THE RESURRECTION OF DIDO: FROM VIRGIL TO MARLOWE AND NASH

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Abstract

The legendary Queen Dido, founder of Carthage, has captured the imagination of writers and readers for over two millennia. Originally appearing in Virgil's epic poem the Aeneid, Dido's tale was resurrected and transformed in Christopher Marlowe's play Dido, Queen of Carthage, which he co-authored with Thomas Nashe. This paper examines how Marlowe and Nashe adapted Virgil's portrayal of Dido, focusing on their expansion of her character and story. Through close reading and comparative analysis, it demonstrates how they shifted Dido from a relatively minor role in Virgil into the central protagonist, delving deeper into her psychology and the tragedy of her romance with Aeneas. Marlowe and Nashe's reshaping of classical mythology in Dido, Queen of Carthage exemplifies the Renaissance humanist project of engaging with and reinventing the literary inheritance of antiquity. The play's resurrection of Dido anticipates her recurring presence as a powerful and tragic figure in Western literature and culture up to the present day.

Keywords: Dido, Virgil, Aeneid, Marlowe, Nashe, Renaissance, humanism, tragedy, Carthage, Aeneas, love, fate, adaptation, reception, intertextuality, Elizabethan drama, amplificatio, mythological reinvention, classical tradition, literary afterlife.

1. Introduction

The Carthaginian Queen Dido, known as Elissa in Greek sources, has become one of the most enduring female figures to emerge from classical literature. While historical evidence for Dido is scarce and heavily overlaid by legend, she first entered the Western canon in Virgil's epic poem the Aeneid, composed between 29 and 19 BCE. In Virgil, Dido appears in Book 1 and

Book 4, which recount her tragic love affair with the shipwrecked Trojan hero Aeneas, mythical ancestor of the Romans.

As the Aeneid became a foundational text of the Latin literary tradition, widely read and studied in schools throughout antiquity, Dido was transmitted with it. She reappeared in various later Roman epics which engaged intertextually with Virgil, such as the 1st century CE poet Silius Italicus' Punica (Augoustakis, 2010). However, it was the cultural retrieval of Virgil in the Renaissance that solidified Dido's place within the European imagination. She featured in prominent Renaissance literary works including Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy and Geoffrey Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and House of Fame (Ruggiero, 2020).

Amongst 16th century humanists, Virgil became a model and touchstone, "recaptured in editions, commentaries, and translations" (Cheney, 2009, p. 99). The English poet and dramatist Christopher Marlowe played a key role in this Virgilian revival, penning the first translations of the Aeneid into English blank verse. Marlowe also co-authored a stage play based on Virgil's Dido episode with his contemporary Thomas Nashe, first published in 1594 (McJannet, 2020). Entitled Dido, Queen of Carthage, it significantly expanded Virgil's depiction of Dido and placed her character at the center of the drama.

This research paper examines how Marlowe and Nashe resurrected and transformed Virgil's Dido to create their own tragic protagonist and exemplary Renaissance humanist work. It begins by briefly outlining Virgil's portrayal of Dido and her role within the Aeneid, before analyzing the changes and developments made in Marlowe and Nashe's adaptation. Through close comparative readings, it demonstrates how their Dido, Queen of Carthage constitutes an innovative reimagining of the source material, psychologically deepening Dido's character, heightening the tragedy of her downfall, and foregrounding issues of gender, power and desire. The paper argues that Marlowe and Nashe's reshaping of Virgil's mythological framework exemplifies the Renaissance humanist project of creatively engaging with and extending the

literary inheritance of antiquity. Contextualizing the play within the 16th century Virgilian tradition and the cultural milieu of Elizabethan London, it suggests that Marlowe and Nashe's resurrection of Dido as a fully fleshed dramatic protagonist helped cement her place as an archetypal tragic figure within the Western canon, paving the way for her recurring presence in literature and culture up to the present day.

