Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: Dido by Adèle Geras", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1099. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Adèle Geras

Dido

United Kingdom (2009)

TAGS: Aeneas Anna (Dido's Sister) Aphrodite Ascanius / Iulus Carthage Dido Hades Hera Hermes Troy Virgil





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Dido
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2009
First Edition Details	Adèle Geras, *Dido*. Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2009, 259 pp.
ISBN	9780385615174
Genre	Fiction, Romance fiction, Teen fiction*
Target Audience	Crossover (young adults)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Courtesy of the author.

Adèle Geras , b. 1944
(Author)

Adèle Geras was born in Jerusalem in 1944. Owing to the fact that her father was in the Colonial Service, she travelled a lot and lived in several countries (e.g. Cyprus, Tanzania, Nigeria etc.) when she was a child. She attended Roedean School in Brighton and later graduated from St. Hilda's College, Oxford, in 1966. She has been a full-time writer since 1976.

Adèle Geras is a prolific writer – she has penned more than ninety books for children, young adults and adults. *The Girls in the Velvet Frame* was her first full-length novel. She is best known for books such as *Troy*, *Ithaka*, *Happy Ever After*, *Silent Snow*, *Secret Snow* and *A Thousand Yards of Sea*. She has received prizes for poetry and two of her books: The Sydney Taylor Book Award for *My Grandmother's Stories* and the National Jewish Book Award for *Golden Windows.*

She lives in Great Shelford, near Cambridge. Her late husband, Norman Geras (1943–2013), was a Marxist political theorist based at the University of Manchester. One of her two daughters, Sophie Hannah, is also a published author, writing crime fiction and poetry.

Bio prepared by Agnieszka Maciejewska, Univesity of Warsaw, agnieszka.maciejewska@student.uw.edu.pl and Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing about Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?

I have always been interested in the Classics and knew the stories of Homer and the Greek myths from a very young age. I've written three novels set in Classical Antiquity: *Troy*, *Ithaka* and *Dido*.

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2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

For one reason: they are amazingly exciting stories. About things that matter and emotions that we all still feel.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

I did Latin at school till age 16. But I grew up with translations of the myths and also later read Homer in translation. I don't use much research. I reread the *Iliad* for *Troy*, the *Odyssey* for *Ithaka* and Vergil's *Aeneid* Book four for *Dido*. For *Cleopatra* I had a research assistant appointed by the publisher called Alison Stanley and she was wonderful and provided me with all the relevant facts and she was also my editor on *Cleopatra*.

4. How concerned were you with "accuracy" or "fidelity" to the original?

I wanted it to be true to the spirit of Homer and I didn't knowingly alter things BUT invented my own characters and made up the story that they were involved in. Accuracy was sometimes not so good. I have cooks using LEMONS in *Ithaca*, to baste the meat they are cooking and it seems lemons were unknown in Classical Greece!

5. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

I would love to do more but only if someone commissioned me to write such a novel. I am too old now to be writing novels which I'm not sure someone will want to publish.

Prepared by Agnieszka Maciejewska, Univesity of Warsaw, agnieszka.maciejewska@student.uw.edu.pl

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Additional information

Translation	Turkish: Adèle Geras, *Dido*, trans. Zeynep Alpaslan, Izmir: Tudem, 2010.

Summary

Drawing on the narrative of the first four books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Dido* expands and extends the tragic story of the Queen of Carthage, who falls in love with Aeneas and kills herself after he sails away. It is told through the eyes of multiple characters – the young handmaiden Elissa, who becomes nursemaid to Aeneas' son Ascanius, Cubby, a strong, somewhat simple servant, Iopas the bard, and Anna, Dido's younger sister. With the exception of Anna, these characters are invented by Geras and do not appear within Virgil's text. The story takes place over the twenty-four hour period following Aeneas' abrupt departure from Carthage. Each chapter is headed with the name of the focalising character, and an italicised description of the setting and timeframe.

