

The Unfeeling Tutelage of the State and Divine Authority in Virgil's *Aeneid*

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Hopes for a magnificent century

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Abstract

Venus oversees the physical movement that begins from Troy and ends in Italy; she thus secures the establishment of a new state in Italy, *imperium sine fine*. Venus is the ancestress of the line that stretches from Aeneas to Augustus, thus granting the *princeps* a divine and inherited responsibility to rule the Roman nation. With that said, Virgil by no means draws a perfect image of authority with Venus. The poet imagines her as irrational, fearsome, unfeeling, and destructive. She is scandalous with adultery. She is heedless of human suffering as she attends her imperial purpose. Such descriptions undermine Venus' authority and reveal the need for other participants (such as Juno and Jupiter) in the imperial regime. Those who read Venus as a source of Augustan sovereignty must also acknowledge the ways in which the *Aeneid* measures the shortcomings of the goddess and limits her authority.

List of Abbreviations Used

<i>Aen.</i>	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>
<i>Aug.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Divus Augustus</i>
<i>Cl.</i>	Seneca, <i>De Clementia</i>
<i>DRN.</i>	Lucretius, <i>De Rerum Natura</i>
<i>G.</i>	Virgil, <i>Georgics</i>
<i>Hom. Hymn Aph.</i>	Homer, <i>Hymn to Aphrodite</i>
<i>Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Iliad</i>
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
<i>RG.</i>	Augustus, <i>Res Gestae</i>

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the *Aeneid*, the figure of Venus (or rather Virgil's characterization of her) in large measure reflects the poet's ambivalent attitude towards Augustanism. The goddess solidifies the Augustan regime and grants it legitimacy. However, there occurs a spontaneous comparison between Venus' monstrous cruelty and Octavian's reputation for violence. The unfeeling pragmatism with which Venus moves the imperial agenda suggests that such pragmatism also belonged to Augustus, who governs the same program as the goddess. Venus' scandalous name and her associations with adultery contradict the stern laws of Augustan reform, particularly the *Lex Julia De Adulteriis* (The Julian Law Prosecuting Adultery) passed only approximately a year following Virgil's death. Ultimately, Jupiter's *imperium* incorporates Venus as well as her political opponent, Juno; he does not create a system in which Venus rules over other parties. Venus cannot represent the Roman state and religion on her own. This suggests that the imperial state, *imperium sine fine*, relies on more than one political authority. In the present study, I compare Virgil's Venus with her Homeric predecessor, Aphrodite, with her counterpart in the *Iliad*, Thetis, and with her opponent in the *Aeneid*, Juno: compared with other goddesses, Venus appears unfeeling and inattentive to human suffering. Like Aphrodite, Venus causes *furor* and rejoices in the destruction that she creates. A comparison between Venus and Thetis reveals the maternal shortcomings of the former goddess, who ignores the identity of her son and chooses to keep him uninformed about important matters (e.g. the nature of his mission and his part in the divine scheme). A comparison with Juno reveals the political shortcomings of Venus: as late as Book 10, she vainly clings to the Trojan past. Venus' cruelty, in contrast with Juno's subtle humanism, appears monstrous.

It is impossible to understand the *Aeneid*'s engagement with Augustus without reference to its immediate political context. In 44 BC, Gaius Octavian accepted Julius Caesar's call to become his heir. From then on, he engaged in 14 years of civil conflict in order to establish his rule in Rome; the fratricide between Romans began to calm after the Battle of Actium in 31 BC and the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra in the subsequent year. Decades of struggle left the Roman people exhausted, the city of Rome tarnished, and Octavian as foremost citizen (*princeps*). Octavian's victory marked the conclusion of political chaos and launched an era of renovation (governmental and cultural) for the Roman nation. According to historian Suetonius,

Urbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornatam et inundationibus incendiisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset. tutam vero, quantum provideri humana ratione potuit, etiam in posterum praestitit.

Since the city was not adorned as the dignity of the empire demanded, and was exposed to flood and fire, he so beautified it that he could justly boast that he had found it built of brick and left it marble. He made it safe too for the future so far as human foresight could provide for this. (Suet. *Aug.* 28)¹

In 28 BC, Octavian minted a coin that declared the restoration of the Republic (*leges et iura Publicae Rei restituit*) and its laws. In 27 BC, he received the name Augustus and was gifted by the Senate a shield with four virtues inscribed: *virtus* (courage), *pietas* (piety), *clementia* (clemency), and *iustitia* (justice).² In his *Res Gestae*, the strongman writes about how he restored the dignity of Rome, its state and religion:

¹ Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*, ed. and trans. J. C. Rolfe. London: William Heinemann, 1928.

² Karl Galinsky writes, "(1) *virtus* itself, which means courage and leadership in both civilian and military life; (2) clemency, which was never absolute but contingent; an example is Augustus' statement in the *Res*

Curiam et continens ei Chalcidicum templumque Apollinis in Palatio cum porticibus, aedem divi Iuli, Lupercal, porticum ad circum Flaminium . . . aedes in Capitolio Iovis Feretri Iovis Tonantis, aedem Quirini, aedes Minervae et Iunonis Reginae et Iovis Libertatis in Aventino, aedem Larum in summa sacra via, aedem deum Penatium in Velia, aedem Iuventatis, aedem Matris Magnae in Palatio feci.

I built the Senate House, and the Chalcidicum adjacent to it, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine with its porticoes, the temple of the divine Julius, the Lupercal, the portico at the Flaminian circus . . . the temples on the Capitol of Jupiter Feretrius and Jupiter the Thunderer, the temple of Quirinus, the temples of Minerva and Queen Juno and Jupiter Libertas on the Aventine, the temple of the Lares at the top of the Sacred Way, the temple of the Di Penates in the Velia, the temple of Youth, and the temple of the Great Mother on the Palatine. (Aug. *RG*. 19)³

Virgil witnessed these years of healing and began writing the *Aeneid*, crowning urban development with a parallel act of cultural innovation in the literary realm; the epic served as an important (if not integral) part of the Augustan program. Under the tutelage of Augustus, Rome rejoiced with rejuvenation.

Octavian earned the love of his people, but many clung to their memories from the years of civil strife; he had a reputation for cruelty that contradicted the image of Augustus:

Inita cum Antonio et Lepido societate Philippense quoque bellum, quamquam inualidus atque aeger, duplici proelio transegit, quorum priore castris exutus uix ad Antoni cornu fuga evaserat. nec successum uictoriae moderatus est, sed capite Bruti Romam misso, ut statuae Caesaris subiceretur, in splendidissimum

Gestae that he preferred to spare, rather than destroy foreign peoples when they could be pardoned safely; (3) justice, which is essential for any good ruler and good government; and (4) *pietas*, which is the recognition that gods, *res publica*, and family are more important than one's self and that good leaders act accordingly" (Galinsky, 2012: 70).

³ Augustus, *Res Gestae*, ed. and trans. P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967.

quemque captiuum non sine uerborum contumelia saeuit; ut quidem uni suppliciter sepulturam precanti respondisse dicitur iam istam uolucrum fore potestatem; alios, patrem et filium, pro uita rogantis sortiri uel micare iussisse, ut alterutri concederetur, ac spectasse utrumque morientem, cum patre, quia se optulerat, occiso filius quoque voluntariam occubisset necem.

Then, forming a league with Antony and Lepidus, he finished the war of Philippi also in two battles, although weakened by illness, being driven from his camp in the first battle and barely making his escape by fleeing to Antony's division. He did not use his victory with moderation, but after sending Brutus' head to Rome, to be cast at the feet of Caesar's statue, he vented his spleen upon the most distinguished of his captives, not even sparing them insulting language. For instance, to one man who begged humbly for burial, he is said to have replied "the birds will soon settle that question." When two others, father and son, begged for their lives, he is said to have bidden them cast lots or play *mora*, to decide which should be spared, and then to have looked on while both died, since the father was executed because he offered to die for his son, and the latter thereupon took his own life. (Suet. *Aug.* 13)

The mutilation of Brutus' corpse recalls the Homeric expressions of anger and cruelty (namely the mutilation of Hector's corpse by Achilles). In 40 BC, Octavian trapped Lucius Antonius (an ally of Mark Antony) with some of his followers in the city of Perugia and starved them until their surrender. To mark his victory, Octavian sacrificed 300 members of the local upper class at the altar of Divine Julius on the Ides of March. To those who begged for mercy, Octavian would routinely repeat the following phrase: *moriendum est* ("it is time to die"). Such bloodletting in civil conflict brings Octavian to a monstrous scale, beyond human feeling. The strongman restored stability and integrity to Rome. Nonetheless, many continued to fear the cruelty of Octavian, even though the ruler had embraced the identity of clement Augustus (Galinsky, 2012: 36). During the build-up

to the Battle of Actium, Mark Antony's propaganda efforts focused on describing Octavian as a cruel monster (Galinsky, 2012: 47). Even Seneca, in his letters to Nero, describes the shadow of Octavian's cruelty following Augustus:

*In adolescentia caluit, arsit ira, multa fecit, ad quae invitus
oculos retorquebat . . . fuerit moderatus et clemens, nempe post
mare Actiacum Romano cruore infectum, nempe post fractas in
Sicilia classes et suas et alienas, nempe post Perusinas aras et
proscriptiones.*

In youth he was hot-headed, flared up with anger, and did many things which he looked back upon with regret . . . Granted that he was restrained and merciful—yes, to be sure, but it was after Actium's waters had been stained with Roman blood, after his own and an enemy's fleet had been wrecked off Sicily, after the holocaust of Perugia and the proscriptions. (*Cl.* 1.11.1)⁴

Thus, Octavian Augustus was notorious for the cruelty by which he persecuted his political opponents. If such descriptions of Augustus are not perfectly accurate, they at least reveal some of the feelings that the strongman aroused in the hearts of Romans.

The Augustan mission to restore the state and its cultural, architectural, religious and imperial integrity achieved success in many ways. Augustus' reputation, however, remained tied to the carnage that brought the Republic to its knees. To many, the name of Augustus meant hope and the restoration of national pride; to others, his name revitalized fear and memories of monstrous violence. Virgil began writing the *Aeneid* one year after Octavian received the name Augustus. Virgil praises the ruler as a Trojan Caesar who fulfills Jupiter's promise and establishes a boundless empire: *nascetur pulcrha Troianus origine Caesar, / imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris, / Iulus, a magno demissum nomen Iulo* ("A Trojan Caesar will be born from a noble origin. He will extend

⁴ Seneca, *De Clementia*, ed. and trans. J. W. Basore. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.

his rule to the Ocean and his fame to heaven. Julius will be his name, inherited from great Iulus;” *Aen.* 1.286–288).⁵ This gives Augustus a divine, inherited right to rule as the *Aeneid* traces the Julian name to Iulus, the grandson of Venus by founding father Aeneas. Augustus is the saviour of Rome: *claudentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus / saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aenis / post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento* (“The Gates of War will be shut; impious Furor settling over savage arms will rage with his hands bound behind his back with a hundred brazen bonds, his mouth horrid with gore;” *Aen.* 1.294–296). Augustus brought stability to Rome by ending decades of civil war. In Book 6, Anchises reveals Augustus to Aeneas as the promised hero who resembles the gods:

*Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
 Augustus Caesar, Divi genus, aurea condet
 saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
 Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos
 proferet imperium: iacet extra sidera tellus,
 extra anni solisque vias, ubi caelifer Atlas
 axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum.
 Huius in adventum iam nunc et Caspia regna
 responsis horrent divom et Maeotia tellus,
 et septemgemini turbant trepida ostia Nili.
 Nec vero Alcides tantum telluris obivit,
 fixerit aripedem cervam licet, aut Erymanthi
 pacarit nemora, et Lernam tremefecerit arcu;
 nec, qui pampineis victor iuga flectit habenis,
 Liber, agens celso Nysae de vertice tigres.*

It is he; he is the man whom you so often heard promised to you: Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will bring back the Golden Age in Latium throughout the fields that once belonged to Saturn. He will bring the empire to the Garamants and Indians. A land lies beyond the stars, beyond the paths of year and the sun, where

⁵ All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

sky-lifting Atlas carries on his shoulder a sphere studded with burning stars. Now, the Caspian realms and Maeotic land shudder at his arrival; they know the will of the gods. Even the sevenfold Nile's mouths quiver with fear. Not even Hercules, who pierced the brazen-footed deer, who settled the groves of Erymanthus and terrified Lerna with his bow, travelled so much land. Not even victor Bacchus, leading tigers from the height of Nysa, who guides a chariot with vine-leaf reins, travelled so much land.
(*Aen.* 6.791–805)

In the *Aeneid*, Augustus thus enjoys a divine status, since the scale of his fame extends beyond human measure, competing with Hercules and Bacchus. On the shield of Aeneas, Virgil describes Augustus (and Agrippa) as they sail against Mark Antony and champion Roman gods against monstrous (*deum monstra*) Egyptian divinities: *cum patribus populoque, Penatibus et magnis dis / stans celsa in puppi* (“Augustus stands on the lofty stern with his ancestors, his people, the Penates and the great gods;” *Aen.* 8.679–680). The Roman strongman is just like Aeneas, who also champions the Penates and the great gods (*Penates et magnis dis*) with his son and people (*cum sociis natoque*) as followers (*Aen.* 3.12). Therefore, the Trojan king—Virgil allows the Trojans to call Aeneas *rex* (*Aen.* 1.544)—lends his responsibilities to the Roman ruler. It is Aeneas' piety (*pietas*), one of Augustus' four virtues, that gives him the courage to press forward from Troy to Italy. Aeneas' shield depicts Augustus' new and revitalized Rome:

*At Caesar, triplici invectus Romana triumpho
moenia, dis Italis votum immortale sacrat,
maxima ter centum totam delubra per urbem.
laetitia ludisque viae plausuque fremebant;
omnibus in templis matrum chorus, omnibus arae;
ante aras terram caesi stravere iuveni.
ipse, sedens niveo candentis limine Phoebi,
dona recognoscit populorum ...*

But Caesar enters the walls of Rome with triple triumph and does boundless honour to the Italian gods: three hundred temples of the greatest kind throughout the city. The streets celebrate with joy, games and clapping. Every temple is decorated with altars. A band of mothers attend every temple. Slain bulls lie here and there before the altars. Augustus himself, sitting at the bright white threshold of shining Phoebus, studies the gifts that nations bring ... (*Aen.* 8.714–721)

Both the *Aeneid* and the *Res Gestae* stress the role of Augustus as a builder of Rome.

Aeneas' settlement in Italy sows the seeds of Rome, but the hero becomes involved with the establishment of many cities (e.g. Carthage and others found in Book 3) throughout his journey. Aeneas and Augustus may share the same lineage, but they are similar heroes in terms of what they mean to Romans: they are builders of that beloved city (James Morwood, 1991: 212–221).

The *Aeneid* depicts the rule of Augustus as an inherited responsibility and a divine calling (like that of Aeneas). It also, like the *Res Gestae*, describes Augustus as a saviour of Rome, its state and religion. For such truths, many readers receive the epic as Augustan propaganda. Recent work by scholars such as Michael Putnam and Richard F. Thomas (sometimes referred to collectively as “the Harvard school”) challenges the view that Augustanism is the central jewel in the *Aeneid*'s crown.⁶ Indeed, even the would-be Augustan propaganda is undermined by other contemporary accounts: for example, Virgil depicts Augustus standing proudly on a high stern (*stans celsa in puppi*) with the backing of the Roman gods and sailing against Mark Antony and the Egyptian divinities. According to Karl Galinsky, Augustus was sick during the battle and he allowed the more

⁶ Richard Thomas writes, “We need to scrutinize closely the concept of Virgil as “Augustan” poet, if the epithet is taken to imply that his poetry easily serves to persuade, and may have been in part composed so as to persuade that a new, just and perfect order had arrived. I would propose that this is largely a post-Virgilian development, that, potentially this status is a creation of the past two millennia, and particularly of certain cultural moments of those two millennia” (Thomas, 2001: 53).

experienced Agrippa to take charge of the engagement. Galinsky writes, “The battle itself, as historians now agree, was a rather lame affair, and its outcome was foreseeable well in advance;” the event became a turning point, however, for Roman politics and Virgil worked with what Augustus had given him (Galinsky, 2012: 33). Augustus, his ancestral authority, and the hope for a restored Golden Age make a central theme to the *Aeneid*; Virgil spends less time on Augustus and happy days, however, and focuses more on Dido, Palinurus, Misenus, Turnus, and their suffering; the poem focuses, according to David Quint, on the need to heal and forget the past (e.g., the past of civil strife) in order to meaningfully engage in a new chapter, i.e., in this case, the new regime that Augustus offered Rome (David Quint, 1982: 30–38).⁷

Insofar as the *Aeneid* praises Augustus and declares him the great-grandson (by however many generations) of Aeneas and Venus, one can regard it as an Augustan epic. In the present study, however, I argue that the *Aeneid* sustains two political aspects. One aspect empowers the Roman ruler and solidifies his rule; this narrative expresses hope and the desire for a better future (as well as the inevitability of that future as it is imposed by divine will). Another aspect, an expression of wavering and doubt, focuses on the suffering that mortals blindly go through as a necessary evil for the establishment of *imperium sine fine*. In order to make this argument my own way, I focus on the patroness who joins Aeneas to Augustus with divine authority: Venus, whose characterization by Virgil has complexities and problems. If Augustus benefits from his associations with Venus within the realm of Roman politics, the characterization of Venus in the *Aeneid*

⁷ Ralph Hexter (1999: 64–79) also discusses the need to let go or forget in the *Aeneid*. Throughout his journey, Aeneas exhausts his attempts to rebuild Troy; this exhaustion exists as a necessity for Aeneas to take the required measures for his Italian establishment. Forgetting Troy allows the beginning of a new, imperial identity.

has political consequences. Venus' cruelty—Aeneas calls her *crudelis* in Book 1 (line 407)—recalls the criticism voiced against Augustus as a cruel monster. As long as Venus is the goddess of adulterers, she contradicts certain elements of the Augustan cultural reforms, i.e. *Lex Julia De Adulteriis* (Julian Law Prosecuting Adultery), which the ruler introduced in 18 BC, a year after Virgil's death. I am not the only reader to form connections between Virgil's Venus and the poet's reception of the Augustan program; Mairéad McAuley, for example, suggests a connection between the *Aeneid*, sanctioned by Julian Augustus, and Aeneas' shield, sanctioned by Julian Venus. Vulcan resists (*cunctantem*) Venus, but is seduced and yields. McAuley writes,

If we take the art-commissioning Venus as a (at least partly ironic) surrogate for Virgil's patron Augustus, the passage does not simply comment on the propagandizing relation between *princeps* and his poet-for-payment and the artistic 'seductions' of financial reward: it also ironizes Augustus' familial self-representation as anointed son of Caesar and (future) pater of the Roman people, equating him with an ambitious mother and manipulative, adulterous wife (albeit a divine one), who is herself *genetrix* not only for Aeneas but also of the Julian clan.
(McAuley, 2016: 63–64)

As we have seen, the transition from cruel Octavian to clement and pious Augustus took time. For Romans, Augustan politics existed as a source of hope, a chance to recreate Rome as another Golden Age. Others, however, remembered Octavian defiling the corpse of Brutus with Homeric anger and the human sacrifices of Perusia. They feared that Octavian's cruelty hid behind Augustus. In fact, as early as 34 BC, Mark Antony's propaganda efforts were geared towards depicting Octavian as a "monster of cruelty" (Galinsky, 2012: 47). Viewing Venus as a source of Augustan authority and accepting her as a guardian of the movement that begins with Troy and ends with Rome, I argue that goddess, a protagonist, fails to offer a political system that is ethically

superior to her opponent and antagonist Juno, who hates the Trojans and delays Aeneas' mission. Compared with the antagonist, Venus appears cruel and unresponsive to human suffering; Juno, however, attends mortal cries of pain. If we in any degree take Venus' unfeeling involvement in the imperial purpose as a representation of Augustan politics, there occurs a spontaneous comparison between Augustus' cruelty and the cruelty displayed by the divine ancestress; if the strongman exceeds human measure (as Virgil compares him to Bacchus in Book 6), then does he resemble Venus in cruelty? The *Aeneid*, despite being considered *the* Augustan epic, allows and even encourages such considerations. Beyond being Augustan, this is the national epic of Rome; therefore, it creates a space in which more than one political sphere exists. There emerges a balance between Venus and Juno as it becomes clear that the protagonist goddess does not offer a superior moral standard or a more blissful existence than her antagonist counterpart; the two parties must learn to coexist. The necessary ceasefire between Venus and Juno suggests that Virgil's epic always leaves room for the presence of two political aspects. One aspect champions Augustus with a hopeful attitude; another aspect follows with doubtful reluctance.

