

Dido-character statigraphy

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Nahum Tate, Henry Purcell's librettist for *Dido and Aeneas* (c. 1695) has a reputation as a writer of 'the most lamentable doggerel'¹ – although Tate was poet laureate during the reigns of four early modern monarchs, the first Irish poet laureate, he received an excellent education and he wrote poetry and plays all his life. Tate was raised in Ireland, commencing his studies at Trinity College, Dublin aged 16. He attended 1668-1672 and received a Bachelor of Arts degree aged 20. The myth of Dido was created over centuries of literary history. Her morality, motivation and ethics were adapted and displaced by authors to please their patrons and accord with the dominant ideologies of the time. In the opera, Tate incorporates characterisations of Dido from Ancient history through the Renaissance and seventeenth century. By examining the classical texts Tate used as inspiration for the protagonists and plot of his libretto and tracing changes he made to his sources, it can be seen that Tate rewrote the rules of versification in relation to *fate*, *destiny*, *love* and *death* in early modern opera.

This article explores the literary history of the Dido myth by examining differences in her characterisation by Virgil, Ovid, Tertullian, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Douglas, Surrey, Phaer and Twynne, Stanyhurst, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dryden and Tate. Tate's Aeneas in particular, is often placed in the anti-hero category, which makes him the antithesis of Virgil's. The article discovers when, how and why perceptions of her character changed.

Purcell and Tate's *Dido and Aeneas* was – allegedly – based on Virgil's *Aeneid*, which was composed during the second decade BCE for Augustus Caesar, in the style of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by Homer.² The predominant theme of the *Aeneid* is that honour and duty ought to prevail over love. Virgil mentions Dido in books I, IV and VI. Regarding Virgil's *Aeneid* from the politico-cultural perspective of its creation means understanding that Rome had suffered from twenty years of civil war after the assassination of Julius Caesar, followed by restoration and peace provided by Augustus.

¹ E.J. Dent, *Foundations of English opera: A study of musical drama in England during the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1967), p.178.

² All quotations from Virgil's *Aeneid* are taken from Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid*, trans. H.R. Fairclough, rev. G.P. Goold, (Cambridge, MA, 1916).

England had also suffered from civil war followed by restoration during the course of the seventeenth-century and it is no surprise that a narrative of empire building should arise at both these times.

Virgil describes Dido's love for Aeneas as *a culpa*, root of the word culpability or blame. The epithet *pius* Aeneas and descriptions of Aeneas' *pietas* are consistently used throughout the epic. Conversely Tate's Dido in her first appearance on stage, sings that she will *languish* until her *grief is known*. She is henceforth passive and reactive, while in Virgil her very presence implies causation. Aeneas' persona in Tate however, still embodies piety of hope – a sincere wish unlikely to be fulfilled, when he sings in his first appearance *I'll defy the feeble stroke of destiny!* Thus there are substantial deviations from Virgil in Tate. Virgil designs Aeneas' flight to Rome in response to the will of the gods 'saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram' [through cruel Juno's unforgiving wrath] (I 4) and portrays the actions of Aeneas on his journey from east to west as one part of a larger, colonial empire building story. Aeneas (believed by some scholars to have been inherited by Virgil from classical sources) is developed by Virgil into an idealised patriotic Roman, subordinating his own interests in favour of the greater goals of nationalism.³ Tate's depiction of both Dido and Aeneas supports this view to some extent. Andrew Baswell calls Virgil's Aeneas 'a hermeneutic hero' because his actions follow prophecies, omens and signs. Unfortunately he frequently misinterprets or resists these signs.⁴ This trait is further developed by Tate until Aeneas is almost unrecognisable from Virgil's hero, leading to the conclusion that Tate adapted other sources. Tate's Aeneas is a foppish prince compared to Virgil's hero. In Tate, it is Aeneas who is 'ignorant of fate' – *Aeneas has no fate but but you!* but Virgil attributes being 'fati nescia' [ignorant of fate] to Dido. Anthony Welch believes Tate includes Aeneas in the *anti-hero* category, which makes him the antithesis of Virgil's.⁵ Another significant difference between Virgil and Tate follows the appearance of Mercury, sent to call Aeneas away from Carthage. In Virgil, Aeneas reacts strongly 'At vero Aeneas aspectu obmutuit amens, arrectaeque horrore comae et vox faucibus haesit' [But in truth Aeneas, aghast at the sight, was struck dumb;

³ S. Price and E.Kearns, eds. *The Oxford dictionary of classical myth & religion* (Oxford, 2003) p.8.

