

## Augustine's Pagan Pleasure: the *Aeneid's* Influence on the *Confessions*

My paper examines connections between Virgil's *Aeneid* and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. The *Aeneid's* influence on Augustine's *Confessions* has been thoroughly documented in modern scholarship (MacCormack, 1998; Pucci, 2014; Ramage, 1970). I believe, however, that I have made two new connections in the way Augustine uses the *Aeneid* to shape his *Confessions*.

First, Augustine uses a Virgilian model for his sexuality. Both Aeneas and Augustine take three lovers in their respective stories; Aeneas had Creusa, Dido and Lavinia, while Augustine takes two concubines before turning his sexual life over to the Lord. Each partner Aeneas takes in the *Aeneid* mirrors Augustine's partners in the *Confessions*. Aeneas was first married to Creusa, a long and loving marriage that resulted in a son being born. Likewise, Augustine's first concubine was in a relationship with him for almost twenty years, producing a son as well. Both men were extremely emotionally distressed by the loss of their first partner, yet it was necessary for both to lose them on their path to destiny. After the devastating loss of a first partner, Aeneas and Augustine then rebound with a second partnerships with, respectively, Dido and another concubine. For both men, this second relationship marks a diversion, a misstep from their greater goal. Both Dido and this second concubine epitomize an aversion for responsibility and a desire for a life of leisure, so these women must also be left behind. Finally, each man ends up in the marriage that ends their *errores* and provides inner peace, stability, and divine love. For Aeneas, this marriage is to Lavinia, in which he has found glory and a new homeland for the Trojan people. Augustine likewise finds the perfect marriage with the Lord by becoming celibate. This "marriage" also ends Augustine's *errores* in the *Confessions*, as he has now found inner peace

and spiritual salvation. Aeneas attains his ultimate destiny through marriage after two unsuccessful attempts, and Augustine similarly models his own struggles with sexuality in the *Confessions*.

The second new connection I have made is between Monica, Augustine's mother, and Venus, the goddess of love and Aeneas' mother. While most studies compare Monica and Dido (Bennett, 1988; MacCormack, 1998), I believe that the comparison between the two mothers is equally important. Both mothers want the best for their sons, as Venus hoped that Aeneas would reattain the Trojan's lost glory in Italy while Monica prayed for Augustine's spiritual salvation. Although both women believe that they are helping their sons, they actually hinder them. Both Monica and Venus push their sons to marry, yet this fact works against their sons' development. In the end, both mothers must conform to the Divine Will: Venus to Jupiter's and Monica to the Lord's. Alongside these thematic and structural similarities, the philological connections Augustine makes with the *Aeneid* in his *Confessions* on the subjects of sex and mothering confirm my previous arguments.

#### Bibliography

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