Chapter 2: Aphrodite

In the *Aeneid*, Virgil consistently problematizes the characterization of Venus. For example, although the goddess closely oversees the Roman movement from Troy to Italy, she maintains a measure of distance between herself and Aeneas; the hero himself acknowledges this distance and calls it cruelty. In this way, the goddess offers purpose and relief, while she also brings confusion and dissatisfaction (especially for Aeneas). In order to understand Virgil's Venus, it is necessary first to examine several seminal treatments of Aphrodite in Greek literature. These influenced Virgil's development of the persona of a Roman Venus in his epic, which in important ways can be seen both as a descendant of and as a reaction against her Greek progenitors. The following chapter examines Aphrodite's representations in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Book 8 of the *Odyssey* and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. The *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and the *Hymn* portray Aphrodite as an irrational, mischievous and scandalous goddess with a subtle inclination to cruelty.

2.1 *Iliad* Book 3: Aphrodite Inspires Irrational Behaviour

We may begin by considering the notion that Aphrodite represents an irrational aspect in the human experience. In Homer and later Greek literature, she is often associated with impulse and desire. Book 3 of the *Iliad* offers a useful vignette of Aphrodite: for Helen and Paris, the goddess clearly represents an irrational urge that goes against the demands of reason. Furthermore, Aphrodite haunts Book 3 with subtle cruelty.

Initially, *Iliad* Book 3 portrays men behaving rationally. Following a lengthy and scolding speech by Hector, Paris takes courage and decides to fight Menelaus. Hector's

speech makes it clear that Paris stands a weaker fighter next to his opponent; despite his lack of talent for battle, Paris wishes to fight a stronger man. He makes his purposes clear in his response to Hector: he wishes to ward off the insults of his brother and other Trojans; he wishes to protect his heroic reputation. Furthermore, Paris hopes to prevent the death of many soldiers by limiting the combat to a single fighter for each side. Paris calculates that if he or Menelaus dies, then a clear victor will emerge, the Greeks will go home (with or without Helen) and innocent Trojans will continue their happy lives (*Il.* 3.373–375). Hector announces the idea to the soldiers on both sides and Menelaus accepts; both heroes, Hector and Menelaus, acknowledge that the death of one man would spare the lives of many Greeks and Trojans (*Il.* 3.392–94, 100–110). Crowds of Trojans and Greeks welcome the news and understand that such a pact between Menelaus and Paris holds the potential to bring peace (*Il.* 3.311). In these scenes, cool reason and calculated rhetoric dictate the terms of ceasefire. This pattern of common sense, however, evaporates when Menelaus emerges as the victor and Aphrodite enters the arena to rescue Paris. Aphrodite interrupts an agreement that values communities over individuals and duty over pleasure.

As Menelaus and Paris prepare to face each other in one on one combat, Priam, wishing to learn about the Greek heroes, calls Helen to his side for conversation.

Although many perceive Helen as the primary cause of war, the king addresses his daughter-in-law gently.⁸ Priam speaks: οὐ τί μοι αἰτία ἐσσί, θεοί νύ μοι αἴτιοί εἰσιν / οἳ μοι ἐφώρμησαν πόλεμον πολὺδακρυον Ἀχαιῶν (“The way I see it, you’re not to blame;

⁸ Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* repeatedly refer to Helen as the primary cause of war. Hanna M. Roisman offers an exhaustive list: *Iliad* 1.159–160; 3.126–128, 156–157; 4.173–174; 6.344–358; 7.350–351; 9.339; 19.325; 22.114–116; 24.762–774; *Odyssey* 4.235–289; 11.438; 14.68–69; 17.118–119; 22.226–230; 23.218–221 (Roisman, 2006: 1).

the gods are blameworthy, / who stirred this lachrymose war between my people and the Achaeans;” *Il.* 3.164–165). Priam neither names a god nor appears to be thinking about a single divinity. Multiple gods desire the destruction of Troy. However, without ignoring the agency of various divinities, one has reason to point a finger at Aphrodite, since the adulterous love affair between Paris and Helen catalyzes the war between the Greeks and the Trojans; Aphrodite causes the scandal and destruction alike.

Following the duel between Menelaus and Paris, Aphrodite approaches Helen and bids her to attend her lover. Helen responds with indignation: κεῖσε δ’ ἐγὼν οὐκ εἶμι: νεμεσσητὸν δέ κεν εἶη: / κείνου πορσανέουσα λέχος: Τρωαὶ δέ μ’ ὀπίσσω / πᾶσαι μωμήσονται (“I will not go to him; I will not attend his bed. It would be outrageous. The women of Troy will mock me always from now” *Il.* 3.410–412). This response reveals that Helen suffers an internal conflict between her desire for Paris and her desire for respect. According to F. J. Groten, Jr., Helen behaves like a Homeric hero and concerns herself with the status of her reputation; Helen reasons that her union with Paris would bring her shame and make her the object of laughter (Groten, 1968: 35). Meanwhile, Helen suffers an irrational urge, the force of Aphrodite, which contradicts her reasoning. Faced with rejection, Aphrodite grows angry and assumes a threatening posture. With such a response from the goddess, Helen has no choice but to concede. Homer holds Aphrodite’s threats together with the growth of Helen’s salacious desire to uncontrollable levels. Helen’s voice of reason pulls her towards reputable decisions, whereas Aphrodite occupies a part of Helen’s psyche that stirs irrationally.⁹

⁹ I describe Aphrodite as a part of Helen’s psyche, because I do not wish to imply that Helen suffers something completely external to her soul; one must not entirely blame Aphrodite and consider Helen a

Aphrodite threatens Helen and inspires fear. Subtle cruelty hides in Aphrodite's handling of Helen, mainly because the goddess degrades the mortal. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Homer describes Helen as she expresses feelings of nostalgia for her life before Paris. In Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, Helen describes her reaction to the destruction of Troy:

ἐνθ' ἄλλαι Τρῳαὶ λίγ' ἐκώκυον: αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ
χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ ἤδη μοι κραδίη τέτραπτο νέεσθαι
ἄψ οἴκόνδ', ἄτην δὲ μετέστενον, ἦν Ἀφροδίτη
δῶχ', ὅτε μ' ἤγαγε κεῖσε φίλης ἀπὸ πατρίδος αἴης,
παῖδά τ' ἐμὴν νοσφισσαμένην

Other women of Troy were loudly wailing, while I was glad at heart. Already I desired to go back home. I regretted the madness which Aphrodite instilled in me, when she led me away from my sweet motherland and my child. (*Od.* 4.259–263)

In Book 3 of the *Iliad*, when Priam engages in conversation with Helen, she begins to talk about her past: ὡς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἀδεῖν κακὸς ὀππότε δεῦρο / υἱεῖ σῶ ἐπόμεν θάλαμον γνωτούς τε λιποῦσα / παῖδά τε τηλυγέτην καὶ ὀμηλικὴν ἐρατεινήν (“If only evil death pleased me before I sailed here with your son; I left behind my bedchamber, countrymen, my child and lovely friendships” *Il.* 3.173–176). Helen, therefore, feels nostalgia and blames Aphrodite; in *Iliad* Book 3, the goddess reveals her awareness of Helen's resentment before the mortal has the opportunity to express it. Aphrodite plays on Helen's nostalgia. One expects the immortals (especially Olympians) to appear in disguise. Aphrodite's appearance as an old wool-dresser woman, whom

mere victim. For the view that Aphrodite's agency does not acquit Helen of guilt, see F. J. Groten: “divinity is not being used as a scapegoat to evade responsibility but rather as a way of explaining human error in judgement...” (Groten, 1968: 35). In a similar vein, Hannah M. Roisman writes, “[In Helen's speech to Aphrodite,] we hear here a mixture of resignation, anger at the god's manipulations, and a deep sense of powerlessness, not an excuse, special pleading, or abnegation of responsibility” (Roisman, 2006: 26–27).

Helen loved beyond all others (μάλιστα δέ μιν φιλέεσκε), cleverly targets Helen's feelings of homesickness (*Il.* 3.388). The goddess confronts the mortal by creating an impossible but pleasant scenario. Aphrodite designs her disguise in a way that tortures Helen's psyche; the goddess burdens the mind of the mortal with images of her past. Why does poetic authority introduce such an act of cruelty into the dialogue between Helen and Aphrodite? Aphrodite herself claims that she loves the mortal lady (*Il.* 3.415). Despite her favouring Helen, the goddess' treatment of her is touched with a degree of cruelty. In Homeric poetry, mischievous cruelty appears to be a natural part of Aphrodite. Aphrodite inspires salaciousness, but she also inspires fear.

Next, Homer offers the dialogue between Paris and Helen. The scene begins with Helen harshly insulting Paris. She mocks the prince for his inability to stay on the battlefield. Paris responds not by defending himself against Helen's words but by inviting her to bed: οὐ γάρ πώ ποτέ μ' ὤδέ γ' ἔρωσ φρένας ἀμφεκάλυψεν ("never yet has desire so overtaken my senses" *Il.* 3.442). In this line, Paris makes an interesting reference to his senses; Aphrodite's force typically targets the φρένες, i.e. the rational faculty.¹⁰ Paris bears many burdens. First, his brother Hector scolds him. Next, although Paris dutifully agrees to enter into battle against Menelaus, he ultimately fails to end the war and to spare the lives of his countrymen. Finally, Helen scolds him. Helen and Paris both share the wish to earn public respect, but Aphrodite grips them too strongly. In the case of Paris, Aphrodite seizes not only his judgement but even his entire body as she carries him away from Menelaus. Aphrodite has an unyielding grasp over Helen and Paris. Helen and

¹⁰ Although the term often refers to the physical structure of the body, the Greeks understood φρήν also as the seat of thought. The term refers to rational activity (Sullivan, S. D., 1983: 15-22). The φρήν is like a container for emotions, ideas.

Paris experience the goddess in the same way: an overwhelming irrational force that pulls mortals away from reputable decisions and actions. Aphrodite corrupts the rational faculty by which mortals participate in community.

Helen and Paris seek to secure a respectable status in society. Aphrodite's force, however, interrupts their pursuit for good reputation; lascivious urge overwhelms the mortals. Without forgetting the independent existence of gods and goddesses apart from mortals, Homer shows that Aphrodite's influence takes over the rational human faculty. *Iliad* Book 3 also describes Aphrodite as a fearsome goddess as she threatens Helen with violence (*Il.* 3.414). Furthermore, subtle cruelty lurks in Aphrodite's treatment of Helen. Writing the *Aeneid*, Virgil recalls this Homeric backdrop to Venus. Reading about Venus' involvement in the imperial Roman purpose and the Augustan program, one must question how much of Homer's Aphrodite, the irrational force, lingers within Virgil's Venus.

2.2 *Odyssey* Book 8: Aphrodite's Scandal

Aphrodite is the goddess of desire and pleasure. As can be seen with Paris and Helen, the goddess has the power to overwhelm the human rational faculty. In doing so, Aphrodite causes the sexual scandal that devastates armies before the walls of Troy. In Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, Homer first allows Aphrodite to enjoy her own powers (with Ares). Next, the poet imagines the scandal and humiliation that the goddess suffers after Hephaestus learns about the adultery. Apollo informs Hephaestus about an adulterous relationship between his wife, Aphrodite, and Ares. The god of the forge comes up with a plan: he builds an invisible net and establishes it around the frame of his own bed; then,

he feigns a trip to his favoured city, Lemnos, giving the adulterous lovers enough time to be together. While Ares and Aphrodite enjoy their time, the bonds of Hephaestus fall over them, trapping them together *in flagrante delicto*. Meanwhile, Hephaestus emerges from his hiding place and finds the lovers in that guilt. He calls other gods to his home in order to publicize the adultery that took place in his own bed. Poseidon rescues Ares by offering Hephaestus a ransom payment (*Od.* 8.266–356). In Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, Aphrodite suffers the same humiliation that she inflicts upon Helen, Paris and others elsewhere.

Noteworthy is the reaction of the divine community to the adulterous affair: the goddesses stay away on account of modesty (θηλύτεραι δὲ θεαὶ μένον αἰδοῖ οἴκοι ἑκάστη). Meanwhile, ἄσβεστος γέλως, i.e. unquenchable laughter, takes hold of male gods (*Od.* 8.324, 326). Focusing back on Aphrodite, one imagines that the goddess feels deep embarrassment. Helen expresses this kind of humiliation in the *Iliad* (in 3.412). Adultery humiliates Aphrodite in the same way. Thus, the divine adulteress suffers the same humiliation which she readily inflicts upon mortals.

2.3 The Hymn to Aphrodite: Aphrodite Causes Destruction

The Hymn to Aphrodite creates an image of Aphrodite that resembles her descriptions in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The *Hymn* imagines the goddess as powerful, fearsome, and mischievous.¹¹ The first forty-four lines of the poem mainly talk about the vastness of Aphrodite's power:

¹¹ Monica Silveira Cyrino offers a reading that concludes similarly. According to Cyrino, "In the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, as in much of Greek poetry, erotic desire is portrayed as an impulse disastrous to the physical and mental integrity of the people who feel its power. And, as the fearful Anchises surely knows, this is

ἦτε θεοῖσιν ἐπὶ γλυκὺν ἴμερον ὤρσε
καί τ' ἔδαμάσσατο φύλα καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων
οἰωνοὺς τε διυπετέας καὶ θηρία πάντα,
ἡμὲν ὄσ' ἠπειρος πολλὰ τρέφει ἠδ' ὄσα πόντος:
πᾶσιν δ' ἔργα μέμηλεν εὐστεφάνου Κυθερείης

Aphrodite sends sweet longing unto gods, conquering mortals,
flying birds and all animals birthed from land and sea: the
goddess deals with all things (*Hom. Hymn Aph.* 1–6).

Three exceptions interrupt Aphrodite's seemingly boundless field of authority: Athena, Artemis and Hestia. With those aside, even Zeus stands vulnerable to Aphrodite's power (*Hom. Hymn Aph.* 7–44). Thus, the poet attempts to extend an exhaustive account of Aphrodite's range of power in order to offer the goddess complete and satisfying honour.

Zeus makes Aphrodite fall in love with a mortal in order to grant the goddess an understanding of her own power, since Aphrodite has a habit of causing gods and mortals to fall in love with each other, an excessive execution of her potency that contradicts the good order of things. As Aphrodite approaches Anchises, the object of her desire, the goddess initially hides her divinity from the man: στῆ δ' αὐτοῦ προπάροιθε Διὸς
θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη / παρθένω ἀδμήτη μέγεθος καὶ εἶδος ὁμοίη, / μή μιν ταρβήσειεν ἐν
ὀφθαλμοῖσι νοήσας (“Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, stands before Anchises with the body
and the face of a maiden, lest he becomes terrified after gazing at her” *Hom. Hymn Aph.*

especially true when a mortal male is weakened by erotic contact with a female immortal. This suggests that the figure of the erotically appetitive and grasping goddess, most prominently played here in the *Hymn* by Aphrodite herself as the personification of desire, expresses in magnified form a danger which the ancient Greek mythographers may have felt as inherent in all erotic love” (Cyrino, 1993: 227).

81–83).¹² A sudden gaze at the Olympian would shock Anchises, whereas the goddess intends to seduce the man. Although Anchises immediately recognizes and explicitly acknowledges the presence of a divinity, he believes Aphrodite’s lies and agrees to marry the false image of a young maiden. Ironically, Anchises’ acceptance speech begins with εἰ μὲν θνητὴ τ’ ἔσσι (“if you are a mortal” *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 145); this draws attention to the incongruity of a union between human and divine. Following the night of romance, Aphrodite reveals herself to Anchises: ὡς δὲ ἴδεν δειρὴν τε καὶ ὄμματα κάλ’ Ἀφροδίτης, / τάρβησέν τε καὶ ὅσσε παρακλιδὸν ἔτραπεν ἄλλῃ: / ἄψ δ’ αὔτις χλαίνη τε καλύψατο καλὰ πρόσωπα (“As he sees the neck and beautiful eyes of Aphrodite, fear strikes him. He turns away. Back into the blanket he buries his face” *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 181–183). Here, Anchises clearly reacts with fear. Anchises complains: αὐτίκα σ’ ὡς τὰ πρῶτα, θεά, ἴδον ὀφθαλμοῖσιν, / ἔγνων ὡς θεὸς ἦσθα: σὺ δ’ οὐ νημερτὲς ἔειπες (“The first moment I laid eyes on you, goddess, I knew that you were immortal. But you lied to me” *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 185–186).¹³ Anchises assumes a defensive tone; he fears Aphrodite’s resentment for his apparent inability to recognize the goddess despite his prior humility.¹⁴ Aphrodite, however, expresses no anger.

¹² These lines recall the *Aeneid*, when Venus appears before Aeneas in Book One: *virginis os habitumque gerens virginis arma* (“Venus assumes the face and posture of a maiden, while carrying weapons that fit the role” *Aen.* 1.315) To a certain degree, this shows that Venus must hide her divinity from Aeneas, at least as much as she initially hides from Anchises.

¹³ Note the difference between Anchises and Aeneas. Anchises reacts with fear and has time to spend with Aphrodite, whereas Venus reveals her divinity with her departure, leaving Aeneas no time to speak to her true self.

¹⁴ Mortals who stubbornly refuse to recognize and acknowledge the divinity of gods run the risk of provoking divine anger. Such anger has no place in the *Hymn* for various reasons. Aphrodite desires Anchises and she probably has no interest in putting the mortal through a test. Furthermore, although Anchises later allows himself to believe Aphrodite’s claim to be a mortal, he initially acknowledges her divinity and even guesses her identity upon first contact (*Hom. Hymn Aph.* 93).

Divinities engaging too closely with mortals run the risk of interrupting their blissful experience with moments of mourning; mortals who mingle with the gods often suffer. Following Anchises' pleas to find a place among the gods with the permission of Aphrodite, the goddess herself draws attention to the dangers of a lasting union between herself and the mortal man. First, Aphrodite talks about Ganymede, whom Zeus introduces into the divine assembly as a cupbearer for the gods. Although the disappearance of Ganymede causes Tros, the legendary ancestor of the Trojans, to suffer, Zeus placates him with gifts. The main problem in the story of Ganymede lies not with Tros' mourning but with the stunted growth of the boy who eternally enjoys divine company. Although Ganymede enjoys immortality (ἀθάνατος), he remains unaging (ἀγήρω) in his existence (*Hom. Hymn Aph.* 214). In other words, Ganymede never grows to find his true image; he must always remain an incomplete version of himself. In accord with the story of Ganymede, Aphrodite also talks about the love between Tithonus and goddess Dawn. Dawn brings her lover into divine realm, but forgets to bless him with agelessness. As long as he remains in the sphere of the gods, Tithonus lives aging ceaselessly. Finally, Dawn cannot endure the repulsive (στυγερόν) aspect of her lover's aging and she shuts him away: ἐν θαλάμῳ κατέθηκε, θύρας δ' ἐπέθηκε φαεινάς ("The goddess hides him in a room and shuts doors behind him" *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 236). The stories of Ganymede and Tithonus describe lost manhood following a union between human and divine. According to Cyrino, "There is clearly a correlation between Anchises' immediate fear for his health and his knowledge of the physically disastrous fates of the mortal lovers of goddesses;" Cyrino refers to the story of Adonis, a lover of

Aphrodite, and calls his death by a bull “a symbolic castration” (Cyrino: 1993, 227).¹⁵ Anchises worries about his physical and mental health, then, for good reason! In his own words, οὐ βιοθάλμιος ἀνὴρ / γίγνεται, ὅς τε θεαῖς εὐνάζεται ἀθανάτησι (“A man who couples with a goddess divine becomes unfit” *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 190–191). In this way, Aphrodite deals not only in terms of pleasure but also destruction, since her agency lies behind most (if not all) problematic and potentially disastrous engagements between mortal and divine.