⁴ A. Baswell, *Virgil in medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the twelfth century to Chaucer* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.227-28.

⁵ A. Welch, 'Songs of Dido: Epic poetry and opera in seventeenth-century England' (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006), p.299.

his hair stood up in terror and the voice choked in his throat] (IV 279-80). Tate's Aeneas reacts with the *tonight?* and then *Jove's commands shall be obey'd*. Here, Tate's Aeneas is less complex than Virgil's.

The most striking difference between Virgil's and Tate's Dido is their portrayal of the end of her life. Virgilian Dido is full of anger and vengeance while Purcell and Tate's is poised and dignified. When Virgil's Dido realises she has betrayed her late husband Sychaeus 'non servata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo' [the faith vowed to the ashes of Sychaeus I have not kept] (IV 552) the love she felt for Aeneas turns to hate 'non potui abreptum divellere corpus et undis spargere?' [could I not have seized him, torn him limb from limb, and scattered the pieces on the waves?] (IV 600-1). Michael Putnam believes, along with several other critics, that Virgil has designed Dido's fatal flaw to be her infidelity to Sychaeus' memory. According to Putnam, both Virgil's Dido and his narrator define this as her *culpa* (IV 19 Dido to Anna; IV 172 the narrator).⁶ The first description of Dido in the *Aeneid* is when Venus tells Aeneas about Dido's love for Sychaeus. Venus describes how Dido's brother Pygmalion murderously usurped Sychaeus, then king of Tyre, causing Dido to flee to Carthage with an entourage 'imperium Dido Tyria regit urbe profecta, / germanum fugiens' [Dido wields the sceptre — Dido, who, fleeing from her brother, came from the city of Tyre] (I 340-1). Dido is initially found in book I in the temple of Juno where she is asked to act as a judge 'iura dabat legesque viris, operumque laborem / partibus aequabat iustis aut sorte trahebat' [laws and ordinances she gave her people; their tasks she adjusted in equal shares or assigned by lot] (I 507-8). She is compared to Diana leading her dancers and Aeneas is likened to Apollo 'qualis ubi hibernam Lyciam Xanthique fluenta deserit ac Delum maternam invisit Apollo' [As when Apollo quits Lycia, his winter home, and the streams of Xanthus, to visit his mother's Delos] (IV 143-4) thus Virgil's hero and heroine are deliberately matched. Virgil's Dido however transforms from god-like, regal, dispenser of justice to deranged, vicious harridan, overcome with furious anger.

Virgil's Dido mirrors both Cleopatra and Vipsania, the wife Tiberius was forced to divorce in order to marry Julia, Augustus' choice for his step-son.⁷ These are just two of

⁶ M.C.J. Putnam, *Virgil's Aeneid: Interpretation and influence* (London, 1995), p.157.

⁷ S. Bertman, 'Cleopatra and Antony and models for Dido and Aeneas,' *Echos du monde classique/Classical views* xlv (2000) pp.395-98; C.M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London, 1960); M. Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, textuality and the Medieval Aeneid* (London, 1994);

