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‘SOUND THIS ANGRIE MESSAGE IN THINE EARES’:
SYMPATHY AND THE TRANSLATIONS OF THE AENEID IN
MARLOWE’S DIDO QUEENE OF CARTHAGE

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This article proposes that Marlowe’s Dido Queene of Carthage engages with both the English tradition of Virgil translation and the Renaissance commentaries on the Aeneid. Instead of looking at the divergences from Virgil, the focus is on Marlowe’s direct translations of the Aeneid. These translations are shown to be carefully selected and structured: they focus on speeches that were associated with Virgil’s formidable rhetorical power in Renaissance commentaries. In particular, Marlowe highlights the oratorical strength in the speeches of Virgil’s gods as they impose their wills upon humanity. Where Marlowe differs from previous translators and adapters of the Aeneid, however, is that he presents these divine imperatives without the sympathetic narrative that usually softens their violence. In doing so, he composes the one truly pessimistic response to the Aeneid in the English Renaissance.

DIDO. Now Dido, with these reliques burne thy selfe,
And make Aeneas famous through the world,
For perjurie and slaughter of a Queene:
Here lye the Sword that in the darksome Cave
He drew, and swore by to be true to me,
Thou shalt burne first, thy crime is worse then his;
Here lye the garment which I cloath’d him in,
When first he came on shoare, perish thou to:
These letters, lines, and perjurd papers all,
Shall burne to cinders in this pretious flame.
And now ye gods that guide the starrie frame,
And order all things at your high dispose,
Graunt, though the traytors land in Italy,
They may be still tormented with unrest,
And from mine ashes let a Conquerour rise,
That may revenge this treason to a Queene,
By plowing up his Countries with the Sword:
Betwixt this land and that be never league,
Littora littoribus contraria, fluctibus undas
Imprecor: arma armis: pugnent ipsique nepotes:
Live false Aeneas, truest Dido dyes,
Sic sic juvat ire sub umbras. (5.1.292–313)¹

This passionate speech of Dido's, from the final scene of Marlowe's *Dido Queene of Carthage*, illustrates the different layers of adaptation, imitation, translation and quotation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which run throughout this play. We can find here instances of free invention: line 300, for example, has no parallel in *Aeneid* 4, where there is no mention of 'papers' from Aeneas. We can find here examples of imitation: Dido addressing the relics that Aeneas left behind as she is about to commit them to the flames (292–4) is an adaptation of her speech at *Aeneid* 4.651ff., but Marlowe's rendition is only a very loose recreation. In lines 306–8, we can find a direct translation of lines 625–7 from *Aeneid* 4, where Dido pleads for an avenger to arise from her ashes. And in the Latin at the end of this passage, we can find exact quotations of the original lines 628–9 and 660 of Virgil's epic. As this speech of Dido's illustrates *in nuce*, Marlowe's play moves freely between different levels of engagement with the *Aeneid*. Although the majority of the play is free adaptation, which cannot be pinned down to any specific lines in Virgil's Latin, there are particular passages in Marlowe's drama that are demonstrably translations from Virgil. Roma Gill has considered the entirety of *Dido* as an example of the Renaissance category of translation called 'paraphrase', but her account tends to brush over the different layers within the drama.

Although the categories of imitation and translation were held in close proximity by most Renaissance theorists, they were typically considered distinguishable. Lawrence Humphrey offers the clearest theoretical discussion of this distinction from the English Renaissance in the *Interpretatio linguarum* (1559). Humphrey was keenly aware of the complications of categorizing translation and considers what different acts the Latin word 'interpretatio' can describe. Nevertheless, he is insistent that there is a real distinction that should be made between translation and imitation, which he characterizes as the difference between being an 'interpres' and a 'scriptor'. In Humphrey's account, one of the problems of excessive freedom in translation is that the boundaries between these two roles will be transgressed. The translator who works too freely behaves 'quasi interesset nihil inter scriptorem & interpretum'

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2 For ease of reference, all quotations of Virgil and references to line numbers in the *Aeneid* in this article refer to: Virgil, tr. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 1999-2000). I have checked all quotations in this article against multiple Renaissance editions and have found no significant discrepancies. Unless otherwise indicated, I also quote Fairclough's English translations.


[as if there were no difference between being a writer and a translator]. Humphrey explains:

Scriptor enim liber est, ut dicat quae uelit, & quo ordine, ac quibuscunque uerbis, modo probatis: interpres praefixam habet ob oculos metam, & terminos extra quos euagari non potest, si autoris sensum reddere fideliter, si officio suo satis uelit facere.

[For a writer is free to say what he wants, and in what order, and with whatever words, as long as they are of an approved kind, but the translator has a limit fixed before his eyes and boundaries beyond which he cannot wander, if he wants to render the meaning of the author faithfully and to fulfil his duty.]

Valerie Worth and Glyn P. Norton have noted that early modern French theorists also make this clear distinction; Worth writes that Du Bellay, Sebillet and Peletier, ‘even if recognizing the close relationship between translation and imitation, nevertheless conceive of translation as a separate and identifiable category’. Marlowe’s Dido could arguably be considered as ‘translation’, though its status as such varies throughout, and only select portions of the text strive to maintain a high degree of fidelity to Virgil’s Latin. Marlowe’s tragedy jumps back and forth over the boundaries that Renaissance writers established between ‘scriptor’ and ‘interpres’, often blurring the obvious demarcations.

Studies of Dido have so far overwhelmingly focused on those instances where Marlowe moves the furthest away from Virgil: critics look towards the places where Marlowe can be seen as intentionally ‘subverting’ Virgilian authority, where he can be seen to be marking out his difference. Such a principle underlies studies such as those by Emma Buckley, Roma Gill, Malcom Kelsall, Clare R. Kinney, as well as Mary E. Smith’s book on this play, ‘Love Kindling Fire’. For Smith, ‘the differences between Marlowe and Virgil are more significant than the similarities’. Recently, many critics, such as Patrick Cheney, Clifford Weber and Deanne Williams, have also speculated about the contemporary political relevance of the drama. In this article, however, the focus is on another side of Marlowe’s

5 Lawrence Humphrey, Interpretatio linguarum, 23.
6 Lawrence Humphrey, Interpretatio linguarum, 23-4.
tragedy. I am interested primarily in those moments in the drama where we can say that Marlowe moves ‘closest’ to Virgil’s Latin: those moments that can be identified as translation proper.