The destructive aspect of Aphrodite concerns the gods as well. Indeed, Zeus’ need to challenge Aphrodite’s power gives impetus to the poem. Zeus causes Aphrodite to fall in love with Anchises because he wishes to temper the goddess. Otherwise, Aphrodite ceaselessly mingles gods with mortals and boasts of her ability to curb the will of another god. After Aphrodite becomes pregnant with Anchises’ child, Aphrodite names the baby “Aeneas”, which puns the Greek words ἄχος (sorrow) and αἰνός (dreadful); the goddess explains that the name describes her suffering at the prospect of becoming intimately involved with mortals (*Hom. Hymn Aph.* 198–199). The nature of Zeus’ (and other gods’) grievance against Aphrodite becomes clear: whereas the gods see a need to maintain separation between themselves and mortals, the force of Aphrodite compels the gods to get involved in limited relationships and temporal sources of happiness with mortal lovers. Aphrodite’s ability to cause other gods suffering and her boasting about the fact grants the goddess victory. She must, however, enjoy her victory with measure. Although

¹⁵ Cyrino also writes, “Then there is Endymion, who was loved by the night-roaming goddess of the moon, Seleme, and whom she cast into an everlasting sleep, so that he lay ever accessible, passive, malleable, and distinctly deprived of vitality and consciousness. Most significantly, another one of Aphrodite’s lovers, the youth Adonis, dies miserably when gored in the groin by the tusk of a boar—a symbolic castration—and the brevity of his life is represented by the wilting and dying of tiny potted lettuce-gardens during the hot summer festival of the Adonia.” (Cyrino: 1993, 227)

Aphrodite must accept moderation to her seemingly boundless and destructive capability, by no means does the poem imply a shift in the essential nature of the goddess. Aphrodite stands ready to unleash devastation; for the moment, the goddess achieves a greater understanding of the sorrow that she has the ability to cause.

Aphrodite, a fearsome and vastly powerful goddess, has the ability to bring together ill-fitting couples. Close union between human and divine goes against cosmic order. In the case of the divine, gods become involved with mortals, admitting temporary happiness and mourning into their experience. In the case of the mortal, divine contact has crippling effects that steal away from the human experience (e.g. Ganymede, being stunted, never experiences his full capacity). Although Zeus achieves success in containing Aphrodite, the goddess perceives her power to force couples into unity as a testament to her might. In other words, the *Hymn* reveals that Aphrodite may bring erotic pleasure as well as terrible sorrow; the goddess delights in both results.¹⁶

2.4 Aphrodite Scandalous, Powerful, Fearsome and Cruel

¹⁶ Andrew Faulkner reads the *Hymn to Aphrodite* in relation to Hesiod's *Theogony*. According to Faulkner, the *Hymn* does not necessarily follow the tradition of explanatory storytelling as found in Hesiod's telling of Prometheus, the falling of man from divine grace and the arrival of Pandora. Faulkner stresses that Aphrodite reserves the power to exercise her abilities: "The position of van der Ben and Clay that the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite provides an *aition* for why gods no longer sleep with mortals is possible but not certain. Opinions as to what is implied in the poem will undoubtedly continue to differ, but the case for the poem narrating the end of unions between gods and mortals has at least been overstated. It is not explicitly announced at any point before the beginning of the narrative, nor, as has been claimed, is it necessarily implicit in lines 36–39, where there are good linguistic and structural reasons to favour Aphrodite's power over Zeus being described as an eternal characteristic rather than a thing of the past. Even in lines 247–55, it is neither explicitly stated nor necessarily implied that Aphrodite will no longer be willing to bring about unions between gods and mortals. The emphasis in Aphrodite's speech upon her previous power over 'all gods' (vv. 249 and 251) makes it equally possible that what is implied is that her power has been diminished because of her own shame but not entirely stopped. In any case, the central concern of the passage and the narrative as a whole seems to be Aphrodite's shame and the cessation of her boasting, the successful outcome of Zeus' intention announced in lines 45ff. The theme of Aphrodite's embarrassment before the gods is one that is known elsewhere in early epic and itself provides an important comment upon the nature of sexual love: sexual unions often end in shame for one or more individuals" (Faulkner, 2009: 16). In other words, Aphrodite learns to keep the peace in divine community; in a time of conflict, however, the reader may imagine the goddess boasting over the ruin that she has caused.

The Homeric poems characterize Aphrodite as fearsome, powerful, irrational, scandalous and potentially cruel. Aphrodite joins ill-fitting agents with one another and produces destructive results such as the love affair between Tithonus and Dawn or the adultery between Paris and Helen. Thus, Aphrodite's nature has various aspects. The goddess offers sensuous pleasure, but she also boasts victoriously over destruction. The complications that arise between Venus and Aeneas may have their source in Virgil's understanding of the Homeric Aphrodite. The chasm between mortal and divine affects Anchises and Aphrodite; this informs the lifelong distance between Venus and Aeneas. After all, Aeneas' name acknowledges Aphrodite's suffering at the prospect of becoming too involved with mortals. However, this does not nullify Aeneas' accusation, which complains that Venus treats her own son with cruelty. In fact, Aeneas' reaction to Venus in Book 1 of the *Aeneid* echoes Helen's reaction to Aphrodite in Book 3 of the *Iliad*.¹⁷ Ultimately, Helen feels abused by Aphrodite as Aeneas feels abused by Venus. Understanding that Aphrodite handles Helen with a degree of callousness, one notices that such cruelty lingers in Venus' handling of Aeneas and Dido.

We shall next take into consideration how Venus, drenched in Aphrodite's power, playfulness, callousness and scandal, fits in with Jupiter's plan for a boundless empire (*imperium sine fine*) and how the goddess fits in with Augustus, the prosecutor of adulterers, his cultural program and his vision for Rome.

¹⁷ Aeneas complains: *Quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis / ludis imaginibus? Cur dextrae iungere dextram / non datur, ac veras audire et reddere voces?* ("Why so often do you trick your son with false images? You also are cruel. Why is it not allowed for us to join hands and trade simple truths?" *Aen.* 1.407–410) The hero's complaint begins with a question that resembles Helen's first line to Aphrodite: *δαμονίη, τί με ταῦτα λλαίεαι ἠπεροπεύειν;* ("Goddess, why does it delight you so much to trick me?" *Il.* 3.399).

Chapter 3: Venus the Roman

Venus participates in Virgil's epic as the mother of Aeneas and as the ancestress of the Julian dynasty. In Book 1, the dialogue between Venus and Jupiter reveals the political importance of the goddess; Venus grants divine legitimacy to the Roman imperial program and the Augustan regime. Since the Roman poet places such weighty responsibilities on the goddess, one can say that Virgil's Venus exceeds Homer's Aphrodite in the Roman epic cosmos. However, in many ways, Venus resembles her Homeric predecessor, as we have seen in Chapter 2. Consistent with Homer's characterization, Virgil produces a playful, carefree and (at times) unfeeling Venus. Despite Aeneas' mourning for his Trojan past, Venus engages jocosely with her son. As Aphrodite oversees the forbidden love between Paris and Helen in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Venus oversees the union between Aeneas and Dido in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*. Both affairs cause war; Venus inherits Aphrodite's ability to cause destruction. Reflecting the political and cultural reality of Virgil's day, the characterization of Venus in the *Aeneid* represents a complex dynamic between her various aspects: the goddess participates in the epic as the mother of Aeneas, as the successor of Homer's Aphrodite and as an empire-builder overseeing the foundation of Rome.

How does the characterization of Venus in this way complement the Augustan program? Augustus tried to take on the responsibilities of a cultural hero, whose mission was to restore Roman morality. Sumptuary laws regulating expenditures of luxury and laws to maintain the integrity of the family unit (i.e. *Lex Julia De Adulteriis Coercendis*, The Julian Law Prosecuting Adultery) were popular among Augustus' conservative base. The year following Virgil's death, Augustus became a prosecutor of adultery. This raises

the question: how much of Homer's irrational, scandalous and adulterous Aphrodite does Virgil's Venus, the very source of Augustan authority in the poem, inherit? Aphrodite, as we earlier understand, remains the universal principle of irrational and sexual desire; she causes adultery (as she did for Paris and Helen). If the parallels between Aphrodite and Venus are close enough, Augustus, who exiled his daughter and granddaughter on account of adultery, would have to acknowledge the scandal that comes with Venus, thus shaking Julian authority. After all, Augustus imposed a certain moral standard upon his people.

3.1 Venus' Maternity and Imperial Ambitions

In *Aeneid* Book 1, Venus engages with Jupiter, inquiring about Aeneas, the Trojans, their suffering and the empire to come. In her first scene, Venus displays her maternity and dedication to the Roman imperial movement. For the moment, Virgil places less emphasis on Venus' authority over romantic and sexual events, although this aspect of the goddess becomes prominent later in Book 1 and elsewhere. Therefore, the poet allows the audience to understand that his Venus differs from what the readers of Homeric poetry may expect: the goddess engages with the epic storyline as a mother and as an empire-builder; all of this fits a grander Augustan purpose.

Virgil marks Venus' first appearance in the *Aeneid* with maternal care. The poet describes the goddess as she prepares to address Jupiter: *tristior et lacrimis oculos suffusa nitentis* ("rather sad, she had allowed her eyes to shine with tears" *Aen.* 1.228). Venus' appearance, immediately following the storm sent by Aeolus and Juno, reveals her concern for Aeneas and his Trojan followers. The goddess questions Jupiter, *quid meus*

Aeneas in te committere tantum, / quid Troes potuere ...? (“What great crime were the Trojans and my Aeneas able to commit against you?” *Aen.* 1.231–232). The *Aeneid*’s first mention of the familial bond between Aeneas and Venus comes from the goddess herself and bears an affectionate tone (Austin: 1971, 90). In her speech to Jupiter, Venus closely associates herself with Aeneas:

*nos, tua progenies, caeli quibus adnuis arcem,
navibus (infandum) amissis unius ob iram
prodimur atque Italis longe disiungimur oris
hic pietatis honos? Sic nos in sceptris ponis?*

We, your descendants, to whom you promised the citadel of heaven, with our ships (unspeakable fact!) lost owing to one goddess’ anger, are betrayed and kept far away from Italian shores. This is the reward for piety? Thus you restore us to power? (*Aen.* 1.250–253)

Although Venus does not experience earthly burdens as Aeneas does, the lines nonetheless describe the goddess and her son suffering together. In these ways, Venus’ first appearance in the *Aeneid* reveals her maternal affection for Aeneas.

While Venus’ first speech introduces the maternal side of the goddess, it also reveals the political dimension of her characterization. Venus oversees the teleological movement that begins with Aeneas from Troy and culminates with Augustus and the Roman Empire.¹⁸ Venus’ petition to Jupiter resembles Athena’s complaining before Zeus

¹⁸ Susanna Morton Braund reads Aristotelian notions of τέλος into Virgil’s *Aeneid*: “When we consider “religion” and “philosophy” in Virgil, we are always talking about how Virgil grapples with and articulates the origins, workings and *telos* (purpose) of the world and the way in which human beings fit into that world, particularly in their behavior as individuals and as members of communities towards other individuals and communities.” (Braund: 1997, 204). Ultimately, Braund argues that Virgil has access to various philosophical schools and that the *Aeneid* enjoys a degree of flexibility in its engagement with philosophy. Aeneas’ mission, in a way, is of divine and teleological nature, sanctioned by Jupiter and Venus.

in the *Odyssey*. However, the difference between the two scenes reveals the imperial and political ambitions of the *Aeneid*; in the words of Randall T. Ganiban, “While the Homeric passage focuses on the personal aspect of Odysseus’ suffering, the Vergilian passage places Aeneas and his travails in a broader context that is historical and nationalistic” (Ganiban: 2012, 186). In Augustus’ propaganda, Venus is the source of the Julian dynasty and thus the requirements of Augustan rule inform the involvement of Venus in the *Aeneid*.¹⁹ Venus’ first speech exposes her interests beyond Aeneas’ daily misery. The goddess imagines an extraordinary empire by her descendants: *certe hinc Romanos olim volventibus annis, / hinc fore ductores, revocato sanguine Teucris, / qui mare, qui terras omnis dicione tenerent, / pollicitus* (“Surely, from this stock come the Romans with the passing of time. Restoring the line of Teucer, from this stock rulers will come; they shall command the sea and all land with authority, according to your promise” *Aen.* 1.234–237). Thus, Venus’ participation in the epic legitimizes the Augustan regime as well as the imperial purposes of the Roman state. Within the story, Venus seeks to earn glory by overseeing the foundation of a great empire.

Venus’ first speech lacks any amatory dimension. It seems as though Virgil goes out of his way to disallow any detail of romantic spark in the scene; this becomes apparent as Venus completes her speech and Jupiter leans over to kiss her: *Olli subridens hominum sator atque deorum / vultu, quo caelum tempestatesque serenat, / oscula libavit*

¹⁹ Virgil talks about this most clearly in Jupiter’s response to Venus’ complaints in Book 1: at puer Ascanius, cui nunc cognomen Iulo / additur; Ilus erat, dum res stetit Ilii regno (“Ascanius now receives the family name “Iulus”; it was “Ilus” while the Trojan rule stood strong” *Aen.* 1.267-268). Virgil thus provides an etymological connection between the Julius dynasty and Ascanius’ cognomen. Ganiban comments, “[Virgil] thus creates an ancient connection between Ascanius/Iulus (Aeneas and Venus) and the Julian family. Iulus, as an alternate name for Ascanius, was probably invented in the late Republic to associate Ascanius with the Julian gens (i.e. the family of Julius Caesar and thus also Augustus...)” (Ganiban: 2012, 189).

natae (“Smiling at Venus with his face, by which he clears the sky and storms, the father of gods and men touches his daughter with kisses” *Aen.* 1.254–256). Servius and other readers widely acknowledge the familial (as opposed to sexual) nature of Jupiter’s kisses. Servius writes,

leviter tetigit. et sciendum osculum religionis esse, suavium voluptatis, quamvis quidam osculum filiis dari, uxori basium, scorto suavium dicant

He touched her lips lightly. And it ought to be known that *osculum* is matter of duty while a *suavium* is matter of pleasure, although some say that an *osculum* is given to your daughters, a *basium* is given to your wife, and a *suavium* is given to a legal common. (Serv. *Aen.* 254–25)²⁰

One can appreciate that Venus’ first appearance in the epic lacks amatory spark. For this scene, Edward Gutting reads Venus as the roman *matrona*, a mother who participates in political movement by petitioning the *paterfamilias* (Jupiter) and furthering her ambitions via her association with a man such as husband or son (Aeneas); Gutting explains, “She has put aside her divinity, as it were, to play the Roman *matrona*” (Gutting: 2009, 42).²¹ The absence of romance does not endure throughout the epic. In Book 1 and elsewhere, Venus presides over romantic passion. Nonetheless, Juno’s storm threatens the safety of Aeneas and the imperial quest. The emergency briefly causes Venus to emphasize her

²⁰ According to Austin, “he lightly touched his daughter’s lips with a kiss” (Austin: 1971, 99).

²¹ According to Edward Gutting’s reading, the true mark of Venus is her ability to join together ill-fitting elements: she is the embodiment of her power via her multiple and contradictory identities as mother, goddess of romantic passion and figurehead of political authority. For the scene at hand, Gutting writes, “Thus in the end, we see the Venus whom the poem presents as something more than either role; she is a distinctive personality poised between contradictory considerations. We cannot simply speak of Venus as playing a goddess of love or the mother of a mortal. She is a peculiar, ill-fitting combination of both which we can only describe through the unique term ‘Venus’” (Gutting: 2009, 55). It would be possible, however to revise Gutting’s argument by questioning whether Venus’ maternal shortcomings may reveal the poet’s lack of enthusiasm for the Augustan political agenda.

maternity and imperial ambitions, which momentarily override the romantic aspect of the goddess.

The intensity of Venus' focus on the imperial project becomes apparent when one considers Aeneas' lack of interest in the divine project. Confronted with Juno's storm, Aeneas makes his first speech in Book 1:

*... o terque quaterque beati
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis
contigit oppetere! O Danaum fortissime gentis
Tydide! Mene Iliacis occumbere campis
non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra*

O three times, four times happy those who met their deaths before their fathers under the high walls of Troy! O Diomedes, bravest of the Greeks, if only I died on the Trojan battlefield and let go of this life by your hand. (*Aen.* 1.94–96)

With this speech, Aeneas reveals not only his longing for a beautiful death on the battlefield (which might bring κλέος ἄφθιτον), but also the unwillingness to press forward as a landless survivor.²² Responding to Venus' complaints, Jupiter reveals the glorious future of the Trojans. Meanwhile, Jupiter explains that Aeneas will die as soon

²² As the storm approaches, Aeneas hurls (*iacto, iactare*) words of despair; Virgil's choice of vocabulary may interest the reader, since the poet rarely uses this verb when describing speechmaking. Austin writes, "*Iactare* takes its tone from its context: it is often used of ranting, boastful talk (e.g. 2.588, 9.621), and Servius unsympathetically interprets here '*inaniter loquenti*', but Aeneas' cry is one of despair" (Austin: 1971, 57–58). While Aeneas' speech and Virgil's choice of words suggest an absence of heroism, the poet quickly gives the hero an opportunity to redeem himself. During the storm, Aeneas feigns hope and makes a brave speech before his followers. For the speech, Virgil informs the reader: *talia voce refert curisque ingentibus aeger / spem vultu simulat, perit altum corde dolorem* ("Such a speech Aeneas voiced, still sick at heart with many worries, and on his face he feigned hope as he pushed his grief deep into his chest" *Aen.* 1.208–209). Austin comments for these lines: "critics of Aeneas would do well to note his courage and unselfishness here." (Austin: 1971, 84). Anitra Laycock writes, "The 'stoic' endurance of Aeneas has been tested to the breaking point, as Vergil portrays very clearly in the contrast between the public confidence with which Aeneas proclaims his comrades their destiny and the doubts that assail him privately" (Laycock: 1997, 45–46). C. M. Bowra talks about philosophical principles and the development of Stoic heroism in Aeneas throughout the *Aeneid* (Bowra: 1933, 8–21). Mark W. Edwards focuses on the so-called Stoic lines in the *Aeneid* (Edwards: 1960, 151–165).

as the foundation of the new settlement in Italy comes to conclusion: *bellum ingens geret Italia populosque feroces / contundet moresque viris et moenia ponet / tertia dum Latio regnantem viderit aestas / ternaque transierint Rutulis hiberna subactis* (“Aeneas will wage a great war in Italy and subdue proud nations. He will give laws and walls to his people, until the third summer finds him ruling in Latium, and until three winters leave behind the humbled Rutulians” *Aen.* 1.264–266). Jupiter (for Venus’ pleasure) creates an image of war and glory. This image, however, takes for granted the amount of mortal suffering that such a project requires (especially for Aeneas). Aeneas has no interest in this *bellum ingens*. Nonetheless, the hero must accept that mortals are disposable in divine eyes. Venus pays great attention to the Roman project while she overlooks the suffering of her son, who must participate in the movement against his will. The individual becomes lost under the umbrella of a great project, the imperial program of the Roman state.

It is difficult to assess to what extent Venus overlooks human suffering. Reading Venus as a Roman *matrona*, one expects a maternal and purposeful attitude. Furthermore, the goddess enters the scene with tears and betrays her maternity; it seems that any greater performance of grief would contradict Venus’ loftiness. However, without demanding theatrical expressions of grief, one may question the degree of suffering that Venus’ project necessitates. Venus talks about the forthcoming Roman glory and the fall of Troy: *hoc equidem occasum Troiae tristisque ruinas / solabar, fatis contraria fata rependens* (“Weighing fates against fates, with the promise [for empire] I comfort myself for the loss of Troy and its sad ruins” *Aen.* 238–239). Venus’ ambitions remain aligned with Jupiter’s imperial project. However, the theme of necessary sacrifice, introduced

thus by Venus, reappears widely in the *Aeneid* and gives breath to a voice that fills the epic with feelings of despair, abandonment and regret.²³ The hero loses his city, friends, lovers and members of his family; all of this sacrificial loss takes place in order to move forward the imperial agenda sanctioned by Venus and Jupiter. Mortals, who are ignorant of destiny, suffer and complain. Meanwhile, the gods, perceiving a picture greater than what is available to mortals and desiring things that extend beyond mortal measure, maintain a chilling impartiality towards human suffering.

Virgil's Venus thus differs from Homer's Aphrodite. Venus' character exists as a complex dynamic. Venus never loses her authority over romantic passion, although the poet introduces the goddess by placing her maternal and political associations to the fore. Meanwhile, the first appearance of Venus in the *Aeneid* draws the contrast between divine and human: the gods weave grand schemes while mortals have no option but to participate in divine plans and must endure their outcomes.

3.2 Venus Imitates Aphrodite

While Virgil's Venus differs from Aphrodite in some details, she resembles her predecessor with others. In Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, Venus recalls Homer's Aphrodite from Book 3 of the *Iliad* and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. Venus' jocosely engagement with Aeneas during his state of hopelessness recalls the capricious, joyful and even cruel Aphrodite; as Aphrodite's work with Paris and Helen causes the Trojan War, Venus' work with Aeneas and Dido anticipates heartache and destruction.

