

Disenchanted Reception

Amazonian Diversities in Medieval Receptions of Myth

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If Atalanta had a womanly nature, I should recognize it from her upbringing. If she chose to remain a virgin, then I should see her confined to the women's quarters. But if she was not raised in the ways of women, then she also transposed her gender. For one's upbringing confirms one's gender, and for the different genders the ways of upbringing are correspondingly different.¹

THE TWELFTH-CENTURY BYZANTINE rhetorician Nikephoros Basilakes composed rhetorical exercises, or *progymnasmata*, for the Komnenian court in Constantinople. Not much is known about him nor the audience for which he wrote, but the collection of rhetorical exercises is dated to sometime in the late 1130s or early 1140s.² The

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¹ Basilakes, *Progymnasmata* 27, 35–40: εἰ γυναικεῖαν Ἀταλάντη φύσιν εἶχεν, ἐκ τῆς τροφῆς ἐπιγνώσομαι· εἰ παρτενεύειν εἴλετο, καὶ θαλαμειομένην ὄψομαι. εἰ δὲ τὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐτρέφετο, καὶ τὸ γένος παρήλλατε· βεβαιοὶ γὰρ τὸ γένος ἢ τροφή καὶ διαφόροις γένεσιν αἱ τροφαὶ παραπλησίως διάφοροι. For all Basilakes' citations in English, I have quoted Beneker and Gibson's translation (2016).

² Papaioannou 2007, 357. Regarding the potential audience, it is worth mentioning that, as in the West, in Byzantium courtly literature was composed also on the command of women patrons. During the twelfth century, we thus see an interest at the courts in literature among women. As in the West, in Constantinople literature was an occasional, social matter, read aloud for an audience. For women's patronage in Byzantium, see Hill 1999.

quotation above is drawn from a rhetorical refutation, which argues for the implausibility of the mythological Atalanta. It also presents an idea of gender as culturally constructed.

Atalanta, the huntress who rejects an upbringing in the women's quarters of civilization to live in the woods, cannot convince the narrator that she still has a womanly nature. According to the rhetorical exercise, one is not born, but rather becomes, woman, to use Simone de Beauvoir's classic phrase:³

You posit that she is a girl, and I believe you. Then you should also restore to her an upbringing befitting a girl. As you are making her out to be now, female in nature, but male in behavior, then also her paradoxical upbringing throws her gender into doubt.⁴

The case of Basilakes' refutation of Atalanta illuminates how the twelfth-century reception of ancient myth can take shape as means to discuss philosophical matters more broadly. In the present volume, Baukje van den Berg shows how the Byzantine reception of tales of Troy tended to work as vehicles for allegorical interpretations, encouraging ethical reflection and moral education. She analyzes how, in Eustathios of Thessalonike's Homeric commentaries, Athena should not be understood as a goddess, but more so as Achilles' readiness of mind, and that her descent from heaven represents his reason. In this way, we see how Trojan reception can function as removing the flesh and subjectivity of mythological (female) characters, to instead have them being an instrument serving more abstract purposes. Maybe this is what we see also in Basilakes' depictions of Atalanta. What is a woman? Is womanhood a universal and eternal essence, or is it, rather, a material condition tied to the female body in culture? Such questions, which have occupied feminists and gender theorists for years, and which are also

³ Simone de Beauvoir introduces the second volume of *The Second Sex* (1949), in which she goes through how womanhood is formed from the childhood onwards in culture (rather than it being an inherent essence). See Beauvoir 1949, 293.

⁴ Basilakes, *Progymnasmata* 27, 41–45: παρθένον ὑποτίθης καὶ πείθομαι. ἀπόδος καὶ τροφήν παρθένοις προσήκουσαν, ὥς νῦν γε πλάττεις φύσιν μὲν θήλειαν, τρόπον δὲ ἄρρενα. καὶ τὸ τῆς τροφῆς παράδοξον ἀμφίβολον ποιεῖται τὴν γένεσιν.

echoed in Beauvoir's mentioned phrase, can be seen as addressed already in Constantinople at the Komnenian court.

In this present volume, we see how the medieval reception of Troy takes different shapes and forms, that it can be re-actualized in many ways and for many purposes, in various languages and regions. Basilakes' refutation of Atalanta presents an idea of gender in Byzantine courtly literature. In the following, we shall look at how myth can be used to discuss ideas similar to this one, examining the genre of the Old French courtly romance, and more specifically, an adaptation of the tale of Trojan Aeneas' travel to Italy, during which he stays in Carthage in the presence of queen Dido.

They saw Carthage, the city where Dido held fort. Lady Dido had the palace, and kept the city peaceful. Lady Dido had the country; no count or marquis would rule it better. Never had a county or a kingdom ever been ruled better by a woman.⁵

The *Roman d'Énéas* forms part of the first Old French romances, and thus forms part of an ongoing development of the genre. It dates to around 1160 and is preserved in nine manuscripts, dating from the beginning of the thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth centuries.⁶ The tale is a translation, or perhaps rather a version, of Virgil's Latin epic the *Aeneid*. Together with Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* and the anonymous *Roman de Thèbes*, these three are usually referred to as *romans d'antiquité*, which were vernacular versions of ancient tales, all dating around or shortly after mid-twelfth century.⁷

⁵ *Roman d'Énéas* 369–76: “Cartage virent, la cité / Dont Dido tint la fermeité : / Dame Dido tint lo palés / Et la cité an mult grant pès ; / Dame Dido tint lo país, / Miaus nel tenist quens ne marchis ; / Unc ne fu mes par une feme / Mielz maintenu enor ne regne.” The translations into English from this work are throughout my own.

⁶ See the introduction to W. Besnardeau and F. Mora-Lebrun's edition (2018, 7). The edition is based on ms A, which dates to the beginning of the thirteenth century, sometime between 1201 and 1210 (see *ibid.*) and stretches to 10050 verses. For the present article, I always quote this edition, which also offers a modern French translation; I have made my own translations to English.

⁷ We know little to nothing about the author of the *Roman d'Énéas*, but through its likely correlation with the other two mentioned *romans d'antiquité*, which have both been linked to Eleanor of Aquitaine's patronage, we have reason to believe that also

In this medieval version, a change has been made from the introduction of Dido in Virgil's ancient epic. Virgil's Dido enters into the Latin narrative after Aeneas has gazed upon a mural painting in Juno's temple in Carthage:

The Amazons were there in their thousands with crescent shields and their leader Penthesilea in the middle of her army, ablaze with passion for war. There, showing her naked breast supported by a band of gold, was the warrior maiden, daring to clash with men in battle. While Trojan Aeneas stood gazing, rooted to the spot and lost in amazement at what he saw, queen Dido in all her beauty arrived at the temple with a great crowd of warriors around her.⁸

In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas sees Penthesilea, the Amazon warrior queen, and thereafter he sees the monarch in front of him. Also present is Dido, the powerful ruler who has denied herself of love and male company, so that she can steadily rule her own city, founded by herself. In the Old French poem, *Énéas* sees Carthage along with his men, and the poet-narrator introduces Dido into the story, seen in the quoted lines above. A bit later in the poem, *Énéas* and his men meet Dido: "In the castle beneath the tower, they found the queen in the big hall, accompanied by a big entourage".⁹ A medieval castle and a courtly setting in Carthage, and no Amazon warrior queen. Can this removal, the absence of Trojan reception, be interpreted?¹⁰ In the following, I intend to demonstrate how the erasure of this specific

this romance was commanded by her. Elizabeth Jeffreys further argues for the possibility of these three romances to be linked to Eleanor and Louis VII's experiences of the Second Crusade, when they visited Constantinople. See E. Jeffreys (1980), 455 and 459.

