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# Rhetorical Elements in Homer's Embassy and Vergil's Dido

Emmett M. Ingram

Vassar College, [emingram@vassar.edu](mailto:emingram@vassar.edu)

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Rhetorical Elements in Homer's Embassy and Vergil's Dido

**Introduction**

Ancient and modern commentators agree that Homeric texts were highly influential in the development of Roman literature and its rhetorical style. Admiration for the epic grandiosity of speeches from his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* inspired studied imitation from later speakers and writers, particularly by Roman authors of the republic and empire. Quintilian devotes a laudatory section of his *Institutio Oratoria* to the importance of the blind bard in his list of required reading for students, even calling him the “Zeus” of literary composition. He goes on to write,

*Hic enim ... omnibus eloquentiae partibus exemplum et ortum dedit. Hunc nemo in magnis rebus sublimitate, in parvis proprietate superavit. Idem laetus ac pressus, iucundus et gravis, tum copia tum brevitate miserabilis, nec poetica modo sed oratoria virtute eminentissimus. Nam ut de laudibus exhortationibus consolationibus taceam, none vel nonus liber, quo missa ad Achillem legatio continentur, vel in primo inter duces illa contentio vel dictae in secundo sententiae omnis litium atque consiliorum explicant artes?* (10.1.46-48)

“Homer provides the model and the origin of every department of eloquence. No one surely has surpassed him in sublimity in great themes, or in propriety in small. He is at once luxuriant and concise, charming and grave, marvelous in his fullness and in his brevity, supreme not only in poetic but in oratorical excellence. To say nothing of his encomia, exhortations, and consolations, does not Book Nine, containing the embassy to Achilles, or the debate between the chiefs in Book One, or the opinions delivered in Book Two, exhibit all the arts of forensic and deliberative rhetoric?”

Indeed, Homer was considered the creator and master of all categories of schematic speech to the point that the ideals of Homeric rhetoric became hegemonic in Rome. It will be seen that Vergil himself felt competent enough with this style to make a deliberate break from it in the character of Dido from the *Aeneid*. His desire to create speech beyond the scope of Epic within an epic poem acknowledges the pervasiveness the Homeric literary mindset. First, though, let us consider a classic example of pre-Roman rhetorical discourse from the *Iliad*: that praiseworthy *legatio* from Book Nine. The embassy to Achilles is widely regarded as one of the finest passages of the *Iliad* for its compelling tripartite argumentation, so some investigation of how it really “exhibit[s] all the arts of forensic and deliberative rhetoric” should be in order.

**Odysseus**

First is Odysseus, the man of many wiles Odysseus' speech functions as an *exordium* to the embassy's speech as a whole. The section begins with a *captatio benevolentiae* in which he attempts to elicit Achilles' good will in alternating ways. First he briefly praises the feast Achilles has prepared for the embassy, which might be considered an attempt at flattery *ab iudicum persona*<sup>1</sup>. This section may be as short as it is because the Odysseus is already a good friend of Achilles and has reminded him of this by feasting with him. Odysseus then quickly

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<sup>1</sup> Lausberg 277

transitions into an appeal *ab nostra persona*<sup>2</sup> in which he presents his party as deserving of sympathy. He does this by reporting the direness of the Trojan threat to the Greek fleet with a *descriptio* of the situation. He provides vivid details of the expected Trojan attack, describing the fire (πυρός 9.242) and smoke (καπνοῦ 9.243). He emphasizes the uncertainty of the situation (ἔνδοιῃ 9.230) and his own apprehension (ταῦτ' αἰνῶς δείδουκα 9.244) to suggest his group's helplessness while avoiding any suspicion of arrogance. At the same time that they stir up sympathy, these scenes of destruction also aim to rouse outrage towards the Trojan enemy. This connection is implied by the fact that the Trojans are necessarily the source of this trouble, but Odysseus sharpens this attack *ab adversarium persona*<sup>3</sup> by giving an individual face to the enemy. Odysseus' description of Hector paints him as bloodthirsty and overconfident:

Ἕκτωρ δὲ μέγα σθένει βλεμεαίνων  
μαίνεται ἑκπάγλως πίσυνος Δίι, οὐδέ τι τίει  
ἀνέρας οὐδὲ θεοῦς (9.236-8)  
"Hector, exulting greatly in his strength,  
rages violently: trusting in Zeus,  
he cares neither for man nor god."