As the characters struggle with their grief and shock that the Trojan refugees have suddenly left, spurred on by the decree of Zeus, they share their memories and reflect on their two year stay, so that the primary narrative is supplemented by numerous flashback episodes that detail Dido's foundation of the beautiful city of Carthage, the arrival of the Trojan refugees, and the development of Dido and Aeneas' intense love affair, that culminates in their strange marriage ceremony in the cave, presided over by the goddess Aphrodite.

Geras adds another complication to the plot. Elissa is attracted to the handsome, charismatic Aeneas. Despite her devotion to the queen, whom she regards as a substitute mother figure, she sleeps with Aeneas and falls pregnant. When she shares her secret with the Iopas, he betrays her to the queen. Dido goes mad and curses her handmaiden, before begging her forgiveness. She is obsessed with the idea of shame and the loss of her people's respect, concerns that one online review describes as anachronistically Victorian. Elissa watches Hades come to the Queen and persuade her to stab herself with Aeneas' sword, but Iris, Hera's messenger, intervenes at the last moment to spirit the Queen away to the Elysian Fields. Elissa watches the ash from the funeral pyre settle on her skin "like small bruises" (p. 260), and vows that if her baby is a girl, she will name it after the

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Queen.

Analysis

As in Geras' other epic adaptations, the gods play a prominent part in the story, appearing throughout the palace and talking with the mortal characters, though these encounters are quickly forgotten. It is interesting that Geras chooses to refer to the gods by their Greek names rather than their Latin ones, perhaps because they might already be familiar to readers of her other books. This choice serves to distinguish *Dido* from the *Aeneid*, even while Virgil's poem provides the narrative framework for this retelling.

The gods speak to the mortal characters in lofty, grandiose terms, and are used to represent different philosophical positions in their conversations with one another. Artemis and Aphrodite argue over whether the glory of love is worth the pain that inevitably accompanies it. As he was in *Troy*, Hermes is presented as a metafictional figure who makes self-conscious comment about narrative and its shape. He bluntly tells Elissa "You are not part of Aeneas' story and that's all there is to it." (p. 35). While highlighting that it is not Aeneas' destiny to remain in Carthage, Hermes also draws attention to Geras' invention of new characters within the famous saga.

It is made clear that the gods control the action and have the power to manipulate the emotions of mortals, even though they too must abide by the rules of destiny. Artemis says of Dido: "It is her fate. Even the Gods cannot change that. What is to be will be." (p. 114). In a reworking of Virgil's famous scene, Anna witnesses Dido getting struck by Cupid's arrow when she takes the little boy Ascanius on her lap, and the queen's sudden infatuation with Aeneas is apparent to everyone in the palace. Elissa's crush on Aeneas is not explained in the same way, although Aphrodite urges her to follow her desires and submit to them (p. 220). The sex scene, and the ensuing rivalry between the two women when Dido discovers what has happened, makes for uncomfortable reading. *Dido* predates the #metoo movement by several years, but the representation of a coercive relationship between a vulnerable young woman and a powerful older man resonates with events from our own time, even if Geras did not intend the parallels when she wrote the novel.

The book explores the preciousness of virginity and the pain of

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	motherhood, but is ultimately preoccupied with the power of love as an enlivening and destructive force, particularly when it is unreciprocated. The book offers titillation by arranging the characters in a chain of unrequited romance. Dido's sister Anna desires Iopas, the court poet, who in turn is in love with Elissa, who loves Aeneas. Elissa's friend Tanith is devastated when her lover Maron leaves with Aeneas. As it moves around the palace, from the royal chambers to the humble quarters of the servants, the narrative shifts easily between powerful tragedy and mundane melodrama. Geras makes significant changes the narrative, offering readers alternative versions of feelings and motivations than are suggested in Virgil's poem. Through the eyes of the ordinary characters, readers gain insight into the high and low moments of this famous, tragic love story.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aeneas Anna (Dido's Sister) Aphrodite Ascanius / Iulus Carthage Dido Hades Hera Hermes Troy Virgil
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Desires Emotions Friendship Girls Immigration Intertextuality Journeys Loss Love Names Nation Past Relationships Romance Storytelling Suicide
Further Reading	Review at librarything.com (accessed: September 14, 2020). Review at thetimes.co.uk (accessed: September 14, 2020).

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