several possible models for Virgil's Dido and similarly there are many antecedents to Tate's. The *Aeneid* was written after the Punic wars when Augustus was using Carthage as an administrative base because of its proximity to Africa. *Punic* derives from ancient Greek φοῖνῖξ/phenikes or Latin phoenix and is the name exclusively used in classical sources to refer to Carthaginians and Phoenicians in the Western Mediterranean. In *media res*, Virgil describes how Aeneas is caught in a storm after fleeing Troy and finds himself on the Carthage coast. Venus, guiding and protecting her son, leads him to a new city constructed by Dido. Virgil's Dido can be understood to represent Carthage, the hostility between Carthage and Rome, and Dido/Carthage's ultimate destruction. Porcius Cato 'Cato the Censor' demanded that 'Carthago delenda est' [Carthage must be destroyed], at the end of every speech he made in the senate until war was declared in 149 BCE.⁸ Throughout the epic, Virgil frequently calls Dido by the names of the people and nations she leads: 'Phoenissa, Sidonia, Tyria' (I 340, I 446, I 613, I 670, VI 450, IX 266, XI 74).⁹ Virgil's political framing of Dido through a type of nomenclature is compared to Ovid's later treatment of his Dido. In *Heroides*, VII she is described as wife (VII 22, VII 69), daughter-in-law, sister (VII 31-2) and 'gravidam' [pregnant] (VII 33). Ovid separates her from a greater political context and places her firmly in a domestic one. Although Virgil (book IV) and Tate portray Dido's attitude towards Aeneas at the end of her life very differently, Tate has clearly used the final appearance of Dido in *Aeneid* book VI as inspiration for the calm resignation of her aria *When I am laid in earth* at the end of the opera. In Virgil's final, memorable description of Dido she ignores Aeneas in Hades 'illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat' [she, turning away, kept her looks fixed on the ground] (VI 469). In Tate's version it is Belinda who defines the cause of Dido's uneasiness, not Dido herself *the Trojan guest / Into your tender thoughts has prest*. The second woman then uses the Virgilian word *such piety*. Tate reverses the crocodile metaphor, used by Virgil to emphasize a parallel between Dido and Cleopatra. In the libretto *thus on the fatal banks of Nile / Weeps the deceitful crocodile* is sung by Dido to Aeneas. In Tate's libretto she sings *Fate forbids what you pursue* answered by Aeneas *Aeneas has no fate but you*. She is clearly coerced here and later, more subtly by Belinda *pursue thy conquest, Love*. Tate's Dido incorporates aspects of Virgil's Turnus, killed at the end of the *Aeneid*. The

W. Heller, 'A Present for the ladies: Ovid, Montaigne, and the redemption of Purcell's Dido,' *Music and Letters* lxxxiv (May 2003), pp.189-208.

⁸ J. Roberts, ed. *Dictionary of the classical world* (Oxford, 2007), p.602.

⁹ Baswell, *Virgil*, pp.270-271.

poem thus ends with what Bowra describes as ‘a lamentation for this great spirit sent to an untimely doom.’¹⁰ Even the word *lament* here has a parallel with the end of Tate and Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* in the form of Dido’s aria. Virgil describes how at the end of book XII ‘ast illi soluntur frigore membra / vitaeque cum genitu fugit indignata sub umbras’ [his limbs grow faint and cold, and, wailing, his indignant life takes flight] (XII 951-2). The idea of an *indignant* ending to a life is changed by Tate into a swan-song demanding compassion.

Tate and Purcell added a sorceress and witches, replacing the machinations of the gods in Virgil. Presenting the supernatural on stage was not a new phenomenon. Some scholars have suggested that witches represented Catholics. Amanda Eubanks Winkler notes that the *weird sisters* in William Shakespeare’s 1606 *Macbeth* are thought by some to be ‘political lampoons’ of the Gunpowder plotters.¹¹ There are historical precedents throughout the seventeenth century ranging from the three witches in *Macbeth* produced on stage by Sir William Davenant in 1674, to twelve in *The Masque of Queens* by Ben Jonson, 1609. *Maleficium* was a term used in medieval and early modern Europe for the causing of harm by certain individuals.¹² The last person executed as a witch in England was in 1685.¹³ *Witchfinder General* Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne, his colleague, had over a hundred people executed as witches in East Anglia 1645-47.¹⁴ Tate’s witches are described as ‘an outrageous set of Restoration witches’¹⁵ by Joseph Kerman and Edward Dent outlines how ‘audiences of this period were never tired of seeing witches on the stage.’¹⁶ We know from contemporary diarists that public spectators believed in omens, signs and the supernatural because some had assumed that the thunder and lightning during the day of Charles II’s coronation was a sign of God blessing the occasion. Marianne MacDonald supposes that Tate and Purcell’s witches are a

¹⁰ Bowra, *Virgil to Milton*, p.47.

¹¹ A. Eubanks Winkler, ‘Society and disorder,’ in *The Ashgate research companion to Henry Purcell*, ed. R. Herissone (Farnham., 2012), pp.269-302, at p.300.

¹² S. Davies, ‘Superstition and witchcraft,’ in *The Ashgate research companion to popular culture in Early Modern England*, eds. A. Hadfield, M. Dimmock and A. Shinn (Farnham, 2014), pp.323-336, at p.323.

