

# University of Cincinnati

Date: 4/12/2022

I, Sashini J Kannan, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Classics.

It is entitled:

**Gremium as the Site of Intersecting Maternal and Erotic Identities in Vergil and Beyond**

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*Gremium* as the Site of Intersecting Maternal and Erotic Identities in Vergil and Beyond

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Department of Classics of the College of Arts and Sciences

by

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July 2022

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## Abstract

Vergil's systematic deployment of *gremium* to show coexisting maternity and sexuality is unparalleled by other extant Classical authors. Through a close reading of four passages from Books 1 and 4 of the *Aeneid*, I argue that *gremium* becomes the physical site where Dido's maternal and sexual desire intersect. My argument responds, in particular, to psychoanalytic readings that oversexualize Dido and see her sexuality as corrupting her maternity; Dido's *gremium* is a seat of intersecting and overlapping desires, which are related but distinct. In order to preface the discussion of the *Aeneid*, I first present evidence that the lap and *gremium* are feminine-coded concepts in the ancient sources and highlight the connections to maternity and sexuality. Building upon these broad observations, I demonstrate how Vergil develops a web of semantic associations surrounding *gremium* to frame Dido and related characters' maternal and sexual identities. Then, I analyze how those identities interact with each other within the network. In order to contextualize Vergil's unique deployment of *gremium* to speak to female characters' maternal and sexual identities and desires, I turn to Lucretius who similarly uses *gremium* systematically in an explicitly feminine-coded context, the image of Mother Earth. An analysis of the four instances of *gremium* in *De Rerum Natura* calls attention to the overlapping themes in the use of *gremium* between Lucretius and Vergil, namely its use with Venus and its use to represent maternity and fertility. My intertextual analysis that compares the similar feminine-coded themes in both authors' versions suggests that Lucretius directly influenced Vergil's use of *gremium*. The comparison to Lucretius results in a widening of the initial network that illuminates the shared associations of *gremium* in the Vergilian corpus beyond Dido and Venus. This paves the way for a fruitful analysis of *gremium* in Ovid. Ovid uses *gremium* with men to subvert gender roles. When he does so in his "little Aeneid," I argue that this is a direct

response to Vergil's treatment of the same story. By drawing upon *gremium*'s maternal and erotic connotations, Ovid complicates the Aeneas narrative and recalls elements of the mythological tradition that Vergil tries to circumvent. The intersection of politics with *gremium*'s feminine-coding informs our reading of *gremium*'s other uses in the *Aeneid*. Vergil, in the Venulus and Tarchon episode, similarly employs *gremium* to subvert gender roles and simultaneously critique a sociopolitical narrative. My thesis, while nominally about the lap, speaks to two of the most important identities for women: motherhood and sexuality, and by looking critically at previous scholarship and employing a close textual analysis, I both complicate representations of women in the ancient world and encourage the disentanglement of modern biases from scholarship.



## Acknowledgements

I must begin by thanking my wonderful advisor, Dr. Caitlin Hines, without whom this thesis would not exist. I am immensely grateful for her guidance, patience, and expertise at every stage in the thesis process. Caitlin's mentorship during my time at University of Cincinnati has forever shaped me as a scholar, a teacher, and a person.

I would also like to thank the other member of my committee, Dr. Daniel Markovich, whose thoughtful questions and critiques pushed me to think about my research from new and exciting perspectives. His support and advice throughout my graduate career have made me a better-informed and more well-rounded student of Classics.

I must extend my immense gratitude to every member of the Blegen community, all of whom have been integral to my continued success, especially Dr. Jack Davis, my faculty mentor, Allie Pohler, my graduate student mentor, and Austin Hattori, who offered many late-night writing crunch reassurances.

Words of gratitude cannot adequately express how much love and support I've received over the years from every member of my family. I would not be here today if not for my parents, Vedavalli Sankaran and Murugan Kannan, my sister, Kirthana Kannan, my Ayah and Thatha, and every one of my Mamas, Athas, Ayahs, Thathas, and cousins who support my endeavors and brighten my days.

I would like to conclude by extending my thanks to the many teachers who influenced my life, especially my 8<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, Mr. Hull, who instilled in me a love of writing, and Dr. Bella Grigoryan, whose support of my future in Classics is the reason I went to grad school.

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## I. Introduction

*Such lavish will I make of Turkish blood,  
That Jove shall send his winged messenger  
To bid me sheathe my sword and leave the field;  
The sun, unable to sustain the sight,  
Shall hide his head in Thetis' watery lap,  
And leave his steeds to fair Bootes' charge...*

(Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1590), Part 2, Act I, Scene 6, Lines 39-44)

The lap as a site of intimacy is embedded in the English language. In contemporary American society, parents hold babies in their laps and place them upon the lap of Santa Claus in scenes of familial love and platonic affection.<sup>1</sup> Laps are also romantically and sexually charged in erotic gestures of lying in a partner's lap and in the concept of lap dances.<sup>2</sup> Though many of these intimate associations do exist cross-culturally and cross-linguistically, viewing the lap through an anglophone lens necessitates confronting the centuries-old language-bound connotations as well as scholarship fraught with moral judgments on sex, romance, and female power.

Alex MacConochie's article on the lap in Early Modern English drama demonstrates the endurance of the lap as a site of expressions of gender, class, and intimacy in English literature and Anglophone societies.<sup>3</sup> Common to many of the passages MacConochie analyzes, however, are characters from Greco-Roman Classical mythology. For example, Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* invokes an image of the sun "hid[ing] his head in Thetis' watery lap," which MacConochie identifies as "specifically maternal in nature, and opposed to the assumption of

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<sup>1</sup> In support of my anecdotal observations are studies of the effects of infants in mothers' laps and the concept of lap-sitting across various disciplines, including psychology (Pisano et al., "Perceptions of nonreciprocal touch," (1986) 29-40), education (Revilla et al., "Infant-Teacher Lap Interactions," (2022) 253-271), and psychoanalysis (O'Reilly, "The Maternal Lap," (2018) 149-160).

<sup>2</sup> See Colosi, *Dirty Dancing*, (2012) for a thorough examination of the phenomenon of lap dances.

<sup>3</sup> MacConochie, "Lady, Shall I Lie in Your Lap?," (2017) 25-50.



martial manhood.”<sup>4</sup> Robert Wilson’s *The Cobbler’s Prophecie*, in particular, systematically employs the lap throughout the play, the result of which, MacConochie argues, “transforms its own critique of aristocratic luxury into the pretext for a misogynistic devaluation of the female touch, maternal or erotic, which Venus had attempted to defend.”<sup>5</sup> The pattern of engagement with mythological figures points to the lap’s symbolic significance, at least in part, being derived from the Classical source material. Characters like Venus, Mars, and Vulcan who are frequently depicted in close proximity to laps in Early Modern English works are also often in close proximity to laps in the Classical texts, and as I argue here, maternity and eroticism are integral to the image of the lap in the Latin texts.

MacConochie’s article reveals an oversight in Classical scholarship. The lap in Early Modern English literature has been the subject of focused studies, but there is no similar treatment of the lap in its Classical precedents. My analysis aims to fill this gap by demonstrating how the lap engages with gender and sexuality in 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Latin texts. In addition to enriching our understanding of Classical texts, my analysis also lays the foundation for analyses of English literature to engage more closely with the source material’s impact on the use of the lap.

Though I also discuss the laps of Classical characters who do not have descendants in the anglophone Renaissance world, MacConochie’s article grounds an analysis of the Classical texts by demonstrating the cross-cultural endurance of the conceptual associations across millennia. Such prominent overlap in semantics and sociocultural associations does pose some barriers to analysis. Even in the absence of such proximity in sense, it is near impossible to avoid imposing our own preconceptions about a word onto the Latin text, and by inadvertently eliding the

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<sup>4</sup> MacConochie, “Lap,” (2017) 31.

<sup>5</sup> MacConochie, “Lap,” (2017) 33.

cultural gap in semantics it is possible to lose sight of important analytic trends and authorial creativity. The relative rarity of the lap, or *gremium*, in the extant texts from 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Rome alleviates some of this concern as it allows for a very thorough and precise dissection of the text without sacrificing breadth of scope within the already fragmentary record.

### **i. Introduction to Vergil and Dido's *Gremium***

One of the few classical authors who use *gremium* with moderate frequency in their work is Vergil. Though the *Aeneid* only uses *gremium* twelve times, its usage is systematic and deliberate, conveying a carefully cultivated set of connotations and implications in every instance. Since *gremium*'s use in the *Aeneid* is so unique and encompasses many if not all of its basic dictionary definitions, Vergil and the *Aeneid* lie at the center of my analysis, from which we can look back to its influences and forward to the authors and texts it influenced. The character for whom Vergil most often affords a *gremium* is Dido, so the four instances of Dido's *gremium* in the *Aeneid* have the most readily observable symbolic value and developed imagery.

All the Vergilian references to Dido's *gremium* involve her relationship to Ascanius, so it is important to situate this analysis amidst previous scholarship on Dido's relationship to Aeneas and Ascanius. While more recent scholarship has challenged and problematized the traditional view of Dido, it still must often reckon with the tendency to hypersexualize her character or apply anachronistic gender stereotypes.<sup>6</sup> Even explicitly feminist scholarship can fall prey to these biases by either undermining Dido's sexuality and femininity to emphasize her political

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<sup>6</sup> The bibliography on Dido is extensive, so I call specific attention to a few prominent trends in scholarship. Desmond, "Dido as *Libido*," (1994) 74-98 outlines how Dido historically came to be synonymous with libido. The tendency to sexualize Dido in scholarship especially from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and before is pervasive. Cf. DeWitt, "Vergil's Tragedy of Maidenhood," (1924) 107-109. More recent scholarship that hypersexualizes Dido includes Oliensis, "Sons and Lovers," (1997) 294-311; Oliensis, "Freud's *Aeneid*," (2001) 39-63; and Gutting, "Marriage in the *Aeneid*," (2006) 263-279. Analyses that rely upon stereotypes of femininity include Ramsby, "Juxtaposing Dido and Camilla," (2010) 13-17 and West, "Vergil's Helpful Sisters," (1979) 10-19. See Giusti and Rimell, "Vergil and the Feminine," (2021) 3-24 for a more complete overview of scholarship on the *Aeneid* through a feminist lens.

power or by labeling the traditionally feminine as negative qualities.<sup>7</sup> Most of the time, it is not wrong or harmful to focus an argument on one aspect of her character and downplay others; some of the most influential and thought-provoking research relies upon viewing Dido as primarily inhabiting a single role, like a utilitarian political tool<sup>8</sup> or a tragic woman.<sup>9</sup> The issue arises when that one aspect precludes her ability to occupy other roles. Essentially, Dido can be both a formidable world leader and have irrational emotions.<sup>10</sup> In particular, analyses of Dido with Ascanius either paint her exclusively as a maternal figure or as a sexual being, when it is possible for an individual interaction to demonstrate both qualities.<sup>11</sup> Psychoanalytic readings, specifically, pit these desires against each other, which detracts from the simultaneous power of Dido's sexuality and the power of her maternal desire. This results in a removal of much of her agency by undermining her ability to have complex emotions.<sup>12</sup>

I situate my argument in dialogue with psychoanalytic interpretations. While I do not entirely depart from the commonly noted themes of motherhood and sexual desire, I argue that the lap, *gremium*, becomes the physical site where Dido's separate but related maternal and sexual desires intersect. I am not opposed entirely to psychoanalytic frameworks, and my analysis, in fact, retains some elements of a psychoanalytic reading in its discussion of desires as well as disguise and doubling. However, a distinctly Freudian analysis that relies heavily on the

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<sup>7</sup> See Giusti and Rimell, "Vergil and the Feminine," (2021) 5-10 for an overview of feminist scholarship that inadvertently falls prey to misogynistic or anti-feminist biases.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Eidinow, "Heirship and Obligation," (2003) 264-267 examines how Dido's role in issues of inheritance reflects recent political heirship disputes.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Harrison, "The Tragedy of Dido," (1989) 1-21 views Dido through the generic lens of tragedy.

<sup>10</sup> Monti, *The Dido Episode and the Aeneid*, (1981) is a rare treatment that not only grants space for Dido's various identities but actively incorporates them into a comprehensive view of Dido's various inhabited roles.

<sup>11</sup> Lesky, "Amor bei Dido," (1966) 593-601 treats Dido as primarily maternal; McAuley (2016) 66-93 does discuss her maternity but tends to read perverse or incestual undertones into passages where both maternity and sexuality are present.

<sup>12</sup> Psychoanalytic readings that pit Dido's maternal and sexual desire against one another include Oliensis, "Sons and Lovers," (1997) 294-311; Oliensis, "Freud's *Aeneid*," (2001) 39-63; Gutting, "Marriage in the *Aeneid*," (2006) 263-279; Starnone, "Vergil and the Matrix of Love," (2021) 225-238.

Oedipal complex is not necessarily the most appropriate approach to the scenes where Dido interacts with Ascanius. To illustrate this point, consider a similar relationship dynamic set in contemporary society: a single father dating an infertile woman. If the woman holds the child and feels maternal desire, and at the same time, holding her significant other's child reminds her of her partner and her romantic or sexual feelings towards him, is that incestual in any way? In other words, does the simple fact that a child's existence can recall thoughts and feelings about their parent automatically mean a conflation of parental and romantic feelings? Certainly, these desires are related; the existing child is a product of the parent's sexual activity and having a child with someone traditionally requires having sex. Central to my argument here is the suggestion that this is not a conflation of desires but rather an intersection.

Given Dido's traditional characterization, the temptation to fit her character into this paradigm by viewing her simultaneous maternal and sexual desire as incestual makes sense, but the result is a one-dimensional Dido, far from the complexity of her character present in the actual text.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that Dido has a romantic and sexual desire for Aeneas and that she also has a strong maternal desire that often manifests itself in connection to Ascanius. It is also true that the scenes with Dido and Ascanius combine both sexual and maternal desire, but the result is not an incestual, Oedipal relationship. Dido's sexual desire for Aeneas and her desire for motherhood, I argue, are not intermixed to the point of confusion, but rather these desires coexist as distinct but intersecting. Vergil uses the word *gremium* to signal this intersection of desires, drawing upon its symbolic associations with both sexuality and motherhood, and exploits its complex connotations in order to add depth to Dido's diverse and complicated emotions.

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<sup>13</sup> By "traditional characterization" I refer to scholarly tendencies to foreground her role in the narrative as a hindrance to Aeneas' Italian destiny and to reduce her complex desires to perversity.

