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The scholarly discourse comparing Vergil's *Aeneid* with Milton's *Paradise Lost* traditionally approaches *Paradise Lost* as a Christian re-modeling of Vergil's epic, discussing the works only in terms of how the *Aeneid* can help readers better understand *Paradise Lost*. Recently, the comparative criticism has shifted, and as David Quint has noted, we can study Milton's "Virgilian imitations not only to understand *Paradise Lost*, but for the way that they shed light retrospectively on the *Aeneid* itself" (177). I see this reciprocal relationship between the texts based on issues common to both, especially the role of knowledge. Deciphering who has knowledge in these texts and how they get it is essential to understanding the Dido episode in the *Aeneid* and Eve's temptation in *Paradise Lost*, because in both poems, knowledge is distributed along gendered lines.

Both the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost* recognize that knowledge is a commodity, having the right knowledge and being able to correctly interpret information is a source of power. Examining these texts side by side reveals that knowledge is systematically distributed along gendered lines in both texts. For while Aeneas and Adam are made explicitly aware of their fates through intermediaries like Mercury and Raphael, the information given to Dido and Eve is ambiguous and incomplete. However, a distinction emerges between the ways that Eve and Dido treat knowledge. Eve actively seeks more information, abandoning the unquestioning obedience that 17<sup>th</sup> century Calvinism required in favor of empirical evidence. Meanwhile Dido remains ignorant even though she has been told all the answers and knows Aeneas's fate, because she is "blinded" by love. Still, both of these women's stories are about a fundamental mistake in understanding that leads to a larger mistake in action. First, this paper will establish what Eve and Dido know prior to making their mistakes. Then the paper examines three distinct parallels

between Dido and Eve's experiences: the moment of their deception, the moment they realize that they have been deceived, and the consequences of their mistakes. Finally, the paper concludes with a characterization of women's relationship to knowledge in both the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*.

When we are introduced to Dido in Book I by Venus, she is described as *fati nescia* (*Aen.* 1.299), "ignorant of fate." One of the major ironies of Books II and III of the *Aeneid* is that while Dido is being given the information she needs to know about Aeneas's fate, as he tells the story of his escape from Troy, she is becoming transformed by the *caeco...igni*, the "blind fire" of love (*Aen.* 4. 2). The love for Aeneas which Cupid, in the form of Ascanius, breathes into Dido makes her figuratively blind to the knowledge that would save her. During Books II and III Aeneas describes how he learned of his fate three times in increasingly explicit detail. First he relays his vision of Hector on the night of Troy's destruction, which is quote number one on your handout. Hector commands Aeneas to take the Trojan *penates*, the household gods, "as the companions of your fate, to seek with these the great walls which you will build in the end, having wandered through the sea" (*Aen.* 2.294-5). At this point, Aeneas's mission is clear, if the location of these future walls is not. However, when Aeneas meets Creusa's ghost, she gives the fated journey an explicit goal: "you will comes to Hesperian land, where...the Tiber flows" (*Aen.* 2.781-2). If Aeneas or his listener Dido was still unclear about the details of his fate, the Trojan *penates* themselves explain a third time that he is to go to his ancestral land, "called by the name of Italy" (*Aen.* 3.166). After having heard Aeneas tell this story, Dido should be absolutely clear about Aeneas's fate. Namely, that Aeneas must go on to Italy, and that he cannot possibly stay with her and contravene fate. Yet even with all of the correct information, Dido is still deceived, because Venus has blinded her with love for Aeneas.

Eve, on the other hand, does not receive all the information that she needs. Milton emphasizes that Eve's knowledge must be filtered through Adam, her "lord" and mediator in all things. This aspect of their relationship is noted by Verbart, who writes that "Adam...is Eve's God" (66) based on line 299 in Book IV, "He for God only; she for God in him." So in Book VIII, when Adam and Raphael begin to discuss God's prohibition against eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, Eve appropriately departs. She goes to water the plants in her garden and leave philosophical discussion to Adam and the angel, rather than satisfy her own curiosity. Because of Adam's role as her mediator and educator, the burden of correctly imparting information to Eve falls on him. Raphael tells Adam in detail about the consequences of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, including God's anger at their inability to obey without understanding, to "stand fast" (*PL* 8.640), and the potential punishment for all of their descendants. As Adam is solely responsible for passing information along to Eve, he is solely culpable for the incomplete knowledge she receives. Like Dido, who is figuratively blinded by Venus, Eve cannot be held responsible for her lack of knowledge and understanding.