Odysseus in this way reminds Achilles why Hector in particular must be opposed: first, because he wishes harm to Achilles' allies; and second, because he is Achilles' rival as best fighter among the Trojans. Odysseus will return to this theme of competition later in his speech.

Odysseus ends his introduction with an early peroration in which he explicitly tells Achilles what he should do next. This mini-*peroratio* consists of two parts. In the first, Odysseus presents the ultimate goal of the embassy: to bring Achilles back to battle. In the second part, he tells a very brief story about Peleus, Achilles' father, when he sent Achilles to Agamemnon. Odysseus takes on the voice of Peleus (prosopopoeia) advising his son to restrain his temper:

τέκνον ἔμὸν... σὺ δὲ μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν  
ἴσχειν ἐν στήθεσσι. (9.254-6)  
"My child... restrain your great-hearted spirit in your breast."

This is a kind of *affectus* appeal, part of the peroration that stirs up the listener's emotions to rouse him to action. Next, Odysseus lists the rewards Agamemnon offers for Achilles' return to battle. The main purpose of this section is to provide Achilles with the facts of the situation. Here Odysseus takes up most plainly one of the three main purposes of rhetoric: *docere*, to instruct. According to Quintilian, the role is often contrasted with the other two main purposes of figured speech: to stir up emotions and to give pleasure to the listener. Obviously the fact that there are gifts to be given plays a central role in the embassy's persuasive agenda inasmuch as they believe it will be the deciding factor. Much of Phoenix's arguments will hinge on the gifts as a token of apology, but these only come into play after Achilles has made clear that material offerings are not good enough. Here, however, Odysseus merely provides an inventory in an

<sup>2</sup> Lausberg 273

<sup>3</sup> Lausberg 276

official capacity as messenger of the king. This information needs to be provided so that later arguments can be built from it.

We see then that Odysseus' speech centers around five main proofs, or *argumenta*. Those are: that Achilles will regret not helping now if he changes his mind later because of the increased difficulty of the task (9.249); that his father told him to curb his prideful emotions (252); that he should accept the gifts and the honor that goes with them (260); that Achilles should honor the men who honor him (301); and that he should kill his enemy Hector (304). These arguments all hinge on either expedience or utility, the two highest considerations of *suasoriae*. In the context of the Homeric hero culture, in which insults were repaid monetarily and honor was closely connected to loyalty, these arguments spring from *loci communes* related to expectations within the heroic hierarchy. That is, the acceptance of appropriate recompense for slights and respect for regional alliances. These undertones give Odysseus' words more weight with his audience especially within this context.

Odysseus also shows his rhetorical skill in what he alters and omits from his speech. Roman advocates and court speakers often had to consider what points not to discuss in a declamation. Tact required the omission of accusations that could not be easily answered and facts that could incriminate the speaker or his client. We see in Odysseus an ease with sparing words in adjustment for the situation at hand that Quintilian describes:

*Propter hoc quoque interdum videntur indocti copiam habere maiorem, quod dicunt omnia, doctis est et electio et modus.* (2.12.6)

“For the same reason the uninstructed sometimes appear to have a richer flow of language, because they say everything that can be said, while the learned exercise discrimination and self-restraint.”