²³ For a discussion on the theme of sacrifice in the *Aeneid*, see to Michael C. J. Putnam; he talks about the progressive movement in the *Aeneid* that forces the hero to shed away aspects of his life one by one in order to make room for a new beginning in Italy (Putnam: 1965, 98–99). Also note Philip (Hardie, 1993: 19–53).

The first dialogue between Aeneas and Venus takes place in Libya. Aeneas sets out to probe the land and Venus appears before him. The scene produces a stark contrast between mother and son. Whereas the hero mourns, the goddess (no longer grieving as she did before Jupiter) comes with a cheeky attitude. Venus enters the scene,

*virginis os habitumque gerens virginis arma ...
namque umeris de more habilem suspenderit arcum
venatrix dederatque comam diffundere ventis,
nuda genu nodoque sinus collecta fluentis*

wearing the appearance and the costume of a maiden ... for she, like a huntress, had suspended her bow from her shoulder as is custom; she had given her hair to flow out in the winds. Her knees remain bare as she holds her flowing robes collected on her lap.
(*Aen.* 1.315, 318–320)

Virgil's decision to employ the noun *arma* bodes ill; whereas the hero longs for quiet settlement (*tendimus in Latium, sedes ubi fata quietas / ostendunt*), the goddess comes bearing arms (*Aen.* 1.205–206). Venus appears as Diana, whose chastity opposes the powers of the goddess of love. According to W. D. Anderson, Venus appears as Diana in order to engage jocosely with Aeneas; by imagining a playful Venus, Virgil allows the goddess to maintain a connection with her cultural and mythological predecessor, the playful Aphrodite (Anderson: 1955, 234).²⁴ Furthermore, Venus' image comes with a seductive quality as the goddess appears with her legs half naked and her hair joyfully loosened for the winds. Venus calls to Aeneas (and his only companion Achates): *heus, iuvenes* ("Hey there, lads" *Aen.* 1.321). *Heus*, as read by scholars such as Anderson and

²⁴ Anderson writes "The point is that Aeneas' mother has decided to play a joke on him, nothing malicious or even particularly subtle, but (as Aeneas' later words clearly show) the same trick of impersonation which has succeeded with him a number of times before" (Anderson: 1966, 234). Anderson mainly argues that Virgil must simultaneously satisfy the political expectations that come from the association between Venus and Augustus and the reader's expectations to find traces of Homer's Aphrodite in Venus.

Austin, reveals Venus' playful approach (Anderson: 1955, 234; Austin: 1971, 121).

Venus' jocular behaviour presently fits the description of Homeric Aphrodite; however, her playfulness comes at an inappropriate time as Aeneas and his followers suffer uncertainty and mourn for lost comrades.

Although Aeneas acknowledges the divinity of the huntress, he nonetheless fails to recognize his own mother. The hero questions the identity of the goddess: *o dea certe! / an Phoebi soror? An Nympharum sanguinis una?* ("Surely, you're a goddess. Are you a sister of Phoebus? Or are you one from the blood of nymphs?" *Aen.* 1.327–329). These lines echo the words of Anchises in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. Confronted by Aphrodite, Anchises makes a speech:

χαῖρε, ἄνασσ', ἢ τις μακάρων τάδε δῶμαθ' ἰκάνεις,
Ἄρτεμις ἢ Λητώ ἢ χρυσέη Ἀφροδίτη
ἢ Θέμις ἠυγενῆς ἢ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,
ἢ πού τις Χαρίτων δεῦρ' ἦλυθες, αἶτε θεοῖσι
πᾶσιν ἔταιρίζουσι καὶ ἀθάνατοι καλέονται,
ἢ τις Νυμφάων, αἴτ' ἄλσεα καλὰ νέμονται

Greetings, queen, whoever you are of the blessed to visit this dwelling, either Artemis, Leto or golden Aphrodite, noble Themis or Athena with starry eyes. Perhaps you came here, one of the Graces, who are deathless and dear to the gods. Are you one of the nymphs who inhabit lovely groves? (*Hom. Hymn Aph.* 91–97)

The Homeric backdrop is strongly present in the *Aeneid*. Disturbingly, Aeneas fails to recognize his own mother, whereas, in *Iliad* Book 3, Helen immediately recognizes Aphrodite and questions the purpose of her disguise; perhaps the goddess is more familiar to Helen than to her son. It is funny and painful: although Helen immediately recognizes Aphrodite, she believes her cruel for the details of her disguise; Aeneas fails

to recognize Venus and calls her cruel for hiding herself. One remembers Odysseus' words for Nausicaa: εἰ μὲν τις θεός ἐσσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν, / Ἀρτέμιδί σε ἐγὼ γε, Διὸς κούρη μέγαλοιο, / εἶδός τε μέγεθός τε φυήν τ' ἄγχιστα εἶσκω... ("If you are one of the gods who rule the spreading sky, I guess that you are Artemis, being most like her in looks and tall posture;" *Od.* 6.150–152). Aeneas perceives her mother not as Helen recognizes familiar Aphrodite; the hero beholds Venus as Anchises sees Aphrodite and as Odysseus sees Nausicaa, a maiden so ready for marriage. The incestuous innuendo is brief and subtle, but it exists. Furthermore, this moment manipulates the psyche of Aeneas, who takes up his emotional needs with Dido.

Reading Venus' first speech to Aeneas, one again finds hints of the Homeric Aphrodite. In Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Aphrodite appears as the matchmaker between Paris and Helen, whose love affair brings ruinous consequences for both Greeks and Trojans. In Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, Venus remains a matchmaker, this time targeting Dido and Aeneas, another love affair with deadly consequences. Venus oversees the introduction of Dido to Aeneas. The goddess informs the hero about the kingdom of Dido:

*Punica regna vides, Tyrios et Agenoris urbem;
sed fines Libyci, genus intractabile bello.
imperium Dido Tyria regit urbe profecta,
germanum fugiens. Longa est iniuria, longae
ambages; sed summa sequar fastigia rerum.
huic coniunx Sychaeus erat, ditissimus auri
Phoenicum, et magno miserae dilectus amore,
cui pater intactam dederat primisque iugarat
ominibus. Sed regna Tyri germanus habebat
Pygmalion, scelere ante alios immanior omnis.
Quos inter medius venit furor. Ille Sychaeum
impius ante aras atque auri caecus amore
clam ferro incautum superat securus amorum*

*germanae; factumque diu celavit et aegram
multa malus simulans vana spe lusit **amantem***

You now see the Carthaginian realm, the Tyrians and the city of Aenon. Libyans hold the border, a nation undefeatable in battle. Dido rules a city that she herself established. She had to run away from her brother. Long is the story of her suffering; I will trace for you the important parts. Sychaeus was Dido's husband, richest with gold among the Phoenicians and loved greatly by the queen. Dido's father arranged the first rituals of the wedding and gave away the bride a virgin. Meanwhile, Pygmalion was ruling the realm of Tyre; he exceeded all others in crime. Fury came between Sychaeus and Pygmalion. The lawless man with a sword, blinded by a love of gold, stealthily crept behind Sychaeus, who did not notice the danger amidst his prayer, and killed him without care for her sister's devotion. Pygmalion hid the deed for a long time and with many a trick he deceived by vain hope his sister in love. (*Aen.* 1.338–352)

In this quotation, although grief makes up Dido's past, the subject of love becomes inescapable; lines 344, 349, 350 all end with a form of the noun *amor*, while line 352 ends with a participial form of the first-conjugation verb *amare*. The goddess indiscriminately covers her speech with amatory vocabulary (despite the mood of Dido's tale). Telling the story of Dido, Venus focuses on details that make the queen uniquely attractive to Aeneas: Dido loses her husband, flees her city away from enemies and establishes a new home; much like the queen, Aeneas loses his wife, flees his city away from enemies and seeks new settlement. Upon learning about the queen's past, the rhetoric of Venus' speech impels Aeneas to compare himself to Dido and search for a meaningful connection. Venus becomes a matchmaker who seeks to unite Aeneas with Dido. Here, Venus remains true to her Homeric form; as Homer's Aphrodite oversees the bond between Paris and Helen, Virgil's Venus joins her own son with Dido. As the forbidden love between Paris and Helen brings destruction for Greeks and Trojans, the

illegal affair between Aeneas and Dido anticipates death and destruction. Such wars and deaths do the goddess glory, witnessing the extent of her powers.

We have thus seen the ways in which Virgil's Venus preserves Homer's Aphrodite. Despite Aeneas' feelings of despair, Virgil's Venus comes with a joyful attitude that resembles Aphrodite's playful and carefree demeanour. Meanwhile, Venus keeps Aphrodite's power for destruction, since the affair between Aeneas and Dido (like the Helen and Paris) sows seeds of war.

3.3 Adulterous Venus and Augustus, the Prosecutor of Adulterers

Venus adopts Aphrodite's callous playfulness, her command over romance and desire, her brief moments of cruelty and her ability to create carnage. Venus also inherits the adultery that comes with her Homeric predecessor. Beyond Aphrodite, Venus busies herself with statecraft and grants princely authority to Caesarean rule. During the creation of the Roman epic, Augustus presented himself to Romans as a cultural hero. He was concerned with the declining moral standards of Roman society. He passed sumptuary laws and laws to prosecute adultery (after the death of Virgil in 19 BC). By that reality, the *Aeneid* confronts its early and modern readers with the following problem: Venus enters the epic as the guardian of Roman establishment, religion and as a source of authority for the Augustan regime; Venus fails to live up to the moral standards of the Augustan government (reminding Julia the Elder and Julia the Younger), since Virgil imagines that Venus continues Aphrodite's habits for adultery.

Following the carnage of the civil wars, the Romans sought to understand the causes of their suffering and to make meaning of it. There was a notion that luxurious

Rome failed to keep up with the vision established by its ancestors. The Romans feared that their state was tilting towards a painfully slow decline and that its happier days were becoming rarer with the passing of generations.²⁵ Furthermore, the general public resented an immoderate upper class flaunting its extravagant wealth and loose lifestyle. During such doubtful days appeared the certain hand of Augustus, who earnestly sought to heal Roman society. The concerned strongman hoped to renovate the quality of Roman society by means of legislature, e.g. sumptuary laws “limiting expenditure on meals, clothes, plate, jewellery and the like” (A.H.M Jones, 1980: 131). In the same vein, Augustus felt a need to reinforce the marriage institution. He valued *pietas* (i.e. Roman devotion to religion, family and state) while resenting the noisily rich; Matthew D.H. Clark describes him: “Augustus was able to rely on a socially conservative consensus in his attempt to reform Roman society. Augustus’ upbringing in the provincial town of Velitrae contributed to his conservative attitudes” (Clark, 2010: 121–122). In 18 BC, Augustus passed the *Lex Julia De Adulteriis Coercendis*. Essentially, the law prosecuted *stuprum*, i.e., in this case, union between a man and anyone other than his wife, his slave or a legal common. Found guilty, the adulteress and her seducer suffered exile (Jones, 1980: 131–132). Such aspects of Augustan reformism did not excite the majority of the Roman upper class; after a period of unrest, they desired to enjoy their wealth, sometimes ignoring the sumptuary laws and secretly continuing adulterous affairs.

The prosecution of adultery proved to be a challenge. In some ways, the Romans

²⁵ In the words of Matthew D.H. Clark, there was “the prevailing sentiment that the Roman senators of his era had fallen short of the standard of behaviour set by previous generations. The historian Sallust had argued that the extravagance of the upper class had been an important cause of the civil wars. As a *popularis* and a supporter of Julius Caesar, he blamed Sulla for the moral decline. He believed that increasing rewards for the wealthy had led them to be corrupted by the example of the Greek east and that Sulla had seduced his centurions and soldiers with lax discipline and excessive rewards. . . Cicero’s writings harked back to the golden age of the generation that had beaten Hannibal, and despaired of the excessive luxury of some of his colleagues in the Senate” (Clark, 2010: 121).

had already woven a salacious form of liberty into the fabric of their culture with prominent names such as Julius Caesar, Ovid, Horace or Catullus (Clark, 2010: 122, 126; Jones, 1980: 131). Julia, Augustus' only child, lost her husband Marcellus, Augustus' nephew, in 23 BC and in 21 BC she married Agrippa to whom she bore five children. Agrippa died, however, in 12 BC and Julia found herself (with the bidding of the emperor) in a marriage with Tiberius. In 6 BC, Julia's unhappiness caused Tiberius to abandon his office and move to Rhodes. In 2 BC, Augustus learned that Julia had affairs with various notable men who opposed Augustan politics, among them Iullus Antonius (son of Mark Antony). Augustus suspected malevolence and, in no way planning to allow the revival of an Antonian alternative to his rule, sentenced Iullus Antonius to death. Julia lived a short life in exile. Augustus also exiled Julia the Younger, his granddaughter, on account of adultery. While the upper class resisted impositions of state authority in their intimate lives, Augustus remained a stern prosecutor of adultery (Clark, 2010: 126–127). In the *Aeneid*, however, the rule of Augustus finds authority by its connection to Venus, the cosmic cause of adultery.

Virgil implicates Venus with all of Aphrodite's adultery, but he does so quietly. For example, in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, Virgil makes it clear that the illegal affair between Dido and Aeneas is very similar to the relationship between Helen and Paris, adulterous and destructive at large (since rulers represent their nations). Vowing words belong to Dido:

*pater omnipotens adigat me fulmine ad umbras,
pallentis umbras Erebo noctemque profundam,
ante, Pudor, quam te violo at tua iura resolvo.
Ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores
abstulit; ille habeat secum servetque sepulchro*

May the all-powerful father strike me to the shades with a bolt, to the pale shades of Erebus and the deep night, before I violate you, Shame, or your law. He took my love when he first married me; let him keep that love with himself and nourish it in the gloom down there. (*Aen.* 4.25–29)

It is clear, in this speech, that an intimate, romantic relationship (marriage or not) between Dido and Aeneas remains highly inappropriate. According to Alfred Schmitz'

notes:

Toujours consciente des remous qui l'agitent—ainsi en sera-t-il, sans répit, dans toute sa destinée tragique—Didon lutte contre elle-même: Sychée continue à rester son mari legal. Le rejet de coniugis marque les droits que le défunt maintient sur elle.

Always mindful of the storm that agitates her—so it shall remain, without respite, throughout her tragic destiny—Dido struggles against herself: Sychaeus still remains her legal husband. The rejection of the *coniugis* signals the rights that the deceased retains over her. (Schmitz, 1960, 29)

Dido's *lutte contre elle-même* resembles Helen's futile resistance in *Iliad* Book 3.²⁶

Voiceless Sychaeus, unlike Menelaus, cannot for a moment oppose the authority of such a goddess. In addition, one must not forget the brief but awkward moment between Venus and Vulcan in *Aeneid* Book 8. The goddess approaches her husband and asks the god of the forge to produce new arms for Aeneas and his cause in Italy, noting that she never did such a thing before and even during the siege of Troy. She then embraces Vulcan and allows him to enjoy her beauty (*Aen.* 8.370–394). The fact that Venus needs to seduce Vulcan reminds us of the goddess' intimate relationships outside of her

²⁶ Austin writes, "Dido, in her self-struggle, binds herself to Sychaeus' memory in a solemn and awful prayer, again, by her own deliberate act, making the coming tragedy more dreadful" (Austin, 1955: 31). Bartha Tilly writes, "Dido had sworn a perpetual widowhood after Sychaeus' death, yet now she is feeling an inmost temptation to break her vows. . . The Romans in theory, if not always in later practice, disapproved of second marriages: at a wedding, for instance, the bride's attendants were married women who had had one husband (Tilly, 1968: 78).

marriage. The adulteress champions Aeneas, her own son, but not her husband's. It also reminds us of the relationship between Aphrodite and Ares from the *Odyssey*. It appears that Virgil imagines a Venus no less adulterous than her Homeric counterpart. Indeed, Vulcan momentarily resists (*cunctantem*) the embrace of the goddess (*Aen.* 8.388). The seduction, however, overcomes the god. Assuring his wife that her demands will be met, Vulcan asks: *fiducia cessit / quo tibi, diva, mei?* ("Where has your faith in me gone, goddess?" *Aen.* 8.395–396). With the noun *fiducia*, Vulcan perhaps asks whether Venus no longer trusts the husband's devotion or the craftsman's skill. In legal speech, *fiducia* means a binding 'pledge', such as the legal commitment that crowns any marriage ritual. In this way, Vulcan's question subtly reveals his ceaseless mindfulness of his wife's capricious nature. Vulcan resists Venus for a moment with only a few words, then yields.

Virgil then offers the reader a remarkable description of Vulcan with a simile as he gets out of bed in order to fulfill his promise to Venus:

*Inde ubi prima quies medio iam noctis abactae
 curriculo expulerat somnum, cum femina primum,
 cui tolerare colo vitam tenuique Minerva
 impositum, cinerem et sopitos suscitavit ignis
 noctem addens operi famulasque ad lumina longo
 exercet penso, castum ut servare cubile
 coniguis et possit parvos educere natos:
 haud secus ignipotens nec tempore segnior illo
 mollibus e stratis opera ad fabrilia surgit.*

Just as, when the first quiet, in the middle of a night drawing away, expels sleep, just when a housewife, whose work is to tolerate life with the distaff and the gifts of soft Minerva, excites drowsy flames and ember, investing nightly hours into her labour and working her maidens with the onerous task as they keep their heads towards lamps. She works so that she may keep her husband's bed chaste and so that she may be able to raise little

sons: in that hour, not anymore lazily does the god, mighty with fire, rise out of his soft bed to work the craft. (*Aen.* 8.407–514)

The poet describes the god as he takes on the duties of a wife who works day and night to raise children and to keep her husband's bed chaste. However, the problem remains: the duties of the chaste wife should not fall upon Vulcan but Venus; furthermore, Virgil's mention of children (*natos*) prevents the reader from forgetting Venus' adultery. Vulcan toils not for the raising of his own children. Under the grasp of Venus, the family unit turns upside down, becoming something strange.

Although Venus bears the Augustan banner, the goddess contradicts some of the legal demands imposed over the Roman people by Augustan reformist policy. An adulteress Venus in the *Aeneid* inevitably recalls Augustus as the prosecutor of adultery (along with the scandal revolving around Julia the Elder and Julia the Younger). Furthermore, Mark Antony had allegations against Augustus that he "himself pursued a number of affairs with married women, although this is of course a biased source. Augustus had certainly shown scant regard for the conventions of Roman marriage when he had removed Livia from her husband and married her when she was pregnant with her previous husband's child" (Clark, 2010: 126). At this point, it is important to remember that Virgil died in 19 BC, while Augustus passed the *Lex Julia De Adulteriis Coercendis* in 18 BC; certainly, Virgil does not intend to depict a completely illegal Venus. However, the fact remains: even during the Augustan era, readers of the *Aeneid* had to accept Venus, divine adulteress, as the source of Julian authority while they also had to accept Augustus, the prosecutor of adultery, as a champion of Roman values. Rather than a crisis, this hypocrisy reveals the universality of Virgil's *Aeneid* as the national epic of the

Roman state. Indeed, Venus grants princely authority to the Augustan program. However, the goddess cannot champion the state and religion and the family unit altogether on her own. The whole *imperium sine fine* rests not only on Venus' authority (i.e. Augustan authority). The participation of Jupiter and Juno—the latter is the chief antagonist and a fierce enemy of Trojan/Roman movement throughout the epic—remain essential.

3.4 Venus Empire-Builder and a Source of Inherited Authority

In her first appearance, Venus enters into dialogue with Jupiter and shows her maternal care for Aeneas. However, Venus' concern extends beyond Aeneas, his Trojan followers and their daily misery: the goddess midwives the *imperium sine fine*. In Book 1, Aeneas merely longs for settlement, but Venus plans the establishment of an empire and forces the son to participate in her scheme; the divine project necessitates human suffering. A part of this suffering, as the reader finds out in Venus' speech, is the fall of Troy.

In her second appearance, Venus enters into dialogue with Aeneas. During this scene, the goddess engages jocosely with her son. Venus' choice of words and her disguise reveals her playful and carefree nature (in accord with Homer's imagination). Meanwhile, Venus' playfulness contrasts the mourning of Aeneas and problematizes the description of the goddess as unfeeling. This scene introduces Venus' plan to join Aeneas with Dido and recalls Aphrodite's work with Paris and Helen in Book 3 of the *Iliad*. Since Helen's affair with Paris causes the destruction of Troy, Aeneas' involvement with Dido anticipates the death of Dido, the Punic Wars and the consequent destruction of Carthage. One imagines Venus as a destructive goddess who leaves behind cities in ruin.