2. Virgil's Dido

2.1. The Aeneid and Its Cultural Importance

Any examination of Marlowe and Nashe's Dido must begin with her origins in Virgil's Aeneid. Composed in the reign of Rome's first emperor Augustus, the Aeneid became the Roman national epic, mythologizing the foundation of the Roman people by the Trojan hero Aeneas (Hardie, 2014). Across twelve books of Latin hexameters, Virgil wove Homeric epic and Roman history into an intricate, multi-layered narrative that would become "the central Latin literary text for the whole of late antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (Tarrant, 1997, p. 56).

The Aeneid narrates Aeneas' journey from the fall of Troy to his destiny in Italy, where he will become progenitor of the Latin people and Rome. On his wanderings, he encounters Dido, recently widowed queen of the fledgling North African city of Carthage. Virgil dedicates Books 1 and 4 of the epic to this episode, which concludes with Dido's tragic suicide.

Scholarship has long recognized that Virgil overlaid mythological elements onto historical realities in shaping Dido's story (Starks, 2013). Carthage was in fact founded around 814 BCE, almost 3 centuries before Aeneas' purported lifetime in the 12th century BCE (Lancel, 1995). The real founder seems to have been an exiled Tyrian princess called Elissa, rendered as Dido in later sources. By crafting a doomed romance between Aeneas and Dido, Virgil provides an origin story for the longstanding hostility between Rome and Carthage, which culminated in the Punic Wars of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE (Syed, 2005).

2.2. Dido in the Aeneid Virgil first introduces

Dido in Aeneid Book 1, as Aeneas arrives in Carthage, a city still under construction. Dido is presented as a capable and authoritative ruler, compared to the goddess Diana, and "no less courageous than her male counterparts" (McLeish, 1972, p. 126). In a key passage, Venus tells Aeneas of Dido's background:

"She was from Tyre, and fled her homeland when
Her brother Pygmalion ruled there – a monster
Of wickedness, who blindly killed Sychaeus, Dido's husband, as he prayed at the altar,
Without a thought of his sister's passion.
He long concealed the deed, and with base hope Fooled the lovesick queen. But in her sleep
She saw the likeness of her unburied husband... He told the altar's secrets, bared his chest,
Showing the knife wound and the house's evil. Then he advised her to make haste and leave
Her homeland..." (Aen. 1.441-452, trans. Fagles, 2010).

This backstory sets up Dido as a sympathetic figure and faithful widow, driven into exile by the cruelty of men. When Aeneas meets Dido, he is overwhelmed by her regal beauty and generosity in welcoming the shipwrecked Trojans. However, he cannot linger in Carthage, driven by his mission to reach Italy and fulfill his glorious Roman destiny (McLeish, 1972).

It is in Book 4 that Dido's story turns to tragedy, as Aeneas prepares to depart. Virgil portrays Dido as desperately in love with the Trojan hero, to the detriment of her reputation and responsibilities as queen. This has been engineered by the gods – Venus and Juno collaborate to make Dido fall helplessly for Aeneas, each with their own motivations. Venus wants to protect her son Aeneas, while Juno hopes to waylay Aeneas in Carthage and keep him from Italy (Hardie, 2014).

A famous episode unfolds in which Dido and Aeneas, out hunting, take shelter in a cave during a storm and consummate their relationship:

"Primeval Earth herself and Nuptial Juno
Opened the ritual, torches flared in heaven,
High on a crest the Nymphs cried out the wedding hymn.
That day was the first cause of death, the first
Of sorrow..." (Aen. 4.166-170).

Dido considers herself married to Aeneas, but when Mercury reminds Aeneas of his Italian destiny on Jupiter's orders, Aeneas prepares his ships to depart, untouched by Dido's pleas for him to stay. In a wrenching speech, Dido accuses Aeneas of betraying her love and calls down curses on him and his descendants (Aen. 4.584-705).

