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Graeco-Latina Brunensia. 2019, vol. 24, iss. 2, pp. 225-234

ISSN 1803-7402 (print); ISSN 2336-4424 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): https://doi.org/10.5817/GLB2019-2-15
Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/141764

Graeco-Latina Brunensia 24 / 2019 / 2
https://doi.org/10.5817/GLB2019-2-15

Fluctus curarum
Catullan and Lucretian Intertexts in the Dido-episode of the *Aeneid*

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Abstract

This paper examines the way the depiction of Medea in Ennius' *Medea exul* and that of Ariadne in Catullus 64 constitute the background for the Dido-episode of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Regarding the intertextual relations of the Vergilian and the Catullan texts, I focus on the motif of *fluctus curarum*, the 'flow of concerns' affecting the above mentioned heroines. These Catullo-Vergilian intertextual connections are tinged by the circumstance that the phrase is also employed by Lucretius in his *De rerum natura*. It will be of key importance to observe the way the *Aeneid*'s combined reminiscences to the Lucretian mankind as a victim of illusions and to the Catullan Ariadne as not only a victim but also a product of them lay the foundation of Dido's falling prey to unrealities.

Keywords

Vergil; Catullus; Lucretius; Ennius; intertextuality; Dido; Ariadne; Medea

In this paper, within the framework of the Catullo-Vergilian depiction of women, I examine how the background of the *Aeneid*'s Dido-episode is constituted by the 64th *carmen* of Catullus and – being the model of the Catullan poem's figure of Ariadne – by the story of Medea, known from the classical works of Euripides, Apollonius of Rhodes and Ennius. As the Vergilian and Catullan texts in question are linked with each other by numerous intertextual connections and most of these connections are well known,[1] I will analyze passages that have yet received little attention in recent research. My focus will be on the motif of *fluctus curarum*, the 'flow of concerns', an element that seems to be of crucial importance in both the Catullan description of the abandoned Ariadne and the Vergilian depiction of Dido being in love, and which – though in a completely different context – is also emphatically present in Book 6 of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. The purpose of my study is to briefly review the intertextual relations of the Catullan, Lucretian and Vergilian texts connected to each other by the above mentioned motif, and then to examine the way the Vergilian passages – on some occasions by means of combined allusions – get in touch with the other poetic texts simultaneously.

The opening lines of Book 4 of the *Aeneid* present Dido burning for Aeneas the following way:

> At regina gravi iamdudum **saucia cura**
> vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.
> **multa** viri *virtus* **animo multusque** recursat
> gentis honos; haerent infixi *pectore* vultus
> verbaque, nec *placidam* membris dat **cura** *quietem*.
> (*Aen.* 4.1–5)

> But the queen, **wounded** long since **by** intense **love**,
> feeds the hurt with her life-blood, weakened by hidden fire.
> The hero's *courage* often returns **to mind**, and the nobility
> of his race: his features and his words cling fixedly *to her heart*,
> and **love** will not grant *restful calm* to her body.
> (Transl. Kline 2014)

'Utilizing all the force that an initial line can muster as it prepares its readers for what follows',[2] the Vergilian passage leads the reader back to its three literary antecedents. On the one hand, it recalls lines 286–287 of Book 3 of Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, which inform the reader that Medea has been wounded by Eros, whose 'arrow burned deep in the girl's heart, like flame' (βέλος δ' ἐνεδαίετο κούρῃ / νέρθεν ὑπὸ κραδίῃ, φλογὶ εἴκελον).[3] Furthermore, lines 296–297 of the *Argonautica*'s Book 3 also get recalled, which passage 'compares the way Medea flares up in love to a woman who kindles a fire

