, reclined beside him, and asked to hear about his experiences in the underworld.

So, too, Homer represents Odysseus as narrating all of his post-war travels—struggles and accomplishments that include the aforementioned trip to the realm of the dead—to the royal family during a splendid banquet at the court of Phaeacia, the final stop on his travels. As Lillian Doherty has observed, the women in his audience respond

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2 See the analysis of Biskind 2008, particularly his comments about the original plans for the scene in which Luke and Sally make love, and about the debate over whether to ascribe pleasure-giving agency to Luke’s mouth: “The filmmakers researched the question thoroughly, interviewing paraplegic vets and medical experts as well as the girlfriends and wives of paraplegics. The answer was that there was no single answer: a paraplegic’s ability to have an erection depends on the position and nature of his wound and is often unrelated to stimulation. For the film’s purposes, says [producer Jerome] Hellman, ‘it was decided that the thing that these guys could do was cunnilingus. They were great at it. And Jane’s character had never had it. She’d had a traditional guy, who jumps on and pumps away until he comes and gets off. But manliness wasn’t necessarily related to a big stiff dick. This big macho guy with the medals was a total wipeout as a husband and a lover. And the vet who had only half a body, he was the real man.’”

3 As Aldo Setaioli, himself a former resident of southern California, has observed in private correspondence, one striking feature of the “home” depicted in this film is its utter detachment from the Vietnam War operations. Those who are not engaged in fighting go about their own business, largely unaffected by the lethal military operations in far-off surroundings; the “home front” ambiance is altogether different from that during the second World War, a national mobilization requiring support and personal sacrifice from the civilian population. To be sure, the Iliad portrays the disruptions in the lives of Trojan “civilians” who live near the battle sites. But the places to which Odysseus travels after the war, including his home in Ithaca, are far removed from the fighting; although Aeneas arrives in a war-torn Italy, and Dido worries about military assaults by hostile neighbors, peace prevails in Dido’s Carthage while Aeneas resides there.
with particular interest to his narrative. Once Odysseus returns home to Ithaca, and successfully battles the suitors of his beloved wife Penelope to regain his kingdom, he recounts these post-war adventures to Penelope as well. Significantly, Homer begins his account of Odysseus’ story-sharing with Penelope at *Odyssey* 23. 300-341 by relating that Penelope shared what she had endured at home, from her suitors. He then states that Odysseus shared both the miseries he had inflicted on other men as well as those he himself had suffered while attempting to return home.

Yet the *Odyssey* does not depict its hero as sharing his actual military experiences at Troy with any of his female erotic partners. Admittedly, the account of his trip to the underworld that he narrates for the Phaeacian court includes affecting and emotionally charged conversations with his fellow, now-dead, Greek warriors, such as Agamemnon and Achilles. Even so, Odysseus does not describe these exchanges that he had with these other male Trojan war veterans until he is pointedly bidden to do so by the Phaeacian king Alcinous, at 11. 375ff. Prior to the king’s inquiry, in fact, Odysseus appears to craft his story telling with a woman listener, Queen Arete, primarily in mind.

Vergil seeks to recall the erotic interactions of Homer’s Odysseus with Calypso and Circe in his *Aeneid*, by depicting its Trojan hero Aeneas as loving and then leaving a seemingly independent woman—Queen Dido of Carthage—on his travels after the Trojan War. Furthermore, Vergil has Aneas narrate his own wartime experiences to Dido and her court at a similarly opulent banquet, and do so at the importuning of Dido herself: after Aneas’ mother, the love goddess Venus, has schemed to have her other son, the love god Cupid, cause Dido to become inflamed with unquenchable passion for Aeneas. The final lines of *Aeneid* Book One, 748-756, represent Dido as first asking *(rogitans)* for details about the Trojans for whom Aeneas fought and his Greek foes, then demanding *(dic)* to hear, from the beginning *(a prima origine)* about the misfortunes of his entourage and his own wanderings *(casusque tuorum erroresque tuos)*. I quote both the Latin text and C. Day Lewis’ translation.

Nec non et vario noctem sermone trahebat
Infelix Dido longumque bibebat amorem,
Multa super Priamo rogitans, super Hectore multa;

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4 See Doherty 1995 on Odysseus’ “choice” of narrative details that make a strong and positive impression on the women of the Phaeacian court in his audience, particularly Queen Arete.

5 For Calypso and Circe as models for Dido in “their mature eroticism and power” see, for example, Hexter 1992, 337-338, who concludes that Dido is in fact an “anti-Calypso, because her “ultimate resignation and concern for Odysseus’ well-being serve as counter examples to Dido’s undying wrath.” Oliensis 1997, 305 does not mention Homer’s Calypso and Circe, but rather Arete and Nausicaa, as models for Dido, “yielding an oddly maternal passion” for Aeneas on Dido’s part.