Such a study of the direct translations in Dido can, I argue, establish three new insights into the play. First, the translations, far from being negligible additions, are fundamental to the play’s structure. Translations both open and bring to a close the plot of Dido, and they are organized to highlight the violence inherent in the Virgilian gods’ interactions with men. Second, contrary to previous critical wisdom, I will show that Marlowe closely engages with both the English tradition of Virgil translation and currents of Renaissance commentaries on the Aeneid. Dido needs to be considered within such a context and not simply in light of Marlowe’s later works. Such a context, furthermore, can help us identify what makes Marlowe’s response to Virgil unique in the English Renaissance. Marlowe alone presents translations of the poem stripped of the sympathetic narrative voice of the epic. In all other sixteenth-century Dido dramas, this voice is re-incorporated through the inclusion of choruses; in all other translations, it is inherent in the Virgilian narrative. In contrast, Marlowe isolates the divine imperatives of Virgil’s gods, and lays them out for the reader with the greatest conceivable force.

Marlowe’s Dido and the Renaissance Aeneid

At the end of the introduction to her critical edition of Dido, Roma Gill states that Marlowe’s play does not engage with the translations or commentaries that were prevalent in his time:

Marlowe ignored other English translations of the Aeneid that would have been available in print to him, and he seems to have had no need of a commentary on the Latin, such as the one he used when translating Lucan. 11

In the case of Marlowe, we do not possess the copy of Virgil that he owned, and there is no clear indication to point towards a specific edition. The question of how best to contextualize Marlowe’s translation within a broader reception of Virgil in Renaissance England has thus proved challenging. However, in spite of Gill’s statement, there are some signs that Marlowe’s reading does engage with at least a couple of prominent aspects of both the English translation tradition and Renaissance commentaries on the Aeneid.

One particularly revealing interpolation by Marlowe—and one that has not received sufficient attention—comes at the end of Act 3. Dido and Aeneas have

been driven together by the storm, and just before they leave the stage to enter the
cave, Aeneas exclaims to Dido:

AENEAS. If that your majestie can looke so lowe,
As my despised worths, that shun all praise,
With this my hand I give to you my heart,
And vow by all the Gods of Hospitalitie,
By heaven and earth, and my faire brothers bowe,
By Paphos, Capys, and the purple Sea,
From whence my radiant mother did descend,
And by this Sword that saved me from the Greekes,
Never to leave these newe upreared walles,
While Dido lives and rules in Junos towne,
Never to like or love any but her. (3.4.41–51)

This elaborate declaration by Aeneas has no parallel in the Latin: Virgil tiptoes
very cautiously around the issue of what was or was not said by Aeneas. He leaves
the reader to imagine what sort of pledges of love or faith Aeneas may have offered
to Dido. All we are explicitly told is that she ‘coniugium vocat’ (4.172) [‘calls it
marriage’]. So why does Marlowe add this declaration? The proper context for
reading this interpolation is found within the English tradition of Virgil transla-
tion. The silence of Aeneas in the Virgilian version of this episode led to one of the
major points of disputation regarding the quality of Aeneas’s character. This crux
became a focal point, in the two centuries before Marlowe, in the work of Geoffrey
Chaucer and Gavin Douglas.

As has been demonstrated by Christopher Baswell, Chaucer’s reading of the
_Aeneid_ is rich and complex. Confronting the varied and conflicting readings of
Virgil available in late medieval England (pedagogical and allegorical responses, an
Ovidian counter-tradition, and medieval romances), Chaucer revels in the her-
meneutic discrepancies. In the *House of Fame* and the *Legend of Good Women*,
he makes Dido into the ‘center of an unresolved hermeneutic dialogue between lit-
erary traditions’. Chaucer tends to view the _Aeneid_ from one angle at one
moment, but then to switch to another angle a moment later, constantly asking
questions as to where the real poetic authority is to be located. In the ‘Legend of
Dido’, this agonistic treatment of the different traditions is evident from the very
beginning:

Glorye and honour, Virgil Mantoan,
Be to thy name! and I shal, as I can,
Folwe thy lanterne, as thow gost byforn,
How Eneas to Dido was forsworn.
In thyn Eneyde and Naso wol I take
The tenor, and the grete effectes make.13

L. D. Benson and others (eds), _The Riverside Chaucer_, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2008), 608.
Here Chaucer begins by honouring the name of Virgil and claiming that he will follow him, by using the image that Dante uses of Statius following Virgil. However, even by the fourth line Chaucer has veered away from Virgil’s lantern towards the romance tradition, and in the fifth line Ovid interjects. Moreover, Chaucer all the while assertively speaks in his own voice, as if he will arbitrate for himself between the different versions. Hence he feels free to add in the non-Virgilian detail that ‘Eneas to Dido was forsworn’. There are two points about this statement that are remarkable: first, it represents a sort of hermeneutic levelling, in which Virgil’s text is not exclusively privileged and other details can be added from outside; second, it undercuts the epideictic reading of the *Aeneid*, which was already favoured in the fourteenth century, especially among Italian authors. If the *Aeneid* is seen as the epitome of epideictic rhetoric, then Aeneas cannot be touched with blame.  

Gavin Douglas completed his manuscript translation of the *Aeneid* in 1513, by which time the epideictic reading of Virgil had become standard. Douglas thus pointedly objects to Chaucer’s ‘Legend of Dido’. As an early Scottish humanist, Douglas includes with his translation poetic commentaries, which claim that his work returns to the original purity of Virgil’s text (‘Rycht so am I to Virgillis text ybund’).  

