

The Tragedy Of Dido Queene Of Carthage

by
Christopher Marlowe

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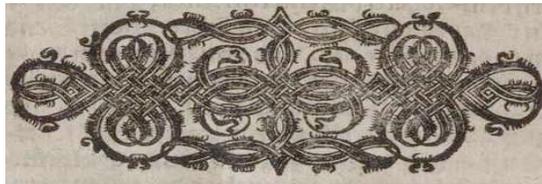
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Marlowe's Tribute to His Queen in

Dido, Queen of Carthage

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Christopher Marlowe's title character in *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage* addresses the marriage question, as did most Elizabethan literature during this time, but Marlowe's approach is more praise and less advice. Prior to Cupid's enchantment, Dido is a queen to be reckoned with; however, this spell causes her to become a dependant, love-struck worshipper of Aeneas and eventually drives her to her death. Using Dido and Aeneas, Marlowe praises Queen Elizabeth's strength as a monarch by presenting what could have been had she bowed to the pressures of Parliament to marry. Marlowe commends his queen for her eventual choice in a "husband" (meaning her "marriage" to England) by illustrating the consequences of giving in to the pressures of choosing an unworthy mate.



In the past critics have generally agreed that Christopher Marlowe's Dido in *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage* (hereafter *Dido*) is a representation of Queen Elizabeth I. They have not, however, agreed on what representation Marlowe intended. Previous depictions of Queen Dido have varied greatly: an imperialistic force; a negligent sovereign; a loyal widow; a lusty hedonist; a righteous queen; or an emotional woman.¹ The existence of these previous, contradictory Dido myths complicates the reading of Marlowe's play, making it difficult to determine which version of Dido he is using and, thus, how he is commenting on Queen Elizabeth; therefore, Marlowe's Dido has received a variety of different (and contrasting) labels. I argue that Marlowe's Dido is not the hysterical woman about whom Virgil wrote but rather a queen demanding respect and fear in equal portions, mirroring the dominant image of Queen Elizabeth; however, once Dido falls in love with the strange foreigner, she neglects her subjects and leaves her kingdom to fall apart. By depicting Dido with such widely shifting prerogatives, I believe that Marlowe utilizes both extremes of the Dido myth—the lusty widow

and the powerful monarch—to emphasize both to Queen Elizabeth and her kingdom the importance of her choice in husband and that Marlowe praises her choice to remain sole monarch. When read this way, *Dido* becomes a positive representation of Marlowe's queen and her strength despite, or perhaps because of, her sex.

This play addresses the marriage question, as did much literature during Elizabeth's time, but Marlowe's approach is more praise and less advice, as opposed to other writers who were frequently urging her to marry and immediately beget an heir of flesh.² Marlowe illustrates his praise of the Queen by introducing *Dido* as a queen of immense power and influence; however, Venus and Cupid's spell causes her to become a dependent, love-struck worshipper of Aeneas and eventually drives her to her death. Using *Dido* and Aeneas, Marlowe praises Queen Elizabeth's strength as a monarch by presenting what *would have been* had she bowed to the pressures of Parliament to marry. Marlowe commends his queen for her eventual choice in a "husband" (meaning her "marriage" to England) by illustrating the consequences of giving in to the pressures of choosing an unworthy mate.

The date of composition for *Dido* is as much in dispute as is Marlowe's intent, but an accurate dating is important because it is difficult to determine Marlowe's meaning without placing the play in its proper historical context, especially given Queen Elizabeth's rather tumultuous public and personal life. Margo Hendricks dates the composition to about 1588-1592, thereby verifying her belief that the play celebrates English imperialism and, subsequently, English racial superiority.³ Deanne Williams, however, believes the play to have been composed somewhere between 1585 and 1588 while Marlowe was attending Cambridge University.⁴ Finally, Sara Munson Deats states that "majority critical opinion still accepts the traditional dating of the play as Marlowe's earliest work, probably composed around 1585-1586."⁵ Because the play focuses so heavily on the sexuality of the queen and her various suitors, I argue that it was composed after 1584, when the marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and her most probable match, the duke of Alençon, ended upon his death, but prior to 1588, during which time the country was more concerned with the impending Spanish threat than with now-obsolete marriage negotiations. It is unlikely that the play would have been composed any earlier because, as Donald Stump says, "Elizabeth struck out furiously at those who publicly opposed her plan to marry [Alençon], banning sermons on the subject, calling in broadsides and pamphlets, punishing those who dared distribute such material."⁶ As I argue, *Dido* is as much a satire of Elizabeth's former suitor Alençon (who was a young, vain, and incompetent leader much like Marlowe's Aeneas) as it is a compliment to the Queen for her choice to remain solely wed to England. Audiences would have just as easily made the connection between *Dido*

and Elizabeth's marriage negotiations as they would between Marlowe's play and Virgil's epic, so Marlowe would have written the play to be performed after the danger of reproach had passed but while the mismatched courtship was still recently on the minds of both the English people and their queen.

