"Marks of their origin": Using *Dido, Queen of Carthage* to Think Critically about National Origin Myths at Northumbria University (UK)

PAUL FRAZER
NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY, NEWCASTLE

Introduction

This paper describes an approach to teaching Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* as part of an optional undergraduate (final year) English literature module in the UK. "EL6045: Political Theatre in Early Modern Britain" focuses on how a range of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays can be used to explore political concepts: rhetoric (*Julius Caesar*), succession (*Gorboduc* and *King Lear*), mythic origins (*Dido, Queen of Carthage*), pandemic politics (*The Alchemist*), corruption, misogyny, and othering (*The White Devil*), tyranny (*Richard III*), and rebellion (*Richard II*). Each theme corresponds to a one- or two-week block of the module, and classes follow handout-led reading and discussion exercises. Students are in class for 3 hours per week, for 10 weeks per semester—other contact time includes a mid-point "Enhancement week" and a final week of assessment support tutorials. Central to the module's learning and assessment aims is that students are also required to think about these concepts in relation to time periods outside of the early modern. The session in focus for this paper is one three-hour workshop-seminar on Marlowe's *Dido*, which is read in relation to mythic origins—a term used to introduce the origin story as a political concept. The reading and discussion exercises in the handout below encourage students to approach *Dido* as a satire of Britain's dubious origins-myth: the ancient settlement of Troynovant (i.e. London) by Brutus the Trojan, Aeneas's great-grandson. The work students complete on this play is designed to not only strengthen their understanding of how origins stories can be politically useful, but also for the capacity of drama and its modern readers, to question them.

Political Theatre at Northumbria University

"Political Theatre in Early Modern Britain" is new: 2024 will see just its second outing. In the module's maiden delivery, week 5 (*Dido* and mythic origins) fell on February 22nd, two days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. One day prior, the Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a long, televised speech from the Kremlin, addressed to "Russian citizens" and

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"our compatriots in Ukraine."[1] This landmark piece of political theatre saw a seated Putin discuss the long "common knowledge" history of the Ukrainian territories as "an inalienable part of [Russian] history, culture and spiritual space," tied by blood to the Russian people. Because "modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia" and built upon "historically Russian land," ownership of the region and nation's origin story became a key prelude to war. The political theatre module requires students to relate their learning about the early modern period to other contexts, including the present. So, without knowledge of the scale of what in the coming days would follow, my students and I watched part of this address at the beginning of our class on mythic origins. Almost two years later, with no end to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in sight, ruinous global conflicts rage in Gaza, Myanmar, the Maghreb, and Sudan (while Kosovo and Taiwan edge closer to the brink); in this context, the politicisation of origin stories has increased (and increasing) importance. Literature, and the literature classroom, need not adopt political bias to teach students to think critically about political concepts. As this paper will argue, historical literature can be especially useful for the discussion and appraisal of abstract political concepts—especially when they involve narratives of origin and destiny. Unchallenged stories about when or where "we" came from can impact upon who we are today.

Where our students are now is at a good and important university in the region, with a growing international reputation. Located in Newcastle upon Tyne in the North-East of England, Northumbria was named the 2022 Times Higher Education University of the Year. Central to its recognition, the THE claims, is its student recruitment profile: "drawing 40 per cent of undergraduates from widening participation backgrounds and placing as many graduates into highly skilled employment across the north-east as all the Russell Group institutions combined."[2] As my colleague Adam Hansen's essay in this collection also outlines, the literature cohorts that we teach reflect this profile, with the mainstay of our undergraduates coming from the lowest POLAR (participation of local areas) quintiles. Many become first-generation university graduates.[3] Most of our undergraduates consider themselves to come from working class communities.