6 I have retained Lewis’ British spellings of words such as “honour” since they appear in the American translation.
Nunc quibus Aurorae venisset filius armis, 
nunc quales Diomedis equi, nunc quantus Achilles. 
“Immo age et a prima díc, hospes, origine nobis, 
insidias”, inquit, “Danaum casusque fátorum 
erroresque tuos; nam te iam septima portat 
onibus errantem terris et fluctibus aestas.” 

“Yes, and ill-starred Dido talked on into the small hours, / Talked over many 
things as she drank deep of love, / Asking about Priam and Hector / Asking about the armour of the son of Aurora had come in / The points 
of Diomed’s horses and the stature of great Achilles. But no, dear guest, tell us, 
please tell us from the beginning / The story of Greek stratagems, and how your 
comrades fell, / And your own wanderings, for now is the seventh summer / That 
over land and sea you have been widely wandering.”

Book II of the Aeneid opens where Book I left off, with Aeneas’ response to Dido’s 
request. Here, too, Vergil accords major emphasis to the role of speech and story-telling. 
Aeneas immediately characterizes the narrative that Dido has demanded from him as “a 
grief that must not be spoken about” (infandum dolorem); he asks, rhetorically, if any 
Greek soldier could refrain from tears in speaking (fando) about the sufferings caused 
by the Greeks. Yet he also acknowledges that Dido’s request stems for her love (amor) 
for learning about his own misfortunes (casus cognoscere nostros). Again I quote both the 
Latin text and the C. Day Lewis translation:

Conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant. 
Inde toro pater Aeneas sic orsus ab alto: 
“Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem, 
Troianas ut opes et lamentabile regnum 
Eruerint Danai, quaeque ipse miserrima vidi 
Et quorum pars magna fui. Quis talia fando 
Myrmidonum Dolopumve aut duri miles Ulixi 
Temperet a lacrimis? Et iam nox umida caelo 
Praecipitat suadentque cadentia sidera somnos. 
Sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros 
Et breviter Troiae supremum audire laborum. 
Quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit 
Incipiam...

“All fell silent now, and their faces were all attention / When from his place 
of honour Aeneas begins to speak: / O queen, the griefs you bid me reopen are 
inexpressible: / the tale of Troy, a rich and most tragic empire / Erased by the 
Greeks: most piteous events I saw with my own eyes / And played no minor part 
in. What Myrmidon or Thessalian, / What soldier of fell Ulysses could talk about 
such events / And keep from tears? Besides, the dewy night drops fast / From
heaven, and the declining stars invite to sleep. / But if you want so much to know what happened to us / And hear in brief a recital of Troy’s last agony, / Although the memory makes me shudder, and shrink from its sadness, / I will attempt it.”

Nevertheless, the two women Odysseus abandons after engaging in mutually satisfying sexual liaisons are emotionally resilient goddesses, whom he rejects in favor of his mortal wife and home. But Aeneas — as he tells Dido in detail at *Aeneid* 2. 768 ff. — loses his own wife Creusa as well as his homeland on his last night at Troy.

He must find, and must make, a new home, in Italy. Dido, moreover, is a mortal woman who regards her erotic bond with Aeneas as marriage rather than dalliance, and takes her own life in despair upon his departure.

At *Aeneid* 4. 1-23, Vergil portrays Dido as yielding to her passion for Aeneas, breaking her vow to remain faithful to her dead husband Sychaeus. But she only does so after hearing Aeneas recount his experiences of war and wandering; in the process she becomes impressed not only with his personal qualities but also the wars, “fought to the finish” (*exhausta*), he narrated in epic fashion (*canebat*). As Vergil relates (and C. Day Lewis translates):

At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura
Vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.
Multa viri virtus animo multusque recursat
Gentis honos: haerent infixi pectore vultus
Verbaque, nec placidam membris dat cura quietem…
‘Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent!
Quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes,
Quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!
Credo equidem, nec vana fides, genus esse deorum.
Degeneres animos timor arguit. Heu quibus ille
Iactatus fatis! Quae bella exhausta canebat…
Solus hic inflexit sensus animumque labantem
Impulit. Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ.

