

The Role of the Gods in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*

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What are the gods for in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*? Their role clearly differs greatly from that of their counterparts in the *Aeneid*, and their behaviour differs markedly again from that of their counterparts in other early modern plays and works.¹ Yet their importance to the play is obvious. Indeed, the degree of importance they are given is perhaps somewhat surprising: why should Marlowe, who is often taken to be atheistic, include gods at all in his version?² Why not a godless version of events as found in other renderings of the Dido and Aeneas story, such as Jodelle's *Didon se sacrifiant*, Nahum Tate's libretto to Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, or Metastasio's melodrama *Didone abbandonata*?³ Or, to ask essentially the same question another way: why should Marlowe choose to adapt *this* story, to which the gods are so central, rather than, say, one which features only human characters? Don Cameron Allen notes in comparing Marlowe's play with other more or less contemporary versions that "[t]he gods have more to say and do in the English *Dido* than in any of the previous [continental] dramas."⁴ Far from removing or minimising the role of the gods, then, Marlowe seems to have found their use greatly fruitful for his dramatic and literary purposes. With such questions as the above in mind, then, it quickly becomes clear that the gods of *Dido, Queen of Carthage* are unique, uniquely important, and uniquely interesting.

¹ On the gods on the early modern stage, see the Introduction to Charles Eager, *Theophany on the Shakespearean Stage*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2020, and references. On *Dido* and 1580s drama, see Christopher Marlowe, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, ed. by Ruth Lunney (Manchester University Press, 2023), 20–22. Quotations from the play come from this edition.

² Marlowe's possible atheism remains much discussed. Recent biographies take it for granted. See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, *Dark Renaissance* (Bodley Head, 2025); David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (Faber, 2004). For good recent work on this issue see Cristiano Ragni, "'Scorning both God and his ministers': At The Origins of Marlowe's Atheism," *Journal of Marlowe Studies*, no. 4 (2024): 92–114.

³ For a discussion of Jodelle with respect to Marlowe, see Don Allen, "Marlowe's *Dido* and the Tradition," in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*, ed. Richard Hosley (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 63–64. Tate's replacement of Juno and Venus with witches is discussed by Mary Smith, *Love Kindling Fire: A Study of Christopher Marlowe's "The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage"* (Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1977), 69–70. For Metastasio, Marlowe, and the Dido myth, see *Didone: La tragedia dell'abbandono*, ed. Antonio Ziosi (Marsilio, 2017). (Hereafter: Ziosi, *Tragedia*.)

⁴ Allen, p. 66.

This then raises the question of what the end or purpose of this uniqueness, importance, and interest with which Marlowe's gods are invested might be. This essay will argue that Marlowe's treatment of the Dido and Aeneas story in this play works *inter alia*—and precisely through his portrayal of the gods and of the divine realm—as a critique of the pagan worldview, at least insofar as such a worldview manifests itself and is played out in the story of Dido and Aeneas. The question is also raised of *why* Marlowe should wish to achieve such an end. It appears that in this play, probably written towards the end of his Bachelor's degree in 1584–5,⁵ Marlowe shows the mark not only of his years of humanistic education via the play's extensive classical knowledge,⁶ but also of the examination style to which he had been introduced at Corpus Christi, Cambridge, in which students were required to argue for and against a rich variety of unlikely—sometimes even outlandish—propositions.⁷ Likewise, I suggest, this play entertains a thesis which, while not presenting a live option to the educated, sophisticated audience for which it was envisaged, is offered for their consideration.⁸ Playwright and audience, in this view, are enjoying argument and discussion for its own sake as an end in itself. What, then, is the play's thesis? It could be put in a number of ways, precisely because it is never explicitly stated. In its pithiest form, it could be reduced down to something akin to: “The universe of the pagans—or Virgil, or the ancients—is an absurd one.” I hasten to add here that any criticism on Marlowe's part of pagan worldviews does nothing to suggest or imply his preference for a Christian one. Rather, its bleak world is part of the play's generally pessimistic outlook, which has been noted before.⁹

On this view, *Dido* is perhaps to be thought of as a quasi-academic drama, informed by and bearing the influence of the rich intellectual and dramatic cultures of Cambridge

⁵ This essay subscribes to Ruth Lunney and Hugh Craig's carefully-researched conclusion that the play seems to have been written by Marlowe—without Nashe—in 1584–85; see *Dido*, ed. Lunney, 15–20, and references and, in particular, Ruth Lunney and Hugh Craig, “Who Wrote *Dido, Queen of Carthage*?,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies*, no. 1 (2020), 1–31.

⁶ Probably the fullest account of the role played by Marlowe's classical reading in informing *Dido* is Antonio Ziosi, *Didone regina di Cartagine di Christopher Marlowe: Metamorfosi virgiliane nel Cinquecento* (Carocci, 2015). (Hereafter: Ziosi, *Metamorfosi*.)