As the Trojans set sail, Dido can no longer bear to live. The poet describes her inner turmoil in vivid terms:

"...over and over, her mind turned on
The same thought, she still veered from decision to decision. Just as a grand old oak in the Alps, hacked by ax blades, Blow after blow, will begin to totter, threaten a long time, Trembling in its high leaves till gradually the last Mortal wound tears through, uprooting it from its ridge." (Aen.4.447-452)

In despair, Dido resolves to die by the sword on a funeral pyre:

"...she climbed the pyre's soaring height and bared
The Trojan sword – a gift desired for no such purpose.
There, once she saw the Trojan clothing, saw The bed they knew so well, she wavered a moment, Tears and memories welling up inside her. She sank to the bed and spoke her last: 'Dear relics,
Dear as long as Fate and the gods allowed, take This spirit of mine, release me from my torments..." (Aen. 4.900-907).

Dido's death scene is rendered with great pathos, showing her anguish and the "gifts, the clothes, the bridal bed of Aeneas, tokens of a happier time" (Hardie, 2014, p. 92). Virgil has her attendants find "her body drenched in blood, the sword impaled" (Aen. 4.907). Although Juno takes pity and releases Dido from her suffering, sending Iris to cut a lock of her hair, Virgil makes clear that Dido has died before her fated time, by violence and misguided passion:

"... this was a death before her day, the bitter End she chose in the heat of her frenzy – doomed Dido died..." (Aen.4.935-937).

Critics have long debated Virgil's intent in his portrayal of Dido. Clearly, Aeneas bears some of the blame for her death, showing a troubling capacity to abandon Dido despite her desperate pleas and his own professed love for her (McLeish, 1972). This casts a shadow on the heroism and pietas (duty and devotion) for which Virgil celebrates Aeneas elsewhere in the poem.

However, the poet is also deeply ambivalent toward Dido herself. Ultimately, her "Passion and emotions as a lover prove incompatible with her duties and responsibilities as a ruler" (Syed, 2005, p. 184). Dido is undone by desire for Aeneas, forgetting her political role, to the disapproval of her subjects. Virgil sees this as a transgression against her prior vow of chastity and loyalty to her dead husband Sychaeus, even though he invokes the gods as accomplices in her seduction (Rudd, 1990).

Throughout, Dido is subject to forces she cannot control, from the divine machinations of Venus and Juno to the political necessity that Aeneas forsake her for Italy. On a metapoetic level, her tragedy stems from Virgil's need to eliminate her as an obstacle to his overarching narrative of Rome's glorious rise. Dido is "a sacrifice to Roman destiny, the price of future Roman imperium" (Quint, 1989, p. 9).

For all the pathos Virgil grants her, Dido's story in the Aeneid ultimately serves to contrast the steadfast Roman pietas that Aeneas will found with the disorder and passions of the foreign

Other, embodied by Carthage (Syed, 2005). Her doomed struggle against fate heightens the tragedy, but also reaffirms the inevitability of Rome's triumph. As such, Dido remains constrained by Virgil's ideological framework, never becoming a full counterpoint to Aeneas nor transcending her instrumental role in Rome's ascendancy.

2.3. Dido's Medieval Reception

After Virgil, Dido remained best known through the prism of the Aeneid in the centuries that followed. Latin poets such as Ovid, Seneca, and Silius Italicus reworked elements of her story, with Ovid in particular expanding on her tragic epistle to Aeneas in his Heroides (Verducci, 2014). However, Virgil's formulation endured and preserved Dido as an example of passionate excess, abandoned love, and submission to Trojan/Roman male heroism (Desmond, 1994).

This view was filtered through Virgilian commentators such as Servius and Fulgentius, and colored the later medieval reception of Dido. She continued to symbolize unbridled desire, frequently contrasted with ideals of chaste Christian womanhood (Desmond, 1994). In his influential 5th century work The City of God, St. Augustine upheld Dido as an example of the dangers of lust and suicide. For Augustine, Dido's self-immolation revealed misplaced, idolatrous love of the earthly Aeneas over the divine (Wygant, 2016).

