'Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent! 
quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes,
(11) quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis! 
credo equidem, nec vana fides, genus esse deorum.
degeneres animos timor arguit. heu, quibus ille 
iacet sus fatis! quae bella exhausta canebat!'

This passage, Dido's first recorded utterance after Aeneas' narration of his 
wanderings, contains in line 11 a well-known problem. Does the word *armis* 
here derive from *arma* or from *armus* — and hence, in *quam forti pectore et 
armis*, is Dido referring to Aeneas' 'brave heart and feats of war' (the 'idealistic 
approach') or to his 'strong chest and shoulders' (the 'physical approach')? Or, just conceivably, is it an intended ambiguity?

(1) The 'idealistic approach'. This interpretation was favoured by Servius — an important, though a far from infallible, authority. Among modern English commentators, Servius was followed by T. E. Page (a romanticist — in the best sense of the word — in his whole approach to Virgil). Page objects that 'Dido cannot speak of Aeneas as though she were appraising a horse with “strong forequarters”.' (This statement is somewhat unfair in that Virgil does elsewhere use *armus* of a man's shoulder, e.g., at xi. 641; but it must be conceded that the word is much more commonly used in relation to animals.) In his recent commentary, R. D. Williams also supports the 'idealistic' view, but for the different reason that 'in an ambiguity of this kind the reader naturally takes the more normal meaning . . . unless the context prevents it'. A further argument for the 'idealistic approach' is that, if *forti pectore* can be taken as referring to courage, the remark *degeneres animos timor arguit* (13) seems to follow more naturally.

(2) The 'physical approach'. Conington (perhaps surprisingly) supported the 'physical' interpretation of the phrase; so likewise, in his commentary on the fourth book, does R. G. Austin, who quotes Valerius Flaccus' use (*Argon*. iv. 265) of *pectore et armis* with reference to heroes boxing. (This may not, however, be particularly significant: for although the post-Augustan epic poets admittedly copied Virgil on numerous occasions, the phrase is one that could slip easily enough into a boxing commentary without conscious reminiscence. And, anyhow, more distinguished authors than Valerius Flaccus have been known to misunderstand their models.) But Austin's chief reason for accepting the 'physical' interpretation is drawn from Henry's argument (*Aeneidea*, on iv. 8–14), which is essentially that 'primitive' people will form and express a favourable opinion of heroic figures primarily on the grounds of good looks. One of Henry's 'parallels' is too delightful to omit here: 'A Siamese ambassador to the Court of Queen Victoria says, in a pamphlet published by him on his return to his own country: “One cannot but be struck with the aspect of the august Queen of England, or fail to observe that she must be descended from
a race of goodly and warlike kings and rulers of the earth, in that her eyes, complexion, and, above all, her bearing, are those of a beautiful and majestic white elephant".1

(3) One must also at least admit the possibility that Virgil left the phrase deliberately ambiguous, without positively intending either one or the other interpretation. There are many occasions in Virgil’s work where a good deal can be supplied by the reader’s imagination, not least in the matter of ‘allegorical’ references in the Eclogues;1 and here one cannot be sure that Virgil had made up his own mind, unconvincing though such possibility seems to the modern scholar’s mind.

However, a further argument (I think a new one) must now be advanced in favour of (2) (the ‘physical’ interpretation), an argument drawn from Homer. In Odyssey xi, midway through the tale of his experiences in the Underworld, Odysseus breaks off temporarily, and the Phaeacian Queen Arete immediately comments as follows (336–8):

"Φαίηκες, πιὸς ἱμμὴν ἄνηρ ὀδὴ φαινεται εἶναι εἰδής τε μέγεθός τε ἢ ἔφρας ἐνδον ἔσας; ξεῖνος δ’ ἀυτ’ ἐμὸς ἐστιν . . .”

‘Phaeacians, how does this man appear to you in shape and size and good sense? Moreover, he is my guest . . .’ Now, it is of no matter that (as D. L. Page and others have pointed out) the remark seems inconsequential; that this so-called Phaeacian Intermezzo was probably an interpolation designed to fit the later Nekula more firmly among the other wanderings of Odysseus; or that ‘this Intermezzo is not only ruinous to the structure of the story but also of very poor quality in itself’.2 All that is neither here nor there. On the other hand, this much is indisputable: that Virgil constantly drew on Homer and echoed Homer; that physical attraction is often emphasised by Homer, not least in the Phaeacian scenes;3 and, most relevantly to our purposes, that in Virgil’s text of Homer a Queen’s first reaction to her heroic guest’s narrative (cp. ξεῖνος with hospes at Aen. iv. 10) was to remark on his physical distinction. I believe, therefore, that this passage provides powerful support for the ‘physical’ interpretation of Aen. iv. 11, inviting us still more strongly to believe that Dido’s reaction was essentially the same as that of Major-General Stanley’s daughters in The Pirates of Penzance: ‘How pitiful his tale! How rare his beauty!’

University of Natal
Pietermaritzburg

D. S. RAVEN

1. On allegory in general, a nice point is made by J. R. R. Tolkien in his foreword to the complete edition (1968) of The Lord of the Rings: ‘I think many confuse “applicability” with “allegory”, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author’.
3. See especially Odyssey vi. 152ff, 243ff, though in neither case is the context so strikingly similar to Aen.iv.9ff.
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