He writes for an aristocratic audience (‘At the request of a lord of renown | Of anciestry nobill and illustir baroun’), and attempts to show that Aeneas possesses ‘euery vertu belangand a nobill man’. In his prologue to Book 1, Douglas comments very shrewdly on Chaucer’s ‘Legend of Dido’:

My mastir Chauser gretly Virgill offendit.
All thoch I be tohald hym to repreif,
He was fer baldar, certis by hys leif,
Sayand he followit Virgillis lantern toforn,
Qhhou Eneas to Dydo was forsworn.
Was he forsworn? Than Eneas was fals–
That he admittis and callys hym traytour als.
Thus, wenyng allane Ene to haue reprevit,
He haß grety the pynce of poetis grevit.
For, as said is, Virgill dyd diligens,
But spot of cryme, reproch, or ony offens,
Eneas for to loif and magnyfy,
And gif he grantis hym maynswnow fowlwy,
Than all hys cyvr and crafty engyne gais quyte.  

To challenge Aeneas’s actions in Book 4 of the *Aeneid* is not only to challenge his behaviour at that moment, but to undercut an entire model for reading the poem. Likewise, in the Phaer-Twyne translation, which was the dominant English

version of the *Aeneid* in English when Marlowe was writing his play, Aeneas is a perfect and wise man: an early gloss tells us, ‘Vnder the name of Eneas is described in Virgill the part of a perfite wise man and valiant capteyn if ye marke it’.19 If any point was a crux for disputing this claim, however, it was Aeneas’s love affair with Dido.

With its elaborate declaration of love by Aeneas, Marlowe’s *Dido* of course falls on the side of Chaucerian freedom and works against the humanist response of Douglas. Inserting such a declaration into the play is a firm repudiation of the epideictic version of Virgil. Instead of the clear humanistic model of reading Virgil, Marlowe was drawn closer to the hermeneutic intermingling of the Chaucerian model. Like Chaucer, Marlowe is interested in probing the authority of the Virgilian text, by setting it alongside other possibilities. As Dido herself states, ‘For many tales goe of that Cities fall, | And scarcely doe agree upon one poynyt’ (2.1.108–9). As Emma Buckley has recently stressed, *Dido* is a play that is aware of conflicting versions of the very story that it is telling.20 However, what has not been sufficiently taken into account, and what is made clear by looking at this passage in light of Douglas, is that a specifically epideictic conception of the *Aeneid* is at stake.

The second major issue in Renaissance responses to the *Aeneid*, which shapes Marlowe’s drama, pertains to the oratorical qualities of the epic. As an example, we can begin again with a particular oddity of this play: in *Dido*, Aeneas is presented time and again as being a brilliant orator. Dido asks her sister, ‘Speakes not *Aeneas* like a Conqueror?’ (4.4.93) And whereas Virgil’s Dido exclaims about Aeneas, ‘quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!’ (4.11) [‘How noble is his mien! How brave in heart and feats of arms!’], Marlowe’s Dido translates, ‘Is not *Aeneas* faire and beautifull? [...] Is he not eloquent in all his speech?’ (3.1.63–5; my italics) With a similar enthusiasm for the play’s oratory, Gavin Douglas had written about Virgil’s ‘flude of eloquens’,21 and indeed it was probably from Douglas’s translation, which was printed in London in 1553, that Marlowe took the idea of Dido being captured by Aeneas’s speech, rather than his face. At this very point Douglas’s Dido had exclaimed, ‘Quhou wyß in speche and in his commonyng | He schawys hym self’.22 Regarding Aeneas’s speeches in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, modern scholars could hardly react more differently. Feeney, for instance, writes about the ‘taciturnity’ of Aeneas in the face of Dido’s rhetorical flourishes.23 However, in Marlowe’s translation, both Aeneas and Dido are consummate rhetoricians. One part of this transformation is certainly the incorporation of Aeneas the storyteller into the drama. In the *Aeneid*, ‘Aeneas the storyteller’ displays a deft command of language and rhetoric, but this storyteller

20 Buckley, ‘“Live false Aeneas!”’, 130-1. 21 Douglas, ii, 11, l. 310.
22 Douglas, ii, 155, ll. 21-2.
exists in two books only. Today, these books are often treated as separable (as for instance Feeney does in his essay) from the general characteristics of Aeneas as a taciturn man elsewhere in the epic. Marlowe breaks down this division and creates a consistently loquacious and eloquent hero. His fascination with the rhetorical side of characters in the *Aeneid* is a distinctive part of the Renaissance reception of Virgil.

The rediscovery and first printing of Tiberius Claudius Donatus’s commentary in 1488 marks one of the key points in the transition from the medieval to the Renaissance *Aeneid*. Donatus became the second most printed commentary from 1469 to 1599, second only to Servius. In Donatus’s commentary, Virgil’s primary skill is that he is the greatest of all orators. Donatus believed that the essential quality of Virgil’s writing was its oratorical strength. His commentary thus concentrates on this quality in every book of the *Aeneid*. At the beginning of the commentary, Donatus states, ‘si maronis carmina competenter attenderis, & eorum mentem congrue comprehenderis, inuenies in poeta rethorem summum, atque inde intelleges urigilium non grammaticos, sed oratores praecepuos tradere debuisse’ ['if you attend correctly to the poems of Virgil and fittingly grasp their spirit, you will find in the poet the greatest rhetorician, and from this fact you will understand that it is not grammarians, but rather the chief orators who ought to teach Virgil’]. Virgil displays the ‘artem plenissimam dicendi’ ['fullest art of speaking'], and this oratorical capacity comes through in the speeches of all the characters in the epic. Thus Juno’s persuasive speech to Aeolus in Book 1 is praised in no uncertain terms: ‘hunc locum si quis attentius, diligentiusque discutiat, nihil quod non miretur inueniet. est enim arte & subtilitate dicentis admodum satiatus’ ['if one examines this point rather attentively and diligently, one will find nothing that one will not marvel at, for it is wholly filled with the art and subtlety of speaking']. Gods and men have remarkable powers of speech. It was this Renaissance tradition of reading the *Aeneid* as a fount of oratory that influenced Douglas and Marlowe when they write of the extraordinary eloquence of Virgil’s characters.