1 See e.g. Thomas (1982) and Zetzel (1983).

2 Putnam (2016: p. 154).

3 Gildenhard (2012: p. 260).

at night: "such was the destructive love which coiled around her heart and burnt there in secret" (τοῖος ὑπὸ κραδίῃ εἰλυμένος αἴθετο λάθρῃ / οὖλος Ἔρως)'.[4] On the other hand, the quoted lines of the *Aeneid* recall a fragment of Ennius' *Medea exul*, in which the nurse describes Medea as 'heart-sick' and 'wounded by furious love' (*Medea animo aegro amore saevo* ***saucia***, *Med*. fr. 89 M., 213). By means of the combined allusion, Medea is 'present' both as a young woman madly in love and as an abandoned wife full of rage in the lines of the *Aeneid*'s Book 4 that depict Dido's state of mind. This can foreshadow the Carthaginian queen's fate, that is, she – as a woman deeply in love, wounded by Cupid – will also be abandoned by her lover.[5] Due to these sinister omens, the possibility of a murder committed by Dido can also emerge in the reader, as Medea has first killed her brother, Apsyrtus in order to advance the Argonauts' escape from Colchis, then her children born from Iason as well, after the Greek hero had abandoned her. The thought of killing Aeneas and his companions indeed emerges in Dido after the Trojan hero has abandoned her, when – in lines 600–602 of Book 4 – she mentions it as a missed opportunity that she has not torn apart Aeneas and sprinkled his limbs into the sea, or that she has not served Ascanius to him during a feast. While the first possibility echoes the Apollonian depiction of the *sparagmos* of Apsyrtus, whose limbs were thrown into the sea in order to balk their chasers, the second possibility reminds the reader of the tragedy of Thyestes, so the Vergilian heroine's words recall both the epic and tragic models of murder of extraordinary cruelty. Eventually, the reader's suspicion[6] evolving due to the reminiscences of the opening lines of Book 4 that Medea can be a model for Dido regarding her murders as well, receives affirmation at a later stage of the plot: Dido indeed commits a murderous act in the end – so, in this regard, the allusions in question prove to be proleptic –, but it is not the beloved man nor his child who becomes the victim but herself.

Furthermore, the Vergilian lines examined above are also in intertextual connection with Catullus 64. Lines 249–250 of the epyllion describe Ariadne left by Theseus on the island of Dia, watching her lover's leaving ship:[7]

> Quae tum prospectans cedentem *maesta* carinam
> **multiplices animo** *volvebat* **saucia curas**.
> (*carm*. 64.249–50)

> While she gazed *with grieving* at his disappearing keel,
> *turned over* **a tumult of cares in her wounded spirit**.
> (Transl. Smithers 1894)

4 Ibid. (p. 275).

5 Ibid.

6 I suppose the reader's suspicion evolving due to intertextual connections alone, not due to a piece of knowledge concerning the pre-Vergilian suicide of Dido/Elissa/Theiosso.

7 Nappa (2007: p. 383).

The parallels *saucia cura* – *saucia curas* and *multa animo* – *multiplices animo* make the connection of the two passages obvious. Catullus also describes Ariadne as wounded (*saucia*), and we come to know the processes in her mind (*animo*), similarly to the case of Dido. The words *multa* and *multus* of the Vergilian passage that occur as the attributes of Aeneas' *virtus* and his race's honour (*gentis honos*) also find their parallel in the Catullan expression *multiplices*, which is in etymological connection with them and occurs as an attribute of Ariadne's cares. However, a significant difference can also be observed between the situations of the heroines: Ariadne turned over multiple cares (*multiplices curas*) in her mind, which leads us to the consequence that an emotional ambivalence possesses her, but at the same time the attribute *multiplex* draws our attention to the polysemy of the word *cura*: on the one hand, it can mean Ariadne's love for Theseus,[8] on the other hand, the grave cares arising from this love under the known circumstances, and finally, lovesickness. Dido became wounded by the cares of love, her feelings for Aeneas have just begun to evolve, so the meaning of the *cura* possessing the Carthaginian queen can be associated with the first opportunity taken into account regarding the 'cares' of Ariadne, but the word – through its Catullan usage – might arouse the reader's suspicion that Dido – similarly to Ariadne – will experience other kinds of cares as well. At this point, I have to draw the attention to the word *virtus* recalling Catullus 64 in a twofold way, as Catullus uses this same expression first in the introduction of the *ekphrasis* of Peleus' and Thetis' coverlet on their nuptial bed (*haec vestis priscis hominum variata figuris / heroum mira virtutes indicat arte*, *carm*. 64.50–51), and then in the prophecy of the Parcae about Achilles[9] (*illius egregias virtutes claraque facta / saepe fatebuntur gnatorum in funere matres*, *carm*. 64.348–49; *testis erit magnis virtutibus unda Scamandri*, *carm*. 64.357). In these cases, the word *virtus* should definitely be taken ironically, otherwise Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus at a deserted island and Achilles' rampageous massacre – by means of which he makes a multitude of mothers mourn for their sons and blocks the river Scamander with the Trojans' corpses – would have to be considered as virtues.

Therefore, the Catullan intertexts – unlike the reminiscences of the story of Medea – do not suggest how the Dido-episode could end but how it will actually end:[10] the abandoned heroine will be watching her lover's leaving ship from the shore. However, the effect of the Vergilian allusion cannot be reduced only to this much, as it recalls a Catullan passage which is in an intertextual connection with the opening part of Book 6 of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, so the quoted passage of Catullus 64 also relates the Vergilian text with the *De rerum natura*. But before I explain the effect of this Lucretio-Catullan intertext on the *Aeneid*, it is necessary to examine the intertextual relations of the passages quoted from the earlier poets as well.