## ii. Outline of Structure

In order to preface my analysis of Dido's *gremium*, I first look more broadly at semantic trends and etymology to argue that *gremium* and the lap as a body part are feminine-coded words and concepts in Latin literature of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. I then turn to Books 1 and 4 of the *Aeneid* to explicate Vergil's most systematic usage of *gremium* as the physical site where related desires and emotions intersect, a network centered around Dido but extending to the various pairings of adjacent mothers and sons. I aim to complicate previous scholars' comments on these passages that are either too simplistic or unnecessarily sexualized; the nexus of semantic associations surrounding *gremium* in the *Aeneid* goes far beyond the simple association with motherhood that Albin Lesky notes in his analysis of Dido's character and is more innocent than the "odd triangle of sexual passion and (passionate) maternal love" suggested by Kenneth Reckford.<sup>14</sup>

While the *Aeneid*'s use of *gremium* is unprecedented in its scope and depth of development, Vergil is indebted in particular to Lucretius who similarly systematically develops an image of *gremium* across four occurrences in *De Rerum Natura*. By detailing the Mother Earth image that pervades Lucretius' use of *gremium*, I will show that Lucretius directly influences Vergil's application of the word in the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*. Just as we can see a direct predecessor to Vergil, we can also look forward to Ovid to see how Vergil, and, by extension, his own influences impact how Ovid employs *gremium*. Ovid, of all the extant Latin poets, uses *gremium* most often, with 23 instances. Thus, I first perform a cursory analysis of major observable trends of *gremium* in Ovid and then hone in more deeply on several case studies that demonstrate the impact of Vergilian models on Ovid and how Ovid employs Vergilian methods to critique both Vergil and himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Lesky, "Amor bei Dido," (1966) 597-598; Reckford, "Recognizing Venus (I)," (1995a) 25.

## II. *Gremium* as Feminine-coded

### i. Etymology

The complexity of understanding *gremium*'s place in Latin poetry begins with its exact meaning and etymology. In terms of etymology, the OLD entry only has the short comment “perhaps cf. OSl *gromada*” while Lewis and Short has “cf. Sanksrit garbh-as, child; cf. germen.” The OLD’s note linking it to the Slavic *gromada* ultimately comes from *gero* and the Greek ἀγείρειν. This derivation can be traced back to Walter Whiter, who cites Vossius, and Valpy, who includes it in his Vergilian etymological dictionary.<sup>15</sup> The most recent Latin etymological dictionary also includes this derivation.<sup>16</sup> Given the cohesion in the other sources, Lewis and Short’s departure only makes sense in context of the full definition of *gremium* and the Sanskrit *garbhas*:

*Gremium* (Perhaps cf. OSl *gromada*)<sup>17</sup>

- 1 A person's lap or bosom: (*especially as the place in which a child, etc., is held*)
- 2 The lap or bosom as a place in which objects are carried or put for safe keeping
  - b (*transf.*) a pocket or hollow of ground; a natural basin
- 3 (*poet. and colloquial*) The female genital parts
- 4 (*transf.*) The interior, heart, depths (of a country, the earth, sea, etc.)
  - b the inner angle, recess (of a bay)
- 5 (*in a hand mill, probably*) The hopper

गर्भ<sup>18</sup> gárbh-a *m.* womb; interior (–° *a.* containing – within); foetus, embryo; new-born child; child; offspring, brood (*of birds*); conception; sprout: \*-ka, *m.* wreath of flowers interwoven with the hair; -kâma, *a.* desirous of the fruit of the womb; -kâra, *n.* *N. of a Sastra* (producing fertility); -kâla, *m.* time of pregnancy; -gata, *pp.* lying in the womb; -griha, -geha, *n.* inner apartment, bed-chamber; inner sanctuary containing the image of the deity; -graha, *m.*, -grahana, *n.* conception; -kyuti, *f.* birth; -tâ, *f.*, -tva, *n.* pregnancy; -dâsa, *m.* (î, *f.*) slave by birth (*Pr.*); -dvâdasa, *m. pl.* twelfth year after conception; -dharâ, *a. f.* pregnant; -dhâr-ana, *n.* pregnancy; -purodâsa, *m.* cake offered during the pregnancy of a female animal; -

<sup>15</sup> Whiter, *Etymologicon Magnum* (1800) 140; Valpy, *Virgilian Hours* (1849) 43.

<sup>16</sup> De Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin* (2008) 272-273.

<sup>17</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *gremium*. Although this is a discussion of Lewis and Short’s etymology, I refer to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* definition here and in the main analysis, as there are no relevant differences in the definitions between Lewis & Short and the *OLD*.

<sup>18</sup> From Macdonell, *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary* (1929).

**bhartri-druh**, *a.* injuring the foetus and the husband; **-bharman**, *n.* nurture of the foetus; **-bhavana**, *n.* inner sanctuary *containing the image of the deity*; **-bhâra**, *m.* burden of the womb: *-m dhri*, become pregnant; **-mandapa**, *m.* inner apartment, bed-chamber; **-mâsa**, *m.* month of pregnancy; **-rûpaka**, *m.* young man; **-lakshana**, *n.* sign of pregnancy; **-vatî**, *a. f.* pregnant; **-vasati**, *f.*, **-vâsa**, *m.* womb; **-vesman**, *n.* inner chamber; lying-in room; **-sâtana**, *n.* causing of abortion; **-samsravana**, *n.* miscarriage; **-samkarita**, *m.* one of mixed extraction; **-sambhava**, *m.* conception; **-sambhûti**, *f. id.*; **-stha**, *a.* being in the womb; **-sthâna**, *n.* womb; **-srâva**, *m.* miscarriage.

There are a number of clear parallels between *gremium*'s use as a holding place for children and the Sanskrit's core meaning of the physical fetus or child. Because of Sanskrit's agglutinative grammar, the structure of the dictionary allows us a view into the word's core associations and its derivatives. The biggest difference between the two words is the absence of the sense of lap or any external holding place in Sanskrit. Though this etymological origin is certainly more concrete for a non-linguist than *gero*, this is not a linguistic analysis, so I do not argue that the etymology provided by Lewis and Short ought to be favored. Rather, if viewed as a quasi-folk etymology, it provides an interesting foreground for a discussion of *gremium*'s connotations and semantic range.

Just from this snapshot, the Sanskrit clearly shows a development from a concrete concept of the womb and the child to more symbolic and peripheral meanings, like "bed-chamber" and "the sign of pregnancy." This kind of development is hard to see from dictionary entries for *gremium* for two reasons. First, *gremium* is not a very frequent word in extant classical Latin. Though it is not exceedingly rare, in comparison to other semantically related words like *pectus* or *sinus*, it has comparatively fewer uses. Second, the basic definition of *gremium* as the lap is itself not concrete. The lap is thought of as a body part, but it only exists when seated, so it is impermanent. Furthermore, it is used especially as a space to hold things, so its emphasis is on its capacity to be empty and able to hold something else of value. Its

transferred uses, “the interior, heart, depths (of a country, the earth, sea, etc.)” and “a pocket or hollow of ground; a natural basin” are actually more concrete concepts than the base definition. Consider *sinus*, a synonym of *gremium*. Its most general definition is “a bent surface (raised or depressed), a curve, fold, a hollow....folds, coils.”<sup>19</sup> This very generic idea then takes on the more specialized meanings of lap, the folds of clothing, a bay, and so on. Especially without a clear etymology for *gremium*, it is difficult to discern what is in fact the core meaning and which are the metaphorical or symbolic senses of the word.

The uses of *gremium* cited by the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and Lewis and Short seem to indicate *gremium*'s association with the poetic register, which can help explain some of the semantic ambiguity unexplained by etymology. Though *gremium* makes an appearance in some prose texts, these tend to be sporadic with only a couple references per author. The list of authors who do use *gremium* with a fair amount of frequency is dominated by poets, including Catullus, Lucretius, Ovid, Vergil, and Statius, with the only exception to this rule being Cicero. *Gremium*'s correlation with poetry, a form that traditionally abounds with metaphor and artistic language, suggests that perhaps there is not something missing from our understanding of *gremium*'s semantic evolution but rather that it belongs in an elevated register where ambiguity is standard.

## ii. *Gremium* as feminine-coded in Latin Literature

Some of *gremium*'s feminine connotations can be understood simply by thinking about what a person's “lap” conceptually is. First, it only exists when seated. Unless on a horse, a person must be at rest and not actively doing battle. Second, the lap is a constructed cavity that forms right around the genitals. This can be seen to resemble an external extension of the vagina,

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<sup>19</sup> Lewis & Short s.v. *sinus* I.



which literally means “sheath” in Latin, creating an internal cavity that extends into external cavity. If we return to the Latin dictionary definition of *gremium*, its feminine qualities become even clearer. The OLD lists three definitions not considered a transferred sense: 1. A person's lap or bosom: (*especially as the place in which a child, etc., is held*); 2. The lap or bosom as a place in which objects are carried or put for safe keeping; 3. The female genital parts. In the case of a child both *in utero* and already birthed, both definitions 1 and 2 are equally applicable. The idea of a body part that forms for a child to be held and carried for safe keeping is essentially a description of a womb, a body part exclusive to women. Because of the physical proximity of the lap to the genitalia combined with the general vagueness of the Latin language’s conception of *gremium*, it is difficult to determine whether the lap as a body part encompasses the genitals as part of its literal definition or whether the genitals are a metaphorical extension of the concept of the literal lap. This ambiguity is characteristic of vocabulary from the poetic register. By nature of form and genre, the aim of a word like lap is not precise medical accuracy, and for the purposes of this analysis, the ambiguity itself lends additional credence to the argument that *gremium* is feminine-coded.

The associations of being seated and carrying a child are traditionally feminine, but they are actions in their most literal sense that men are also able to perform. When *gremium* is used to refer to a woman, it often takes on the implied extension of these actions of pregnancy, childbearing, and the female genitalia, concepts actually exclusive to women. When applied to men, mixed company, or inanimate objects, *gremium* retains its feminine-coded core meanings, but not the actually gender-specific extrapolations.

Henry David Jocelyn's note on Cicero's use of *gremium* in *Philippic* 12.24 gives some insight into *gremium*'s feminine-coding within Classical Latin literature.<sup>20</sup> To preface the analysis of Cicero's use of the word, Jocelyn provides a close analysis of *gremium*'s semantic change over time by looking critically at the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*'s (*TLL*) categorization of uses by definition. While I do not agree with his argument that the majority of the *TLL*'s listed uses for "female *pudenda*" in the classical period are inaccurate, his observation that the early poets tended to use *gremium* with earth and creation imagery with vague and varied physical conception is a valuable insight.<sup>21</sup> The ambiguity with which *gremium* is used throughout extant Classical Latin, Jocelyn argues, demonstrates its inherently symbolic quality, conjuring an image of "the goddess *Tellus Terra/Mater* seated. Those who borrowed the image would have been attracted merely by its grandeur."<sup>22</sup> Thus, *gremium*, while physically ambiguous, had an established set of connotations that poets could exploit. Jocelyn is correct that the uses of *gremium* listed in the *TLL* I.B. under "*angustiore sensu: interior pars corporis, ventris...i.q. pudendum muliebre, uterus*" often do not literally or physically work if trying to model the logistics of a scenario, but this is exactly the point. The connotation of *gremium* as a feminine-coded concept means that the *imbrem aurem* (Ter. *Eun.* 585) do not actually have to be depicted as entering Danae's vagina for *gremium* to carry the associations of pregnancy and insemination.

Even if the scope is limited to its occurrences in the *Aeneid* alone, *gremium*'s feminine-coding can be readily observed in a broad analysis. *Gremium* occurs a total of twelve times in the *Aeneid*, and of the six instances where it refers to a singular named character,<sup>23</sup> five refer to

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<sup>20</sup> Jocelyn, "Uses of *gremium* in Classical Latin," (1984) 17-21.

<sup>21</sup> Jocelyn (1984) 18.

<sup>22</sup> Jocelyn (1984) 18.

<sup>23</sup> For the sake of clarity, I exclude from this broad overview more metaphorical uses of *gremium* with anthropomorphic characters, like *Aeneid* 9.261 in which Ascanius, making an offering to the gods, places his fortunes into their *gremiis*. As we see with Venus, the gods can have *gremia*, but in this case, the *gremia* are not actually physically present and primarily function symbolically. This is similar to 10.79 where *gremiis* refers to a

women: three to Dido (1.685, 1.718, 4.84) and two to Venus (1.692, 8.406). There is one instance that refers to Tarchon (11.744; see discussion below in V.iii). When *gremium* is used to refer to a single, anthropomorphic character, Vergil uses *gremium* exclusively with women characters in the *Aeneid* (with the exception of Tarchon). Furthermore, these are women whose roles in the *Aeneid* are defined by their relationships to men. While this is true of most women in Latin literature, it is important to note that *gremium* is not used to refer to Camilla or any other female characters besides Dido and Venus. Just from this broad overview, *gremium* begins to come into focus as a feminine-coded word. The concept of the lap itself also seems to be a feminine-coded body part. The main Latin synonym for *gremium* is *sinus*. *Sinus* has many definitions and can be used more broadly than *gremium*, so of the 20 total uses in the *Aeneid*, only three (4.30, 4.686, 11.544) refer to the body part “lap,” and of those three, only one is used to refer to a man (11.544). Considering the number of occasions in the *Aeneid* in which men clutch something or even hold a child, it does not seem to be a coincidence that neither *gremium* nor *sinus* is used with any frequency to reference men. The infrequent uses for men can be accounted for by the fact that the lap is not explicitly a feminine body part, just feminine-coded, so authors are able to endow male figures with laps without implying literal womanhood or female-specific sex characteristics. When authors do give men laps, they tend to impart the traditionally feminine connotations. Thus, Camilla’s father, the man in the *Aeneid* with a *sinus*, and Tarchon, the man in the *Aeneid* with a *gremium*, as will be discussed in detail in V.iii, both have prominent feminine-coded undertones in their narratives.

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collective group in a metaphorical statement without a concrete image of an actual lap. I also exclude the geographic uses (3.509, 5.31, 7.233, 8.713) since I am interested here in *gremium* as a concrete, anthropomorphic body part. Many of the geographic uses will be discussed in detail in sections II.iii and IV.

### iii. Mother Earth Imagery

One of the most prominent feminine-coded patterns of usage is the Mother Earth, an image that straddles the boundary between animate and inanimate, and, thus, provides a unique insight into *gremium*'s feminine coding. Though the mother earth image is just one of many trends observable in the *TLL* entry for *gremium* (*sub* II A) that could be easily construed as feminine-coded or associated with similar concepts of maternity and fertility, I choose to look closely at this image in particular because it is most relevant to the texts discussed in this paper and requires slightly more interpretation to fully comprehend the nuances of its feminine coding and its pervasiveness throughout the classical Latin corpus.