How Marlowe ultimately treats the powers of speech in the *Aeneid*, however, is greatly different from the standard, moral tradition, which subsumes all of the

epic’s rhetorical grandeur under the category of laudativum. In Marlovian drama in general, power and rhetoric are closely tied together. As Harry Levin writes, Driven by an impetus towards infinity and faced with the limitations of the stage, the basic convention of Marlovian drama is to take the word for the deed. [...] Magniloquence does duty for magnificence. [...] Hence the hero is a consummate rhetorician and, conversely, weakness is represented as speechlessness. 30

Levin was writing here specifically about Tamburlaine, most likely composed shortly after Dido, but this statement seems true of the earlier play as well. In an epideictic conception of rhetoric, the power of language is fundamentally benevolent and will sway an audience towards the good. In Marlowe, however, this is not necessarily the case; in fact, it is rarely the case. Even in this early play, we can witness the dramatist exploring for what ends of deception and coercion language can be used. Stephen Greenblatt has argued that Marlowe’s conception of rhetoric is essentially Gorgian, which is to say that deception is the very essence of its practice. 31 When we consider the translations from Virgil below, we shall see how deception and coercion are two common themes in Marlowe’s reception of Virgil.

What seems to have fascinated Marlowe about the Renaissance Aeneid are thus two different facets. One is the sheer rhetorical power embodied in the speeches in the epic. Marlowe found himself in a position where highlighting this aspect of the Aeneid was aided by the cast he was writing for: the primary asset of a child actor was his voice, which would be highly trained in elocution. 32 This connection between the casting of children and the rhetorical aspects of Marlowe’s Dido has been recognized astutely by Jackson I. Cope, who argued that with their training, ‘the sweet singing boys were ideally prepared to declaim complex verse’. 33 Such a cast thus gave Marlowe a chance to foreground elaborate speeches. The second is the status of Virgilian authority: how the different hermeneutic strands of the Renaissance reception of Virgil can be placed against each other. Patrick Cheney has argued that for Marlowe, Virgil and Spenser remain ‘largely monolithic’ poets, who represent first and foremost a writing of nationhood. 34 In Cheney’s account, Marlowe then opposes this with a poetics of counter-nationhood, modelled upon Ovid (and, as he has argued more recently, the Lucanian sublime). 35 Opposition or subversion, however, is too simple a model for Marlowe’s engagement with the Aeneid. There were distinctive qualities associated with the Renaissance Virgil by which he was fascinated. These qualities must be brought into any consideration of the translations within the play.

34 Patrick Cheney, Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood (Toronto, 1997), 15.
35 Patrick Cheney, Marlowe’s Republican Authorship, 82.
Translations of the *Aeneid* in *Dido Queene of Carthage*

In *Dido*, translations from the *Aeneid* are found almost exclusively in Acts 1 and 5. Acts 2, 3 and 4 together only include a handful of lines that show a direct reliance upon the Latin. Translations thus provide a framework, within which Marlowe invents much of his own material for the central acts. While source study can often become a rather dry and unrewarding pursuit, in the case of *Dido* it reveals much about the basic structure of the play and provides insights into the method of composition. In this section, I will trace all of the key instances in the drama where Marlowe is conspicuously translating Virgil. As we shall see, there is a pattern and a common significance to those moments when Marlowe moves himself closest to Virgil, where he translates rather than freely adapts.

Act 1 begins with Jupiter famously dandling Ganymede upon his knee. This opening, which is pure Marlovian invention, serves to call into question the ethical value of the god who is overseeing the universe, as critics have frequently remarked. Judith Weil has convincingly argued that this opening sets up an ironic analogy for the audience, who will later see Dido dandling Cupid upon her knee, and even later the old nurse dandling Cupid as well. The audience will then perceive that *eros* seems to be guiding this whole Marlovian cosmos, and that justice and pleasure are not being distributed fairly. The opening scene of the play thus emphasizes the *unernst* aspect of the classical gods—an aspect that is hinted at in Virgil, but never so clearly foregrounded. Perhaps Marlowe was responding to these hints in the original, but Virgil is never so overtly provocative as Marlowe is at the beginning of his play. Marlowe portrays Jupiter handing over all control to Ganymede: ‘Sit on my knee, and call for thy content, / Controule proud Fate, and cut the thred of time’ (1.1.28–9). Erotic indulgence is thus the first note that is sounded in *Dido*.

The Jupiter of Act 1 scene 1 is not, however, simply the god of Marlovian *eros*. Remarkably, later in the same scene, when Venus pleads with the king of the gods to save her son, he responds in lines that directly imitate and translate Virgil’s Latin. After a free and provocative beginning, when Marlowe came to Jupiter’s prophecy, he evidently put the text of Virgil in front of him as he wrote. The beginning and end of Jupiter’s speech, for instance, clearly translate into English *Aeneid* 1.257–8 and 272–4. The careful reproduction of the Latinate adjectives and proper names calls attention to the source text. ‘Parce metu, Cytherea’ literally becomes ‘Content thee Cytherea in thy care’ (1.1.82), and ‘Hic iam ter centum totos regnabitur annos | gente sub Hectorea’ becomes ‘Thus in stoute Hectors race three hundred yeares’ (1.1.104). For a moment, Virgil’s authorial presence appears within Marlowe’s drama. Given how different the initial Marlovian presentation of Jupiter is, the return to the Virgilian Jupiter so swiftly is perhaps meant to surprise an audience, but it also establishes early on that Marlowe is not always writing...

freely, away from Virgil’s epic. He keeps his copy of Virgil at hand, as it were, and consults it on occasion. Marlowe takes care to integrate translation here, and the importance of this early moment in the narrative should not be underestimated. It is the one moment that sets out the providential course that the epic, or drama, will need to take: Jupiter prophesies that Aeneas will eventually land in Italy, and that he shall found the Roman race. Aeneas’s political mission will thus overrule his affection for Dido and Carthage. And Marlowe spells it out in authoritative tones, in the Virgilian voice. According to Donatus, the phrase ‘parce metu, Cytherea’ is part of Jupiter taking on the ‘personam regis, non patris’ [‘character of a king, not of a father’], and it is remarkable how quickly the king of gods can secure peace when he wishes: ‘Quam cito mærentis animum soluit!’ [‘How quickly he relieves the mind of the grieving one!’]. 38 The secure, divine providential framework is thus looming in the background of Dido, even if the opening suggested another direction. The spectator is thus left to wonder how the Marlovian Jupiter and the Virgilian Jupiter should ultimately fit together.