The most important of these omissions in the embassy is any real description of Agamemnon other than his offer of the gifts. Odysseus diplomatically leaves Agamemnon out of the equation, knowing that even a mention of the king could stir up Achilles' anger even more than it has been already. Even worse would be to describe the full terms of Agamemnon's offer: that in accepting the gifts Achilles submit himself to the king. Such an admission at this point in negotiations would surely be a bad idea considering the nature of Achilles' perceived slight. Odysseus also ensures that the gifts do not constitute the entirety of his argument so that Achilles has other reasons to accept his proposition. Thus we see the mastery of the orator at work: Odysseus knows to evoke some emotions but not others in order to maintain complete control over his audience's emotional response. Omission is not the only way the speakers take creative liberties with the truth in the embassy, however. In his description of Hector at 9.240, Odysseus claims to know Hector's state of mind at that very moment as well as for what and to whom he is praying: ἄρ᾽αἴται δὲ τάχιστα φανήμεναι Ἡῶ δῖαν (He prays that sacred dawn appear quickly). Likewise, Phoenix will later show a similar proficiency with manipulative persuasion with his fabricated exempla.

In all, Odysseus' speech can be broken down into three main sections: the first, in which he attempts to secure the goodwill of his listener using appeals to sympathy and contempt for the

opponent; the second, in which he captures his listener's attention with vivid descriptions of the danger the Trojans pose; and the third, in which he lays out Agamemnon's reward for Achilles' return to battle. These sections mirror the traditional plan for a *prooemium*, whose goals are to render the listener *benivolum*, *attentum*, and *docilem*. As far as introductions go, Odysseus' is more effective for adhering to the highest virtue of an exordium, brevity, throughout. He sets the stage for Phoenix to build towards more impassioned, "purple" rhetoric.

### Phoenix

Phoenix's speech consists of a series of stories that function as *exempla* corresponding either to Achilles' situation or to remind him of his relationship to Phoenix. His arguments are based for the most part on ideas of honor rather than utility. In effect, Phoenix's main goal is to remind Achilles of the people to whom he is indebted: first, Phoenix himself for having raised him (434-95), and second, Agamemnon for having offered appropriate gifts as compensation (515-23).

Phoenix begins by responding to the closing words of Achilles' response to Odysseus wherein he suggests that Phoenix stay behind at Troy. This introduction is a kind of *insinuatio*<sup>4</sup>, which takes into account Achilles' expressed hostility to the embassy's proposition. Phoenix reminds Achilles of the close personal relationship they share as a way of shifting the topic of discussion from utility to pathos. He pushes this theme into his first exemplum, which is his own life story. Phoenix's story is basically true, and as such qualifies as a kind of *res gestae* example or a *similitudo*<sup>5</sup>. The fact that the events of his life closely parallel Achilles' current situation suggests that he is more credible to give advice and make the listener more open to what the speaker says next. Phoenix sharpens this comparison by recounting his experience helping to raise Achilles at the end of the story. This section makes the link between speaker and listener unmistakable. From here he transitions into another epideictic example.

His second exemplum is a poetic one. Poetic exempla are less about providing credible parallels and more "a means of *ornatus* and *pathos*"<sup>6</sup>. Phoenix uses this opportunity to expand on a simple sententia: even the gods are more forgiving than Achilles (στρεπτοὶ δὲ τε καὶ θεοὶ αὐτοί, even the gods themselves are open to entreaty, 9.497). Using amplification, Phoenix spins out a description of the gods, hubris, and the power of humility to bring divine favor. Prayers are "the daughters of Zeus" (Διὸς κοῦραι), who follow behind Strife (Ἔτη) and heal the damage it inflicts. Only a man who reveres them (ὄς μὲν τ' αἰδέσεται κούρας Διὸς) can receive their help (τὸν δὲ μέγ' ὤνησαν). With this imagery Phoenix implores Achilles to stop brooding over the damage that has already been done so that he can pray to Zeus and in this way avoid further destruction (Ἔτη). This exemplum is a *poetica fabula* because it deals in lofty imagery and carries a serious moral cautionary tale.