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[1] Vladimir Putin, "Address Concerning the Events in Ukraine," YouTube Video, 21 February 2022. Accessed 1 November 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5-ZdTGLmZo

[2] "THE Awards 2002: Winners Announced," *Times Higher Education* online. Accessed 1 November 2023, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/awards-2022-winners-announced

[3] The POLAR metric measures socio-economic status by post-code, generating university intake statistics by diving the number of young people who enter HE aged 18 or 19 against the total number of young people from a given area. By breaking postcode areas down into socio-economic quintiles, this also offers an economic profile

As in other places, many things (including the conflict in Ukraine) have increased pressure on families in the region in recent times; and there has been palpable discomfort with university fees and rising living costs within the student body. The number of our students who, for example, continue to live in their family home throughout their studies, has increased sharply—further burdening parents and guardians with modest socio-economic means. I doubt that I will ever forget the first time that a student foodbank leaflet was left in my staff pigeon-hole (as it was in 2016).

That our students occasionally miss classes because they need to work (sometimes multiple part-time jobs) is familiar enough. But thinking about them going hungry was new to me.[4] I was shocked. (The Northumbria Foodbank closed during the Covid-19 pandemic and has not reopened.) As an artifact of ongoing student poverty, which has of course spiralled to new lows in recent years, this leaflet represents something significant to me about our student body and their learning needs. In recent years I have adapted my teaching style and approach: rather than replicating what and how I was taught, I try to be responsive to the very different social and political contexts that my students are studying within. Knowledge comes at a price, and when our students can barely afford to stock their food cupboards, it's also worth thinking about how and what we teach them about literature and its value to society and the world. Part of this, of course, pertains to politics, political change, and the

of student bodies. See "Young Participation by Area," Accessed 1 November, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/search-by-postcode/

[4] On the rise of foodbank usage in the UK, pre-pandemic see Rachel Loopstra et al., "Austerity, Sanctions, and the Rise of Food Banks in the UK," *British Medical Journal* 350 (2015): 1–6. See also Jessica Murray, "Testing Times for Students: Food Banks Open at Universities," *The Guardian* 24 March 2020. Accessed 1 November 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/mar/24/testing-times-for-students-food-banks-open-at-universities

capacities of young graduates to think critically about the political worlds they inhabit and will shape in the future.

This brings me to oppression. The value-for-money debate about the role that Humanities graduates play in the economy has, for many already, poisoned the terms of that debate beyond cure. To say that the disciplines themselves are oppressed by debates about their economic utility is well known; and the effect of this on a student body from some of the most deprived local authority areas in the country comes close to what bell hooks once termed as principles of exclusion.[5] Close, also, is what Paulo Freire coined as the category of the oppressed, in educational terms: "[t]he oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being": a desire to exist "authentically" always underwritten by the consciousness of the oppressor (hooks terms this "dominator culture") which they have internalised.[6] Traits Freire attributes to the oppressed relate to "the marks of their origin": "prejudices" and "deformations," including "a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want, and to know"—manifesting through characteristics of the oppressed which include "self-deprecation, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them."[7] These traits are *very* familiar to me as a teacher. I see them often in my students, and it is a two-fold oppression. As in other places, all over the world, the English literature student at Northumbria University faces oppression in both economic and cultural terms.

And yet, something that I have long admired about our literature cohorts is the resilience of their belief in the importance of studying literary texts. In the face of a public debate which often demonizes, and certainly trivializes, higher education study of literature and the arts, there is a defiance to political pressure in many of our students. As a teacher, this gives me hope; and hope in the classroom is not something I take for granted. As I write, 2024 will host elections in major democracies across the globe: 40 national elections will take place, seeing what Bloomberg Economics estimates as 41% of the world's population

[5] bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). For a visual illustration of the indices of deprivation, see Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, "The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IiD2019)," 12. Accessed 1 November 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/IoD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf

[6] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 48.

[7] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 60, 63.

electing new political leaders.[8] In this context, stories about where a given people originate from, and why that matters, is a matter of considerable import. Through engagement with teaching materials guided by (in this case) Marlovian subversion, it is hoped that modules like this can enable critical thinking skills of the past to lend themselves to the betterment of the future.