The most extended sequence of translation in Act 1 scene 1, however, does not come until later, during the encounter between Venus and Aeneas (187–202). The goddess, disguised as a Tyrian huntress/maid, confronts her son and informs him that he has landed in Libya, that Carthage is near and that his ships have not been lost in the storm. This sequence covers nearly 70 lines and is the most sustained instance of translation in Dido. It includes translations of Aeneid 1. 321–3, 326–34, 335–41, 369–70, 378–83, 384–5, 390–1 and 407–9. Marlowe renders a few lines, then leaps forward, renders a few more lines, and then leaps forward again. The only major omission (341–69) is Venus’s account of Dido’s past.

Along with Marlowe’s translation of this sequence between Venus and Aeneas, and his translations from the prophecy of Jupiter, the one other substantial translation in Act 1 is in scene 2 and is taken from the speech of Ilioneus to Dido at Aeneid 1.522–41. In Marlowe’s play, however, the speech is split into three different parts and given to three different speakers: Ilioneus, Cloanthus and Sergestus. (1.2.4–47). Together, these three instances of translation—Jupiter’s prophecy, the Venus and Aeneas dialogue, and the speeches to Dido—make up a significant portion of Act 1. What, if anything, do they hold in common? In the case of the first two, it is clear that they both involve the relations between gods and men. These are moments where the gods determine the course the Trojans will have to take. The third instance, the speech of Ilioneus, does not as clearly fit in; but we should note that the centre point (and the bulk) of this brief translation is the declaration to Dido that the Trojans are seeking out ‘Hesperia’. It thus once again pertains to the fated mission of Aeneas and his men. What Marlowe does in Act 1 of his play is to present a series of translations from the Aeneid, intermingled with his own provocative inventions. The translations set a predominantly Virgilian tone near the outset, and the characters are placed in the context of the Virgilian mission destined for them by the gods.

38 Donatus, Donati in libros dvodecim Aeneidos, sig. B6v.
The translation from Act 1 scene 2 is the last extended piece of translation for almost three full acts. Given how much translation there is in scene 1, one might be surprised to see how far Marlowe travels from his source. The lack of translation in the central acts is striking in itself. It is not simply a matter of there not having been opportunities to include translations. The 160 line account of the fall of Troy in Act 2 surely provided numerous opportunities to translate passages from the *Aeneid*. However, Marlowe avoids direct translation, and, as J. B. Steane writes, Marlowe’s ‘version of the story is virtually independent of its source’. 39 Instead of translating Virgil, Marlowe uses the opportunity to engage in Lucanian hyperbole and horrors:

**AENEAS**  Yong infants swimming in their parents bloud,
   Headles carkasses piled up in heapes,
   Virgins halfe dead dragged by their golden haire,
   And with maine force flung on a ring of pikes. (2.1.193–6)

Likewise, Act 3 scene 2 would seem to present many obvious opportunities for translation. In this scene Juno and Venus discuss the happenings at Carthage and debate what course events may take. This is clearly built upon *Aeneid* 4.90–128. But Marlowe again avoids letting the dramatic speeches move too close to Virgil, who is held at arm’s length. Instead, the language of this passage blends into the occasionally exalted, often playful, amorous lyricism that pervades the central act. With one very brief possible exception, the central acts avoid engaging the *Aeneid* directly. Indeed, it is as if the Virgilian narrative is temporarily forgotten. And I would argue that this is precisely the effect that Marlowe would have wanted the central acts to have upon their audience: they open up a space in which the Virgilian original fades into the background. The re-emergence of the original towards the end of the play is thus made all the more dramatic.

In *Aeneid* 4, Iarbas’s invocation marks a turning point. His complaint to Jupiter leads the narrative up to heaven, where the king of the gods acknowledges the prayer, and then sends Mercury down to earth to tell Aeneas he must leave Carthage. It is the starting point of the god’s intervention that leads towards the final tragedy of Aeneas’s departure. And it is entirely fitting with Marlowe’s practice of Virgil translation in this drama that this speech should begin the move back towards the Latin source. Much like the speech by Jupiter at the beginning of the play, Iarbas’s invocation of the gods in Act 4 scene 2 is not fully a translation, but Marlowe has put the Latin in front of himself once again. 40 The structure of the speech precisely mirrors the structure of Virgil’s: there is an invocation of Jupiter at the beginning, a switch to a complaint about Dido just short of half-way through (again at the beginning of a line), and then a plea for justice, the due reward for his piety, at the end of the speech. Several of the lines within this invocation are also close translations: ‘cui litus arandum | cuique loci leges dedimus’ (4.212–3), for

instance, becomes ‘[w]ith whom we did devide both lawes and land’ (4.2.14), and ‘femina, quae nostris errans in finibus’ (4.2.11) becomes ‘[t]he woman that [... ] straying in our borders up and downe’ (4.2.11–2). Iarbas’s invocation hints at the return of the Virgilian voice, which is to come in Act 5, and it effectively does so by subtly reincorporating translation from the Aeneid at the most ominous of moments.