Virgil's Venus continues the work of Aphrodite as the goddess of amatory passion, while she also continues the Homeric tradition as the mother of Aeneas. Furthermore, the Roman poet gives the goddess new responsibility by issuing her as the ancestress of the Julian dynasty and the overseer of the teleological movement that begins with Troy and culminates with the Roman Empire. However, there remains an important layer of complexity: the contradiction between Augustus' cultural agenda and the details of Venus' characterization: as divine adulteress (and as the cause of adultery in human and divine community), Venus contradicts the Augustan mission to reinforce the marriage institution and to prosecute adultery. This makes explicit that Venus plays a vital but measured role in the Roman Empire. Entirely on her own, Venus cannot fully represent the Roman religion, state and the family unit.

3.5 Seducing Mars

The connection between Aphrodite and Venus for their power over Ares (Mars) has important consequences for the imperial agenda. The goddess of love has the power to summon war and create carnage by inspiring irrational behaviour among mortals, overwhelming them with desire and contradicting their public interests. In return, however, the goddess has the power to arrest Ares (Mars) by seduction and impose peace. Venus decides between peace and war, especially according to Lucretius: *belli fera moenera Mavors / armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se / reiicit aeterno devictus vulnere amoris* ("Mars, powerful in arms, who rules the savage works of battle, often throws himself in your bosom, completely tamed by an eternal wound of love" *DRN*. 1.33–35). Such an authority over peace and war is a necessity for an empire that intends to rule without measure.

Even this image of Venus, however, has its problems. The proem of *De Rerum Natura* recalls the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, both praising Aphrodite (Venus). The *Hymn*, however, does the goddess honour while it also reveals Zeus' need to contain her.²⁷ According to Elizabeth Asmis, Lucretius praises Venus in such a way that depicts the goddess as a patroness for Epicurean philosophy and a potential replacement for Jupiter's regime based on Stoicism: "Lucretius was influenced by the contemporary Stoic view of Zeus to fashion an Epicurean divinity, Venus, who would take the place of Stoic Zeus as well as of any other ruling deity" (Asmis, 2007: 88). How does Virgil deal with Venus as a potential usurper for Jupiter's rule? In Chapter 5, I discuss the scenes in which Jupiter contains Venus' powers; the goddess plays a vital role in the imperial project, but she also reveals shortcomings in some respects. Compared with Juno, Venus appears heedless of human suffering.

²⁷ See 2.4.

Chapter 4: Venus and Thetis as Mother Figures

Venus and Thetis resemble each other by the virtue of their involvement with mortal men: whereas Thetis beds Peleus and mothers Achilles, Venus beds Anchises and mothers Aeneas. In Book 1 of the *Iliad*, after Agamemnon takes Briseis away from Achilles, Thetis comforts her son and petitions Zeus on behalf of the hero; in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, Venus, as we have seen, petitions Jupiter after Aeneas suffers Juno's storm and she visits her son in order to introduce him to Carthage. In Book 18 of the *Iliad*, Thetis petitions Hephaestus to have armour forged for Achilles; in Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, Venus petitions Vulcan (mentioned earlier) to have armour forged for Aeneas. Virgil establishes obvious parallels between these Roman and Greek goddesses.²⁸

Homer consistently describes Thetis as a tutelary goddess. She participates in Zeus' κόσμος (i.e. the good order of things) by offering protection: when Hera, Poseidon and Athena join their efforts in mutiny against Zeus, Thetis intervenes to rescue the king. Furthermore, in the case of Hephaestus, the god suffers cruel rejection from his mother, Hera, while he enjoys warm reception in the arms of Thetis. Homer imagines Thetis as a nurturing goddess.

There appears a natural comparison with Achilles and Thetis on one side of the coin and with Aeneas and Venus on the other. Virgil acknowledges the intimate connection between the Greek hero and his divine mother; nonetheless, the poet

²⁸ One needs to look no further than Gilbert Highet to understand that Virgil expects his reader to compare and contrast Thetis with Venus. According to Highet, "Venus in the *Aeneid* is not a goddess of sexual love so much as a protective guardian and mother. The chief Homeric divinities of whom she reminds us in her speeches are Thetis mother of Achilles and Athena protector of Odysseus" (Highet: 1971, 271). It seems excessive, however, to say that Venus participates in the *Aeneid* more as a mother than as the goddess of love (especially in the case of Dido); as we shall see, comparing and contrasting Thetis with Venus reveals how the Roman divinity lacks a maternal aspect found so strongly in the Greek goddess. Furthermore, unlike Thetis, Venus has a militant aspect.

disallows such intimacy between Aeneas and Venus. Compared with Thetis, Venus appears to lack feelings of maternity. Thetis sits by Achilles, touches him, utters his name and makes conversation; as we shall see, the conversation between Achilles and Thetis has a healing quality. In contrast, Venus ignores the identity of Aeneas and hides her own identity. On the shores of Libya, she abandons Aeneas longing for physical, conversational and emotional contact.

Thetis and Venus petition the same god, Vulcan (Hephaestus), and request new armour for their respective sons. In the *Iliad*, Thetis visits Achilles in order to comfort him after the death of Patroclus; she understands that her son requires new armour to join the battle and promises to solve the matter by talking with Hephaestus. In the *Aeneid*, Venus perceives the forthcoming battle in Italy and on her own accord feels the need to ask for Vulcan's favour; unlike Thetis, Venus never comforts Aeneas for the death of his friend, Pallas. Compared with Thetis, Venus appears less involved with her son's emotions and more focused towards military activity.

There are moments of familial contact between Aeneas and Venus in the *Aeneid*. In books 2 and 8, the goddess reveals herself to the hero and makes physical contact. As we shall see, however, these moments do not make up for the absence of maternity experienced by Aeneas in Book 1. The goddess never properly instructs with truthful conversation (*veras voces*) her son about the nature of his suffering as Cyrene maternally instructs her son, Aristeus, in the *Georgics*; rather, Venus allows Aeneas to trudge through the *Aeneid* without proper understanding of his part in the divine scheme for the eternal Roman state.

All things considered, Virgil imagines a militant, scheming and ambitious Venus, whose relationship with Aeneas lacks the intimacy found in other examples (Homeric or Virgilian) of mortal-divine familial relationships. In an explicit way, Virgil connects the divine authority of Venus with the Caesarean political/imperial establishment. The problematizing of Venus at the hands of Virgil cannot be read only as a self-contained phenomenon; a deceptive, ambitious and unfeeling Venus colours the *Aeneid's* reception of the Augustan agenda.

4.1 Thetis

According to Homer, Nereus, an aged god of the sea, has thirty-four daughters, collectively called the Nereids; Thetis is one of these sea-nymphs. In the *Iliad*, Thetis becomes relevant as the mother of Achilles. Homer imagines her as a protective goddess; she participates in the story by playing a tutelary role not only for mortal Achilles but also for divinities such as Dionysus and Hephaestus.²⁹ As a nymph of the sea, Thetis uses her powers to bestow safe passage.

In the *Iliad*, three characters reveal information about Thetis: Hephaestus, Diomedes and Achilles. In Book 18, Hephaestus describes the protection he received from Thetis after his mother, Hera, abandoned him:

ἦ ῥά νύ μοι δεινὴ τε καὶ αἰδοίη θεὸς ἔνδον,
ἦ μ' ἐσάωσ' ὅτε μ' ἄλγος ἀφίκετο τῆλε πεσόντα

²⁹ On Thetis as a tutelary goddess, see Laura M. Slatkin. She writes, “The most general, but most telling, statement of Thetis’ power is expressed by the formula *λοιγὸν ἀμῦναι*—“ward off destruction.” The ability to *λοιγὸν ἀμῦναι* (or *ἀμύνειν*) within the *Iliad* is shared exclusively by Achilles, Apollo and Zeus. Although others are put in a position to do so and make the attempt, only these three have the power to “ward off destruction”, to be efficacious in restoring order to the world of the poem. Thetis alone, however, is credited with having had such power in the divine realm, for she alone was able to ward off destruction from Zeus.” (Slatkin: 1991, 65–66).

μητρὸς ἐμῆς ἰότητι κυνώπιδος, ἣ μ' ἐθέλησε
κρύψαι χωλὸν ἐόντα: τότε ἂν πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῷ,
εἰ μή μ' Εὐρυνόμη τε Θέτις θ' ὑπεδέξατο κόλπῳ
Εὐρυνόμη θυγάτηρ ἀψορρόου Ὠκεανοῖο.
τῆσι παρ' εἰνάετες χάλκευον δαίδαλα πολλά,
πόρπας τε γναμπτάς θ' ἔλικας κάλυκάς τε καὶ ὄρμους
ἐν σπηῖ γλαφυρῷ: περὶ δὲ ῥόος Ὠκεανοῖο
ἀφρῷ μορμύρων ῥέεν ἄσπετος: οὐδέ τις ἄλλος
ἦδεεν οὔτε θεῶν οὔτε θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων,
ἀλλὰ Θέτις τε καὶ Εὐρυνόμη ἴσαν, αἶ μ' ἐσάωσαν.

Indeed, a respected and revered goddess arrives. It was she who saved me when I suffered the pain of that great fall by the will of my dog-faced mother, who wished to hide me on account of my lameness. Then my soul would have suffered greatly, had not Eurynome and Thetis received me in their warmth. Eurynome is the daughter of back-flowing Ocean. With them, over nine years I worked my cunning forge. I made buckles, curved helmets and necklaces in the hollow cave of Thetis. Nearby her home, the foamy current of Ocean roars indescribably. No man or god knew my whereabouts. Only they who saved me, Thetis and Eurynome, knew my situation. (*Il.* 18. 395–405)

Thetis counters the cruelty of Hera, who shuns Hephaestus for his physical blemish.

Hephaestus suffers rejection from his mother, Hera, and resentfully insults her (μητρὸς κυνώπιδος), but he receives maternal (at least by contrast) warmth in the arms of Thetis (Θέτις θ' ὑπεδέξατο κόλπῳ). Thetis moves the kind waters that cradle Hephaestus and carries him to safety. Having rescued the god from danger, Thetis offers Hephaestus shelter and keeps him for nine years, allowing him to recover strength and to practice his art of the forge. The scene reveals Thetis as a goddess who delights in protecting and nurturing.

Diomedes mentions Thetis in Book 6 of the *Iliad*. The hero tells a story that closely resembles the one told by Hephaestus, where the goddess plays a tutelary role.

According to Diomedes, Thetis rescued Dionysus from danger:

οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ Δρύαντος υἱὸς κρατερὸς Λυκόοργος
δὴν ἦν, ὅς ῥα θεοῖσιν ἐπουρανίοισιν ἔριζεν:
ὅς ποτε μαινομένοιο Διωνύσοιο τιθήνας
σεῦε κατ' ἠγάθειον Νυσηΐον: αἶ δ' ἅμα πᾶσαι
θύσθλα χαμαὶ κατέχευαν ὑπ' ἀνδροφόνοιο Λυκούργου
θεινόμεναι βουπλήγι: Διώνυσος δὲ φοβηθεὶς
δύσεθ' ἀλὸς κατὰ κύμα, Θέτις δ' ὑπεδέξατο κόλπῳ
δειδιότα: κρατερὸς γὰρ ἔχε τρόμος ἀνδρὸς ὀμοκλή.

Lycurgus, the strong son of Dryas, did not live long after he chose to contend with a true god. Lycurgus chased away from sacred Nysa the nursing guardians of Dionysus. Immediately, they all threw down their religious wands when Lycurgus beat them with an ox-goad. Terrified, Dionysus threw himself on the sea, since sharp terror held the god by the threats of Lycurgus. Thetis, however, received Dionysus on her lap. (*Il.* 6.130–140)

Dionysus entrusts himself to the sea and Thetis comes to his rescue. Again, Thetis moves gentle waters and carries another god into safety. Again, the goddess takes delight in offering protection. Furthermore, Thetis receives Dionysus in her lap (ὑπεδέξατο κόλπῳ) just as she does Hephaestus; again, Thetis reveals her nurturing side.

Finally, Achilles himself develops the idea of Thetis' protective role. The hero talks about a time when the gods conspired against Zeus. Athena, Hera and Poseidon joined forces and managed to bind Zeus in shackles:

πολλάκι γὰρ σεο πατρὸς ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἄκουσα
εὐχομένης ὄτ' ἔφησθα κελαινεφέϊ Κρονίωνι
οἷη ἐν ἀθανάτοισιν ἀεικέα λοιγὸν ἀμῦναι,
ὄππότε μιν ξυνδῆσαι Ὀλύμπιοι ἤθελον ἄλλοι

Ἦρη τ' ἠδὲ Ποσειδάων καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη:
ἀλλὰ σὺ τὸν γ' ἐλθοῦσα θεὰ ὑπελύσασο δεσμῶν,
ᾧχ' ἑκατόγχειρον καλέσασ' ἐς μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον,
ὄν Βριάρεων καλέουσι θεοί, ἄνδρες δέ τε πάντες
Αἰγαίων', ὃ γὰρ αὖτε βίην οὔ πατὴρ ἀμείνων:
ὅς ῥα παρὰ Κρονίωνι καθέζετο κύδει γαίων:
τὸν καὶ ὑπέδεισαν μάκαρες θεοὶ οὐδ' ἔτ' ἔδησαν.

Often I heard you boasting in the halls of my father, saying that you, alone among the gods, kept danger away from cloud-bearing Zeus, when all the other gods (Hera, Poseidon and even Pallas Athena) conspired to bind the god-king. But you came and delivered him from chains; you swiftly called unto great Olympus for the beast with one-hundred hands, the one named Briareus by the gods and all men of Greece. Briareus, proven stronger than his father in the contest of physical force, boasting in glory sat by Zeus. The blessed gods took fear and dared not to challenge their king. (*Il.* 1.395–406)

Shackles pose a serious threat to Zeus: while it remains impossible to kill a god, it is possible to bind one and thus render one passive. The attempt to bind Zeus constitutes a mutinous effort. Therefore, Thetis' intervention on behalf of Zeus protects not only the god himself but also the ruling regime that he holds in place.³⁰ Homer consistently characterizes Thetis as a protective figure.

Hephaestus, Diomedes and Achilles consistently describe Thetis as a goddess who protects those in danger. As a nymph of the sea, Thetis uses her powers to grant safe passage. Furthermore, one learns from the stories of Hephaestus and Dionysus that Thetis delights in nurturing. While the *Iliad* presents Thetis as a bringer of protection, it also

³⁰ According to Slatkin, “Binding is the ultimate penalty in the divine realm, where by definition there is no death. It serves not to deprive an opponent of existence, but to render [Zeus] impotent. Once bound, a god cannot escape his bondage by himself, no matter how great his strength. In this sense it is not finally an expression of strength (although violence certainly enters into the Titanomachy), but of what has been called “terrible sovereignty.” The attempt to bind Zeus recounted at 1.136ff thus constitutes a mutinous effort at supplanting him and imposing a new divine regime—on the pattern of his overthrow of Kronos and the Titans. Thetis' act in rescuing Zeus is therefore nothing less than supreme: an act that restores the cosmic equilibrium” (Slatkin: 1991, 68–69).

focuses on the mortality of Achilles. Thetis protects the gods, but even she cannot change human reality and prevent the death of her son. Her presence, however, ensures the existence of hope against overwhelming circumstances; even Zeus relies on that hope and protection at some point.

4.2 Venus Ignores Aeneas

Thetis' marriage to mortal Peleus renders her comparable to other goddesses who experience familial connections with humans (e.g. Aphrodite and Anchises in the *Hymn to Aphrodite*). Despite mutual affection, Aphrodite rejects Anchises' petition to enter the divine realm as her lover, explaining that a similar romantic affair unfolds tragedy for Eos and Tithonus.³¹ The Homeric tradition establishes important parallels between Thetis and Aphrodite: both goddesses engage in union with mortal men, Anchises and Peleus, and they mother mortal heroes, Aeneas and Achilles. Virgil imagines Aeneas as the founding hero of Rome in the *Aeneid*: *ille Aeneas, quem Dardanio Anchisae / alma Venus Phrygii genuit Simoentis ad undam* ("That man is Aeneas, whom nourishing Venus bore for Dardanian Anchises by the waves of Phrygian Simois;" *Aen.* 1.617–618). Holding the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad* together, one witnesses how Virgil imagines the moments between Venus and Aeneas without forgetting the Homeric precedent. The relationship between Aeneas and his mother often resembles (and sometimes significantly differs from) the Homeric duo. Comparing the intimate bond between Achilles and Thetis with Venus' handling of Aeneas, one appreciates how Virgil acknowledges rituals of maternity set in place by the *Iliad* and how the poet intentionally excludes such comforting rituals from his *Aeneid*.

³¹ See 2.3

In Book 1 of the *Iliad*, Achilles relies on his mother for emotional support. Having quarrelled with Agamemnon, Achilles grieves for his lost prize, Briseis, and calls upon Thetis. The goddess hears the prayers of his mournful son (δάκρυ χέων, τοῦ δ' ἔκλυε πότνια μήτηρ) and sits next to him (πάροιθ' αὐτοῖο καθέζετο); she comforts Achilles with the touch of her hand (χειρὶ τέ μιν κατέρεξεν) and calls him by name (ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε) in conversation (*Il.* 1.357; 1.360–361).³² One can see in these details that Thetis meets Achilles with warm maternity. The conversation between Achilles and Thetis has an interesting quality: the dialogue appears to produce emotional healing. According to D. Feeney, “The healing and unifying power of dialogue is a constant feature in Homeric poems” (Feeney: 1983, 212).³³ Thetis asks her son to talk about his troubled state of mind: τέκνον τί κλαίεις; τί δέ σε φρένας ἴκετο πένθος; /

³² These details of social convention become important when one considers how Homer employs them elsewhere in the *Iliad*. Here is the line for Achilles and Thetis: χειρὶ τέ μιν κατέρεξεν ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε (“She comforts him with the touch of her hand and calls him by name in conversation” *Il.* 1.361) A very similar line appears elsewhere between two divinities, Thetis and Charis: ἔν τ' ἄρα οἱ φῶ χειρὶ ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε (“Charis places her hand upon Thetis and calls her by name in conversation” *Il.* 18.384). This familiarity between two divinities remains appropriate; however, such an open interaction may shock the reader between a mortal and goddess. Nonetheless, the hero Achilles receives special treatment as son of Thetis respected among Olympians. Although the relationship between Achilles and Thetis suffers the extreme contrast between mortal anxiety and divine bliss, the two still enjoy brief moments of familial affection.

³³ Feeney shows that the healing power of conversation runs through Homeric tradition as a reoccurring theme. He writes, “In *Odyssey* 4, for example, we see Menelaus greeting Telemachus and Peisistratus, the son of Nestor. In speaking of his lost friends, Menelaus mentions Odysseus, so that Telemachus is moved to tears (113 ff.) Helen enters and guesses his identity (141–4), so that first Peisistratus may openly speak of Telemachus’ troubles (156–67), and then Menelaus may speak again of his own grief for his lost friend (169–82). Their words bring the purging tears to all four (183–7); Peisistratus is moved to commemorate his brother Antilochus (190–202), and Menelaus graciously puts the seal on their weeping (212). Their open talk of their pain, and the resulting tears which they shed together, provide some measure of solace” (Feeney: 1983, 212). Feeney, however, is a reader of the *Aeneid* and he compares the healing power of dialogue in Homeric tradition with the absence thereof in Virgil’s epic; he writes, “The world of the *Aeneid* is lacking in the Homeric style of the open, co-operative and sustaining speech. Vergil consistently excludes from his poems the intimacy, companionship and shared suffering which Homer’s men and women hold out to each other through speech” (Feeney: 1983, 213). The presence of a natural, healing conversation between Thetis and Achilles fits the Homeric tradition; the absence of such dialogue runs through the *Aeneid*, giving the epic a lachrymose mood. While the Homeric characters enjoy healing conversation, Aeneas remains unable to do the same even with his mother. In his epic, Virgil purposefully censors Homeric warmth; an example of this censorship is the incomplete relationship between Aeneas and Venus.

ἐξάυδα, μὴ κεῦθε νόω, ἵνα εἶδομεν ἄμφω (“My son, why do you grieve? What pain strikes your heart? Speak up and do not hide it in your chest so that we both know” *Il.* 1.362–363). Here, Thetis speaks as though she desires to learn about the things that trouble Achilles; one soon learns, however, from the hero that the goddess feigns ignorance. Achilles responds, οἶσθα: τί ἢ τοι ταῦτα ἰδυίη πάντ’ ἀγορεύω; (“You know. Why should I narrate all these things to you despite your awareness?” *Il.* 1.365). Nonetheless, the hero needs the healing conversation; he speaks for nearly fifty lines, taking cathartic solace from his narration.