This lack of knowledge becomes clear at the moment of Dido and Eve's mistakes, their falls. For Dido, this moment is the famous scene in which she and Aeneas have their first sexual encounter in the cave outside Carthage, number two on the handout. Dido interprets the events leading up to their *conubiis*, "mating" (*Aen.* 4.168) as the preceding events to a divinely sanctioned marriage. However, as Williams comments, "the elemental powers of nature and supernatural divinities conspire to produce a parody of a wedding, a hallucination by which the unhappy Dido is deceived" (346). This deception is engineered by Venus and Juno, who give the scene every semblance of an official wedding. Juno is present, described as *pronuba* (*Aen.* 4.166), the person who guides a bride to the altar, and Lauren Caldwell argues that even in

Dido's hesitance to join the hunting party she is assuming the role of a "modest bride" (426). Caldwell reads the whole hunting party as the procession from Dido's bedroom, *thalamus* to the cave, where Dido meets her future husband, drawing on the use of the word *dux* (*Aen.* 4.165), which echoes the *deductio*, a term which Romans used to refer to marriage (Caldwell 430). Yet, despite the evidence that this scene does depict a marriage, at the end of the cave passage, the speaker of the poem indicts Dido, in quote number three on the handout. The narrator tells the reader that "She calls it a marriage; with this name she conceals her fault" (*Aen.* 4.172). Her only fault is that this marriage contravenes Aeneas's fate and keeps him from Italy. Dido is tricked by the ambiguity of this scene, ambiguity created by Venus and Juno, but only the reader is given the knowledge of her deception.

Eve's fall, of course, occurs when she eats the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Unlike Dido, Eve does not have all of the information she needs. Eve fundamentally misunderstands God's word, which she has received through Adam, and is thus unable to refute Satan's logic. Eve explains to the serpent her understanding of the prohibition against the Tree of Knowledge: "God hath said, Ye shall not eat / Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (*PL* 9.661-3). This makes the serpent's rebuttal simple. He says, "Look on me, / Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live" (*PL* 9.687-8). Eve does not possess the nuanced understanding of the situation that Raphael gave to Adam. She does not know about the long-term implications of their actions, nor that it is the ability to "stand fast" (*PL* 4.640) that God values, not merely their lives. Furthermore, the serpent tempts Eve based on her desire to have more knowledge than she has been given. Her last words before she eats the fruit, quote number four on your handout, are based on misinformation, but are an earnest outcry against what she does not know:

What fear I then, rather, what know to fear

Under this ignorance of good and evil,  
 Of God or death, of law or penalty?  
 Here grows the cure of all, this fruit divine,  
 Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,  
 Of virtue to make wise: What hinders then  
 To reach and feed at once both body and mind? (*PL* 9.773-9)

Eve's desire for knowledge outweighs the strength of God's precept for obedience. It is not her fault, but Adam's that complete knowledge has been withheld from her—just as it is not Dido's fault, but Juno and Venus's, that Dido misinterprets the event at the cave as a marriage. These women are led into their mistakes by the ambiguous and incomplete information that others give them.

Dido and Eve both have distinct moments when they realize that they have been deceived. For Dido, it is when she confronts Aeneas about the rumors that he plans to leave Carthage. In line 305 of Book IV, Dido addresses Aeneas as *perfide*, "liar." This is an unfair assessment, for Aeneas did explicitly inform her of his fate in Books II and III, which made a lasting marriage between the two impossible. Rather, Dido's rage should be directed at Venus and Juno, who keep her from seeing the real situation. Aeneas faces the brunt of Dido's ire and replies, in quote number five, "I did not ever offer wedding torches or come into these agreements" (*Aen.* 4.338-9). He reaffirms the role of Fate in the last words of his speech: *Italiam non sponte sequor*, "I do not follow of my own free will to Italy" (*Aen.* 4.361). Humiliated, Dido realizes that she has been deceived into a mistake that will inevitably end in her suicide, and she blindly blames Aeneas for the deception, cursing his journey, see quote number six:

Go, follow the winds to Italy, seek a kingdom through the waves. Indeed, I hope, if the pious deities are capable of anything, that you will drink your punishments at the middle rocks and often call the name of Dido. (*Aen.* 4.381-4).