*Gremium*'s association with mother earth imagery is a time-enduring relationship that crosses the boundaries of genre, including uses by Cicero (*Leg.* 2.63; *Cat.* 51), Lucretius (*DRN* 1.251, 2.375, 6.539), Vergil (*Georgics* 2.325; *Aeneid* 3.509, 8.713), Seneca (*Oed.* 746), Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 2.154), Petronius (122.1.124), Statius (*Thebaid* 4.793), Pliny the Younger (*Panegyricus* 32.3), and Apuleius (*Apologia* 88.14; *De Mundo* 8.4), not to mention a plethora of post-classical uses.<sup>24</sup> Though for many authors the *gremium* of the earth is only present once or twice in their extant corpus, the image's pervasiveness across genre and time demonstrates its enduring cultural and semantic resonances. Thus, authors are easily able to invoke this image to imitate or adapt previous uses or to develop the image within their own work.

Jocelyn notes that the early poets are fond of this imagery, but I argue that the association is more widespread throughout all of Classical Latin literature.<sup>25</sup> Given Jocelyn's preference for narrowly defined, literal boundaries for categorization as seen with his critique of the *TLL*'s references under *gremium* for "female *pudenda*," his narrow constraints for the popularity of the

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<sup>24</sup> See *TLL s.v. gremium* II for examples from the post-Classical period.

<sup>25</sup> Jocelyn (1984) 17.

*gremium* of the earth image make sense; well-developed and unambiguous Mother Earth images with *gremium* are limited.<sup>26</sup> However, I propose that many instances in Latin literature of the earth's *gremium* without explicit *terra mater* vocabulary ought to be considered part of a broader category. Because the Roman conception of the *terra mater* is itself part of a more ancient cross-cultural phenomenon of earth goddesses, it seems arbitrary to draw a line between evocations of the *Terra Mater* and more generic evocations of the fertility and divinity of the earth.<sup>27</sup> There are certainly differences among the references, like the degree of explicit anthropomorphism, but fundamentally, all references to the *gremium* of the earth contain some connection to fertility. For example, Pliny the Elder writes explicitly of the Mother Earth when describing the earth's vital role in the *Natural History*:

Sequitur terra, cui...cognomen indidimus maternae venerationis... complexa **gremio** iam a reliqua natura abdicatos, tum maxime ut mater operiens. (*Nat.* 2.154)<sup>28</sup>

The earth follows, upon whom we impart the title of venerable mother...having now embraced those disowned by the rest of nature in her *gremium*, then finally covering them, just as a mother does.<sup>29</sup>

Compare this to Pliny the Younger *Panegyricus* 32.3:

Sed sive terris divinitas quaedam, sive aliquis amnibus genius, et solum illud et flumen ipsum precor, ut...molli **gremio** semina recondat, multiplicata restituat.<sup>30</sup>

But whether there is a certain divinity of the earth, or another divine nature for the waters, I ask the soil and the river itself, that it bury the seeds in its soft *gremium*, and return them multiplied.

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<sup>26</sup> For Jocelyn's preference for unambiguity cf. Jocelyn, "Interpretations of Catullus 2 and 3," (1980) 421-441; "Uses of *gremium* in Classical Latin," (1984) 17-21.

<sup>27</sup> See Ortner's quintessential anthropological study, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" (1972) 5-31 for a more global examination of women and the natural world. See Keith, *Engendering Rome* (2000) 36-64 for an overview of the association between land and the female in Latin literature. For an overview of the concept of specifically *Tellus/Terra Mater* in Roman culture see Gesztelyi, "Tellus – Terra Mater in der Zeit des Prinzipats," (1981) 429-456.

<sup>28</sup> I note the textual edition used at the source's first appearance in the thesis as well as in the bibliography. Pliny the Elder. *Naturalis Historia*. Mayhoff, Karl Friedrich Theodor. Lipsiae: Teubner, 1906.

<sup>29</sup> All translations are my own.

<sup>30</sup> Pliny the Younger. *Panegyricus*. Henderson, Jeffrey. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Though Pliny the Younger does not invoke Mother Earth by name, he does refer to a generic earth divinity, all of whom are female in the Roman pantheon, and in the act of praying to an earth divinity to bring about environmental fertility, anthropomorphizes the image. Similarly, Cicero in *Cat.* 51 does not explicitly refer to a divinity but relies upon anthropomorphizing language in his description of agricultural growth that paints the earth as a mother gestating the seed within her womb and depicts its offspring maturing:

(Terra) quae cum gremio mollito ac subacto sparsum semen exceptit...dein tepefactum vapore et compressu suo diffundit et elicit herbescentem ex eo viriditatem, quae nixa fibris stirpium sensim adulescit, culmoque erecta geniculato vaginis iam quasi pubescens includitur...<sup>31</sup>

When the earth receives the scattered seed in its softened and ploughed *gremium*... then, having been warmed by its heat and by its own embrace, it spreads out and draws out from it a viridity growing into green blades, which, supported by the fibers of the stalks, little by little, matures and it, erect in its jointed stalk, is embraced in sheaths, just like one reaching puberty.

Though the earth is not technically labeled as divine, the image of the earth gestating the seed within her *gremium* and the overlapping language used both for agriculture and sexual metaphor employed here to depict the offspring's progress through the life cycle ascribes a sort of anthropomorphic agency to the earth. This is not just a description of grass growing; it is an embodied earth initiating the process of generation. For the purposes of this argument, the most important thing to note is the enduring image of the *gremium* of the earth and its association with fertility, maternity, and divinity.

#### iv. Iliadic Models

The Mother Earth image demonstrates an enduring feminine-coded meaning, but the concept of the lap as feminine-coded seems to cross the boundaries of not just time but language as well. The Greek word for lap, κόλπος, has similar feminine-coded connotations in the *Iliad*, and all the Homeric characters with a κόλπος (Vulcan/Hephaestus, Venus/Aphrodite, Juno/Hera)

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<sup>31</sup> Cicero. *Cato Maior De Senectute*. Powell, J.F.G., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

either have contact with a *gremium* in the *Aeneid* or serve as models for characters in the *Aeneid* who do (Thetis, Andromache).<sup>32</sup> Looking broadly at the LSJ entry, κόλπος is related to curves and folds, similar to the etymology of the Latin *sinus*;<sup>33</sup> however, κόλπος is used particularly of the vagina and womb<sup>34</sup> and used primarily for women's dress when referring to the folds of fabric,<sup>35</sup> showing its feminine-coded nature like *gremium*.

Κόλπος is frequently associated with Thetis in the *Iliad* (e.g., 6.136, 18.398), as the LSJ notes, often “in a half-literal sense.”<sup>36</sup> When Thetis, a sea goddess, accepts one into her fold, the image functions both anthropomorphically and geographically, a similar ambiguity seen in Mother Earth imagery with *gremium*.<sup>37</sup> Κόλπος is also present in scenes with Andromache holding Astyanax (*Iliad* 6.400, 6.467), resembling Dido holding Ascanius in her *gremium*, a recurring image central to Vergil's systematic deployment of *gremium* in the *Aeneid*.<sup>38</sup> In one particularly rich moment in Book 14, Aphrodite tells Hera to take her magical band into her κόλπος, and Hera does so.

*Iliad* 14.218-223:

τόν ῥά οἱ ἔμβαλε χερσὶν ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε:  
 ‘τῆ νῦν τοῦτον ἱμάντα τεῶ ἔγκάτθεο κόλπω

<sup>32</sup> Obviously, the Homeric and Vergilian characters are not identically one-to-one, and the scholarship comparing Vergilian characters to Homeric precedents is extensive, so I call attention to a few studies that highlight motherhood and sexuality. Leach, “Social Construction of Maternal Behavior,” (1997) 347-371 in its comparison of Venus' and Thetis' motherhood breaks down how scholarship has been influenced by contemporary attitudes towards motherhood. West, “Andromache and Dido,” (1983) 257-267 shows the resemblances between Andromache and Dido in the *Aeneid* especially in connection to their unfortunate (*infelix*) fates. See Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis* (1995) for Thetis more generally; of particular importance is the chapter “Allusion and Interpretation,” 107-122.

<sup>33</sup> Studniczka, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der altgriechischen Tracht*, (1886) 101 notes the similarity in core meaning of κόλπος with *sinus* and the German *Busen*.

<sup>34</sup> LSJ s.v. κόλπος I 2.

<sup>35</sup> LSJ s.v. κόλπος II; though the exact nature of the clothing referred to by κόλπος and its related compound words are still debated, it is generally agreed that its use for women's dress comes from its initial meaning of a body part. See van Wees, “Clothes, Class, and Gender,” (2005) 1-12 and Lee, “Problems in Greek Dress Terminology: Kolpos and apoptygma,” (2004) 221-224.

<sup>36</sup> LSJ s.v. κόλπος III 1.

<sup>37</sup> See section II.iii and IV.

<sup>38</sup> See section III.

ποικίλον, ᾧ ἔνι πάντα τετεύχεται: οὐδέ σέ φημι  
 ἄπρηκτόν γε νέεσθαι, ὅ τι φρεσὶ σῆσι μενοινᾶς.<sup>39</sup>  
 ὣς φάτο, μείδησεν δὲ βοῶπις πότνια Ἥρη,  
 μειδήσασα δ' ἔπειτα ἔῳ ἐγκάτθετο κόλπῳ.<sup>39</sup>

She put it in her hands and spoke this speech and called out to her: “Now take this band, embroidered in many colors, in your κόλπος, in which all things are made. I say that you will not return unsuccessful in whatever you desire in your heart.” Thus she spoke, and ox-eyed queenly Hera smiled, then having smiled, she laid it in her κόλπος.

This scene invokes a number of feminine-coded connotations also associated with *gremium*, including sexuality and motherhood. Simply having Aphrodite and Hera in a room together conjures ideas of sexuality, marriage, and childbearing stemming from the goddesses’ traditional characterizations and domains. These general undertones are heightened by the scene being two women alone discussing feminine power to influence sexuality. Certainly, Hera is deceiving Aphrodite, but even her cover story of wanting to intercede in Oceanus and Tethys’ relationship is in line with the theme of women using femininity and sexuality to influence men’s actions. Furthermore, Hera calls Tethys μήτηρ (14.201) and calls upon the parental role Oceanus and Tethys played in her life (14.202) in order to convince Aphrodite to give her the ἱμάς. The symbol of feminine power, Aphrodite’s ἱμάς, is deliberately stated both by Aphrodite and in the narration of Hera putting it on as being placed in the κόλπος. As the natural seat for the ἱμάς, κόλπος becomes the physical part of the body wherein lies the power of sexuality, motherhood, and femininity.

In the absence of a much broader analysis of the lap from the archaic Greek period through the Augustan age, it is impossible to say whether the uncannily similar associations of κόλπος and *gremium* are a result of a time-enduring, cross-cultural idea of the lap as feminine-

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<sup>39</sup> Homer. *Iliad*. Monro, David B. and Allen, Thomas W. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920.



coded or a product of later Latin authors closely engaging with Homeric texts and language, but the resonances are too clear to attribute to mere coincidence.

### III. Dido

#### i. Venus' Plot: Aeneid 1.683-688

The combination of etymological and cross-linguistic precedents with an analysis of the lap in the *Aeneid* and of the mother earth imagery across classical Latin authors provides a solid foundation for reading *gremium* as feminine-coded. Having established such a foundation, it is now possible to dive deeply into Vergil's use of *gremium* in the *Aeneid*, a pattern centered around Dido. The first occurrence of *gremium* in the *Aeneid* occurs at line 1.685 when Venus, speaking to Cupid, describes her plot to have him take over the body of Ascanius and make Dido fall in love with Aeneas.

*Aeneid* 1.683-688

Tu faciem illius noctem non amplius unam  
falle dolo et notos pueri puer indue vultus,  
ut, cum te **gremio** accipiet laetissima Dido  
regalis inter mensas laticemque Lyaeum,  
cum dabit amplexus atque oscula dulcia figet,  
occultum inspires ignem fallasque veneno.<sup>40</sup>

You, not for more than one night, feign by trickery that one's face, and, Boy, put on the known face of the boy, so, when happiest Dido receives you in her *gremium* amidst the royal tables and Lyaeian liquid, when she grants embraces and affixes sweet kisses, that you breathe into her a hidden fire and deceive her with poison.

Others have noted how this passage strongly shows Dido's maternal<sup>41</sup> and sexual desire.<sup>42</sup>

However, the few scholars who do call specific attention to the use of *gremium* connect it to

<sup>40</sup> Vergil. *Opera*. Mynors, R.A.B., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

<sup>41</sup> Lesky (1966) 597-598.

<sup>42</sup> Oliensis (1997) 305-306.

motherhood specifically and do not extend its implications to sexual or romantic desire as well.<sup>43</sup> If we look more closely at the immediate context surrounding *gremium*, there is also language that can be interpreted as sexual. A close analysis of the maternal and sexual elements in this passage will reveal that *gremium* lies at the intersection of both desires.

Dido's maternal desire is clear from the plan itself – the best way to manipulate her is through the use of Aeneas' son, so the use of *gremium* here already is endowed with associations with the womb and childbearing because of the narrative context. This is furthered by the use of *laetissima* so close to *gremium*. In addition to its simplest meaning of “happy,” *laetus* also carries connotations of fullness or fatness and of fertility, and these two meanings are often conflated when talking about animals and livestock.<sup>44</sup> Though Vergil does not use *laetus* to refer to sexual pleasure elsewhere in the *Aeneid*, this sense is established in Lucretius and other authors.<sup>45</sup> By its proximity to other words that have sexual connotations, like *nox*, *accipiet*, *amplexus*, and *oscula*, *laetissima* is also imbued with the connotation of sexual pleasure.<sup>46</sup> Just as *laetissima*'s dual maternity and sexuality is dependent upon other charged language, the other words' potential sexual connotation could be overlooked or attributed to coincidence if looked at independently. Words like *accipio* simply have too broad a semantic range to connote sexuality in isolation. It is akin to the English “take.” There are certainly sexually explicit phrases that use the verb, but without additional context, it is far from evocative of any emotion. There are also words like *amplexus* and *oscula*, similar to *laetissima*, that are concretely linked to both

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<sup>43</sup> See Lesky (1966) 597-598 for *gremium* and maternity. Lesky does note Dido's sexuality in his analysis of this passage but not in connection to *gremium*.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis & Short s.v. *laetus* II.G.2; Wiltshire, “Hopeful Joy,” (2012) 13-15 examines *laetus* specifically in the Vergilian corpus.