⁸ Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.491–9: "Ducit Amazonidum lunatis agmina peltis / Penthesilea furens mediisque in milibus ardet, / aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae, / bellatrix, audetque viris concurrere virgo. / Haec dum Dardanio Aeneae miranda videntur, / dum stupet, obtutuque haeret defixus in uno, / regina ad templum, forma pulcherrima Dido, / incessit magna iuvenum stipante caterva." Translation by David West (1990) 2003.

⁹ *Roman d'Énéas* 559–61: "Sus el chastel desoz la tor / Troverent ja el palleor / La raïne o tot grant barnage."

¹⁰ To be sure, there are other elements and characters from ancient myth in the romance, not least the goddess Juno, for example. However, this article focuses only on Dido's Amazonian association, or rather lack thereof.

part of Trojan reception can be understood as tied to ideas of gender such as those articulated by Basilakes, mentioned above. In this way, I will argue that silent gaps of reception also speak.

8.1 PENTHESILEIA AND THE AMAZONS IN ANCIENT EXAMPLES

In Greek literature, the earliest reference to the Amazons is usually deemed to be found in Homer. In the *Iliad*, they are referred to as (*amazones*) *antianeirai* – “equals of men”.¹¹ In other words, we see that in their first occurrence in Greek literature, the Amazons are defined both by their female sex *and* by their lack of femininity. Their separation from the feminine gender norm or expectation is what makes them who they are. The Amazon was a figure present in the collective consciousness of the Greeks, an important one, as Josine H. Blok argues.¹² One of the Amazons’ functions can be understood as reflecting Greek identity through contrast. Accordingly, the Greek citizen would identify himself by acknowledging that he is *not* an Amazon. Page duBois describes the human subject in Greek culture to be based on a relation of defined differences: “The human Greek male, the subject of history and of the culture of the *polis*, is [...] at first simply not-animal, not-barbarian, not-female.”¹³ Thus, duBois describes the Greek subject to situate himself in relation to his negation.¹⁴ One could say that through the Amazon’s distinction from other women, she becomes a rival of the Greek male warrior. Her likeness to him, *antianeira* as it were, makes her worth fighting. As she makes man able to reflect himself in her, she becomes a threat that needs to be killed.

Let’s now move on to the specific case of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and more specifically to Dido’s link to the Amazon.¹⁵ Having arrived in Carthage, Aeneas gazes upon a mural painting in Juno’s temple, and the last object that Aeneas

¹¹ See Blok 1994, 146.

¹² Blok 1994, 1.

¹³ duBois 1991, 4.

¹⁴ duBois 1991, 6.

¹⁵ Dido has also been associated with other mythological figures, not least Diana; see Duclos 1969; Pach Wilhelm 1987; Polk 1996; Fratantuono 2006. For comparisons between Dido and Homer’s Nausicaa, see Couch 1942, and Starr 2009, who further also compares Dido with Penelope. In this article focus is put on the Amazon, while acknowledging the many mythological connotations Dido has.

sees before seeing Dido is none other than Penthesileia, the Amazon queen (see quotation above).

Dido's connection to Penthesileia is thus made through the narrative's way of focalizing Aeneas' gaze. It is in his perspective that the two queens are connected. Hence, we can arguably speak here of the monarch's equality to man, of her likeness with the male subject and her way of reflecting him that dooms Dido to her tragic fate already here, in the narration of Aeneas' gaze's wandering from the piece of art to the human flesh.

Dido's connection to the Amazon goes beyond physical stature. Her masculine office, ruling her city as a monarch, makes her unfeminine, or, "equal of man". Charles Segal argued that Dido's agency in the poem should be interpreted through the lens of the Penthesileia alignment.¹⁶ However, as the love tale between her and Aeneas develops and Dido devotes herself to love at the cost of her political duties, her Amazonian resemblance appears to become replaced with a more 'traditional' femininity. As Dido chooses to be with Aeneas, she goes through a shift from masculine to feminine roles, Segal argued.¹⁷

In Dido's case, it is divine will that conducts her towards erotic desire for Aeneas and maternal love; her fate appears to end up in a traditional feminine role. Grace Starry West referred to the androgyny in Dido's character as "a tragic conflict in her soul."¹⁸ Dido can be described as taking on a "properly masculine" destiny. After having been married to Sychaeus as a young girl, Starry West wrote, "upon his death she becomes a *regina* with full responsibility for her city."¹⁹ With her death, Dido is returned to Sychaeus: "She is no longer political and masculine but wifely and feminine."²⁰ Although she attempts to live a masculine life, denying the role as wife and mother, she cannot escape her fate. Penthesileia or not – Dido cannot deny her cultural feminine identity, and dies trying. Seen in this way, Virgil's Dido can be said to represent a view of gender as being an essence, as opposed to the view noted in Basilakes' rhetorical exercise, where gender rather seems so be

¹⁶ Segal 1990, 4.

¹⁷ Segal 1990, 7.

¹⁸ Starry West 1980, 315.

¹⁹ Starry West 1980, 317.

²⁰ Starry West 1980, 317.

socially constructed. Ancient Dido cannot escape the determinism inherent in her sex. In other words, that gaze that introduced Dido to the narrative, Aeneas' eyes on her after having seen Penthesileia in art, appear to work as a prolepsis towards the conflict that Dido shall experience; her future desire to build Carthage together with her beloved will be put to conflict with Aeneas' inability to reflect himself as a male subject faced with the woman in which he sees not his contrast, the Other, so-to-speak, but his similarity, the Amazon. The threat against gender norms that she embodies makes her worthy of fighting. Achilles killed Penthesileia in war whereas Aeneas can be understood as, however unwillingly or indirectly, doing so through love.

