



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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**“Parallels between Dido’s Erotic Passion and the Trojans’
Imperialist Exploits in the *Aeneid*”**

Department of Greek and Roman Studies

Monday, August 18, 2025
11:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B415

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Cedric Littlewood, Department of Greek and Roman Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Mark Nugent, Department of Greek and Roman Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Iain Higgins, Department of English, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Doug Magnuson, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic

Dr. Robin G. Hicks, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This thesis argues that Vergil's *Aeneid* contains a critique of imperial expansion from an Epicurean (specifically Lucretian) perspective. Vergil taints the Trojans' success in conquering the native Italians by associating the Trojans' martial/imperial activities with the act of succumbing to erotic passion. While most Roman ideologies condemned succumbing to erotic passion, they viewed imperial expansion favourably; Epicureanism is one of the few that condemns both.

Vergil plants the seeds for this association in the Dido episode, where he uses Lucretian language to condemn Dido's succumbing to erotic passion. Chapter 1 suggests that there is an Epicurean trajectory in Dido's story. Vergil initially presents Dido as a capable, Epicurean-coded leader of a newly established city. After she programmatically rejects the Epicurean philosophy, she suffers from specifically Lucretian lovesickness symptoms, then eventually takes her own life after being thoroughly disturbed by her lovesickness as well as phenomena resembling Lucretian *simulacra*. Therefore, the consequences of succumbing to passion are shown to be devastating, both personally and politically.

Chapter 2 closely reads passages from the Trojans' imperialist war against the native Italians, noting echoes of the Dido episode, Lucretius, and the erotic generally. Trojan warriors experience literal and metaphorical erotic passion in these battle scenes, where one would expect a showcasing of Roman prowess and power. In the final scene, Aeneas kills his rival, Turnus, in the grips of a passion resembling Dido's. This ending is damning; it conveys that his imperialist exploits are akin to her frenzied erotic passion.

The *Aeneid* is ostensibly a poem celebrating the rise of Rome. The fact that it contains a critique of its proto-Romans' imperialism also conveys a critique of Vergil's contemporaries in the nascent Roman Empire.