At the beginning of Act 5, Marlowe’s Aeneas has decided that he will stay in Carthage. He and his fellow Trojans are debating what to name their city, and they appear to be perfectly happy in their current state: ‘Triumph, my mates’, exclaims Aeneas, ‘our travels are at end.] Here will Aeneas build a statelier Troy’ (5.1.1–2). The drama appears to have reached an elated stasis, where the characters are existing in a seemingly endless state of lyrical pleasure. Shortly before, Dido had remarked, ‘If he forsake me not, I never dye, | For in his lookes I see eternitie, | And heele make me immortall with a kisse’ (4.4.121–3). Act 4 ends on such an elated note, and Act 5 begins with a subsequent and satisfied calm. But this ends when Mercury descends upon Carthage. And when he presents Jupiter’s message that Aeneas must leave, Marlowe reverts, for the first time since Act 1, into an extended direct translation.41 As I have shown, the translations in Act 1 focused on the gods and their relations with men, and the fate to which they have destined Aeneas. The same is true in Act 5, where this declaration by Mercury turns the drama on its head. In Renaissance commentaries, the vehemence of this speech by Mercury is given special emphasis. The speech is described by Donatus as an emphatic ‘obiurgatio’ [‘rebuke’].42 Two of the most influential Renaissance commentaries in circulation in the sixteenth century, Cristoforo Landino’s and Jodocus Badius Ascensius’s, both likewise emphasize the vehement tone. They illustrate how Virgil rhetorically stresses the gravity of Mercury’s command. For instance, Landino begins by describing Jupiter’s command as an ‘oratio plena indignationis’ [‘an oration full of indignation’].43 As Badius notes, Jupiter’s power is highlighted to emphasize both the authority of the command and the fear it should instil: ‘Ipse deum[:] Huius personæ auctoritate, grauiorem facit suam obiurgatione & vt maior sit metus, potestatem ipsius describit’ [‘The king of gods: by the authority of this person he makes the rebuke even graver, and he describes Jupiter’s power so that Aeneas’s fear will be greater’].44 Marlowe’s tragedy picks up all its momentum from this point—there is no turning back. The Virgilian voice, which had largely been forgotten since the first act, returns with a vengeance here at the beginning of Act 5.

42 Donatus, Donati in libros dvodecim Aeneidos, sig. L5v.
43 I quote Landino’s commentary from the Venice, 1499 edition of Virgil ‘with five commentaries’: Publii Virgilii Maronis opera cum commentariis (Venice, 1499), fol. 189v. Translations are my own.
44 I quote Badius’s commentary from the Venice, 1558 edition of the ‘vniversum poema’ Virgil: P. Vergilii Maronis, poete Mantuani, universum poema (Venice, 1558), fol. 209r. Translations are my own.
J. B. Steane has argued that Act 5 is an artistic failure because it moves much closer to Virgil. It seems he took this as a sign that it was a rushed effort. He supposes that Marlowe did not invest himself so thoroughly in the final sequence of events, as he did earlier in the play, and the direct quotations from the Latin are the epitomes of this lack of artistic engagement:

But his being content merely to quote Virgil shows him not to be taken up, involved in the material, as he had been in Aeneas’ narrative. The impression throughout is that he is in too much of a hurry: doing a job, no more.  

Steane, as do others, places far too much value on Marlovian independence in Dido. The instances of closeness to Virgil are just as integral to the drama’s structure. And if Steane condemns Act 5 on these principles, he would have to condemn Act 1 as well, which contains as much Virgilian material. Instead, it is more fruitful to see the incorporation of translations and quotations as a structural device, which Marlowe utilizes to frame his play and, most importantly, to contrast with the free lyrical invention that predominates in the central acts. The carefully controlled translations of the Latin that pile up in Act 5 are selected from all parts of Book 4 of the Aeneid; and they create the impression of a narrative that is collapsing towards its closure, after it seemed to reach towards infinity at the end of Act 4.

The text of Virgil, which appears through the translations, intrudes when the play first sets out its providential vision, and then again when it drives towards its realization. There are three ways that suggest themselves for interpreting this frame. On the one hand, we could perhaps say that Marlowe is, even at this early stage in his career, reluctant to write his own tragic endings. Prolonged tragic conclusions were not his strength, and so he modestly left the task of bringing Dido to an end to Virgil, an author more skilled in this area—so Roma Gill has argued.  

Following another line of argument, we could see this frame of translations as evidence of the joint authorship of the play. The title page of the 1594 printing of Dido states that it was ‘[w]ritten by Christopher Marlowe, and Thomas Nash. Gent.’ (The italicized part is in a smaller type-size and is placed a line below.) One could argue that the closer adherence to the source text in Acts 1 and 5 has something to do with the two distinct authors at work. The shift from more Virgilian parts to the freer central acts could be a sign of a change in authorship, as Brian Vickers has recently argued is the case with the Latinist George Peele’s

46 Roma Gill, ‘Marlowe and the Art of Translation’, 336: ‘I prefer to think that in retaining some of Vergil’s lines Marlowe is betraying a quality not usually attributed to him—modesty. And, of course, an appreciation of the great beauty of those particular lines’.
47 Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, p. 43.
role in Titus Andronicus. This solution, however, has a couple of problems. The first is that critics of this play have not reached any sort of conclusion as to what part Nashe might have written. The vast majority of critics treat Dido solely as Marlowe’s play, and Don Cameron Allen’s judgment may be taken as typical: Nashe’s ‘share, if I may use the touchstone of my intuition, was certainly inconsequential’. Almost all critics agree that Marlowe’s voice seems to be at work throughout the whole drama, including the translations. Moreover, the initial audience would have viewed the play as an artistic unity. The approach I am taking is to consider it as such. By doing so, it can be viewed as a carefully crafted whole, and these translations play an important part within this whole.

Marlowe found a narrative violence in Virgil’s epic that he brings in at carefully planned moments of his drama. This narrative violence is found above all in the arbitrary strength of the gods and their power over men. The translations thus act as rhetorical interventions, which ultimately drive the drama towards its tragic conclusion. A learned audience member could have recognized these moments. The protagonists are allowed to dabble in Ovidian lyricism throughout much of the play. It is a world in which Dido can ask, ‘What more then Delian musicke doe I heare, | That calles my soule from forth his living seate, | To move unto the measures of delight?’ (3.4.52–4) When the Virgilian passages appear in the fifth act, however, they spur on moments of recognition, in which the characters, as it were, are forced to remember the epic space they are supposed to inhabit: the lyrical and romance figures of the central acts suddenly find themselves within a different universe. It becomes a world in which imperial matters impose themselves with the powerful rhetorical gestures of the Virgilian original.