A similar perspective endured in medieval retellings of Dido's tale. In his massive 12th century historical work Speculum Historiale, Vincent of Beauvais emphasized Dido's prior vow of chastity and decried her violation of this as sinful concupiscence (Desmond, 1994). Early vernacular versions in Old French and Middle English, such as the anonymous Eneas and Caxton's Eneydos, largely retained Virgil's storyline while accentuating Dido's lustfulness and Aeneas' innocent victimhood (Baswell, 1995).

However, the later Middle Ages also saw new variations on Dido's character emerge. Notably, Chaucer granted her a degree of rehabilitation in his Legend of Good Women, where she appears alongside Cleopatra and Medea as a virtuous pagan woman wronged by men (Wygant,

2016). Chaucer reframes Dido as an innocent victim of Aeneas' betrayal and a martyr of sorts for true love. This more sympathetic view carried into the 15th century works of John Lydgate and Robert Henryson (Summit, 2012).

Despite this partial redemption, medieval Dido remained largely beholden to Virgil, a supporting character orbiting Aeneas rather than a fully independent tragic heroine. It would take the Renaissance humanists, with their project of carefully rereading and reinterpreting antiquity, to open up new literary possibilities for her character.

3. Marlowe and Nashe's Dido

3.1. Renaissance Humanism and Virgil

The European Renaissance, beginning in 14th century Italy and spreading north in the 15th-16th centuries, saw a surge of interest in the language, literature and culture of classical antiquity. Calling themselves "humanists" from the Latin studia humanitatis (studies of human nature), Renaissance scholars sought to revive and imitate Greco-Roman models across diverse fields of knowledge (Fubini, 2019).

For humanists, the pagan past offered an inspirational example of human potential and achievement. The recovery of ancient texts spurred an outpouring of scholarship, with humanists pouring over manuscripts to reconstruct authoritative editions of authors such as Cicero, Ovid and Seneca. But Renaissance humanism aimed at more than preservation and transmission. Humanists saw themselves in active, creative dialogue with antiquity, extending and reinventing classical materials for their own age (Baker, 2015).

Virgil occupied a central place in this humanist project. The Aeneid was minutely studied, inspiring a wealth of commentaries, translations and imitations. Its mythological framework provided a storehouse of motifs to be borrowed, reworked and subverted (Cummings & Martindale, 2013). Dido emerged as a particular focus of interest, given her prominence within the epic and the tragic potency of her tale.

In Italy, influential humanists such as Petrarch, Boccaccio and Dante had already begun to reshape Dido's character in the 14th century. Petrarch granted her a memorable cameo in his epic Africa, where she delivers a lengthy lament over her fate (Desmond, 1994). Boccaccio included a chapter on Dido in his compendium of famous women De Mulieribus Claris, praising her noble efforts to preserve her chastity before succumbing to love (McLeod, 1991). In Dante's Divine Comedy, Dido appears in the circle of Lust, but Dante places her alongside Helen and Cleopatra, elevating her into the company of legendary classical femmes fatales (Wygant, 2016).

The innovations made by these Italian humanists paved the way for further transformations of Dido on the Renaissance stage, both in their native land and eventually in England. Plays such as Giraldi Cinthio's Didone (1543) and Lodovico Dolce's Didone (1547) expanded the scope of her story and developed the elegiac, sympathetic strain already apparent in Petrarch and Boccaccio (Wygant, 2016). Dido's tale also featured in the Venetian epic romances of the mid-16th century, including Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso (1516) and Torquato Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata (1581).

These continental developments shaped Dido's reception in Elizabethan England, which experienced its own Renaissance somewhat later than Italy. English interest in Virgil accelerated from the 1550s onward, with prominent translations by the Earl of Surrey, Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne (Baswell, 1995). Building on this groundswell, Christopher Marlowe produced his own groundbreaking translation of the Aeneid, the first to use unrhymed iambic pentameter or blank verse (Cheney, 2009).

Published posthumously in 1600, but probably composed in the late 1580s, Marlowe's Aeneid demonstrates his deep engagement with Virgil's Latin (Riggs, 2004). Marlowe captures the epic's "living voice" in supple, muscular English poetry (Cheney, 2009, p. 193). His rendering

of the Dido episode in Aeneid 4 is particularly accomplished, conveying the queen's passion and anguish with vivid immediacy.