Lucretius starts Book 6 of his work with the praise of Epicurus, emphasizing that the Greek philosopher succeeded on proving that 'the human race vainly rolls grim waves of care in its heart':

8 Ibid.

9 Putnam (2016: p. 157).

10 Gildenhard (2012: p. 276).

et genus humanum frustra plerumque probavit
volvere **curarum** *tristis in pectore* **fluctus**
(*DRN* 6.33–34)

[...] And he proved
That mostly vainly doth the human race
Roll in its bosom the grim **waves of care**.
(Transl. Leonard 1921)

Forty lines below, the author condemns the disturbing idea of 'gods rolling great waves of wrath' in their mind as one of the most fundamental human error:[11]

sed quia tute tibi *placida* cum pace *quietos*
constitues *magnos* **irarum** *volvere* **fluctus**
(*DRN* 6.73–74)

Even they, the *Calm Ones* in *serene* repose,
Do *roll* the *mighty* **waves of wrath on wrath**.
(Transl. Leonard 1921)

Regarding the reading of the intertextual connections between Catullus and Lucretius, I take the theory as a basis that – proceeding from the earlier presupposed 'mutual borrowing' – focuses on a special kind of reciprocity between the texts of the two authors, which supposes simultaneous dialogues between them, 'influencing, even retroactively, each other'.[12] Therefore, I will analyze the intertextual interplay of the quoted passages of Catullus 64 and the *De rerum natura*, before I examine their combined effect on the Vergilian text.

The quoted lines of the epyllion (*quae tum prospectans cedentem maesta carinam / multiplices animo volvebat saucia curas*, *carm.* 64.249–250) and lines 33–34 of Book 6 of the Lucretian work both tell us about somebody rolling over (*volvebat* – *volvere*) concerns (*curas*), or waves of concern (*curarum fluctus*) in her/his mind (*animo* – *in pectore*). Besides this, the circumstance of sadness (*maesta* – *tristis*) also emerges as a significant element in both cases, as an attribute of Ariadne in the Catullan poem and as that of the waves of concern in the Lucretian passage. However, the context of the passages largely differs: Lucretius endeavors to corroborate the Epicurean principle according to which mortal fear (and all kind of fear in general) is baseless as the soul perishes at the moment of death, thus humans do not have to be afraid of supernatural punishments, and the gods do not encroach upon their mundane lives. The echoes of lines 33–34 in lines 73–74 emphasize precisely this principle of the *De rerum natura*: the idea of the waves of wrath (*fluctus irarum*) in the gods' minds generates waves of concern in the human minds (*fluc-*

11 Dyson (1997: p. 455).

12 Tamás (2016: p. 2).

tus curarum).[13] On the other hand, Catullus depicts a heroine abandoned on a deserted island, obsessed by mortal fear with almost the same words. Moreover, not even for the first time, as he describes Ariadne at the beginning of the coverlet's *ekphrasis* the following way:[14]

> Quem procul ex alga *maestis* Minois ocellis
> saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu,
> prospicit et *magnis* **curarum fluctuat** undis
> (*carm*. 64.60–62)

> In the dim distance from amidst the sea-weed,
> the daughter of Minos with *sorrowful* eyes,
> like a stone-carved Bacchante, gazes afar, alas!
> gazes after him, heaving with *great* **waves of grief**.
> (Transl. Smithers 1894)

These three lines recall both Lucretian passages: the word *curarum* of line 34 of the *De rerum natura*'s Book 6 gets into the same metrical position with the expression *irarum* of line 74 in line 62 of the Catullan poem, and instead of the word *fluctus* occurring in the text of Lucretius and recalled by the expression *fluctuat* appears as the synonymous word *undis*, with the attribute *magnis*, the parallel of which can also be found in line 74 of the Lucretian passage (*magnos*). Furthermore, the attribute *maestis* expressing sadness can also be found in line 60 of Catullus 64 linked with the eyes of Minos' daughter and also appears in line 249 of the poem as the attribute of the princess herself (*maesta*). Consequently, the doublet *maestis* – *maesta* along with the parallels *curarum* – *curas* and *prospicit* – *prospectans* form a frame for the *ekphrasis* in which Lucretius is also a dominant presence.