Paul Allen Miller categorizes Dido with Camilla, Amata and Penthesileia.²¹ In relation to Penthesileia and Camilla, Miller puts Dido in the middle, defining her as the representation of "a mid-point between future and past," being "both the transition which unites and gives sense to the two Amazon episodes" in the *Aeneid*.²² Dido is positioned as the border between two warrior women in the narrative; one that was vanquished by a male warrior, and one that shall be killed as well, by another male warrior. Dido is aligned with Penthesileia through the visual association mentioned above, and she impresses her people and Aeneas through her luxury, stature and political authority.²³ As do the Amazons, Dido has chosen a life in separation from men, which constitutes the foundation of her power. Accordingly, Dido could be viewed as a 'self-made Amazon'; she rejects living according to expectations of femininity, thus she can be described as rebelling against the embodied gender role to which she is culturally bound, so that she can rule Carthage. The prolepsis in the portrayal of Penthesileia, who died by Achilles' sword, lets us know from the first sight of Dido that the Carthaginian queen will end up dead, outdone by a man who loves her. The independence and power that she demonstrates is in other words unstable. Unlike in the case of Aeneas, Dido's destiny is not fixed by the gods, but rather by her own, human self. Dido's Amazon connection can thus be interpreted as an essential cause of her tragedy. Penthesileia can arguably be viewed as a symbol

²¹ Miller 1989, 51.

²² Miller 1989, 53.

²³ Regarding characterization via metaphor and association in ancient literature (focusing on the Greek novels), see De Temmerman 2014, 35.

for how gender is an essence rather than socially constructed. The unhappy tale of Penthesileia dooms Dido to an inherent defeat by that heterosexual, patriarchal culture from which she is at first emancipated. In this way, myth can be understood as forming a central role in the characterization of Virgil's Dido. The mythological associations carry meaning to the reader's understanding of the characters' traits, motivations and destinies.

Considering the significance of Dido's connection with Penthesileia, the removal of the Amazon in the Old French version of the *Aeneid* is noteworthy. Dido is still doomed, but in this courtly version, her death is de-mythologized, explained through the social stigma of her conduct within her courtly culture. In the following, I will thus argue that the de-mythologization in this twelfth-century romance opens up for new possibilities for female characterization, which may be interpreted as representing ideas on gender that could have been circulating.

8.2 PENTHESILEIA, A 'STRONG WOMAN' IN THE *ROMAN DE TROIE*

As was mentioned above, in the Old French anonymous *Roman d'Énéas*, the association between Dido and Penthesileia has been removed from the narrative. However, I would like to argue that this *lack* of mythological reception can be food for interpretation; what is the meaning of this erasure and how does it impact our interpretation of the text? How does reception thus, in this case at least, relate to medieval views on gender?

Twelfth-century Old French romance is a literature composed in courtly environments, often for women patrons, and read aloud in social contexts.²⁴ We should thus understand the narratives as forming part of social gatherings, encouraging reactions, input and discussion from their audiences. The

²⁴ Regarding women's participation in the creations of courtly romance, see Ferrante (1997) and Green (2007) who both demonstrate and discuss ways of understanding courtly romance as made in what we could call a collaborative process, not merely in the sense that literature was composed through (often women's) patronage, but also in the sense that the reading's social setting encouraged input and discussions from the audiences, which further then formed an essential part of the meaning-making of the literary work (this last point is mainly made by Green who coins this way of literary participation as 'sponsorship').

courtly romance could accordingly be understood as a collaborative work, made in dialogue with an audience at a reading occasion.

We could arguably assume that the removal of the Amazonian association from the *Roman d'Énéas*' Dido ought not be explained by a lack of knowledge of the Amazons or Penthesileia among the courtly audience. Penthesileia is given considerable length in another of the *romans d'antiquités*, Benoît's *Roman de Troie*.

Dealing with pagan myth and deities seems to have been a complicated task in medieval reception. As A. Sophie Schoess argues in her contribution to this volume, to claim connections to Latin and Greek heritage was on the one hand important and made through reception of Trojan narratives. On the other hand, however, it was also important to separate pagan idolatry from Christian religion.²⁵ Benoît, Schoess writes, tends to remove pagan gods from the narratives to some extent (while keeping aspects of religious practice, such as temples and images). Hence, what to include and exclude from myth was something for every poet to decide. The Amazons and Penthesileia were not omitted from the *Roman de Troie*, so what purpose did they serve?

In the *Roman de Troie*, the Amazons can be understood as incorporating the virtues deemed as particular to good femininity, as opposed to bad, i.e., general, femininity. In the romance, the poet-narrator describes the flaws in women in terms of unreliability.²⁶ He argues that women's hearts are inconsistent, that their emotions change rapidly:

If she is in pain, she will find joy in a man whom she is yet to know. Soon she will have turned her love [to someone else], soon she will be comforted again. A woman is never truly at a loss; when she has made her choice, it does not take long for her to end her laments. Pain does not last long in a woman; she cries in one eye and laughs in the other. She changes her heart very quickly, also the somewhat wise one is pretty foolish. After having loved someone for seven years, she forgets him after three days. Never has any woman ever known pain. [...] Never will they admit that

²⁵ See chapter 2 "Pagan Idols and Christian Anxiety in Medieval Troy Narratives".

²⁶ Regarding this view of women in a larger medieval context and its tradition, see Bloch's study (1991) on misogyny in the Middle Ages.

they have acted wrongly, of all their follies this is the worst. He who confines and believes in her, deceives himself.²⁷

Although the poet-narrator accuses women of being unreliable with changing hearts, some verses further down, he describes what marks so-called strong women. He reads Salomon and describes what constitutes a strong woman:

Salomon, who had such wise knowledge, says in his text: "He who can find a strong woman, the Lord must praise." He called her strong, knowing many of the weaknesses [of women]. Strong is she who defends herself, who does not yield to the folly in her heart. Combining beauty with chastity is, it seems to me, very difficult. Below the Sky there is nothing as rare as that. Quite often, the majority of the women succumb to their wooers' tastelessness. It is an extraordinary occasion when a woman, with whom one has the occasion to talk, makes resistance. He who finds a woman beautiful and loyal cannot hold her less dear than he would the angels in the Sky. Neither precious stones nor fine gold can be compared to this treasure.²⁸

The two descriptions of women that are presented by the poet-narrator of the *Roman de Troie* both depict a view of what a woman *should be*, as well as what she *is not*: a strong woman does not yield to the weakness of temp-

²⁷ Benoît, *Roman de Troie* 13434–56: "S'el a hui duel, el ravra joie / De tiel qui onc ne la vit jor ; / Tost i avra torné s'amor, / Tost se sera reconfortee. / Femme n'iert ja trop esgaree : / Por ce qu'ele truiet o choisir, / Poi durent puis li suen sospir. / A femme dure duels petit, / A un oil plore, a l'autre rit. / Molt müent tost li lor corage, / Assez est fole la plus sage : / Quant qu'el a en set anz amé, / A ele en treis jorz oblié. / Onc nule ne sot duel avoir. [...] / Que l'on ja blasmer les en deive. / Ja jor ne quideront mesfere. / Des folies est ce la meire. / Qui s'i atent ne qui s' creit, / Sei meïsme vent e deceit." Translations into English of this work are throughout my own.