Teaching *Dido, Queen of Carthage* as Political Satire

The introduction of Wendy Beth Hyman and Hilary Eklund's *Teaching Social Justice through Shakespeare* asserts:

> historical literature offers us … the chance to defamiliarize our own lived experience … The study of historical literature affords students particular encounters with the far-away, encounters that defamiliarize their modern lives and foster ethical engagement with the strange or remote. The "foreignness" of the historical offers a disruptive estrangement from the present.[9]

This is a useful way in to thinking about the value of what early modern texts bring to the university classroom, especially in relation to sensitive social and cultural concerns. Old texts can thus empower academic study and teaching praxis precisely because of their remoteness from present concerns; and "[o]ne of the core values of the humanities lies," argues Alexa Alice Joubin and Lisa S. Starks, "in understanding the human condition in different contexts, and Shakespeare's oeuvre as a cluster of complex, transhistorical cultural texts provides fertile ground to build empathy and critical thinking."[10] When we turn our attention to Marlowe, ideas of estrangement and remoteness are perhaps even more sharpened. Where Shakespeare's gilded place in the exclusory English Literature classroom of old requires deconstruction, Marlowe's outsider status (in life and literary legacy) lends his work an edge of "disruptive estrangement" that is difficult to deny or replicate. Because the author seems, moreover, to have fashioned himself as an antagonist to Elizabethan dominator values of nation-building and heteronormativity, the empathic potential for students to engage critically with political concepts can be particularly pronounced. Furthermore, according to Patrick

[8] Enda Curran and Anna Crawford, "Brace for Elections: 40 Countries are Voting in 2024," *Bloomberg US Edition*. Accessed 1 November 2023, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-11-01/brace-for-elections-40-countries-are-voting-in-2024?leadSource=uverify%20wall

[9] Wendy Beth Hyman and Hilary Eklund, "Introduction: Making Meaning and Doing Justice with Early Modern Texts," *Teaching Social Justice through Shakespeare*, ed. Hymen and Eklund (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 7.

[10] Alexa Alice Joubin and Lisa S. Starks, "Teaching Shakespeare in a Time of Hate," *Shakespeare Survey 74: Shakespeare and Education*, ed. Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 15.

Cheney, Marlowe's works should be read in antagonistic opposition to the Virgilian work of Edmund Spenser. Through critical responses to Spenser's work, Cheney argues, Marlowe "constructed a career model distinctly counter-Virgilian in its forms and goals."[11] It makes sense, then, to look to the play in which Marlowe literally re-wrote Virgil to appreciate this disruptive impulse in his political theatre.

Additional pedagogic context

Student reading levels: This is a final year (second semester) module. Assuming that students have completed their entire English undergraduate studies at Northumbria, they will have studied several early modern plays on core modules: on "EL4001: Introduction to Literary Studies" (*Titus Andronicus*) and "EL5003: Early Modern Cultures" (*Othello*, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Roaring Girl*, *Coriolanus*, *The Tempest* and Marlowe's *Edward II*). If students have also studied Adam Hansen's final-year, first-semester option module "EL6007: Sin, Sex and Violence: Christopher Marlowe in Context," they will potentially have read the entire Marlowe corpus, including *Dido*. Literature students at Northumbria should also be familiar with broad theoretical approaches to literary texts, including queer theory which is drawn upon in this class.

Preparation reading task: In advance of the session, alongside the primary reading of *Dido,* students are asked to read one short chapter ("Brutus founds Britain") from a modern retelling of the Brut Chronicle: Amy Jeff's *Storyland: A New Mythology of Britain*.[12] In the previous week's reading of Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*, the concept of British Trojan bloodlines will already have been broached. (King Gorboduc and his sons were the final Trojan English kings.) In this sense, the class employs aspects of the "flipped classroom" by prioritising class-time for active thinking tasks.[13]

Handout format: To keep the class as actively focused and present as possible, I avoid PowerPoint presentations and the traditional lecture in this module. Instead, students are seated in a seminar format, and are free to use electronic devices as research tools.

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[11] Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 9.

[12] Amy Jeffs, *Storyland: A New Mythology of Britain* (London: Quercus, 2021), 19–30.