Venus resembles Thetis, but she also does things differently. Venus unexpectedly confronts Aeneas and hides her identity. She gives a lengthy speech about Dido and the history of Carthage. Next, the goddess invites the hero to talk about himself: *sed vos qui tandem? quibus aut venistis ab oris? / quove tenetis iter?* (“At last, tell me who you are. From what shores do you come? Where are you going?” *Aen.* 1.369–370). Like Thetis, Venus feigns ignorance about the affairs of Aeneas. The hero introduces himself, talks about the fall of Troy and his journey on sea. Venus, rather than imitating Thetis’ motherly patience with Achilles’ lengthy speech, abruptly interrupts her son: *nec plura querentem / passa Venus medio sic interfata dolore est* (“No longer enduring her son complaining, Venus interrupts the speech in the middle of grieving” *Aen.* 1.385–386). In comparison with Thetis, Venus fails to treat her son with patience and warmth: whereas the Homeric goddess allows her son to complain for nearly fifty lines, Venus allows Aeneas to complain for only fourteen lines (*Aen.* 1.372–385). By comparing Venus with Thetis, one gains the ability to interpret the former goddess in a new way: many previous readers such as Austin, Page and Servius interpret the interruption of Aeneas’ speech as

an expression of Venus' lack of emotional fortitude towards the subject of her son's suffering. Austin writes, "Venus cannot bear to hear still further sorrows from her son" (Austin: 1971, 138). Page writes,

'Nor enduring his further plaint thus mid his grief Venus interposed.' *Querentem* is not put for *queri* but is to be taken strictly; Aeneas continuing his complaint is a grief which his mother cannot bear. The infinitive would mean 'nor did she permit him to complain further,' which gives an alien sense (Page: 1955, 178).

Servius writes, *aut narrantis Aeneae aut certe suo dolore; aequum enim est malis filii etiam ipsa moveri* ("Venus interrupts either the grieving of Aeneas or her own grieving, since it makes sense to say that the goddess herself also suffers by the evils that befall her son" Serv. *Aen.* 385–386). According to these three interpretations, Venus interrupts Aeneas because she is overcome with grief by her son's suffering. Thetis' maternity, however, drives her to endure—she endures to hear what she already knows—Achilles' complaints for a prolonged period of time; one expects such maternal patience from Venus.

The contrast is disturbing. The hero names himself as Aeneas from Troy, but his mother ignores her son's identity: *Quisquis es, haud, credo, invisus caelestibus auras / vitalis carpis, Tyriam qui adveneris urbem* ("Whoever you are, I believe that the gods do not resent you breathing their air, since you arrive safely on the shores of Carthage" *Aen.* 1.387–388). Venus surprisingly deviates from the Homeric example in a way that makes her appear maternally absent. The goddess avoids emotional contact by refusing to acknowledge her son's identity; in the *Iliad*, Thetis calls Achilles by name (ἔπος τ' ἔφατ')

ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε) and makes conversation (*Il.* 1.357; 1.360–361). Despite the recent storm, Venus keeps Aeneas ignorant about Juno's lingering hatred:

*Perge modo atque hinc te reginae ad limina prefer
namque tibi reduces socios classemque relatam
nuntio et in tutum versis Aquilonibus actam,
ni frustra augurium vani docuere parentes.
aspice bis senos laetantis agmine cycnos,
aetheria quos lapsa plaga Iovis ales aperto
turbabat caelo; nunc terras ordine longo
aut capere aut captas iam despectare videntur.
ut reduces illi ludunt stridentibus alis
et coetu cinxere polum cantusque dedere,
haud aliter puppesque tuae pubesque tuorum
aut portum tenet aut pleno subit ostia velo.
perge modo et, qua te ducit via, derige gressum.*

Only press forward and carry your step towards the gates of Dido. For I announce to you that your comrades are safe and your fleet remains safe, carried into safety with the storm left behind, unless my parents were false and they taught me vain augury. Take a look! There goes a triangle of twelve joyful swans, which the divine bird of Jupiter, falling from sky's vastness, harassed. In their long order, one can see them alighting on land or gazing down unto land already occupied. Returned, they play their wings by the winds, together they circle the sky and sing their songs; not differently your band of Trojans either enter Carthage already or they just gain ground upon the shore. Only press forward and, where the path may lead you, carry your step that way. (*Aen.* 1.389–401)

James O'Hara remarks on the rhetorical deception inherent in Venus' speech: Aeneas leaves Troy with a fleet of twenty ships; following Aeolus' storm, the hero enters Carthage with seven ships. Thirteen ships remain lost, yet Venus points at twelve swans and declares the Trojan fleet restored. Venus disregards the loss of one ship and the death of Orentes. Although Venus' impartiality may appear harmless, "Here Virgil has gently established a pattern that will recur throughout the poem: death is omitted from an

optimistic prophecy” (O’Hara: 1990, 12).³⁴ Therefore, Virgil establishes a stark contrast in attitude between mother and son: At once, we have Aeneas, sad and tired, while we also have Venus, purposeful, deceptive and inappropriately (at least for Aeneas) optimistic.

The dialogue between Venus and Aeneas extends no further. Venus readies Aeneas for Carthaginian affairs. Not having made any familial contact with her son, the goddess abruptly flees the scene:

*Dixit et avertens rosea cervice refulsit
ambrosiaequae comae divinum vertice odorem
spiravere; pedes vestis defluxit ad imos,
et vera incessu patuit dea. Ille ubi matrem
agnovit tali fugientem est voce secutus:
‘quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis
ludis imaginibus? Cur dextrae iungere dextram
non datur ac veras audire et reddere voces?’
talibus incusat gressumque ad moenia tendit ...
ipsa Paphum sublimis abit sedesque revisit
laeta ...*

The goddess speaks and her pink neck glistens as she turns away. From her head, her ambrosial hair breathes divine perfume. Venus’ dress falls down to her very feet and she reveals her divinity by her stride. As he recognizes his mother, Aeneas chases her with words: ‘Why so often—you also are cruel!—do you trick your son with false images? Why is it not allowed for us to join hands and trade simple truths?’ The hero utters such words of rebuke and

³⁴ In the *Aeneid*, divine impartiality often ignores human suffering; in multiple occasions, optimistic prophecy omits the suffering of individual mortals. In Virgil’s Underworld, the first shade to approach Aeneas is Palinurus. Aeneas rebukes Apollo for keeping silent about the death of the helmsman: *quis te, Palinure, deorum / eripuit nobis medioque sub aequore mersit? / dic age. Namque mihi, fallax haud ante repertus, / hoc uno response animum delusit Apollo, / qui fore te ponto incolumem finisque canebat venturum Ausonios. En haec promissa fides est?* (“Which of the divine gods, Palinurus, envied our fraternity and drowned you in that sea? Speak up. Never before, except for this, did Apollo lie to me, who told me that you would safely reach the shores of Italy. Can I not even trust divine words?” *Aen.* 6.341–346). Responding to Aeneas’ complaints, Palinurus explains that he died having reached Italian shores, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Apollo. However truthful Apollo may be, his prophecy nonetheless ignores human suffering. One can see, therefore, how Venus’ optimistic prophecy in *Aen.* 1 initiates a dark theme that runs through the rest of the epic.

takes his path towards Carthage ... For her part, the goddess joyfully revisits her magnificent settlement in Paphos ... (*Aen.* 1.402–410, 415–416)

Here, Aeneas openly complains about Venus' absence as a mother. Thetis appears to Achilles in her true form, while Venus reveals herself only during her departure. Thetis calls Achilles by name, but Venus ignores the identity of Aeneas. Thetis hears Achilles' complaints at length; Venus interrupts Aeneas' speech. Thetis sits by Achilles and offers comforting touch, while Venus joyfully (*laeta*) abandons Aeneas longing for physical and verbal contact. Austin comments on Venus' inappropriate levity: "it is a notable contrast: the son lonely and careworn, the mother gay and warm in her perfumed luxury: was Aeneas not right, perhaps, in thinking her heartless?" (Austin: 1971, 145).

Placing the Greek and Roman epics side by side, one notes how Virgil acknowledges Homeric expressions of maternity and disallows them between Venus and Aeneas. Unlike Thetis, Venus avoids making physical, conversational and emotional contact with her son. Meanwhile, Venus preserves some of the qualities found in her Homeric aspect, Aphrodite: Virgil imagines a deceptive and cheeky Venus who joyfully (*laeta*) leaves Aeneas feeling abandoned.

The *Iliad* characterizes Thetis as a beacon of hope against overwhelming circumstances. She rescues Zeus and (by extension) his κόσμος. The comparison between Thetis and Venus suggests that the Roman goddess plays a similar role in the *Aeneid*, serving as a guardian for Jupiter and the *imperium* relying on Augustan administration. However, the parallels between Thetis and Venus are complex: Venus does not imitate Thetis' nurturing quality and her patience. Venus rejoices for her imperial program, while

she ignores human suffering. How much of Venus' relentless purposefulness, emotional absence and disregard for human suffering does the Augustan administration employ?

4.3 Thetis Arms Achilles: Venus Arms Aeneas

Thetis and Venus petition the same divinity, Hephaestus (Vulcan), in order to have new armour forged for their respective sons. Again, while the Virgilian and Homeric paradigms compare neatly, one must remain attentive towards the contrast between the Roman and Greek examples. As Thetis arms her son, she attends Achilles' need for emotional support after the death of Patroclus. As Venus arms her son, the goddess attends the newly emerging military activity in Italy. Venus never consoles Aeneas for the death of Pallas.³⁵ In this case, Venus's participation in the *Aeneid* pointedly lacks the maternal quality in Thetis' involvement with Achilles.

Thetis and Achilles interact in Book 18 of the *Iliad* following the death of Patroclus. Thetis hears the wailing of Achilles (ἄκουσε δὲ πότνια μήτηρ) and on her own accord decides to visit her son, telling the Nereids, ἀλλ' εἴμ', ὄφρα ἴδωμι φίλον τέκος, ἡδ' ἐπακούσω / ὅττι μιν ἴκετο πένθος ἀπὸ πτολέμοιο μένοντα ("I will go in order to see my dear son and to hear what pain strikes him as he keeps away from battle" *Il.* 18.35, 63–64). Thetis sits by Achilles and asks him to talk about his heartbreak. The scene echoes the encounter between Achilles and Thetis from Book 1: τέκνον τί κλαίεις; τί δέ σε φρένας ἴκετο πένθος; / ἐξαύδα, μὴ κεῦθε ("My son, why do you grieve? What grief

³⁵ The relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is not entirely the same as the relationship between Aeneas and Pallas. Patroclus appears to be Achilles' closest companion. Their friendship exists independently of the war against Troy. Aeneas has had many companions, among them his wife, son, father and others such as Achates and Orestes. His friendship with Pallas was born out of military necessity and political circumstance, another instance of the dissolution of the personal in the impersonal structures of state and cosmos in the *Aeneid*.

strikes your heart? Speak up without hiding things” *Il.* 18.73–74). Again, Achilles and Thetis engage in healing dialogue. Achilles explains that he cannot avenge his fallen friend without his armour (which remains in Hector’s possession); Thetis promises to petition Hephaestus for new arms (*Il.* 18.136–137). In Book 19, when Thetis finally arrives bearing the craftsmanship of Hephaestus, again the goddess treats her son with remarkable kindness. Although Achilles stands with recently forged arms, the hero hesitates to abandon the corpse of Patroclus:

νῦν δ’ ἦτοι μὲν ἐγὼ θωρήσομαι: ἀλλὰ μάλ’ αἰνῶς
δεῖδω μὴ μοι τόφρα Μενoitίου ἄλκιμον υἱὸν
μῦται καδδῦσαι κατὰ χαλκοτύπους ὠτειλάς
εὐλάς ἐγγείωνται, ἀεικίσσωσι δὲ νεκρόν

Truly now, I stand prepared to clash in battle, yet I dread that flies would touch the wounds of brave Patroclus during my absence and breed worms. Such a thing would disgrace the corpse of my friend. (*Il.* 19.23–25)

Achilles, however, does not need to linger around the dead. Thetis encourages her son to press forward and promises to preserve the body of Patroclus: μένος πολυθαρσῆς ἐνῆκε, / Πατρόκλω δ’ αὔτ’ ἀμβροσίην καὶ νέκταρ ἐρυθρόν / στάξε κατὰ ῥινῶν, ἵνα οἱ χρῶς ἔμπεδος εἴη (“The goddess installs fearless courage within Achilles while she sheds nectar and rosy ambrosia on Patroclus through his nose, so that his skin remains untouched by decay” *Il.* 19. 36–38). Thus, Thetis consistently supports and comforts Achilles throughout the *Iliad*. Although the goddess understands that the death of Achilles remains inevitable, she nonetheless extends tutelage by petitioning Hephaestus for new arms and by preparing the hero for battle.

In Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, Venus imitates Thetis by petitioning Vulcan to have new armour prepared for Aeneas. Although Virgil's gods clearly replay the Homeric episode, one must attend the contrast between Greek and Roman paradigms. In the *Iliad*, Hector kills Patroclus and strips from him the armour of Achilles; Thetis attends her son in a state of mourning. The *Aeneid* differs from the *Iliad*, since Venus petitions Vulcan before the battle erupts in full scale and before Aeneas loses his friend, Pallas. Virgil describes Venus' intervention: *at Venus haud animo nequiquam exterrita mater, / Laurentumque minis et duro mota tumultu, / Vulcanum adloquitur* ("For her part, Venus grows anxious for good reason, moved by the stern uprising and threats of the Laurentes" *Aen.* 8.370–372). Thetis and Venus act upon different motivations: Thetis responds to the mourning of Achilles and his need for protective gear; Venus responds to the military threats that jeopardize her imperial campaign in Italy. In contrast with Thetis, Venus' actions betray an eagerness for battle. Vulcan notices this readiness and addresses it openly as he promises to prepare Aeneas' new armour: *si bellare paras atque haec tibi mens est / quidquid in arte mea possum promittere curae* ("If you prepare to wage war and your mind delights with such plans, [I will grant you] whatever care I am able to put forth in my art" *Aen.* 8.400–401). In other words, Venus provides for Aeneas just as Thetis provides for her own son; the Roman goddess differs from the Homeric model, however, in her militant attitude.³⁶ Unlike Thetis after the death of Patroclus, Venus never comforts

³⁶ According to Mairéad McAuley, it is possible to read Venus' militant readiness (*bella parans*) and Vulcan's interjection as Virgil's way of expressing caution towards the Augustan political regime: "If we take the art-commissioning Venus as a (at least partly ironic) surrogate for Virgil's patron Augustus, the passage does not simply comment on the propagandizing relation between *princeps* and his poet-for-payment and the artistic 'seductions' of financial reward: it also ironizes Augustus' familial self-representation as anointed son of Caesar and (future) *pater* of the Roman people, equating him with an ambitious mother and manipulative, adulterous wife (albeit a divine one), who is herself *genetrix* not only for Aeneas but also for the Julian clan. Note too that the desired outcome of Venus' maternal inspiration and artistic patronage is *bella...*" (McAuley: 2016, 63–64). McAuley's scholarship (published as recently

Aeneas for the death of Pallas; the goddess concerns herself not mainly with the suffering of her son but the process of her imperial campaign. Venus prioritizes the new state establishment, *imperium sine fine*, over human feeling.

Venus guards the movement from Troy to Italy and grants legitimacy to the authority that culminates with Augustus. However, her participation in the *Aeneid* is complex. Compared with Thetis, Venus appears maternally absent, deceptive, ambitious and eager for battle. Since Venus sews the seeds of Roman imperial authority with deception, callousness and militancy, one suspects that these qualities are inherent in the political movement (i.e. the Augustan regime) that she primarily sponsors. One cannot call into question Venus' dedication for empire. However, her disregard for mortals in pain darkens the mood of the *Aeneid*. With such a representation of the goddess who legitimizes the rule of Augustus, one wonders whether the poet has similar hopes and worries that Augustan politics would privilege destiny over human sympathy.

4.4 Venus Keeps Aeneas Ignorant

Robert Coleman writes positively about the relationship between the goddess and her mortal son: "It is rare for the Olympians to appear in person to mortals in the *Aeneid*; usually they communicate, as they intervene in events, through minor supernatural agents—Cupid, Iris, Allecto, Mercury. But of course the maternal relationship allows a special intimacy both here [in Book 1] and in Book 8" (Coleman: 1990, 49). According to Coleman, Venus' appearance before Aeneas heals the hero's mourning and fills him

as 2016) contributes greatly to this chapter (and the overall thesis); it is possible to interpret the problems that arise around Venus as an expression of Virgil's flinching compliance with the Augustan agenda. Venus' disregard for human suffering, military readiness and ambition for imperial power sews the seeds of Rome as Augustus offers it via the *Aeneid*.

with the confidence that he needs to press forward. As a nymph of the sea, Thetis' divinity is not as blindingly bright as the Olympian divinity of Venus; Thetis more freely and intimately contacts her mortal son without upsetting the natural order of things.

In the *Aeneid*, it seems as though Venus has the ability to briefly transcend any gap that holds her away from her mortal son. In Book 2, Venus appears before Aeneas in full clarity (*confessa deam qualisque videri / caelicolis et quanta solet*) and with her hand she holds her son (*dextraque prehensum / continuit*), thus bridging the gap between mortal and divine (*Aen.* 2.591–593). Again in Book 8, Venus, offering the gifts of Vulcan, appears before Aeneas and seeks the embrace (*amplexus nati Cytherea petivit*) of her son (*Aen.* 8.615).³⁷ Therefore, the *Aeneid* allows a certain degree of intimacy between Aeneas and Venus; on her own accord, the goddess avoids this intimacy in Book 1. In plain words, her full appearance in Book 2 and her embrace in Book 8 do not completely make up for Venus' maternal shortcomings: both books of the *Aeneid* either implicitly or explicitly problematize Venus' participation in the story. In Book 2, as Aeneas recklessly tries to defend Troy from the Greeks, Venus enters the scene and questions the hero: *non prius ascipies. . . superet coniunxne Creusa* ("Would you not rather find out whether your wife Creusa still lives?" *Aen.* 2.596–597). Aeneas relies on the promise of his mother, *nusquam abero et tutum patrio te limine sistam* ("I will never be away and I will bring you safely to the edges of Troy" *Aen.* 2.620). Aeneas follows his mother's lead and, during the goddess' invisible but ceaseless presence, the hero loses his wife, Creusa,

³⁷ There is an important note regarding the Helen episode: "This passage, usually referred to as the 'Helen episode,' has been the subject of much controversy. Though it does not appear in the major manuscripts, Servius *auctus* (i.e. the Servian commentary as expanded probably in the seventh/eighth century CE) quotes it in a note on line 566, and claims that it was part of Vergil's epic but was deleted by his literary executors. To some, these lines seem inconsistent in various ways with Vergil's style and with what comes before and after the passage . . . The arguments for and against authenticity are numerous and varied, but, in the end, the issue simply cannot be decided with certainty" (Ganiban, 2012: 257).

(misero coniunx fato mi erepta Creusa) as he exits Troy (*Aen.* 2.738). Venus promises her protection and bids Aeneas to attend Creusa, Ascanius and Anchises; despite promised tutelage, the hero finds himself leaving Troy without his wife and without proper of understanding regarding the causes of his suffering: *quem non incusavi amens hominumque deorumque* (“Out of my mind, whom among the gods or mortal men did I not blame?” *Aen.* 2.745). It is true that, in Book 8, the gifts of Vulcan provide Aeneas and Venus with an opportunity to connect; Virgil’s depiction of the scene, however, reveals further the distance and contrast between mother and son. The shield made by Vulcan displays the history of Rome and its triumphs (*res Italas Romanorumque triumphos*), an establishment that rests on the shoulders of Aeneas; nonetheless, Aeneas with mortal vision fails to perceive the great measure of glory and the divine scheme before his eyes: *dona parentis, / miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet* (“Aeneas gazes at the gifts of his mother; he admires and, not understanding the depictions, he rejoices with the image” *Aen.* 729–730). Venus, therefore, allows Aeneas to suffer for the sake of divine purpose, but she never truly informs the hero about the worthy pursuit. In Book 4 of the *Georgics*, Cyrene, a nymph of the sea, senses the mourning of her mortal son, Aristaeus, (*mater sonitum. . . sensit*) and allows him to enter her divine sanctuary (*fas illi limina divum / tangere*); the goddess hears the complaints of Aristaeus (*nati fletus cognovit inanis*) and properly instructs him regarding the causes (*morbi causam*) of his suffering (*G.* 4.333, 358–359, 375, 397). In Book 2 of the *Georgics*, Virgil declares, *felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas* (“Blessed is he, who learns the causes of things” *G.* 2.490). The instruction of Aristaeus by Cyrene in Book 4 about the *causas* of things, therefore,

reveals a fulfilling quality in the moment between mother and son. Noticing that Cyrene resembles Thetis and contradicts the ways of Venus, Mairéad McAuley writes:

While the *Aeneid* offers a mystification of historical processes, a mythical narrative that explains Roman *imperium* as the triumphant fulfilment of *fatum*, the *Georgics* at least purports to ‘understand causes’. . . Cyrene’s instruction is successful, it is implied, because she invests in it with her maternal *cura* in an unmediated, unconcealed way. This is something that Venus is either unwilling or unable to do fully for Aeneas, just as she never ‘teaches’ him full understanding of his role in the poem’s wider design (McAuley: 2016, 108, 109–110).