⁷ See Riggs, chapters 2–6, for particularly useful descriptions of education in Tudor England.

⁸ On possible early performances, see Lunney, ed., 22–29.

⁹ Sheldon Brammall, ““Sound this angrie message in thine eares”: Sympathy and the Translations of the *Aeneid* in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” *Review of English Studies*, no. 65 (2014): 402; William Godshalk, “Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” *English Literary History*, no. 38 (1971): 18. Cf. Smith, 84. For a “Christian” Marlowe, however, see Roy Battenhouse, “Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Christian Premises,” *Connotations*, no. 3 (1993–4): 226–42 and references.

(though not likely to have been performed there, where plays were to be only in Latin). This essay will look first, then, at key moments in which the gods walk the stage in order to see how Marlowe's critique of paganism plays out. As will be seen, these cluster around certain points in the play, thus performing a structural role in the complex of the play's dramaturgy. The earlier acts are more weighted with gods than Acts Four and Five, which feature only Cupid-as-Ascanius and a brief theophany of Mercury respectively. However, it is these later acts, I argue, which show the results of the divine activities seen in the play's first half. This nicely divides both the play and this article into two parts of roughly equal length. The essay will find that the second half of the play allows—and, I suggest, invites—the reader or spectator to draw certain conclusions concerning such unseen forces as Fate which are at work in the play and, finally, what sort of cosmos the characters find themselves in. In this I am following in particular two stimulating essays from the 'eighties, by Richard Martin and Bruce Brandt, both of whom suggest that Marlowe invites spectators and readers to judge the cosmos of *Dido*, though I differ from some of their conclusions.¹⁰

I

The importance and the peculiarity of *Dido*'s divine realm are emphasised from the very first stage direction:

Here the curtains draw. There is discovered Jupiter dandling Ganymede upon his knee, and Mercury lying asleep. (1.1.0 SD)

As the two lovers begin to discuss the possible punishment of Juno for the "shrewish blows" (1.1.4) which she seems routinely to administer to Ganymede, the scene efficiently establishes a sense of the cruelty that is common currency in Jupiter's heavenly court, as well as the court's notable lack of any transcendental attributes beyond an arbitrarily-used cosmic power implied in such worrying lines as when Jove vows, should Juno "frown on [Ganymede] more, / To hang her meteor-like 'twixt heaven and earth" (1.1.12–13), or when he invites Ganymede to "Control proud Fate and cut the thread of Time" (1.1.29). Whatever

¹⁰ Bruce Brandt, *Christopher Marlowe and the Metaphysical Problem Play* (Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1985), 16–17; Richard Martin "Fate, Seneca, and Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*," *Renaissance Drama*, no. 11 (1980): 50. Cf. Claude Summers, *Christopher Marlowe and the Politics of Power* (Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974), 20–40; Judith Weil, *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 18; Smith, 61–62.

the seriousness or feasibility of such imagined scenarios,¹¹ we are assured, to use a word current at the time, that this is an extraordinarily “base” heaven and, moreover, one running contrary to the mainstream of Renaissance intellectual culture, in which the more scandalous myths of the gods are reinterpreted through allegory so as to signify something more polite and high-minded than is offered by a literal reading of ancient texts.¹² If there can be said to be any allegory here, it is that in the heaven of Marlowe’s Jupiter, rather than, say, such virtues as justice and mercy, there rule instead such opposing vices as wrath and envy.

The desultoriness of Jupiter’s court has often been noted. However, what has been overlooked by commentators is the role which Venus plays in combatting this languor and turning it into action.¹³ Her speech marks the first Virgilian moment in the play, but departs from its source markedly in tone:

Ay, this is it! You can sit toying there
And playing with that female wanton boy,
Whilst my Aeneas wanders on the seas
And rests a prey to every billow’s pride. (1.1.50–53)

Yet, despite this—far from winsome—attitude, she is in the end successful in persuading Jupiter to act as she wishes: her “care” (1.1.82) becomes, by the end of the scene, Jupiter’s: “Venus, farewell, thy son shall be our care. / Come, Ganymede, we must about this gear” (1.1.120–21). These are the last words of Jupiter in the play, placing Venus’s care, Aeneas, in the god’s final resounding couplet. He has, up until this point, sought to content Venus during their dialogue (see 1.1.82–121) but despite this she remains indefatigable in rousing him to an action which—albeit reluctant on his part—seems genuine. As he acknowledges to Ganymede, “We *must* about this gear.” (And, as will be seen, the modal verb *must* will continue to do a lot of work later in the play.) This idea of Jove’s gradually increasing seriousness is implicitly validated by the theophany of Mercury in Act Five when the god says: “The king of gods sent me from highest heaven, / To sound this angry message in thine ears” (5.1.32–33). Thus the god who was *lying asleep* at the play’s beginning, by the ends of

¹¹ Some critics have taken Jove at his word here, but it seems like the excess typical of Marlovian lovers. Ganymede will not actually control Time and Fate.

