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Alexandra D. Mina April 17, 2012

Dante's Dido: A Study of Extended Simile in Vergil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Commedia*

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Abstract

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This project grew out of an interest in defining an aspect of the relationship between Dante's *Commedia* and Vergil's *Aeneid.* I have studied the sequence of extended similes in both texts that illustrates the relationships between the protagonist and his lover. As I hoped and anticipated, there is indeed a meaningful pattern in both sets of similes that is linked to the overall meanings of their respective poems. Furthermore, I would argue that the simile programs are in communication with one another, i.e. that Dante deliberately corrects Vergil with his own reading of what love should be. In approaching two texts with such a rich commentary history, I, of course, could not read more than a portion of potentially relevant work. Nevertheless, as far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no comparative study of the extended similes describing the relationship between Aeneas and Dido to that of Dante and Beatrice prior to this one. Both of these texts have been at the center of scholarly debate: it will be seen that the conclusions of this study tend to confirm both the pessimistic reading of the *Aeneid* and the ironic reading of Virgil and other figures the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.

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Introduction

This project grew out of an interest in defining an aspect of the relationship between Dante's *Commedia* and Vergil's *Aeneid.* Needing to narrow the study to a single and finite aspect of the poems, I settled on studying the sequence of extended similes in both texts that illustrates the relationships between the protagonist and his lover. As I hoped and anticipated, there is indeed a meaningful pattern in both sets of similes that is linked to the overall meanings of their respective poems. Furthermore, I would argue that the simile programs are in communication with one another, i.e. that Dante deliberately corrects Vergil[1] with his own reading of what love *should be*. In approaching two texts with such a rich commentary history, I, of course, could not read more than a portion of potentially relevant work. Nevertheless, as far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no comparative study of the extended similes describing the relationship between Aeneas and Dido to that of Dante and Beatrice prior to this one. Both of these texts have been at the center of scholarly debate. In the case of the *Aeneid*, the debate centers on the question of whether the *Aeneid* is pro or anti-Augustan, i.e., whether it praises the Roman imperial project (the "optimistic" reading) or, instead, puts it into question (the "pessimistic" reading). In the case of the *Commedia* the debate centers on the moral status of the condemned: whether they are in some sense as heroic exemplars of the human spirit or, instead, sinners whose every utterance must be subjected to an ironic reading, given their relegation to hell. It will be seen that the conclusions of this study tend to confirm both the pessimistic reading of the

[1] The spelling "Vergil" is used in this paper to denote the author of the *Aeneid* whereas "Virgil" is used to denote the character in the *Commedia* based on the author.

Aeneid and the ironic reading of Virgil and other figures the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.[2] I turn now to some fundamental background information on Vergil and Dante and their major works.

Vergil lived from 70 – 19 BC,[3] and thus wrote during a time of political upheaval in the Roman republic. The *Aeneid*, written between 29-19 BC, treats the questions of empire, war, Caesar's claim of his descent from Venus through Ascanius – Iulus – the son of Aeneas, the son of Venus. After Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, the struggle for political power began a new civil war in a state which had been at war with itself since 133 BC. After the defeat of the conspirators by the members[4] of the second triumvirate at the battle of Philippi in 42 BC, Octavian and Marc Antony, no longer allies, continued to vie for control and the title of rightful heir to Caesar's power. At the naval battle of Actium[5] in 31 BC, Octavian, Marcus Agrippa, and their Italian allies defeated Antony, Cleopatra – queen of Egypt – and their Eastern allies, leaving Octavian the only survivor and ruler of the Roman state. In his effort to rebuild Rome and maintain his authority as the sole ruler of the empire, Octavian began representing[6] himself as the restorer of the republic and of the *Pax Romana* "Roman Peace" as well as the bringer of a new Golden Age. Nevertheless, this new political and military situation brought with it questions for all about what it would mean for Rome and her subjects. Since Octavian – referred to as Augustus after 27 BC –was Caesar's son and heir,[7] he also claimed direct lineage from Venus. In

[2] These readings will be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

[3] See Perkell 1999 "Editor's Introduction," pp 3 for further discussion of *Life of Vergil* by Aelius Donatus.

[4] Octavian, Marc Antony, Lepidus.

[5] The Battle of Actium is placed in the center of the shield of Aeneas in *Aeneid* VIII.675-728.

[6] See Zanker for more on the development of Octavian's image campaign.

[7] In Caesar's will, he named Octavius his adopted heir, thus giving him the name Octavian.

the *Aeneid*, Aeneas, a Trojan prince and the son of Venus and Anchises, flees Troy with his father, son, household gods, and some of the remaining Trojans in order to found Rome.

In addition to understanding the historical context of the *Aeneid*, it is vital to have a basic understanding of the literary context. Just as one might assume, the *Aeneid* expanded on the literary tradition already established, particularly by Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes, and the tragedians in the Greek tradition, as well as by Ennius, Catullus, and Lucretius in the Latin tradition.[8] Understanding such texts is crucial to Vergil's development of his own unique epic, which did not imitate,[9] but rather appropriated the tradition already established to create a wholly Roman epic. Aeneas appears in literature as far back as the *Iliad*, as well as in a number of founding myths which foretold that he would reign over the surviving Trojans, presumably elsewhere in Asia Minor. In Vergil, he becomes the Roman hero of the quintessentially Roman virtue of *pietas* and the founder of the Roman Empire. Thus, although Vergil certainly drew on prior writings, he created his own version of the Aeneas tale which then became canonical.

Since its publication, the *Aeneid* has been read by students and scholars who have created an extensive commentary tradition. To anyone who has read the text, this should come as no surprise. From the time it was written, most have viewed[10] the piece as pro-Roman and pro-Augustan Imperialism. Contemporary readers who subscribe to this pro-imperial reading are called "optimists." Some have gone as far as to claim that the *Aeneid* is fundamentally a piece of

[8] See Perkell 1999 "Editor's Introduction," pp 7-14 for further discussion concerning the literary tradition of the *Aeneid*.

[9] Perkell 1999 "Editor's Introduction," pp 9.

[10] Perkell 1999 "Editor's Introduction," pp 14-22. This paragraph summarizes Perkell's work in providing a clear and developed account of the various interpretations of the *Aeneid* over the millennia.

propaganda – which is most certainly not the case. Although Augustus did heavily utilize Aeneas[11] in his image campaigns, such a reading of Vergil's poem is overly simplistic. During the Vietnam War, when antiwar demonstrators accused the United States itself of being imperialistic, challenges to the "optimistic" reading of the poem took hold with the Harvard, or pessimistic reading. At this time scholars began to examine the idea that the *Aeneid* was "anti-Augustan" and that Vergil deliberately subverts the ideals of Roman imperialism and raises moral questions concerning the costs of war. Whether or not the *Aeneid* explicitly communicates a "correct"[12] meaning is also up for debate. With my study of the relationship of Aeneas and Dido, I aim to add to the reading that Vergil's poem poses questions of morality in conjunction with war and empire.

Dante was born in Florence in AD 1265[13] and lived until 1321, during which time he composed a number of poems,[14] but the one that will be the topic of this paper and certainly his most famous work is the *Divine Comedy* or *Commedia.* According to Petrocchi, the *Commedia* was composed in the following stages:[15] *Inferno from* 1304-1308, with most of the work completed from 1306-1308, *Purgatorio* from 1308-1312, and *Paradiso* from 1316-1321. The action of the poem takes place on Easter weekend in 1300, prior to the poet's abrupt exile from Florence in 1302 as a result of political turmoil there. In 1274, Dante met Beatrice, a central focus for this study, for the first time and fell in love with her. Tragically for both Beatrice and

[11] Zanker.

[12] Perkell 1999 "Editor's Introduction," pp. 22

[13] Hollander 2001, xi-xiv. Dates of Dante's life are taken from Hollander's chronology.

[14] *Vita Nuova, Convivio* I-IV, *De vulgari Eloquentia*, and the *Monarchia*

[15] Hollander 2001, pp 91 and footnote 115. This is the consensus of most scholars.

Dante, she died rather young in 1290. Nevertheless, Dante never forgot his love for Beatrice. It is Beatrice, therefore, who leads Dante-pilgrim[16] to God in the *Commedia*.

Dante's Catholic epic also has a rich literary tradition, both pagan and Christian, Classical and Medieval. Dante draws most heavily on Vergil, but also on other Roman epic poets: Ovid, Lucan, and Statius. Scholars acknowledge that Dante did not read Greek, and thus, would not have read Homer, although he must have known something from the tradition, how much we cannot say with any certainty. In theological tradition, he was writing after St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Furthermore, he wrote in the tradition of the Sicilian poets, the first Italian vernacular poets, and troubadour love[17] poetry. It is this unique melding of traditions that provides us with the *Commedia*.

Just as is the case with the *Aeneid*, the *Commedia* has its own extensive commentary tradition which began almost immediately after publication. Furthermore, readings[18] of this poem are also almost as diverse as those of the *Aeneid*. Most of the discrepancies in readings the *Commedia* concern the *Inferno* cantica. Traditionally, Romantic – and largely Italian – readers have seen the poet as having great sympathy for the sinners, thus ignoring the moral authority of God that drives the poem. Such a reading, which began to take hold largely in the late-eighteenth century, advocates for the sinners as somehow heroic. On the other hand, the ironic – and largely American and British – reading of the poem places its foundation on the *Commedia* as a

[16] "Dante-poet" indicates the author of the *Commedia*, whereas "Dante-pilgrim" indicates the protagonist.

[17] Barolini, 14-15 "At the heart of troubadour poetry is an unresolved tension between the poet-lover's allegiance to God; the love-service owed to the one inevitably comes into conflict with the love-service owed to the other."

[18] Hollander 2001, pp 104-108. I have summarized Hollander's work on the history of the scholarship. Hollander "Moral Position of the Reader" on Princeton Dante website seems to be the precursor to the chapter discussion in *Dante: A Life in Works*.

Christian text, thus presuming that God is the source of all that is right and just. Therefore, any pity for the sinners is misplaced because they loved their sin more than they loved God. If such a reading holds, as I am inclined to argue, the character of Virgil[19] is then not to be pitied when he is sent back to Limbo, because he does not love God. Thus, as his guide and mentor, Virgil can only bring Dante-pilgrim so far, and, in an effort to surpass Vergil, Dante-poet constantly subverts Virgil and his text.

In the following pages, I set forth the study of the similes in both the *Aeneid* and the *Commedia* that I have conducted. In order to provide a thorough discussion, I examine each text individually. The first chapter, therefore, discusses the *Aeneid,* analyzing the similes that illuminate the relationship between Dido and Aeneas, and concluding with an overall reading of these. The second chapter discusses the *Commedia,* examining the similes that demonstrate the progression of the relationship between Beatrice and Dante-pilgrim, and concluding, again, with an overall reading of these. Ultimately, I end this paper with a discussion of how Dante-poet corrects Vergil's pagan epic with his own, morally superior, Christian poem.

[19] Hollander 2001, pp 116 (footnote 150). "In recent years a growing number of Dante's interpreters have been arguing that Dante deliberately undercuts the Latin poet, showing that both in some of his decisions as guide and in some of his own actual texts he is, from Dante's later and Christian vantage point, prone to error."

CHAPTER ONE**: The *Aeneid*: The Relationship between Aeneas and Dido**

In Vergil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas, leader of the Trojans, lands in Carthage on his way to found a new city for the Trojans after Troy has been defeated. Dido, the queen of Carthage, welcomes Aeneas and his men out of pity and compassion for their suffering. As the two leaders become preoccupied with their romance, Aeneas becomes distracted from his mission to found Rome and Dido from her duties as queen of Carthage. After Mercury appears to remind Aeneas of his mission, Aeneas decides to leave Carthage, but Dido, already consumed by love, spirals further out of control when she learns of Aeneas' departure. In hysteria and despair, she commits suicide, thus leaving Carthage without a leader. The development of the relationship between Aeneas and Dido can be traced through similes and through other comparisons, implicit or direct, that also function as similes. Sources[20] indicate that Vergil was likely the first to tell about the romance between Aeneas and Dido. He represents the relationship between the two lovers as extremely destructive, primarily for Dido and Carthage, in both the short and the long[21] run. The relationship also has negative consequences for Aeneas and the Trojan undertaking because it distracts from the mission. Because the reader is made in many ways to sympathize with Dido's plight and therefore implicitly to question the wrong done to her in the name of Rome, the destruction that Aeneas and his men leave behind raises an important moral question about the Roman mission and its consequences. The program of similes in Book

[20] Austin *Aeneid* IV "The Fourth Book is all Virgil's own, in the spirit of its conception, in the problems of which it treats, and in the manner of its working out" (pp. xvi); O'Hara *Aeneid* IV "either Vergil or the third-century BCE Roman poet Naevius invented the story of their [Aeneas and Dido's] love" (pp 13-14); Perkell 1981,362-363.