Virgil's Dido is quite the tragic figure, but unlike in Marlowe's *Dido*, the tragedy in the *Aeneid* is that she is but a frail woman used only as a means to further Aeneas's success. As a woman ruler, she is strong and clever, but alas she is only a woman. Her kingdom is left in ruins once she falls in love with (and falls apart over) Aeneas, the great Trojan warrior destined to found Rome and, more important to Elizabethan readers, whose descendants would found the great English kingdom.⁷ This Dido greatly contrasts with the chaste Dido that critics have argued is more historically accurate, who predates Aeneas by hundreds of years and is said to have killed herself on her husband's sword upon the advances of King Hiarbas. It is this Dido, the one willing to die to remain loyal to her husband, whom various other Renaissance writers praise and defend. Diane Purkiss gives an example of Petrarch, who vehemently denied the follies of Virgil's Dido and was "so concerned ... to clear Dido's name that he affirms her worth ... in the teeth of Virgil's authority, calling Dido one 'that for her husbande was content to dye— / And not for Eneas, so affirme I. / (Let the vulgar people then holde theyr peace!)"⁸ In addition to Petrarch, Purkiss lists other writers such as Cornelius Agrippa, George Turbeville, and Giovanni Boccaccio among the various Renaissance Dido defenders. As Purkiss points out in her essay, even though Petrarch's chaste Dido is prominent in Renaissance literature, "Virgil's is the generally accepted version."⁹ Purkiss does not hypothesize why this is the case, but perhaps it can be explained by the typical grammar school curriculum of the time, which would definitely focus heavily on Virgil but perhaps not be as diligent in its studies of Petrarch or Boccaccio.¹⁰

Purkiss assumes Marlowe's familiarity with this chaste Dido, but her analysis suggests that this knowledge serves only to criticize Queen Elizabeth and her behavior through the use of a lusty Dido, presenting her as "a tease" and "a flirtatious conqueror of foreign princes."¹¹ However, in contrast, I read the flirtatious streak in both Dido and Elizabeth as brilliant and successful political maneuvering rather than evidence of their lack of chastity. The employment of this coquettish technique becomes an invaluable political tool for both unmarried female monarchs to obtain the respect necessary to lead their countries, and both women retain immense (and sole) power while using this tactic. It is only after Dido is enchanted that the flirtation changes from a political tool to romantic overtures. I commit a large portion of my essay to the dramatic personality shift that occurs in Dido after Cupid's prick precisely because this moment

demonstrates that Marlowe's play commends, rather than criticizes, Queen Elizabeth; proper attention to this detail affirms a reading of *Dido* as a positive representation of Elizabeth.

At first glance, one may believe that Marlowe does embrace the weak Dido and brave Aeneas of Virgil's tale. After all, Dido irrationally kills herself and abandons her kingdom when her lover abandons her, and Aeneas abandons his own desires in order to follow his destined future. Margo Hendricks argues that *Dido* "is intended to rehearse the significance of Aeneas [as ancestor to the future Britain], his race and his fate."¹² She believes his demure behavior is the result of a loss of identity through the fall of Troy and the purpose of his visit to Carthage is to regain that identity and thus his manhood by conquering Dido and her kingdom.¹³ I am, however, inclined to believe that Dido is more than a plot device utilized for the furtherance of Aeneas's destiny. Despite her unwanted infatuation with Aeneas, Dido still maintains control of the relationship, so much so that the gods must interfere *repeatedly* for Aeneas's sake. Her downfall is not caused by mortal actions (neither hers nor Aeneas's) but by the numerous divine interventions necessary to keep Aeneas focused. This fact only helps to illustrate just how powerful Dido is, especially in comparison to her submissive lover. Hendricks's reading does not account for Dido's power and influence and does not address Aeneas's extreme femininity and unquestioning compliance; instead it relies on his lineage (as grandson to Jupiter and grandfather to the founder of England) to establish authority and "empathy" with the audience.¹⁴ Her argument relies heavily on the heroic Aeneas of British folklore, but it is undermined by the fact that no Briton would willingly claim Marlowe's inconstant and impressionable coward as his ancestor, especially Marlowe himself.

