

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

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ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET

1767 Montargis - Paris 1824

*Éole déchaîne les vents contre les vaisseaux troyens*  
*Aeolus unchains the Winds against the Trojan Fleet*  
(Virgil, *Aeneid*, I: 50-91)<sup>1</sup>

Black chalk on paper; executed c.1811.  
268 x 358 mm (image); 268 x 410 mm (sheet)

PROVENANCE: The Girodet estate sale, Paris, 11 April 1825 – Acquired by Antoine-Claude Pannetier (to 1859) – M. de la Bordes, Paris – Auction sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 15 April 1867, lot 2 [listed as *170 dessins de Girodet compositions pour l'Énéide et les Georgiques de Virgile*] – Ambroise Firmin-Didot – Thence by descent (to 1971) – Private collection, Paris

LITERATURE: *Catalogue des tableaux, esquisses, dessins, et croquis, de M. Girodet, peintre d'histoire*, Paris, 11-25 April 1825 [listed as *Recueil de dessins destinés à l'illustration des œuvres de Virgile*] – Angela Stief, *Die Aeneisillustrationen von Girodet-Trioson: künstlerische und literarische Rezeption von Vergils Epos in Frankreich um 1800*, Frankfurt, 1986, the drawing mentioned p. 315, the lithograph reproduced fig. 45 – *Dessiner l'Énéide*, exhib. cat., Montargis, Musée Girodet, Montargis 1997, p. 44, no. 2

LITHOGRAPH: Lithographed by François-Louis Dejuinne, published as plate II in the *Énéide / Suite de compositions dessinées au trait par Girodet. Lithographiées par MM. Aubry-Lecomte, Châtillon, Coumis, Dassy, De Juines, etc.*, Paris 1827

Girodet worked from Virgil's epic poems throughout his life. As early as 1791, he was commissioned by his teacher, Jacques-Louis David, to produce a series of illustrations to the *Aeneid* together with a fellow student, François Gérard (1770-1837). The series was published by Pierre Didot l'ainé in 1798.<sup>2</sup> [fig. 3] Around 1810, Girodet began work on a new series of more than 170 drawings intended either to accompany an edition of Virgil's *Aeneid*, or perhaps as a separate, independent volume of plates unaccompanied by text.

In a letter dated 17 February 1811 to the painter Marie-Philippe Coupin de la Couperie (1773-1851), Girodet mentioned that he had begun work on an extensive new series of illustrations to the *Aeneid*: *Dans mes soirées et un peu pendant mes nuits, je me suis occupé de votre dessert, et je rapporterai une quinzaine de dessins nouveaux, assez arrêtés, quoiqu'ils ne soient pas entièrement terminés. J'ai plus que jamais à cœur de mettre la main à cette grande entreprise, et je compte m'occuper, de suite, à Paris, de mettre le premier livre en état d'être bientôt gravé. Il faut que je me dépêche, mon bon ami, car les années passent vite, et surtout pour moi, qui ne suis plus jeune.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lines of the Latin text, cited from *The Latin Library* (<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen1.shtml>).

<sup>2</sup> Silvain Bellenger, *Girodet 1767-1824*, exhib. cat., Musée du Louvre, Paris 2005, p. 437.

<sup>3</sup> P. A. Coupin (ed.), *Œuvres posthumes de Girodet-Trioson, peintre d'histoire, suivies de sa correspondance; précédées d'une notice historique, et mises en ordre*, Paris 1829, II, pp. 309-10.

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[During my evenings and a little of my nights I have worked on your dessert and I shall bring with me some fifteen new drawings, reasonably finished yet not fully completed. My desire to address my hand to this great undertaking is ever closer to my heart, and I intend, without delay, in Paris, to achieve a state of readiness such that the first volume may advance to an early printing. Hasten I must, my good friend, for the years pass rapidly, and in particular for my own person, since I am no longer a young man.]

The series appears to have remained unfinished on Girodet's death in 1824 and was certainly never published. His friend, the composer and actress Amélie-Julie Simons-Candeille (1767-1834), reported that an English collector's attempt to purchase the illustrations to the *Aeneid* at the Girodet estate sale in 1825 was foiled when friends and students of Girodet, determined to safeguard his heritage and prevent the illustrations from leaving France, made a counter offer. Candeille also noted that the illustrations were purchased by Antoine-Claude Pannetier<sup>4</sup> for 10,000 francs and that it was he who oversaw the production of lithographs by Girodet's students after 72 of the 182 drawings found among Girodet's effects. The entire corpus of drawings remained intact until the descendants of the publisher Pierre Didot began to sell the sheets individually at auction in Paris in 1971.

Virgil's *Aeneid* was written between 29 and 19 BC. It relates the story of the Trojan prince Aeneas who escaped by sea with other survivors of the sack of Troy and reached Italy, where he became the legendary ancestor of the Roman people. The present sheet illustrates a theme taken from the beginning of the first book. It is the scene in which Aeolus, the lord of wind and cloud, smites the rock with his spear to release the winds from the dark cavern in which, on Jupiter's orders, he had kept them enchained, and unleashes a violent storm. Juno, consumed by wrath and undying resentment towards the Trojans, wishes Aeneas and his fleet destroyed. To this end she has cunningly enticed the docile Aeolus into releasing the winds by promising him the loveliest of her nymphs, Deïopëa, as a reward. The present drawing depicts Juno presenting Aeolus with his bride while the winds hurtle from the mouth of the cave in furious flight. Frail seacraft are shown far below, battling the waves in a futile attempt to flee the approaching storm.

Virgil's account of the episode is as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> See Sidonie Lemeux Fraitot, *Inventaire après décès de Gros et de Girodet*, Paris 2002, p.196.