[21] Hannibal becomes her "avenger" in the Second Punic War in 146 BC in which Carthage was defeated.

IV has often been commented on individually and collectively by others[22] in order to better understand how Vergil characterizes Dido. To these, I add my own reading of the similes concerning Dido and Aeneas in order to illuminate further the tragic course of their relationship. For each simile, I will provide the context, the text, in both Latin and English, and an analysis.

When Aeneas and his men arrive in Carthage, they find a thriving city in which the hard working people are compared to bees. At this point in the narrative, the reader has not yet met Dido – she has only been introduced by Venus's account to Aeneas in which Venus elicits strong sympathy, in both Aeneas and the reader, on Dido's behalf as an innocent victim of her brother's greed and violence (*Aeneid* I.340-370). The state of the city also reflects well on Dido [23] as a powerful and productive leader. Therefore, while the first simile is not a comparison of either Aeneas or Dido, it reveals a great deal about Dido's character prior to Aeneas's arrival in Carthage and is significant for establishing Aeneas' impact on Dido as well as the city of Carthage.

Qualis[24] *apes aestate nova per florea rura*
exercet sub sole labor, cum gentis adultos
educunt fetus, aut cum liquentia mella
stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas,
aut onera accipiunt venientum, aut agmine facto
ignavum fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent:
fervet opus, redolentque thymo fragrantia mella.

[22] See Austin, O'Hara, Pöschl, and Spence.

[23] While this may certainly causes a modern reader to make an implicit comparison between Dido and a queen bee, the ancients did not know that the head of the hive was a queen, but rather believed it to be a king. (*Georgics* IV) Therefore, Dido is compared with a king, not a queen, thus characterizing her as masculine.

[24] Latin text was obtained from Perseus Digital Library.

> *Just*[25] *as a swarm of bees in the early summer toils under the sun through the flowery countryside, when some of the hive lead out the young having grown, some pack the cells with oozing honey and distend the cells with sweet nectar while others accept the burdens of those returning, while others, in a column, drive out the drones, a lazy flock, from the hives: the work buzzes, and the honey is fragrant with thyme.*
>
> *Aeneid* I.430-436

Although this simile has important predecessors in the literary[26] tradition, for this paper its significance rests primarily on its illustration of the Carthaginians, who build up their city diligently and productively, most certainly under Dido's orders. In this comparison, different groups of bees are relegated to different tasks in an extremely meticulous and efficient manner, exemplifying the way in which the Carthaginians are building their city. They are so productive - as indeed the Carthaginians themselves were historically - that there is absolutely no place in the hive (*praesepibus*) for lazy (*ignavum*) drones (*fucos*), just as one can certainly imagine that there is no place for lazy men constructing their city. Furthermore, the bees' labor results in fragrant honey, while the men's results in a beautiful city, thus, proving that Dido is a beneficial queen who takes tremendous pride in her city. At this sight, Aeneas exclaims his praise "O Fortunate ones whose city walls now rise" ("O *fortunati, quorum iam moenia surgunt*), and expresses his desire[27] for his own city walls

[25] Translations of the *Aeneid* are my own unless otherwise specified.

[26] See Austin ad *Aeneid* I.430ff: Vergil's refers to *Georgics* as well as Epictetus, Hesiod, Apollonius of Rhodes.

[27] Servius ad loc: *...bene 'fortunati', quia iam faciunt quod ipse desiderat. O FORTUNATI expressit Aeneae desiderium. QUORUM IAM MOENIA SURGUNT laus vela ab ipsa re sumitur quae laudatur.:* They are "fortunate" because they now build what he himself longs for. 'O Fortunate ones' expresses Aeneas's desire. 'Whose walls now rise' praise is taken up by the matter itself which he praises" Servius commentary obtained from Perseus Digital Library. Translations of Servius are my own unless otherwise specified.

(*Aeneid* I.437). Initially, Dido exhibits strong authority in the development of her city, a trait that Aeneas admires in Dido even though he does not yet know her.

One might expect that part of their labor resulted in the construction of the temple dedicated to Juno that Aeneas and Achates admire in the first ekphrasis of the poem (*Aeneid* I.456-493). The doors depict images of the Trojan War that Aeneas admires and identifies as sympathetic towards the Trojans. It has now been established to the satisfaction of many scholars that this is an obvious misreading of the images because Aeneas fails to take into account the context of carvings, which are on a temple to Juno who supported the Greeks in the war; it is much more likely, therefore, that the images taken as a whole celebrate Greek victory at Troy rather than mourn the Trojan defeat. Just as Aeneas catches sight of the image of Penthesila, whom he sees as "a woman who dares to contest with men," he sees Dido, thus, paralleling Dido and Penthesilea and anticipating[28] her tragic end (*Aeneid* I.493).

> *Ducit Amazonidum lunatis agmina peltis*
> *Penthesilea furens, mediisque in milibus ardet,*
> *aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae,*
> *bellatrix, audetque viris concurrere virgo.*
>
> *Penthesilea raging leads the battle lines of Amazons with their crescent shaped shields and shines in the middle of the soldiers, a gold belt fastened underneath her naked breast, a woman warrior, and a maiden, she dares to contest with men.*
>
> *Aeneid* I.490-493

According to some versions of the myth, Achilles kills Penthesilea just as the two of them fall in love, suggesting that the juxtaposition of the two women does not bode well for Dido. Vergil

[28] Perkell 1999, "*Aeneid* I: An Epic Program," 46.

stresses her current role as leader by placing the verb *ducit* "she leads" emphatically at the beginning of the description of the image. Moreover, he delays the subject, *Penthesilea*, until the next line, utilizing enjambment for emphasis. *Penthesilea, furens* "raging," is associated with *furor*, a force of chaos and disorder as part of a thematic[29] program in *Aeneid* I in which *imperium* "power/order," and later on "empire," attempt to control *furor.* Therefore, Penthesilea constitutes a challenge to *imperium,* as Dido will prove to be as the narrative progresses. The final line of the image is framed by *bellatrix* and *virgo,* calling attention to Penthesilea's status as warrior and maiden in a male dominated world similar to Dido's, who is, as Venus points out earlier, *dux femina facti* "a woman made general" (*Aeneid* I.364). This comparison with Penthesilea – who meets a tragic end – foreshadows a similar fate for Aeneas and Dido's relationship.

When Aeneas observes Dido entering the temple, he compares her to Diana alluding[30] to a scene in the *Odyssey* in which Nausicaa is compared to Artemis (*Odyssey* VI.102-109).

> *Haec dum Dardanio Aeneae miranda videntur,*
> *dum stupet, obtutuque haeret defixus in uno,*
> *regina ad templum, forma pulcherrima Dido,*
> *incessit magna iuvenum stipante caterva.*
> *Qualis in Eurotae ripis aut per iuga Cynthi*
> *exercet Diana choros, quam mille secutae*
> *hinc atque hinc glomerantur oreades; illa pharetram*
> *fert umero, gradiensque deas supereminet omnis:*
> *Latonae tacitum pertemptant gaudia pectus:*
> *talis erat Dido, talem se laeta ferebat*
> *per medios, instans operi regnisque futuris.*
>
> *While these things seemed necessary to marvel at to Dardanian*
> *Aeneas, while he was amazed and motionless fixed in one gaze,*

[29] Perkell 1999, "*Aeneid* I: An Epic Program," 35-36.

[30] Austin ad *Aeneid* I.498ff.

> *queen Dido, most beautiful in form, came to the temple with a large crowd of youths gathered around. Just as Diana leads the dancers on the banks of the Eurota or through the peaks of Cynthus, Diana leads 1000 Oreades followers collected here and there; she carries a quiver on her shoulder, and as she walks she stands out among all the goddesses: Joy fills the silent breast of Latona: so was Dido, as she, joyful walked through the middle of the crowd, urging on the work for her coming kingdom.*
>
> *Aeneid* I.494-504

A number of scholars[31] have considered Vergil's use of this Homeric simile to be out of place and somehow inappropriate as Dido is giving orders to her subjects, not dancing with maidens. In response to this, Pöschl[32] notes Dido's happiness as her state of being before her *peripeteia,* reversal of fortune. He argues that, just as characters of tragedy, Dido begins as a fortunate character, since she is a proud leader of a growing city, but will soon experience a fall from such fortune. By focusing on Dido's current happiness, Vergil makes her *peripeteia* all the more tragic. Pöschl has also noted that Dido's current joy stands in contrast[33] to Aeneas' melancholy, but this, too, will change. Furthermore, Perkell[34] proposes that Vergil's intention is precisely that this simile be inappropriate because Dido is misread by Aeneas, thus providing an ironic reading of the simile in contrast to Pöschl's.

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[31] Williams ad loc.

[32] Pöschl, 61 "The dark drama of Dido begins with a happy scene. This contrast according to the rules of classical composition adds emphasis to the tragic aspect of the poem. In the mind of the reader Dido's joy contrasts with her subsequent sorrow, her constant interest in the growth of Carthage with that city's destruction."

[33] Pöschl, 63 "In stark contrast to Aeneas' melancholy contemplation of Trojan reliefs, it ripples with joy. Here, Aeneas' mournful quietude is contrasted with her happy plans for her dominion's future. Subsequently, this is all reversed. Troy will rise again more gloriously; Carthage will fall. The fatal reversal in Dido's life is balanced by the happy change in Aeneas' life."

[34] Perkell 1999 "*Aeneid* I: An Epic Program," 47.

Moreover, Austin[35] has carefully noted the differences between Vergil and Homer, which make this simile distinctly Vergilian: "Virgil's concern is to show Dido's happiness (*talem se laeta ferebat*, 503) as she came intent on her city's business, *instans operi;* her beauty is secondary...Virgil marks Dido's happiness in her royalty by stressing Diana's leadership while her nymphs follow (499)." Austin has also called to our attention that the adjective *laeta* "happy" describing Dido in this instance while the epithet *infelix* "unhappy" or "unlucky" will first be attributed to her in line 712 of Book I when she begins to fall in love with Aeneas; therefore, this change in adjectives foreshadows her tragedy. Before she meets Aeneas, she is *laeta*, and after she meets him, she is *infelix*. Keeping in mind that the focalization of this description is through Aeneas' eyes, we will note that he sees Dido as Diana, a strong virginal goddess of the hunt. This perception is not entirely correct because as a widow, Dido is not a virgin, nor does she prove to be nearly as composed as Aeneas initially assumes. At this moment, he views Dido as a strong and confident leader who urges her subjects to work (*instans opera*), thus misreading Dido in the same way that he had misread the temple doors.

Aeneas narrates the story of the fall of Troy and his wanderings afterward to Dido in Books II and III, [36] but then there is a shift in focalization[37] in Book IV from Aeneas to

[35] Austin ad *Aeneid* I.498ff.

[36] Spence, 94-95 observes: "Vergil constructs his text in such a way as to make Book 4, when seen from certain angles, narratologically excisable. Book 3 ends in Sicily, Book 5 picks up en route to Sicily, where Book 3 left off. The detour caused by Juno that leads to Aeneas' trip to Carthage is as much of a digression as is his love for Dido."

[37] Spence, 83: *At regina,* "but the queen" indicating a shift in focus (*Aeneid* IV.1).

Dido. Because she does not wish to break her vow[38] to her deceased first husband Sychaeus, Dido conveys her distress at her feelings of love for Aeneas to her sister Anna, seeking Anna's advice on the matter (*Aeneid* IV.9-29).

> *Anna (fatebor enim) miseri post fata Sychaei*
> *coniugis et sparsos fraterna caede penatis*
> *solus hic inflexit sensus animumque labantem*
> *impulit. agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae.*
>
> *Anna, indeed (I will confess) that after the death of my wretched husband Sychaeus, and the penates scattered by brotherly slaughter, he [Aeneas] alone has bent my feelings and challenged my tottering spirit. I recognize the signs of the ancient flame.*
>
> *Aeneid* IV. 20-23

In the quote above, Dido expresses her love for Aeneas to her sister Anna, comparing her current feelings to those that she once had for Sychaeus, her first husband. As she states here, her marriage ended tragically when her brother murdered her husband, and she had to flee from Tyre to Carthage with her people, thus creating an ominous forecast for her relationship with Aeneas. Also, she seems to have completely ignored Aeneas's description of his mission in Books II and III. The first simile of Book IV compares the way that Dido rages on account of her feelings toward Aeneas to the way that a hind does when it is struck by a spear.