¹³ Davies, *Superstition and witchcraft*, p.334.

¹⁴ Davies, *Superstition and witchcraft*, p.325.

¹⁵ J.W. Kerman, *Opera as drama* (London, 1989), p.43.

¹⁶ Dent, *Foundations of English opera*, p.182.

displacement of ‘the supernatural that Virgil associates with Dido...a metathesis of demonization, another survival of the ancient in the modern.’¹⁷

Classical studies have frequently addressed the question of whether or not Virgil created a relationship between Dido and Aeneas. The scene adapted from book IV was often rewritten and transcribed both in Latin and the vernacular in medieval, renaissance and early modern versions of the story.¹⁸ The first translation of a major classical work into a British language and the first of two sixteenth century translations of the whole of the *Aeneid* was Gavin Douglas’ *Eneados*¹⁹ completed in 1513 in Middle Scots or northern English rhymed pentameters.²⁰ Ezra Pound praised Douglas’ version for its faithfulness to the Latin and thought it the best *Aeneid* translation. In his poem Douglas describes love as ‘continewit in lust, and endyt with penance’ [continued in lust, and ended with penance]. Douglas’ Dido accords with Tate’s although close examination reveals *Eneados* to be an exemplum about lust, pertaining to a very different Dido to Tate’s. Next, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey published translations of books II and IV of the *Aeneid* in 1557.²¹ His translation introduced blank verse and a heroic idiom into English and is thought by some to have established the accentual-syllabic system that would dominate poetry until the 1950s.²² Following Douglas, Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twynne’s *Aeneidos*,²³ translated into fourteeners of southern English was printed eight times in four different editions between 1558 and 1620. It was the first complete translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* into southern English. The Phaer-Twynne version has been described by scholars as a cultural landmark. It was the most widely read renaissance translation of the *Aeneid*.²⁴ Phaer and Twynne achieved a line for line correspondence to the Latin hexameters. Richard

¹⁷ M. McDonald, *Sing sorrow: Classics, history and heroines in opera* (Westport, CT, 2001), p.50.

¹⁸ M. Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, textuality and the medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis, MN, 1994), p.30.

¹⁹ LLV816a Edo: Gavin Douglas, *The xiii bukes of Eneados of the famose poete Virgill* (London: William Copland, 1553).

²⁰ S. Braund, ‘Thomas Twyne’s appropriation of Thomas Phaer’s *Aeneidos*: ‘Worke unperfytt’ perfected?’ *Translation and Literature*, xxvii (2018), pp.287-304, at p.287.

²¹ BLL01003802190 / C.21.a.17: Henry Howard Surrey, *Certain bokes of Virgiles Aeneis* (London: Richard Tottell, 1557).

²² A. Poochigan, ‘Have we lost the lofty? Virgil’s *Aeneid* and the history of English poetry,’ *Words without borders: The online magazine for international literature* (January 2016).

²³ 69773: Thomas Phaer, Thomas Twynne and Aelius Donatus, *The whole XII bookes of the Aeneidos of Virgill* (London: Wyllyam How, 1573).

²⁴ Braund, *Worke unperfytt*, p.291.

Stanyhurst completed a partial translation of books I-IV in 1582.²⁵ Thomas Nash criticises Stanyhurst's attempts to translate Virgil into hexameters:

The hexameter verse I grant to be a gentleman of an ancient house (so is many an English beggar); yet this clime of ours he cannot thrive in. Our speech is too craggy for him to set his plow in. He goes twitching and hopping in our language like a man running upon quagmires, up the hill in one syllable and down the dale in another, retaining no part of that stately smooth gait which he vaunts himself with amongst the Greeks and Latins.²⁶

Tate's libretto (c. 1689) was followed by Dryden's *Aeneid* (1697) composed in the heroic rhymed couplets typical of the English Augustan era. Dryden uses ten-foot iambic lines, rather than the traditional English hexameter line²⁷ and terms book IV a 'noble episode, wherein the whole passion of love is more exactly described than in any other poet.'²⁸ When Dryden's narrator describes Dido's feelings for Aeneas there are similarities in form, structure and vocabulary with Virgil, which are very different to Tate's style.