[13] See William R. Slomanson, "Blended Learning: A Flipped Classroom Experiment," *Journal of Legal Education,* 64, no. 1 (2014): 93–102; On the benefits of the "partially flipped" classroom see Shannon Jenkins, "Flipping the Introductory American Politics Class: Student Perceptions of the Flipped Classroom," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 48, no. 4 (2015): 607–11.

Annotatable copies of the handout are provided, and students can also access this electronically via the virtual learning platform. As part of the module's learning and assessment objectives encourages students to think beyond the early modern, section 5 of the handout is structurally focused on taking the concept in question and exploring it in another historical period. This approach brings students out from the historical text to enable a productive closing discussion.

Seminar questions: Freire phrases his active learning pursuit as an attempted "awakening of critical consciousness." Of especial value here is problem-posing: "the important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking … My experience shows that when a suggestion is posed as a problem to the group, new themes appear."[14] As such, where possible the questions in the worksheet frame student discussion and thinking tasks in a problem-posing format: challenging students to consider problems in relation to their reading and wider knowledge of political and literary cultures.

Hyperlinks: Embedded hyperlinks within the handout provide students with relevant critical and wider primary reading resources for further independent research. Where resources are linked to Northumbria's library subscription services, I provide the link to the bibliographic details page for readers to avail of this information.

Further reading and listening: A list of relevant critical materials is provided at the end of the handout for further independent research. Supplementing this is a week-to-week list of useful audio-visual resources which students can access to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the week's primary reading and conceptual focus. In this week, I provide links to two podcast episodes on the (Albina and Brutus) origins of Britain from an independent podcast series: *Tales of Britain and Ireland*, by Graham Cooke. Whilst further, formal research is recommended if students wish to write about these topics, the pedagogical benefits of podcasts as a socially inclusive technology are increasingly recognised within educational research.[15]

[14] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 87, 124.

[15] See Daniela Gachago, "Podcasts: A technology for all?," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 47, no. 5 (2016): 859–72; Rachel E. Holmes, "Teaching *Serial* with Shakespeare: Using Rhetoric to Resist," in Hyman and Eklund, *Teaching Social Justice*, 145–154; and Varsha Panjwani, *Podcasts and feminist Shakespeare pedagogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Week 5: Origin Stories (*Dido, Queen of Carthage*)

Recap week 4

- Origins of English political tragedy: *The Tragedy of King Gorboduc*
- 1560s as beginning of a period of prolonged anxiety over the Tudor Succession
- Dramatic performance as political counsel
- Counsel as motif (rhetoric, storytelling and performance)
- Ancient Britain and the end of the Trojan bloodline

This week, our primary reading takes us back to the ancient origins of Britain, via those of Rome. Written by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe in the late 1580s, *Dido, Queen of Carthage* retells Virgil's origin-story about Rome: according to Virgil, a Trojan father and son (Aeneas and Ascanius) escaped the sack of Troy. Thereafter, they embarked upon an epic journey, and their fate/destiny was to found the Roman dynasty in Italy. Along the way, they were shipwrecked on the coast of Carthage in North Africa, and were aided by its queen. Without her help, the Trojan refugees would never reach their new home …

As you will learn from the additional reading material for this week, later English medieval chronicle history used Virgil's story to imagine Britain's origins as well – via Aeneas's great-grandson, Brutus. (We talked about Sackville and Norton's interest in Trojan Blood last week, remember? This is where it stems from.) As you work through the reading material for this week, try and think about how political regimes (past and present) use a sense of 'origins' to legitimate certain kinds of ideological beliefs and practices. Make a list of examples as they call to mind. Think about the relationship between myth and history; and keep words like native, homeland, destiny, and purity in mind as you read, think and discuss.

1. Imagining Britain's Origins

It's important for people to know where they come from, right? For national communities, this can feel especially significant – and this was true in the early modern period as well. In the week 5 folder on Blackboard, I've included some additional reading materials from a recent (modern) retelling of the Brutus myth. Read this alongside the below passage about the naming of Albion, from the earlier ancient migration of Albina ('The White Goddess') and her sisters. Think about how you would react to being told that this history was *true*.