> *uritur infelix Dido totaque uagatur*
> *urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerua sagitta,*
> *quam procul incautam nemora inter Cresia fixit*
> *pastor agens telis liquitque uolatile ferrum*
> *nescius: illa fuga siluas saltusque peragrat*
> *Dictaeos; haeret lateri letalis harundo*

[38] Pöschl, 91 claims that betrayal of this vow makes Dido guilty.

> *Unhappy Dido burns and wanders, raging through the whole city, just as a hind shot by an arrow hurled, a hind which, wounded from a distance, a shepherd while driving his spears struck among the Cresian groves, and unaware, left the deadly iron. The hind roams through the forests and the marshes of Crete in flight. The deadly reed sticks in her side.*
>
> *Aeneid* IV.68-73

In this simile, Dido is compared to a deer and Aeneas to a shepherd. By emphatically placing Dido in the middle of the two actions that frame the line, *uritur* "burning" and *vagatur* "wandering," the poet paints a vivid picture of Dido's helpless and frantic state. Using the same word, *furens*, here as was used to modify Penthesilea earlier, the poet connects the two women once again. *Furens* modifies Dido, thus aligning her with *furor* against Aeneas, the embodiment of *pietas*[39] and *imperium*. Moreover, the poet adds *pathos* by describing the deer as *incautam* "wounded" *procul* "from a distance" causing us to sympathize[40] with Dido as a defenseless animal. A shepherd throwing spears (*telis*) emphatically unaware[41] (*nescius*) that he has hit the deer is likened to Aeneas who is also unaware of the pain and love that Dido experiences. The hind, still hurt, continues to wander through the forest just as Dido continues to suffer silently. Furthermore, the representation of Aeneas as hunter and Dido as hunted[42] upsets the balance of the relationship that existed earlier. Dido is driven into frenzy as she is consumed by her

[39] I most certainly do not suggest that Aeneas is consistently a force of control and rationale as he will be overcome by *furor* at the end of Book XII, but he certainly maintains a sense of restraint in dealing with Dido, thus standing in contrast to her frenzied state.

[40] Pöschl, 80 suggests that "the image of the noble, suffering animal moves us to compassion."

[41] Pöschl, 80 suggests that this is an indication that Aeneas is guiltless. On the other hand, Austin ad loc suggests that *illa* following *nescius* adds "unconscious cruelty" to Aeneas' actions. See also Williams ad *Aeneid* IV.69ff.

[42] See Spence, 84 for a discussion on Dido and sacrificial imagery.

passion, but the implication of Aeneas as *nescius* is that he has without intending to, wounded her with passion for him and, therefore, likely does not feel the same way. The epithet *infelix*, unlucky or ill-starred, used here for the first time in Book IV is attributed to Dido seven times throughout the poem,[43] inviting us to pity her since she is no longer *laeta* "happy," and there is no hope[44] for her to remove the fatal arrow that is stuck in her.

In the following simile, Aeneas and Dido prepare to hunt as Dido tries to ward off divine punishment for breaking her vow to her first husband. This association with hunting will recall the hind simile.

> *qualis ubi hibernam Lyciam Xanthique fluenta*
> *deserit ac Delum maternam inuisit Apollo*
> *instauratque choros, mixtique altaria circum*
> *Cretesque Dryopesque fremunt pictique Agathyrsi;*
> *ipse iugis Cynthi graditur mollique fluentem*
> *fronde premit crinem fingens atque implicat auro,*
> *tela sonant umeris: haud illo segnior ibat*
> *Aeneas, tantum egregio decus enitet ore.*
>
> *Just as when Apollo leaves the Lycian winter camp and the streams of the Xanthus and visits maternal Delos and he renews the dances, and crowded about the altars Cretans and Dryopes and the tattooed*[45]*Agathyrsi roar. He himself walks on the peaks of Cynthus and shaping his flowing hair he binds it with a soft reed and he fastens it with gold. The arrows resound on his shoulders. By no means less slowly did Aeneas go than Apollo; so much splendor shone forth from his beautiful face.*
>
> *Aeneid* IV.143-150

[43] O'Hara ad *Aeneid* IV.68- 69: *Aeneid* I.712, 749; IV.68, 450,529, 596; VI.456.

[44] See Williams ad *Aeneid* IV.69ff; O'Hara ad *Aeneid* IV.69-73.

[45] Austin ad *Aeneid* IV.146.

A simile that ripples out as Aeneas prepares to leave for the hunt with Dido compares[46] Aeneas to Apollo. I aim to establish the parallels between this simile and the one it recalls in Book I, which compares Dido to Diana. In this case, the dances that Apollo renews *instauratque choros* echo the *exercet Diana choros* of the Diana simile. Also, Apollo carries a quiver on his shoulders (*tela sonant umeris*) that resemble the one in Diana's description earlier (*illa pharetram/fert umero*). While Aeneas is cast in a similar light as Dido, the two are no longer equals because, tragically, Dido is no longer in a mental state worthy of being compared to Diana, even though Dido's manner of dress prior to their departure for the hunt is suitable for the virginal goddess. Aeneas still maintains authority and composure, but Dido has spun out of control similar to a hind that has been shot. Furthermore, this description alludes[47] to a scene in the *Iliad* when Apollo comes to bring the plague on the Greeks for failing to ransom Chryseis back to her father, a priest of Apollo (*Iliad* I.146). O'Hara[48] has suggested that this is an indication that Aeneas will bring harm to Dido, as Apollo did to the Greeks.

Following this scene, the two spend a night together in a cave, an event which Dido believes to indicate marriage[49] between the two of them; Aeneas, however, does not. This scene alludes to one in Apollonius' *Argonautica* in which Jason and Medea are formally

[46] Williams ad loc notes three key parts to this similes: 1) the beauty and majesty of Aeneas/Apollo 2) a hunting and archery motif. 3)the recollection of the Dido and Diana simile.

[47] O'Hara ad *Aeneid* IV.149.

[48] O'Hara ad *Aeneid* IV.149.

[49] Feeney suggests that the lack of formal wedding ceremony means that no wedding took place.

married. Williams[50] carefully notes the joy and clarity of the scene in the *Argonautica* versus the lack of formal ceremony in the *Aeneid* (*Argonautica* IV.1130ff). He further observes that because Dido sees their relationship as marriage, she no longer feels compelled to hide her passion.

> nec iam furtiuum Dido meditatur amorem:
> coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.
>
> No longer does Dido pursue a secret love: she calls it marriage, by this name she covers her fault.[51]
>
> *Aeneid* IV.171-172

Therefore, when Dido realizes that Aeneas is planning[52] to leave Carthage, she becomes extremely frantic as if a raging Bacchante, as she intends to confront him.

> *saeuit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem*
> *bacchatur, qualis commotis excita sacris*
> *Thyias, ubi audito stimulant trieterica Baccho*
> *orgia nocturnusque uocat clamore Cithaeron.*
>
> *Powerless in her mind she rages and she, inflamed behaves as a Bacchante through the whole city, just as a Thyiad having been stirred up by the sacred rites, when the voice of Bacchus is heard, the third year rites spur on and nocturnal Mt. Cithaeron calls with a shout.*
>
> *Aeneid* IV.300-303

[50] Williams ad *Aeneid* IV.166ff.

[51] I have translated *culpa* as "fault" even though this may come across as harmless in English. Williams ad loc has suggested "sin," but the Christian connotations of "sin" make me inclined to choose a different translation.

[52] Spence, 86 She suggests that this is Dido's *peripeteia.*

In this simile, Vergil captures Dido's feelings as helpless and powerless, generating sympathy for her from the reader once again. The poet stresses her unstable condition by positioning *saevit,* "rages," at the beginning of the line and *bacchatur* "act like a Bacchante" at the beginning of the next line for emphasis, thus framing the compound sentence with two verbs illustrating a wild state. Also attributed to Dido, are the adjectives, *inops* "powerless" and *incensa* "burning up" or "inflamed," which further reflect Dido's mental state as she is compared to a raging[53] Bacchante. The Bacchantes were female followers of Bacchus (or Dionysus) who were known for their frenzied state. Bacchus is a deity associated with ecstasy, literally "to stand outside of oneself," and enthusiasm, literally "the god within." Therefore, to compare Dido to such a woman is to clearly indicate that Dido's reason and rationality are overwhelmed by emotions regarding Aeneas' imminent departure. Thus, she stands in remarkable contrast to the description of Aeneas as Apollo.

In the following simile, Aeneas is compared to a tree being assailed by winds as he endures Anna's words of Dido's emotional response to his departure.

> *ac uelut annoso ualidam cum robore quercum*
> *Alpini Boreae nunc hinc nunc flatibus illinc*
> *eruere inter se certant; it stridor, et altae*
> *consternunt terram concusso stipite frondes;*
> *ipsa haeret scopulis et quantum uertice ad auras*
> *aetherias, tantum radice in Tartara tendit:*
> *haud secus adsiduis hinc atque hinc uocibus heros*
> *tunditur, et magno persentit pectore curas;*
> *mens immota manet, lacrimae uoluuntur inanes.*

[53] Williams ad loc suggests that the comparison between Dido and a Bacchante has a self destructive quality to it that we have not yet seen. Her passion has previously been characterized as a lack of control, but now there is an element, according to Williams, that makes her destructive.

> *And just as when Alpine North Winds struggle among themselves to overturn a strong oak with aged timber with blasts now here now there. Roaring rises and the lofty leaves scatter the trunk violently shaken; it, itself, sticks to the rocks and as much as it stretches with the top towards the breezes of the aether, so much it stretches into Tartarus with the root: even so the hero is shaken by unceasing appeals from every side and feels the cares deeply in his great breast; his mind remains unmoved; useless tears are rolling down.*
>
> *Aeneid* IV.441-449

In this comparison, Aeneas is the strongly rooted tree that cannot be moved by the storm. Dido's emotions are the storm. Once again we have the dichotomy of order and disorder in which Aeneas represents the order and Dido the disorder. Aeneas is described as *validam quercum* "a strong oak" with *mens immota manet* "his mind remains unmoved" in contrast to Dido who is unable to withstand *furor*. Servius[54] notes that Aeneas is not entirely unmoved, but still does not allow his tears here described as *inanes,* "useless," to deter him from what he must do. Expanding on this, Pöschl[55] explains that these tears are Aeneas', not Anna's, and uses this to further his argument that Aeneas is blameless. Nevertheless, the ambiguity[56] of precisely to whom these tears belong is still up for debate.

After her pleas have fallen on deaf ears, Dido resolves to die and interprets many signs as confirmation that it is appropriate for her to do so. One such portent is her

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[54] Servius ad *Aeneid* IV.44 *FRONDES sicut lacrimae Aeneae* "The leaves are just as the tears of Aeneas."

[55] Pöschl, 47.

[56] Williams ad *Aeneid* IV.449 "The fact is that Virgil has not said whose tears; by not specifying he widens the area of sorrow, generalizes this particular conflict into the universal conflict of pity with duty."

nightmare in which Aeneas is pursuing her. Then, she is equated with two key figures of Greek tragedy – Pentheus and Orestes. [57]

> *...agit ipse furentem*
> *in somnis ferus Aeneas, semperque relinqui*
> *sola sibi, semper longam incomitata uidetur*
> *ire uiam et Tyrios deserta quaerere terra,*
> *Eumenidum ueluti demens uidet agmina Pentheus*
> *et solem geminum et duplices se ostendere Thebas,*
> *aut Agamemnonius scaenis agitatus Orestes,*
> *armatam facibus matrem et serpentibus atris*
> *cum fugit ultricesque sedent in limine Dirae.*
>
> *In her dreams, savage Aeneas himself goes after her, raging, and she always seems to herself to be left alone, she without a companion seems to go on a long road and to search for the Tyrians in a deserted land or just as Pentheus out of his mind sees bands of Furies and twin suns and doubled Thebes show themselves to him or Orestes son of Agamemnon hunted across the stage flees his mother armed with torches and black snakes and while the avenging Furies sit in the threshold.*
>
> *Aeneid* IV.465-473

Each of these characters embodies chaos and *furor* in one way or another. With regard to Pentheus, the best known version of the myth comes to us from Eurpides' *Bacchae.* Pentheus is driven mad because he denies Dionysus' legitimacy as a deity and opposes his worship. As a consequence, Pentheus is then violently torn apart by women, including his mother, who have been maddened by Dionysus and believe that Pentheus is an animal to be hunted. As for Orestes, in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides,* he is pursued by furies[58] after he avenges his father Agamemnon's death by killing his mother and her lover.