But Marlowe's fascination with Dido extended beyond poetic translation. Together with his contemporary Thomas Nashe, he penned a tragic stage version of her story entitled Dido, Queen of Carthage. First published in 1594, the year after Marlowe's death, the play may have originated during his university days at Cambridge in the 1580s (Deats, 2004). Its date of composition and initial performance is uncertain, but it seems to have been written for the boys' theater companies then popular in London (Lunney, 2011).

Dido, Queen of Carthage is a significant example of English Renaissance mythological drama. It follows the trend already apparent in Italy of using Virgil's poem as a source to create original, freestanding renditions of classical tales (Black, 2007). At the same time, it exemplifies the humanist technique of amplificatio or rhetorical expansion, elaborating on and subtly altering Virgil's portrait of Dido to craft a compelling tragic heroine (Crowley, 2011).

3.2. Expanding and Reframing Dido's Story

Marlowe and Nashe's play greatly expands the scope of Virgil's Dido episode, adding new scenes and characters. The drama covers events only briefly mentioned in the Aeneid, such as Dido's flight from Tyre and Aeneas' wanderings after the fall of Troy. As Crowley (2011) notes, this has the effect of making Dido and Aeneas' back stories "equally eventful and impressive" (p. 57). Whereas Virgil grants Aeneas the bulk of the narrative, Marlowe and Nashe establish Dido as a parallel protagonist from the outset, foreshadowing the tragic collision to come.

The playwrights also invented episodes and characters not found in Virgil, further fleshing out Dido's milieu. For instance, in Act 3 Dido hosts a lavish banquet for Aeneas where she requests he recount the fall of Troy, echoing a similar scene in Aeneid 1. Marlowe and Nashe use this as an opportunity to stage the tale of the Trojan horse, with Aeneas enlisting members of the Carthaginian court to play the Greeks in his metatheatrical reenactment (Crowley, 2011). This

dumbshow, or mime within the drama, wittily alludes to the Elizabethan vogue for stage plays about Troy, such as Thomas Heywood's The Iron Age (Purkiss, 2011).

Another striking departure from Virgil is the inclusion of Dido's ill-fated first husband Sychaeus as an onstage character. In Act 5, Sychaeus' ghost appears to the lovelorn Dido, accusing her of forgetting her vows and urging her to "leave Aeneas' love and repent" (5.1.2). This visitation from beyond the grave underscores the personal cost of Dido's dalliance with Aeneas and ratchets up the play's tragic tension.

Throughout, Marlowe and Nashe place the machinations of the gods in the forefront of the action. Whereas Virgil narrated the roles of Venus, Juno and the other immortals in a few brief passages, here they are major players, frequently descending from on high to intervene. Dido becomes a pawn in the rivalry between Venus, intent on protecting Aeneas, and Juno, determined to keep him from Italy (Godshalk, 1971). Farcical scenes depict Jupiter attempting to broker peace between the goddesses, like a harried father, as they hurl insults at each other.

Virgil had portrayed Cupid as a mere instrument of his mother Venus, disguising himself as Aeneas' son to inflame Dido's passion. Marlowe and Nashe grant Cupid much greater agency, puckishly delighting in his love-arrows' effects as he flits between the mortal and immortal realms. In one memorable episode, Venus whips Cupid for his disobedience, prompting him to tattle to Juno about his mother's plots.

This emphasis on divine squabbling renders Dido and Aeneas' fate all the more inevitable, subject to forces they cannot hope to control. At the same time, it somewhat absolves them of responsibility for the disastrous consequences of their love (Godshalk, 1971). Dido becomes a true tragic figure in Marlowe and Nashe's hands, brought low by powers beyond her command.