But anxious cares already seiz'd the queen: / She fed within her veins a flame unseen; / The hero's valor, acts, and birth inspire / Her soul with love, and fan the secret fire. / His words, his looks, imprinted in her heart, / Improve the passion, and increase the smart (IV 1-6).

Almost half the words are Latinate. There are rhetorical and emphatic parallel constructions. The lines create distinct verses that define the poem's structure. He uses rhyme as punctuation like two stressed syllables mark a line ending in Virgil's Latin. Both Dryden and Douglas have been criticised by some scholars for rhyming an unrhymed poem but Dryden's translation cemented the epic style which is thought by some to have continued in blank verse and couplets until the final major epic in a classical style, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, 1885.²⁹ Dryden's *Aeneid* is, arguably, the most famous seventeenth-century translation of Virgil. In the dedication to his translation

²⁵ 14648: Richard Stanyhurst, *Thee first foure bookes of Virgil his Aeneis* (Leiden: Iohn Pates, 1582).

²⁶ P.F. Baum, *The principles of English versification* (Cambridge, 1922), chapter III.

²⁷ Poochigan, *Have we lost the lofty?*

²⁸ Dryden in H. Eastman, 'The drama of the passions: Tate and Purcell's characterization of Dido.' *The Musical Quarterly* lxxiii, (1989), pp.364-381, at p.366.

²⁹ Poochigan, *Have we lost the lofty?*

Dryden deems the moral of Virgil's *Aeneid* is obedience to authority. Dryden's version retains some of the dramatic irony (a contested term) of Virgil's, unlike Tate's libretto, inevitable in scripted drama. Aeneas' first speech to Dido for example, could be perceived as ironic given the outcome and Dido's *fate*. Dryden's translation of the passage:

While rolling rivers into seas shall run, / And round the space of heav'n the radiant sun; /
While trees the mountain tops with shades supply, / Your honour, name, and
praise shall never die.³⁰

Roughly ten years earlier Tate had given these words to his Aeneas *Aeneas has no Fate but you. / Let Dido Smile, and I'll defie, / The Feeble stroke of Destiny*. It is possible to conclude nonetheless that Dryden did retain some of the ironic ambiguity of Virgil's original and that Tate in fact emphasised the theme with the final lines he gives Dido to sing *Remember me, but forget my fate*. This line of argument leads directly back to Virgil's ideas of empire building. Dryden (unlike Tate) is sympathetic towards Aeneas, believing him to be subservient to a false fate.³¹

Although Tate was guided by the *Aeneid*, Virgil was not his only inspiration. Tate incorporated several other sources, most significantly, Ovid's *Heroides*, VII.³² Tate contributed to a translation of *Heroides* undertaken by Dryden, printed by Jacob Tonson in 1680. Ovid's works were popular in Early Modern England and formed the basis of the classical myth aspect of school curricula although according to the OED the word *myth* cannot be found until 1830.³³ In the 1530s Winchester required fourth and fifth form boys to memorise up to twelve lines of *Metamorphoses* per week and perform rhetorical and poetical exercises based on the poem. Ovid's Dido in *Heroides*, VII set an example for her portrayal as both bitter (following Virgil) and pathetic. However, a close reading of the lines reveal a different Dido, worthy of sympathy, closer to the Dido imagined by Tate: *What can you charge me with but love?* (VII 64). A similar theme is found in Tate's prologue *and if the deity's above, / are victims of the powers of love, / what must*

³⁰ MS Add 380: Virgil/John Dryden, *Aeneis* (c. 1715).

³¹ Eastman, *Drama of the passions*, p.370.

³² 6.13.B.40: Ovid, *Heroides* (Macerata: Giuseppe Piccini, 1682); Ovid, *Heroides. Amores*, trans. G. Showerman, rev. G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA, 1914).