Although the mistake was neither Dido nor Aeneas's fault, Dido is unable to separate her anger at Aeneas from the real source of her misfortune, Fate. Instead, she turns her considerable resources away from building the city of Carthage and towards a futile and misguided attempt at rectifying her situation through witchcraft.

Eve's realization comes after she has convinced Adam to also eat of the fruit. Immediately they are filled with lust for each other and have, as Milton puts it, "amorous play" (*PL* 9.1045) under the Tree of Knowledge. When they awake, "bare / Of all their virtue: silent, and in face / Confounded long they sat, as stricken mute" (*PL* 9.1062-4). Adam immediately blames Eve for leading them to this fallen state, although, as this paper has argued, she was missing information that Adam knew and could have imparted to her. Eve asserts her independence, casting the blame on Adam, asking in quote number seven,

Was I never to have parted from thy side?  
 As good have grown there still a lifeless rib.  
 Being as I am, why didst thou not the head  
 Command me absolutely not to go,  
 Going into such danger as thou saidst? (*PL* 9.1154-7).

Unlike Dido, Eve is able to accurately define the source of her deception based on the roles she and Adam have been given.

The consequences of Dido and Eve's deceptions are dire, even though neither woman can be held fully responsible for her actions, and the severity of those consequences calls into

question the characterization of women in both texts. Dido begins a descent into paranoid madness which leads to her suicide. She sees herself as both an abandoned wife and a victim of fate. However, her last act is a reassertion of her individuality and importance in the narrative of the *Aeneid*. In quote number eight on the handout, Dido ends by praying, “Let the cruel Dardan drink up the high fire with his eyes and may he bear the omens of my death with him.” (*Aen.* 4. 661-2). Dido’s final characterization in the *Aeneid* is a tragic woman who nonetheless defiantly chooses her own destiny: “she died a death neither fated nor merited” (*Aen.* 4.696). While Aeneas was never fated to remain in Carthage, Dido was not meant to die in this tragic way either, but unlike Aeneas, Dido at least chooses her own fate. Eve’s consequence is not death, but that all of humanity will sin and die because of her actions. Although she suggests suicide to Adam as a way to end their suffering and the potential suffering of their descendents, Eve is not allowed an individuating final stand like Dido’s. Rather, she must learn to submit, to obey without questioning. Her final words in the poem affirm her position as the follower of Adam “thou to me / Art all things under heaven” (*PL* 12.117-8). Although Eve’s fate is to accept blame for her mistake, she does not have to die, and tells us that “By me the promised seed shall all restore” (*PL* 12.623). Eve has a future in which she can facilitate regeneration and peace.

Examining Dido and Eve’s deception through misinformation and their consequent mistakes offers a fresh insight into both texts. Milton reconfigures *fati nescia* Dido as Eve, who literally does not possess the knowledge she needs. This emphasizes retrospectively how Dido’s ignorance is actually blindness to the reality of the situation, which has been explained to her by Aeneas. Conversely, seeing the clarity of Vergil’s objective opinion on Dido’s actions, characterized as her *culpa*, emphasizes how ambiguous Milton is being about his opinion of

Eve's fault. The narrator of *Paradise Lost* never explicitly condemns Eve, focusing on the tragedy of her fall, rather than ascribing blame from on high.

Ultimately, the most significant aspect that arises from considering these texts in conjunction is Milton and Vergil's treatment of knowledge as it relates to women. Eve seeks knowledge and so must be punished and brought to submit herself to the hero, Adam. Dido ignores pertinent information and still must be defeated, in her case, killed, so that Aeneas's hero mission can continue. Neither pursuing nor ignoring knowledge saves the woman. Although Eve is allowed a future regenerative role, and Dido is allowed a final stand, neither can continue to exist as a chief agent in her story. The overwhelming message is that in these epic stories of male heroes, strong female voices must be subdued or silenced, and knowledge kept in the hands of men.