3.3. Deepening Dido's Character

Beyond plot expansions, Marlowe and Nashe significantly deepen and enlarge Dido's character. From her opening lines, their Dido is more assertive, politically engaged and quick-

witted than Virgil's relatively decorous queen. In Act 1, we see her supervising the building of Carthage, giving orders to her master architect. She is very much in command, boasting of the city's rapid rise:

"Now looks Aeneas like to louely Ilium, Before Aeneas stole Dame Helen thence. Come my Aeneas: leave these dumps; and let's Among the Soldier's sort their banquets, And quaff their bowls crown'd with Lyaeus' liquor..." (1.1.22-26).

However, Dido's authority is soon undermined by her consuming desire for Aeneas. In a key metatheatrical moment, Virgil himself appears onstage as a character to warn Dido of the folly of neglecting her duties as queen:

"O Dido, patroness of all our lives, When first thou build'st this town of Carthage, Jove did promise,

That golden Autumn with his starrye nights Should waite on thee, as long as Hell was dark. Why then dost stay? – Aeneas is ariv'd..." (2.1.53-59).

Despite this admonition, desire overwhelms Dido's reason and vows to Sychaeus. In the key cave scene, here relocated to Act 3, Marlowe and Nashe have Dido explicitly equate sex with marriage, declaring to Aeneas "Spouse, I yield myself to thy embraces" (3.4.28). This makes his later abandonment all the more wrenching a betrayal in her eyes.

Dido's anguish and rage at Aeneas' departure is the emotional crux of the play. Marlowe and Nashe retain Virgil's basic storyline here, with Aeneas preparing to sail for Italy at Mercury/Jupiter's command. But they increase the intensity of Dido's reaction, which builds over the course of an entire act. In a tour de force of vituperation, Dido berates Aeneas:

"These hands, these bloody hands, shall tear out that false heart of thine, And make thee know, sweet boy, what 'tis to mock Queen Dido's love. And when I have done't, then will I kill myself..." (5.1.117-119)

Dido cycles rapidly through different emotional registers in this scene, from fury to pleading to suicidal despair. She assumes a more dominant role in her final confrontation with Aeneas than in Virgil, reducing him to feeble protestation: "In vaine my love thou spendst thy fainting breath, | If words might move me I were overcome..." (5.1.148-9). This makes Dido's Virgilian rhetorical power her "weapon of vengeance" (Crowley, 2011, p. 67).

When pleading proves futile, Dido turns on Aeneas savagely, calling down destruction upon him in language that directly echoes Virgil's Latin:

"And let hell's fury on thy cursed head fall, For taking Dido from her native land, To lead a silly woman in love's trance..." (5.1.193-195)

At the same time, Dido acknowledges her own fatal role in succumbing to Aeneas: "O Dido, now learne by proofe what love can do" (5.1.215). This frank admission makes her a more psychologically complex figure than in the Aeneid. Marlowe and Nashe's Dido is self-aware enough to recognize that her ruin stems from her transgressive desires, yet too enthralled by Aeneas to escape them.

Dido's death unfolds with similar deviations from Virgil. In a departure from the Aeneid, Marlowe and Nashe stage Dido's suicide onstage rather than reporting it via messenger. Dido ascends the funeral pyre and unsheathes Aeneas' sword in full view of the audience, crying:

"Ay me, Aeneas! now Dido, time it is to die; Aeneas, in his flight, will ne'er look back to see His love forsaken Dido shed a tear. Sweet sword, farewell! Thou shalt kiss Dido's lips, And rid her from pain..." (5.1.282-286).

This choice heightens the impact of Dido's death throes and renders them with graphic immediacy:

"Now, Dido, come; we may no longer stay: The wound is deep, and mortal - yea, Dido dies!" (5.1.293-294).

In another innovation, Marlowe and Nashe grant the dying Dido a final speech that blends Virgil's Latin with their own poetic interpolations. Dido first invokes the sun, praying to have her death and Aeneas' betrayal remembered: "Phoebus, remember you of Dido's wrong!" (5.1.297). She then addresses the imaginary personifications of Death and Fame:

"O Anna, Anna! I see black death stands by, And now doth summon me to come with him: Jove grant, that Fame record with golden pen My death, as well as my declining life..." (5.1.303-306).

