

Movement and Stasis in Vergil's *Aeneid*

The theme of movement is prevalent in Vergil's *Aeneid*, yet few scholars have considered how it and its natural counterpart, stasis, manifest themselves in Aeneas' and Dido's relationship throughout the epic. Roger Hornsby has argued that Dido's characterization is simply ancillary to Aeneas' more important destiny and therefore unworthy of deeper analysis (Hornsby, 1970). In contrast, Philip Hardie provides valuable insight on Dido's helpless infatuation with Aeneas and how her role at Carthage changes, yet does not treat Vergil's imagery concerning her movement and change throughout the epic (Hardie, 1986). This paper traces Vergil's usage of the verbs *figere*, *vagare*, and *haerere* within Books I through VI to delineate the rhetoric of movement and stasis that underlie the characterization of Dido and Aeneas and provide new insight into their relationship and Dido's tragic death.

Aeneas is associated with the verb *figere* from the beginning of book one when his crew, and by extension, Aeneas, is beginning to fix the freshly-caught *cerva* onto spits: "*pars in frusta secant veribusque trementia figunt, / litore aëna locant alii flammisque ministrant*" (*Aen.* 1.210). This passage is one of many in Vergil's extended metaphor of Aeneas as the hunter and Dido as the deer which, as M. K. Thornton has shown, creates sympathy for the Dido and portrays the cruelty of Aeneas (Thornton, 1996). This introduction to the deer metaphor primes the audience for the simile in Book IV where Dido is directly compared to a *cerva incauta* (*Aen.* 4.68-73). Before her tragic death, Dido is often described with the verb *vagare* in direct juxtaposition to the stasis and finality provided by the verb *figere*. It is only in Book IV that Dido sheds her mortality and finds stasis in the underworld. Once Aeneas finds Dido in the underworld, Vergil repeats a line from Book I discussing Minerva's attitude towards the Trojans: "*diva solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat*" (*Aen.* 1.482). By repeating this line, Vergil not only emphasizes how

Dido has moved on from her relationship with Aeneas but describes her stasis in the underworld. In death, Dido is finally at peace and is no longer characterized with verbs such as *vagare*. Virgil further emphasizes Dido's change through descriptive mountain imagery. Dido says that Aeneas was born from the rocks (*cautibus*) of the *Caucasus* (*Aen.* 4.365-67). Aeneas uses similar language to describe Dido in Book VI: "...*nec magis incepto vultum sermone movetur/quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes*" (*Aen.* 6.470-71). These similes characterize Aeneas and Dido as stationary and immutable. Horsfall does well to point out that Vergil also emphasizes Dido's stasis through the words *aut stet* (Horsfall, 2013).

As we have seen, Vergil employs the rhetoric of movement and stasis to emphasize Dido's change from *vagans* to *fixa*. This paper argues that Aeneas imposes his immutable fate upon Dido who can only reach a sense of equilibrium in death. Although Aeneas is by no definition physically stationary, he is consistently associated with the verb *figere*. This association is due to his destiny to found Rome, no matter the cost. Thus, Aeneas comes to symbolize the agent of stasis and control while Dido is simply subjected to his actions.

Bibliography

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