Another critic who disagrees with Hendricks's positive interpretation of Aeneas is Donald Stump, who believes that Aeneas is not the hero that has been traditionally portrayed in this tale and that his feminization in *Dido* is a negative and permanent quality that is never redeemed. Marlowe's *Dido* perverts Virgil's epic tale by "[making] a laughing stock of the *Aeneid*" and its title character.¹⁵ The play takes Virgil's story and reduces the qualities of its brave "hero" to the point of ridicule. Stump believes that the play is a commentary on the perils that Elizabeth faced should she give in to a foreign match, most notably her possible match with the French Duke of Alençon, who was merely a child compared to the much older queen of England. In *Dido* Aeneas himself is almost childlike in his exchanges with Queen Dido, completely naïve and oblivious to Dido's subtleties. Stump believes that Marlowe's play is also a broad satire of several aspects of Elizabeth's personal and public life. Some of these parallels are quite obvious, such as Stump's comparisons of Iarbus to Elizabeth's own rejected suitor Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester;

however, some of his proposed parallels are less convincing.¹⁶ For example, Stump parallels the Greeks' massacre of the Trojans to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris as a representation of Aeneas/Alençon's cowardice through inaction. Though both events resulted in a tragically high body count, the comparisons of the men are far from perfect. Aeneas is a soldier and would be expected to protect his land, king, and people, but Alençon, only seventeen years old at the time and lacking the means to save the Huguenots, was forced to watch piteously as his overbearing mother and older brother ordered the massacre. His was not a crime of inaction so much as a crime of inability.¹⁷

Despite its eventual deterioration into weakness comparable to Aeneas's, Queen Dido's initial strength in the play is comparable to Queen Elizabeth's—men fawn over both women, and they both display their courtships like trophies. Dido reminds Iarbas when he pleads for her love,

Iarbas, know that thou of all my wooers—
And yet have I had many mightier kings—
 Hast had the greatest favours I could give.¹⁸

While assuring Iarbas of his status, Dido demeans him, a conversation that recalls Elizabeth's exchanges with Sir Walter Raleigh in his poem "Fortune hath taken away my love" and her response poem "Ah, silly Pug." Devastated by the rise in favor of Robert Devereux, Raleigh laments:

In vain, my eyes, in vain ye waste your tears;
 In vain, my sights, the smoke of my despairs,
 In vain you search the earth and heaven above.
 In vain you search, for Fortune keeps my love.¹⁹

Elizabeth's response to Raleigh is just as playfully demeaning as Dido's to Iarbas. In her response poem, she writes:

Ah, Silly Pug, wert thou so sore afraid?
 Mourn not, my Wat, nor be thou so dismayed.
 It passeth fickle Fortune's power and skill
 To force my heart to think thee any ill.

...

Pull up thy heart, suppress thy brackish tears,
 Torment thee not, but put away thy fears.
 Dead to all joys and living unto woe,
 Slain quite by her that ne'er gave wise men blow,
 Revive again and live without all dread,
 The less afraid, the better thou shalt speed.²⁰

In the first part of her response, Elizabeth assures him that she is not so fickle as Fortune in her favor; in the second part, however, she playfully pokes fun at him and his misery. In her response one can almost hear the laughter in her voice as she keeps Raleigh at the beggar's table while making him completely responsible for his circumstance. Similar to Elizabeth, Dido uses her femininity as a political device to keep a

beneficial alliance without becoming submissive or giving in to the demands of those with whom she seeks to ally herself, but that changes when she places her trust in Aeneas, an action that results in her demise and the demise of her kingdom.