These lines suggest a kind of "heroic self-definition" for Dido (Crowley, 2011, p. 68). Even in death, she seeks to control how she will be memorialized, conscious of her legacy. Whereas Virgil portrayed Dido as a passive victim of fate, Marlowe and Nashe grant her the power to shape her own myth.

This is underscored by Dido's final words, addressed to the absent Aeneas:

"Now, Aeneas, hard-hearted Aeneas, stay; The time prefix'd is come, and I must die. Ay me! unhappy Dido, I must die." (5.1.311-313).

By naming Aeneas repeatedly, Dido places him at the center of her tragedy, refusing to let him evade responsibility. At the same time, the insistent repetition of "I must die" conveys her sense of doom and the play's overarching theme of female suffering at the hands of men (Crowley, 2011).

Dido expires with a plaintive, poetic apostrophe:

"O Earth, gape, and swallow Dido in, For in the world doth Aeneas only reign!" (5.1.314-315)

With this, Marlowe and Nashe's Dido becomes a sacrificial victim to Aeneas' imperial destiny, the Virgilian cost of Rome's future greatness. Yet she also emerges as a deeply tragic figure in her own right, undone by the very qualities that made her compelling - her passion, wit and fiery will.

3.4. Virgilian Tragedy and Humanist Reinvention

Dido, Queen of Carthage constitutes both an homage to Virgil and a transformative reworking of his epic material. Marlowe and Nashe remain broadly faithful to the Aeneid's outline, but alter key details to create a freestanding tragic drama. They retain Virgil's essential contrast between Dido's emotional abandon and Aeneas' Roman pietas, but deepen and enlarge Dido's character to grant her greater agency.

Dido is the driving force of Marlowe and Nashe's play, dominating the stage in a way she never could in Virgil's epic. By expanding the Virgilian material around her - the divine plotting, her backstory, the confrontations with Aeneas - they establish Dido as a compellingly conflicted tragic protagonist. She is both victim and agent of her downfall, subject to external manipulation yet never surrendering her rhetorical mastery and force of personality. Marlowe and Nashe grant Dido a belated victory over her fate through the memorializing power of the poetic utterance.

At the same time, the play is haunted by an awareness of the inevitability of Dido's tragedy. Virgil's shade appears onstage to foreshadow Dido's ruin and the suffering her love of Aeneas will unleash. The meddling of Venus and Juno underscores that the lovers are mere pawns of the gods, destined to be sacrificed for Aeneas' imperial future. Dido may rage against abandonment, but by evoking Virgil's canonical Latin, Marlowe and Nashe remind the audience that her story has already been written.

In this way, Dido, Queen of Carthage epitomizes the humanist approach to antiquity in the Renaissance. Marlowe and Nashe engage deeply with their Virgilian source, but move beyond mere homage or imitation. They flesh out Virgil's potent mythological framework to create an innovative work of English tragedy. Where Virgil constrained Dido to an instrumental, supporting role, Marlowe and Nashe place her inner turmoil and emotional experience at the center of their dramatic universe.

At the same time, their play remains in active dialogue with the Aeneid, nodding to its language and imagery throughout. The many metatheatrical moments, such as Virgil's appearance and Aeneas' miniature staging of the fall of Troy, draw attention to the way in which the authors are rewriting an established narrative. Dido's tragedy gains much of its power from the audience's knowledge of her canonical fate.

In some ways, Marlowe and Nashe's method anticipates the intertextual games of postmodern literature, juxtaposing and undercutting the authority of the classical text. However, they remain very much humanists in their careful, line-by-line engagement with Virgil's Latin and their commitment to using it as a foundation for original invention. Dido, Queen of Carthage is not a subversive or parodic text, but an attempt to draw out the human drama implicit in the Aeneid and realize it fully on the Renaissance stage.