Depending on the different readings of Ariadne's depiction in Catullus 64, the Catullan poem and the quoted passages of the *De rerum natura*'s Book 6 can affect each other in different ways. If we contemplate the Catullan presentation of Ariadne's story by itself, not as the part of an *ekphrasis*, it seems that a mutual 'subversive' effect can be observed between the texts of the authors. In her beset situation, Ariadne does not even try to defeat her fears as a wise Epicurean would do and gives honest signs during her monologue repeatedly that she is committed to the *religio* regarded as reprehensible by the Epicureans,[15] for example when she prays to Jupiter or addresses the Eumenides to fulfill her curse. What is more, the Eumenides fulfill the curse for real and Bacchus saves the Cretan heroine at the end, so the text undermines another Epicurean principle, according to which divine forces do not affect the lives of humans. On the other hand, the *De rerum natura* affects the Catullan text in a 'subversive' way by questioning the

13 Dyson (1997: p. 455).

14 Moskalew (1982: p. 174).

15 Tamás (2016: p. 11).

existence of the mythical world itself depicted in the epyllion, which regards divine intervention into human lives possible. However, if we consider the circumstance that the myth of Ariadne appears as a poetic description of a pictorial representation on a mythic couple's nuptial coverlet, we can observe that Ariadne repeatedly draws attention to her own illusory nature in her monologue.[16] Some Lucretian echoes in the monologue also support this interpretation.[17] The epyllion's line 61 seems to confirm this from which we are informed that Ariadne watches the receding ship like a 'stone statue of a Bacchante', like a *saxea ... effigies bacchantis*. The word *effigies* with the meaning 'image', 'shade' or 'phantasm' recalls the Lucretian technical term *simulacrum*, which is often used by Lucretius as a synonym of it[18] (for example *dico igitur rerum effigias tenuisque figuras / mittier ab rebus*, *DRN* 4.42–43). According to Philip Hardie, the expression can refer to all kinds of misleading visual images from 'ghost image' to 'vision', in accordance with Book 4 of the *De rerum natura*.[19] As the Epicurean philosophy regards these as mere fictions, the fictional nature of Ariadne as an *effigies / simulacrum* is also emphasized by the Lucretian intertext. In the case of this interpretation Catullus 64 affects the *De rerum natura* in an affirmative way, as if Ariadne herself is only a product of illusions, her fears obviously would have to be considered accordingly, just like the outcome of the Catullan version of the myth, that is, the *deus ex machina*. Thus, the Lucretian idea, according to which the belief in divine intervention and the fears generated by it are gratuitous and detrimental, receives confirmation.

Being aware of all of this, I return to the interpretation of the first lines of the *Aeneid*'s Book 4. We have already seen the tight interconnectedness of Catullus 64 and the opening part of the *De rerum natura*'s Book 6, however, the quoted passage of the *Aeneid* recalls Lucretius not only through the Catullan poem but also by itself, as Vergil uses some words in lines 4–5 that can also be found in the Lucretian passages examined: Aeneas' face and words have been imprinted into Dido's heart (*pectore*, like in *DRN* 6.34) and the cares of love (*cura – curarum*, *DRN* 6.34) do not 'grant restful calm to her body' (*placidam quietem – placida cum pace quietos*, *DRN* 6.74). If we analyze the intertextual relations of only the Vergilian and the Lucretian passages, the *De rerum natura*'s 'subversive' effect can be observed, as – according to the Vergilian narrative – two gods, Venus and Cupid are responsible for Dido's concerns. This kind of divine activity is regarded to be unthinkable by the Epicurean philosophy, so – like in the case of Catullus 64 – the mythical framework of the *Aeneid* itself is called into question. Furthermore, although Dido herself tends to follow the Epicurean ethics,[20] she still becomes a victim of divine manipulation. Thus, it turns out through the Lucretian text that the heroine cannot become a

16 Ibid. (p. 7).

17 See ibid. (pp. 7–12).

18 Sedley (2003: p. 39).

19 Hardie (2002: p. 151).

20 For example, when Dido speaks for the first time in the epic she advises the Trojans to abandon their fear and cares (*solvite corde metum,Teucri, secludite curas*, *Aen.* 1.561), which words recall the ultimate aim of Epicurean psychology: reaching the state of *ataraxia*, 'serenity' (Dyson 1996: p. 205). For an extensive analysis of Dido's relationship to Epicureanism see Dyson (1996).

true Epicurean. If we take the retroactive effect of the intertexts in question into consideration as well, we can notice that the opening lines of the *Aeneid*'s Book 4 'correct' the quoted passage of the *De rerum natura* – and, as a matter of fact, Epicurean philosophy in general – as the words of Dido, who tries to present herself as an Epicurean, prove that she is ready to believe in fate considered as non-existent by the Epicureans, if it is in her interest (*heu, quibus ille / iactatus fatis*, *Aen*. 4.13–14). What is more, Aeneas will fulfill the *fatum* at the end, thanks to a divine intervention, that is, to the appearance of Mercury.

