The purposes of the proposal are to:

- Help formalize your thinking about your topic.
- Provide a focus for your research to know what you are looking for and working towards, making it easier to provide constructive feedback.

1. Subject of Your Paper
The subject is your broad topic. For example:

The lieto fine [happy ending] at the end of Francesco Cavalli’s opera La Didone (1641)

2. A Provisional Title for Your Paper
This helps bring a greater focus to your topic. You may want to experiment with several different titles. Remember, your title can keep changing to reflect your research and thinking on the subject. For example:

Performing Tragedy: Cutting the Happy Ending of Cavalli’s La Didone and What It Means

Abandoning Dido: Understanding the Lieto Fine of Cavalli’s La Didone (1641) And Why We Ignore It

3. Provisional Thesis
This will be the hardest part of this proposal and your paper, and will probably change as you continue to work on your topic. A thesis is a statement that requires proving, not a statement of fact or an observation. Ideally it is a complete sentence or two that explains in some detail what you expect to write about and clues the reader in on what they are about to read. You may wish to write out a thesis paragraph or two where you set up a context, and then your thesis. For example:

In Virgil’s Aeneid, the Carthagianian queen Dido commits suicide after being abandoned by the Trojan hero Aeneas, but in his libretto for composer Francesco Cavalli’s opera La Didone, Gian Francesco Busenello writes a happy ending for the title character by marrying her to the Maxitani king, Iarbas (a character from an alternate version story by Junianus Justinus that also has a tragic ending). The lieto fine of La Didone—doubly so in the face of Virgil and Justinus—is well within the budding tradition of Venetian opera, yet two recent recordings of Cavalli’s opera—a 1988 ‘world-premiere’ audio recording based on live performances with Thomas Hengelbrock and the Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble, and a video production by Fabio Biondi and Europa Galante at La Fenice opera house in 2006—ignore Busenello’s and Cavalli’s (and Dido’s happy ending, the
Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble but cutting it entirely and ending the opera with Dido’s suicide, and the Europa Galante production by undercutting it with Claron McFadden’s shell-shocked performance of the concluding duet. What is behind our twentieth-century inability to give Dido the happy ending Busenello and Cavalli’s wrote for her: and further, why did Busenello and Cavalli write her one?

In this presentation, first I argue that the Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble’s and Europa Galante’s interpretation of Cavalli’s Dido is based both on a modern taste for tragedy and the equation of the tragic with artistic depth, and on influence of the misogynistic practice of punishing nonconforming heroines that emerged in the nineteenth-century operas that are the mainstay of the modern operatic canon. Second, I demonstrate that Busenello’s happy ending for Dido comes out the seventeenth-century literary practice of rectification—of changing the tragic endings of plots drawn from myth and history to re-enact not what did happen, but to enact what should have happened. I show that the practice of rectification grew out of a belief in the justice and equity of modern seventeenth-century society, in comparison to the barbarism of the Medieval and Antique past. Third, I address the character of Dido in the liminal context of the Venetian carnival, when social power structures were ritualistically turned upside down. I contend that the character of Dido as an Other—woman and African—represented personal agency in the male-dominated Venetian society that used Aeneas as a model of masculine rectitude. Consequently, in giving Dido her rectified happy ending Busenello and Cavalli make a case for personal freedom and happiness in the midst of restraints imposed by society. Finally, I address how modern performances of Cavalli’s La Didone—with the happy ending intact—can, in “authentic” seventeenth-century Venetian carnival tradition, counteract the misogynistic themes of consequent operas of the operatic canon, and make a political statement about what should (and did) happen.

4. Rationale and Significance
“Why should the reader care about your topic?” This will probably be based in why the topic you have chosen is important to you. The “why” can be cosmic in scope, or it could be a small point—either is fine. For example:

The treatment of female characters is problematic in much of the canon of frequently performed operas in that feminine agency—for example, Lucia, Norma, Gilda, Violetta, Carmen, Butterfly, Tosca—is generally punished by death. This is problematic in a genre that is represented as ‘high art’ to a modern liberal society. This was not always so: seventeenth-century operas celebrate personal freedoms that should appeal to modern audiences. The question is why performers do not choose to do this.
5. Research Questions
To guide your research, figure out what questions you need to answer. For example:

- How was Dido represented in early modern literature and the visual arts, and what did she symbolize?
- How were widows and re-marriage viewed in Venetian society? (Dido is a widow)
- How was Aeneas represented?
- Aeneas founds Rome, yet Venetians had an antagonistic relationship with Rome: how did this color Venetian’s views of Aeneas?
- How does Carnival function? How does opera function within carnival?
- What is the role of carnival in Venetian society?
- How are heroines similar to Dido represented in contemporary Venetian opera?
- What are Busenello’s views as exhibited in his literary works and activities?
- What do I make of Busenello’s constant use of deis ex machine to influence the decisions by various characters (Venus and Aeneas, Cupid and Dido, Mercury and Iarbas)?
- What are the contemporary writings and theories about rectification?
- What are Cavalli’s views on the character of Dido as revealed by his musical setting? Look at her Act III soliloquy, the harangue of the ghost of her dead husband Sichaeus, the role of Iarbas through out the opera, and the final duet.

