

Dido the Seer

While many scholars have discussed the significance of Dido's curse upon Aeneas and his descendants in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, a subtle point that, to my knowledge, has been overlooked in this discussion is Vergil's substitution of the adjective *furibunda* for the usual *furens*. Although various forms of *furō* and *furor* appear frequently in the *Aeneid*, the adjective *furibunda* occurs only twice: once in Book 4 to describe Dido (4.646) and once in Book 7 to describe Amata (7.348). R.O.A.M. Lyne has convincingly argued that Vergil builds up or initiates specific meaning for certain words and then redeploys them later in the epic to "cash in" that created nuance (Lyne 1989: 178-94). I contend that Vergil is doing something similar with *furibunda*. Though this adjective is easy to gloss over as yet another word describing Dido's madness, this paper argues that Vergil deploys it purposefully in order to validate Dido's curse of Aeneas and to connect Amata's actions in book 7 with Dido and her curse.

Cicero provides an informative description of the adjective *furibunda* in the *de Divinatione*, where he connects it to prophetic predictions such as the Sibylline Books (Cic. *Div.* 1.4). He specifically defines *furibunda* later in the work, writing that the "mantic soul sees in advance things which will come to pass" (*furibunda mens videt ante multo, quae sint futura*, Cic. *Div.* 1.114). The association, then, of *furibunda* with bona fide prophecy or truly seeing the future should nuance our reading of the adjective in the *Aeneid*. Vergil's use of the adjective to describe Dido comes just after her famous curse on Aeneas and the Trojan race in lines 615-29. Immediately after, Dido summons her nurse to fetch Anna so that she may be present for her impending suicide. Vergil then describes Dido, writing that "mantic, she ascended onto the lofty pyre" (*altos / conscendit furibunda rogos*, 4.645-5). These ritualistic descriptions combined with

Dido's prophecy create a divinatory scene where Cicero's definition of the adjective is right at home. Vergil specifically uses *furibunda* here to tap into Dido's prophetic nature and verify her prophecy about the fate of the Trojan race. While Vergil's reader does not have the privilege to read on about Hannibal and the Punic Wars which Dido refers to in the second part of her curse, they will find Aeneas and his people struggling to create a new colony in Latium, where Allecto will set in motion the war which occupies the second half of the epic.

Vergil only uses this adjective only one other time in the epic to describe Amata after she has been affected by Allecto's serpent, writing that "mantic from the monster, she throws the entire palace into confusion" (*furibunda domum monstro permisceat omnem*, 7.346-8). Allecto's serpent infects Amata with the frenzy with which Dido was once described. In a ring composition, Vergil deploys this specific adjective to demonstrate that Dido's prophetic utterance is being fulfilled, at least in part. Fantham, Burke, La Penna, and Zarker have already noted ties between Amata and Dido, but not in terms of prophecy (Fantham 1998: 135-53; Burke 1976: 24-9; La Penna 1967; Zarker 1969). Austin specifically calls attention to Vergil's use of *volvens* and *aciem* to describe Amata, which he argues signify prophetic frenzy and connects to previous descriptions of Dido (Austin 1963: n.643, 186). Aeneas and his crew will indeed face the first part of the turmoil which Dido cursed upon them. For, after this scene, Amata conceals Lavinia far from the city and Allecto rouses Turnus and the Trojans to war.

While several scholars have already noted inherent comparisons between the characters Dido and Amata and how Vergil portrays them, they have missed Vergil's intentional choice to use the adjective *furibunda*, which is charged with prophetic nuance, as we see in Cicero's *de Divinatione*. I hope to show that, in using this specific word, Vergil further connects Dido and

Amata, validating Dido's curse and pointing out the war with the Latins as a symptom of that curse for the reader.

Bibliography

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