“ But now for some while the queen had been growing more grievously love-sick / Feeding the wound with her life-blood, the fire biting within her. / Much did she muse on the hero’s nobility and much / On his family’s fame. His look, his words had gone to her heart / And lodged there…” Dido then tells her sister Anna, “This man, this stranger I’ve welcomed into my house—what of him? / How gallantly

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7 For Aeneas’ abandonment of Creusa, see Grillo 2010, who argues that Vergil has shaped the episode of her “disappearance” after the models of Eurydice’s departure from Orpheus in his own *Georgics* 4 and Andromache’s parting from Hector in *Iliad* 6. Vergil’s narrative, however, emphasizes Aeneas’ forgetfulness here and throughout Book 2, a detail which Dido does not evidently notice in forming her high opinion of his courage and character. See also Oliensis 1997, 304-305.
he looks, how powerful in chest and shoulders! / I really think, and have reason to
think, that he is heaven-born. / Mean souls convict themselves by cowardice. Oh, 
imagine / The fates that have harried him, the fight to a finish he told of! / ...This 
man is the only one who has stirred my senses and sapped / My will. I feel once 
more the scars of the old flame.”

Significantly, Vergil depicts Aeneas as sharing the details of his military sufferings
at Troy with Dido on multiple occasions: first at the court banquet, later after she, at 
her sister’s urging, succumbs to her desire for him and offers him Carthage as his new 
home. At 4. 74-79 Vergil describes Dido as out of her mind (demens), as she repeatedly 
(iterum) demands that Aeneas repeat what he told her previously about his Trojan toils, 
and repeatedly (iterum) hangs on his every word:

Nunc media Aenean secum per moenia ducit
Sidoniasque ostentat opes urbemque paratam. 75
Incipit effari mediaque in voce resistit;
nunc cadem labente die convivia quaerit,
Iliacosque iterum demens audire labores
Exposcit pendetque iterum narrantis ab ore.

In C. Day Lewis’ translation:

Now she conducts Aeneas on a tour of her city, and shows him / the vast resources 
of Carthage, the home there ready and waiting; / Begins to speak, then breaks off, 
leaving a sentence unfinished. / Now, as the day draws out, she wants to renew 
that first feast, / In fond distraction begs to hear once again the Trojan / Story and 
hangs on his words as once again he tells it.

Dido consequently neglects her city, ceases to care about her reputation, and, as the 
result of divine sexual engineering by Aeneas’ mother and the scheming goddess Juno, 
becomes Aeneas’ lover without benefit of wedlock.

What is more, at Aeneid 1. 446-497, even before Aeneas actually meets Dido, he 
ascertains her compassionate and informed interest in his painful military past. Almost 
immediately upon arriving in Carthage he encounters, and responds tearfully to, scenes 
from the Trojan War on a temple she was building to the goddess Juno.

Hic templum Iunoni ingens Sidonia Dido
Condebat, donis opulentum et numine divae …
Hoc primum in luco nova res oblata timorem 450
Leniit, his primum Aeneas sperare salutem
Ausus et adflictis melius confidere rebus.
… videt Iliacas ex ordine pugnas
bellaque iam fama totum vulgata per orbem,

As C. Day Lewis renders this passage:

Dido was building here, in Juno’s honour, a huge / Temple, made rich by offerings and the indwelling presence of Juno: / … here Aeneas for the first time dared to hope for / Salvation and believe that at least his luck was turning. / For … he noticed a series of frescoes depicting the Trojan war, / Whose fame had already gone round the world; the sons of Atreus / Were there, and Priam, Achilles too, hostile to both. / Aeneas stood, and wept, ‘O Achates, is there anywhere, any place left on earth unhaunted by our sorrows? / Look! Priam. Here too we find virtue somehow rewarded, / Tears in the nature of things, hearts touched by human transience. / Then cast off fear; the fame of our deeds will ensure your welfare’. / He spoke, and fed his soul on those insubstantial figures, / Heavily sighing, the large tears rivering down his cheeks. / Pictured there, he beheld scenes of the fight round Troy. / Here the Greeks fled with the Trojan warriors hard behind them, / Here fled the Trojans before the chariot of plumed Achilles. / He recognized through his tears, not far away the snow-white / Tents of Rhesus, while all slept deep … He noticed himself, too, in the forefront of the battle / Noticed the Ethiopian brigade and the arms of black Memnon; / Picked out Penthesilea leading the crescent shields of / The Amazons and storming through the melee like a fire, / Her bare breast thrusting out over the golden girdle, / A warrior queen,
a girl who braved heroes in combat. Now while Aeneas viewed with wonder all these scenes / And stood at gaze, rooted in a deep trance of attention, / There came in royal state to the temple, a crowd of courtiers / Attending her, Queen Dido, most beautiful to see ...

