

## Lavinia: An Alternative Study in Virgilian *Pietas*

Lavinia is a curious figure in the *Aeneid*. In the words of Francis Cairns, “Lavinia is a paradox. She is indisputably a key figure in the *Aeneid*. Yet she hardly ever appears in person and, compared with more robust personalities, she seems insubstantial and lacking in individuality” (Cairns 1989:151). It is apparent that her importance stems from her role as the future wife of Aeneas and mother of the future Rome. The first adjectives applied to Lavinia indicate this fact: she is *iam matura viro, iam plenis nubilis annis* (Aen. 7.53). Not only is she thus defined by her readiness for marriage and childbearing, but the man for whom she is ready is the same introduced in the epic’s first line: *arma virumque cano* (Aen. 1.1). I will argue, however, that Virgil’s Lavinia brings more to the marriage than her ability to allow Aeneas to beget the Roman race, that she is more than merely “a city turned into a woman by inflection” (Mack 1999: 138-9). Virgil takes pains to characterize Lavinia as virtuous, even *pia*. This fact is evident in his descriptions, including of her famous blush (Lyne 1983), but even more so in her structural position within the poem. Lavinia’s role in the second half of the *Aeneid* closely parallels that of Dido in the first; the correspondences between Aeneas’ introduction to the Carthaginian and Italian courts in the first and seventh books, for example, are striking. Thus, Virgil presents Lavinia as more than just the Italian bride; she is the fitting wife of *pious Aeneas*.

### Bibliography

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