²⁸ Benoît, *Roman de Troie* 13471–91: "Salemon dit en son escrit, / Cil qui tant ot saive esperit : / 'Qui fort femme porreit trover, / Le Criator devreit löer.' / Fort l'apele por les feblors / Qu'il sot et conut en plusors. / Forz est cele qui se desfent / Que fols corages ne a prent. / Biautez e chasteez esnenble / Est molt griés chose, ce me senble : / Soz ciel n'a rien tant coveteite. / Assez avient mainte fiee / Que par l'ennui des proieors / En sunt conquises les plusors : / Merveille est cum riens se desfent / A qui l'on puet parler sovent. / Qui la trueve bele e leial, / Un des anges esperital / Ne deit estre plus cher tenuz : / Chieres pieres ne or moluz / N'est a ces thesor conparez."

tation, but rather defends herself from others' threat against her. A weak woman, then, is guided by a changing heart, lacks constancy, is unreliable. A strong woman, who is at once beautiful and chaste, is a rare gem. To believe in a woman's loyalty is, the poet-narrator lets us know, foolish.

In this context of defining female strength and virtue, the Amazon fits rather perfectly. In the *Roman de Troie*, the Amazons are introduced as separatist women living far away in the East. Their land is big and wealthy, they themselves are beautiful and richly dressed. During three months, they meet men of their valor and reproduce. The daughters they keep with them, the sons they let grow up in the patriarchal world in which they take no part. But many of the women never reproduce, instead they remain virgins. If a man enters the land of the Amazons, he is cut to pieces.²⁹ The women who choose to not reproduce devote themselves to being warriors:

Of these there are many who shall never in their lives be addressed by any man. They shall never lose their virginities. They carry arms, they are very brave, daring and apt to fight. And everywhere they are being praised.³⁰

It is the challenging defense against men that defines women's strength, if we believe the *Roman de Troie*. In the romance, the Amazon queen Penthesileia can be described as personifying this view of female strength. Being an Amazon, she challenges men's dominance and rejects the cultural feminine role according to gender norms. Further, as she is told about Hector's death, her emotions of grief are described as profound and sincere:

When the news reached Penthesileia she was struck with pain; that Hector was dead burdened heavily on her. Such great torment was manifest in her expression that no one's grief prior to hers could ever compare.³¹

²⁹ See *Roman de Troie*, 23302–56.

³⁰ Benoît, *Roman de Troie* 23347–53: "D'eles i a molt grant partie / Que ja a nul jor de lor vie / Ne seront d'omes adesees / Ne ja n'èrent despucelees. / Armes portent, molt sunt vaillanz / E ardiés e cumbatanz, / E en toz lués en sunt preisees."

³¹ Benoît, *Roman de Troie* 23382–7: "Quant noncié fu Panteselee / La dolorose destinee, / Qu'Ector ert morz, molt l'en pesa : / Un si fet duel en demena / Que rien ne vit ainc si grant faire."

As the Amazon queen is re-actualized in the Old French romance, thus, we see that she incorporates strength and virtue, at the same time as she lacks that which is deemed bad in women. She is warlike, rejects men's erotic advancements, and has a reliable, steady heart. Her emotion does not change rapidly. Her grief for a dead man is sincere. Penthesileia, in the courtly twelfth century, appears as an admirable woman, an exception to the rule, according to which women are weak and insincere. And yet, it is worth acknowledging how the idea of Penthesileia is negotiated in medieval reception, which then relates to ideas of gender in courtly culture of chivalry. Earlier in this volume, Hilke Hoogenboom demonstrates this ongoing elaboration in literature by comparing Benoît's representation of the Amazon queen with Guido delle Colonne's one a century later. The use of the Amazon, and Penthesileia specifically, offer the possibility to define not only what a woman is, but also how the male subject is fashioned through his relation to the Other, the woman. As we saw above, the Amazon functioned as a mirror to the Greek male subject during Antiquity, but as she is re-actualized in medieval reception, her ways of representation may shift, as may her meaning. Nevertheless, her function as a surface on which gender can be negotiated remains. Hoogenboom analyzes the medieval Amazon through Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance; in this sense, the gender of the Amazon is interpreted through her actions, rather than her corporeality. And indeed, as Hoogenboom shows in the example of Guido, Penthesileia is at once a *uirgo* and full of desire, she is femininely dressed in white, and as chivalrous as the bravest knight.³² If we then move on to the *Roman d'Énéas*, we shall see that, rather than presenting gender as performative, Dido can be interpreted as representing an understanding of the sexes through its corporeal materiality; that regardless of her potential transgressive performance, she cannot escape her gendered identity.

In her study on the Dido tradition (1994), Marilyn Desmond writes that the poet of this medieval version of Virgil's tale, more generally, "approaches the plot of the *Aeneid* as though it were a series of questions to which the vernacular text provides explanatory answers; in that respect, the

³² See chapter 7 "Femme Fatale: Penthesileia and the Last Stand of Chivalry in Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*".

narrative of the *Roman d'Énéas* implicitly provides both text and commentary.”³³ Rather than being a verbatim translation, the medieval narrative comments and offers new perspectives. Considering how the Amazons, and Penthesileia specifically, are present and described in the *Roman de Troie*, the reference could be assumed as known to the audience also of the *Roman d'Énéas*. Rather than, thus, interpreting the removal of Penthesileia in this adaptation of Virgil as due to lack of mythological knowledge, we could see it as forming part of this mentioned ongoing negotiating of gender views, which is elaborated through medieval receptions of Troy. What comment does the poem make in its removal of Penthesileia?

8.3 DIDO'S EMOTIONS TRAPPED IN COURTLY CULTURE

In his analyses of Byzantine historiography (John Malalas) and allegory (John Tzetzes) in this volume, Adam Goldwyn shows how Trojan reception appears to, if not unwrite powerful mythological women altogether from tradition by simply omitting them, then rationalize them through disenchantment, which diminishes their power.³⁴ Accordingly, de-mythologization, as it were, can be understood as a tool for misogyny, whose function is to minimize the importance of women in (literary) history, if not erase them altogether. In the following, I intend to propose a different function for the removing of myth in medieval reception, in the case of Dido in the *Roman d'Énéas*. Here, her tragedy can be viewed as rationalized, explained by the social consequences that she suffers by prioritizing her love and desire over courtly norms and political expectations. However, I would like to suggest that rather than this rationalization would diminish Dido's importance, it adds a materialist dimension to the tale of Dido, as well as it humanizes the mythological figure into a female subject who faces earthly conditions, to which perhaps even a courtly audience (of women or not) could relate.

In the *Roman d'Énéas*, Dido's passionate desire is trapped within her courtly culture, which results in frustration. Énéas tells Dido about his long journey and misfortune before reaching her shores, and she listens, but not

³³ Desmond 1994, 105.