³³ A. Vine, 'Myth and legend,' in Hadfield, Dimmock and Shinn, *Ashgate popular culture*, pp.103-117, at p.103.

wretched mortals do. Nonetheless Ovid's Dido differs from Tate's in her tone. Her voice in Ovid is full of pathos *Undone myself, I fear lest I be the undoing of him who is my undoing, lest I bring harm to him who brings harm to me* (VII 61). In the opera her voice is powerful and strong. Both contrast with Virgil's Dido who for political reasons ended her life 'cursing Aeneas' people to perpetual enmity with her own race.'³⁴ Ovid's Dido is complex however, with emotions ranging from guilt to anger and resignation. Unlike Tate's Dido she refers to her first husband 'Exige, lease pudor, poenas! Violate Sychaei / ad quas, me miseram, plena pudoris eo.' [O purity undone! – the penalty due Sychaeus. To absolve it now I go – ah me, wretched that I am, and overcome with shame!] (VII 97-8) Tate's final lines *Remember me but forget my fate* are comparable. Ovid opens his poem with an explanation of the context of Dido's 'concinit albus olor' [swan song] (VII 2) while Tate's is at the end. In the libretto the chorus of witches create a separation between Dido and Carthage when they sing *Elissa bleeds tonight and Carthage flames tomorrow*.

The earliest account of Dido/Elissa (Punic) is preserved among fragments attributed to Greek historian Timaeus of Tauromenium (c. 356 BCE-260 BCE), now lost. Some of the facts are disputed but can be roughly sketched as follows. In 839 BCE Elissa, the daughter of a king variously known as Μάττηνος/Matgenus in Greek or Mattan I was born in Tyre which is modern day Sūr, a town on the Mediterranean coast of Phoenicia which is now Southern Lebanon. In 831 BCE her father, the king, died and her brother Pygmalion began to reign. In 825 BCE Acerbas her Tyrian husband/uncle and a 'priest of Hercules' died – probably poisoned by Pygmalion. Elissa then fled Tyre with an entourage and in 814 BCE she founded the city-state of Carthage, now a seaside suburb of Tunis, capital of Tunisia. In 759 BCE she died at Carthage.³⁵ 753 BCE is the official date for the founding of Rome. From this biographical sketch it can be seen that Virgil altered historical facts to exemplify his themes of honour and empire building. The story told in the *Aeneid* is set just after the fall of Troy. Some ancient sources claim that Troy fell in 1184 BCE. Archaeological evidence confirms violent destruction during the second half of the twelfth century BCE. These dates mean that the main action of the *Aeneid*, including the meeting between Dido and Aeneas in book IV, takes place three

³⁴ Baswell, *Virgil*, p.200.

³⁵ F.M. Cross, 'An interpretation of the Nora stone,' *Bulletin of the American schools of oriental research* ccviii, (1972), pp.13-19.

hundred years before the foundation of Rome.³⁶ There are several precedents for Virgil's *Aeneid* which also describe the founding of Rome. Nacrius' *Punic War* was written in the third century BCE in the Saturnian measure still used by poets at that time. A century later, *Annals* by Ennius, outlined the foundation story starting with Romulus. Classical scholars are sure Virgil knew these texts and aimed to write an epic which would surpass both. His poem therefore offers Rome a largely imaginary past, emphasising the implications of historical events, rather than the accuracy. Resemblances between Virgil's Dido and Cleopatra include – both were African queens who fled from their brothers, both had relationships with notorious Romans and then took their own lives. The postcolonial trope of the fear of danger offered by the East to the West is expressed in Horace's *Odes* (I 37). Virgil writes the following lines on Aeneas' shield: 'Sequiturque, nefas, Aegyptia coniunx' [and follows, shame on it! Th'Egyptian bride] (VIII 688). Here illustrating the relief felt by the Roman people at her death. In book VIII Virgil describes the relationship between the real Antony and Cleopatra (VIII 684-7), a historical event still fresh in the minds of his audience. In accordance with his political loyalties, Virgil reverses the roles of slave to Venus and attributes this vulnerability to Dido rather than Mark Antony.³⁷ Virgil's creation of the meeting between Dido and Aeneas was also influenced by Plutarch and Homer. The battle of Actium described by Plutarch which ended in disaster for Rome parallels the storm which blew Aeneas off course and led him to Carthage. Also brought to mind is the Calypso episode in Homer's *Odyssey*. Tate includes a reference to Plutarch in his libretto. The name of the goddess Iris who visits Tate's Dido at the end of her life is a reflection of Cleopatra's servant Eirus.³⁸ Iris is not mentioned in connection with either Virgil's or Ovid's Dido so Tate must have found the reference in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*. Of course, Tate's perception of Cleopatra was also guided by Shakespeare's *The tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* (1623).