<sup>45</sup> Wiltshire (2012) 53-56 notes that in general, *gaudia* and its derivatives are more commonly used of sexual pleasure than *laetus*, but it is possible that *laetus* also connotes sexual pleasure when undertones of fertility are present. These joint criteria perhaps lend additional support to the reading of *laetissima* here as indicative of both maternity and sexuality.

<sup>46</sup> Wiltshire (2012) 284-287.

maternity and sexuality. Both can be used of children (or of other close, platonic relationships) and of intimate partners. If the passage is read with Dido's maternal identity in mind, the maternal implications stand out. If the passage is read with her sexuality in mind, the sexual implications stand out. Both are equally accurate and both desires manifest in actions taking place in her *gremium*.

Though technically the potentially sexual acts are parallel to the maternal gestures towards Ascanius, I do not believe this is incestual. Vergil creates an intentional distance in order to protect against incestual or pedophilic undertones by framing the passage as Venus narrating what Cupid disguised as Ascanius will do to Dido. This is not a description of Dido actually holding Ascanius; it is Venus envisioning her scheme playing out. Even if it were actually a description of contemporaneous narrative action, the *puer* is not actually Ascanius but Cupid disguised. The intentional distance allows us to both attribute the sexual imagery to Dido's sexual desire for Aeneas as well as see that, from Venus' perspective, Dido's sexual desire is a maternal concern. In general, Cupid disguised as Ascanius in all of Book 1 allows Vergil to lean further on the sexual imagery that has the potential to be misread as incest or pedophilia.<sup>47</sup> The necessity of Cupid-as-Ascanius is particularly clear in the image of "*te gremio accipiet.*" Considering *gremium* is generally a constructed cavity and can metaphorically be a vagina, this appears to be a euphemism for sex, in which *te* stands in both for Aeneas as well as a child conceived by him. The mere presence of Cupid, a god of erotic love, heightens the sexual overtones of the scene in addition to the lexical evidence presented above. So if *te* were the actual Ascanius and not the Cupid-as-Ascanius present, incest would be difficult to deny, even framed as Venus' imagined outcome. The strangeness of simultaneous distance and presence

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<sup>47</sup> For examples of incestual and/or pedophilic readings, see Oliensis (2001) 52-54, Oliensis (1997) 306-307, Reckford (1995).

created by *te*, since it stands in literally for Ascanius and Cupid and metaphorically for Aeneas and a hypothetically conceived child, is emphasized further by the doubled *pueri puer* (684). This idea of separation but sameness is akin to the disguise distancing Dido from the real Ascanius, while simultaneously creating the necessary lexical conditions under which the strength of both her maternal and sexual desire can blossom.

While *gremium* is concretely the seat of Dido's intersecting desires, it is impossible to divorce her desires from those of Venus. This passage is part of a conversation between mother, Venus, and son, Cupid, concerning Dido's relationship to Venus' other son and grandson. Dido's sexual relationship with Aeneas is a maternal concern for Venus, and any concerns of Venus and Cupid are imbued with eroticism because of their divine domain. Especially when considering the body of scholarship that shows Dido's resemblance to both Diana and Venus, it is difficult to fully understand which relationships and parallelisms are activated at what time.<sup>48</sup> The sheer breadth of allusions between characters creates such a tightly wound web of interconnections that it seems to be intentionally difficult to keep straight even the literal plot let alone the metatextual level of analysis. While this may result in intentionally incestuous dynamics in other places in the text involving these characters (e.g., Venus disguised as Diana appearing to Aeneas), in this case, the overlapping associations serve to heighten both the audience and the characters' empathy and humanity.<sup>49</sup> Venus' primary concern is Aeneas; her scheme is not driven by hatred or vengeance against Dido. Similarly, Dido's experience of maternal and sexual desire is far from foreign to Venus. Through the textual conflation of Dido with Venus, Dido

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<sup>48</sup> See Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen* (2018) 92-149 for Dido and Diana; Gutting, "Venus' Maternity and Divinity," (2009) for Venus' binary tensions; Stroppini (2003) 47-57 for Dido's doubling.

<sup>49</sup> In contrast to the incestual argument put forth in Gutting, "Marriage in the Aeneid," (2006) for this scene. See Reckford (1995) for incestuous undertones in the scene of Venus as Diana appearing to Aeneas.

implicitly takes on Venus' maternal concern for an existing child and Venus takes on Dido's maternal longing for future children.

The doubling of identities initiated here is a theme that continues throughout the uses of *gremium* in the *Aeneid*. As the narrative and the network of *gremium* associations develop, the conflation of Venus and Dido and of Aeneas, Ascanius, and Cupid becomes more compelling. At this point, the doubled relationships are parallel, but we are not necessarily compelled to interchange the characters. For example, actually reading Venus in Dido's place in a line like "*ut, cum te gremio accipiet laetissima*" only makes sense if you have the background knowledge that Venus is commonly depicted holding Cupid. Granted, Vergil's contemporary audience would probably have made this connection, but just four lines later, the background knowledge is unnecessary. Venus takes the real Ascanius into her lap and her interchangeability with Dido is complete.

## ii. The Plot's Fulfillment: Aeneid 1.677-1.694

The power of *gremium*'s use just four lines after its first occurrence lies in the parallel language between its use in Venus' speech and in the narrative, so I reproduce the whole passage here to more easily highlight the similarities:

*Aeneid* 1.677-1.694:

Regius accitu cari <b>genitoris</b> ad urbem	
Sidoniam puer ire parat, mea maxima cura,	
dona ferens, pelago et flammis restantia Troiae:	
hunc ego sopitum somno super alta Cythera	680
aut <b>super Idalium</b> sacrata sede recondam,	
ne qua scire dolos mediusve occurrere possit.	
Tu faciem illius noctem non amplius unam	
falle dolo, et notos pueri puer indue vultus,	
ut, cum te <b>gremio</b> accipiet laetissima Dido	685
regalis inter mensas laticemque Lyaeum,	
cum dabit <b>amplexus</b> atque oscula <b>dulcia</b> figet,	
occultum <b>inspires</b> ignem fallasque veneno."	

Paret Amor dictis carae **genetricis**, et alas  
 exuit, et gressu gaudens incedit Iuli. 690  
 At Venus Ascanio placidam per membra quietem  
 inrigat, et fotum **gremio** dea tollit **in altos**  
**Idaliae lucos**, ubi mollis amaracus illum  
 floribus et **dulci adspirans complectitur** umbra.

“The royal boy, my greatest care, is preparing to go to the Sidonian city by the summon of his dear father, bearing gifts that survived the sea and burning Troy. I will hide him asleep in sleep above high Cythera or above Idalia in the sacred throne, so that he is not able to learn of the deceits or get into the middle. You, not for more than one night, feign by trickery that one’s face, and, Boy, put on the known face of the boy, so, when happiest Dido receives you in her *gremium* amidst the royal tables and Lyaeon liquid, when she grants embraces and affixes sweet kisses, that you breathe into her a hidden fire and deceive her with poison.” Amor obeyed the words of his dear mother, and opened his wings, and joyous, walked in the manner of Iulus. But Venus infuses a peaceful rest through Ascanius’ limbs, and the goddess lifts him warmed in her *gremium* into the deep groves of Idalia, where soft marjoram, sighing out, embraces him with flowers and sweet shade.

The use of *gremium* right after the close of Venus’ speech intensifies the intersecting associations created in the first instance. Just the repetition of *gremium* would itself recall the intersection of maternal and sexual desires, but the parallels in language make this especially clear. Note the echoes of vocabulary: *amplexus* (687) and *complectitur* (694), *inspires* (688) and *adspirans* (694), *genitoris* (677) and *genetricis* (689). The shared significance of generation is heightened in this context by the more neutral *genitor* and *genetrix* instead of *mater* and *pater*. While they are gendered words for parents, their shared root and only three letter difference creates an ambiguity. Furthermore, their use in the genitive heightens the intersection of identities in this passage. *Genitor* is an individual identity, *genitoris* is an individual identity and a (genitive!) connection to someone else.

As foregrounded in the previous section, the mirroring of language and action between the first instance of *gremium* referring to Dido and the second instance referring to Venus completes the interchangeability of Venus and Dido initiated in Venus’ speech. Previously, Venus could empathize with and had a similar stake in Dido’s maternal and erotic desires, but

now, by undertaking the same action, it is possible to retroactively read Venus as simultaneously in Dido's place since she effectively does the same thing four lines later. Thus, the opposite switch is also possible; though 1.692 is technically Venus' *gremium*, by its parallels with 1.685 and the completed doubling of characters, this is implicitly Dido's *gremium* as well. Thus, all the repeated implications and the newly introduced maternal and sexual imagery in this passage applies to both Venus and Dido.

The repetition of the sleep and nature imagery solidifies the image as a *locus amoenus*, which conventionally carries a sense of fertility and motherhood.<sup>50</sup> The framing of the speech on either end with similar imagery and the exact repetition of Idalia creates a kind of circular composition with *gremium* at the very center.<sup>51</sup> While there is not a perfectly symmetrical structure, *gremium* is bounded by other maternal and sexual imagery in both instances, so *gremium*'s position as the ultimate site where these circulating desires finally meet is itself reflected in the structure of the text. The temporal clause, "*cum te gremio accipiet laetissima Dido*" (685), furthers the centrality of the *gremium* to the scheme and to all characters involved. The plot's continuation is contingent upon Dido's reception of the child into her *gremium*, and there is no question about if it will happen. It is only a question of when.

### iii. Dido Meets "Ascanius": Aeneid 1.709-722

As Cupid fulfills his instructions, *gremium* appears yet again, just 32 lines later. Cupid-as-Ascanius brings gifts to Dido at the feast, and she takes him into her *gremium*:

Mirantur dona Aeneae, mirantur Iulum,  
 flagrantisque dei voltus simulataque verba,                   710  
 pallamque et pictum croceo velamen acantho.  
 Praecipue infelix, pesti devota futurae,

<sup>50</sup> Bernstein, "Locus Amoenus and Locus Horridus," (2011) 89-90 identifies this scene as a *locus amoenus*; Reckford (1995) 16-22 shows this passage's evocation of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and 27-28 notes the pastoral imagery.

<sup>51</sup> Lesky (1966) 598 notes the ring composition of this passage but does not identify *gremium* as the central point.

expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo  
 Phoenissa, et pariter puero donisque movetur.  
 Ille ubi complexu Aeneae colloque pependit           715  
 et magnum falsi implevit genitoris amorem,  
 reginam petit. haec oculis, haec pectore toto  
 haeret et interdum **gremio** foveat inscia Dido  
 insidat quantus miserae deus. at memor  
 ille matris Acidaliae paulatim abolere Sychaeum   720  
 incipit et vivo temptat praevertere amore  
 iam pridem resides animos desuetaque corda.

They marvel at the gifts of Aeneas, they marvel at Iulus, at the blazing looks of the god and at the counterfeit words, and the robe and the cloak embroidered with golden acanthus. The especially unfortunate Phoenician, cursed with future destruction, is not able to fill up her mind and burns with desire in her gazing, and she is equally moved by the boy and by the gifts. After he embraced and hung upon the neck of Aeneas and filled up the great love of his fake father, he seeks the queen, she, with her eyes, she, with her whole breast clings and meanwhile warms him in her *gremium*, Dido, ignorant of how great a god settles upon her wretched self; but he, recalling his Acidalian mother, little by little begins to chip away at Sychaeus, and tries to outstrip with living love his soul already long ago at rest and to chip away at her unaccustomed heart.

In the buildup to the line with *gremium* at the end of this scene, there is a constant alternation and parallelism depicted between Dido's desire for the *dona Aeneae* and for the *puer*. The repeated contrast between the *dona Aeneae* and Ascanius, the *puer*, even more explicitly demonstrates the idea of Aeneas as representing sexual pleasure and Ascanius as representing maternal desire for Dido. Tighter parallel structures like *mirantur dona Aeneae, mirantur Iulum* (709) and *pariter puero donisque movetur* (714) mirror the circular structure of 1.677-1.694 on a smaller scale, but the effect is the same; this is a structural juxtaposition of Dido's two desires. Furthermore, the use of *pariter* emphasizes the evenly matched strength of the desires as well as their inherent separation. *Pariter* implies a comparison and thus an intersection, but Dido's sexual and maternal desires are distinctly defined enough that they should not be confused with one another.



Again, the culmination of these circulating and fomenting desires happens right in Dido's *gremium*. The repetition of themes and vocabulary from the previous passage, in addition to its narrative purpose, recall the associations of maternity and sexuality surrounding *gremium*. *Genitoris* (716) and *matris* (720), explicitly parental terms, as well as the more ambiguous *complexu* (715) and *fovet* (718) appear again. Their ambiguity lies in their ability to be used of both parental and sexual intimacy. As Lewis and Short notes, *foveo* is a favorite of Vergil, so I first examine in detail its implications, and then bring in the other ambiguous words into the analysis of this passage.<sup>52</sup> *Foveo*'s dual parental and sexual implications are secondary to its literal meaning of "to keep warm." Figuratively, the word has a number of meanings, including to cherish, protect, encourage, caress, make love, and so on.<sup>53</sup> Passages from the *Aeneid* are referenced under the majority of the definitions, so, in general, Vergil uses *foveo* in a breadth of situations with varying sexual and non-sexual connotations. Lesky connects the usage of *fovet* in 1.692 to maternal imagery for Dido and sexual imagery for Venus.<sup>54</sup> Reckford, similarly, sees *fovet* as an inherently maternal image that in context becomes perverted into a sexual one.<sup>55</sup> I argue that all of these interpretations are correct. Rather than *fovet* needing to transform from one meaning to another, its usage equally and simultaneously connotes both maternal and sexual desire. I reject the idea that the inclusion of sexual desire somehow corrupts the maternal desire. The narrative shows Venus caring for Ascanius as a maternal figure, so those implications are present. The use of *fovet* (1.692) where Venus draws Ascanius into her *gremium* anticipates Dido's *fovet gremio* (1.718); still, amidst the maternal imagery in the later passage, Dido's

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<sup>52</sup> Lewis & Short s.v. *foveo* I.

<sup>53</sup> Literal definition in Lewis & Short s.v. *foveo* I; figurative meanings in Lewis & Short s.v. *foveo* II A and B; "make love" in Frieze-Denison s.v. *foveo*.

<sup>54</sup> Lesky (1966) 599; Starnone (2021) 228 also notes Lesky's association of Dido's love with Venus' *pietas*.

<sup>55</sup> Reckford (1995) 27.