³⁴ See chapter 6 “The Sexual Politics of Myth: Rewriting and Unwriting Women in Byzantine Accounts of War”.

fully focused; she looks at him, but love keeps picking on her. She sighs and blushes.³⁵ Dido has his bed arranged. She follows him to his chamber, and Énéas, who is very tired, falls asleep. Dido, however, cannot get herself to leave him on his bed, and so four counts conduct her to her own bedroom, where, in turn, hundred esteemed ladies await her:

She looked at him with tenderness, as Cupid tormented her. Cupid picks on her, Cupid incites her; she sighs repeatedly and changes color. When it was time to go to sleep, she had his bed arranged. She accompanied him to the bedroom where the beds were garnished with beautiful covers and drapes. He [Énéas] laid himself down, being exhausted. The queen assisted him, she could not get herself to leave. Four counts brought her with them to her bedroom, she went in. A hundred worthy damsels were there, daughters of counts and kings. Not one without a task; they served the queen as she went to bed.³⁶

Thus, Dido's desire for Énéas is put inside a courtly infrastructure over which she rules and under which she is served but also, at the same time, supervised. It appears that Dido must not pursue her desire, as she seems to be in lack of liberty to do so within the courtly structure. As Dido then tries to sleep in her quiet bedroom, the narrative describes in a lengthy scene the corporeal nature of her desire. She cannot sleep, but breathes heavily, turns from one side to the other, and she is filled with agitation and torment. Dido's erotic excitement follows her into her sleep. In her fantasies, to which the audience is given entrance, Dido kisses her pillow and embraces her quilt, confusing it for her beloved in her dozed off state:

³⁵ For the ways of narrating desire in this physical form as it is expressed in Trojan reception, see Lilli Hölzlhammer's chapter 3 in this volume, "Narrating and Translating Medea in Medieval Romances: Narrative Strategies in Greek, medieval Latin, and Middle High German Translations of the *Roman de Troie*".

³⁶ *Roman d'Énéas* 1219–36: "El lo regardoit par dolçor / Si com la destreignot Amor ; / Amor la point, Amor l'argüe, / Sovant sospire et color mue. / Quant il fu termes the colchier, / El fait les liz aparouillier ; / An la chanbre l'an a mené / Ou li lit furent apresté / De covertors et de buens dras. / Cil s'est colchiez, qui toz ert las ; / La raïne fu au covrir, / A grant poine s'an pot partir. / Quatre conte l'an ont menee / An sa chanbre, s'an est antree. / .C. donzelles i ot de prois, / Filles de contes et de rois ; / N'i ot nule ne fust meschine : / Al cochier servent la raïne."

When the bedroom turned quiet, Dido could not forget him, for whom the god of love had put her in such a ruse. She begins to think about him, in her heart she starts to remember his face, his body, his stature, his words, his way of speaking, the battles of which he had told her. She could not sleep for anything. She twisted and turned repeatedly, she breathes heavily, sighs and moans; she struggles and suffers, trembles, shivers and flinches. Her heart fails her and is gone. The lady suffers a great torture. And she is just about to lose consciousness, she thinks of herself together with him, she sees herself holding him between her arms. She does not know how to hide or conceal her love. She embraces her quilt, but finds not comfort or love. A thousand times she kisses her pillow, for love of the knight. She believes him, who is absent, to be present in her bed. He was not there at all, he was elsewhere! She speaks to him as if he heard her, she seeks for him in her bed with her hand. As she cannot find him, she pounds herself with pangs. She cries and feels great pain. Her tears make her sheets wet. The queen keeps turning – first to her stomach, and then to her back. She cannot find peace, she suffers greatly, she experiences great pain and sadness through the night.³⁷

The narrative depicts Dido in a setting that appears far from the unattainable grandeur and stature that otherwise suits a monarch. Rather, we find her in a scene to which it would have been easier to relate on a mere material level; in the dark of the night, Dido appears as a woman like any other. As her bedroom has now become quiet after having been filled with the grand company of counts and ladies, the text describes Dido's emotions and

³⁷ *Roman d'Énéas*, 1237–74 : “Quant la chanbre fu aserie, / Dame Dido pas ne oblie / Celui por cui li dex d'amor / L'avoit ja mise an grant freor. / De lui comance a penser, / en son corage a recorder / Son vis, sun cors et sa faiture, / Ses diz, ses faiz, sa paroleüre, / Les batailles que il li dist. / Ne fust por rien qu'ele dormist : / Tornor et retornor sovant, / Ele se pasme et s'estant, / Sofle, sospire et baaille, / Molt se demeine et travaille, / Tranble, fremist et si tressalt, / Li cuers li mant et se li falt. / Molt est la dame mal baillie ; / Et quant ce est qu'ele s'oblie, / Ansanble lui guide gesir, / Antre ses braz lo quide estraindre : / Ne set s'amor covrir ne foindre. / Ele acole son covertor, / Confort n'i trove ne amor ; / .M. foiz baise son oreillier / Anpor l'amor au chevalier, / Cuide que cil qui ert absenz / Anz an son lit li furst presenz ; / N'an i a mie, aillors estoit ! / Parolle o lui com s'el l'ooit, / An sun lit le taste et quiert ; / Quant nel trove, des poinz se fiert. / Ele plore et fait grant duel, / Des larmes moillent si linquel ; / Molt se detorne la raïne, / Primes adanz et puis sovine. / Ne puet garir, molt se demeine, / Molt traist la nuit et mal et poine.”

fantasies. The audience can thus picture Dido alone with her arms around her quilt. In the solitude of her bed, we are given access to Dido's emotions as well as her physical, erotic desire, in which she indulges. In contrast to the courtly infrastructure that prevents her from pursuing her desire with Énéas, here, in private, Dido lets out that which, in public, she must hide.

Dido and Énéas are, nevertheless, united also beyond Dido's fantasies, in reality. Fama, the goddess of rumor, circulates in Virgil's epic, talking about how Dido and Aeneas have changed their respective devotions to their political missions, to instead devote themselves to their lust for each other. In the courtly romance, the rumor that is spreading says that Dido has been dishonored by Énéas. There has been a shift of focus in the medieval text; now, the focus centers around the shame imposed on Dido for having had her honor violated. Now, the same sort of collective, courtly supervision that was seen when Dido was conducted to her bedroom and prepared for bed, turns against her, rather than serves her. The rumor is described as having "a thousand mouths with which to talk, a thousand eyes, a thousand wings with which to fly, a thousand ears with which to hear if perhaps there is something scandalous to spread out".³⁸ Dido lives under social surveillance. Her desire is seen through the light of the culture in which she lives and, as the narrative makes clear, it is not allowed.

In the *Roman d'Énéas*, the rumor is described as a phenomenon by the poet-narrator in critical terms, as something that makes one believe in false matters. Further, "based on a hint of truth it tells such lies that it appears as a dream, and it adds so much to the story, that whatever there was that was true is no more".³⁹ The poet-narrator then continues by explaining the process of the rumor, stating that the rumor begins by being mild and discreet, then it raises its voice, announcing the story louder and louder, then, as the story is out, it speaks in all openness.

The rumor not only puts Dido and Énéas to shame for their erotic adventures, but further, it ruins Dido's status on the marriage market in a wider perspective:

³⁸ *Roman d'Énéas* 1555–9: ".M. boches a dont al parolle / .M. ielz, .M. eles don't al vole, / .M. oroilles dont ele oriole / Se ele orroit nule mervouille / Qu'ele peüst avant noncier."

³⁹ *Roman d'Énéas* 151569–72: "D'un po de voir dit tant mençonge/ Qu'il resamble que ce soit songe, / Et tant lo vait muntepliant / N'i a de voir ne tant ne quant".