Phoenix returns to arguing *pro honestis* in the next section of his speech, which is about the gifts. He begins by saying that if Agamemnon were not offering such gifts, he would not ask Achilles to return to battle. Phoenix's argument in this case is not really based on the gifts themselves, but

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<sup>4</sup> Bonner 290

<sup>5</sup> Lausberg 422

<sup>6</sup> Lausberg 413

more the fact that Agamemnon has submitted himself to giving such valuable treasure. Refusing the gifts and the pleas of the embassy would constitute a violation of ξενία, a practice Achilles is famous for respecting. From this section Phoenix transitions into another exemplum, his last and longest one.

This passage concerning Meleager is highly altered from the mythological tradition which almost certainly predated Homer's account. By most accounts, the figure of Meleager was known from a story in which he was fated to live only as long as a burning hearth log. His mother saved the log from the flames but later relit it after Meleager killed several men including his brother and uncle. Phoenix's version, however, omits any mention of the log and instead focuses on Meleager's withdrawal from a battle between his people, the Aetolians, and the Curetes. The epic parallels between Meleager and Achilles are particularly pointed in Phoenix's retelling. For example, Achilles earlier in Book Nine described how Hector was afraid to fight him outside of Troy's walls:

...ὄφρα δ' ἐγὼ μετ' Ἀχαιοῖσιν πολέμιζον  
οὐκ ἐθέλεσκε μάχην ἀπὸ τείχεος ὀρνύμεν Ἔκτωρ (9.352-3),  
"As long as I was fighting among the Achaeans  
Hector did not wish to start a fight away from the walls".

Phoenix, crafting his own epic hero for his *exemplum*, describes Meleager similarly:

ὄφρα μὲν οὖν Μελέαγρος ἄρηι φίλος πολέμιζε,  
τόφρα δὲ Κουρήτεσσι κακῶς ἦν, οὐδὲ δύναντο  
τείχεος ἔκτοσθεν μίμνειν πολέες περ ἑόντες (9.550-2),  
"As long as Meleager, dear to Ares, was fighting,  
it was going badly for the Curetes, and they did not dare at all  
to begin fighting outside the walls although they were many".

Likewise, Meleager is enticed to return to battle with gifts but delays, and as a result sacrifices the gifts, the glory, and his people. Phoenix has adeptly expanded and twisted a story whose most resonant associations, ironically, actually work against his aims! The original myth, that is, most closely parallels Achilles' situation through the shared theme of mortality. Just as Meleager brought about his own destruction by defending his allies in the boar hunt, Achilles will cause his own death by returning to battle and killing Hector. Why would Phoenix (or Homer, for that matter) choose an exemplum that needs such obfuscation and explanation?

Let us digress for a moment to explore this question of the poet's choice. Homer had any number of options as to which mythological narrative he could have had Phoenix employ to support his argument. Indeed, Phoenix himself states as much:

οὕτω καὶ τῶν πρόσθεν ἐπευθόμεθα κλέα ἀνδρῶν  
ἥρώων, ὅτε κέν τιν' ἐπιζάφελος χόλος ἴκοι:  
δωρητοί τε πέλοντο παράρρητοί τ' ἐπέεσσι. (9.424-6)  
"In this way have we heard the fame of ancient heroes,  
when furious anger came upon any:

they might be won by gifts and turned aside by pleadings.”

Why, then, would the poet choose Meleager for his tale of *χόλος*? If we accept that the Meleager *exemplum* is suboptimal, we must assume that Homer intends to communicate something deeper. The most rhetorical interpretation is that the poet selected an analogy that was deliberately strained in order to show his craftiness by proxy of the speaking character. But why would Homer make dear old Phoenix the wiliest speaker than Odysseus? Perhaps, as some scholars suggest, the metaphor is not as strained as it seems - they point to the conspicuous etymological commonalities in the names Cleopatra and Patroclus and suggest that the audience would be aware of other mythological similarities not directly referenced in the text<sup>7</sup>. Whether the Meleager story would seem forced or reasonable to an ancient audience, the use of the story as an *exemplum* reveals serious consideration on the author’s part for his listeners’ knowledge.