[57] See Spence, 89 for explanation on the appropriateness of these tragic characters.

[58] Furies take vengeance on those who have shed familial blood.

This simile appears to allude[59] to a dramatic performance of the story, since Orestes is being chased across a stage. Unlike Pentheus, Orestes does not meet a tragic fate because he is eventually acquitted for his crime and the furies become the "Eumenides." Austin calls attention to Dido's feelings of isolation in this passage. By comparing Dido with Pentheus and Orestes, Vergil makes her a tragic hero, creating sympathy for her.

In the final simile of Book IV, Dido is compared to a falling city, an allusion to Homer's *Iliad* (*Iliad* XXII.410-413). As Dido commits suicide, she is paralleled with the Trojans,[60] who mourn for Hector as they would mourn for the city if it had been destroyed.

> *non aliter quam si immissis ruat hostibus omnis*
> *Karthago aut antiqua Tyros, flammaeque furentes*
> *culmina perque hominum uoluantur perque deorum.*
>
> *Not otherwise than if all Carthage or old Tyre should fall to an attacking enemy, and raging flames would roll on through the homes of both men and gods.*
>
> *Aeneid* IV.669-671

This simile reflects the immense destruction that Aeneas and his men have brought upon Dido. Ironically, Dido's death is compared to the fall of Carthage, which is compared to Troy, Aeneas' city. In the *Iliad*, Hector is the enemy of the Greeks just as Dido opposes Aeneas and the mission. Yet, we are compelled to pity both Hector and Dido. She falls, engulfed in flames, foreshadowing the future destruction of Carthage by the Romans, in the Punic Wars. *Furor* has consumed Dido. She meets a tragic end and the reader is inclined to sympathize with her, thus questioning Aeneas and the Roman mission.

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[59] Austin ad *Aeneid* IV.469ff suggests that this may allude to a painting as well.

[60] O'Hara ad loc. See also Spence, 87.

Book IV concludes with Juno sending Iris to cut a lock of Dido's hair and to lead her spirit to the underworld since Dido has died before her time.[61] This passage is largely contested. O'Hara believes that the narrator passes judgment on Dido's fate by hinting that she did not have to die for Aeneas to accomplish his mission.[62] Williams,[63]on the other hand, suggests that Dido died only because she wished to die. Finally, Perkell[64] argues that there is no correct reading of this scene and that it is intentionally ambiguous. Nevertheless, I believe that this scene creates sympathy for Dido. By ending Book IV, Dido's book, with her death and journey to the underworld, we pity Dido and thus question the mission that caused her death.

Aeneas and Dido's last encounter occurs in the underworld. When Aeneas sees Dido, he finds himself expressing surprise and regret for her fate. Suddenly, all the words that he failed to say when he was about to depart from Carthage come flooding out of his mouth. Dido, however, does not dignify these words with any sort of response. The whole of Book VI is modeled on Homer's *Odyssey*, and the speakers with whom Aeneas interacts are each modeled on the speakers whom Odysseus encounters. In Dido's case, she is paralleled with Ajax[65] who will not speak to Odysseus; but Dido, unlike the archaic hero that she is modeled after, has been placed in the *Lugentes campi*, "Mourning Fields," with those who have died for love (*Aeneid* VI.441). In the Greek tradition, Ajax commits suicide

[61] *nec fato merita nec morte peribat* "she perished by a neither fated nor deserved death" *Aeneid* IV.696.

[62] O'Hara ad *Aeneid* IV.696.

[63] Williams ad *Aeneid* IV.696-7.

[64] Perkell 1994, pp.68-71.

[65] Servius ad *Aeneid* VI.468.

for honor after having gone mad and killed his sheep, thinking they were Greeks. Vergil is the first author who creates such a detailed landscape[66] of the underworld. This becomes something that Dante will expand upon later in his *Commedia*. After Aeneas addresses Dido, she refuses to acknowledge his words. She is then compared to a rock.

> *talibus Aeneas ardentem et torua tuentem*
> *lenibat dictis animum lacrimasque ciebat.*
> *illa solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat*
> *nec magis incepto uultum sermone mouetur*
> *quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes.*
> *tandem corripuit sese atque inimica refugit*
> *in nemus umbriferum, coniunx ubi pristinus illi*
> *respondet curis aequatque Sychaeus amorem.*
>
> *With such words, Aeneas kept trying to soothe her burning spirit, fiercely looking and he brought forth tears. That one turning away held her eyes fixed to the ground; no more her face moved by the beginning speech than if she stood as a hard rock or a Marpessan crag. Finally she snatches herself away and unfriendly fled into the shady grove where Sychaeus, her first husband answers her cares and equals her love.*
>
> *Aeneid* VI.467-474

By turning away, Dido pretends that she has no loving feelings toward Aeneas; the reader understands that she is still angry because she is among those who have died for love. At the beginning of their relationship, Aeneas misreads Dido, but by the end, Dido appears to misread herself. She sees herself as a hero who died for her city and a hero who is unwilling to forgive someone who has clearly wronged her. Her placement in the underworld betrays her, however. She is unable to obtain the results that she wanted. Aeneas' mission continues on despite everything she has tried to do to sabotage it.

[66] Leach, 120.

Three books of the *Aeneid,* Books I, IV, and VI, develop the relationship between Dido and Aeneas. In Book I, we see a strong character in Dido as she tries to help Aeneas and his men on their journey, initially out of pity and humanity. By Book IV, however, Dido, completely obsessed with her passion for Aeneas, becomes a destructive force, both for her city and for Aeneas' mission. Ultimately, unable to come to terms with Aeneas's rejection, denial of their marriage, and departure, Dido commits suicide. In Book VI, when Aeneas encounters Dido in the underworld, she is an inert[67] force, refusing to talk to him. In Book I, Aeneas, who first sees Dido as the virginal warrior Penthesilea and the virginal goddess Diana, is attracted to her. By the end of Book IV, however, Aeneas puts his mission ahead[68] of Dido and, denying her claims of marriage, remains unmoved by her grief. When he encounters Dido in the underworld in Book VI, Aeneas confesses strong remorse and concern for Dido. The two begin as equals in Book I but by the end of their relationship, they diverge.

[67] See Spence, 93-94 for a reading on the power of Dido's silence in the Underworld,

[68] See Perkell 1981

CHAPTER TWO: The *Commedia*: The Relationship between Dante-pilgrim and Beatrice

In Dante's *Commedia*, Beatrice's influence and love precipitate Dante-pilgrim's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. In order to discern the progression of Dante and Beatrice's relationship over the course of the *Divine Comedy*, I will closely examine the similes[69] that refer to Dante-pilgrim and Beatrice. Although there are twenty four similes[70] involving the two,[71] I have selected the eighteen that are the most significant[72] to the development of the relationship of Dante and Beatrice for this chapter. For each of these similes I aim to provide context, the quote, in both Italian and English, and an analysis. Although many scholars have commented on similes[73] as well as programs of similes, I have not found a thorough discussion of the development of the similes that specifically illuminate the relationship between Beatrice and Dante. In these, Beatrice takes on many roles including mother[74] and lover to help the

[69] Lansing, 19 "Dante introduces the majority of his similes...by employing a formulaic pattern, which is consistently repeated. He is especially dependent on the use of the formulaic particles of correlation when the simile is extended and characterized by the inclusion of subordinate clauses." Lansing, footnote 4 "In the longest similes, those containing five or more tercets, the initial particle of correlation is usually omitted."

[70] Hollander 2001, 145: There are over 400 similes in the entire *Commedia.* For a greater estimate of approximately 600 see Lansing, footnote 1.

[71] Thorough discussion of the following similes is not included: *Purgatorio* XXXI.121-123; *Paradiso* IV.1-9;10-18; XXVII.31-36; XXVIII.1-12; XXIX.1-9.

[72] I see a pattern in the similes from military, to harsh mother, to caring mother, to less of an authority figure as Dante-pilgrim becomes more capable of taking care of his own soul. I have omitted similes that are redundant.

[73] Lansing, 13-14 seeks to "concentrate on revealing the nature of that interaction [i.e. the image of the simile and its narrative context], and attempt to identify the ways in which similes are inextricably linked to the structure of the poem's significance."

[74] There are four mother/child similes – not including one in which Virgil is compared to a mother. I will further comment on this later.

pilgrim achieve salvation. In order to attain this salvation, Dante must learn to love God[75] more than anything or anyone else. Thus, Beatrice's love is both constructive and a model to be aspired to. She loves God more than she loves Dante, and, as a result, she puts Dante on the path to seeking a much greater love for God. This becomes clearer to Dante the further he progresses on his journey. Because the reader experiences the *Commedia* through Dante-pilgrim's eyes, Beatrice's love unfolds to us as it does to Dante: the more deeply he understands it, the more deeply the reader does.

Beatrice herself appears at the beginning of *Purgatorio* XXX to replace Virgil as Dante's guide through the rest of Purgatory and the majority of Paradise. Although she is not physically present in the *Inferno*, Beatrice's speech in *Inferno* II is important for the characterization of Beatrice and Dante's mission and therefore requires some consideration in order to establish context for their relationship in the *Commedia*. Virgil briefly relays the mission to Dante through a quotation of Beatrice's words to him (*Inferno* II.52-114). Both Dante and the reader learn that the pilgrim has lost his way, and Beatrice, Rachel, Lucy, and the Virgin Mary have taken a keen interest is putting him back on the path to salvation, thus giving[76] his mission legitimacy. Over the course of her discussion with Virgil, Beatrice reveals that her motivation for helping Dante is *amor* or "love": *amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare* "love moved me that makes me speak" (*Inferno* II.72). Beatrice's own words, therefore, form the basis for the argument that Beatrice's love is salvific. Because Beatrice does not appear in *Inferno,* there are no similes referring to her

[75] This notion forms the basis for the American reading of the *Commedia* which draws on the Christian theology discussed earlier.

[76] Hollander ad *Inferno* II.109-114.

in this cantica to discuss. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Virgil is the source of Beatrice's first introduction in the *Commedia* as it is he who quotes her direct speech to him.

> *e*[77] *cominciommi a dir soave e piana,*
> *con angelica voce, in sua favella:*
>
> *Gentle and clear, the words she spoke to me -*
> *an angel's voice was in her speech:*
>
> *Inferno* II.56-57

Therefore, in his introduction of Beatrice, Virgil, based on his personal interaction with her, provides his own evaluation of Beatrice as kind and graceful. As some have noted,[78] this description of Beatrice's character and manner is at odds with how Beatrice appears in *Purgatorio* XXX. Beatrice also expresses her fears that Dante has strayed from the path to salvation and explains that Mary, as well as Lucy and Rachel, have taken a personal interest in Dante's salvation. The poet's undertaking to describe the afterlife[79] is therefore approved by a higher authority. Beatrice furthermore explains that at this point in Dante-pilgrim's life, his love for her is somehow impure, thus keeping him from salvation. This, however, is not just a comment on Dante, but also on Beatrice, namely that her love for the pilgrim and God is such that she wishes for Dante to be saved. Both Dante's love for Beatrice and Beatrice's love for Dante must be in harmony with God's will in order for them to achieve salvation.

When Dante-pilgrim first encounters Beatrice in *Purgatorio* XXX, he recognizes her with a quote from Vergil's *Aeneid* by Dido: *conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma,* which is a vernacular

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[77] All of the Italian text was taken from the Dartmouth Dante Project Site.

[78] Holmes.

[79] Hollander ad *Inferno* II.109-114: Calling on the authority of Mary, Lucy, and Rachel is just one of the ways in which Dante-poet protects himself against any charges of blasphemy.

translation of Vergil's quotation: *agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae* "I recognize the signs of an ancient flame" (*Aeneid* IV.23; *Purgatorio* XXX.48). This allusion[80] is most certainly set up to force the reader to compare Dido and Beatrice. In the *Aeneid,* Vergil has Dido say these words, comparing her new feelings for Aeneas to the feelings which she experienced for Sychaeus, her deceased husband. In his poem, however, Dante-poet aims to correct this destructive love attached to guilt. Dante-pilgrim recognizes the feelings he has for Beatrice now as the same as those he once had for her; these are feelings that are appropriate and fruitful. When Dido felt this way for Synchaeus, it ended with his death; therefore, these words are ominous in the *Aeneid*. Dante-poet, on the other hand, has completely changed the meaning of the phrase[81] because this begins a turning point in his journey to salvation rather than his destruction, as is the case with Dido.