The lady was greatly dishonored; all over Libya, her name was disgraced. As the barons, dukes, princes and counts were told of the affair — all those whom she had rejected in the past — were offended, since she had chosen a man of lower standard than them, a man who was neither count or king.⁴⁰

Dido's shame is contextualized within the courtly aristocracy. Her behavior is considered shameful, and as a result she loses all of her status. The narrator then, after having explained the nature and function of the rumor, continues to retell that which the offended courtly men say among themselves. A man is foolish for believing a woman's word, they say, and "he [who believes a woman's word] takes her, who is senseless, for being wise".⁴¹ As Hoogenboom shows, Penthesileia in Benoît's romance is valued for being both a good lover and a good knight.⁴² The Amazon's distance from the feminine gender role opens up the possibility for her to be praised for the same values as those for which male knights would be praised. In Dido's case here, however, her Amazon connection is gone and so is her possibility to act according to masculine standards.

This romance is not the only case of the medieval reception of Virgil that omitting mythological traits which results in turning Dido into a more relatable subject. As Susannah L. Wright demonstrates, Juno is omitted from impacting the occurrence of Dido and Aeneas' hunting scene in the Middle Irish *Imtheachta Aeniasa*, dated to the twelfth or eleventh century. Instead, the event is narrated as resulting organically, as being an idea that is developed in the mind of Dido.⁴³ In the *Imtheachta Aeniasa* and the *Roman d'Énéas*, we see a development of Dido towards conducting herself according to her own agency and desire, not mainly governed by a mythological heritage, but rather by her own mind.

⁴⁰ *Roman d'Énéas* 1591–600: "Molt ert la dame defamee / Par tote Libe la contree, / An mal on essaucié son non. / Quant l'oënt dire li baron, / Li duc, li prince, li contor / Qu'ainçois ne volt prendre a segnor, / Molt se tienent por vergondez, / Qu'eles les a toz revelez / Por un home de plus bas prois, / Qui ne estoit ne cuens ne rois."

⁴¹ *Roman d'Énéas* 1604: "Tel tient l'en sage qui est fole."

⁴² See chapter 7.

⁴³ See chapter 4 "Troy Translated, Troy Transformed: Rewriting the *Aeneid* in Medieval Ireland".

Not only has Dido been de-mythologized in the *Roman d'Énéas* through the removal of Penthesileia, but the courtly setting of the story writes forth a new sort of social pressure, narrated as part of the courtly culture that Dido lives in. The rumor is explained within this social context, as a collective set of mouths and eyes that dishonor Dido. The effects of the social shame that Dido then suffers are seen through the light of the marriage market; honorable men no longer see her as dignified enough for them to marry, they conclude among themselves, stating that: "He who trusts a woman is a fool!"⁴⁴ Dido is thus deemed an unreliable woman, not unlike how the poet-narrator describes the female sex in the *Roman de Troie*. The *Roman d'Énéas'* Dido, thus, can be interpreted as a literary representation of a woman who is affected by accusations against women in literature, not unlike that which we saw above in the case of Benoît's *Roman de Troie*.

As she does in Virgil's *Aeneid*, this medieval Dido also dies as her beloved's journey continues without her. Unlike the tragedy inherent in Virgil's Dido's mythological association to Penthesileia, however, we could hardly explain this romance's Dido's death as being caused by such an inherent mythological defeat. Rather, the courtly Dido's death can be explained in cultural terms; she acted inappropriately for a courtly lady and, thus, suffers social punishment. This causal explanation to Dido's sufferings can be compared to medieval receptions of Medea, as Lilli Hölzlhammer shows in her contribution to this volume. As we see in Konrad's von Würzburg *Trojanerkrieg*, Medea remains tied to her fate of being struck by love's force, and cannot escape it although she is aware of her awaiting tragedy. Medea's fate is long since written, and is not open to reform: the poet knows it, the audience knows it, even Medea knows it.⁴⁵ The determinism of her myth is inherent to her character. Indeed, Dido's tragedy also lies ahead: anyone familiar with Virgil's tale of Aeneas knows that Dido is not destined to follow him on his journey. And yet, as it is told in this Old French romance, Dido's story begins by establishing her as a courtly lady, a queen of the world as the audience knows it, rather than as someone of another, mythological distant past.

⁴⁴ *Roman d'Énéas* 1612: "Fox est qui an fame se fie!"

⁴⁵ See chapter 3.

The conflict in which Dido finds herself is contextual; social matters stand in the way of the medieval female character's expressions of love. Medieval Dido feels desire, without her desires ever being described as put into conflict with her inner or true identity as chaste and constant, or a view of what makes a woman 'strong' defined by men. It is not a matter of inner conflict that ruins Dido in the courtly romance; it is not her desire in conflict with Amazonian traits that challenge one another introspectively. In this regard, Dido's story is more in the open; mythological determinism to her character is replaced with the potential of the unknown. In other words, Dido does not appear unconditionally tied to any limitations due to her sex, but rather, her identity forms part of her social context. It seems that this suggested de-mythologization or disenchantment results in a humanization of medieval Dido's character, making her a desiring subject in a relatable social setting. Dido's new tragedy can be described as her being a desiring subject in a culture in which her subjectivity finds no room to be expressed. The limits to Dido's liberties and her predestined fate to die as Énéas' journey continues are unconditionally tied to her story, but not to her character. Without her inherent mythological association to the Amazons, she appears as a subject in the world, a character that is affected, not by myth, but by earthly conditions.

Dido's death in the *Roman d'Énéas* takes place in a bedroom, where she has had placed all her gifts from Énéas. She takes the sword that he once handed her, not knowing that she would turn it against her own chest:

In the bedroom all alone; there is no one there to keep her from the insanity that she wants to pursue as she draws the Trojan's sword. When he gave it to her, he hardly thought that it would be the cause of her death. And she holds the sword, wholly naked, and she presses it against her chest. Dido then jumps into the fire that she has had her sister prepare, and then lays herself down on her stomach in the bed, on the sheets that the Trojan once gave her. She wallows and rolls around in her blood.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *Roman d'Énéas* 2035–47: "En la chanbre est tot solement ; / N'i a qui li destort noiant / La descrie qu'el velt faire, / De l'espee al Troien traire : / Quant li dona, ne quida mie / Par li deüst perdre la vie. / Et tint l'espee tote nue, / Soz la memelle s'est feue. / O tot lo cop salt anz el ré / Que sa suer li ot apresté : / El lit desor les garnemenz / Al Troien se colche adanz, / El sanc se voltre et demoine."

Dido's suicide can be interpreted as commenting on the consequences of her previous pursuit of her sexuality. She directs his sword, a symbol of the phallus, against her own chest, and then covers his sheets with her blood. Dido's death can thus be understood as the death of her sexuality, and, hence, her subjectivity. The sheets, she says, "formed the beginning of death and destruction for me".⁴⁷ Unable to live as a free subject with room for her sexuality, Dido does not seem to see the possibility of continuing to live at all.