Colin Burrow and David Quint have written about how Virgilian epic imposes order upon narrative. Burrow writes, ‘This history of Virgil’s influence suggests that the imaginative drive of the Aeneid lies in its digressions, in the way vagrant desires are stunned and discarded. This makes it a powerfully perverse poem: its energy lies in what it asserts to be irrelevances’. In a similar vein, David Quint has commented,

Virgil’s poem attached political meaning to narrative form itself. To the victors belong epic, with its linear teleology; to the losers belongs romance, with its random or circular wandering. Put another way, the victors experience history as a coherent, end-directed story told by their own power.

51 As Mary E. Smith argues, in the translations of Virgil ‘the translator of Ovid and Lucan can be seen at work’ (‘Love Kindling Fire’, 111).
Thus pity, in the case of Burrow’s study, and resistance to empire, in the case of Quint’s, threaten to protract teleological missions interminably, but Virgilian narrative turns these impulses back. In *Dido*, Marlowe is interested in exactly this sort of rhetorical violence that can pull a narrative back onto its course. He has little faith in the grand scheme: Marlowe highlights the capricious aspects of his king of the gods. But he nonetheless preserves power for the gods. It is a power that, in this play, leads towards an ending, whereas in his later plays, when his heroes assume such rhetorical gestures against the gods, it will create a movement towards a sort of narrative infinity. The sequence of translations from the *Aeneid* in *Dido* are carefully chosen to highlight the Virgilian energy that can tragically impose an ending upon what appears to be an interminable moment of amorous bliss.

**Dramatic and Epic Voices in *Dido Queene of Carthage***

Marlowe’s adaptation of Book 4 of the *Aeneid* allowed him to pick and choose, down to the individual line, what portion of Virgil’s epic he would translate. This is a freedom not available to most translators of Virgil in the sixteenth century, and it sets Marlowe apart. Furthermore, Marlowe not only translates between Latin and English, he also performs a generic translation, from epic into drama. Having considered the instances where Marlowe translates lines from Virgil’s epic, we are in a position to consider how these specific instances of translation are excerpted and transplanted into the dramatic form. For this discussion, modern classicists provide a useful starting point: the so-called ‘dramatic’ and ‘epic’ qualities of the *Aeneid* and their inter-relations are an important part of contemporary Virgilian criticism. It is frequently noted, moreover, that Book 4 of the *Aeneid* borrows many elements from the tradition of Greek tragedy. It should thus not be surprising that *Aeneid* 4 lends itself to being adapted into a drama: it contains traces of the dramatic genre within itself already. This is surely a part of the reason why the episode was adapted so frequently for the stage. In the sixteenth century alone, for instance, there are important Dido plays written in Italy by Alessandro Pazzi (*Dido in Cartagine*, 1524), Giambattista Giraldi-Cinhthio (*Didone*, 1543) and Lodovico Dolce (*Didone*, 1547), in France by Étienne Jodelle (*Didon se sacrifiant*, between 1552 and 1563) and in England by Edward Halliwell (*Dido*, lost, but performed before the Queen in 1564), William Gager (*Dido*, 1583), and Christopher Marlowe.

In an essay that has recently been published in English in the collection *The Poetry of Pathos*, Gian Biagio Conte provides an overview of what he calls the ‘Virgilian paradox’: the incorporation of drama into epic. Conte builds upon a

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long tradition of German scholarship, which has influenced many twentieth-century English Virgilians, most notably Brooks Otis. This tradition began by interpreting a contrast between Homer and Virgil. Richard Heinze, in his seminal work of 1903, argued that in Homeric narrative there is a single point of view, which transcends the authorial persona to merge with objective reality. (In traditional Roman epic—Ennius, Naevius—this single point of view will be identified with a grand political and historical design, in which all personal truths are subsumed.) In contrast, Virgil created a new form of epic, by making two great changes. These are described by using a specific terminology, which I shall borrow. First, it was argued that Virgil narrated in a highly sentimental tone. One line commonly quoted to illustrate this is his imitation of *Iliad* 6.244 at *Aeneid* 2.503, during the fall of Troy. Where Homer writes, referring to the rooms of the children of Priam, ‘fifty chambers of polished stone’, Virgil, with a sense of the tragic loss at Troy, laments, ‘quinquaginta illi thalami spes tanta nepotum’ ['those fifty bed-chambers—such great hope of grandchildren']. Homeric objectivity is transformed into Virgilian pathos. This narrative pathos has been termed ‘sympatheia’. Second, Virgil creates an empathetic relationship between his narrator and his different characters. In doing so, he reaches out time and again towards the different characters’ own perspectives. This has been called ‘empathia’. As Conte argues, this second quality comes from the Virgilian incorporation of drama. The Virgilian characters are not subsumed under a single objective lens. But rather Virgil’s new epic attempts to create a texture that is essentially ‘polycentric’, allowing the characters their own, unreconciled, tragic sensibilities. Conte states: ‘Virgilian empathy is not just a pose of the narrative surface to generate pathos, but rather a bold appropriation of the fractured and confrontational language of drama.’

This multiplication of fractured points of view within the epic threatens to undermine any objective overview. One of the most distinctive marks of Virgilian epic is that it is constantly in danger of collapsing into tragedy; it exists on the brink of having its epic status – its claim to portray a teleological and meaningful vision for Rome – break down under the weight of countless individual tragedies, which cry out in their own voices. What acts against this disintegration of the poem into a cacophonous mixture of perspectives is the overarching perspective and sympathy of the omniscient narrator: he suffers along with the characters, but always supports a comprehensive view of the epic’s direction. In Conte’s account, the Virgilian texture is thus one full of competing, subjective voices, but it is held together, however precariously, by the narrator’s ‘sympathetic’ persona. Moreover, the competing, tragic voices become strongest at those moments of the narrative where Virgil has drawn the

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most from Greek drama. This is witnessed above all in the episode of Dido and Aeneas.