*ardescitque tuendo* (1.713) has clear sexual overtones. The implication of the passive participle of *foveo* is that Ascanius has already been warmed when Venus carries him away (*tollit in altos / Idaliae lucos*, 1.692-3). *Gremio* is also not modified by a possessive adjective, so theoretically it could refer to Dido, meaning “Venus lifted [Ascanius], having been warmed in (Dido’s) lap, into the tall groves of Idalia.” This is unlikely, but the result of the grammatical ambiguity despite a contextual simplicity results in the ability to layer meaning. Dido’s sexual and maternal desire and Venus’ maternal duty all intersect in the *gremium* holding (and warming) Ascanius.

The phrase *gremio fovet* (1.718) has been paid particular attention by psychoanalytic readings that highlight its intensely sexual meaning.<sup>56</sup> While my argument generally pushes back on the overemphasis of sex in psychoanalytic readings of Dido and Ascanius, in comparison to Venus’ *fotum gremio* (1.693), the sexual undertones are much stronger in Dido’s lap (1.718). It is possible that some degree of female sexual desire underlies 1.693 because of the other sexually charged language nearby and by nature of Venus doing the action, but there is no narrative reason why Venus would exhibit sexual desire towards Ascanius. In fact, the intensely maternal nature of Venus caring for Ascanius foregrounds the intersection of desires in Dido’s lap. 1.693 is a primarily maternal narrative scene, but it recalls Dido’s *gremium*-based desires established in Venus’ speech. This in turn anticipates 1.718 in which *gremio fovet* concretely connotes sexual desire. 1.718 portrays the real, living Dido experiencing an emotional reaction centered in her *gremium* in the present tense, in a powerful and active image of not just her sexual desire but her sexual pleasure. In isolation, the sexual connotations are at the forefront and can obscure the potential for maternal undertones in the image. Though Vergil notes Dido’s maternal desire in other ways, the memory of Venus’ hyper-maternal *fotum gremio* infuses maternity into Dido’s

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<sup>56</sup> Reckford (1995a) 27-28; Oliensis (2001) 52-53 both identify this phrase as indicative of sexuality.

immediately sexual *gremio fovet*, concretizing her *gremium* as the precise site where both maternity and sexuality thrive. My interpretation diverges from a psychoanalytic reading at this point in that there is no incest or perversion present. The interaction of maternal and erotic desire is intensified when Dido witnesses Cupid-as-Ascanius embracing Aeneas (*ardescitque tuendo...ille...complexu Aeneae*, 1.713-15), so two objects of disparate desires are present and contributing to her joy in this scene. Dido may perform the verb *fovēt* because of her sexual desire for Aeneas, but she also does so with maternal desire for the child in her *gremium*.

*Fovere gremio* is itself a salient image, but the rich ecosystem of co-existing and overlapping emotions would not be as powerful without the support of other similarly ambiguous words that have the potential for both familial and sexual connotations. *Infelix* is a particularly charged word that is closely associated with Dido's tragic character, and her tragedy is both a failure to be a mother and to be with Aeneas. As others have noted, *infelix* often connotes infertility specifically, and Stroppini and Ratti connect *infelix* to a lack of ability to breastfeed, intensely maternal concerns.<sup>57</sup> This connotation is furthered by Vergil's use of *infelix* with Camilla as well, whose tragedy is also connected to her failure to procreate.<sup>58</sup> Similarly connected to both sexuality and maternity are the *-plex* root words that appear in both passages as well as with *gremium* later on in 8.406<sup>59</sup> and 11.74.<sup>60</sup> The idea of embrace is a close, intimate gesture, but this gesture can be parental (cf. *Aeneid* 6.698) or sexual depending on context.<sup>61</sup> In a

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<sup>57</sup> Pease (1935) *ad* 4.38; Stroppini (2003); Ratti, "Le sens du sacrifice de Camille dans l'Enéide (11,539-566)," (2006) 414.

<sup>58</sup> See Zieske, "Infelix Camilla (Verg. *Aen.* 11,563)," (2008) 378-380.

<sup>59</sup> See IV.i for discussion of this passage.

<sup>60</sup> See V.iii for discussion of this passage.

<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note *-plex* root words are not used of sexual embrace in the *Aeneid* apart from the uses discussed in this thesis in connection with *gremium*. Regardless, its use for sexual situations is well-established in other authors (cf. Plautus *Asinaria* 879; Propertius 1.12.5, 2.18.11; Ovid *Amores* 3.6.43, *Metamorphoses* 3.284).

feedback loop, the *-plex* root's close association with *gremium*, a site of various desires, adds additional ambiguity. This, in turn, reinforces *gremium* as a site of various desires.

The ambiguous desires introduced by the repeated vocabulary and charged words compel readers to imbue much more mundane words that are associated generally with intimacy and affection with stronger, more specific connotations. This includes words like *cari* (1.677), *cura* (1.678), *ignem* (1.688), *carae* (1.689) and *ardescit* (1.713) in the first passage and *amorem* (1.716), *pectore* (1.717), *amore* (1.721), *corda* (1.722) in the second. These are all terms that are generally associated with strong emotion but are non-specific in the absence of context. Because they are such common words that can be used in a variety of situations, it is easy to simply recognize them as indicative of emotion or affection but not categorize them any more specifically. However, when there are so many other terms and images that necessitate a label of maternal or sexual or both because they either have the potential for confusion or are inherently loaded terminology, the more generic words are retroactively or proactively compelled to be reassessed.

If we return to the parallelism noted at the beginning of this section with the reassessment of connotations in mind, the phrase *haec oculis, haec pectore* becomes an even more potent image, adding depth to the various sexual and maternal images in this passage. Just like the *dona Aeneae* on the one hand and the *puer* on the other, the *oculis* refer to physical attraction<sup>62</sup> to Aeneas and *pectore* to maternal attraction<sup>63</sup> to Ascanius. Vergil sets up a structure in which two body parts that represent Dido's two main desires end up intersecting in another body part, the

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<sup>62</sup> For *oculus* used in reference to sexual or romantic attraction see Propertius 1.1.1, Ovid *Amores* 3.11.48, *Ars Amatoria* 2.721. *Oculus* can be used as a term of endearment for a lover as well, as in Plautus *Cistellaria* 53.

<sup>63</sup> *Pectus* is used for many strong emotions that would be at play in Dido's maternal desire, including fear (Ovid *Met.* 11.448), tenderness (Ovid *Amores* 3.8.18), steadfastness (Vergil *Aeneid* 12.528), grief (Vergil *Aeneid* 1.197), happiness (Catullus 64.221, Vergil *Aeneid* 5.816), and courage (Vergil *Aeneid* 9.249).

*gremium*, and this intersection is represented spatially both within the textual structure and upon the structure of the body itself. The arrangement of the scene adds additional support to this dichotomy; Dido is holding Ascanius in her *gremium* while she is looking at Aeneas. Perhaps, if Aeneas were not present, some incestual undertones may emerge, but a more rational explanation is that Dido sees Aeneas and feels sexual anticipation and she holds Ascanius and feel maternal hope. There are two concepts, two people, and two sensory inputs that are triggering her emotions that eventually meet in the *gremium*, the established seat of intersection.

#### **iv. Dido's Passion: Aeneid 4.83-85**

The final instance of *gremium* directly relating to Dido occurs in Book 4. After two books of Aeneas recounting his journey to Dido, the narrative returns to Carthage. Dido, fully in love now, feels guilty for betraying her late husband, Sychaeus, but her sister, Anna, convinces her to pursue Aeneas romantically. In her state of passion, she holds Ascanius in her *gremium*.

*Aeneid* 4.83-85:

...illum absens absentem auditque videtque,  
aut **gremio** Ascanium genitoris imagine capta  
detinet, infandum si fallere possit amorem.

She, absent, both hears and sees him, absent, or she holds Ascanius in her *gremium*, seized by the appearance of his father, in the hopes that she is able to deceive her unspeakable love.

Though many of the evocative word choices and themes discussed in the previous instances of *gremium* are prominent in this passage, I choose to treat this separately in order to highlight how the motif of the *gremium* in Dido's narrative is established and develops throughout Book 1, so that, even three books later, the strength and depth of the associations are able to bloom. Dido in this passage is distraught over both Aeneas and Ascanius, and while I think that her maternal desperation is very clear here, Gutting differs, writing of these lines, "Dido is no longer acting

only out of maternal affection for the child, but has also made the boy a sop to her own erotic passions...Cupid successfully displaced Ascanius.”<sup>64</sup> While there is not much explicitly maternal imagery here, the use of *gremium* alone presents Dido as both parental and erotic because of the systematic development of the motif in Book 1. Yet even in the simplest *gremium* nexus, so many of the paradigms that developed *gremium* into a single word signifier for intersecting desires are present within just three lines. *Gremium* occurs directly in the middle, again mirroring the metatextual use of *gremium* as a central location. Structurally, *absens absentem* (4.83) recalls *pueri puer* (1.684) just as *auditque videtque* (83) recalls *haec oculis, haec pectore* (1.717). The association of different senses with different desires also overlaps with the overarching theme of sight, appearance, and reality amidst the whole social network of Venus, Cupid, Aeneas, Ascanius, and Dido.

Gutting’s reading of *capta* (484) and *detinet* (485) as indicative of Dido’s hostility towards Ascanius in place of her previously maternal drive is an oversimplification of Dido’s emotions.<sup>65</sup> Though she may be angry at other times, this is the one point in her narrative arc in which she is freed from the shame of betraying her husband and hopeful for a future with Aeneas and Ascanius. *Capta* does appear indicative of strong emotion, but it is an emotion turned inwards. Dido does not capture; she is captured, so the force of *capta* speaks more to an emotional irrationality or lack of control rather than to the strength of negative emotion directed at another person. Perhaps part of the anger that underlies Gutting’s understanding of *detinet* comes from an intrusion of the English cognate. Detain is often used of law enforcement and of other hostile parties, but *detineo* is often used with a more neutral connotation of holding back or delaying. Even when *detineo* is used figuratively, it can be used of being held back in some

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<sup>64</sup> Gutting (2006) 268.

<sup>65</sup> Gutting (2006) 268.

undefined business (cf. Cicero, *In Verrum*, 3.6), physical states like sleep (cf. Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 1.640), and emotional states (cf. Tacitus, *Annales*, 13.36). Two separate emotional processes are happening that make Dido want to prolong Ascanius' time in her *gremium*. First, Ascanius looks like his father, so he serves as a visual reminder of her love for Aeneas. Second, Dido longs for motherhood and in her lap has a child who soon could be her stepson. Of course, she wants to spend as much time as possible with him, especially in such a maternal position. It is easy to write off Dido as just angry or mad, but even when she does not think rationally, her actions are not erratic or unreasonable and can be clearly understood as stemming from her sexual and/or maternal desire. Given that we and Vergil's contemporary readers know that Dido is doomed, having been reminded of the fact that she is *infelix Dido* not 20 lines earlier (4.68), the urge to read Dido's intense emotions as anger is understandable and potentially an authorial intention. *Detinet*'s neutrality and its ability to be used in many emotional contexts foreshadows the anger and pain that Dido is about to experience, which compounds the intersection of identities in her *gremium*. At that moment, her maternal and sexual desires meet in her *gremium*. The intersection of those desires is the reason why she is both *infelix* (4.68) and *laetissima* (1.685). The roughly 200 lines between Anna convincing Dido to pursue Aeneas and the start of the conflict between them is a strange, liminal moment in Dido's narrative before the inevitable descent. Her *gremium*, established as a point of intersection, now becomes a symbolic inflection point; everything good in her *gremium* has its symmetrical bad.

Dido's *gremium* is therefore the site of systematic and predictable desires. Even the most incestual readings are based upon a corruption of Dido's desire for Aeneas and desire for Ascanius, so the discrepancy in interpretation of those desires only arises when they approach one another and occupy the same space. This is fundamentally an issue of misogyny. Dido has

fallen prey to the Madonna-Whore complex.<sup>66</sup> She cannot be both a woman deserving of motherhood and a woman who voices her sexuality. While the core misogynistic belief of the paradox is age-old, the reconciliation of the cognitive dissonance in psychoanalytic readings is a distinctly Freudian, 20<sup>th</sup> century western cultural narrative.<sup>67</sup> Misogyny certainly underlies aspects of Dido's characterization, but it does not manifest in a corruption of her sexual and maternal desires. In order to treat Dido's character with the nuance she deserves, we must respect and preserve this distinction. Vergil has written an infinitely complex character and developed the concept of the *gremium* as a microcosm of that complexity. We must afford Dido the ability to be complicated, to have emotions that men do not understand, to change her mind, and to feel two things at once.

#### IV. Intertexts and Antecedents in Lucretius

Dido's *gremium* is a systematically established image with its own self-contained network of associations that creates meaning on its own, but by reading Dido in dialogue with other authors and texts, it is possible to enrich our understanding even further. When read in concert with texts that influenced it and that are influenced by it, *gremium*'s symbolic value in both the *Aeneid* and its intertexts are readily highlighted. This new discovery of meaning in turn can shed additional light on the Didonian *gremium* system. An analysis of the *Aeneid*'s predecessors and intellectual descendants also allows us to access the significance of the non-Didonian uses of *gremium*, a task that is impossible to do in isolation. I first examine Lucretius,

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<sup>66</sup> Though this term was originally coined by Freud to describe a psychological complex with distinctly psychoanalytic causes (see "Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebeslebens," (1912) 40-50), it has come to be used more generally to refer to the belief that women are either sexual objects (whore) or worthy of wifedom and motherhood (Madonna), and that these are mutually exclusive roles.

<sup>67</sup> See Wellton, *Mother, Madonna, Whore* (1988) for an explicit labeling of motherhood as perversion and how psychoanalysis connects this to incest.



whose influence on Vergil, in particular, provides insight into the path towards the development of Dido's symbolic *gremium*.

### **i. *Gremium* in Lucretius**

In order to fully understand the intertextual relationship between Lucretius and Vergil, it is first necessary to explicate Lucretius' use of *gremium*. Lucretius systematically employs *gremium* in a way similar to how Vergil develops a pattern of *gremium* with Dido. The four instances of *gremium* in *DRN* (1.33, 1.251, 2.375, 6.539) all build upon the image of the *gremium* of the earth (*telluris, terrai*, etc). The systematic development of the image lies in each instance's degree of anthropomorphism. Ultimately all the references relate to a larger environmental fertility, but they manifest in various manners. Just as Vergil does with Dido, Lucretius centers a particular shared thematic element that underlies each use of *gremium*. This element is then systematized and manipulated to nuance each individual occurrence. Vergil's systemization, at its core, uses this same basic structure, but as will be discussed throughout the coming sections, Vergil's *gremium* system extends beyond Dido to more independent uses in the *Aeneid* and to the *Georgics*, creating an infinitely complex semantic web to untangle. Lucretius' use of *gremium*, on the other hand, relies primarily upon one sense of the word and exists within one coherent textual system. By outlining the smaller and more self-contained Lucretian system, the mechanisms underlying Vergil's system can be more clearly illuminated.