In this sense, the removal of mythological reception, so to speak, also carries meaning. Dido's tragic fate lives on through the ages, but the explanations of it can be said to shift along with her speaking to new audiences in different times and settings, which we saw also in the case of Medea in Hölzlhammer's analysis, where her and Jason's tale has transformed into fitting a courtly structure: Jason has become a vassal in Benoît's *Roman de Troie*, and in *Trojanerkrieg* the vassal identity has been omitted, but the courtliness to their story remains.⁴⁸ Could it have been possible for a women-audience to mirror themselves in a de-mythologized Dido? Could they have seen themselves in her conflict with unfavorable conditions in culture and social shame caused by men's badmouthing rumors? And perhaps then also in her way of letting out her emotions in the dark solitude, when there is nobody around to condemn her for them? In her final moment, Dido returns to her private solitude where she once let out her emotions, in the dark confinement of a quiet bedroom. From having first held on to her pillow she now throws herself down on the sheets, staining his gifts with her blood. Dido's fate can thus be interpreted as equally determined as it was when she was associated to Penthesilea's defeat in Virgil's epic, but with the causality of which modified. Here she is doomed by courtly conditions that deprive her of pursuing her sexuality and, thus, subjectivity.

8.4 ONE IS NOT BORN MYTH, BUT RATHER REWRITES IT

As soon as a female infant is born, she is a woman; she sees the light of day and simultaneously enters the women's quarters, and after her mother's womb a wom-

⁴⁷ *Roman d'Énéas* 2054–5: "Il me furent commancementz / De mort et de destrucion."

⁴⁸ See chapter 3.

an knows nothing beyond these quarters. And so she is trained by her mother's hands in virginal conduct. She is shy and this extends even to her glance. She does not come within sight of males. To such a height of modesty do virgins come. She knows how to cling to maidenhood alone. She labors at spinning wool. She does the housekeeping in the women's quarters. She is reckoned as one of the maidservants. These are the deeds of the chaste woman, these the lessons learned by young girls.⁴⁹

In Basilakes' refutation of Atalanta's plausibility, we read of how girls are fostered into womanhood from the moment that they are born. The myth of Atalanta's inherent femininity, as something that is living within her unconditionally, regardless of the world in which she has grown up, is refuted as implausible, since it does not factor in her life's material conditions. In this sense, we could perhaps say that Basilakes disenchants Atalanta from her ancient myth, humanizing her to become a girl like any other, who is affected by the world in which she lives, and acts accordingly.

Perhaps we should understand Dido in the Old French *Roman d'Énéas* as a character who, rather than primarily forming part of a mythological tradition of Trojan narratives, forms part of a medieval breaking with such a tradition. Perhaps this de-mythologization can be said to illuminate myth's risks of stagnating female characters in fixed roles; arguably the disenchantment liberates them from inherent limitations. Dido is not Penthesileia, she is not an Amazon, but rather, her characterization through mythological association is unwritten, more than myth she can be interpreted as representing an embodied subjectivity who orients in her (courtly) world.

The Amazonian character, and in the descriptions discussed from the *Roman de Troie* Penthesileia more specifically, can arguably be defined by her strength – equals of men, as it were. Women are blamed for being unreliable in the *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Énéas* alike. In Benoît's romance, we

⁴⁹ Basilakes, *Progymnasmata* 27, 48–56: Οὐκοῦν ἅμα τίκτεται βρέφος γυνή, καὶ προῆλθεν εἰς φῶς ἅμα καὶ θάλαμον καὶ μετὰ τὴν τεκοῦσαν νηδὺν οὐδὲν οἶδε πλέον θαλάμου. γυνὴ ἐπὶ τούτοις ὑπὸ ταῖς τῆς μητρὸς χερσὶν ἐκπαιδεύεται· τὰ παρθενικὰ αἰδεῖται μέχρι καὶ βλέμματος· εἰς ἀρρένων ὄψιν οὐκ ἔρχεται, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἦλθεν αἰδοῦς τὸ τῶν παρθένων χρήμα· μόνῃς οἶδε παρθενίας ἐξέχεσθαι· ὑπὸ τῇ ταλασίᾳ διαπονεῖται· περὶ τὴν γυναικωνίτιν οἰκουρεῖ· ταῖς θεραπαίνισι συνεξετάζεται. ταῦτα γυναικὸς σωφρονοῦσης ἔργα, ταῦτα παρθένων παιδεύματα.

read that a strong woman, a virtuous woman, is a woman who separates herself from women in general, not merely on an abstract level in terms of characteristics, but in the case of the Amazons, in a highly literal sense. What is praised is the exception from the rule.

How did audiences consisting of women, in western and Byzantine courts alike, see themselves reflected in these Amazonian women, those exceptional women in literature who are defined through their contrasts to women in general? How did the literary tradition of these mythological warriors speak to women audiences? How did these women relate to the idea of their sex being condemnable, with the only alternative being to deny it by assimilating to masculine coded virtues? Is it in the choice to de-mythologize, in the removal of reception, so to speak, that we find testament of women-readers?

In another of his rhetorical exercises, namely a confirmation of Atalanta's plausibility (rather than a refutation of it), the narrator convinces the audience of her credibility by arguing that the strong women have indeed existed, which can be seen also among animals. As opposed to what the critic may say, which is that the rejection of a womanly upbringing is unnatural, the speaking voice thus argues for the contrary, namely that the construction of gender in culture is unnatural:

But, the critic says, she was raised to be manly and, rejecting an upbringing at home, she boasted of what was unnatural behavior. And why is it an accusation against nature, if the pursuit of manliness was ever desirable for a woman too? For, first of all, one must not completely reject the idea of the female of the species being strong in those days. If you search even among wild animals, you will see that the female is also hard to fight, and it may be that you will be more courageous against the males. Second, if humans have been given the ability to fight wild animals, it would also be possible for the daughter of Oeneus, being human, to go hunting.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Basilakes, *Progymnasmata* 28, 26–35: ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἀνδρίαν ἐτρέφετο καί, τὴν οἰκουρὸν ἀπολιποῦσα τροφήν, τὰ παρὰ φύσιν ἡλαζονεύετο. καὶ τί κατηγόρημα φύσεως, εἰ καὶ πρὸς γυναῖκά ποτε γέγονεν ἀνδρίας φιλότιμος; πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ οὐ πανταχῇ τὸ θῆλυ τοῦ γένους τότε εἰς ῥώμην ἦκον ἀποδοκιμαστέον. – καὶ εἰς τοὺς θήρας ἐξιχνεύσης καὶ θήλειαν ὄψει δῦσμαχον, καὶ μᾶλλον, εἰ τύχοι, θαρρήσεις τοῦ ἄρρενας. – ἔπειτα, εἰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὁ πρὸς τὰ θηρία δέδοται πόλεμος, εἴη ἂν καὶ τὴν Οἰνέως οὔσαν ἀνθρώπον τὰ πρὸς θήραν ἀσκήσασθαι.