The Meleager story is the most credible *exemplum* yet because it is historical, despite the fact that the comparison is forced. It marks a subtle shift to an argument based on utility. It constitutes the climax of Phoenix’s speech and of the embassy’s appeal as a whole. The story is greatly expanded with vivid and impassioned language. On a textual level, the comparison is prophetic in the sense that Achilles will in fact return to battle but only after his closest friends are killed. However, Phoenix’s argument in this section seems to have shifted slightly from the original goal of the embassy. Instead of imploring for Achilles to fight at all, this story asks him to return sooner rather than later. It is as if Phoenix already knows Achilles will return to battle and is instead trying to show him how much more glorious his return will be if it happens now. Phoenix says that the task will be easier and the gifts will be bigger; both of these arguments are for utility. Phoenix ends with a brief *peroratio*, whose first part is a recapitulation of his case (return now), and whose second part is a reminder of the honor at stake.

### Ajax

Ajax’s speech is peculiar because it takes place after Achilles has made his final decision not to return. For this reason, and because Ajax is a poor speaker, the speech does not follow the model of his predecessors. However, it does generally follow the pattern of *recapitulatio* and *affectus* that make up a traditional *peroratio*. The only thing missing is the explicit exhortation to action, which is by now unnecessary (Achilles knows what the embassy wants him to do) and hopeless (Achilles has said no already). From his first words Ajax breaks the mold: he begins by addressing Odysseus (*πολυμήχαν’ Ὀδυσσεῦ*, 9.624). As Achilles stands by, Ajax refers to him in deprecating terms: *Ἀχιλλεὺς ἄγριον* (9.628), savage Achilles, and *νηλῆς* (9.632), pitiless one. When he finally addresses Achilles directly, Ajax accuses him of having a stubborn and evil heart (*ἄληκτόν τε κακόν τε θυμὸν*, 9.636-7). This manner of speaking is not diplomatic but is nevertheless effective for being heartfelt and perhaps excusable because of the friendly relationship between the speaker and audience.

The main arguments in this section come in the form of *loci*: a man should care for those who honor him, a man can accept restitution for harm done to him, and a man should accept generous gifts. These truisms are intended to show Achilles how unreasonable he is being. At the same

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<sup>7</sup> Swain 274

time, they remind Achilles one last time of the offer at stake: the chance to help his allies, receive great gifts and honor, and make his closest friends (the embassy) happy. This short speech adheres to the traditional virtue of closing statements: brevity.

### **Dispositio**

As a whole, the embassy speech can be seen as a direct antecedent to many rhetorical devices described by later, Roman authors. Perhaps the clearest of these is the idea of *dispositio*. Lausberg<sup>8</sup> cites Quintilian in explaining that the purpose of this technique was to organize the parts of an oration so as to maximize *utilitas* for the speaker:

*dispositio (est) utilis rerum ac partium in locos distributio* (Quint. *Inst.* 7.1.1)  
“*dispositio* is the expedient distribution of things and parts under their appropriate heads.”

This scheme of dividing a speech into segments could apply either to the entire speech as a whole, or to each complete individual part, or both. Its goal was usually to emphasize one of two aspects: tension or completeness. On the one hand, tension was emphasized in speeches composed of two antithetical parts. Completeness, however, was emphasized in speeches of three parts. Consider how the embassy is a precedent for this model.

First, the three speeches of the embassy together constitute a classic tripartite oration. The three voices contrast with each other, each emphasizing different arguments: one for honor, one for expedience, one for glory. Each voice has its own personality – Odysseus is wily and pragmatic, Phoenix is passionate and personal, Ajax is gruff and brusque. The poet captures the character of each speaker and his relationship to Achilles with tremendous nuance. Each speaker also serves the goal of the embassy as a whole in a way that is allowed by their speaking order. By having Odysseus speak first, the embassy introduces the most important information first: that the Greeks are in danger and need Achilles’ help and that Agamemnon offers great gifts. Hearing Achilles’ response before proceeding to their strongest arguments allows Phoenix to adjust his words accordingly to make them as effective as they can be. Finally, having Ajax speak last, once the listener has effectively made up his mind, is best because his inarticulateness has the smallest chance to damage the embassy’s case. In this way the entire oration employs an effective organizational scheme that maximizes their persuasiveness and emphasizes the individual merits of each distinct appeal. The depth of the scene’s characters and the complexity of their interactions from a rhetorical level would have been a *tour de force* performance moment for the poet and establish it as a worthy predecessor for later *suasoria*.