From the scenes depicted on the temple alone, Aeneas is aware that Dido will be a good listener, and source of emotional support, indeed what Day Lewis translated as “Salvation”, when he shares his war experiences with her. In addition, the scenes establish Dido as knowledgeable about war, specifically the war in which he himself fought and whose outcome has created unspeakable grief, unseen wounds of war. Alison Keith has argued, moreover, that the reference to the temple’s representation of the Amazons, female warriors who fought with Aeneas at Troy, right before Dido makes her first appearance in the epic, strengthens the associations between Dido and the waging of war.

Love and story sharing, then, do not merely combine in Vergil’s account of his hero’s effort to return “home” from war in the Aeneid. They also involve—as the amatory and narrative enterprises of Homer’s Odysseus do not—Aeneas’ recounting his actual military experiences to a compassionate lover, and Aeneas’ gaining emotional sustenance (if not regaining a former kingdom) through the therapeutic benefits of his erotic encounter. But while Vergil represents love as positively transforming the invisible war wounds in Aeneas’ heart, mind and spirit, at the same time he depicts Dido as emotionally wounded, unable to continue living. Owing to Aeneas’ abandonment of her at the height of their love affair, in the midst of her trusting, therapeutic efforts to heal him, she takes her own life.

Previous studies of the Aeneid (and they are far too numerous to mention) have not addressed the issue of why Vergil has drawn upon, and yet dramatically transformed, the connections made in the Odyssey between love and the sharing of military experiences. Nor have they related Vergil’s representation of Dido as simultaneously Aeneas’ lover and therapist to Vergil’s portrayal, later in the Aeneid, of Aeneas’ meeting with Dido in the underworld at 6. 440-476. There Aeneas’ pleas for love and understanding are met with total, stony silence.

Here is how Vergil portrays their final encounter, and how C. Day Lewis translates Vergil’s Latin:

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8 Keith 2000, 68 characterizes Dido as a “warmongering regina”: observing that we first encounter Dido right after this description of Aeneas’ Trojan ally, the bellatrix Penthesilea; noting that Dido is also modeled on and identified with Cleopatra, depicted as fighting at the Battle of Actium on Aeneas’ shield in Book 8. See also Oliensis 1997, 307, who regards the heroic Italian warrior maiden Camilla, herself associated with the Amazon Penthesilea, as “another virginal avatar of Dido”.

9 For the vast bibliography on the Aeneid, see, for example, the works cited in Martindale 1997. Hardie 1997, 321-322 considers Dido to be a tragic figure, likening her to Euripides’ Hippolytus, and concluding that she is a “victim of transgressions of a kind thoroughly at home in Attic tragedy.” But he does not address her role as therapeutic recipient of Aeneas’ war stories.
Nec procul hinc partem fusi monstrantur in omnem
Lugentes campi; sic illos nomine dicunt.
Hic quos durus amor crudeli tabe peredit
Secreti celant calles et myrtea circum
Silva tegit; curae non ipsa in morte relinquent…
Inter quas Phoenissa recens a vulnere Dido
Errabat silva in magna; quam Troius heros
Ut primum iuxta stetit agnovitque per umbras
Obscuram, qualem primo qui surgere mense
Aut videt aut vidisse putat per nubila lunam,
Demisit lacrimas dulcique adfatus amore est:
‘Infelix Dido, verus mihi nuntius ergo
Venerat extinctam ferroque extrema securam?
Funeris heu tibi causa fui? Per sidera iuro,
Per superos et si qua fides tellure sub ima est,
Invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi.
Sed me iussa deum, quae nunc has ire per umbras,
Per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam,
Imperiis egere suis; nec credere quivi
Hunc tantum tibi me discessu ferre dolorem.
Siste gradum teque aspectu ne subtrahe nostro.
Quem fugis? Extremum fato quod te adloquor hoc est.’
Talibus Aeneas ardentem et torva tuentem
Lenibat dictis animum lacrimasque ciebat.
Illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat
Nec magis incepto vultum sermone movetur
Quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes.
Tandem corripuit sese atque inimica refugit
In nemus umbriferum, coniunx ubi pristinus illi
Respondet curis aequatque Sychaeus amorem.
Nec minus Aeneas casu concussus iniquo
Prosequitur lacrimis longe et miseratur euntem.