With Basilakes' *progymnasmata* as an example, we see how gender appears to have been a topic of interest during the twelfth century, and perhaps more specifically, ideas of what a woman is and can be. In the development of Old French romances, we can arguably see similar reasonings and ideas reflected in the narratives.

Further below in the confirmation, masculinity and femininity are defined not as essential to the male and female body respectively, but rather, that one needs to be able to acknowledge these qualities in both genders when they occur:

If you exclude the female gender from manliness, make sure that you also call no man unwarlike. But if you ever faulted the male for his lack of manliness, make sure that you occasionally admire the female for her manliness as well. For if poetry turned all women into soldiers, it would be reasonable to mistrust this unreasonable depiction, but if the phenomenon is rare, the fact that this is surprising does not make it unbelievable. You also hear how the Amazon women, an entire nation, had war as their occupation and did not fear the Greeks even though they were men – the same Greeks whom the Trojans, who were also men, could not endure.⁵¹

With reference to the Amazons, womanhood can be opened up to mean something broader than what is usually thought of. By acknowledging the Amazons, women's potential reaches beyond the walls of the women's quarters. Atalanta should be acknowledged for her masculine coded virtues, the speaking voice states, just as much as men are acknowledged for their activity in hunting and the like. If women can under no circumstances be acknowledged for embodying masculine virtues, then men must unconditionally be recognized for embodying them, regardless of their individual actions. If a man is blamed for lacking manliness, then the woman

⁵¹ Basilakes, *Progymnasmata* 28, 35–45: εἰ δὲ τῆς ἀνδρείας τὸ γυναικεῖον φύλον ἀπέκλεισας, ὅρα καὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν μηδένα λέγειν ἀπόλεμον· εἰ δ' ἔστιν οὐ καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν εἰς ἀνδρίαν ἐμέμψω, καὶ <τί> τὸ θῆλυ ποτε πρὸς ἀνδρίαν θαυμάσειν; εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἀπάσας γυναῖκας ἢ ποιήσας ὥπλισεν, εἶχεν ἂν λόγον δυσπιστεῖν τὸ παράλογον, εἰ δὲ τὸ χρήμα σπάνιον, οὐκ ἅπιστα τὰ τοῦ θαύματος. Ἀκούεις δὲ καὶ τὰς Ἀμαζόνας γυναῖκας, ὅλον ἔθνος, ὅπως ἔργον εἶχον τὸν πόλεμον καὶ, ἄνδρας ὄντας, οὐκ ἐδεδίσαν Ἑλλήνας, οὓς οἱ περὶ Τροίαν, ἄνδρες ὄντες, οὐκ ἔφερον.

who displays the same qualities ought to be praised. Accordingly, masculine and feminine characteristics, as it were, are not tied to one's body, but can be acknowledged in both sexes, and for which both sexes deserve recognition.

Atalanta's character can be contextualized to her upbringing far from the realms of gender norms in culture. Does this make her less of a woman? Not if we believe Basilakes' confirmation, as there is in reality nothing that should claim women to not be strong as they are, as seen above. Perhaps, thus, in this case of twelfth-century reception, we could interpret a discernible perspective on gender and womanhood, represented by Atalanta, as open for other definitions than the tradition would usually suggest. With Atalanta as an example, an idea of gender as not being an essence or inherently determined can be formulated.

By reading Dido in the *Roman d'Énéas* as compared with Atalanta in Basilakes' rhetorical exercises, perhaps we could reach something of an answer to the question as to why Penthesileia did not re-appear in the Old French version. Medieval Dido is transformed into a courtly woman with emotions, desires and thoughts, but who must hide these and who is punished for them within her social and material context. It is not an internal battle between her pursuit and her sex that causes Dido's demise, as one might say about the case of the *Aeneid*, but cultural factors. The choice of removal can thus arguably be interpreted as forming part of the poetic work. The absence also speaks. Maybe it tells us that there existed an audience of women who did not relate to the established view of women that condemned them as unreliable, if they did not distance themselves from their own sex in order to be deemed as strong, through contrast to other women. Beauvoir wrote about myth's part in the making of woman as the Other that:

Any myth implies a Subject who projects its hopes and fears of a transcendent heaven. Not positing themselves as Subject, women have not created the virile myth that would reflect their projects; they have neither religion nor poetry that belongs to them alone. They still dream through men's dreams. They worship the gods made by males. And males have shaped the great virile figures for their own exaltation:

Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal; in the destiny of these heroes, woman has merely a secondary role.⁵²

Since her entrance into the world of text, the Amazon has functioned as a mirror for the (Greek) male subject. She is strong like him, a warrior just as he is, and thus, a threat to his supremacy. Her 'equality' is defined on the basis that she is more like man than other women. In the examples from Basilakes' rhetorical exercises, gender appears not to be an essence inherent in one's sex, and in the *Roman d'Énéas*, it appears as if Dido represents a similar idea of gender. Can she be strong and powerful, without it being explained by her association with the queen of the Amazons? Can she be strong and powerful, and a woman like any other?

The removal of Penthesileia from the *Roman d'Énéas* opens up the possibility to define woman as something beyond the given terms of androcentric mythology. Dido has become a courtly lady, a woman of flesh and blood, who feels desire and juggles her desire within a limited social setting. Medieval Dido is not a 'strong woman' in the sense that is found in the *Roman de Troie*. Neither is she necessarily condemnable. Rather, she can be interpreted as suffering from her culture's high demands on her being, demands that come into conflict with her subjectivity. In the *Roman d'Énéas*, the removal of Penthesileia is not necessarily replaced with another virtuous, strong woman figure. Dido is no longer myth, no longer legend. She is human, strong and weak at once, powerful yet filled with emotion. To me, this is what the removal of Penthesileia marks in this romance: the attempt to write forth a female subject through not only elaborations with, but also rejections of, Trojan myth.

Throughout this volume, Trojan receptions demonstrate their various ways to take form in medieval literature, as well as their potential to serve different purposes. Enchantment and disenchantment can have various functions. As Tine Scheijnen writes in this volume's introductory chapter, what binds the various cases of medieval Troy reception together, albeit across different languages, genres and contexts, is a joint need to adapt the Trojan tales to new socio-cultural systems and their sets of ideological val-

⁵² Beauvoir 1949, 166, from Borde and Malovany-Chevalier's (2011) translation.

ues.⁵³ As we have seen in the present volume, the creative diversity in how to have Trojan narratives serve different poets and scholars reveals the literary innovations embedded in medieval reception. The mythological heritage of ancient Troy tales can induce power in medieval female characters or it can doom them to a fate over which they possess no power. In this way, we see how receptions of Troy appear to be just as diverse as literary representations of gender. Additionally, we must consider the occasional aspect to courtly literature; how meaning is made in the occasion of reading as a collaboration between poet and audience. There is no one way to understand medieval reception of Troy, but as many as there are works in which we find it.

⁵³ See chapter 1 “Facing the Other: Medieval Challenges in Retelling the Trojan Tale”.

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