All four instances of *gremium* in Lucretius are tied to a sense of life and natural fertility, but they exist on a spectrum of human embodiment from the most human at 1.33 to the most abstract at 2.375. Though Lucretius never uses *gremium* with humans, he does afford Venus, an anthropomorphic deity, a *gremium*. The first instance of *gremium* in *DRN* appears in the proem

to Book 1 in a plea for Venus to seduce Mars in order that war may cease and peace may prevail on earth:

Nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare  
mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors  
armipotens regit, **in gremium** qui saepe tuum se  
reicit **aeterno devictus vulnere amoris**.<sup>68</sup>

(*DRN* 1.31-34)

For you alone are able to help the mortals with tranquil peace, since Mars, powerful in arms, reigns over the wild works of war, who often flings himself into your *gremium* having been conquered by the everlasting wound of love.

The concretely anthropomorphic form of Venus and the distinctly human interaction with another anthropomorphic figure, Mars, sets this apart from the other uses of *gremium* in

Lucretius. *Gremium* in *DRN* 1.251 appears to be similarly anthropomorphizing:

Postremo pereunt imbres, ubi eos pater Aether  
in gremium matris terrai praecipitavit;  
at nitidae surgunt fruges ramique virescunt  
arboribus, crescunt ipsae fetuque gravantur.

Finally the rains perish when father Aether casts them down in the *gremium* of the mother Earth; but the shining crops rise and the branches are green in the trees, which themselves grow and are swollen with fruit.

The fully embodied *pater Aether* raining *imbres* into the *gremium* of *matris terrai* is an anthropomorphic representation of penetrative vaginal sex, but there is a distance from the proximity to humanness in form that Venus' *gremium* possesses in *DRN* 1.33. Though both are deities, Venus is more concretely anthropomorphic than Terra/Tellus Mater who represents a more general divinity of the earth.<sup>69</sup> Even if all deities are considered to be physical representations of the concepts they represent, the abstraction of love, Venus' domain, needs to be concretized in form, while the concept of the earth is already physical and visible. It is

<sup>68</sup> Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura*. Bailey, Cyril. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921.

<sup>69</sup> See section II.iii for background on Terra Mater.

possible to visualize rain falling on the ground, but it is impossible to visualize the concept of love (or the generative power of the earth or whatever we take Venus to represent in *DRN* 1.33) seducing the concept of war and bloodshed. The metaphor is fundamentally tied to the anthropomorphic nature of the gods. Thus, while 1.251 is meant to evoke an image of sexual intercourse, it is fundamentally more removed from anthropomorphism than 1.33.

However, the explicit identification of the actors in *DRN* 1.251 as *pater* and *mater*, titles used of animate beings, typically humans, sets this use closer to humanness than *DRN* 6.536-9:

...et in primis terram fac ut esse rearis  
 supter item ut supera ventosis undique plenam  
 speluncis multosque lacus multasque lacunas  
 in gremio gerere et rupes deruptaque saxa;

...and in the first place make sure that you know that the earth below is the same as above, full everywhere with windy caves and bearing in its *gremium* many hollows and many chasms and cliffs and steep rocks.

Similar to *DRN* 1.251, this is an image meant to anthropomorphize the earth. The imagery of *multosque lacus multasque lacunas* underneath the earth itself evokes the womb, and the phrase *in gremio gerere* concretizes this image. The combination of *gremium* and *gerere*, both associated with maternity, fertility, and child-bearing, animates the description of what are fundamentally non-living rocks. Here, *gremium* functions as an anatomically coherent image of a womb in the earth's interior bearing caves and caverns, but this is one step removed from the humanity evoked in *DRN* 1.251 in its *pater* and *mater* engaging in a quasi-human sexual act.

The *gremium* most distant from humanity appears in *DRN* 2.375:

concharumque genus parili ratione videmus  
 pingere telluris gremium, qua mollibus undis  
 litoris incurvi bibulam pavit aequor harenam.

We see that shells in a similar way paint the *gremium* of the earth, where the sea strikes the thirsty sand of the curved shore with soft waves.

Here, *gremium* does not spatially make sense as a “womb” and the surrounding words like *pingere* and *pavit* are not particularly evocative of maternity or of humanness, but it is a dynamic description of an ecosystem in perpetual motion. Each section, one of which is the *telluris gremium*, is engaged in its own action as part of the whole. This is how environments and ecosystems as well as human and non-human bodies function. Thus, *gremium* carries the sense of innervation, of life, but not exclusively of humanity. By simply capitalizing *Telluris*, however, we can restore a degree of anthropomorphism to the image. The ambiguity contained in *tellus* and *terra*, being both nouns and goddesses, is impeded by modern textual conventions. Editors make the decision for all readers by choosing whether to capitalize. If we read *Telluris*, then *gremium* becomes the “body part” of the anthropomorphic divinity. The image of shells painting the *Telluris gremium*, while not physically impossible, is not quite a coherent action for an anthropomorphic being. In the context of *DRN*’s larger narrative, this section comes as a transition after explicating various animals whose mothers and young recognize each other to show that, even in inanimate nature, the same distinction between species applies. By centering an argument about inanimate elements around an anthropomorphic image of *Telluris gremium*, the image is imbued with a sense of maternity and the relatable intimacy of human childbirth. Of course, shells do not gestate in the womb, but the personifying actions of painting the shore and beating again the *gremium* with soft waves combined with the immediate context of mothers and young create a closeness to animate beings. Lucretius employs the image of the *Telluris gremium* to integrate abiotic natural elements into a larger metaphorical representation of the ecosystem modeled upon mammalian reproduction.

Since the more human uses are explicitly associated with feminine entities and concepts, the less human uses with less explicit feminine-coding implicitly evoke the network of

associations by the mere utterance of *gremium*. The implicit evocations supplement the inherent feminine concepts still present in these uses. Although DRN 2.374-6 does not have Venus or a geographical womb, *(T/t)ellus*, a feminine noun and a female deity, activates similar associations. By nature of his subject material, Vergil tends to use *gremium* with more concretely anthropomorphic characters, so it is easier to see the lap as feminine-coded in the *Aeneid*. However, Lucretius' *gremia* are also all part of an established network of majority feminine associations centering around the Mother Earth image. Thus, Lucretius' uses support the idea that *gremium* as feminine-coded is not a Vergilian innovation. Furthermore, Lucretius' more tentative anthropomorphism lends support to the idea that *gremium* is a feminine-coded word at its core and not just feminine-coded when used as a human body part.

## ii. Lucretian Influence on Vergil

Though Lucretius is one of the first extant authors to pair the Mother Earth image with *gremium*, the image's transcendence beyond genre and prevalence throughout Classical Latin literature, as discussed in II.iii, suggests that Lucretius is not the inventor of the image but is drawing upon a larger preexisting association. However, the peculiarities of Lucretius' vocabulary and phrasing are directly paralleled by Vergil. *Gremium* has a pre-existing web of associations that Lucretius drew upon and developed which, in turn, Vergil drew upon and ultimately added to. In conjunction with the earlier broad overview of *gremium* in classical Latin and its etymological origins, the parallels with Lucretius help to discern the more generic associations of the word from the elements of Vergil's use that are carefully and deliberately constructed in dialogue with Lucretian models. Both Vergil and Lucretius build upon the already existing associations of *gremium* with femininity, fertility, and maternity observable in other

extant Classical authors,<sup>70</sup> but the development of the uniquely Vergilian application in the *Aeneid* can be genealogically traced back to Lucretius's *DRN* and Vergil's *Georgics*. By comparing the Lucretian models to their descendants in Vergil, we can identify Lucretius as the most immediate influence on Vergil's use of *gremium*.

The many points of contact between Lucretius and Vergil are well established, and none more relevant to the discussion of *gremium* than the opening words of *De Rerum Natura*, *Aeneadum genetrix*.<sup>71</sup> Lucretius, from the outset, frames his depiction of Venus as defined by her maternity to the Roman people focalized through her relationship as mother of Aeneas.<sup>72</sup> This choice anticipates the peculiarities of the relationship that are present in the *Aeneid*. Furthermore, the scholarly controversy surrounding Venus' anthropomorphism and symbolic value in the *DRN* actually adds to the thematic similarities with *gremium* in the *Aeneid*; the ambiguity of Venus as goddess, mother, symbolic representation of the earth's generative power and origin of erotic desire underlie the narratives of fertility and desire that intersect in the *gremium* of Vergil's *Aeneid*.<sup>73</sup> Though Dido is at the center of my discussion of *gremium* in the *Aeneid*, the Lucretian connection mediated by Venus provides a supplementary pathway to analyze *gremium*.

The most direct Lucretian parallel to the Didonian system of *gremium* occurs in the proem to Book 1 of *DRN*. Following the invocation of "nourishing Venus, mother of the line of Aeneas" (*Aeneadum genetrix...alma Venus*, 1.1-2), the narrator says:

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<sup>70</sup> See section II for *gremium* as feminine-coded in Latin literature more generally.

<sup>71</sup> Lucretian influence on the *Georgics* is the most well-established and well-studied connection (see Gale, *Virgil on the Nature of Things* (2000) for the most complete treatment of the subject), but there is also scholarship that highlights Lucretian influence in the *Aeneid* (see Hardie, "Lucretius and Later Latin Literature," (2007) 111-127). I am particularly indebted to Giesecke, "The influence of Lucretius on the bucolic, heroic epic, satiric, and lyric poetry of the early Augustan period," (1992) for her collection of Lucretian allusions in the *Aeneid*, including a discussion of several of the passages that use *gremium*.

<sup>72</sup> See Clayton, "Lucretius' Erotic Mother," (1999) 69-86.

<sup>73</sup> Many scholars have commented on Venus' role in *DRN*, and the proem in particular has posed a significant question for scholarship, given its supposed Epicureanism. Courtney, "The Proem of Lucretius," (2001) 201-211 sums up the various opinions well.



broken by quaking thunder, trembling with light, runs across clouds; the wife, happy because of her tricks, cognizant of her beauty, understood. Then the father, conquered by everlasting love, said...

...having spoken the words, he (Vulcan), having been poured into the *gremium* of his wife, granted the desired embraces and sought peaceful sleep throughout his limbs.

The Lucretian influence on this passage is evident, and at the center of the numerous parallels in vocabulary, imagery, and technique is *gremium*. The most obvious connection to the Didonian *gremium* system is the fact that both *gremia* belong to Venus, a character integral to Dido's narrative and who often is a double for Dido in Vergil's *gremium* passages.<sup>76</sup> The centrality of Venus, known primarily as the goddess of erotic love, explicitly foregrounds the sexual connotations of *gremium*. But even in the absence of the shared character of Venus, the nuanced senses and connotations of *gremium* employed by Lucretius are often the same as in the *Aeneid*. In both the Lucretian and Vergilian passages, *gremium* is clearly the site of a sexually charged act, but it is ambiguous whether it is explicitly the genitalia or a euphemistic gesture. The uncertainty of whether *gremium* is the lap or the vagina or both recalls the perpetual question of how maternity and eroticism intersect in Dido's *gremium* in the *Aeneid*. In all likelihood, both readings are present, and the ambiguity is deliberate. Since this ambiguity is common in the poetic register, there need not be any question of coherence in the text stemming from such an ambiguity. Rather, its poeticism draws readers to contemplate each readings' implications.

Just as in the *Aeneid* adaptation of the Lucretian passage, Venus' sexuality and maternity are simultaneously present and at the forefront of the narrative, and just as with Dido, the *gremium* becomes the site where these identities intersect. The *gremium* that bore Aeneas is the *gremium* with which Mars and Vulcan are seduced. Underlying the sexual act of Mars flinging

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<sup>76</sup> The doublings of Dido, Venus, and related characters are primarily noted by psychoanalytic studies (Gutting (2006, 2009); Reckford (1995); McAuley (2016); Stroppini (2003)), and though I have critiqued the extension of their readings to perversion, their readings of doubled characters and identities are valuable.



himself into Venus' *gremium* is Venus' protective, maternal goal of preserving peace for Rome. The maternal undertones in *gremium* are anticipated by the framing of the entire work with the invocation of *Aeneadum genetrix*, explicitly fronting Venus' role as mother of all Romans via her motherhood to Aeneas. No matter if we view Lucretius' Venus as only allegorical or as incorporating some degree of literality or physicality, Venus as representative of the earth's generative power adds an additional layer to *gremium*'s maternal undertones.<sup>77</sup> Thus, her *gremium* is both the feminine-coded, anthropomorphic body part and the *gremium* of the earth, part of the Mother Earth image.<sup>78</sup> The Venus of the *Aeneid* functions more concretely as the mother of Aeneas, so Vergil is not able to draw as heavily upon Venus as symbolic of generative power to imbue *gremium* with connotations of maternity. Thus, the *Aeneid* relies more heavily upon a consistent development of language and imagery surrounding *gremium* throughout Books 1 and 4 in order to supplement the immediate maternal and sexual cues. Regardless of the exact textual mechanisms that shape *gremium*'s network of associations, both Lucretius and Vergil employ *gremium* to speak to women's roles as mothers and lovers.

Both Venuses and Dido have experiences that speak to motherhood and sexuality, but the Venuses' intersections of identities shift away from Dido's experience. The Venuses already occupy positions of power within their roles as mother and as seductress, while Dido's maternity and sexuality exist solely as unfulfilled desires. Thus, the Venuses actively engage with the potentially conflicting identities by manipulating their sexuality in order to fulfill maternal duties. Dido tends not to have the position of power nor presence of mind to leverage her desires in the same way. Lucretius' Venus is unconstrained, at least at this stage, by figures that threaten

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<sup>77</sup> See note 73 above.

<sup>78</sup> See section II.iii for more on *gremium*'s connection to the mother earth image.

her authority, and in Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, unlike earlier in Books 1 and 4, Vergil's Venus is unthreatened by Dido. When both Dido and Venus are contending with the complications posed by their maternal and sexual roles, the *gremium* almost becomes a site of vulnerability, where the two most important aspects of their identities at that moment intersect and create a target. In the absence of an exterior threatening figure, Venus, both in Lucretius and in Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, wields her *gremium* as a seat of godly, feminine power.