The degree to which the oratorical underpinnings of the embassy scene came to dominate later Roman practice can be seen in the elevation of Homer as father of Rome’s entire educational system. However, it was not only advocates like Quintilian that idolized Homer, but also poets like Vergil. The best way to dissect his dependence on Homer as a stylistic source is to compare two passages with a common form, so let us consider a Virgilian *suasoria*, his Book Four speech from Dido to Aeneas, to see how Vergil works from and, in this case, against Homer’s precedent.

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<sup>8</sup> Lausberg 443

## Dido

Dido's speech to Aeneas (4.305-330) parallels the general *suasoria* aspect of the embassy scene: whereas Odysseus and his friends try to persuade Achilles to rejoin the battle, Dido ostensibly tries to persuade Aeneas not to leave Carthage. Both of these situations would have and most likely did make great speaking exercises for students of rhetoric. The embassy for its part has always been well-known as a famous *suasoria* and as for the Dido and Aeneas exchange, the fourth-century commentator Servius Auctus describes parts of this passage as a *controversia*.<sup>9</sup> However, the circumstances of the Aeneid scene differ in a few important ways. First, Dido is the only member of her embassy. Vergil has only one voice with which to employ varying rhetorical techniques, which affects the cohesiveness of the speech as a whole. Second, Aeneas does not receive Dido in a diplomatic negotiation as Achilles does the embassy. Instead, Dido chases down Aeneas as he is already preparing to leave. The nighttime setting, the secretive travel preparations, and urgency of both parties charge their encounter with a strong emotional element. Here, the crime has already been committed and Dido has already passed judgment. However, her language betrays a complexity of emotions that prevents her from wholly committing to either condemnation or pleading.

## Structure

Dido begins her speech on a decidedly un-diplomatic note. In her first line of text she insults her listener with the vocative *perfide*, "perfidious one". This opening salvo contrasts with the traditional *captatio benevolentiae*-style *exordium* as strongly as possible. Instead of seeking good will from her listener Dido expresses her own outrage and shock. In this way Dido signals at the beginning of her speech that she has turned against her listener. However, in the next line, she turns around and seems to reverse herself.

*Nec te noster amor nec te data dextera quondam  
nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido?* (4.307-8)

"Does not our love hold you, does not your pledge once given  
hold you, does not Dido about to die in a bitter death hold you?"

Dido asks Aeneas to recall the love and marriage that she believes they shared and tells him that she will kill herself for being wronged in this way. She backs away from the strong attack she began with and instead lists reasons why he should change his mind, as if she still believed this to be possible. Instead of provoking Aeneas' anger, she seeks to provoke his guilt and pity.

These two questions foreshadow the alternating outrage and despondency that Dido will express in the later parts of her speech. They also function rhetorically, however, by provoking the listener to emotional responses. Dido doesn't care how Aeneas responds to her abuse, be it with anger or remorse, as long he expresses some form of emotion. This much would be a success for her, allowing the two to communicate in some meaningful way. Instead Aeneas responds stoically, as is his custom, with consideration only for duty and piety. He speaks of *fas* (4.350), family (*Anchisae* 4.351, *Ascanius* 4.354), and even employs a *sententia* that dismissively

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<sup>9</sup> Servius 4.333

contrasts love with fatherland: *hic amor, haec patria est.* (4.347) Aeneas' response is much closer to a Homeric oration than Dido's in terms of values (compare with Aeneas' businesslike listing of the gifts, Phoenix's invocation of filial obligation, and Ajax's pragmatic evaluation the value of the gifts versus the deprived spoils.) The fact that these two characters seem to completely speak past each other reveals the vast difference between self-consciously Greco-Roman-style rhetorical speech and untrained, passionate speech.