“Not far from here can be seen, extending in all directions, / The vale of mourning — such is the name it bears: a region / Where those consumed by the wasting torments of merciless love / Haunt the sequestered alleys and myrtle groves that give them / Cover: death itself cannot cure them of love’s disease / … Amongst them, her death-wound still bleeding, through the deep wood / Was straying Phoenician Dido. Now when the Trojan leader / Found himself near her and knew that the form he glimpsed through the shadows / Was hers — as early in the month one sees, or imagines he sees / Through a wrack of cloud the new moon rising and glimmering, / He shed some tears, and addressed her in tender, loving tones: / “Poor, unhappy Dido, so the message was true that came to me / Saying you’d put an end to your life with the sword and were dead? / O god! was it death
I brought you, then? I swear by the stars / By the powers above me, by whatever
is sacred in the Underworld, / It was not of my own will, Dido, I left your land.
/ Heaven’s commands, which now force me to traverse the shades, / ‘This sour
and derelict region, this pit of darkness, drove me / Imperiously from your side.
I did not, could not imagine / My going away would ever bring such agony on
you. / Don’t move away! Oh, let me see you a little longer! To fly from me, when
this is the last word fate allows us!’ / Thus did Aeneas speak, trying to soften the
wild-eyed, / Passionate-hearted ghost, and brought the tears to his own eyes. / She
would not turn to him, she kept her gaze on the ground, / And her countenance
remained as stubborn to his appeal / As if it were carved from recalcitrant flint or
a crag of marble. / At last she flung away, hating him still, and vanished / Into the
shadowy wood where her first husband, Sychaesus, / Understands her unhappiness
and gives her an equal love. / None the less did Aeneas, hard hit by her piteous
fate, / Weep after her from afar, with tears of compassion.

It warrants note that Vergil describes Dido in line 450 as recens a vulnere, fresh from
her wound. Day Lewis translates this phrase as “her death-wound still bleeding.” But as
we have seen, Vergil earlier describes Dido’s love for Aeneas as itself a wound. Dido has
aided in healing his, unseen, wounds of war. Aeneas is in no way what the ancient histo-
rian, and Vietnam veteran, Lawrence Tritle has called an “emotionally frozen iceman.”
Vergil characterizes Aeneas as capable of expressing the pain and suffering that recalling
sorrows and losses entail, from the moment he meets Dido. Aeneas here evinces, albeit
far too late, profound compassion for Dido’s own pain and sufferings. But because he is
far too late to recognize the pain and suffering he has caused her, she remains with her
wound, a wound from loving a warrior, for eternity.

In this essay, I have contended that Aeneas’ erotic encounter with Dido, like Luke’s
with Sally in Coming Home, proves emotionally restorative and therapeutic to him, heal-
ing his unseen wounds of war while, ironically, at the same time, wounding, emotion-
ally and mortally, his lover Dido. Aldo Setaioli would, it should be recognized, interpret
what happens to Aeneas in Dido’s Carthage somewhat differently. After all, Vergil does
not award much attention to Aeneas after he and Dido have consummated their mu-
tual passion. Rather, Vergil makes Aeneas virtually disappear from the narrative, only
to present him suddenly, at 4. 215 ff., in the garb of an oriental monarch. Vergil then
subtly indicates to the reader that Aeneas has become uncomfortable with his new situ-
ation, guilty about forgetting his mission. Yes, Dido does endeavor to heal Aeneas’ war

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10 On Aeneas’ encounter in the underworld with Dido, see in particular Skinner 1983, who observes
that here Aeneas and Dido have reversed their previous emotional roles, with Aeneas evincing compassion
and the wounded Dido dry-eyed, unyielding as stone, and notes Vergil’s use of verbal echoes from earlier in
the poem to convey the moral ambiguities and complexities in this poignant situation. Tritle 2011 specifically
draws on the study of Matsakis 1988 in discussing veterans who prefer silence to talking with their wives
about the war, and referring to them as “icemen”, who forswear not only communication but intimacy.
wounds by listening to the stories he shares, but this effort is doomed to failure during her lifetime. Aeneas does not recognize how helpful Dido has been to his emotional recovery until he sees her in the underworld, and by then it is too late.11

Finally, it is worth comparing Vergil’s narrative about Dido in the Aeneid with the later Roman poet Ovid’s more sympathetic, albeit very different, rendering, in his Heroïdes, of Dido’s words to Aeneas before she commits suicide. Ovid’s Dido recounts various episodes from Aeneas’ past, including the loss of his wife. Yet she never acknowledges Aeneas’ sufferings in the Trojan War itself. Indeed, I would maintain that both Vergil and Ovid are suggesting to their, Roman, audiences that supportive loved ones run the risk of emotional pain themselves while they endeavor, and even manage, to heal wounded warriors.12

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11 See Setaioli 1998; see also Tritle 2011, 3-4 on the failed efforts, by his slave-captive concubine Tecmessa, to communicate and offer therapy for the stoically silent, pain-paralyzed Trojan combat veteran Ajax in Sophocles’ play by that name.

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