Now that the context has been established, I aim to illustrate the trajectory of the relationship between Dante pilgrim and Beatrice as it unfolds in similes. In *Purgatorio* XXX,[82] Beatrice appears to Dante to replace Virgil as the pilgrim's guide. With her first words, Beatrice harshly chastises Dante for weeping on account of Virgil's departure.[83]

> *"Dante, perche Virgilio se ne vada,*
> *non pianger anco, non piangere ancora;*
> *ché pianger ti conven per altra spada."*

[80] See Hollander ad loc. Also see Brownlee, 104-105; As well as Hawkins 1991 113-130.

[81] This is not the first Vergil quote in this canto. For further discussion see Hollander ad *Purgatorio* XXX.21.

[82] "No other segment of the *Commedia* is as filled with similes as the first ninety-nine verses of this canto; there are seven in all." Hollander ad *Purgatorio* XXX.58.

[83] See Hollander ad *Purgatorio* XXX.49-51 for discussion to allusion to *Georgics* IV.525-527.

"Dante, [84]because Virgil has departed,
Do not weep, do not weep yet -
There is another sword to make you weep."

Purgatorio XXX.55-57

The reader will note that Beatrice[85] does not greet Dante initially, but rather she rebukes him for weeping over the loss of Virgil. While Beatrice does eventually introduce herself by name, she does so only after she castigates Dante-pilgrim because he should not weep for Virgil – he needs to weep[86] for his sins (*Purgatorio* XXX.73-75). Therefore, this displays a hierarchy of importance in Beatrice's mind: Dante must repent for his sins first and acknowledge the truth of her identity second, further emphasizing that Beatrice comes to Dante on a specific and vital mission.

In the following simile, the pilgrim relays his reaction to Beatrice's first words by comparing her to an admiral in the navy, thus further characterizing her as stern.

Quasi ammiraglio che in poppa e in prora
viene a veder la gente che ministra
per li altri legni, e a ben far l'incora;
in su la sponda del carro sinistra,
quando mi volsi al suon del nome mio,
che di necessità qui si registra,

Just like an admiral who moves from stern to prow
to see the men that serve the other ships
and urge them on to better work,

[84] This is the first and only time Dante is named in the *Commedia,* and, as such, it constitutes for Hollander the climax in the poem. See Hollander *Purgatorio* XXX.55. Also see Schnapp 1993, pp204.

[85] Hawkins 1991, 121-122: reads this interaction as an allusion to the *Aeneid* VI encounter between Aeneas and Dido in the underworld in which Dante is recast as Aeneas and Beatrice as a Dido who is neither silent nor flees.

[86] This may recall St. Augustine's *Confessions* I.33 when he admits that he spent his youth weeping for Dido when he should have wept for his soul. Hawkins 1991, 119 suggests that Dante certainly knew this story. The proximity of the tears to the allusion to Dido earlier in the canto makes me inclined to argue that the reader may be intended to connect this episode with Augustine's. Also see Hawkins 1991, 120. For another reading see Hollander ad loc.

so on the left side of the chariot -
as I turned when I heard her call my name,
which of necessity is here recorded –

Purgatorio XXX.58-63

Dante-pilgrim views Beatrice's rebuke as harsh. He compares her to an admiral commanding his men to work harder. An admiral[87] is undoubtedly in a position of authority over his crew just as Beatrice is in a position of authority over Dante. Moreover, an admiral in Dante's time would have been a man, and so, in this first simile, Beatrice is compared to a man, which is fitting because she is as authoritative as a military man would be. Although some scholars[88] have been troubled by this image, I am inclined to believe that it fits rather well here. Dante's first impression of Beatrice in the *Commedia* is formed by Virgil's description discussed earlier, but here we see a very different Beatrice, one who is stern rather than gentle (*Inferno* II.55-57).

Still maintaining her dominance, Beatrice assumes a more feminine role in the following simile, that of a mother. As Beatrice speaks to Dante-pilgrim, he cannot seem to look at her because she chides him for approaching heaven when he does not understand its nature (*Purgatorio* XXX.73; 74-75).

Così la madre al figlio par superba,
com' ella parve a me; perché d'amaro
sente il sapor de la pietade acerba.

As a mother may seem overbearing to her child,
so she seemed to me, for the taste
of such stern pity is a bitter taste.

Purgatorio XXX.79-81

[87] For discussion on program of voyages in the *Commedia* see Hollander ad loc.

[88] See Hollander ad *Purgatorio* XXX.58.

This is the first time, but certainly not the last, that Beatrice is compared to a mother. In this text, a mother is often associated with redemption[89] because of her associations with Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. The most interesting aspect of this particular mother simile, however, is that it follows a comparison of Virgil to a mother a little earlier in the canto. As Beatrice appears at the end of the pageant, Dante becomes awestruck and even a little frightened and then turns to Virgil as a scared child would to his mother.

Tosto che ne la vista mi percosse
l'alta virtù che già m'avea trafitto
prima ch'io fuor di püerizia fosse,
volsimi a la sinistra col respitto
col quale il fantolin corre a la mamma
quando ha paura o quando elli è afflitto,
per dicere a Virgilio:

As soon as that majestic force,
which had already pierced me once
before I had outgrown my childhood, struck my eyes,
I turned to my left with the confidence
a child has running to his mamma
when he is afraid or in distress
to say to Virgil...

Purgatorio XXX.40-46

Through this description, Dante implies that Virgil is a caring mother[90] who could calm her child's fears. With Beatrice's appearance in canto XXX, one mother comes to replace another, but Beatrice is a remarkably different mother from Virgil. These two passages are placed in this canto so the reader will contrast the guides. They indicate to the reader just how different the

[89] *Glenn,* 123-124. "The maternal imagery is connected to a redemptive event in history (the Incarnation of the Word) and a providential mission (Dante's journey and purification leading to the creation of a vernacular Christian poetics)."

[90] See Hollander ad *Purgatorio* XXX.43-48 on the nurturing role of Virgil.

saved Beatrice is from the condemned Virgil.[91] As part of his characteristic *pathos*,[92] Virgil does not often chide Dante, but rather pities the pilgrim. This, however, is ultimately misguided because Dante has fallen off the path to salvation and needs to be scolded and taught the errors of his ways. While a child does not appreciate an "overbearing mother," Beatrice rebukes him out of love in order to teach him a lesson. Early on,[93] Dante-pilgrim sees Beatrice as an overbearing mother, but as he comes to understand the true meaning of his journey, he will come to appreciate her love. As with the previous simile in which she was compared to an admiral, Beatrice, as mother, is once again placed in a position of authority. Therefore, Dante-pilgrim is both the army that needs direction and the child who needs to be rebuked. Here there is an interesting reversal of roles because one would expect Beatrice, a woman, to be put in a more submissive role; but this is not the case as she is constantly placed into active and dominant roles. It is important for her to love God and help others – regardless if they are men or women – love God, and by doing so she demonstrates that there is no difference between men and women with respect to salvation. Toward the beginning of their interactions, Dante-pilgrim's weakness is highlighted in comparison to Beatrice's strength.

When Beatrice demands that Dante confess his sins, he, dumbfounded, remains silent, but she continues to push. As a result, Dante feels the pressure to say something in response to her demands.

Come balestro frange, quando scocca

[91] Holmes, 132.

[92] Hollander 2001.

[93] See Hollander 2001, 124-125 For further discussion on Beatrice's role as moral preceptor in *Purgatorio* and guide to the truth in *Paradiso*.

da troppa tesa, la sua corda e l'arco,
e con men foga l'asta il segno tocca,
sì scoppia' io sottesso grave carco,
fuori sgorgando lagrime e sospiri,
e la voce allentò per lo suo varco.

As a crossbow breaks with too much tension
from the pulling taut of cord and bow
so that the arrow strikes the target with less force,
thus I collapsed beneath that heavy load
and, with a flood of tears and sighs,
my voice came strangled from my throat.

Purgatorio XXXI.16-21

This is another warfare simile as Beatrice, placing too much pressure on Dante, causes him to break. Since Dante is compared to the bow that breaks, Beatrice is implicitly compared, therefore, to an archer who pulls with excessive force. Once again, Beatrice is associated with a force of strength and masculinity. Although her love here is not obvious to the reader or to Dante, it is a strong force that is unable to be resisted. When the pilgrim begins to weep, she does not waver because his tears do not move her to pity,[94] but only to push harder. Beatrice then explains that Dante's love for her was supposed to lead to his salvation, but he strayed and lost his way after her death (*Purgatorio* XXXI.22-30).

Finally, Dante admits some fault, but not enough to satisfy Beatrice who continues to chastise him for his lust for other women after her death (*Purgatorio* XXXI.37-63). To these charges, Dante is once again mute. At the beginning of their relationship, Beatrice speaks much more than the pilgrim, another indication of her authoritative role in their relationship.

Quali fanciulli, vergognando, muti

[94] This is a key difference between Beatrice and Virgil, who pities the pilgrim when he should not. This illustrates one reason why Virgil is condemned and Beatrice is saved.

con li occhi a terra stannosi, ascoltando
e sé riconoscendo e ripentuti,
tal mi stav' io;

As children in their shame stand mute, their eyes
upon the ground, listening,
acknowledging their fault, repentant,
just so I stood...

Purgatorio XXXI. 64-67

Once again, the pilgrim is compared to a child and Beatrice to a mother, but there is something different about this simile. In this instance, Dante is compared to someone who acknowledges his fault. Beatrice's love, her strong will, is helping Dante with his journey. Now, he can weep for himself because he is beginning to understand his shortcomings. Beatrice's love and authority are constructive, which is crucial to the pilgrim's journey; she helps build Dante's soul.

Since Dante has progressed in his understanding of his faults on account of what he has heard, Beatrice commands him to look up so he may learn more by seeing, now engaging Dante's sense of sight (*Purgatorio* XXXI.67-69). Despite his strong desire to keep his head down, Dante is overpowered by Beatrice and his head is forced upwards.

Con men di resistenza si di barba
robusto cerro, o vero al nostral vento
o vero a quel de la terra di Iarba,
ch'io non levai al suo comando il mento;
e quando per la barba il viso chiese,
ben conobbi il velen de l'argomento.

With less resistance is the sturdy oak[95]
torn from the earth, whether by our northern wind
or by the one that blows from Iarbas' lands,
than was my chin nudged up by her command.
When by my beard she sought my face

[95] There are three similes discussed which contain trees up against a natural force.

I recognized the venom in her words.

Purgatorio XXXI.70-75

In this allusion to Vergil's *Aeneid*, Dante is the "new Aeneas[96]" who is unable to resist the wind that is Beatrice (*Aeneid* IV.196-278; 441-449). In the *Aeneid*, Iarbas' prayer to Jupiter precipitates Aeneas' immediate departure, which causes Dido to become so devastated that shecommits suicide. When Anna, Dido's sister, relays Dido's emotional state to Aeneas, he is compared to an old oak that cannot be moved by the wind (*Aeneid* IV.441-449). In this scenario, Dante-pilgrim is not strong enough to resist the winds because Beatrice is once again too strong for him. This is another instance of Dante re-writing Vergil to demonstrate the superiority of his own Christian epic: while Aeneas bending to Dido would result in failure of his mission, Dante-pilgrim needs to yield to Beatrice in order to successfully complete his. Examining this simile in the development of the relationship between Dante and Beatrice, one will note that Beatrice's strength is continuing to help develop Dante's soul as she forces him to examine his faults so he may correct them and be saved.

After Dante-pilgrim has passed through the waters of the Lethe, cleansing himself of his sins, Beatrice commands that he approach her (*Purgatorio* XXXIII.16-24). In response to her request, the pilgrim timidly states that Beatrice can help him.

Come a color che troppo reverenti
dinanzi a suo maggior parlando sono,
che non traggon la voce viva ai denti,
avvenne a me, che sanza intero suono
incominciai: "Madonna, mia bisogna
voi conoscete, e ciò ch'ad essa è buono."

[96] See Hollander ad loc.