After a harsh opening, Dido transitions into a brief argument based on expedience: that is, that it is too dangerous to travel by sea in stormy conditions:

*quin etiam hiberno moliri sidere classem  
et mediis properas Aquilonibus ire per altum,  
crudelis?* (4.309-10)

“Why do you hurry to send off the fleet in the winter stars  
and go through the deep amid storms,  
cruel one?”

However, instead of pursuing this line of argument, Dido uses this fact as a way to guilt her listener. *mene fugis*, she asks, as if to say, “am I really that bad?” Then she takes on this theme of guilt and pursues it through the rest of her speech. From an oratorical perspective, there are several faults with this section. One is the failure of the speaker to build towards a climax. Traditionally, a speaker would begin his speech with plain language and even tone. Gradually the language would become more florid and the tone more impassioned until it reached its zenith in a so-called “purple passage”, and then concluded soon after. What we have with Dido's speech is a flat line. She begins with already a great deal of passion which makes it difficult to build upon later. If anything, she starts to cool down as her speech progresses. Likewise, her language sticks to a consistently plain, if pointed, level.

### **Incongruities**

Dido's speech stands at odds with expected rhetorical traditions in a few major ways. One major difference concerns the grounds of her argument. That is, Dido does not ground her speech in the most important considerations of traditional argumentation, honor, expedience, or necessity<sup>10</sup>. Instead, she argues from the level of entirely personal, emotional considerations that have nothing to do with *virtus*. In this way Dido refuses to participate in traditional Greek and Roman rhetoric in any but her own terms. Related to this is the uncertainty of the speaker's oratorical goal. Dido seems to alternate between denunciation (*vituperandi*) and dissuasion (*dehortandi*). Even though she begins by hurling epithets at Aeneas, for example, she nevertheless ends with a lament that he never gave her a child, *qui te tamen ore referret*, “whose face would bring you back” (4.329). These are two very different categories of speech, the former deliberative and the latter epideictic. In this regard she never seems to fully settle on her feelings towards her listener in this passage. From the perspective of an embassy speaker, this might be the biggest weakness of Dido's speech: that she lays everything out all at once and too soon. She gives her listener no chance to respond to each argument formulated as a focused

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<sup>10</sup> Bonner 280

point, so that when he does respond she has nothing more to say.

The most unconventional aspect of Dido's speech is that it lacks any form of *dispositio*. Her speech cannot be matched to any traditional division of parts in sequence. Neither does it surpass organization entirely and become chaos, an alternate non-organizational choice. Dido has one theme, emotionality, which manifests itself in various appeals. However, instead of progressing straightforwardly from one category of appeal to another (say, from accusation to pleading) she mingles the categories together. For example, at line 319 she uses one particularly charged word: *oro*. This term, from *orare*, to beg, indicates that Dido is pleading with Aeneas. According to Quintilian, begging is the absolute last resort for persuasion – *ultima est deprecatio* (7.4.17), “the last (defense) is begging”. Within the context of judicial self-defense, it should be used only when there are no other lines of defense remaining. Likewise, in a *suasoria*, begging should be saved for when there are no other ways to convince your audience. Using this word before the very end of her speech shows that Dido is too ready to descend to the lowest possible kind of appeal when there are others she has not fully explored, like the expedience argument. In this way her speech does not accord with the traditional major ordering principle. That is, the *ordo naturalis*. This “natural order” was used under normal circumstances in planning an oration and was intended to present ideas in their natural, logical order. Though some authors identified up to eight subcategories of this order (“*quot modi sunt naturalis ordinis? octo*”<sup>11</sup>), Lausberg mentions two chief among these: *modus per tempora*<sup>12</sup> and *modus per incrementa*<sup>13</sup>.

