



## AP Latin: Vergil 1999 Sample Student Responses

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Both Rumor (Fama) and Iris play important roles in Book IV of the Aeneid. Rumor is described as it flies down through all of Libya, telling of the relationship between Aeneas and Dido. In the first line, 'Exemplo Libyae magnas it Fama per urbes', Rumor is said to have traveled (going) through the great Libyan city. Rumor is then further described as reaching the heads of all individuals through the swift airs. (max sese ... condit.) It is after this vague description of what Rumor does, that Vergil chooses to thoroughly describe how Rumor looks. Rumor has swift feet and wings and is a horrible monster (pedibus... horrendum). The entire creature is bird like in form and covered with feathers, and on every feather are eyes, and tongues, and mouths for each feather. (tot vigilas... aures.). This image for Rumor makes it seem ever vigilant and watchful as well as harmful and potentially dangerous. It comes in the middle of the night (Nocte... medio) and it flies between the land and the sky (terraeque per umbram stridens).

This dark description of Rumor is similar to the description given to Iris. At the end of Book IV, Aeneas has left Carthage and Dido has decided to take her own life on the top of the funeral pyre. She lays on the pyre for a long time, slowly dying, until All powerful Juno can no longer endure the suffering and sends down Iris from Olympus. (Tum Juno... Olympo.) Just as Rumor, Iris comes down from the sky to the Libyan coast. Just like Rumor, Iris is also seen as a somewhat dark figure, she is described going through the Styx river in Hades

and ~~being~~ being the being that sends people to the underworld. (*nondum illi flavum... Orco.*). Iris is then described coming down to the shore from the heavens (*Ergo Iris... pennis*) and stopping above the head of Dido (*supra caput astitit.*). Unlike Rumor, Iris is sent to Earth by the gods for what in this case is a noble thing - finally allowing Dido to die. Rumor, on the other hand is the result of human action and continues to spread and survive as it travels to all the towns near Carthage. In the final two lines, after her brief speech, the Iris then takes Dido's hair in her right hand and cuts it, thus releasing her spirit and her life.

These two characters appear in the two most pivotal moments in the relationship between Dido and Aeneas. Rumor appears once the two have begun their relationship with one another, and Iris appears once the relationship has ended by order of Mercury and Jupiter himself. With these characters, the relationship between Dido and Aeneas is shown to be beyond their own control and subject to only drastic actions and divine intervention.

Twice, while describing the fall of Dido, Vergil employs two vivid characters, Fama, the goddess of rumors and gossip, and Iris the messenger goddess to heighten the drama and tragic beauty of his poem. Though strikingly different, Fama and Iris play a similar role in the presentation of poor Dido's situation to the reader.

Fama, crucial to the plot and to the image of Dido's helplessness, is a vivid and horrible character. Rumors are so important in Book IV of the Aeneid, because without them, Dido may never have killed herself. But Fama is ruthless and "impia," not caring about the troubles her gossip creates. In this passage, "Fama per urbes" (Fama goes through the city) "qua non aliud velocius ullum" (who no other is more swift than she) to tell gossip to the people of Carthage about the marriage of Dido and Aeneas. The reader, who sympathizes with Dido wishes that Fama would brush her hundreds of mouths and slow her swift feet so that Dido's reputation is not ruined when her people find out about her mock-marriage to Aeneas, and the reader pities Dido when Iarbas hears from Fama's mouth that his conquest has married a foreigner. But just as in life today, gossip is uncontrollable and creates struggles out of secrets. This makes the reader understand and pity Dido all the more because throughout her scenes in the poem, she is controlled by the gods and goddesses to such an extent that her

faults even are not really her own. Venus made her fall in love with Aeneas with the help of Cupid, Juno and Venus, with the help of the wood nymphs ~~made~~ arranged their "marriage"; ~~because~~ because fama spread the gossip, Icarus influenced Jupiter Ammon to send Aeneas out of Carthage via Hermes, ~~and~~ thus through Dido's relationship with Aeneas, she has no control. Fama is just another goddess who meddles in Dido's life. One "extra" ~~purpose~~ purpose Fama serves however, is as a sort of social commentary that ties the time of Aeneas, Virgil's time, and the present day together. Gossip seems to be an immortal being and today she is just as swift, unloyal, and troublesome as ever. This connection helps the reader to feel as though the ancient story could happen ~~right~~ now all over again because fama hasn't changed ~~at~~ a bit.

Iris on the other hand, while just as swift as Fama, and functioning as another goddess who exerts some control over Dido, is a very different sort of girl who clarifies both Roman perceptions of death and the tragedy of suicide. ~~Iris is sent by Juno omnipotens to help Dido to her death~~  
All powerful Juno sends Iris down from Olympus, ~~(Juno omnipotens... Iris demisit Olympo)~~ to end the struggle of Dido as her spirit begins to flee her body. Because her mission is a bittersweet but kind one, it is fitting that beautiful Iris, who travels on a rainbow should run to Dido at Dido's bittersweet, yet freeing death. The "various... sole colores"

(various colors of the sun) i.e. the rainbow bring beauty to this sad scene and also illumine the relationship that the people have with the Gods.

This scene ~~is~~ shows compassion in Juno and friendliness in Iris, so ~~although~~ it is really Juno's fault that Dido is in her deathbed, the reader understands that sometimes "there is faithfulness in heaven which cares for such things." Therefore, Iris cuts a piece of Dido's hair <sup>with her right hand,</sup> so that she may enter the underworld and Dido's spirit goes out into the ~~proce~~ <sup>proce</sup>. This scene is very dramatic because it contrasts life and death, the anger ~~of~~ and the compassion of the Goddesses. Dido is also not ~~punished for committing suicide like many modern religions suggest people would be. Dido instead is pitied,~~ yet supported by Juno and Iris. ~~the~~

Through the descriptions of Fama and Iris, Vergil "intensified the dramatic power of each scene" because of the connections the goddesses have to the world and to Dido's life. With them, Dido's story is not just one of a fallen woman. It becomes a spiritual and a divine story, controlled, overseen and ended by the goddesses.

Virgil often calls upon minor characters briefly, who, by some chance or design, in fact have a major impact on the story. Two such characters, <sup>Fama and Iris,</sup> are described in great detail by Vergil. By using vivid imagery, Virgil is able to emphasize the importance of these characters and to increase the dramatic impact of each scene.

Fama, or Lady Fame, is the evil force of Gossip that seeks to cause ruin by spreading ill news. Vergil chooses to make this creature into a monster, a terrible being that haunts the heroes. In lines 1-2, the reader learns that Lady Fame moves through the city of Libya, ~~at~~ unnoticed by its people. Indeed, ~~for~~ for: "parva metu primo," at first Lady Fame is small, ~~and~~ difficult for people to detect. But, as the ~~reader~~ reader sees in lines 4-5, Lady Fame soon stretches so high she hides her head among the clouds. Virgil, with this description, is showing how something so innocent & seemingly harmless as gossip can grow to become terrible and frightening. This also emphasizes the dire trouble that poor Dido is in. Vergil also de-humanizes Lady Fame, making her into a pitiless creature that is both sinister in appearance and demeanor. Lady Fame is a "monstrum horrendum, ... sunt corpore plumae," a horrible monster "a body covered in feathers and "tot vigilans oculi," so many vigilant eyes. ~~Virgil~~ Virgil wants the reader to know that this horrible creature can see every thing; he also wants the reader to know that she has "tot linguae, totidem ora sonant," so many tongues and ears, that Lady Fame

also hears everything, and has enough tongues to tell everyone what she has heard. Not good at all for Dido, should Lady Fame decide to tell a certain African King what she's been doing w/ Aeneas. ~~Virgil~~ Virgil ~~also~~ also dramatizes the scene by giving the reader little hope that the hero Aeneas could ~~even~~ stop Lady Fame, even if he knew about her. For she "Nocte volat caeli medio" moves through the middle of the sky at night and "terraeque per umbram stridon" on the ground, she strides through the shadows. Such a terrible, mischievous creature, as described by Vergil, greatly increase the tension in the story, and provides the heroes w/ a force they can't find, ~~defeat~~ defeat, or even know about.

Iris, on the other hand, is a much more positive force, being a messenger and Goddess of rainbows. She is ~~sent~~ "demisit Olympo," sent from Olympus by Juno. Iris is a free-spirited, rather spritely goddess. She "per caelum roseida pennis" soars through the sky, rather like Mercury. Fearlessly, she travels down to hell, to deliver her message. Virgil describes her as a being both ~~wild~~ wild and loyal, brave, and colorful. She is much like the rainbows she is patron to. She is almost a hero herself, save that she serves Juno, the story's villain.

Fame is a force of despair, while Iris is one of hope. Fame is used by Virgil ~~as~~ as a fearful, destructive force, working only for ruin. Iris forms a counterpoint, becoming symbolic of creation and virtue. Virgil uses the two as avatars of opposite causes - one spreads information to hurt, one to build, while he ~~does~~ does this, though, both are looked upon in much the same way. They are both dangerous, powerful, and "mirabile dictu" wondrous to behold.