6. Tentative Organization (very brief outline)

The organization of your research will in many ways depend upon your topic. Indeed, the structure of your paper may change dramatically by the time you turn in the final. However, creating a general outline at this point can help focus your research efforts. A general outline will also help your instructor provide feedback. For example:

- Introduction: Description of Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble and Europa Galante productions of La Didone
- Problems with Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble’s cut, and Europa Galante’s acting decisions
- Thesis
- Short history of female characters in opera, and place these modern performances in that history context
- Contrast with historical practices of Venetian opera and literary rectification practices
- Look at the lieto fine phenomena in Venetian operas up to 1641 (and maybe a little beyond)
- Examine the character of Dido, Aeneas, and perhaps the various Greek gods that show up
- Look at Busenello’s libretto (maybe in the context of his other few libretti?)
- Look at carnival and the liminal in general, and then in Venetian society
- Analyze Cavalli’s music
- Conclusion, and further thoughts
FURTHER RESEARCH AND QUESTIONS (MY OWN)

- Double plot of *Didone*:
  - Aeneas plot (Act I through most of Act III)
  - Dido-Iarbas plot (Act II through Act III)
  - Crossover in Act II-III, i.e. Aeneas-Dido plot
- Double plot as “modern”
- Comparison of Aeneas and Iarbas (King who sacrifices love for duty, King who sacrifices duty for love)
- FATE as controlling force:
  - Plots of the gods and their role in human lives
    - Venus (Venere)
    - Eros (Amore)
    - Juno (Giunone)
    - Neptune (Nettuno)
    - Jupiter (Giove)
    - Mercury (Mercurio)
      - What is Mercury’s role? He is messenger for Jupiter, but acts as *deux ex machina* for Iarbas.

“While both myth and epic rely upon the supernatural to explain the natural world (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) or to justify the divine destiny of a people (Vergil’s *Aeneid*), *L’incoronazione di Poppea* presents a series of events controlled almost exclusively by the desires, ambitions, and powers of mortal man.”¹

“With Poppea, opera relinquished its dependence upon myth and the supersensible world. It discovered the vast canvas of history, in which the narrative structure—the beginning, middle, and end of the drama—is not deanitively circumscribed in the sources, and in which the patently unrealistic practice of sung drama seems to have unexpected power to convey complex notions of reality.”²

- What is role of the ghost of Sicheus to Dido in Act III? Versus the ghost of Creusa to Aeneas in Act I?
  - Topic of Remarriage in Venetian Republic
- Music of final scene (*Scena Ultima*) as key to happy ending
- What is myth of Venice, and relation to Troy, Aeneas, and Rome??
- Role of Female Rule: Role of Juno (Giunone) in the Iliad as enemy of not only Aeneas (as prince of Troy and founder of Roman line), but masculine rule Jove. How many operas is she featured in with a vindictive meddling role? (Role in *Calisto* as rightfully wronged wife and her message to wives in audience play role letdown of *Calisto*)


Connection between Aeneas/Aeneid and Dante/Divine Comedy—a “New Aeneas”

Dante as Beatrice.

Dante as Dido, Virgil as Aeneas.

Dante responds to Beatrice’s reproaches, as Aeneas does not to Dido. Brownlee, 6.

Correction of Aeneas in Christian context, Brownlee, 6. “contrition leads to confession which leads to penance.”

“The reference to Iarbas in Purgatorio 31.72 serves to recall the destructive Virgilian erotic passion of Aeneid 4, at the very moment that it is being dominated, corrected—even “sublimated”—by the Christian poetics of Dante-protagonist’s successful conversion by and to Beatrice.”

“The reference to Iarbas in Purgatorio 31 thus evokes—in a variety of inter-related ways—the failure of erotic love associated with Dido.”

“The Christian poetics of the Commedia require…that Dante-protagonist yield to the power of Beatrice’s words: the positive figure is here the uprooted robusto cerro.”

Dante faints, Dido faints.

“this corrective inversion by Dante of his Aenean model carries the larger Christian implication of “weakness as strength,” of “dying into life.” This ‘redempted’ (and ‘redemptive’) instance of passion leads to contrition and, ultimately, to salvation.”

“Dante’s Christian ‘sublimation’—his making good—of erotic love. In the political poetics of the Aeneid, the figure of the Lady is eccentric. Erotic love as figured by Dido is a danger, a temptation, an obstacle to the protagonist’s task of (collective) political destiny. In the Divine Comedy, the figure of the Lady is, by contrast, central. The

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sublimation of erotic love as figured by Beatrice is the essential instrument of the protagonist’s (individual) salvation.”

Dido Works

Virgil, Aeneid.
Justin, Epitome.
Dante, The Divine Comedy.
Petrarch, Trionfi, L’Africa.
Boccaccio, De Mulieribus Claris, De Casibus Illustrium Virorum

“Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio…wrote extensive reevaluations of the life of Dido in the light of what they considered to be historical, rather than literary, evidence.”

“Petrarch’s exasperation with those who were prepared to ignore historiography in favor of poetics is further vented in a letter to Federigo Aretino included in the Rerum Senilium: “Who, except some of the multitude, who anywhere, I ask, is so uneducated as not to know that the story of Dido and Aeneas is fictitious, and that it has gained the status of truth among men, eager not so much for truth as for beauty…”(IV.5).”

“Virgil remained true to the Greek epic poetry convention of the implacability of fate, his Dido was very much a tragic figure in the Homerian sense. He considered her to be ‘infelix’, a word best translated as ‘ill-starred’”

Sword that Aeneas leaves behind? What’s that about?

Bibliography


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13 Margaret Franklin, “‘Dido’: Faithful Widow or Abandoned Lover?,” Artibus et Historiae Vol. 21, No. 41 (2000): 111.
14 Margaret Franklin, “‘Dido’: Faithful Widow or Abandoned Lover?,” Artibus et Historiae Vol. 21, No. 41 (2000): no. 8 (p. 120).