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*Smouldering, putting these questions to herself  
The goddess made her way to stormcloud country,  
Aeolia, the weather-breeding isle.  
Here in a vast cavern King Aeolus  
Rules the contending winds and moaning gales  
As warden of their prison. Round the walls  
They chafe and bluster underground. The din  
Makes a great mountain murmur overhead.  
High on a citadel enthroned,  
Scepter in hand, he mollifies their fury,  
Else they might flay the sea and sweep away  
Land masses and deep sky through empty air.  
In fear of this, Jupiter hid them away  
In caverns of black night. He set above them  
Granite of high mountains—and a king  
Empowered at command to rein them in  
Or let them go. To this king Juno now  
Made her petition:*

*“Aeolus, the father  
Of gods and men decreed and fixed your power  
To calm the waves or make them rise in wind.  
The race I hate is crossing the Tuscan sea,  
Transporting Ilium with her household gods –  
Beaten as they are – to Italy.*

*Put new fury  
Into your winds, and make the long ships founder!*

*Drive them off course! Throw bodies in the sea!  
I have fourteen exquisite nymphs, of whom  
The loveliest by far, Deïopëa,  
Shall be your own. I'll join you two in marriage,  
So she will spend all future years with you,  
As you so well deserve,  
And make you father of her lovely children.”*

*Said Aeolus:*

*“To settle on what you wish  
Is all you need to do, your majesty.  
I must perform it. You have given me  
What realm I have. By your good offices  
I rule with Jove's consent, and I recline  
Among the gods at feasts, for you appoint me  
Lord of wind and cloud.”*

*Spearhaft reversed,  
He gave the hollow mountainside a stroke,  
And, where a portal opened, winds in ranks,  
As though drawn up for battle, hurtled through,  
To blow across the earth in hurricane.  
Over the sea, tossed up from the sea-floor,  
Eastwind and Southwind, then the wild Southwest  
With squall on squall came scudding down,  
Rolling high combers shoreward.*

(trans. Robert Fitzgerald)<sup>5</sup>

Girodet also made drawings of the two episodes that immediately follow the present scene in the narrative. One of these drawings is now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the other in the Louvre. The Boston sheet depicts the dramatic situation on board one of the ships during the storm. Aeneas, wearied by fear and anguish, stretches both hands to the stars, lamenting his own fate and extolling the good fortune of the fallen Trojan heroes who died on the field of battle beneath the walls of Troy [fig. 1]. The Louvre sheet shows Neptune rising from the ocean bed. Angered by the actions of his sister, Juno, and her accomplice Aeolus, who has usurped his power over the seas, he commands the winds to withdraw and calms the waves [fig. 2].

This suite of illustrations to the *Aeneid* bears little resemblance to the earlier illustrations Girodet had made in the 1790s for Pierre Didot's editions of Virgil (published 1798) [fig. 3]. In fact, it highlights a stylistic break with the illustration designs he had produced under the aegis of David. In the new series of illustrations to the *Aeneid* begun some 10 years later, painstaking modelling and meticulous handling of detail are supplanted by highly expressive simplicity of line. In these drawings Girodet's style of draughtsmanship is often compared to that of his English contemporary John Flaxman and

<sup>5</sup> Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, New York 1983; citations are from the paperback edn., 1990, Book I, pp. 5-6, the translator's lines 73-122.

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reflects a trend that was discernible in England, France and Germany around 1800. The scholar Robert Rosenblum, in his noted thesis,<sup>6</sup> posited that the burgeoning emphasis on outline – to the detriment of modelling and perspective – spawned works that were cleansed to the point of abstraction. Flaxman's renown and influence outside his own country rested largely on line engravings by Tommaso Piroli after Flaxman's illustrations to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Volumes of the line engravings were widely disseminated in Europe. The extraordinary concision of Flaxman's pen-and-ink line drawings has come to symbolise a form of modernity respectful of the ancients but nevertheless oriented towards the future. Their crisp, economical outlines stimulated the imagination of the viewer, who could 'complete' them in his head. Girodet knew Flaxman and was familiar with his line drawings. They were evidently in his mind when he executed the illustrations to the *Aeneid*.<sup>7</sup> The figure of the wind with the outstretched right leg is indeed based on one of Flaxman's illustrations to the *Iliad* – a depiction of the funeral of Patroclus. Girodet would almost certainly have known it from Piroli's engraved version which was published in London in 1805<sup>8</sup> [fig. 4].

Sidonie Lemeux-Fraitot will include the present drawing in her forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Girodet's work.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Rosenblum, *The International Style of 1800: A Study in Linear Abstraction*, New York 1956; repr. 1984, pp. 140-2.

<sup>7</sup> Jay A. Clarke, 'L'Énéide', in S. Bellenger, exhib. cat., *Girodet 1767-1824*, Paris 2005, pp. 451-4.

<sup>8</sup> Piroli's engraving after Flaxman's drawing was first published in 1793; the second edition was published in London in 1805.

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Fig. 1: *La tempête*  
Black chalk on paper, c.1811, 270 x 420 mm  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [inv. 1999.7]



Fig. 2: *Neptune ordonne aux vents de se retirer*  
Black chalk on paper, c.1811, 263 x 420 mm  
Musée du Louvre. Dépt. des Arts graphiques, Paris  
[inv. RF34729]



Fig. 3: *Lamentation sur la mort de Pallas (Énéide, XI)*  
Black chalk, brown and grey ink, wash, heightened with white, c.1790-3, 215 x 165 mm  
The Metropolitan Museum, New York, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection [inv. 1996.567]



John Flaxman, *The Winds fan the Flames of the Funeral Pile of Patroclus*, [Illustration for Homer's *Iliad*, trans. A. Pope, XXIII, 268]  
Pen and ink, c.1793, 202 x 295 mm  
SMPK, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin