Furor and Furiae in Virgil
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INTERPRETATIONS

FUROR AND FURIAE IN VIRGIL

F. Cairns has recently attempted to justify Aeneas' rage at the end of the Aeneid (12.946–47: furiis accensus et ira / terribilis) by distinguishing "between furo and furibundus on the one hand, which are always condemnatory, and furiae and furo / furens on the other. These latter terms may be condemnatory but need not be" (Virgil's Augustan Epic [Cambridge 1989] 82–84). The evidence for the rehabilitation of furiae over furo comes chiefly from Aen. 8.494, where in response to the atrocities and tortures of Mezentius Etruria rises up furiis . . . iustis. But that merely suggests that the whole range of such words is generally condemnatory, and that here when justifiable furiae is provoked, in order to be acceptable, it must be modified by iustus. In response to Cairns' argument, D. P. Fowler has noted: "If you want to distinguish justified anger from irrational rage, you do it more clearly than by using words from the same root" (G&R 37 [1990] 108). I should think this is so, but it is worth noting that the ancients also attempted to make the distinction, though not in a way that will assuage uneasiness about Aeneas' final act: quidam "furorem" pro bono et innocentii motu accipient, "furias" semper pro malo (DServ. ad Aen. 4.474). The observation per se is philologically and critically worthless (as Aen. 8.494 proves); DServ. or his source just needed at this moment to formulate a "scientific" rule so as to blame Dido, as some at Aen. 12.946–47 seem to need to do in order to praise Aeneas.

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