Instead, Vergil uses a version of the *ordo artificialis*; another, less used ordering principle. Lausberg describes the “artificial order” as a “deliberate (‘artistic’) deviation from the *ordo naturalis*, determined by considerations of *utilitas*”<sup>14</sup>. In essence, Dido's “artificial order” functions as an apparent lack of any order so as to make her appear authentic. Here we see a point of tension between the author's goal and his speaker's goal: Vergil constructs a carefully designed speech in such a way as to make it seem entirely unplanned. This would be wholly expected within the rhetorical tradition if only the speech were not quite so pointedly aschematic. Any Roman orator with training would attempt to impose some sort of order (temporal, incremental, or even thematic). Dido, however, is not a trained Roman orator – indeed, she is not a Roman orator at all. And this is Vergil's real goal: to write a speech (albeit in Latin hexameter) that stands entirely apart from Roman rhetorical tradition.

Dido's address to Aeneas seems to be an example of the kind of inspired speech Quintilian describes that, though lacking in organization, can be more successful than prepared rhetoric because of the passion behind it. In section 7 of book 10 he expounds on the merits of thinking before speaking.

*Nam mihi ne dicere quidem videtur nisi qui disposite ornate copiose dicit, sed tumultuari.  
Nec fortuiti sermonis contextum mirabor umquam, quem iurgantibus etiam mulierculis*

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<sup>11</sup> Fortunatianus 3.1.11

<sup>12</sup> Lausberg 450

<sup>13</sup> Lausberg 451

<sup>14</sup> Lausberg 451

*videmus superfluere: cum eo quod, si calor ac spiritus tulit, frequenter accidit ut successum extemporalem consequi cura non possit.* (10.7.12-13)

“Anyone who does not speak in an orderly, formal and fluent manner is not, to my mind, speaking at all but only ranting. It is never a surprise to me that random talk shows coherence (we see an abundance even in squabbling women) – after all, once the heat of inspiration takes over, it often happens that deliberate effort is cannot rival the success of improvisation.”

Here Quintilian claims that disordered speech is merely “ranting”, while admitting that it can also be effective in its own way. The mention of “quarreling women” is also particularly relevant, perhaps even referring to this very passage with Dido. Quintilian’s use of the diminutive form of “mulier” combined with “etiam” is strongly pejorative. The suggestion that we see coherence “even with squabbling women” implies that angry women are the least likely to care for the organization of their words. Vergil’s Dido seems to be an example of the author expanding into this “disorganized” style so different from the usual epic speaking style. Critics have claimed that Dido comes off better in her encounter with Aeneas, and this is probably true in a general sense. That is, a jury would most likely condemn Aeneas as Dido does because her passion comes through despite her ineloquence, though this is largely because Aeneas’ response is so lame. His passion for Troy and Rome can’t match Dido’s fury, which make his actions seem more callous.

Dido’s passion seems even more powerful because of its lack of clear rhetorical order. Compared to her fiery opening lines, Aeneas’ response at 332 rings hollow and insincere. His speaking style, which might seem normal in another context, is inappropriate here because it does not match Dido’s extemporaneous rebuke. It is too formal (*regina*, 334), too politically correct, too legalese (*pro re pauca loquar*, 337) and seems to embody every criticism of rhetorical speech. This seems to be Vergil’s mission with Dido’s speech. By having these characters speak the way they do, he heightens the contrast between Dido, who is determinedly non-Roman in her rhetoric, and Aeneas, who is overly so. Other oppositions spring from this contrast: Roman vs foreign, male vs. female, emotion vs. reason.

### **Conclusion**

We see, then, that since Vergil was working within rhetorical framework that was in large part indebted to Homer and particularly passages like the embassy scene, his presentation of Dido deliberately avoids those conventions. Instead, he constructs a character whose speech is defined by his culture’s assumptions about women and foreigners. By giving her this style of speech Vergil makes her a richer character for realistically standing outside the expectations of Roman rhetoric without overtly condemning her as foreign and female. In this way he balances the competing demands of author and national poet.

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