> The devil and his legions ascended to the deepest parts of the forests and caves, thickening the air and visiting the women after nightfall. When they saw the spirits' eyes in the darkness they knew their own hunger was as nothing to the hunger suffered by these beings. Their eyes were red from an eternity in the dark without touch. Their lips were pale from the chill of ages of neglect. All at once the sisters ached with pity. And in the vessel of the night they enveloped the spirits with their tender touches and the spirits sowed their seeds in them. In the consummation of dawn, the devils slid from the women's arms and back down into hell.
>
> After a few weeks Albina and her sisters suffered violent sickness. Their bellies swelled – as if they were already full term – and by the time they had gestated for nine months, they

> barely escaped with their lives, as if some magic kept their outsides from splitting like overripe plums. When they finally gave birth, their screams sent eagles flapping from the mountain-tops and knocked fish insensible within the depths of the northern lakes. When the pain finally passed, the mothers were intact and weathering the wails of their enormous, hideous sons and daughters. From devils and queens the giants of Albion were born and they suckled milk that was as fat as the land.
>
> Amy Jeffs, *Storyland: A New Mythology of Britain* (London: Quercus, 2021), pp.14-15.

A: Are origin stories politically important? In what circumstances might they become politically useful?

B: Discuss the story in relation to female sexuality. What role does the female body play in the origin story of a society, race or nation?

2. Queering Mythology

Queer theory can offer us a useful way of thinking about literary narratives, especially when we're dealing with history and mythology. Queer readings are often valuable because they deconstruct normative assumptions. Read the extracts from the play's opening scene below and think about why this play begins the way it begins:

Act One, Scene One

> *Here the curtains draw. There is discovered* JUPITER *dandling* GANYMEDE *upon his knee, and* MERCURY *lying asleep*
>
> JUPITER: Come, gentle Ganymede, and play with me:

I love thee well, say Juno what she will.

GANYMEDE: I am much better for your worthless love
That will not shield me from her shrewish blows!
Today, whenas I filled into your cups
And held the cloth of pleasance whiles you drank,
She reached me such a rapt for that I spilled
As made the blood run down about mine ears.

JUPITER: What? Dares she strike the darling of my thoughts?
By Saturn's soul, and this earth-threat'ning hair,
That, shaken thrice, makes nature's buildings quake,
I vow, if she but once frown on thee more,
To hang her, meteor-like, 'twixt heaven and earth,
And bind her, hand and foot, with golden cords,
As once I did for harming Hercules.
…
Sit on my knee, and call for thy content,
Control proud fate, and cut the thread of time.
Why, are not all the gods at thy command,
And heaven and earth the bounds of thy delight?
…
Hermes no more shall show the world his wings,
If that thy fancy in his feathers dwell,
But, as this one, I'll tear them all from him,
Do thou but say, 'their colour pleaseth me'.
Hold here, my little love! [*Giving jewels*] These linked gems,
My Juno wore upon her marriage-day
Put thou about thy neck, my own sweet heart,
And trick thy arms and shoulders with my theft.

GANYMEDE: I would have a jewel for mine ear,
And a fine brooch to put in my hat,
And then I'll hug with you a hundred times.

JUPITER: And shalt have, Ganymede, if thou wilt be my love.

A: Who is Ganymede? What does he bring to Marlowe's story?

B: Why begin this origin story with an intimate relationship between two men? What kind of history is Marlowe's play interested in retelling?

3.i. Dido, Queen of England: In Praise of Elizabeth?