During Dido's initial interactions with Aeneas, she more closely resembles Queen Elizabeth than at any other point in the play because she exercises a power over him that only a queen of great magnitude could be capable. During Dido's first meeting with Aeneas, she is far from love and even further from suicidal worship. In fact, she immediately recognizes and revels in her superiority, contradicting previous depictions of her as a weak or love-struck woman. During this initial exchange, Dido is assertive to the point of insult, and Aeneas is disappointingly weak. She commands "What stranger art thou that dost eye me thus?" and belittles him by saying, "Warlike Aeneas, and in these base robes? / Go fetch the garment which Sichaeus ware" (2.1.74, 79-80). She speaks in disbelief that the person before her is the great Aeneas his men have no doubt been praising since their arrival in Carthage, and she strips him of his identity and self-respect by stripping him of his Trojan robes. Just as she did with his men, she proceeds to dress him up in what she feels is appropriate attire becoming of a great warrior—that is, the robes of her late husband. Aeneas, in all his glory, sheepishly asks the queen for accommodations equal to his means and thanks her for the undeserved comforts. She reprimands him for the humility: "Remember who thou art. Speak like thyself; / Humility belongs to common grooms" (2.1.100-101). Dido had been expecting a warrior of princely attributes but instead receives a gangly, hallucinating man wandering on her beach. In his wet and dirty clothes, Aeneas is unidentifiable even to his own men and is humbled by his "base" appearance. Dido commands him to dress in the clothes she provides, a symbolic branding of this Trojan as her property. Already suffering an identity crisis, Aeneas allows any remaining hints of his identity to be absorbed into the Carthaginian robes he dons. As he wallows in self-pity, Dido simultaneously attempts to comfort him and assumes control over him.

Dido's ability to wield complete power over the men of her court parallels the same power held by Queen Elizabeth, who could easily provide for her favorites or bankrupt them if and when they fell out of favor—so learned Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. At a young age, Essex quickly gained Queen Elizabeth's favor through his affiliation with Robert Dudley; however, this same favor resulted in his utter ruin and subsequent execution. Essex repeatedly took advantage of Elizabeth's affections to pursue doomed endeavors that lost more money than they gained. After one too many failures, especially militarily, Elizabeth refused to renew Essex's patent on sweet wine, his main source of income. Similarly, Dido is able to keep Iarbus and his army at bay with her regal

and feminine powers, and, favoritism aside, she impounds Aeneas's ships when she realizes he has betrayed her trust.²¹

Marlowe more firmly establishes Dido as the dominant figure in the relationship during the banquet scene, while simultaneously satirizing the inability of Aeneas to overpower the queen. Dido urges Aeneas to tell the tale of the fall of Troy and his miraculous escape from the Greek army. Aeneas faints at the very memory of the battle; to which Dido responds,

What, faints Aeneas to remember Troy,
In whose defence he fought so valiantly?
Look up, and speak." (2.1.118-120)

Again, Dido must urge him to be a man. He advises his audience to listen with "Myrmidons harsh ears, ... Lest [they] be moved too much with [his] sad tale" (2.1.123-125). However, it was Aeneas, and not his audience, who moments ago was fainting and swooning. Aeneas is hailed by his men as a great warrior, but he cannot even think about battle without becoming overwrought with sorrow – and this in the presence of an already-proven imperialistic success. If this play was written at any time between 1584 and 1588, as I have argued, then the impending Spanish threat was in the consciousness of England's people. King Phillip II was, after all, preparing his Spanish Armada for English invasion as early as 1585. This play shows that it is Dido, and not the foreign warrior, who has the stomach for battle, and as 1588 would show, it is England and not Spain that would triumph in their conflict. Marlowe here is again complimenting his queen, this time for her prowess as a battle-ready sovereign and on his belief that she will conquer any and all of her foes.

Aeneas continues his attempts at self-glorification (something with which Elizabeth was all too familiar from her numerous conversations with potential husbands) and tells his tale of the furious battle with the Greeks, attempting at every point to highlight his valiant efforts; however, Aeneas continues to disappoint with his inability to deal with the actuality of the tragic loss. Dido interrupts throughout with different interjections that demean his story and/or his role in the siege, again asserting her dominance over the weak and pitiful warrior. When he begins to speak, he is again overcome with emotion and interrupts the story with, "O Dido, pardon me!" (2.1.159); only at Dido's insistence and reassurance does he continue. At this point, Aeneas describes the bloody attack to which he awoke, demonizing the Greeks by describing their "stern faces [that] shined the quenchless fire / That after burnt the pride of Asia" and detailing in excess the brutalities they committed, perhaps as a way to validate his spineless reactions to his own story and the fact that he never once mentions trying to fight off the Greeks (2.1.186-187). The Trojans are no match for the horrific acts and cries of "Kill; kill!" coming from the Greeks, so the ghost of Hector makes an appearance to command Aeneas to flee the city (2.1.190). Aeneas must attribute his retreat to the great

warrior Hector to rationalize abandoning his city. Dido again interrupts the story and exclaims, "O Hector, who weeps not to hear thy name?" (2.1.209). Aeneas is telling the story of his own great escape from Troy, yet Dido ignores his part and laments Hector, the real hero of Troy, as yet another way to belittle her guest. Aeneas continues to describe the various tragedies he witnessed during his flight, including the death of King Priam that he made no effort to prevent. Though he takes great pains to describe this death, Aeneas avoids any mention of why he did not save his king (a duty most warriors would not hesitate to fulfill) or under what table he was cowering while watching what seems like an excessively brutal and drawn-out murder. Aeneas's story is an attempt to justify himself as a brave warrior, but he allows Dido, a creature of the "weaker" sex, to run over his tale without even the smallest protest.