Venus’ actions pointedly deviate from both Homeric and Virgilian examples of maternity.

Both things stand true simultaneously: there could never be a satisfying familial relationship between Aeneas and Venus because of the chasm between divine and mortal, just as such a relationship remains impossible between Aphrodite and Anchises in the *Homeric Hymn*; Venus refuses to participate in the rituals of maternity established by other goddesses in Homeric and Virgilian poems. In Book 2 and Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, Venus truly appears before Aeneas and touches him. Despite these moments, one discovers insubstantiality in the relationship between mother and son: as late in the epic as Book 8, Venus withholds true, instructive conversation (*veras voces*) from Aeneas and allows her son to trudge onward without understanding (*ignarus*) his position in the divine, imperial scheme.

4.5 Venus and the Impersonal Regime

Under the unfeeling tutelage of Venus, Aeneas suffers in the name of state and religion. The purpose of his suffering, however, remains unclear. Aeneas moves by the

bidding of his mother, but the goddess never talks to her confused son about the worthiness of his mission. The imperial quest propels the hero forward without giving him an opportunity to make meaning of his experience. Venus' program is the imperial establishment that begins in Italy after the fall of Troy, stretching from Aeneas to Augustus. She attends her purpose with brutal pragmatism. How much of Venus' callousness, deception and militancy lingers in Augustus' political program? One may read the characterization of Venus as an indication of Virgil's attitude for the imperial movement and Augustan politics. Virgil champions the Roman state, its mission and Augustan administration. However, he problematizes this picture of authority. While the *Aeneid* expresses hope, it also expresses wavering confidence. One believes that Virgil received the Augustan program with a similar attitude: Virgil longs to believe Augustus and his promises of peace; nonetheless, he fears Venus' deception, callousness and readiness for violence. He fears that the state, originally fuelled by such a goddess, would disregard human suffering.

Chapter 5: Comparing Venus with Juno

In the *Aeneid*, Jupiter manages the rivalry between two parties, Venus and Juno. Venus' involvement in the imperial agenda remains vital throughout the epic: she oversees the movement from Troy to Italy and sows the seeds of empire. As the mother of Aeneas, she grants the Julian line—the line begins with Aeneas and culminates with Augustus—a divine, inherited right to rule. There appears, however, a measure to Venus' involvement in the *imperium sine fine*. Venus does not offer some of the things that Juno has to contribute (e.g. the queen's authority over marriage rituals and her attention for *mores patrium*). Venus cannot represent the Roman state and religion on her own; such a magnificent task requires the participation of others such as Juno. Jupiter's rule incorporates both goddesses.

5.1 The Storm in Book 1: *Furor* and *Imperium*

The *Aeneid* begins with a storm that comes from Juno and Aeolus, which drives the Trojans towards Carthage. Juno seduces Aeolus to do her bidding by offering him a bride; he unleashes the storms that are under his authority (*imperio premit*), thus harassing the Trojans, while also annoying Neptune (*Aen.* 1. 54, 71, 125). As Neptune restores quietude, Virgil describes the god with a simile:

*ac veluti magno in populo cum saepe coorta est
seditio, saevitque animis ignobile vulgus,
iamque faces et saxa volant (furor arma ministrat),
tum pietate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem
conspexere, silent arrectisque auribus astant;
ille regit dictis animos et pectore mulcet*

Just as when trouble often erupts in the affairs of a great nation and the base crowd seethes with rage in their heart, already torches and rocks are flying here and there; fury provides arms. Then, if by chance the people catch sight of some man, weighty

with merits and piety, they stand still and raise curious ears. That man of piety uses words to sooth the hearts of men. (*Aen.* 1.147–153)

Pietas ensures *imperium*, restraining *furor* and its natural chaos. Following that storm, Venus approaches Jupiter who reveals that a plan remains fixed to settle Aeneas in Italy and to launch the establishment of an *imperium sine fine*. Jupiter plans to govern the human realm under a single regime that provides order and law. According to the last three lines of Jupiter’s speech, peace is the ultimate goal: *claudentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus / saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aenis / post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento* (“The Gates of War will be shut; impious Furor settling over savage arms will rage with his hands bound behind his back with a hundred brazen bonds, his mouth horrid with gore” *Aen.* 1.294–296). Peace crowns the establishment of the boundless state. The achievement of such peace requires the binding of *Furor*. In that case, Juno and Aeolus contradict the imperial agenda by administering *furor*. The *furor* introduced by Juno lingers throughout the *Aeneid* and Aeneas relies on his *pietas* in order to continue his mission (Christine Perkell, 1999: 35–37).³⁸

5.2 Venus and Juno Arouse *Furor*

Dido’s tragedy begins with Book 1, when Aeneas and the Trojans arrive at Carthage and entrust themselves to the queen’s hospitality. Venus distrusts Juno’s city and her intentions. Jupiter already bends Carthaginian minds to friendliness (*Aen.* 297–300). Although Venus has awareness of Jupiter’s present hospitality, the goddess decides to take the matter into her own hands. Venus plans to burn Dido with madness (*firentem*

³⁸ Furthermore, Augustus promised the Roman people an end to *furor*. In the words of Randall T. Ganiban, “the adjective *impius* describes something monstrous, and is especially used by the Roman poets when speaking of civil war, because it is a violation of the laws of nature ... *Furor impius* represents an emphatic counterpart to the ideals seemingly embodied in Augustus’ reign (Ganiban, 2012: 192). The instigation of *furor*, therefore, contradicts not only Jupiter’s regime but also Augustus’ mission to uphold that *imperium*.”

incendat reginam atque ossibus implicet ignem) and petitions Amor (*Aen.* 1.659–660).

The goddess gives clear instructions: *occultum inspire ignem fallasque veneno* (“Breath into her the hidden flame and render her senseless with your poison” *Aen.* 1.688). By the beginning of Book 4, that poison deeply settles within the veins of Dido. Overwhelmed by longing, she becomes sick and loses sleep (*Aen.* 4.1–7). Worse than that, she can no longer contain her madness, running through the streets of her city: *est mollis flamma medullas / interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus. / Uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur / urbe furens* (“The soft fire still runs through her innermost marrow and burns inside her chest. Ablaze, sad Dido runs here and there in the streets of her city, displaying her madness” *Aen.* 4.66–69). In the *Aeneid*, as early as Book 1, Venus participates as an instigator of *furor*.

Juno responds to the situation. She approaches Venus and asks to marry Aeneas with Dido. In order to have her way, just as with Aeolus in Book 1, in Book 4 Juno offers marriage, a harbinger of peace. The sad reality, however, remains: Juno, in an attempt to halt Aeneas’ mission, vainly squanders her position. She knows that fates are certain against such a marriage. Juno seeks to introduce her sphere of authority into an illegal circumstance. Venus agrees to Juno’s offer, but she knows that the affair between Aeneas and Dido is void. She even comments on it: *sed fatis incerta feror, si Iuppiter unam / esse velit Tyriis urbem Troiaque profectis / miscerive probet populos aut foedera iungi* (“But, I’m confused about one thing: the fates. Does Jupiter wish there to be one city for Carthaginians and Trojans alike, or does he allow the two nations to be mingled and to join each other with marriage bonds?” *Aen.* 4.110–112). Venus knows that Juno’s arrangement is unsustainable.³⁹ However, Juno requests to accomplish the wedding on

³⁹ Tilly writes, “Venus only *pretends* she is doubtful about Aeneas’ destiny” (Tilly, 1968: 86).

her own (*mecum erit iste labor*) and takes responsibility. By that responsibility, Juno allows her sacred rituals to sink to an illegitimate affair.

The Carthaginian affair shows that both Venus and Juno share a readiness to bend rules. Venus' disregard for *hospitium*, a responsibility sanctioned by Jupiter not only for humanity at large but also specifically for Dido and Aeneas, undermines her position and reveals the goddess' readiness for violence (e.g. towards Dido) and her disregard for human suffering, her cruelty (in the words of Aeneas).⁴⁰ Meanwhile, by stubbornly trying to marry Aeneas with Dido, Juno brings the standards to extralegal low. One goddess by no means holds a moral upper ground over the other (Vassiliki Panoussi, 2009: 93–95).⁴¹

5.3 Death of Dido

Abandoned by her lover, Dido expresses a sense of broken national pride. She feels tricked and, by extension, she feels that her kingdom has been brought to mockery: *Pro Iuppiter! Ibit / hic, ait, et nostris inluserit advena regnis?* (“By Jupiter! Will he just go?—she says—will the intruder just ridicule our kingdom like that?” *Aen.* 4.590–591). Describing Carthaginian humiliation, Virgil employs the verb *includere* (to mock, to abuse). This brings to mind Aeneas' complaints to Venus in Book 1: *quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis / ludis imaginibus?* (“Why so often—you also are cruel!—do you trick your son with false images?” *Aen.* 1.407–408). During Dido's grief, Venus'

⁴⁰ Venus' fears, however, are not groundless, considering Dido's violent mind after losing her lover (Austin, 1971: 201).

⁴¹ A comparison between Venus, protagonist, and Juno, antagonist, shows that one goddess does not offer a moral upper ground over the other; that argument belongs to Panoussi as well: “As a locus where the human and the divine meet, ritual acts constitute the means by which deities may communicate their will to humans. Yet Venus, like Juno, is not satisfied simply to convey her will through these appropriate channels but actively interferes in human affairs, often in the context of ritual. An examination of the moments of Venus' active participation in the plot of the poem reveals an utter disregard for correct ritual procedure. By negating ritual correctness, she is complicit in the instigation or perpetuation of ritual disruption and crisis and may thus be read as a version of Juno: she constitutes yet another divine figure who promotes repetition of ritual corruption in the epic (Panoussi, 2009: 93). Furthermore, Panoussi shows that there exists a blatant parallel between Juno's *Allecto* and Venus' *Amor*, thus drawing the two divinities together in a picture of violence and ritual corruption.

hidden presence brings to light the cruelty by which the goddess propels the Roman movement.

Before her death, Venus prays to Juno, Hecate and the Dirae (the Furies) that her death is avenged. Further, she demands that the Tyrians and Trojan descendants foster enmity for each other: *O Tyrii, stirpem et genus omne futurum / exercete odiis, cinerique haec mittite nostro / munera, nullus amor populis nec foedera sunt* (“O Tyrians, persecute with hatred their line and future generations and grant my ashes this: let there be neither any love nor treaty between the two nations” *Aen.* 4.622–624). Dido’s call for *nullus amor* names Venus’ unfeeling participation in the Carthaginian episode. In addition, Dido calls upon an unknown avenger:

*exoriare, aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor,
qui face Dardanios ferroque sequare colonos,
nunc, olim, quocumque dabunt se tempore vires.
litora litoribus contraria, fluctibus undas
imprecor, arma armis; pugnent ipsique nepotesque*

Arise, nameless avenger, from my ashes. Chase the Dardanian colonies with your torch and sword, now, later, or whenever in time strength allows. I pray that shores go against shores, waves against waves, and arms against arms; they will fight and so will their children. (*Aen.* 4.625–629)

Hannibal will be Dido’s avenger (Tilly, 1968: 148). With the image of shores against shores and arms against arms, Dido describes the “interlocked struggle of Rome and Carthage” according to Austin, and “Dido seems to leave the two peoples locked for ever in their enmity. And would not the Roman reader have thought also of that other struggle, the Civil War?” (Austin, 1955: 182–183). The queen’s policy *nullus amor* results in *furor* that endures throughout centuries. The illegal affair between Aeneas and Dido (and by extension Venus and Juno) finally necessitates the destruction of Carthage by Roman

hands, an event which historically defines Rome as the undisputed Mediterranean superpower. In this way, Venus' efforts during the Carthaginian episode can be seen as an investment in the *imperium sine fine*. Indeed, Venus advances the imperial cause. The cause, however, and her ways translate to a great deal of sacrifice at the human level. Venus and Juno together create *furor*.

Having made that dreadful speech, Dido strikes herself with the sword. As if that does not suffice, the queen also burns over a pyre built of things that remind her (*virī monumenta*) of Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.498). It is clear that Dido herself becomes the source of the fire; she approaches it as her inward wound (i.e. the poisonous flame that comes from Venus and Amor) manifests into physical reality. Virgil gives the following simile:

... *it clamor ad alta
atria; concussam bacchatur Fama per urbem.
lamentis gemituque et femineo ululatu
tectā fremunt, resonat magnis plangoribus aether,
non aliter, quam si immissis ruat hostibus omnis
Karthago aut antiqua Tyros, flammaeque furentes
culmina perque hominum volvantur perque deorum*

Shouting takes the lofty halls. Rumour chants frenzy through the city struck with grief. Palace halls echo with the groan of lamenting and woman's ululations. The sky rings with great wailing, as if all Carthage or the ancient Tyre falls with enemies pouring in and the raging fires capture the dwellings of the people and the temples of the gods. (*Aen.* 4.665–671)

Fire must either extinguish or spread. Dido's fire burns throughout the city just as the Romans truly burn it to the ground. Carthage burning also recalls the fall of Troy.⁴² The mission of Venus and Aeneas necessitates the destruction of both cities alike: neither

⁴² Virgil compares the fall of Troy to the destruction of Carthage. In Book 1, Virgil introduces Carthage with the following: *Urbs antiqua fuit (Tyrii tenuere coloni), / Karthago* ("There was an ancient city, colonized by the Tyrians" *Aen.* 1.12–13). Later, in Book 2, Virgil declares the fall of Troy with the following: *Urbs antiqua ruit, multos dominata per annos* ("The ancient city falls, for so many years a jewel of authority" *Aen.* 2.363). The two lines, one for Troy and the other for Carthage, place the two cities neatly next to one another: both cities fall in order to move the mission for *imperium sine fine*.

Troy nor Carthage can hold back the authority that rests with Aeneas' descendants.

Imperium sine fine demands great sacrifice. Those who suffer for it have little means (or none at all) to make meaning of their experience.⁴³

Despite the physical wounds that defile the body, Dido's soul, still resisting the circumstance, lingers onto the nearly lifeless body. Juno pities the scene and sends Iris:

*Tum Iuno omnipotens, longum miserata dolorem
difficilisque obitus, Irim demisit Olympo,
quae luctantem animam nexosque resolveret artus.
nam quia nec fato, merita nec morte peribat,
sed miserata ante diem subitoque accensa furore,
nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertice crinem
abstulerat Stygioque caput damnaverat Orco.
Ergo Iris croceis per caelum roscida pinnis,
mille trahens varios adverso sole colores,
devolat et supra caput adstitit. "hunc ego Diti
sacrum iussa fero teque isto corpore solvo":
sic ait et dextra crinem secat; omnis et una
dilapsus calor atque in ventos vita recessit.*

Then, all powerful Juno, pitying the endless suffering and the difficult death, sends Iris down from Olympus, so that she may loosen the resisting spirit from her body in the likeness of prison now. She dies neither by fate, nor a deserved death. In misery she dies before her day, caught by a sudden flame of frenzy. Proserpina does not take the golden lock from her hair, damning her to the Stygian Orcus. Therefore, Iris with saffron wings dragging a thousand various colours through the sky flies down, landing next to Dido's head. Iris speaks: "With this, I send you to Dis. As bidden, I set you free from your body". With her hand Iris cuts a lock from the queen's hair, and at once her colour departs from her body. Her life recedes to the winds. (*Aen.* 4.693–705)

⁴³ According to Michael C. J. Putnam: "The flames through whose gleam he sets his sails, consume her body and end her love for Aeneas at the same time. The metaphorical wound of love he inflicted, the fire he ignited, become a reality, as destructive of the past as it is ominous for the future. Aeneas even looks back (*respiciens*) as he did finally for Creusa, dying in the inferno of sinking Troy. But here, as there, it is the glance of one ignorant of the necessary human suffering left scattered in the wake of his ideal journey. Thus Dido's corpse is overwhelmed by fire; thus Priam's ancestral Troy is consumed in flames which destroy the past and, at the same time, seem only to spur Aeneas on his destined way. (Putnam, 1965: 68).

Unlike Venus, Juno pities (*miserata*) Dido. Whereas Venus administers death, Juno provides relief. According to Virgil's judgement, the queen dies before her time and, therefore, Proserpina cannot bring about a swift end to Dido's pain. Austin explains the matter with Proserpina's delay: "In a sacrifice the hair of a victim was first removed and offered as a first-fruit; and when men die at the appointed time, Proserpina herself cuts off a lock of hair as a like first-fruit; but she could not do this for the untimely dead, and so Iris is sent to do it, out of special compassion for Dido (Austin, 1955: 200). Although two goddesses together cause the death of Dido, there exists a stark contrast in attitude between the two divinities: Venus, callously ambitious, attends only the large picture, the great state *sine fine*; she ignores the suffering of individuals, small mortals. Juno brings compassion and human feeling into the *Aeneid* at a time when it is most needed (Banks J. Wildman, 1908: 26–29).⁴⁴

5.4 Juno Responds to Venus' Cruelty

Venus and Juno each make an appearance in Book 5. With the disturbing memory of Dido's death and Venus' violence in the background, Juno takes the offensive. She sends Iris to arouse a rebellion among Trojan women. Even before the arrival of Iris, the women complain: *heu tota vada fessis / et tantum superesse maris* ("Alas, what depths, what seas await these tired people?"); Virgil adds, *Urbem orant; taedet pelagi perferre laborem* ("They desire a city; They've had enough of the sea's challenges" *Aen.* 5.615–616, 618). Iris targets their feelings of homesickness: *Hic quaerite Troiam, / hic domus*

⁴⁴ Wildman writes, "Juno, strong, passionate, determined, intensely human, assists greatly in giving the poem a human atmosphere" (Wildman, 1908: 29). Juno's compassion does not reach everybody. The queen attends Dido and Turnus, but one does not forget the terrifying hatred with which she targets the Trojan race. Venus and Juno resemble each other for their cruelty; Juno, however, appears more attentive to human suffering than Venus.

est (“Here, seek Troy; here is your new home” *Aen.* 5.648–649). With such words bending Trojan minds to treachery, the goddess takes a torch, throws it towards the ships of Aeneas and teaches the women to do the same. Driven with frenzy (*actae furore*), they set fire to the ships (*Aen.* 5.659). Aeneas and other Trojans hasten into the scene and the women scatter in fear and shame, having realized and shaken off (*excussa que pectore Iuno est*) Juno’s presence (*Aen.* 5.679). Aeneas prays to Jupiter and calls down rain, extinguishing Juno’s fire.

Juno’s little trick has a remarkable effect. Indeed, Aeneas loses confidence, becomes forgetful of his mission (*oblitus fatorum*), pondering whether he should truly sail for Italy or remain in Sicily (*Aen.* 5.703). With the council of Nautes (whom the ghost of Anchises confirms in Aeneas’ dream), the hero decides to establish a new city, Acesta, with Acestes as its leader; only those wanting to press forward join the hero on his Italian adventure. Juno, however, manages to delay Aeneas and his followers. The queen seeks to halt the imperial movement in perpetual delay. Indeed, the Trojans linger:

*iamque dies epulata novem gens omnis, et aris
factus honos; placidi straverunt aequora venti,
creber et adspirans rursus vocat Auster in altum.
exoritur procurva ingens per litora fletus;
complexi inter se noctemque diemque morantur.*

Nine days pass by as Aeneas’ people, all of them together, feast and give honour by the altars of gods; peaceful winds had calmed the waters. Again and again, southern Auster beckons the travellers to sea. A din of grieving arises along the curved shore. Embracing one another, they linger even another day, another night. (*Aen.* 7.562–766)

Thus, Juno threatens to perpetually delay Aeneas’ mission, making each step of the way painful for the hero and his followers.