We can, of course, only speculate about why Marlowe and Nashe wanted to write about Aeneas's betrayal of Queen Dido. One possibility is that the story appealed to its authors (and audiences) because of its political topicality. For example, some critics have found parallels between Queen Dido and Queen Elizabeth I. With Elizabeth (and the succession problems we have been talking about) in mind, please complete the below reading, thinking and discussion exercises:

> *Dido, Queene of Carthage …* dramatizes the symbiotic relationship between Elizabeth's virginity and her political power. Earlier in her reign, Elizabeth had been entertained by theatrical performances that urged her to choose a mate. However, as the queen entered her fifties, the selecting of a husband and production of an heir were no longer likely: Elizabeth's final engagement with the Duke of Alençon had reached its inevitable stalemate, and ended with his death in 1584. Like William Gager's *Dido*, performed on 12 June 1583, at Christ Church, Oxford, and the Siena Sieve portrait of Elizabeth, painted in the early 1580s, Marlowe's *Dido, Queene of Carthage* uses the figure of Dido, Aeneas's jilted paramour, to praise the queen's *de facto* decision to remain single. By depicting Dido as a negative example of enslavement by erotic love and the desire for marriage, *Dido, Queene of Carthage* offers a sophisticated theatrical compliment to the queen.

Deanne Williams, 'Dido, Queen of England', *ELH* 73.1 (2006), pp.31-59.

A: What does Williams mean by 'the symbiotic relationship between Elizabeth's virginity and political power'?

B: Imagine that you were Elizabeth I. Would you consider Queen Dido to be a complimentary representation of you?

AENEAS: [*to the disguised* VENUS] But what may I, fair virgin, call your name,
Whose looks set forth no mortal form to view,
Nor speech bewrays aught human in thy birth?
Thou art a goddess that delud'st our eyes
And shrouds thy beauty in this borrowed shape.
But whether thou the sun's bright sister be,
Or one of chaste Diana's fellow nymphs,
Live happy in the height of all content
And lighten our extremes with this one boon,
As to instruct us under what good heaven
We breathe as now, and what this world is called
On which by tempests' fury we are cast. (1.1.188-199)

IARBUS: Eternal Jove, great master of the clouds,
Father of gladness and all frolic thoughts,
That with thy gloomy hand corrects the heaven
When airy creatures war amongst themselves,
Hear, hear, O hear Iarbus' planning prayers
Whose hideous echoes make the welkin howl
And all the woods 'Eliza' to resound!
The woman that thou willed us entertain,
Where, straying in our borders up and down,
She craved a hide of ground to build a town,
With whom we did divide both laws and land
And all the fruits that plenty else sends forth,
Scorning our loves and royal marriage-rites,
Yields up her beauty to a stranger's bed,
Who, having wrought her shame, is straightway fled. (4.2.4-18)

A: Where is Elizabeth in these speeches?

B: What kind of readings might a politically-minded audience take from moments like these?

3.ii. Dido, Queen of England: Satirizing Elizabeth?

Given the play's queer opening, we might also think about the more disruptive and subversive moments in the play, especially in its preoccupation with the figure of Elizabeth I. We also know that both Marlowe and Nashe wrote satirically elsewhere in their careers. Read the below quotations and answer the questions which follow.

> When a ruler who occupies her throne as a result of heaven's intervention knowingly seeks to trade her crown for the annulment of her lover's imperial destiny, questions arise about the nature of royal *dignitas*. Outside the boundaries of the play, Aeneas will eventually rule Italy in accordance with Jupiter's decree, calming such tensions, and an Elizabethan audience would have been well aware of the Virgilian hero's destiny. Nonetheless, such fulfilment remains external to Marlowe and Nashe's play, which ends instead with a Carthage deprived of legitimate heirs by the suicides of Dido, her sister, and the Gaetulian king, Iarbus. Dido's efforts to cancel the divinely ordained destiny of Aeneas's descendants and her wilful indifference to the line of royal succession ultimately leads to the collapse of her monarchy, an ending that no god acts to prevent. Marlowe's portrait of a politically irresponsible ruler, who attempts to circumvent the dictates of heaven and bestow the royal crown on personal impulse, might arguably be read as a provocative allusion to Elizabethan England, where Dido's sixteenth-century namesake, Elizabeth I, refused to appoint a successor, and rival claimants debated the validity of primogeniture, Henry VIII's will, and parliamentary decree. Certainly, as

fissures emerge between Dido's divine-right rhetoric and the actual will of the gods, Marlowe and Nashe's audience may begin to question why Jupiter initially sanctioned Dido's right to rule, and even to wonder if the gods really chose the best candidate for the position.