In passing, Aeneas briefly mentions the various women that he also failed to save but does not linger on the details like he did with the previous fighting scenes. This point is significant, not only because Aeneas eventually abandons Dido, as well, but also because it emphasizes the possible sentiments of many men, including a queen's male suitors, who might believe women are expendable. First, Aeneas briefly states that he "lost [his] wife" but does not elaborate on the circumstances (2.1.270). Was she killed? Abducted? Misplaced? Aeneas never informs his audience, nor does he mention her again either in mourning or passing. Next, Aeneas literally picks the ravaged and disheveled Cassandra up from the streets, but when the Greeks begin to follow him, "[he], alas, was forced to let her lie"; she must have been weighing down his retreat (2.1.279). Aeneas then begins to turn back to rescue Polyxena but turns around after the Greeks appear. She is subsequently captured and sacrificed by the Greeks.²² Despite all the casualties, Aeneas is miraculously able to save the only people who offer him a clear benefit: himself and his son, his only heir (though even his son apparently does not mean much to Aeneas during his first attempt to abandon Dido, when he heads for his ships without dear Ascanius). This section of the story not only offers Elizabeth and her subjects a glimpse of what she has possibly avoided by remaining unmarried, but it also reminds them of the actual attitudes of at least two kings closely linked to Queen Elizabeth: her father King Henry VIII and her former brother-in-law King Phillip II of Spain. Her father famously disposed of four of his six wives as he saw fit.²³ Then King Phillip II, in order to maintain an alliance with England, made an attempt at marriage negotiations with Queen Elizabeth after the death of his wife and Elizabeth's sister Queen Mary. By rejecting marriage, Elizabeth avoided becoming a bargaining chip or political tool for the benefit of her would-be husband and his country.

Aeneas, the supposed-valiant warrior, leaves his king to die a brutal death and fails to save any of the women that come to him for help.

This last battle is no battle at all, but simply a retreat for Aeneas to save himself. Dido and company are obviously disappointed at Aeneas's cowardly exit strategy. Here, the story mirrors Elizabeth's unsuccessful marriage negotiations with the Duke of Alençon, who was involved in a doomed conflict with Spain during the early 1580s, which subsequently took his life. Prior to Alençon's death, Elizabeth was terribly displeased with his involvement in and then mismanagement of the war. She made her feelings known through her letters to him and later through the postponing and withholding of previously promised monetary contributions. While Elizabeth was usually reluctant to encourage any conflict among the European nations, she was much more disgusted with inept handlings of such conflicts. During the entire storytelling, Aeneas unconvincingly attempts to make himself a hero. Like Elizabeth who had plenty of courtiers to keep her company, Dido is not impressed with the non-existent last-stand of Aeneas. During her first conversation with Aeneas, she does not show interest in him as a potential husband, lover, or even political ally. Aeneas is weak and feminine compared to her, and he has no kingdom or fortune to offer. Unfortunately for Dido, Venus and Cupid force her to fall in love with Aeneas; then, just as quickly and easily as Aeneas selfishly abandoned the women of Troy (whom he claims to have made every effort to save), he leaves his Dido as soon as he has obtained what he needs.

After the banquet scene, Marlowe strays from complimentary parallels of Dido and Elizabeth to a hindsight-aided warning. When Cupid's arrow pricks Dido in Act Three, she suddenly cannot contain her attraction to Aeneas. This event represents the various courtships in which Elizabeth engaged with a number of inappropriate suitors that could have very easily distracted her from the business of her kingdom. Dido's previous strength and wit are diminished by the inexplicable passion she feels for Aeneas, and the surrender of her inaccessibility results in her downfall. When speaking to Anna, she asks, "Is not Aeneas fair and beautiful? ... Is he not eloquent in all his speech?" (3.1.62-64). Then she exclaims, "O dull-conceited Dido, that till now / Didst never think Aeneas beautiful!" (3.1.81-82). She praises the features which she had, until that moment, found unappealing and almost comical, and she admits to not having had any feelings for him prior to this moment. At first, she tries to control her feelings for him, maintaining the dignity of her position, but soon she vacillates between propriety and passion:

DIDO. Then never say that thou art miserable,
 Because it may be thou shalt be my love.
 Yet boast not of it, for I love thee not.
 And yet I hate thee not. [*Aside*] O, if I speak,
 I shall betray myself. (3.1.168-172)

Once under Love's spell, Dido abandons the demands of her position and submits to the whims of her passion; the respect she once commanded is completely obliterated, and her kingdom is surrendered before she even knows it. Here Marlowe compliments Elizabeth by reminding her of what she could have lost had she chosen to marry *anyone* but especially a foreigner who would have wanted and demanded command of her kingdom upon their marriage.