Venus does not remain idle. She responds to Juno’s schemes by approaching

Neptune and bargaining for the safety of Aeneas and his followers on their way towards Italy. Although Venus never offers any kind of payment, it becomes clear that Neptune's compliance comes at a cost. Neptune agrees to the goddess' request for a safe journey, but he feels entitled to claim one of Aeneas' friends (*unum pro multis dabitur caput*) for the security of the collective group (*Aen.* 5.815). Somnus comes for blameless (*insonti*) Palinurus, the Trojan helmsman, and hurls him (*proiecit*) into the sea (*Aen.* 5.841, 859). The death of a blameless victim, unwittingly sacrificed to a cause greater than his individual existence, draws the stark contrast between Venus and Juno: early in the epic, the queen of gods seeks to achieve her goals by striking marriage deals, a peaceful measure; meanwhile, Venus deals death. She oversees a program that goes beyond whatever vision available to mortals and sacrifices blameless individuals.⁴⁵

Venus' policy of *unum pro multis* makes sense to anyone who appreciates the historical Roman Empire, *imperium sine fine*. Its true meaning, however, eludes Aeneas. In the Underworld, the hero first runs into Palinurus and complains that Apollo's guidance deceives: *mihi, fallax haud ante Apollo, / qui fore te ponto incolumem finisque canebat / venturum Ausonios. En Haec promissa fides est?* ("Never before did Apollo deceive me, who prophesied that you would journey over the sea safely and find the shores of Italy. Is this how gods attend their promises?" *Aen.* 6.343–346) Then, the hero learns from Palinurus that he, indeed, reached the shores of Italy but only to be slaughtered upon his arrival by local barbarians (*gens crudelis. Aen.* 359). Once again,

⁴⁵ Putnam lays it down: "The sea is henceforth to mean nothing more in the life of Aeneas, and Palinurus symbolizes in his person the death of that part of Aeneas which pertains to voyaging, to wandering, and to a meaningless search for a goal which has, almost until this very moment, remained unstipulated. The pilot is one thoroughly versed in the reality of the sea, as opposed to those charmed by its superficial beauties. Aeneas is not fated, like Captain Ahab or Mark Twain's river pilot, to penetrate into the deeper meanings of the ocean and its symbols. Palinurus, who is, must die by virtue of the knowledge and loyalty he symbolizes ... Both Dido and Palinurus are parts of him which he must put behind as he plunges into the underworld for the clarification of his destiny" (Putnam, 1965: 98–99).

Apollo's prophecy holds true; the cold delivery of truth, however, does not change the fact that Aeneas trudges through his mission in a state of confusion, without the relief that one expects from divine guidance. Meanwhile, the Sibyl announces that the shore of his death will bear the name of Palinurus; the helmsman's fate remains not altogether a tragedy. Much like Caieta at the very beginning of Book 7, Palinurus gives his name to the place of his martyrdom.⁴⁶ Therefore, such famous mortals literally become parts of the Roman Empire. Their deaths find meaning. Nonetheless, Aeneas walks away from Palinurus feeling cruelly tricked by the gods. In martyrdom, Palinurus makes meaning of his lot; those still suffering, however, feel the daily anxiety of uncertainty.

5.5 Amata

Juno takes the offensive against Venus and her champion in Book 7. The queen expresses that she understands her inability to prevent the course of fate. However, she has the ability to somehow delay the imperial mission. In her speech, Juno expresses resentment towards Aeneas' purpose to marry Lavinia, since the plan interrupts the arrangements made for Turnus. Juno calls Aeneas a second Paris (*alter Paris*), another seducer of brides and harbinger of war (*Aen.* 7.321). The name Lavinia echoes the name Livia in an interesting way. Just as Aeneas interrupts the arrangement between Lavinia and Turnus, Augustus interrupted the marriage between Livia and her husband while she was still pregnant by him; Augustus took Livia for himself in a way that utterly disregards the marriage institution, Juno's rituals (Matthew D. H. Clark, 2010: 126). The comparison between Paris, the weak adulterer, and Aeneas thus involves Augustus. Juno,

⁴⁶ Caieta, Aeneas' nurse: *tu quoque litoribus nostris, Aeneia nutrix, / aeternam moriens famam, Caieta, dedisti; / et nunc servat honos sedem tuus, ossaque nomen / Hesperia in magna, si qua est ea gloria, signat* ("You also, nurse of Aeneas, with your death gave an undying fame to our shores, Caieta; still your honour keeps the resting-place. In great Hesperia, if some such glory seems appropriate, your name marks the place of your ashes" *Aen.* 7.1–7).

calling Aeneas *adulter*, complains that the Trojans disregard prior arrangements and steal brides (*soceros legere et gremiis abducere pactas*) from the arms of their lovers (*Aen.* 10.79, 92).

In order to bend Italy to war, Juno targets Amata and Turnus. The queen sends Allecto, described by Virgil as *infecta venenis* (steeped in poison). R. D. Williams describes the dark deity with the following words: “Allecto essentially symbolises *furor*, the evil and uncontrolled quality which can dominate and consume a human personality” (Williams, 1973: 191). In Book 1, Amor targets Dido with poison (*veneno*). Venus and Juno resemble each other in their violence. Although Juno, initially softer with offers of marriage, now turns violent having witnessed the cruelty of Venus and Amor; as Juno arouses war, she resembles Venus during the grim episode at Carthage.

In their pain, Amata and Dido closely resemble each other, another testament to the idea that both goddesses are willing to turn their backs on mortal suffering. Both divinities are willing to become cruel and use mortals as disposable pawns. Allecto hurls a snake at Amata; it travels through her inner heart (*praecordia ad intima*) and unseen (*attactu nullo*) it attacks the senses (*fallit furentem*) of the queen, driving her into frenzy (*Aen.* 7.347, 349–350). The poison within Amata turns into a flame (*ossibus implicat ignem*), thus directly recalling the burning of Dido by Amor’s poison (*Aen.* 7.355). Just like Dido, Amata cannot contain herself but exposes herself to public scrutiny:

*Ceu quondam torto volitans sub verbere turbo,
Quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum
Intenti ludo exercent (ille actus habena
Curvatis fertur spatiis; stupet inscia supra
Inpubesque manus, mirata volubile buxum;
Dant animos plagae), non cursu segnior illo
Per medias urbes agitur populosque ferocis ...*

As when a top, spinning under a twisted lash, which keen boys, gathering in great a great circle, exert playfully through empty halls. The top, driven by the by the lash, is carried drawing circles. The youthful band stares in awe, gazing in wonder at the wooden thing. Whipping strike gives the game fun. In such a way, Amata is driven through the midst of the city and the noisy people ... (Aen. 7.378–384)

In Book 4, Dido cannot contain herself but runs through the streets of her city in a frenzy. Virgil's employment of the noun *ludus* recalls Aeneas' employment of the verb *ludere* as he accuses her mother for cruelty. It also recalls Dido's employment of the verb, complaining that Aeneas made a mockery of herself—Venus (and to some extent Juno), in fact, made mockery of Dido and Carthage—and her kingdom. In the world of the *Aeneid*, the gods are cruel and often reduce mortals to their playthings, disregarding human suffering.

In her frenzy, Amata refuses the realities imposed by Aeneas and his conquering followers. She hides her daughter, Lavinia, in the woods and delays (*moretur*) the ceremonies that await Aeneas and the princess (*Aen.* 7.388). By Juno, Amata thus fulfills her purpose: she instigates *furor*, which itself causes war, for herself and for other women (recalling Iris) and therefore delays the conclusion of Aeneas' mission, the foundation of a new, imperial state.

Amata truly becomes a second Dido when she commits suicide, believing Turnus slain by Aeneas (before their duel actually transpires). Resolved to die (*moritura*), the unhappy (*infelix*) and frenzied (*fuorem*) queen hangs herself (*Aen.* 7.598, 601–602). With her death, it becomes evident that the cruelty of Juno equals that of Venus. The divine protagonist offers no more relief to the suffering of mortals than the savagely cruel

antagonist; in fact, Venus initially sets the standard by destroying Dido, while Juno merely matches the other goddess' level of violence and disregard for human suffering.

Despite the Amata episode, Juno remains attentive to human cries of pain. For example, following the death of Pallas in Book 10, Juno plays a trick on Turnus in order to delay his death by keeping him away from battle. Appearing to flee from violence, Turnus feels humiliated and attempts suicide with a sword (just like Dido); Juno pities the notion and holds (*miserata repressit*) him back (*Aen.* 10.866). Unlike Venus, Juno shows a tendency towards humanitarianism. In that way, Juno's presence has a healing power as one sees her prevent Turnus from becoming a second Dido.

5.6 Jupiter's Government

Jupiter's government relies on his ability to serve as an arbitrator between contesting parties. This can be seen most clearly in books 10 and 12. In Book 10, Virgil puts Venus and Juno into a contest of words. Venus begins the parley with her complaints about Juno's interventions, focusing on the actions of Aeolus, Iris and Allecto. Juno appears, according to Venus' argument, unwilling to comply with the demands of fate (which Jupiter protects). In return, the queen of gods argues that it is natural for her to aid the Rutulians as long as her divine rival also participates in mortal affairs, even bringing Aeneas new armour from heaven (*Aen.* 10.17–95). With the conclusion of the two speeches, Virgil asserts that neither goddess decisively wins the debate: *cunctique fremebant / caelicolae adsensu vario* ("The crowd of gods ends up cheering for both sides" *Aen.* 96–97). Both Venus and Juno muster up support from the divine community; Jupiter must deal in a way that does not oppress one party in favour for another. The assembly looks to Jupiter for justice. Jupiter responds to their need:

*accipite ergo animis atque haec mea figite dicta.
quandoquidem Ausonios coniungi foedere Teucris
haud licitum nec vestra capit discordia finem:
quae cuique est fortuna hodie, quam quisque
Tros Rutulusve fuat, nullo discrimine habebo,
seu fatis Italum castra obsidione tenentur
sive errore malo Troiae monitisque sinistris.
nec Rutulos solvo. Sua cuique exorsa laborem
fortunamque ferent. Rex Iuppiter omnibus idem;
fata viam invenient ...*

Hear me, therefore, in your very hearts and write down my words. Since it is in no way possible that Ausonians and Teucrians make an alliance, and since your discord knows no end: whatever fortune may find these people today, may he be Trojan or Rutulian, I will receive the matter with no discrimination, whether camps are besieged with the fate of Italy, or Troy's ill error and false prophesies. Nor do I let go of the Rutulians. Chosen paths will bring according struggle and reward to each. Jupiter rules as king above all alike. The fates know their direction ... (*Aen.* 10.104–113)

Jupiter governs by keeping himself out of the contests that arise between opposing parties.

Gods and men witness Jupiter's impartial *imperium* with Turnus and Aeneas.

Virgil describes the king studying the fates of both men with an equal eye: *Iuppiter ipse duas aequato examine lances / sustinet et fata imponit diversa duorum, / quem damnet labor et quo vergat pondere letum* ("Jupiter himself upholds two scales with an equal eye and settles the varying fates of the two heroes, whom labour damns and whose weight calls him down" *Aen.* 12.725–727). Jupiter calculates the fates and reveals the outcome; the king reserves his personal opinion. Moments before Turnus' death, Jupiter confronts Juno and orders her to cease her resistance:

*ventum ad supremum est. terris agitare vel undis
Troianos potuisti, infandum accendere bellum,
deformare domum et luctu miscere hymenaeos:
ulterius temptare veto ...*

The end is here. You had the power to drive Trojans over lands and waves and to blaze up unspeakable war, to deform a royal home and to mingle misery with wedding rituals. For more, I forbid you the attempt ... (*Aen.* 12.803–806).

Jupiter speaks sternly, but he also reminds Juno of his willingness to indulge her. In response, Juno declares that she yields (*cedo*), but she also makes the following demand:

*ne vetus indigenas nomen mutare Latino
neu Troas fieri iubeas Teucros vocari
aut vocem mutare viros aut vertere vestem.
sit Latium, sint Albani per saecula reges,
sit Romana potens Itala virtute propago;
occidit, occideritque sinas cum nomine Troia.*

Do not command the native Latins to change their ancient name or to become Trojan and to be called Teucrians. Neither command these men to change their language or their clothes. Let Latium be, let there be Alban kings throughout the ages. Let the Roman stock learn from Italian virtue. Troy is fallen. Let it stay fallen with its name (*Aen.* 12.823–828).

Jupiter accepts that demand and declares that the Italians preserve the ways of their fathers (*patrium mores*), setting the foundation of the Roman culture. Juno thus sets the Roman imperial precedent: the expansion of the imperial state should never result in the destruction of Italian culture. Along with that, Jupiter adds that the Romans will worship Juno (*aeque celebrabit*) more than any other nation (*Aen.* 12.840).⁴⁷

Jupiter manages between two goddesses. Both Venus and Juno walk away from the ordeal with a feeling of victory. The Romans worship Venus as a founding figure,

⁴⁷ Tilly writes, “Juno’s impassioned appeal is that when the two people Latins and Trojans at last are fused into one, all things Latin should be preserved and that they should take on a Latin character: their name, language, dress and lad must be Latin: the kings before the founding of Rome must be Alban, not Trojan although they will be descended from Trojan Ascanius, and the race will be Roman called after the founder and will draw strength from native Italian virtues. The complete disappearance of Troy and all things Trojan will be welcome to her. In this way is the problem solved of combining two such differing peoples: they will make peace and combine into one race, but the Latin characteristics will be dominant. The Romans had a dislike for eastern peoples, whom they considered weak and effeminate in their ways and habits. This attitude of mind was calculated to make the acceptance of the Trojan legend of the origins of Rome difficult” (Tilly, 1969: 213).

genetrix. Further, the *Aeneid* accepts Venus as the source of Julian authority, placing that responsibility (eventually) on the shoulders of Augustus. Venus, however, suffers the true loss of her beloved Troy; in Book 10, she compares Aeneas' settlement in Italy to a new Troy (*nascentis Troiae*) in vain hope (*Aen.* 10.27). The *imperium* reduces Troy to only a chapter along with Carthage. The king and his *imperium* protect the realms; without that protection, divinities like Juno and Venus run free, unleashing *furor* and the chaos that follows. Venus has an incomplete grasp of the imperial project, still longing to recreate Troy. According to David Quint's reading of Book 3, Aeneas, during his journey from Troy to Italy, must learn to let go of his past. The hero must constantly press forward, eventually witnessing the failure of all of his attempts to build a new Troy; he must only attend his imperial quest. Quint convincingly argues that the importance of forgetting the painful past in the *Aeneid* gives the epic a political aspect: Augustus expects the Roman nation to accept the new regime and forget the painful memories of civil war (Quint, 1982: 30–38). As late as Book 10, Venus still has thoughts for a new Troy; she, the source of inherited rule, thus fails to completely participate in the imperial project; she alone cannot represent the state and its religion (although her participation serves the imperial cause in many ways).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

At the point of conclusion, it should be clear that Virgil's characterization of Venus has political consequences relevant to the Augustan regime. Venus oversees the physical movement that begins from Troy and ends in Italy; she thus secures the establishment of a new state in Italy, *imperium sine fine*. In addition, Venus is the ancestress of the line that stretches from Aeneas to Augustus, thus granting the *princeps* a divine and inherited (thus monarchical) responsibility to rule the Roman nation. With that said, Virgil by no means draws a perfect image of authority with Venus. The poet imagines her as irrational, fearsome, unfeeling, and destructive. She continues Aphrodite's ways in adultery and scandal. She is heedless of human suffering as she attends her imperial purpose. Such descriptions undermine Venus' authority (which is, by the end of the *Aeneid*, less than total) and reveal the need for other participants (such as Juno and Jupiter) in the imperial regime. Those who read Venus as a source of Augustan sovereignty must also acknowledge the ways in which the *Aeneid* measures the shortcomings of the goddess and limits her authority.

In order to understand Virgil's Venus, I compared her with other goddesses. Chapter 2 focuses on Aphrodite through the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. While the goddess governs feelings of desire and attraction, she deals not only pleasure but destruction as well. Aphrodite has the power to inspire irrationality and to create chaos; she moves mortals against their own interests and the interests of their communities. By creating scandalous adultery (which is arguably treasonous in the case of Paris and Helen), Aphrodite pits cities against cities in war. The dialogue between Helen and Aphrodite reveals how the goddess may handle mortals with cruelty.

Aphrodite brings romantic pleasure as well as terrible sorrow; the goddess delights in both results: she may choose to interfere in mortals' affairs by arousing war, or she may seduce and arrest Ares.

Chapter 3 explores how Virgil's Venus recreates Homer's Aphrodite but how she also exceeds the Greek predecessor. With imperial purpose, the goddess receives a new dimension. Venus continues Aphrodite's dealings with desire and attraction; she imitates Aphrodite for her scandals, her cruelty, mischievous attitude and her scant regard for human suffering. In addition, Venus oversees the imperial program from Troy to Italy and from Aeneas to Augustus. Venus attends her mission, however, with brutal pragmatism. The goddess tends a great program that consumes small mortals, their needs, feelings, and their individual identities. As Venus rejoices (*laeta*) in the imperial agenda, she keeps mournful Aeneas in confusion, uninformed about the greatness of his cause. If we accept Venus as a symbol of Augustan authority, her brutal pragmatism complicates the formulation of a so-called Augustan narrative in the *Aeneid*.

Chapter 4 compares Venus with Thetis (on the grounds that one goddess mothers the hero of the *Aeneid* while the other mothers the hero of the *Iliad*), in order to show Venus' maternal shortcomings and her inability (and unwillingness) to emotionally connect with mortals. Venus plays a tutelary role over Aeneas and the imperial quest; her maternity, however, pointedly lacks the warmth that one finds in the relationship between Thetis and Achilles. The contrast that Virgil establishes between two goddesses reveals Venus' *modus operandi*: she carefully cultivates the divine scheme for empire while ignoring the heavy burdens layed upon mortals. Fuelled by such a goddess, the imperial program sees only the need to rule without measure (*imperium sine fine*), while it

overlooks human feeling. In the *Aeneid*, mortals who seek to make meaning of their painful experiences have little (or no) means to do so, even though they have a place in the divine scheme for *imperium*.

Chapter 5 compares Venus with her political opponent, Juno. Within the epic, Venus plays the part of a protagonist, while the queen exists as an antagonist who constantly targets the Trojans with hatred. This is not, however, a simple dichotomy. As much as Venus appears to ignore human cries of pain, the reader finds Juno pitying (*miserata*) the mortals who become victimized by the ruthless resolve of the imperial agenda. Juno thus introduces an element of humanism into the epic and provides the relief that otherwise does not exist under Venus' cold tutelage. As Virgil prepares the scene of Turnus' death, Venus' victory in Italy is less than absolute. Venus imagines a new Troy in Italy, while Jupiter promises to Juno the gradual but complete fading away of the Trojan culture; all cultures that participate in the *imperium* become absorbed by the larger identity of the empire. Jupiter's rule incorporates Venus and Juno, political opponents, in an equal manner. In the *Aeneid*, *imperium* does not rest on a singular source of authority; rather than granting Venus an absolute victory, the establishment of *imperium* secures the existence of two political factions, one belonging to Venus and another belonging to her opponent.

One may, to some degree, accept Venus and Virgil's characterization of her as an expression of the poet's attitude towards Augustanism. On the one hand, the goddess solidifies the Augustan regime and grants it legitimacy. On the other hand, the reader cannot fail to compare Venus' cruelty and Octavian's reputation for violence. The unfeeling pragmatism with which Venus moves the imperial agenda suggests that such

pragmatism also belonged to Augustus, who governs the same program as the goddess. Venus' scandalous name and her associations with adultery contradict the stern laws of Augustan reformism, particularly the *Lex Julia De Adulteriis* passed only approximately a year following Virgil's death. Ultimately, Jupiter's *imperium* incorporates Venus as well as her political opponent, Juno; he does not create a system in which Venus rules over other parties. Venus cannot represent the Roman state and religion on her own.

Although Jupiter favours Venus (as seen, for example, in Book 1), he also feels the need to measure and limit her victory; he feels the need to make space for Juno, Venus' political rival. In many ways, one can read Venus as a symbol of Augustan authority. While Virgil weaves an Augustan narrative by issuing Venus *genetrix* as a guardian of the imperial program, he also problematizes the characterization of the goddess. For that reason, the *Aeneid* is not merely an Augustan epic that champions a singular source of authority; it is the national epic of Rome and it provides a space in which political rivalry exists.

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