Chloe K. Preedy, '(De)Valuing the Crown in *Tamburlaine, Dido Queen of Carthage,* and *Edward II*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 54.2 (2014), pp.259-277 (270).

A: What does Preedy's argument bring to this discussion? Do you agree with her?

B: With your response in mind, read and think about Dido's words and actions in the below extracts. How would you describe them?

DIDO: Speaks not Aeneas like a conqueror?
O blessèd tempests that did drive him in!
O happy sand that made him run aground!
Henceforth you shall be our Carthage gods.
Ay, but it may be he will leave my love
And seek a foreign land called Italy.
O that I had a charm to keep the winds
Within the closure of a golden ball,
Or that the Tyrrhene Sea were in mine arms
That he might suffer shipwrack on my breast
As oft as he attempts to hoist up sail!
I must prevent him; wishing will not serve.
…
What if I sink his ships? O, he'll frown!

Better he frown than I should die of grief.
I cannot see him frown, it may not be.
Armies of foes resolved to win this town,
Or impious traitors vowed to have my life,
Affright me not: only Aeneas' frown
Is that which terrifies poor Dido's heart.
Not bloody spears, appearing in the air,
Presage the downfall of my empery,
Nor blazing comets threatens Dido's death:
It is Aeneas' frown that ends my days.
If he forsake me not, I never die,
For in his looks I see eternity,
And he'll make me immortal with a kiss. (4.4.93-123)

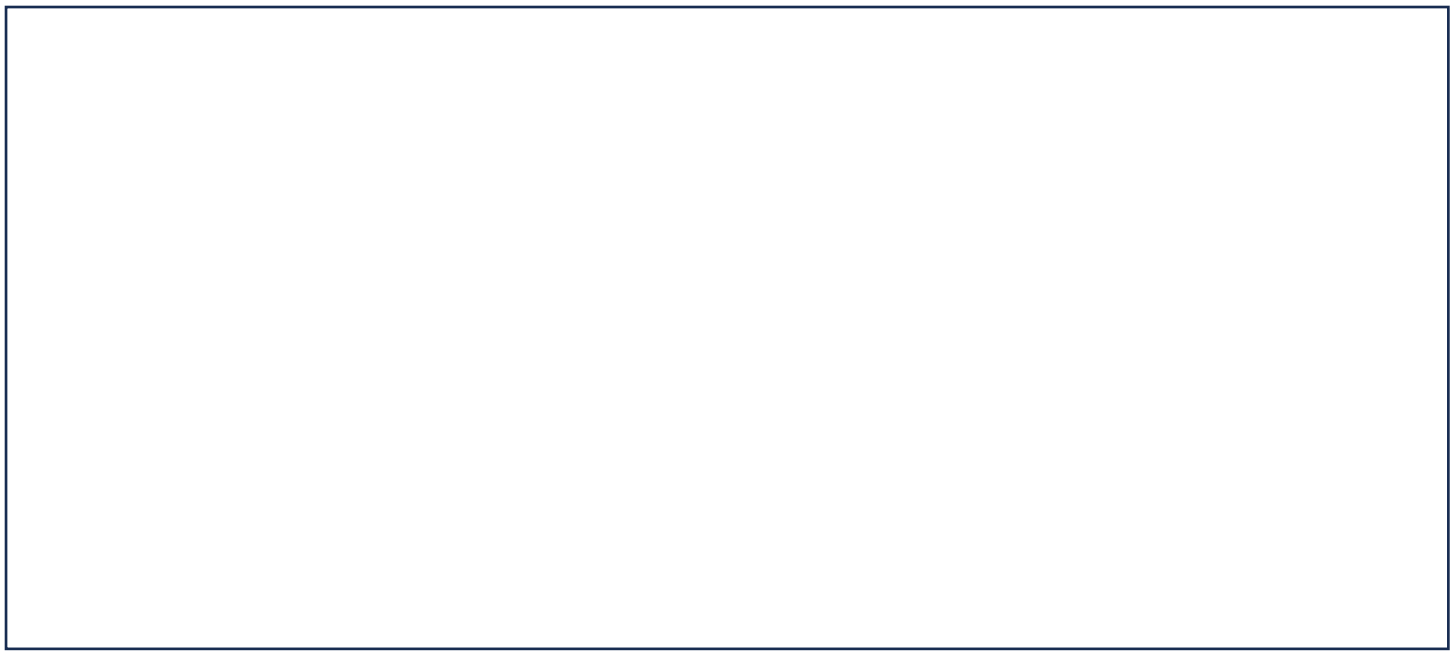
DIDO [*to* IARBUS]: Go thou away, Ascanius shall stay.
IARBUS: Ungentle queen, is this thy love to me?
DIDO: Oh stay, Iarbus, and I'll go with thee.
CUPID: And if my mother go, I'll follow her.
DIDO: [*to* IARBUS]: Why stay'st thou here? Thou art no love of mind.
IARBUS: Iarbus, die, seeing she abandons thee!
DIDO: No, live Iarbus; what hast thou deserved,
That I should say 'Thou art no love of mine'?
Something thou has deserved. Away, I say!
Depart from Carthage! Come not in my sight!
IARBUS: Am I not king of rich Gaetulia?
DIDO: Iarbus, pardon me, and stay a while.
CUPID: Mother, look here.
DIDO: What tell'st thou me of rich Gaetulia?
Am I not queen of Libya? Then depart!
IARBUS: I go to feed the humour of my love,
Yet not from Carthage for a thousand worlds.

