

The Figure of Creusa in Augustine's *Confessions*
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In the *Confessions*, when Augustine recalls how he was captivated by the pagan literature of his boyhood, he cites three scenes from Book 2 of Vergil's *Aeneid*: *dulcissimum spectaculum vanitatis, equus ligneus plenus armatis et Troiae incendium atque ipsius umbra Creusae*, "the sweetest spectacle of vanity: a wooden horse full of armed men, the conflagration of Troy, and the shade of Creusa herself." (1.13.22) The three narrative elements that comprise this *spectaculum* are not arbitrary. Rather, they outline the structuring themes of Augustine's spiritual journey. First, the Trojans' misinterpretation of the horse parallels Augustine's misapplication of spiritual gifts in his early life. Second, the direction Aeneas receives during the burning of Troy compares to the guidance of others that directs Augustine toward his eventual conversion and abandonment of his former life. This paper will focus on the last of these three scenes, the encounter with Creusa's shade.

Although scholars have devoted much attention the parallels between Aeneas and Augustine and between Dido and Augustine's mother, little discussed are the echoes of Creusa in Augustine's text.¹ I align Creusa with two figures in the *Confessions*: Augustine's unnamed friend who dies at Thagaste and Augustine's unnamed concubine of over thirteen years whom he must leave because of an engagement to a young girl from a family of good rank. Jointly they recall the reasons Aeneas must leave Creusa behind: death and the promise of an advantageous marriage.

Aeneas loses Creusa as he flees from Troy. Once he discovers this and turns back to search for her, he is met by her shade. At this point, while representing his past and the death of that past, she, nonetheless, simultaneously points him to his future in Hesperia, reminding him of the will of the gods, by whom he feels abandoned, and informing him of a new kingdom and a royal bride that await him (2.783-84). In other words, she shows him how to act in accordance with *pietas*. Moreover, her composure sets a striking example for how to behave, particularly when contrasted with his tears and attempts to embrace her. Just as Creusa reminds Aeneas of his proper course by example, both Augustine's friend and concubine devoutly submit themselves to God shortly before they are separated from Augustine. Afterwards, however, Augustine finds that he cannot imitate the examples they set, as Asiedu examines in the case of the concubine.²

Augustine depicts his relationships with his friend and concubine as substitutes for intimacy with God. Like Creusa at the end of *Aeneid* 2, they too are shades or imitations of something beloved. For example, as he grieves for the death of his friend, it is God that Augustine perceives as a ghost: *verior erat et melior homo, quem carissimum amiserat, quam phantasma in quod sperare iubebatur*, "truer and better was the man, who was very dear to me and whom I had lost, than the ghost in which I was ordered to hope" (4.4.9). The choice of the word *phantasma* to describe God highlights an inversion, in which a dead friend is substituted for a living God.

Augustine's fascination with the shade of Creusa is part of his larger attraction to the literature of Vergil that captivates Augustine not only as a child but in his post-conversion years, as well. Though reading the *Aeneid* is a part of the early education that Augustine seems to condemn, he clearly does not feel the need to abandon Vergil's epic. Rather, he utilizes this

¹ Bennet, Camille. 1988. "The Conversion of Vergil: The *Aeneid* in Augustine's *Confessions*." *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, 34: 46-69.

Fichter, Andrew. 1982. *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance*. New Haven.

Ziolkowski, Eric J. 1995. "St. Augustine: Aeneas' Antitype, Monica's Boy". *Literature and Theology*, 9:1-23.

² Asiedu, F.B.A. 1994. "The Example of a Woman: Sexual Renunciation and Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386." Accessed 10 January 2007, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/felix>.

“spectacle of vanity” as a substantial tool in narrating his relationship with his friend and his concubine. What Creusa is to Aeneas, the *Aeneid* is to Augustine. It is the case that Augustine must relinquish his grip on his past relationships, so as to make room for his marriage, not to a noble girl, but to a chaste and fertile bride in the form of a personified Continentia (8.11.27). Like Creusa’s ghost, however, the very figures that represent Augustine’s past do not hold him back but are reconceived by Augustine as instruments of the will of God that point him to his future.