Marlowe and Nashe's resurrection of Dido exemplifies the creative approach to antiquity that characterized English Renaissance humanism. Through their amplifications and alterations to Virgil, they transformed a relatively minor epic character into a vibrantly three-dimensional tragic heroine. In Dido, Marlowe and Nashe found a vehicle to explore themes of doomed love, female agency, and the tension between human desire and divine fate.

4. Conclusion

Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe's Dido, Queen of Carthage marked a pivotal moment in the afterlife of Virgil's legendary queen. Dido had already undergone something of a renaissance in medieval and early modern retellings of her tale, with figures like Petrarch, Chaucer and Boccaccio rehabilitating her reputation. But Marlowe and Nashe went further, seizing on the dramatic potential of her story to create a work of innovative Renaissance tragedy.

Drawing on the Virgilian material, Marlowe and Nashe greatly expanded Dido's role, granting her a depth of character and central position she never enjoyed in the Aeneid. Their Dido is a

passionate, formidable figure, alive to her own desires and to the machinations of fate that doom her. She rages magnificently against Aeneas' betrayal, all while acknowledging her complicity in succumbing to his charms. Marlowe and Nashe make Dido the architect of her own tragedy, a far cry from her often passive depiction in Virgil.

In crafting their portrait of Dido, Marlowe and Nashe exemplify the humanist approach to antiquity. They engage minutely with Virgil's language and themes, but move beyond imitation to create an original work of art. The many metatheatrical elements of the play, from Virgil's ghostly appearance to Aeneas' staging of the fall of Troy, draw attention to the way in which Marlowe and Nashe are reinventing an iconic narrative.

This resurrection of Dido on the Renaissance stage proved hugely influential. Marlowe and Nashe's innovations helped cement Dido as one of the great tragic heroines of Western literature, a stature she has enjoyed ever since. Their sympathetic and psychologically complex portrayal paved the way for her starring role in later works such as Henry Purcell's opera Dido and Aeneas (1689) and Berlioz's Les Troyens (1858).

Even today, Dido endures as an archetype of the woman undone by love, a perennial subject for novels, plays and films. Recent examples include Fiona Sampson's verse novel In Search of Mary Shelley (2018), which casts Mary Shelley as a latter-day Dido abandoned by her Aeneas, Percy Shelley. Jo Graham's historical fantasy novel Black Ships (2008) retells the Aeneid from the perspective of a oracle in Dido's court, depicted as a strong-willed North African queen.

In many ways, the Dido we know today - passionate, tragic, conflicted, but ultimately transcendent - originated with Marlowe and Nashe's humanist reinvention. By amplifying the Virgilian material to place Dido center stage, they created a foundation for her recurring role as a vehicle for exploring timeless themes of love and loss, agency and fate. Dido, Queen of

Carthage exemplifies the Renaissance humanist project of drawing on classical sources to fashion innovative, psychologically probing works of modern literature.

Of course, Dido's tale continued to be reshaped and reimagined after Marlowe and Nashe, sometimes in ways that challenged or subverted their sympathetic portrait. The Restoration playwright Elkanah Settle offered a far more negative take in his Empress of Morocco (1673), where Dido is portrayed as a haughty, lustful queen tamed by Roman masculinity. The 20th century Martinican poet Aimé Césaire reclaimed Dido as a symbol of African resistance to European colonization in his searing Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (1939).

Nonetheless, it is the Marlovian Dido - the fiery, tragic queen - who has proved most enduring in the popular imagination. Marlowe and Nashe's resurrection of Virgil's character laid the groundwork for her afterlife as an avatar for the plight of abandoned women and the conflict between human will and pitiless fate. In Dido, they found an ideal vehicle for the humanist project of revivifying antiquity, one that transcended the limitations of her source material.

Over four centuries after Dido, Queen of Carthage, writers and artists continue to be drawn to Dido's story. Her turbulent inner life, as channeled so vividly by Marlowe and Nashe, offers seemingly endless possibilities for exploring the human condition. Dido endures precisely because Marlowe and Nashe freed her from Virgilian constraint, granting her the fullness of literary life. In resurrecting Dido, they created the prototype for her countless reincarnations to come.

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