As with those who are too shy
when speaking to their betters and thus fail
to bring their words distinctly to their lips,
so it was with me, and in a failing voice
I began: "My lady, You know what I lack
And exactly how You may provide it."

Purgatorio XXXIII.25-30

Not surprisingly, Beatrice is compared to Dante's "betters," and, therefore, by Dante's own admission, he and Beatrice are not equals.[97] Once more, Dante reemphasizes his awareness of his own fault, but now he begins to ask for Beatrice's help. For the first time, Dante actively seeks Beatrice in her role as a guide by acknowledging her authority, thus causing the reader to see a new development in their relationship. Nevertheless, while the pilgrim recognizes that he has shortcomings that need to be corrected, he still does not understand that loving God will allow him to do so.

In *Paradiso*, the reader will note that there is a much stronger effort to show that the pilgrim is making great strides toward salvation. In the first simile of the cantica, Beatrice proves that she is capable of teaching her love for God to Dante.[98]

quando Beatrice in sul sinistro fianco
vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole:
aguglia sì non li s'affisse unquanco.
E sì come secondo raggio suole
uscir del primo e risalire in suso,
pur come pelegrin che tornar vuole,
così de l'atto suo, per li occhi infuso
ne l'imagine mia, il mio si fece,
e fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr' uso.

[97] Benvenuto ad loc. Dante as student: *sicut discipulus coram magistro* "just as a student face-to-face with a teacher" (Translation of the Latin is my own). Benevenuto's commentary was accessed from the Dartmouth Dante Project.

[98] Ideally, Dante-poet can then teach his new found love for God to his readers.

when I saw that Beatrice had turned toward her left
and now was staring at the sun –
never had eagle so fixed his gaze on it.
And, as a second ray will issue from the first
and rise again up to its source,
even as a pilgrim longs to go back home,
so her gaze, pouring through my eyes
on my imagination, made itself my own, and I,
against our practice, set my eyes upon the sun.

Paradiso I.46-54

Throughout the *Commedia*, Beatrice's eyes are linked to salvation and Dante's eyes are constantly drawn to hers. In this instance, Dante's gaze follows Beatrice's to the sun as it did previously when Beatrice looked upon the griffin (Purgatorio XXXI.118-123).[99] If the griffin in *Purgatorio* represents Jesus,[100] then when Beatrice looks to it intently, she looks to Jesus and causes Dante to do the same. Similarly, as the two stare at the sun, Dante compares Beatrice's eyes to a ray of the sun and his own to a second ray which emanates from the first. Here, she gazes at the sun and Dante imitates her to the benefit of his own soul; thus,their mentor/mentee relationship continues to develop with Beatrice as his spiritual guide. Dante recognizes that looking at the sun[101] is not a normal occurrence for him, just as looking to God is not normal. She guides him once again. At the time the *Commedia* was written people believed that eagles[102] had a unique ability to stare at the sun. Dante cannot look upon the sun for too long, but he still

[99] This simile is not examined by itself in this paper, but, because of its similarity to the quote above, I have analyzed the two in conjugation with each other.

[100] Hollander ad *Purgatorio* XIX.108.

[101] The sun here likely represents God.

[102] Hollander ad *Paradiso* I.46-48.

tries (*Paradiso* I.58-60). This simile begins the canto with a strong sense of purpose and direction in Beatrice's love.

As Dante gazes upon Beatrice, he feels that he has been transformed, and once again, her eyes have the power to save him.

> *Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei,*
> *qual si fé Glauco nel gustar de l'erba*
> *che 'l fé consorto in mar de li altri dèi.*
> *Trasumanar significar per verba*
> *non si poria; però l'essemplo basti*
> *a cui esperïenza grazia serba.*
>
> *As I gazed on her, I was changed within,*
> *as Glaucus was on tasting of the grass*
> *that made him consort of the gods in the sea.*
> *To soar beyond the human cannot be described*
> *in words. Let the example be enough to one*
> *for whom grace holds this experience in store.*
>
> *Paradiso* I.67-72

Dante's comparison of himself to Glaucus alludes to an episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*[103] (*Metamorphoses* XIV.904-968). In Ovid's version of the story, Glaucus is transformed into a sea god with the gift of prophecy after he eats an herb. By Dante's time, Glaucus had become strongly associated with an ability to go beyond what is human or "transhumanation."[104] It is important to note that the word "*trasumanar*" appears for the first time in Italian in Dante's *Paradiso*.[105] As Jacoff has also noted, Heaven itself is not of our physical world, and Dante-poet

[103] Jacoff and Schnapp 1991, 1. The allusions to Ovid constitute the second largest in number after those to Vergil.

[104] Hollander ad *Paradiso* I.70-72.

[105] Jacoff 1993, 221.

uses words that he invented for the purpose of describing a world that has never been described. When Dante-pilgrim compares himself to Glaucus, he believes himself to transcend humanity because he can comprehend more than any mortal man. Moreover, the similarity between the two figures is that they both share an understanding of the world beyond what is human: Glaucus has prophecy, and Dante has the grace of God and vision of Heaven. While Glaucus needs a magic herb, Dante only needs the love of Beatrice, which is an expression of the grace of God. In the simile, we see Beatrice implicitly compared to the magic herb. Thus she is cast in a helpful role, enabling Dante to see himself as spiritually beyond the average man.

No simile illustrates the remarkable development that Dante makes once he reaches *Paradiso* as well as the following:

> *Cor di mortal non fu mai sì digesto*
> *a divozione e a rendersi a Dio*
> *con tutto 'l suo gradir cotanto presto,*
> *come a quelle parole mi fec' io;*
> *e sì tutto 'l mio amore in lui si mise,*
> *che Bëatrice eclissò ne l'oblio.*
>
> *Never was mortal heart so well prepared*
> *for worship, nor so swift to yield itself*
> *to God with absolute assent*
> *as was mine when I heard those words,*
> *and all my love was so set on Him*
> *that it eclipsed Beatrice in forgetfulness.*
>
> *Paradiso* X.55-60

This is the first time in the *Commedia* that Dante-pilgrim expresses a genuine love and appreciation for God. Earlier in the canto, Dante thinks that it is Beatrice who precipitates this sudden change in his love and priorities (*Paradiso* X.37-39). Furthermore, shortly following this

expressed love for God, he notes that Beatrice is not bothered by the fact that he has forgotten[106] her because he loves God more than he loves her, and this is her goal (*Paradiso* X.61). Note that *cor* "heart," the organ associated with love, is placed emphatically as the first word in the line and as a result, love seems to be the ultimate emotion that leads to salvation (*Paradiso* X.55). Since the preparation of Dante's heart for God was done by Beatrice, he now moves toward salvation. Here he acknowledges her contributions to the development of his soul, which is the first major turning point for Dante on his journey since Beatrice's arrival in *Purgatorio* XXX. Furthermore, this is the first clear indication of the transformation to which Dante alludes in the Glaucus simile, which illustrates that Beatrice's aid and direction are proving fruitful. For the first time, Dante demonstrates an ability to be equal to his guide.

As Beatrice and Dante-pilgrim, rising toward Saturn, depart Jupiter and the souls of the saved pagans,[107] the pilgrim looks[108] to his guide, only to realize that she is not smiling. Reading his mind as she has before, Beatrice addresses his concern by explaining that Dante would not survive the power that would emanate from her smile.

> *Già eran li occhi miei rifissi al volto*
> *de la mia donna, e l'animo con essi,*
> *e da ogne altro intento s'era tolto.*
> *E quella non ridea; ma "S'io ridessi,"*
> *mi cominciò, "tu ti faresti quale*
> *fu Semelè quando di cener fessi:*
> *ché la bellezza mia, che per le scale*
> *de l'etterno palazzo più s'accende,*

[106] See Hollander ad *Paradiso* X.59-60; 61-63.

[107] See Hollander ad *Paradiso* XX for a discussion on how the pagans subvert both the author and the character of Virgil.

[108] Hollander ad *Paradiso* XXI.1-4: Dante-pilgrim always fixes his eyes on Beatrice when they ascend to a new sphere.

com' hai veduto, quanto più si sale,
se non si temperasse, tanto splende,
che 'l tuo mortal podere, al suo fulgore,
sarebbe fronda che trono scoscende

Now my eyes were fixed again
upon my lady's face. And with my eyes,
my mind drew back from any other thought.
She was not smiling, "If I smiled,"
she said, "you would become what Semele became
when she was turned to ashes,
for my beauty, which you have seen
flame up more brilliantly the higher we ascend
the stairs of this eternal palace,
is so resplendent that, were it not tempered
in its blazing, your mortal powers would be
like tree limbs rent and scorched by lightening."

Paradiso XXI.1-12

In this simile, Dante-poet continues[109] his program of allusions to the Semele episode in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* III.256-315). In Ovid's narrative, Juno appears in disguise to Semele, a mortal woman having an affair with Jupiter, and convinces her to ask Jupiter to show himself to her in the same splendor that he shows to Juno. After forcing Jupiter to swear on the Styx that he will grant her one wish, Semele asks him to show her his true form. When he does so, Semele is burned to ashes. Semele is pregnant with the god Bacchus, and after she burns up, Jupiter sews the fetus in his thigh and brings it to term. In contrast to Ovid's epic, Beatrice creates a new scenario in which Dante-pilgrim is Semele and she is Jupiter; unlike Jupiter, she is able to choose not to incinerate the pilgrim. Whereas Semele begins to question her lover's identity, there is no doubt or dishonesty in Dante and Beatrice's relationship. Also, Dante will be able to experience the glory[110] of Beatrice's smile later without any repercussions.[111] Beatrice further develops the

[109] See also *Inferno* XXX.1-2.

[110] See Jacoff 1993 for more on the nature of Paradise.

comparison as she explains that Dante would be like a tree burned by lighting. In the second comparison to a tree opposing the elements, Beatrice illustrates that she is still a strong force in their relationship.

In the midst of the shouting from the souls in the sphere of Saturn, Dante becomes alarmed and turns to Beatrice for help.

Oppresso di stupore, a la mia guida
mi volsi, come parvol che ricorre .
sempre colà dove più si confida;
e quella, come madre che soccorre
sùbito al figlio palido e anelo
con la sua voce, che 'l suol ben disporre,

Overcome by wonder, I turned to my guide,
as does a child who always scurries back
to the one who has his utmost trust.
And she, like a mother, quick in comforting
her son when he is pale and out of breath
with a voice that often calmed him in the past,

Paradiso XXII.1-6

Once again, Beatrice is compared to a mother and Dante to a child as she calms his fears precisely as he had wished that Virgil would do in *Purgatorio* XXX. Although Dante did not realize it earlier, he is now beyond needing Virgil and needs only Beatrice to lead him to God. She becomes more nurturing in Dante's eyes the more enlightened he becomes. Dante represents the development of a firm trusting relationship between himself and Beatrice. She calms him now as she did not calm him in the past, thus indicating that Dante now believes her to be soothing. The repeated similes in which Beatrice is compared to a mother encourage the reader to notice the compassion and love that develops in the relationship between the two over the

[111] See Hollander ad loc. See also Brownlee, 117 for Dante-pilgrim as the "Christian Semele."

course of the *Commedia:* first Beatrice is a stern mother and later a caring and nurturing one, just as one might expect God to be. The pilgrim understands Beatrice as helpful, as has been reflected in the similes discussed thus far; however, she is still in a position of authority over the pilgrim since a mother must guide a child until he can act and understand on his own.

At the beginning of canto XXIII, Beatrice is compared to a mother bird in "one of the most lyrical"[112] similes of the *Commedia*.

Come l'augello, intra l'amate fronde,
posato al nido de' suoi dolci nati
la notte che le cose ci nasconde,
che, per veder li aspetti disïati
e per trovar lo cibo onde li pasca,
in che gravi labor li sono aggrati,
previene il tempo in su aperta frasca,
e con ardente affetto il sole aspetta,
fiso guardando pur che l'alba nasca;
così la donna mïa stava eretta
e attenta, rivolta inver' la plaga
sotto la quale il sol mostra men fretta:
sì che, veggendola io sospesa e vaga,
fecimi qual è quei che disïando
altro vorria, e sperando s'appaga.
Ma poco fu tra uno e altro quando,
del mio attender, dico, e del vedere
lo ciel venir più e più rischiarando;

As the bird among the leafy branches that she loves,
perched on the nest with her sweet brood
all through the night, which keeps things veiled from us,
who in her longing to look upon their eyes and beaks
and to find the food to nourish them -
A task, though difficult, that gives her joy -
now, on an open bough, anticipates that time
and, in her ardent expectation of the sun,
watches intently for the dawn to break,
so was my lady, erect and vigilant,
seeking out the region of the sky

[112] See Hollander ad *Paradiso* XXIII.1-12.