Can any of this modern criticism on the *Aeneid*, built upon distinctions first made by German Romantics, be applied to Renaissance dramatic adaptations of Virgil? The task may seem at best precarious, and at worst completely anachronistic. However, there is a way that this analysis of ‘epic’ and ‘dramatic’ elements within the *Aeneid* can be an illuminating lens for Renaissance Dido dramas. For it becomes apparent by looking at a collection of Renaissance Dido tragedies that many of the playwrights were aware that there are dangers in adapting *Aeneid* 4 into drama, and that the primary danger is the loss of a sympathetic, overarching, moral perspective. It is thus in almost all previous Dido dramas—including those by Pazzi, Giraldi-Cinthio, Dolce, Jodelle and Gager—that we find extensive choruses. These choruses, combined with other new inventions, usually act to pre-empt the disintegration of epic into tragic subjectivity. Don Cameron Allen, who has provided an overview of these early Dido dramas in his essay, ‘Marlowe’s *Dido* and the Tradition’, has noted that Giraldi’s, Dolce’s and Jodelle’s plays ‘unite in defending Aeneas’s desertion of Dido’, even if they emphasize different points. In Dolce’s play, for instance, honour is the central theme. In the case of men, this honour appears in duty; and in the case of women, in chastity. Aeneas maintains his honour; Dido loses hers. The result is a play that uses Virgil, in Craig Kallendorf’s words, to ‘reinforce the traditional, patriarchal hierarchy in Renaissance Venice’. In this play, the chorus has an important function, especially in the final act. During the last moments of the drama, as news of Dido’s death is received, the chorus provides a voice that is both sympathetic to Dido’s plight (‘O caduca beltade, | Come misera, come | Picciol momento ti consuma, e perde’ [‘O fleeting beauty, how wretched; what a brief moment consumes and wastes you’]), and nevertheless emphasizes the divine purpose (‘Ch’ ogni cosa mortal governa il Cielo’ [‘Heaven governs every mortal thing’]). This perspective is precisely what critics have associated with the sympathetic voice of the epic narrator in the *Aeneid*.

Another example we can look at to see how these choruses can incorporate the ‘epic’ quality into the dramatic texture is William Gager’s *Dido*. Produced for Prince Albertus Alasco’s visit to Christ Church, Oxford in May 1583, Gager’s *Dido* appeals to its specific noble audience. For this discussion, the most

59 Allen, ‘Marlowe’s *Dido* and the Tradition’, 64.
important aspect of the drama is the change of perspective rendered by the chorus. In Gager’s *Dido*, the chorus turns the drama into a civil event: it becomes the downfall of a city, viewed from the perspective of the citizens. In the first chorus of the play, Dido is presented as the greatest of all princesses, at times nobler even than Aeneas; by the end, however, the chorus is mourning the fall from grace of their queen. Gager’s chorus and epilogue thus treat Dido sympathetically, even while incorporating her into a larger overreaching view of history: ‘sed Elisa fato Tyria miserando occubat’ [‘Tyrian Elisa came to a piteous end’].63 Once again, the chorus finishes a play by restoring the sympathetic epic voice that holds together the tragic subjectivity.

In the most extended study of Renaissance Dido drama to date, Barbara Bono charts a growth towards a greater romantic freedom as the Virgilian dilemma is retold again and again in the Renaissance.64 Bono’s overview of these Dido dramas, however, seems to underestimate what is decisively new about Marlowe’s *Dido*. According to Bono, Marlowe is ‘profoundly subversive’ and treats his subject amorally, but she also believes that Marlowe makes the love between Dido and Aeneas merely ‘a shallow idealization’.65 Consequently, the whole play is predominantly trivial. This seems to me to avoid the significant innovations that Marlowe makes. The most significant of these is that he has avoided any hint of reincorporating sympathetic epic elements into his play. Unlike all of his predecessors, there is no chorus in Marlowe. There is likewise no sustained attempt to justify Aeneas along the lines of epideictic rhetoric. While the whole scope of Trojan history is portrayed in his drama, there is no unifying voice that can sympathize with characters. The result is a play that dramatizes the ‘polycentric’ aspect of Virgil’s *Aeneid* more emphatically than any that had come before. The gods become simply other voices (even if all-powerful ones) within the story. Instead of a narrator who can relate sympathetically to the suffering, all we have is the fickle gods imposing their will. The frame of translations from Virgil that we saw above is thus imposed all the more inexplicably.

By eliminating all traces of Virgil’s sympathetic epic narrator, the polycentric voices are laid bare, in all their individuality. In a short piece in *Notes and Queries*, Lucy Potter has recently claimed that Marlowe was not simply pitting an Ovidian perspective against a Virgilian perspective, but rather that he was finding tragic elements within Virgil’s epic itself.66 The above exploration of translations of the *Aeneid in Dido* can offer, I argue, further evidence of Potter’s claim. Drawing on the immense rhetorical strength that was associated with the epic in the Renaissance, Marlowe incorporates translations of the Virgilian original to emphasize


65 Bono, *Literary Transvaluation*, 130.

those moments where Virgil dismisses the errant desires of his characters. This thwarting of the heroes’ desires is, of course, inherent to Virgil’s epic, although Marlowe’s presentation of these moments without the sympathetic narrative-voice of the Aeneid presents them even more poignantly than they appear in the original. These stark moments of translation, moreover, provide the structure within which Marlowe’s free inventions are built.

After the rather literal and moralistic Phaer-Twyne Aeneid, which was begun in 1555 and first appeared as 12 books in 1573, Marlowe’s dramatic translations were among the first to appear in England, and they could hardly present a more different reading of the epic. Marlowe’s Dido deserves a special place in any history of English Renaissance translations of the Aeneid because of how creatively he uses direct translations from the Latin to frame the play. Breaking away from the humanistic translations of Douglas, Surrey, Phaer and Twyne, Marlowe found a means to bring out the most violent and coercive side of the Renaissance Virgil. For this reason, this play should be regarded as the one, and only, extensive example of a ‘pessimistic’ reading of Virgil’s epic from the English Renaissance.

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