

Andre Stipanovic

Bees and Ants: Perceptions of Imperialism in Vergil's *Aeneid*

John Grant, in his article "Dido Melissa," brought out key observations between Vergil's description of a rising Carthage in *Aeneid* lines I. 418-429 and the bee simile in I. 430-436. Grant mentions that "often a simile (or landscape description) reflects in its tone and atmosphere the mood and feelings of a character who sees what is being described. But sometimes even the comparison itself appears to be a projection of the person's thoughts" (383). This simile is Vergil's extension of Aeneas' visual experience. The shifting of images through Aeneas' eyes (lines 418-429) implies this character's inner feelings of an awesome sight of a city being built; this human action and effect is part of the ongoing narrative of the story of Aeneas. However at another level through the use of simile (lines 430-436), Vergil the narrator is able to intercede and call the reader's attention to certain details relating to the character of the Carthaginians and what they symbolize in relation to Aeneas. In comparison, the ant simile in IV. 401-407 reverses the viewer and viewed. Vergil's decision to use insects in his similes helps the reader to recall the bee simile in Book One. On closer inspection, there are many subtle details of narrative context, word-choice and syntax that also show a deeper correspondence between the two similes.

In Book Four, Dido's observation of the departing Trojans allows for both the reader's and narrator's perspective on events. Again, the narrated activity of our characters is coupled with a simile more obviously initiated by the narrator, yet Vergil's authorial presence here is shown to be even stronger. Indeed, even more forcefully than with the bee simile, Vergil himself is inserting his authorial presence and engaging in conversation with the reader (i.e. line 401 *cernas*, "you might see"). Vergil's similes reveal judgments made by the author on Roman Imperialism during the Augustan Age. Further analysis of the details of the bee and ant similes shall reveal an interesting perspective of Rome's own image of itself.