In which the sun reveals less haste.
I, therefore, seeing her suspended, wistful,
became as one who, filled with longing,
finds satisfaction in his hope.

Paradiso XXIII.1-18

Just as a brood depends on the mother[113] bird for nourishment, so Dante-pilgrim depends on Beatrice for nourishment. Because the mother bird loves her children as Beatrice loves Dante, she awaits sunrise to get food for her children as Beatrice awaits the sun, which we understand to be God, in order to help feed Dante. Much like the brood needs food so the pilgrim needs food for his soul i.e. God. Beatrice eagerly awaits God as the bird eagerly awaits the sun. From this, we understand that Dante sees Beatrice as providing him with sustenance, i.e., hope. He further continues to compare himself to someone who is filled with hope because it is the nourishment that he has been awaiting. The loving nature of Beatrice is becoming more and more apparent to the pilgrim and, therefore, to the reader as well because it is the poet's intention that his epic is salvific for the reader. By identifying with and learning alongside the pilgrim, therefore, the reader gains a better sense of Beatrice, her love, and the saving grace of God.

After the transition to the Starry Sphere in which Mary resides, Dante is able to look upon the full glory of Beatrice's smile in a simile in which his mind is compared to lightening bursting from a cloud that can no longer contain it, thus concluding the Semele program in the *Commedia*.[114]

Come foco di nube si diserra
per dilatarsi sì che non vi cape,
e fuor di sua natura in giù s'atterra,

[113] Hollander ad *Paradiso* XXXIII.1 "It seems entirely fitting that a canto centrally devoted to the mother of Jesus begin with this image of the selfless and loving mother bird."

[114] See Hollander ad *Paradiso* XXIII.46-48.

la mente mia così, tra quelle dape
fatta più grande, di sé stessa uscìo,
e che si fesse rimembrar non sape.
"Apri li occhi e riguarda qual son io;
tu hai vedute cose, che possente
se' fatto a sostener lo riso mio."
Io era come quei che si risente
di visïone oblita e che s'ingegna
indarno di ridurlasi a la mente,
quand' io udi' questa proferta, degna
di tanto grato, che mai non si stingue
del libro che 'l preterito rassegna.

As fire breaks from a cloud,
swelling till it finds no room there,
and, against its nature, falls to earth,
just so my mind, grown greater at that feast,
burst forth, transported from itself,
and now cannot recall what it became.
"Open your eyes and see me as I am.
The things that you have witnessed
have given you the strength to bear my smile."
I was like a man who finds himself awakened
from a dream that has faded and who strives
in vain to bring it back to mind
when I heard this invitation, deserving
of such gratitude as can never be erased
from the book that registers the past.

Paradiso XXIII.40-54

Throughout the *Commedia,* Dante has commented on phenomena that cannot be explained properly because the human mind cannot fully comprehend Paradise. Therefore, as Dante is exposed to Beatrice's smile, his mind fights against nature and metaphorically explodes. As Beatrice explained earlier, he is only able to see and experience this because she has helped him on the path to salvation. In this double simile, it seems that Dante-poet cannot fully remember the experience. He, therefore, is paralleled with a man who is awakening from sleep who does not entirely remember his dream. The longer the man is awake, the less of the dream he recalls.

This is a truly universal comparison since almost everyone can relate to the idea of waking up and barely remembering what he or she has dreamt about. The key difference between the poet and the average man is the first part of the simile, which is representative of a nature that is unexplainable to man because Beatrice has taken an interest in Dante's personal salvation, which has allowed him to go on this journey. Dante is unique because he can experience the kingdom of Heaven before he has died, but like any man, he must wait until then to fully grasp all that it is.

Following Beatrice's speech about the host of spirits in the starry sphere, the hosts begin to dance around Beatrice who then asks Saint Peter to discuss faith with Dante. After Beatrice's order, Dante prepares himself for an examination of conscience by Peter.

> *Sì come il baccialier s'arma e non parla*
> *fin che 'l maestro la question propone,*
> *per approvarla, non per terminarla,*
> *così m'armava io d'ogne ragione*
> *mentre ch'ella dicea, per esser presto*
> *a tal querente e a tal professione.*
>
> *Just as the bachelor arms himself and does not speak*
> *while the master is setting forth the question –*
> *for discussion, not for final disposition –*
> *so I armed myself with all my arguments*
> *while she was speaking, readying myself*
> *for such an examiner and such professing.*
>
> *Paradiso* XXIV.46-51

Once again, Dante is silent, but not because he has nothing to say, which is why he has previously been silent, but because he is preparing responses to Peter's questions about faith, thus demonstrating his own spiritual growth since he is aware of his faults and ready to contemplate the meaning and dimensions of faith in God.

At the end of canto XXV, Dante-pilgrim is temporarily blinded, but as his sight begins to return, he becomes a new man awaking from sleep (*Paradiso* XXV.118-123).

E come a lume acuto si disonna
per lo spirto visivo che ricorre
a lo splendor che va di gonna in gonna,
e lo svegliato ciò che vede aborre,
sì nescïa è la sùbita vigilia
fin che la stimativa non soccorre;
così de li occhi miei ogne quisquilia
fugò Beatrice col raggio d'i suoi,
che rifulgea da più di mille milia:
onde mei che dinanzi vidi poi;

As sleep is broken by a piercing light
when the spirit of sight runs to meet the brightness
that passes through its filmy membranes,
and the awakened man recoils from what he sees,
his senses stunned in that abrupt awakening
until his judgment rushes to his aid –
exactly thus did Beatrice drive away each mote
from my eyes with the radiance of her own,
which could be seen a thousand miles away,
so that I then saw better than I had before.

Paradiso XXVI.70-79

In this simile of sight and awakening, the poet alludes to the blinding vision of Saul – later St. Paul – on the road to Damascus, which is Saul's moment of conversion. This is not the first time there has been a comparison between Dante and Paul. In *Inferno* II, the pilgrim questions Virgil as to why he has been granted this journey when he is neither Aeneas nor Paul (*Inferno* II.31-33). Initially, the pilgrim sees no similarity between himself and Paul, but now he experiences something profoundly similar to what Paul has experienced. As Dante's sight returns he is converted, just as Paul was. When he finally begins to see again, it is Beatrice who guides him with her eyes once again and helps him into his awakening into faith. For Dante-poet to compare himself with St. Paul in this way is rather bold because it may imply that he is as worthy of a

profound spiritual vision as Paul was. As he once again understands how Beatrice's love guides him to the Lord, Dante progresses further in his spiritual journey.

After Beatrice introduces the pilgrim to Adam in the starry sphere, Dante becomes silent on account of his awe, but he quickly overcomes this silence and speaks to Adam. With this comparison, the poet completes the program of similes in which trees face a natural force.

> *Come la fronda che flette la cima*
> *nel transito del vento, e poi si leva*
> *per la propria virtù che la soblima,*
> *fec'io in tanto in quant' ella diceva,*
> *stupendo, e poi mi rifece sicuro*
> *un disio di parlare ond' ïo ardeva.*
>
> *As the tree that bends its highest branches*
> *in a gust of wind and then springs back,*
> *raised up by natural inclination,*
> *so was I overcome while she was speaking –*
> *awestruck – and then restored to confidence*
> *by the words that burned in me to be expressed.*
>
> *Paradiso* XXVI.85-90

As Hollander[115] has noted, it is certainly peculiar that Beatrice almost seems to be cast in a negative light in this simile because she is the wind that opposes the tree, which represents Dante. Beatrice's introduction of Adam causes Dante to become silent, but he rises against this instinct and speaks. Again, this certainly recalls the tree simile in the *Aeneid*, as did the one earlier, but in this instance, Dante-pilgrim is a strong tree whereas before he was a weak one (*Aeneid* IV.441-449). Unlike Aeneas, however, Dante resists the urge to remain silent and overcomes the winds by speaking. Furthermore, Dante is now able to speak of his own volition, demonstrating that he is becoming more capable of looking after his own soul and needs, Beatrice's guidance less than he did before.

[115] See Hollander *Paradiso* XXVI.85-90.

Unlike Virgil's replacement by Beatrice, the reader[116] is given no indication that Saint Bernard will arrive to replace Beatrice. The structure of the *Commedia* is such that the further along one is in the narrative, the closer the pilgrim is to his final vision and ultimate salvation. With this in mind, Bernard then is the highest[117] of the guides. When Bernard replaces Beatrice as Dante's guide, the reader is to understand that Beatrice herself can take Dante only so far. God, not Beatrice, is the proper and true goal of Dante's love, and, therefore, it is only by turning to God and placing Beatrice second that Dante can obtain salvation (*Paradiso* XXXI.65-69). Dante realizes and accepts he must move on without Beatrice who then disappears from his sight.

Da quella regïon che più sù tona
occhio mortale alcun tanto non dista,
qualunque in mare più giù s'abbandona,
quanto lì da Beatrice la mia vista;
ma nulla mi facea, ché süa effige
non discendëa a me per mezzo mista.

From the highest region where the thunder breaks
down to the bottom of the deepest sea,
no mortal eye is ever quite so far
as was my sight removed from Beatrice.
Yet to me that mattered not, because her image
came down undimmed by anything between.

Paradiso XXXI.73-78

In this scene, Dante does not weep the way that he had for Virgil's departure but rather he prays[118] to her thanking her for her help and love (*Paradiso* XXXI.79-90). He compares the distance of his sight to the distance between the topmost point of the sky to the lowest point of

[116] Jacoff 1993, pp 218-219.

[117] Hollander 2001, pp 127.

[118] See Hollander ad *Paradiso* XXXI.79-90; also see Jacoff, 1993, pp 219.

the ocean, thus illustrating how far away she suddenly seems, yet how clearly nevertheless he sees her. He aims never to forget everything that she has helped him achieve, solidifying their connection at the end of their journey together. She has sacrificed to remain in her rightful place in heaven "for my (Dante's) salvation" (*Paradiso* XXXI.80). As she disappears, Dante speaks his last words to Beatrice in which he acknowledges that *tuo podere tua bontate* (*your goodness and power*) have helped him reach salvation (*Paradiso* XXXI.83).[119]Dante is the last to speak, which shows his capacity for taking care of his own soul.[120] He demonstrates that he is now no longer dependent on Beatrice's authority as he was at the beginning of the journey.

Overall, the trajectory of their relationship begins with a harsh Beatrice who demonstrates a militaristic masculine authority, but ends ultimately with a compassionate and helpful guide;[121] whereas, Dante begins his journey as a lost and frightened child and transforms into a man capable of understanding and enlightenment who seeks to love God above all else. The similes beginning in Purgatorio XXX and ending in *Paradiso* XXXI map out the development of their relationship over the course of their journey. To the pilgrim, Beatrice is first the love of his secular life, but at last she becomes the *donna ch'a Dio mi menava* "*lady who was leading me to God"* (Paradiso XVIII.4). The more that Dante understands this, the clearer this becomes to the reader.

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[119] *Glenn,* 136.

[120] Hollander 2001, pp 126 "His final words to her take the form of a prayer (XXXI,91) and reveal the total success of her mission: Dante now fully understands that she lives in Christ, the cause of his being drawn from his sinful life when she descended to Limbo."

[121] Placing Beatrice in a particular category is extremely difficult because she resembles a mother – and therefore Mary – a military leader, a lover, the Church and even Christ. See also Jacoff 1993, pp 219; Ryan, 146; Glenn, 120-124, and Psaki.