It is not until the relationship with Aeneas is consummated that Dido completely destroys any alliance (political or otherwise) with Iarbus and so seals the fate of her kingdom. This consummation, unfortunately for Dido, does not happen without difficulty. Even though she is under Cupid's spell, Dido is still the stronger of the two and so must take it upon herself to seduce Aeneas. After several failed attempts at innuendo (some more explicit than others), Dido must be straightforward with Aeneas to make him realize that she is in love with him. To Dido's relief, they finally do make love, after which a heartbroken Iarbus screams for them to emerge from their lovemaking while calling them "adulterers" (4.1.20). Queen Elizabeth was at many times rumored to be involved in extramarital affairs, so it has been suggested by several critics that this line is one of the few direct and obvious insults to the Queen; however, I contend that Marlowe is distinctly not alluding to that here. As Dorothea Kehler argues, "It would seem that Marlowe intends a denotation other than that of a participant in extramarital relations. Marlowe appears to be using 'adulterer' in a now obsolete sense, the OED's second definition of adulterer: 'one who adulterates, corrupts, or debases.'"²⁴ Therefore, Marlowe is not commenting on Elizabeth's alleged amorous liaisons, which would most assuredly have enraged the Queen; he is instead expressing Iarbus's anger and humiliation at this final and definite rejection. This reading drastically changes the usual approaches to this scene. Iarbus is not necessarily angry at Dido for having sex with another man but for irrevocably ruining any alliance they would have shared through their possible marriage as well as his chances of acquiring her kingdom for himself. Dido's previously effective political flirting, which relied on false hope, has become dangerous when that false hope becomes absolute denial. She has, in effect, "adulterated" the seemingly-probable union with Iarbus by committing to another man, which not only makes her an unfit ally for him but actually makes her an enemy. Therefore, Marlowe is not making a crass suggestion about his queen's behavior, but, rather, he is illustrating the point that if Elizabeth married anyone, especially someone not befitting her station, she could possibly ruin alliances she was able to maintain by avoiding marriage all together.

Dido is eventually reduced to a sniveling, love-struck, and emotional woman who suddenly cannot live without the man she once mocked. She neglects the needs of her people in favor of Aeneas's needs

and behaves with the fury and devastation of a jealous wife when she suspects his abandonment. Here again one hears echoes of the Queen of England, whose jealousy over the secret marriage of her favorite suitor the Earl of Leicester caused her to banish him from court for a period and to banish his new wife (and the Queen's cousin) Lettice Knolls forever. During her friendship and rumored romance with Leicester, Elizabeth at times behaved inappropriately, which caused scandal throughout her court and prompted some to accuse the relationships of compromising the Queen's ability to rule effectively. If she had married, it is possible that her penchant for jealousy would have crippled the ability of Parliament, her husband, or herself to tend to the matters of the kingdom. In effect, she would have met with the same demise as Dido, whose kingdom completely falls apart after she ends her life. Even if Dido had not killed herself, Carthage would have still remained vulnerable because the sources of her power, her unattainable sexuality and the confidence she carried, were irreparably compromised by Cupid and Venus's ploy. Her suicide did not cause the downfall of her kingdom; it merely relieved her of the shame of that inevitable downfall and the indignity of the love that was forced upon her.

Queen Elizabeth was very much like Dido, both in strength and intelligence (political and otherwise), but, unlike Dido, she could not be *forced* to marry or fall in love, despite the pressures of her parliament and, perhaps less overtly, her subjects. And unlike Dido, Elizabeth was able to resist the "charms" of courting foreigners. Marlowe presents her with the consequences of the wrong choice; his play, as Deanne Williams puts it, "dramatizes the loss of sovereignty that Elizabeth (and England) avoided by resolving the question of marriage, characteristically, by refusing to resolve it at all."²⁵ Marlowe employs the previous Dido myths, of which the highly educated Elizabeth, would have been aware, to illustrate the difference between the virtuousness of his queen and possible corruption she could have experienced because of a marriage. As Marlowe's negative exemplum proves, Elizabeth—by choosing not to marry—preserved her kingdom and her people, and perhaps also her life.