By the time Geoffrey Chaucer included Dido in his *Legend of good women*³⁹ in the fourteenth-century, there were two main schools of thought. These can be described as *Ovidian* and *Boethian*.⁴⁰ One implies that Dido acts from romantic motivation and the

³⁶ Bowra, *Virgil to Milton*, p.34.

³⁷ Bertman, *Cleopatra and Antony*, p.397.

³⁸ Bertman, *Cleopatra and Antony*, p.397.

³⁹ MS Gg. 4.27: Geoffrey Chaucer, *Legend of good women* (14--).

⁴⁰ Baswell, *Virgil*, p.224.

other suggests the presence of allegory. Chaucer's text however, merges Virgilian Dido into his narrative which suggests the collateral damage of empire building.

For on a nyght sleping he let hir lye / And stal away unto hys companye / And as a traitour forth he gan to sayle / Toward þe large contre of Italie [For, one night, asleep he let her lie, / And to his company away did fly, / And as a traitor he set out to sea / Towards the large country of Italy] (III 326-9).

In roughly 400 AD Servius wrote *Vigilii Aeneida*, the first commentary on the *Aeneid* which treats the poem as an allegory.⁴¹ During the high and late Middle Ages hermeneutic approaches continued to develop⁴² and Virgil's *Aeneid* was considered canonical in various settings and institutions.⁴³ Three main interpretative commentaries followed between the sixth- and the fifteenth-centuries. These were Fulgentius' *On the Content of Virgil* (sixth-century), Bernadus' *On Virgil's Aeneid* (twelfth-century) and Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (fifteenth-century). These three commentaries mostly agree on the poem's general meaning.⁴⁴ William Caxton's 1490 *Eneydos* is described as 'an even-handed report of *both* the dominant versions of Dido's life: the chaste widow... and then the suicidal lover'⁴⁵ while Chaucer's narrator in *The legend of Dido* unequivocally describes her as 'the fairest creature / That ever was y-formed by nature' (III 74-5) and 'noble queen' (III 81).

Some of the responses of classical, medieval, renaissance and early modern writers to Virgil's Dido are similar. Tertullian praises Dido, Servius and Macrobius accuse Virgil of overwriting the character and Augustine notably weeps for her in *Confessions* (I 13).⁴⁶ Ovid's letter from Dido to Aeneas in *Heroides VII* 'complains' about his cruelty. Tate uses all these interpretations of Dido when he comments ironically in his preface to *A*

⁴¹ D.H. Brumble, 'Let us make gods in our image: Greek myth in Medieval and Renaissance literature,' in *The Cambridge companion to Greek mythology*, ed. R.D. Woodard (Cambridge, 2009), pp.407-424, at p.422.

⁴² Baswell, *Virgil*, p.271.

⁴³ Desmond, *Reading Dido*, p.4.

⁴⁴ Brumble, *Let us make gods*, p.417.

⁴⁵ Baswell, *Virgil*, p.275.

⁴⁶ 6.7.G.15: Virgil/Servius, *Bvcolica, Georgica, Aeneis* (Venetiis: Pietro de Nicolini, 1534); MSS 9000: Macrobius, *Saturnalia* (Convento de Santo Tomás de Avila: S.XV 1401); 44CAMR0091286: Augustine, of Hippo, *Confessions* (London: John Norton, 1631).

*Present for the Ladies*⁴⁷ (written a few years after his libretto) ‘was it not Ingratitude of Heroes that more than half furnish Ovid with Subjects for his Epistles?’ Tate’s sympathies and examples of the literary-historic context of the libretto’s creation can be clearly seen. Exploring Tate’s version of Dido after centuries of cultural and political influences reveals how subtexts have pervaded the story and permeated its current incarnations.

Dido’s literary and historical characters are significantly different. Her morality was mythologised over centuries of cultural history, altered and adapted by writers for their patrons or historical ideologies. Dido’s statigraphy is therefore an exploration of subalternity. However, contemporary scholarship’s interest in politico-allegorical interpretations has overlooked the extent to which Tate was interested in arguments surrounding *fate, destiny, love and death*.

⁴⁷ BLL01019957341 / 8415.aaa.37: Nahum Tate, *A Present for the Ladies* (London: Francis Saunders, 1693).