Conclusion

The Dido episode, which has been read as a great tragic love story by many, is arguably the most memorable episode in the *Aeneid*. For optimistic readers of the *Aeneid*, Dido is the embodiment of *furor* that opposes Aeneas's mission to found Rome. She is a failed character who becomes so consumed by her love for Aeneas that she causes destruction to herself and to her city. For pessimistic readers of the *Aeneid*, on the other hand, Dido represents a moral challenge to imperialism. Such readers argue that because Vergil makes us sympathize with Dido who is an impediment to the mission, we are required to question the mission ourselves. In Dante's *Commedia*, by contrast, Dante-poet's great comedic love story is that of himself and Beatrice. As the object of his youthful affections, Beatrice served as his connection to God; but after her death, the pilgrim was, as he indicates, led astray both by women and by intellectual pursuits (*Purgatorio* XXX.109-145). Beatrice then takes it upon herself, at the suggestions of Mary, Lucy, and Rachel, to help guide Dante back to God and appoints Virgil[122] as the guide through *Inferno* and part of *Purgatorio*. If the reader sees Dante's comedic epic (*Inferno* XVI.128; XXI.2) as a response to Vergil's tragic one (*Inferno* XX.113),[123] then he or she must assume that Dante needed to respond to the Dido episode, undoubtedly the *Aeneid*'s most famous and enthralling.[124] It is my opinion, therefore, that Beatrice – not Francesca, as some might think – is Dante's Dido. I believe, therefore, that I have made a plausible argument that a comparison of the relationship between Dido and Aeneas to that of Dante and Beatrice has

[122] See Hollander 2001, footnote 150, pp 116.

[123] Virgil is made to call the *Aeneid: l'alta mia tragedìa* "my lofty tragedy" (*Inferno* XX.113) while in the following canto the Dante-poet refers to his own epic as *la mia comedìa* "my Comedy" (*Inferno* XXI.2) for the second time thus emphasizing the difference between the two authors and their texts according to Dante-poet.

[124] Ovid *Tristia* II.533-536.

shown that Dante-poet's purpose is to challenge Vergil's text by constructing Beatrice as the new and improved "Christian Dido"[125] who aids Dante in his mission, as opposed to Dido who attempts to deter Aeneas from his. If Beatrice is the new Dido, one can similarly conclude, as I have argued, that Dante-pilgrim is the new Aeneas.[126]

Turning now to the similes specifically, I have argued that, in the case of both poets, the extended similes, a characteristic of the epic genre, are well integrated[127] into the context and meaning of their poems and that they present an interesting lens through which to observe the relationships between Aeneas and Dido and Dante-pilgrim and Beatrice. From my study of the development of these similes in reference to these two relationships, I have concluded that the sequence of similes illuminates the disparities between the trajectories of the two relationships. Furthermore, Dante responds to Vergil's tragic love story with his own "corrected" comic version, in part through similes. That is, Dante's program of similes concerning the pilgrim and Beatrice is deliberately responsive to Vergil's concerning Aeneas and Dido, as the two authors both utilize similes to reveal the nature of these relationships respectively. By examining, the similes common to the two poems, the characters of Dido and Aeneas in the *Commedia*, the authority of the female lovers, and the communication between the lovers, I have aimed to provide another dimension of analysis to the ironic reading of the *Commedia*, wherein Dante-poet subverts Vergil's pagan epic with his "corrected" Christian version.

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[125] See Hawkins 1991.

[126] *Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono*; "I am neither Aeneas nor Paul" (Inferno II.32). See Hollander ad loc for explanation of the irony of this statement because Dante sees himself as both the new Aeneas and the new Paul.

[127] See West for discussion of how similes relate to the surrounding narrative in the *Aeneid;* Lansing for broad discussion of *Commedia* similes.

SIMILE OF THE TREE IN THE WIND

Perhaps the clearest substantiation of Dante-poet's ironic reading of Vergil may be seen in his singular, wholly precise rewriting of Vergil's simile in reference to Beatrice and the pilgrim, i.e. the image of the tree in the wind. In other epics, [128] as well as in the *Aeneid* itself, there are similes in which the tree succumbs to the wind and topples over. In the instance of Book IV, therefore, Vergil intentionally chooses to keep the tree upright. When Anna appeals to Aeneas' emotions by bringing him news of Dido's suffering, she is ultimately unsuccessful since he remains standing as an oak in a windstorm (*Aeneid* IV.441-449). Whether this makes Aeneas admirable[129] – in that it does not deter him from departing from Carthage – or somehow less[130] than human or a combination of the two is indeed a moral question. In any case, however, Aeneas resists the wind to the benefit of the mission because Dido, however sympathetic, would prevent him from founding Rome. In the *Commedia*, Dante-poet drastically changes the meaning of this simile: here the pilgrim is the tree which is uprooted by the wind that is Beatrice (*Purgatorio* XXXI.70-75). Because Beatrice's wind has the will of God behind it, it is more powerful than Anna's. Furthermore, there is no moral question as to which course of action Dante-pilgrim should pursue in his current situation as there is in the *Aeneid*. Unlike Anna and Dido, Beatrice is aligned with a force that supports Dante's mission. As discussed previously, the simile in *Purgatorio* XXXI is the first of three similes in which the pilgrim is compared to a tree up against the elements. In the final simile of this program, Dante-pilgrim resists the wind that

[128] O'Hara ad *Aeneid* IV.445-6; As for how much of the Greek tradition Dante would have been aware of, I cannot say because Dante did not read Greek, and I am not entirely sure what he would have had access regarding the tradition in which Vergil was writing.

[129] Otis, 267.

[130] Perkell 1981, pp 370.

compels him to remain silent, thus validating his independence by speaking to Adam (*Paradiso* XXVI.85-90). Once more, one may see a significant difference between the two heroes: Aeneas overcomes the winds by not speaking, Dante by speaking. Thus, Dante-poet gives a new Christian meaning to the simile from the pagan epic.

AENEAS AND DIDO IN THE *COMMEDIA*

Another feature of Dante-poet's subversion of Vergil is that he places both Aeneas and Dido in the *Inferno*: Aeneas in Limbo with the "virtuous pagans" and Dido in the circle of Lust (*Inferno* IV.122; V.61-62, 85). Along with his creator, Virgil, Aeneas never acknowledges the absolute power of God, nor does he realize the sacred truth of the importance of salvation. Although this is the extent to which Aeneas occurs as a character in the *Commedia,* he is consistently reshaped as the pilgrim assumes the role as the "new Christian Aeneas." Turning again to Dido, we see that in canto V Dido is mentioned twice, once[131] described in the catalogue of souls in the storm, and the second time by name shortly before the appearance of Francesca (*Inferno* V.61-2; 85). Moreover, Dante-poet clearly highlights Dido's placement in the circle of lust by referencing the souls of Paolo and Francesca *cotali uscir de la schiera ov' è Dido* "so did these leave the troop where Dido is," but she does not speak nor is she spoken to, thus being deprived of her power in the *Commedia* (*Inferno* V. 85). In electing to keep Dido silent, Dante-poet undermines one of Vergil's most influential characters and, by extension, Vergil himself. In Vergil's poem, Dido's silence in the underworld has been interpreted both as an affirmation[132] of

[131] *L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa/e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;* "Here is she who broke faith with the ashes/ of Sichaeus and slew herself for love" (Inferno V.61-62).

[132] Spence, 94.

her power and as a lack thereof. Therefore, Dido's placement in the circle of lust rather than with the suicides, affirms both Vergil's and Dante-poet's reading of Dido as a woman who died for love not for her own honor as she claims. The parallel between Francesca and Dido is rather apparent since both are women whose lust ultimately causes their own destruction, and, therefore, Francesca, instead of Dido, speaks to defend[133] herself and her sinful actions (*Inferno* V.88-138). The love between Francesca and Paolo is not as much love as it is lust, preventing them from deserving our pity, since we are readers who should ultimately wish to achieve salvation, and they are failures in this regard, just as are Aeneas and Dido. If the story of Francesca and Paolo invites us to think about Dido and Aeneas, it then also follows that it invites us to think about Dante and Beatrice. From Dante-poet's perspective, Vergil, both the author and his character, is caught in the tragedy of life without God, which forces seemingly innocent people like Dido to be destroyed. Here I have argued that the final judgment of the two, as far as Dante-poet is concerned, is condemnation, whereas Dante and Beatrice will ultimately be placed in paradise because Beatrice represents a true love, a salvific one.

AUTHORITY[134] OF THE FEMALE LOVER

As previously discussed, the relationship between Dido and Aeneas is destructive for them both. It hinders Aeneas' mission to found Rome and consumes Dido with *furor* such that she kills herself and prays for Hannibal, thereby ironically destroying Carthage through her own rage (*Aeneid* IV.625-626). Vergil, therefore, elicits *pathos* from the reader who then sympathizes

[133] See Perkell 2004 for more on the irony of Francesca's speech.

[134] I am using Sarah Spence's definition for authority: "authority – by which I mean her ability to control, either politically, morally, or textually, the focus of attention" (Spence, 80).

with Dido's suffering; nevertheless, she is ultimately unable to affect the outcome[135] of the poem, remaining simultaneously memorable and powerless.

In contrast, the relationship between Beatrice and Dante-pilgrim in the *Commedia* is entirely salvific for Dante-pilgrim and poet. Not only does Beatrice aim to help Dante on his mission, but she is the very reason for the mission, a mission elevated by comparison to Aeneas', since there is no higher calling for a Christian than love and devotion to God. Beatrice is just as memorable as Dido, if not more so, by appealing not to our sense of pity, but to our sense of justice.[136] Initially, Dido calls attention to the fact that she and Aeneas are equals – both widowed leaders who are forced to flee their homes and found new cities (*Aeneid* I.614-630). The opposite is true for Dante and Beatrice, who begin as instructor and student, but progress towards equality. Although Dido does descend into madness, Aeneas is never in a position of moral authority over her, as there is no moral guidance for either of them. Therefore, Beatrice has moral authority over Dante-pilgrim in a way that neither Dido nor Aeneas has over the other. Dante can never hope to surpass Beatrice, as he does Virgil, but instead to be her equal in Heaven, as all who are saved rejoice[137] in God's will. Thus, Beatrice and Dante come together by the end of the poem, whereas Aeneas and Dido diverge from each other. While Dido and Beatrice are equally memorable, they are opposites with respect to their authority.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE LOVERS

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[135] Spence, 80.

[136] Hollander 2001.

[137] As Piccarda explains to the pilgrim in the sphere of the Moon: *E 'n la sua volontade è nostra pace: "*And in His will is our peace" (*Paradiso* III.85).

Another key element of the similes in both texts was the quality of communication between the lovers. In the *Aeneid*, there is a tragic lack of effective communication. Dido misreads Aeneas' dedication to this mission, and Aeneas misreads both Dido's passion for permanence in marriage with him as well as her susceptibility to madness and delusion. In the final encounter between the two lovers in the Fields of Mourning, Dido attempts to show indifference and contempt by not speaking to Aeneas, but her placement in the underworld with those who died for love betrays her and her hostility toward Aeneas.

By contrast, when we look at the beginning of the relationship between Beatrice and Dante-pilgrim, we find that Beatrice takes on the primary speaking role, while the pilgrim is consistently compared to someone who is silent. Initially, Beatrice assumes various authoritative roles over Dante-pilgrim. As the journey progresses, however, he is able to speak with authority on his own behalf. When he prepares to speak with Peter and when he fights against the silencing wind to speak with Adam, he begins to exercise his own power (*Paradiso* XXIV.46-51, XXVI.85-90). Finally, Dante-pilgrim is the last of the two of them to speak to the other in his prayer to Beatrice (*Paradiso* XXXI.79-90). Having been taught by Beatrice to love God and to care for his own salvation, he is now ready to have Saint Bernard as his guide for his final vision.

FURTHER STUDY

Although it was not my original goal, I believe that this comparative study of similes describing the relationships of the two poems' two protagonists has served to confirm Dante-poet's reading of his own poem as a comedy and his and Virgil's reading of the *Aeneid* as a tragedy. Furthermore, I believe that I have illustrated that Dante-poet deliberately constructs his own poem as a comedy responsive to Vergil's pessimism.

This project could be pursued in a number of ways, as one could further examine the development of Dante-pilgrim by studying the similes between himself and Virgil as well as Saint Bernard. Alternatively, one could approach the question from a broader classical context, and, e.g., conduct a study of the similes of other poets, such as Ovid, Lucan, Statius or any combination of the three. Yet another possible avenue of study is to examine St. Augustine's *Confessions* as a bridge between the *Aeneid* and the *Commedia.* Further examination of Beatrice in Dante's other works might add another dimension of analysis to this project, as would an examination of the French and Italian traditions in which Dante was also writing.

In conclusion, the relationship of Dido and Aeneas takes place in life, but leads to death. Whereas, the relationship of Dante-pilgrim flourishes in death, Beatrice's death at least, and leads to eternal life, essentially summing up the Christian ideal. In the *Commedia*, there is a sense of morality, which Dante-poet finds lacking in the *Aeneid*. For Vergil, the world's sorrows, injustices, and horrors are never redressed, but for Dante, all these find resolution in the ultimate love and justice of God.

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