¹ See, for example, Deanne Williams, "Dido, Queen of England," *English Literary History* 73, no.1 (Spring 2006): 31-59; Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown, The I Tatti Renaissance Library (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001); Diane Purkiss, "Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and the Representation of Elizabeth I," in *A Woman Scorn'd*, ed. Michael Burden (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1998), 151-67; and Simon Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). According to Deanne Williams, Dido's name evolved from Elissa to Dido (meaning "the valiant one") because of her "intelligence as a political leader," which resulted in the transformation of Carthage "from a simple trading post to a major Mediterranean power, controlling much of northwest Africa, southern Spain, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica" (33). For contrast see Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden, ed. Charles W. Eliot, LL.D. (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1909). Virgil's Dido becomes so obsessed with Aeneas that she neglects her people and the upkeep of her kingdom:

Meantime the rising tow'rs are at a stand;
 No labors exercise the youthful band,
 Nor use of arts, nor toils of arms they know;
 The mole is left unfinish'd to the foe;
 The mounds, the works, the walls, neglected lie,
 Short of their promis'd heighth, that seem'd to threat the sky. (155)

Williams then describes the Dido in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Famous Women*, whose suicide was not in response to Aeneas's unrequited love but rather in response to the advancements of King Hiarbus. Boccaccio exclaims, "What glory there is in inviolate chastity! O Dido, venerable and eternal model of unsullied womanhood! I wish that women who have lost their husbands would turn their eyes to you and that Christian women in particular would contemplate your strength" (lines 174-5, quoted in Williams 37). However, for Diane Purkiss, Marlowe's Dido is in direct contrast to Boccaccio's (and Petrarch's) chaste Dido, and Purkiss describes her instead as a "romping flirt" intended to "debunk Petrarchan discourses" (162). Similarly, Simon Shepherd alludes to a sentiment common among Dido critics when he habitually refers to her as a "passionate woman" (192, 195, 196, *passim*).

² Queen Elizabeth was frequently urged to marry through speeches, masques, and literature; A few examples of this approach include Robert Dudley's attempts at his Kenilworth estate through masques, recounted by George Gascoigne in *The Princely Pleasures at the Courte at Kenilworth*, in *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. John Nichols (New York: B. Franklin, 1966), 485-523 and Philip Sydney's *The Lady of May*, in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5-13.

³ Margo Hendricks, "Managing the Barbarian: *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*," in *Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Emily Bartels (New

York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1997), 110-29. Hendricks believes that Marlowe's story not only celebrates English imperialism, but also helps further the move to redefine "Englishness" through the use of race. She argues that "in the last decades of the sixteenth century, the cultural image of racial difference often wore the face, manner, and customs of Spain ... and, as Marlowe shows, ... could also be drawn female, powerful, and African" (112).

⁴ David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, *Oxford World's Classics: Christopher Marlowe: Doctor Faustus and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Bevington and Rasmussen state that Marlowe attended Cambridge University intermittently from 1580 to 1586, taking "prolonged absences" during 1581-3, during which time he may or may not have been involved in "confidential government service" (vii). Williams believes that the play was written while Marlowe was attending Cambridge but does not state her sources for her composition date of 1585-8 further, so it is difficult to determine how she came to that date range. For more detailed biographical information on the life of Marlowe, see David Rigg's *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), John Bakeless, *The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe*, 2 volumes (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1942) and William Urry, *Christopher Marlowe and Canterbury* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988). For more detailed (if highly speculative) information on Marlowe's alleged involvement in government service, see Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

⁵ Sara Munson Deats, "Dido, Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris" 1994, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 194.

⁶ Donald Stump, "Marlowe's Tragedy of Virgil: Dido and Elizabethan Dreams of Empire," *Comparative Drama* 34, no.1 (Spring 2000), <http://continuum.uta.edu:2088/servlet/LitRC?&srchtp=adv&c=1&ste=78&stab=2048&tbst=asrch&tab=2&ADVST1=RN&bConts=2050&ADVST1=A72094162&docNum=A72094162&locID=txshrad2597> (accessed April 23, 2007). One could expect a severe and painful punishment from Queen Elizabeth should any opposition to her possible marriage negotiations be voiced or distributed. According to Stump, she once punished a writer named John Stubbs and another man who was helping him for distributing Stubbs's propaganda against the Duke of Alençon marriage negotiations by having "their right hands publicly chopped off" (paragraph 11). Everyone, especially those in her court, had to learn to deal with the matter very delicately. For more on reactions to Stubbs (from subjects and the queen), see Wallace T. MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 1572-88* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

⁷ Ascanius's son (Aeneas's grandson) Brutus was believed to be the founder of Britain. The mythology of the founding of Britain would have been common knowledge amongst most Elizabethan audiences.

