

Corrected Love: Dante's Adaptation of *Aeneid* IV.441-449

Both Vergil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Commedia* have long 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). Brooks Otis and other scholars have argued for the optimistic reading (Otis 1963), while scholars such as Christine Perkell have suggested a pessimistic reading (Perkell 1981). In the case of the *Commedia*, the debate centers on the moral status of the condemned: whether they are, in some sense, heroic exemplars of the human spirit or, instead, sinners whose every utterance must be subjected to an ironic reading, given their relegation to hell. The romantic reading has been largely adopted by Italian scholars, while the many American scholars, including Robert Hollander and John Freccero, have put forth ironic readings of the poem (Hollander 2000, Freccero 1987).

While scholars have noted Vergil's influence on Dante, there has not yet been a comparative study of the extended similes describing the relationship between Aeneas and Dido with that of Dante and Beatrice. This paper will define an aspect of the relationship between Dante's *Commedia* and Vergil's *Aeneid*, focusing on the sequence of extended similes in both texts, which illustrates the relationships between the protagonist and his lover. In both sets of similes, I hope to find a significant pattern, which is linked to the overall meanings of their respective poems. Furthermore, I will 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*.

The clearest substantiation of Dante's ironic reading of Vergil may be seen in his complete reworking of Vergil's simile in reference to Beatrice and the pilgrim, i.e. the image of

the tree in the wind. In the *Aeneid*, in the simile in which the tree struggles against the wind, Aeneas resists the wind to the benefit of the mission because Dido, however sympathetic, would prevent him from founding Rome.

In the *Commedia*, Dante adapts this simile and drastically changes it for his own purposes, using the image twice, once in *Purgatorio* and once in *Paradiso*. By exploring the changes that Dante has made to Vergil's original simile, I intend to demonstrate how Dante gives a new Christian meaning to the simile from the pagan epic.

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