Though *DRN* 1.33 is the Lucretian passage that most clearly refines our reading of *gremium* in the *Aeneid* and nuances the characters of Dido and Venus, there are two other Vergilian passages with *gremium*, *Georgics* 2.325-7 and *Aeneid* 3.509-51, that share unmistakable similarities in word choice and imagery with Lucretian passages. A comparison of the two Vergilian passages with their Lucretian models along with *DRN* 1.33 (Venus' seduction of Mars) and *Aeneid* 8.406 (Venus' seduction of Vulcan) provides significant evidence that Vergil's use of *gremium* is a result of direct engagement with Lucretius' work. A comparative analysis is best accomplished by viewing all the relevant passages as a group in order to see the one-to-one similarities as well as vocabulary and themes shared across multiple passages.

*DRN* 2.374-6:

concharumque genus parili ratione videmus  
pingere **telluris gremium**, qua mollibus **undis**  
**litoris** incurvi bibulam pavit aequor harenam.

We see shells in a similar way paint the *gremium* of the earth, where the sea strikes the thirsty sand of the curved shore with soft waves.

*Aeneid* 3.509-511

sternimur optatae **gremio telluris ad undam**  
sortiti remos passimque in **litore** sicco  
corpora curamus, fessos sopor inrigat artus.

Having cast lots for the oars, we stretch ourselves towards the sea in the *gremium* of the desired land, and scattered around, we care for our bodies on the dry shore, sleep flows over our wearied limbs.

*DRN* 1.250-3

postremo pereunt **imbres**, ubi eos **pater Aether**  
in **gremium** matris **terrai** praecipitavit;  
at nitidae surgunt fruges ramique virescunt  
arboribus, crescunt ipsae **fetuque** gravantur.

Finally the rains perish when father Aether casts them down in the *gremium* of the mother Earth; but the shining crops rise and the branches are green in the trees, which themselves grow and are swollen with fruit.

*Georgics* 2.325-7

ver adeo frondi nemorum, ver utile silvis,  
vere tument **terrae** et genitalia semina poscunt  
tum **pater** omnipotens fecundis **imbribus Aether**  
coniugis in **gremium** laetae descendit, et omnis  
magnus alit magno commixtus corpore **fetus**.

Spring thus is beneficial to the foliage of the groves, spring is beneficial to the woods, in spring the earth swells and demands generative seeds. Then the almighty father Aether with fertile rains descends upon the *gremium* of the happy spouse, and a great man having mingled with a great body nourishes every birth.

A cursory glance at these passages shows a unidirectional adaptation of Lucretian material by

Vergil, very similar to the close linguistic parallelism of *DRN* 1.29-40 in *Aen.* 8.387-406

discussed previously. *DRN* 2.374-6's shells painting the lap of the earth (*telluris gremium*, 2.375)

and the waves (*undis*, 2.375) upon the thirsty sand of the shore (*litoris...bibulam...harenam*,

2.376) become *Aeneid* 3.509-511's bodies littering the dry shore (*litore sicco*, 3.510) upon the

lap of the earth (*gremio telluris*, 3.509), reaching out towards the water (*undam*, 3.509).

Similarly, the rains that *DRN* 1.250-3's father Aether casts into the *gremium* of the earth

(*imbres...pater aether...in gremium terrai...praecipitavit*, 1.250-1) and the trees swollen with

fruit (*arboribus...fetuque gravantur*, 1.253) become *Georgics* 2.325-7's earth swelling (*tument*

*terrae*, 2.326) upon whose *gremium* father Aether descends with rains

(*pater...imbribus...aether...in gremium...descendit*) and nourishes the birth (*alit...fetus*). In addition to the thematic similarities in the paired passages, there is significant semantic overlap and repeated imagery across all six selections. The porous boundaries of inter- and intratextual resonances amidst these *gremium* references show a more pervasive semantic and symbolic network that extends beyond a unidirectional, isolated adaptation of Lucretian lines by Vergil. Many of the intertextual resonances were discussed earlier as integral to the Didonian *gremium* network, like parental vocabulary, *amplexus*, and *laetus*, which demonstrates both a consistency across time and authors of more specific elements of *gremium*'s nuanced connotations as well as a source for the inspiration of Vergil's development of the image of Dido's *gremium*.

Identification of the Lucretian models brings Vergil's cross-textual consistency into focus as well. Interestingly, the one *gremium* reference in the *Georgics* seems to connect with the nexus of associations in the *Aeneid*. Lucretius' impact on Vergil's use of *gremium* has roots outside of Dido and Venus. If we look more deeply at Lucretius' other uses of *gremium*, more parallels between the authors emerge. Common to *Georgics* 2.325-7 and *Aeneid* 3.509-511 is the idea of the *gremium* of the earth, adapted from the Lucretian usages. *Georgics* 2.325's *coniugis in gremium laetae* is mirrored in *Aeneid* 8.406's *coniugis infusus gremio* as well as in *Aeneid* 1.686's *gremio accipiet laetissima Dido*. Since this is the only instance of *gremium* in the Vergilian corpus outside the *Aeneid*, it is difficult to track the development of the idea chronologically, but the similarities in its one usage in the *Georgics* to the uses in the *Aeneid* as well as those in Lucretius demonstrate a larger linguistic and intertextual relationship. While *gremium* is just one element in these passages that is evidence of an intertextual relationship, the thematic and symbolic associations identified in the parallel Lucretius and Vergil passages are shared by *gremium* elsewhere in the *Aeneid*. It is impossible to determine how much of this

overlap can be attributed directly to Lucretius and how much is a result of *gremium*'s broader culturally-bound connotations, but Vergil's close adaptation of Lucretian passages where *gremium* is a salient element demonstrates that Vergil's use of *gremium* in the *Aeneid* is at least in part a product of engagement with Lucretius.

## V. Intertexts and Antecedents in Ovid

Just as we can look back to Lucretius, we can also look forward to Ovid. The analysis of Lucretius adds additional nuance to the earlier broad analysis of the lap as feminine-coded and allows us a window into the development of the Vergilian idiom. As Ovid is the most prolific employer of *gremium* among the Classical Latin poets, his 23 instances certainly also strengthen the general observation of *gremium* as feminine-coded. More crucially to our understanding of Vergil, Ovid also directly engages with Vergilian models in his use of *gremium*, and by extension, with Vergil's own predecessors, including Lucretius. In typical Ovidian fashion, this intertextual engagement both comments upon his predecessors as well as adds complexity to his own viewpoint as presented in the text.

### i. General Trends in Ovid

Ovid, unlike Lucretius, exclusively uses *gremium* as a human body part. While Vergil also tends to use *gremium* to refer to the body part, he sometimes does so in a more metaphorical, generalizing context rather than in reference to a specific person's physical *gremium* (e.g., *Aeneid* 9.261: *quaecumque mihi fortuna fidesque est, in vestris pono gremiis*; "whatever fortune and trust I have, I place it in your laps"). Ovid exclusively uses *gremium* to refer to one character's physical body receiving or holding something, and similar to Vergil, Ovid gives laps to primarily female characters. It is important to note, however, that male characters with a *gremium* are a not insignificant minority, with eight instances across the

Ovidian corpus, primarily in erotic contexts. Since sexuality is so intertwined with the feminine-coded *gremium*, Ovid's men with laps do not represent a stark semantic change but rather a generalizing force; *gremium* retains an inherent association with sexuality but loses its exclusivity as a feminine body part, and at the same time, it can still be deployed in charged feminine-coded situations with a similar semantic network seen in previous authors like Lucretius and Vergil.

This speaks to a larger trend of *gremium* more generally associated with erotic and sexual settings. While eroticism and sexuality are often intrinsically linked to the previously discussed feminine-coded uses of *gremium* in Vergil and Lucretius, this is not always the case. As happens in Ovid, a man can have a *gremium* in an erotic context without necessarily being emasculating, feminizing, or otherwise feminine-coded. Catullus 45.2 and 68.132<sup>79</sup> present a solid precedent for Ovid's uses. However, there are men in Ovid whose laps do represent an intentional emasculation or an embodiment of feminine virtue, and in order for those male exceptions to be salient, Ovid draws upon his own established network of semantic associations surrounding *gremium* to distinguish these reversals from more generic erotic uses.

Given the nature of the *Aeneid*'s narrative, Vergil's development of *gremium* is closely tied to a few related characters; Ovid, on the other hand, develops his use of *gremium* by evoking similar themes across different stories and across his corpus of writings. Several patterns and intertexts are present among the 23 Ovidian uses of *gremium*. Across a series of eight references from the *Amores*, *Fasti*, and *Heroides*, Ovid demonstrates a unique and well-developed use of *gremium* in scenes in which someone, usually a woman, experiences shame. However, *gremium*

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<sup>79</sup> Catullus 45.1-2: *Acmē Septimius suos amores / tenens in gremio...* ("Septimius holding his love, Acme, in his *gremium*..."); 68.132: *aut nihil aut paulum cui tum concedere digna / lux mea se nostrum contulit in gremium* ("to whom she was deserving to concede not at all or a little, my light brought herself into my *gremium*"). See Vinson, "And Baby Makes Three?" (1989) 51-52 for a discussion of a feminine-coded *gremium* in Catullus 2 and 3.

is but one component of the shared imagery and word choice; Ovid seems to employ a formulaic approach, consistently drawing upon images of blushing, cheeks, and tears, alongside the image of eyes looking down into a *gremium*.<sup>80</sup> This is where Ovid diverges from Vergil's use of *gremium*. While both are employed systematically, Ovid's uses remain predominantly static, with little development of the formula between and within texts. This is in part due to the disjointed nature of Ovid's work, as there is not often occasion for the image to reoccur in the same poem. It is also because *gremium* is not at the center of Ovid's semantic network; the tears, shame, and blushing appear to be of equal importance to the image as is *gremium*. It is all the individual elements combined with the narrative context that creates the scene's hyperfemininity.

Though there are eight Ovidian passages that draw upon this image, I highlight two references from *Amores* that are representative of the various elements of the pattern and show how Ovid is able to manipulate the image to subvert expectations. The following passage from *Amores* 1.14 is representative of Ovid's use of *gremium* for ashamed women. In this poem, the narrator berates a woman who is crying because her hair has fallen out:

*Amores* 1.14.51-53:

me miserum! lacrimas male continet oraque dextra  
 protegit ingenuas picta rubore genas;  
 sustinet antiquos **gremio** spectatque capillos,  
 ei mihi, non illo munera digna loco.<sup>81</sup>

Miserable me! She badly holds back tears and covers her face with her right hand, having painted her natural cheeks with redness. She holds the old hair in her *gremium* and looks at it, woe to me, a gift not deserving of that place.

A scene from *Amores* 2.18 draws upon similar vocabulary and themes, but the key difference is the reversal of gender roles:

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<sup>80</sup> The lines in which *gremium* is used with this image are *Amores* 1.8.37; 1.14.53; 2.18.6; *Fasti* 2.756; *Heroides* 5.70; 7.184; 11.35; 21.113.

<sup>81</sup> Ovid. *Amores*. Kenney, E.J., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

*Amores* 2.18.5-10:

Saepe meae “tandem” dixi “discede” puellae -  
 in gremio sedit protinus illa meo.  
 saepe “pudet” dixi - lacrimis vix illa retentis  
 “me miseram! iam te” dixit “amare pudet?”  
 implicuitque suos circum mea colla lacertos  
 et, quae me perdunt, oscula mille dedit.

Often I said to my girl, “Finally, stop it” – She immediately sat in my *gremium*. Often I said “It’s shameful” – with tears hardly held back, she said, “Miserable me! Is it really shameful for you to love?” And she wrapped her arms around my neck and gave me a thousand kisses which destroy me.

In a feedback loop, Ovid uses *gremium* in scenes of ashamed women because of its previously established feminine-coding, which in turn creates further internal associations of *gremium* with feminine-coded concepts, and these intertextual relationships grow exponentially with each successive use, resulting in a cohesive trope with which Ovid is able to play. *Am.* 2.18.5-10 is one such instance of Ovidian subversion of expectations. In this scene, the woman is the active partner, initiating all physical contact and testing the man’s boundaries. She manipulates the man in a heightened emotional state and exclaims “me miseram!” just as the man does to the woman in *Am.* 1.14.51-53 and the other traditional instances of the trope. Similarly, the man adopts the feminine role characterized by passivity, shame, and emotional destruction by the dominant male. Most notably for the discussion at hand is that as part of this inversion of gender roles the man, not the woman, has a *gremium*.

If we look to the larger context of the poem and the first four lines of the poem that precede the aforementioned quote, it becomes even clearer that Ovid uses *gremium*’s traditional feminine-coded associations to emasculate his poetic persona:

*Amores* 2.18.1-4:

Carmen ad iratum dum tu perducis Achillen  
 Prima iuratis induis arma viris,



Nos, Macer, ignava Veneris cessamus in umbra,  
Et tener ausuros grandia frangit Amor.

While you, Macer, direct your poem to Achilles' anger, you entangle the men bound by oath chiefly in war, we are at leisure in the idle shades of Venus, and soft Amor breaks apart my lofty undertakings.

This poem begins as a discussion about the temptation of elegy, an emasculating genre, over other more serious, traditionally masculine forms. By invoking both Venus and Cupid in this already gendered generic discussion, Ovid calls upon *gremium*'s association with eroticism and focalizes the intensely sexual undertones through Venus directly as well as by her parental relationship to Cupid. Furthermore, Venus and Cupid explicitly drive the rejection of the traditionally masculine subject of war. Thus, the emasculation when the girl, a metaphor for elegy, places herself in the *gremium* of Ovid's persona relies not only upon a subversion of Ovid's own unique, gendered patterns of *gremium* but also upon an invocation of the feminine-coded undertones already identified in Vergil, Lucretius, and beyond.

## ii. Ovid and Vergil's *Aeneids*

The reversal of expectations in *Amores* 2.18 can be compared to *Met.* 13.658, another instance in which a man has a *gremium*, signaling a gender role reversal. In this passage, Anius recounts the attempted abduction of his daughters, lamenting: *armorum viribus usus abstrahit invitas gremio genitoris* ("using the strengths of weapons he tore them, unwilling, from the *gremium* of their parent.") Anius is afforded a *gremium*, in part, because he performs a maternal role in this narrative. What separates this from a generic parental care is the fact that he is identified as a *genitoris*, not a *pater* or another more gendered term, along with the visceral image of his children being torn away from his *gremium*, which evokes childbirth and breastfeeding, actions where children are literally tethered to the mother. Unlike *Am.* 2.18.5-10, this is not an emasculating use of *gremium* but one that identifies Anius as embodying a cultural

ideal of womanhood, and Ovid's ability to utilize *gremium's* feminine-coding to both negatively emasculate and positively feminize male characters also shows a semantic expansion from Vergil.