DIDO: Iarbus!

IARBUS: Doth Dido call me back?

DIDO: No, but I charge thee never look on me.

IARBUS: Then pull out both mine eyes, or let me die. (3.1.35-55)



4. The Barren Origin

We began the session thinking about the role of female identity and sexuality in the origin-story template. What role does maternity play in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*? Could we read the text and maternity in relation to its wider interest in bloodlines, succession and authority? Read the below extract (a passage that was not taken from Virgil) featuring Dido's widowed, elderly Nurse and Cupid (disguised as Ascanius):

CUPID: Nurse, I am weary; will you carry me?

NURSE: Aye, so you'll dwell with me and call me mother/

CUPID: So you'll love me, I care not if I do.

NURSE: That I might live to see this boy a man!
How prettily he laughs! Go, ye wag,
You'll be a twigger when you come to age.
Say Dido what she will, I am not old;
I'll be no more a widow, I am young;
I'll have a husband, or else a lover.

CUPID: A husband and no teeth?

NURSE: O what mean I to have such foolish thoughts!
Foolish is love, a toy. O sacred love,
If there be any heaven in earth, 'tis love,
Especially in women of our years.
Blush, blush for shame, why shoudst thou think of love?
A grave and not a lover fits thy age,
A grave? Why? I may live a hundred years:
Fourscore is but a girl's age, love is sweet.
My veins are withered and my sinews dry,
Why do I think of love, now I should die? (4.5.15-34)

A: What does the Nurse regret? Why?
B: Does it matter that Marlowe and Nashe added this passage to Virgil's story?
C: Why did they add it?

5. Origins Stories Today

To involve an 'origins story' in political rhetoric can be a powerful tool. Over the remaining weeks on the module, we will be talking about forms of othering, in relation to a range of concepts including national, racial and ethnic identities – in the UK and beyond. Based on what we discussed today, please watch the below documentary about far-right political dissidence in the United States.

Think in particular about the political commentator Nicholas Fuentes. (*Be warned, this documentary includes offensive language and a range of racial and gender-based slurs*.)

https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0014khc/louis-therouxs-forbidden-america-series-1-1-extreme-and-online

A: How does Fuentes construct an origins story about the racial identity of the US?
B: What rhetorical techniques and strategies does Fuentes employ?
C: What does religion bring to this strategy?

Further reading

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Further listening

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