The interpretation of the *Aeneid*'s quoted passage gets enriched with a new dimension if we take the conclusions arising from the earlier examined interplay of the two works recalled by the Vergilian text into account. Primarily the reading of Catullus 64's myth of Ariadne, according to which Ariadne's figure proves to be not only a victim of illusion but a product of them, can provide new observations regarding the Dido-episode.[21]

Realizing that an Ariadne-figure of this kind of nature serves as the model for Dido's character in the *Aeneid* draws the reader's attention to the circumstance that the Carthaginian queen is also a victim of illusions, as, for example, it was Cupid disguised as Ascanius who has made her fall in love with Aeneas, and she calls their affair a marriage (*coniugium*, *Aen.* 4.172, *per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos*, *Aen.* 4.316), while the Vergilian narrator considers their relationship differently. The similarity of being victims of illusions between Dido and the Catullan Ariadne can result not only in the reader's suspicion that Dido will be seen in a similar situation to Ariadne at the end of the episode – that is, she will be watching her lover leaving by sea –, but also in the presumption that her state of mind will reflect that of Ariadne, and this presumption will prove to be true. As Vergil describes the processes of Dido's mind after the departure of Aeneas:

> [...] ingeminant **curae**, rursusque resurgens
> *saevit amor*, *magnoque* **irarum fluctuat** aestu.
> (*Aen*. 4.531–532)

> [...] her **cares** redoubled, and *passion*, alive once more,
> *raged*, and she swelled with a *great* **tide of anger**.
> (Transl. Kline 2014)

The quoted passage echoes Catullus and Lucretius at the same time through combined allusions: in his own text, Vergil replaces the word *curarum* of the expression *magnis curarum fluctuat undis* of Catullus 64's line 62 with the word *irarum* also occurring in line 74 of the *De rerum natura*'s Book 6, and exchanges the expression *undis* to *aestu*, that is, another word meaning 'flow'. The latter word retains *magnus* as its attribute in the adequate form, which appears in the Catullan and the Lucretian passages as well, in the forms of *magnis* (*carm.* 64.62), and *magnos* (*DRN* 6.74). The word *curae* of line 532 of the *Aeneid*'s Book 4 not only recalls the two passages of Catullus 64 examined (*curarum*, *carm.* 64.62; *curas*, *carm.* 64.250) and the opening part of the *De rerum natura*'s Book 6

21 Tamás (2016: p. 9).

(*curarum*, *DRN* 6.34) but the first line of Book 4 as well (*cura*, *Aen*. 4.1). Through intertextual connections, the word *cura* occurring in the quoted passages recalls its Lucretian 'doublet', *ira*, but in lines 531–532 of Book 4 the two key words appear together explicitly, in such a way that the expression *curae* foreruns *irarum*, which can be understood as an inverse process of the Lucretian logic: while from the first passage of the *De rerum natura*'s Book 6 we can deduce that the reason of human concerns and fears is the presumption of flows of wrath (*fluctus irarum*) in the minds of the gods, Dido's cares of love known from the beginning of Book 4 transform into wrath against Aeneas in the end. A similar transformation of feelings can be noticed in the case of Ariadne as well, who – similarly to Dido – curses the man who has abandoned her. Furthermore, the figure of Medea is also 'present' in the *Aeneid*'s quoted lines by means of an Ennian allusion, as the expression *saevit amor* of line 532 recalls the line of *Medea exul* quoted earlier, that is, *amore saevo saucia* (*Med*. fr. 89 M., 213). As the revenge of Medea and Ariadne has been fulfilled on the 'unfaithful' man, a proleptic function can be attributed to this intertext as well, as it foreshadows that Dido's curse will come upon Aeneas and his descendants, the Romans.

However, the illusory nature of Ariadne underlying the figure of Dido raises several other questions as well, the examination of which – along with the formation of a more complex interpretation – will be the subject of my further research. For example, the question can be of crucial importance of how the appearance of Dido's ghost image as a *simulacrum* in the Lucretian sense in the Underworld scene of the *Aeneid*'s Book 6 tinges the possibilities of the Dido-episode's interpretation arising from its Catullo-Lucretian intertextual connections, but answering this question requires further investigations.

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