The immediate context of Anius' *gremium*, as presented above, seems to have straightforward maternal undertones, but this tightly contained reversal exists in addition to a larger subversion of expectations. In addition to drawing upon *gremium's* feminine-coding to toy with gender roles, Ovid also employs *gremium* in order to respond directly to Vergil's treatment of the same story. Book 13 of the *Metamorphoses*, also termed Ovid's *Aeneid* or the "Little *Aeneid*," engages with not only Vergil's now well-known treatment but also a number of other traditions. Sergio Casali's persuasive analysis shows Ovid's goal of correcting and problematizing the character of Aeneas and the overall narrative presented in Vergil.<sup>82</sup> The story of Anius and his daughters is a particularly salient point of intersection for the conflicting traditions. Similar to the *Aeneid*, in which the lap becomes the site of Dido's conflicting desires, Anius' *gremium* becomes a site where intranarrative emotions intersect as well as a focal point for metatextual dissonances. Thus, Ovid's use of *gremium* in *Met.* 13.658 is a uniquely rich convergence of semiotics, intertextuality, and socio-political history.

Ovid presses upon Vergil's apparent censorship of the elements of the mythological history that interfere with the *Aeneid's* cohesive narrative, like the long-standing version of the myth in which Anius is staunchly pro-Greek, and, as Servius notes, Aeneas rapes Lavinia, one of Anius' daughters.<sup>83</sup> Ovid does not simply showcase the material that Vergil omits, but rather leaves apparent space for suggestion and uncertainty, creating what Bowen terms "an

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<sup>82</sup> Casali, "Correcting Aeneas's Voyage," (2007) 181-210.

<sup>83</sup> Casali, (2007) 198-202.

atmosphere of hermeneutic ambiguity.”<sup>84</sup> One of the points of mythological contention is whether Anius’ daughters willingly served the Greeks or whether they were forcefully abducted. While Ovid does have Anius describe in detail the abduction of his daughters, the use of *gremium* in his speech highlights the inherent ambiguity that pervades every aspect of this narrative.

Bowen’s argument that Anius’ narrative has resonances of prayers during attempted rapes from earlier in the *Metamorphoses* and thus evokes an erotic context supports reading erotic undertones into *gremium* in addition to its maternal ones.<sup>85</sup> Given Ovid’s pattern of using *gremium* in erotic contexts for men and for ashamed female lovers, it is difficult not to read sexual undertones into this usage, especially in the context of the larger surrounding erotic evocations. Within Ovid’s narrative, *gremium* becomes a convergence point of Anius’ parental reaction and of his daughter’s potential sexual interaction with Aeneas. Furthermore, in *Aeneid* 10.79 Vergil uses *gremium* in the context of marriage, specifically referring to ripping betrothed women from *gremia* as spoils of war.<sup>86</sup> In his similar image of women being ripped from the *gremium* of a loved one, Ovid perhaps draws upon this reference as well to highlight that there are still two further divergent traditions about Aeneas’ contact with one of Anius’ daughters: one in which there is a marriage pact, and one in which Aeneas rapes her. *Gremium* has a wide semantic range, yet is unique enough to be identifiable as a point of intersection of the various threads of this narrative and its sociohistorical context. As the subversion of gender roles in

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<sup>84</sup> Bowen, “Patterns of Prayer in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,” (2020) 318.

<sup>85</sup> Bowen, (2020) 308-315.

<sup>86</sup> *Aeneid* 10.79-80: *quid soceros legere et gremiis abducere pactas, pacem orare manu, praefigere puppibus arma?* (“Why do they choose in-laws and snatch away betrothed women from *gremia*, profess peace with one hand, and set up arms on the decks?”)

*gremium* occurs at the height of the story's action, audiences are thus attuned to the other more subtle subversions at play and are compelled to question the ambiguities.

It is difficult not to read some significance into the similarities in the names of the characters in the narrative (Anius/Aeneas, the two Lavinias). Setting aside the English pronunciations of Anius and Aeneas, which are almost identical, the Greek itself (Αἰνείας, Ἄνιος) has undeniable phonetic similarities. While no contemporary reader would legitimately confuse the mythological figures, it is easy to imagine a slip of the tongue or mispronunciation of Αἰνείας and Ἄνιος or a momentary lapse before remembering which Lavinia is the subject at hand. Within the fifty lines surrounding *gremium*, all the father and son characters are mentioned by name, sometimes multiple times – Anius, Aeneas, Anchises, Ascanius, and even Atrides, Hector, and a paternal invocation, “*Bacche pater.*” There is not a single female character named, despite Anius' daughters being a main focus of this passage. The stark contrast between numerous explicitly named fathers and sons and not a single named mother or daughter lends additional support to previous scholars' observations that the conspicuous absences of notable women in the Ovidian version, especially raped women, make them all the more visible.<sup>87</sup> The effect of Ovid's consistent allusions to, but lack of explicit engagement with, the less palatable traditions that Vergil skirts in this narrative is enhanced by artificially enlarging the male characters' presence, creating an even more striking void where women would be expected. The subversion of gender roles in *gremium*'s usage adds to this imbalance. Not only are there no mothers; there is a man occupying the maternal role. Moreover, the supposed children only exist as vague, unnamed abstractions. The use of *genitoris*, rather than Anius' own name, generalizes this subversion of gender roles and subsuming of women to all the many named fathers and sons

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<sup>87</sup> James, “Rape and Repetition in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,” (2016) 154-175.

in this narrative. The assonance among the men's names furthers the general aura of ambiguity and calls attention to the men's occupation of all roles, both the traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine. The seamless with which men inhabit and depart the role of *genitor* resembles the way in which Vergil uses *gremium* in scenes of doubled women. Dido and Venus as well as Ascanius and Cupid often stand in for one another at these convergence points in women's *gremia*. While not as systematic a network of identities, Ovid's blurring of the lines nonetheless highlights in yet another way Vergil's calculated engagement with the mythological tradition to fit his paradigm.

### iii. Tarchon and Venulus vs. Camilla and Her Father

*Gremium* at the intersection of eroticism, femininity, and politics is not unprecedented. In fact, Vergil's depiction of Tarchon and Venulus in battle in *Aeneid* 11.744 similarly imposes eroticism and femininity upon a context not traditionally associated with such concepts in order to allude to an underlying societal tension:

haec effatus equum in medios moriturus et ipse  
 concitat, et Venulo adversum se turbidus infert  
 dereptumque ab equo dextra **complectitur** hostem  
 et **gremium** ante suum multa vi concitus aufert.

Having spoken these things, [Tarchon], about to die, rouses his horse into the middle, and raging, advances on Venulus, and seizes with his right hand the enemy snatched from his horse and stirred up with much vigor carries him off before his *gremium*.

Upon first glance, *Aeneid* 11.744 appears as separate from Vergil's systematic network of *gremia* centered around Dido. Though it does not necessarily directly reflect back upon Dido's narrative, the significance of *gremium* in this passage is reliant upon the semantic web woven throughout Books 1 and 4. Kevin Muse, in noting the clear eroticism imposed upon this battle narrative also points to its similarity to *Aeneid* 1.683-5 in which Cupid, another "little Venus," infects Dido, and much of the erotic imagery scholars have identified here is the same as is used

in the previously analyzed scenes with Dido and Venus.<sup>88</sup> Lyne even singles out *gremium* as particularly indicative of eroticism.<sup>89</sup>

The sociopolitical significance of this passage proposed by previous scholarship can be strengthened by looking more deeply at the intersectionality contained in *gremium*. Though later authors have used *gremium* to impart a sense of general eroticism, Vergil and Lucretius, the most immediate influence on Vergil's use of *gremium*, do not ever use it without at least one other of its semantic senses, and when eroticism is present, it is a specifically feminine-coded sexuality. Thus, the final appearance of *gremium* in the *Aeneid* and its only usage for a man necessarily recalls the complexity of its feminine-coded semantic network; in addition to the explicitly voiced erotic imagery, *gremium*'s established associations with maternity and female sexuality lie just beneath the surface.

Muse argues that the eroticization of this battle scene, combined with the identity politics of Tarchon and Venulus, foreshadow the rape of Lucretia; both the foreshadowing of the rape of Lucretia and the irony of Tarchon reproaching Venus in one breath and snatching up Ven(ul)us in the next are heightened by the fact that Camilla, the paradigm of chastity, is the Etruscans' primary opponent.<sup>90</sup> The image of Tarchon pulling Venulus to his *gremium* recalls a scene from Camilla's infancy less than 200 lines earlier in which Camilla's father pulls her to his *sinus* on horseback, rescuing his infant daughter. While *sinus* has a broader range of meanings and is not generally part of *gremium*'s network, it can be a synonym for lap, and the closest Greek equivalent to *gremium*, κόλπος, is parallel in etymology to *sinus*. Especially given their

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<sup>88</sup> Muse, "Sergestus and Tarchon in the *Aeneid*, (2007) 603.

<sup>89</sup> Lyne, *Words and the Poet*, (1989) 37.

<sup>90</sup> Muse (2007) 602.

proximity to one another, it would be difficult to miss Camilla as the common link between the only two men who have laps in the *Aeneid*.

Even in the absence of the established connection of *gremium* to maternity, the image of Camilla's father clutching her to his *sinus* in flight has undeniable maternal undertones. Similar to *Met.* 13.658, there is a subsuming of the maternal role by father figures, which is explicitly expressed in *Aeneid* 11.540-4:

Priverno antiqua Metabus cum excederet urbe,  
infantem fugiens media inter proelia belli  
sustulit exsilio comitem matrisque vocavit  
nomine Casmillae mutata parte Camillam.

When Metabus was leaving from the ancient city of Privernum, fleeing during ongoing battles of war, he took up his infant as a companion in exile and called her Camilla, having changed a part of the name of her mother, Casmilla.

The more practical purpose of these lines is to ground Camilla's story and lineage in a mythological and etymological tradition, but by expressing the origin of Camilla's name in terms of a father actively changing the mother's name and assigning it to the infant child, Vergil presents Camilla as not simply motherless but with a father inhabiting the role of mother. As Wilhelm notes, Camilla's lack of mother places her as a parallel to Dido, another character who is essentially motherless.<sup>91</sup> The numerous parallels between the characters noted by Wilhelm and other commentators compel readers to read the implications of Dido's *gremium* onto this scene, with the infant Camilla occupying the role of Ascanius in Dido's lap, conjuring the possibility of sexual or erotic undertones. However, no matter how hard one looks, this is a purely parental lap. Thus, the lap creates irony by baiting sexuality for the notoriously devoted virgin Camilla. Despite the bait, there is not actually an intersection of maternity and eroticism, so *sinus* is used instead of *gremium*.

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<sup>91</sup> Wilhelm, "Venus, Diana, Dido and Camilla," (1987) 46.

The dynamic of the lap at 11.544 plays into the function of Tarchon's *gremium* at 11.744. The context and action are very similar, with someone riding on horseback, clasping another person to their lap amidst active battle. The primary difference is that Tarchon and Venulus are enemy combatants, and Camilla's father and Camilla are family members fleeing. The interaction between Tarchon and Venulus uses *gremium* to subvert expectations by overlaying sexuality atop a battle scene, while Camilla's father and Camilla draw upon the lap as a feminine-coded body part to imbue the scene with maternal undertones. Despite the clear differences in the function of the lap and the relationship between characters, the fundamental use of the lap to signify a subversion of expectation in itself links these two passages. Furthermore, the irony of the potential for maternity and sexuality in 11.544 heightens the irony of Camilla as Tarchon's enemy amidst his own hypocritical indictment of sexual pleasures and simultaneous eroticization of warfare. In recalling the scene of Camilla and her father, its actual maternal undertones are also called to mind, thereby feminizing Tarchon's intended daring feat of bravery even further.

The various ways in which the concept of the lap and the breadth of *gremium*'s semantic range interact with Tarchon in this scene enhance the foreshadowing of the rape of Lucretia and the perceived excesses of Etruscan rule.<sup>92</sup> The irony of Tarchon's actions within the narrative and in the context of later sociopolitical events expressed in part by Vergil's use of *gremium* provides additional nuance to the discussion of Ovid's use of *gremium* to respond to Vergil's choice omissions of less palatable mythological traditions. While Ovid certainly pushes upon Vergil's omissions, the fact that Vergil also uses *gremium* to highlight a similarly complicated story of a raped woman crucial to the development of Rome informs why Ovid chooses *gremium*

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<sup>92</sup> Muse, (2007) 602.



to accomplish a similar goal. Thus, Ovid's use of Vergil's techniques to respond to Vergil's own text is twofold; Ovid not only draws upon Vergil's developed semantic network for *gremium*, he also employs it to comment on a similar controversial instance of Rome's history being grounded in raped women. This, in turn, further supports Casali's argument that Ovid corrects and comments on Vergil but does not necessarily condemn.<sup>93</sup> In using *gremium* in this way, Ovid acknowledges Vergil's efforts to engage with the controversial but simultaneously applies pressure to his avoidance elsewhere.

## VI. Conclusion

Just as Dido's *gremium* is at the center of her intersecting identities in the *Aeneid*, Vergil stands as a centerpiece activating intertexts seemingly far removed from one another. Stemming from just four words that center one woman's experience, my intertextual analysis is able to access the past and the future, to see the Vergilian *gremium*'s origins and its descendants. *Gremium* functions as a microcosm of Dido's character, and by extending its intertextual network, *gremium* becomes a microcosm of representations of women in antiquity. I show that *gremium* is integral to our understanding of women as mothers and sexual beings, but *gremium*'s feminine-coded nature manifests in a number of ways and leaves space to perhaps find meaning in other roles that women inhabit. I set the stage for *gremium* to provide insight into the experience of gender more generally by demonstrating that the lap as feminine-coded is a cross-linguistic, multi-cultural image and by highlighting instances where male identities are constructed in apposition to the female through complex usages of the word *gremium*.

Though texts written by men will never allow a direct window to women's experiences, by explicating the complexity with which male authors write female characters, we qualify our

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<sup>93</sup> Casali, (2007).

view of the ancient world's misogyny. Not in any modern sense of the word are any of these classical Latin authors feminists, but every instance of *gremium* analyzed here affords women a degree of power and authority. Lucretius' semi-symbolic, semi-anthropomorphic *Terra Mater* is responsible for creation itself. Dido's *gremium* centers a narrative of a formidable woman leader struggling with her maternal and romantic desires. Ovid comments on the centrality of raped women to Rome's existence, and their erasure from dominant versions of its founding narratives. Crucially, these larger societal and philosophical observations rooted in women's bodies can only be understood by giving one woman her due. At the core of my thesis is the simple idea that women are complex. Dido's maternal and erotic lap shows that when we afford women the ability to be complicated, our understanding of the world is enriched.

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