⁸ Purkiss, 153.

⁹Ibid., 154.

¹⁰ In *Education in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1965), Kenneth Charlton explains that French was commonly taught in schools during the Renaissance and was the “most popular of the modern languages taught in England” (234). Italian, though it rivaled French for popularity, was still new in the Renaissance, so it was not as widespread.

¹¹ Purkiss, 163.

¹² Hendricks, 115.

¹³ According to Hendricks, Dido is a “symbolic sacrifice to a notion of race that [Hendricks argues] is at the center of Marlowe’s narrative” (118). Dido is destroyed because her ethnic and barbarian kingdom is a threat to Aeneas and his destiny as source of the future imperialist kingdom of England.

¹⁴ Hendricks, 113. In both Virgil and Marlowe Aeneas is the goddess Venus’s son; Venus is the god Jupiter’s daughter. See note number 6 on Aeneas’s relation to Britain.

¹⁵ Stump, para. 14.

¹⁶ Stump also details a historical incident similar to Aeneas’s landing on Carthaginian shores involving the Duke of Alençon. During one of his visits to England, Alençon decided to travel disguised as a civilian named Seigneur du Pont-de-Se. He was forced to travel through a storm, which delayed him at the Channel. When he finally arrived, his appearance did not immediately render him recognizable as a “Prince of Blood” (para. 36).

¹⁷ François de Valois (duke of Alençon) was indirectly involved in the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in Paris on August 24, 1572. The massacre, motivated by politics and, arguably, even more by religion, was initiated by Henry, the then-duke of Anjou (François’s brother); Chancellor Burague; the duke of Nevers; and the count of Retz. Most historians agree that Alençon was not involved at all in this action (since he was only 17 and was not usually present at royal council sessions), but as Mack Holt explains, “as a member of the royal family he was nevertheless tainted with the blood of St. Bartholomew’s Day” (21). Neville Williams and Holt both argue that it is this event that causes Elizabeth to halt marriage negotiations the first time around. Almost a decade later, they would resume with new force. For more on the events leading up to and during and aftermath of the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, see Henri Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959). For more on Alençon’s political struggles in France, see Mack Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For information on the strong relation between politics and religion during sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, see Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1999). Subsequent information on Elizabeth’s courtship with Alençon is taken from Neville Williams, *All the Queen’s Men: Elizabeth I and Her Courtiers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972).

¹⁸ Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (Vermont: The

Everyman Library, 1999), 243-93, Act 3, scene 1, lines 11-13. The emphasis is my own. Subsequent references to the primary text are given parenthetically in the article by act, scene, and line numbers.

¹⁹ Walter Raleigh, "Fortune hath taken away my love" 1587, in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 307-8, lines 9-12.

²⁰ Elizabeth Regina Tudor, "Ah, silly Pug" 1587, in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 308-9, lines 1-21.

²¹ Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, was the stepson (though some allege illegitimate son) of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Dudley was Elizabeth's favorite courtier and at times a possible marriage prospect. After his death in 1588, Essex inherited his position as favorite of the Queen. He achieved some successes in battle, but unfortunately he experienced many failures, as well. In September 1599 after he had entered into a court-opposed truce with the rebellious Earl of Tyrone in Ireland and abandoned his post, Queen Elizabeth refused to renew his patent on sweet wines, essentially bankrupting him. On February 7, 1601 Essex unsuccessfully tried to incite a rebellion against Elizabeth but quickly surrendered after citizens refused to join him. He was put to death on February 25, 1601. For added information on Elizabeth's relationship with the Earl of Essex, see Williams.

²² David Riggs refers to Aeneas as a "leaver of women" (124), contradicting Aeneas's excuse for leaving Dido (that the gods command it) by alluding to his already-established pattern of abandoning women when it conflicts with his own interests.

²³ For more detailed information on King Henry's matrimonial history and his wives, see Alison Weir, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991).

²⁴ Dorothea Kehler, "Shakespeare's Recollections of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*: Two Notes," *American Notes and Queries: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 8.

²⁵ Williams, 32.