

“notumque furens quid femina possit”

Virgil, *Aenid.* 5.

AENEAS was fleeing from Carthage and Dido, and his heart, as he watched the flames that rose from Dido's pyre was full of gloom and forebodings. There was perhaps something symbolic in this escapade of the national hero of the Romans. It was a presage of their own destiny. “The rulers of the world,” said Cato the Censor, “were ruled by women. And it is in fact possible to show that the Romans, who obtained their women originally by capture, first encouraged and spoiled them, were then dominated by them, and at last sought to escape them. Aeneas escaped his fate, but not the Romans.

The evidence from Roman literature suggests a strong tradition of feminine influence in public life. It begins as far back as Aeneas, about whom it is not without significance that his destiny was governed by the caprice of the

17. One of my students pointed out to me the many similarities between the Dauphin on his horse—*Henry V*, Act III, Sc. vii—and *The Windhover*. It is perhaps on this level of vaunting self-pride that the poet identifying himself with the bird, sees himself as a “curvetting and caracoling knight-errant” in Gardner's phrase. See W. H. Gardner, *The Religious Problem in G. M. Hopkins*. *Scrutiny*, June, 1937.

18. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*: W. Empson, p. 284, foll. He reads *The Windhover* as “a more evident example of the use of poetry to convey an indecision.”

19. E. E. Phare suggests that “the poet's state of mind is one in which two contradictory moods are held in equipoise and the reader can make one or the other to dominate as he chooses.” With this it is a little difficult to reconcile her interpretation of the last lines as the poet's saying “meekly and resignedly, but not sorrowfully, that is always so.” *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*: E. E. Phare, p. 132.

goddesses, Venus and Juno. Dido herself came very near to wrecking the Roman Empire even before its inception. But there was another woman who caused Aeneas infinitely greater trouble, Amata, wife of Latinus whose daughter's hand Aeneas sought in marriage. Latinus consented, but not Amata, who preferred Turnus for son-in-law, and whose opposition forced Aeneas to fight a long and bitter war before he reached his goal—a war which was in fact a war for a woman and the state. It was not the only one either. When next we find the Romans at war it is again for women and the state. Romulus and his followers, to find themselves wives, raped the Sabine women and went to war with their men. And once again Livy (3. 44 ff) makes Verginius' daughter the proximate cause of the secession of the Roman plebs. But—lest I create the impression that women's influence at Rome was entirely for evil—it was the Sabine women who made peace between their abductors and their fathers, and it was Veturia, Coriolanus' mother, and Volumnia, his wife, instigated by the Roman matrons, who induced the rebel leader to withdraw his armies from the very gates of Rome. (Livy, 2. 40).

One might multiply instances of feminine influence in Roman public life, but the few already cited are sufficient to indicate a very real importance enjoyed by Roman women, and that, too, at a time when they were not yet emancipated. For Livy (34. 2) tells us of women's status in early Rome :

“maiores nostri nullam ne privatam quidem rem agere feminas sine tutore auctore voluerunt : in manu esse parentium, fratrum, virorum.”

Legally, in fact, their condition was little better than that of slaves. And there is here a strange contradiction between the legal subordination and the virtual power of women. Or, perhaps, the contradiction is only apparent and man's respect for women is in inverse proportion to the degree of emancipation she enjoys.

However, it is evident that women, unemancipated, enjoyed considerable power at Rome. And it was not long before they began to make capital out of their menfolk's complaisance. As early as 450 B.C. the form of marriage '*sine in manum conventionione*' allows the bride to remain under her guardian's authority instead of passing into her husband's. This meant in effect that on the death of her guardian a woman was independent and could divorce her husband. She would also inherit property. The Lex Voconia of 169 B.C. which sought to limit the amount of wealth a woman might inherit, indicates that women had become dangerously rich and independent. The Emperor Hadrian later allowed women to dispose of property by will. The '*capitales*' threw on this.

One wonders whether such emancipation could have been obtained by women without agitation, since men do not willingly relinquish their powers. Evidence from Roman literature again suggests the possibility of 'suffragettes.'

Virgil (8. 397) in an inspired passage, describes Amata, driven mad by her husband's opposition to her wishes, inciting the women to rebellion :

ipsa inter medias flagrantem fervida pinum
sustinet ac natae Turnique canit hymenaeos
sanguineam torquens aciem, torvumque repente
clamat, "io matres, audite ubi quaeque Latinae."
si qua piis animis manet infelicis Amatae
gratia, si iuris materni corda remordet,
solvite crinalis vittas, capite orgia mecum."

Had Virgil witnessed such scenes at Rome? But even if Virgil's account is mere poetic fancy, there is Livy 3. 47 :

"Verginius sordidatus filiam secum obsoleta veste comitantibus aliquot matronis cum ingenti advocacione in forum deducit."

and Livy 3. 48 :

"sequentes clamitant matronae, eamne liberorum procreandorum condicionem, ea pudicitiae praemia esse?"

Also Livy 34. 1 (the best of them all) when women demanded the repeal of the Lex Oppia which sought to restrict extravagance in feminine wear :

"matronae nulla nec auctoritate nec verecundia nec imperio virorum contineri limine poterant : omnes vias urbis aditusque in forum obsidebant, viros descendentes ad forum orantes, ut, florente re publica, crescente in dies privata omnium fortuna, matronis quoque pristinum ornatum reddi paterentur."

This is Cato's comment :

"si in sua quisque nostrum matre familia ius et maiestatem viri retinere instituisset, minus cum universis feminis negotii haberemus : nunc domi victa libertas nostra impotentia muliebri hic quoque in foro obteritur et calcatur, et quia singulas non compescuimus, universas horremus."

Women are emancipated, and the fruit of their emancipation was not entirely good. There was a growing disregard for the marriage tie which provoked from Seneca the dry comment :

"illustres quaedam ac nobiles feminae non consulum numero sed maritorum annos suos computant, et exeunt matrimonii causa, nubunt repudii." (Sen. *de ben* 3. 16).

There was also a reluctance on the part of women to marry, which the Emperor Augustus attempted to remedy, firstly by legislation (in his '*lex de maritandis ordinibus*' and secondly by propaganda through his mouthpiece Horace. (cf. Horace, *Odes* 1. 13). Women begin also to take part in blood sports in the arena, and Juvenal paints a lurid picture of feminine licence in his day, a picture which, though exaggerated perhaps, cannot be dismissed as mere fiction.

THE ENUNCIATIVE VOWEL IN DRAVIDIAN

Women have in fact after their emancipation begun to run riot at Rome, and it is not too fantastic to see in their emancipation one of the causes of the social decay which set in at Rome by about the first century B.C. It brought about a disintegration of the family, which in a patriarchal society like that of the Romans could not fail to have evil effects. And perhaps this was the significance of Virgil's treatment of the quarrel between Latinus and his wife Amata which led to the madness of faction and war. It was a poet's warning.

C. W. AMERASINGHE.