¹² The classic account of mythography and the allegorical re-reading of Greco-Roman myth before and during the Renaissance is Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. Barbara Sessions (Princeton University Press, 1953). On high-minded allegorical Ganymedes, see Ziosi, *Metamorfosi*, 91–92, and references.

¹³ Brammall, 392, does note Jove’s increasing seriousness over the course of the scene, however.

the play's induction, is off on Jupiter's business:

Hermes, awake, and haste to Neptune's realm. [...]
Charge him from me to turn his stormy powers
And fetter them in Vulcan's sturdy brass. (1.1.114, 117–18)

The play begins, then, with something like the triumph of Venus. Jupiter's first and last lines to her are hemmed in, bounded, and circumscribed by her "care." As will be seen, it is the first of several such victories. Rather than having allowed herself to be consoled by Jupiter's prophecy, she puts voice instead to a mood of scepticism and protest prevalent throughout the play, writing off the great prophecy which so stands out in Virgil as incredible flattery: "How may I credit these thy flattering terms [...]" (1.1.109). As Ziosi writes, in this non-Virgilian, Marlovian addition to the story, Venus "presses" Jove again, resulting in a great questioning of his authority.¹⁴

When Venus returns to the stage in a sort of "divine epilogue" to the mostly human Act Two, Marlowe makes another important development in his characterisation of Venus which is both highly idiosyncratic and of great importance to the play. It is encapsulated in what is, at first glance, an ostensibly almost throwaway line, in which Venus voices her indifference as to whether Aeneas finally arrives in Italy or stays in Carthage. After giving her instructions to Cupid regarding Dido, she lists her reasons for this attack on the queen:

That she may dote upon Aeneas' love,
And by that means repair his broken ships,
Victual his soldiers, give him wealthy gifts,
And he at last depart to Italy –
Or else in Carthage make his kingly throne. (2.1.327–31)

It is tempting to disregard this last line as merely baffling.¹⁵ But there are a number of important things going on in it, as well as in those preceding. For one thing, it is seen here that Venus does indeed get what she says she desires by the play's end. Moreover, she would have gotten it even if the reversals of Act Five had not taken place and Aeneas had remained

¹⁴ Ziosi, *Metamorfosi*, 1.1.109–112n. Ziosi uses the Italian verb *incalzare*, and indeed it is as if Venus is "stepping on" or "walking over" Jove to some extent here. Cf. Lunney, 1.1.109–21n. On authority and *Dido*'s gods, see Andrew Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify* (Ashgate, 2015), 13–38; Troni Grande, *Marlovian Tragedy: The Play of Dilation* (Associated University Presses, 1999), 83; Simon Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (Harvester, 1986), 200.

¹⁵ It has not received much comment, but it is considered by Clare Kinney, "Epic Transgression and the Framing of Agency in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, no. 40 (2000): 263, though we reach different conclusions.

as King in Carthage. (Dido crowns him co-regent in an unhinged moment towards the end of Act Four, Scene Four which, though presumably of dubious legality, is treated as valid enough by the characters.)¹⁶ This indifference of Aeneas's mother in *Dido* to what is the main point of the *Aeneid* undermines the source text's importance, refocusing the story (as the play does generally throughout) squarely on Carthage and on Dido. Moreover, it also shows, once again, the goddess's disrespect and disregard for, or at least scepticism towards, Jupiter and his prophecy, and therefore also for and towards Fate.¹⁷ Most importantly, however, it is simply a flat contradiction of what Jupiter has told her by—evidently inerrant—prophecy only a few scenes earlier.¹⁸ Why should the goddess operate at odds with—and indeed in wilful ignorance of—the dictates of Fate, especially when they are already in her favour? The implication seems to be that she desires to “wound Queen Dido's heart” (2.1.333), as Cupid puts it immediately after her speech, as an end in itself. If so, this seems to be either for the sadistic pleasure involved in it—which at least evidently appeals to Cupid—or, though she never says so explicitly, as an attack on Juno. At any rate, the self-contradictory “warring” of the gods with Fate becomes a significant theme here and is developed, as will be seen, in Act Three; this then carries over into mortal concerns in Acts Four and Five when Dido and Aeneas debate, with little progress or advantage to either side, the “necessity” of Aeneas's departure, thus calling into question the relationship of both characters to Fate. (It is also carefully set up as a theme at the start of the play when Jupiter speaks of “the Wind-god, warring now with Fate” (1.1.115).) Finally, although Venus's speech is emphatically concerned with the logic of her actions, that is, with purpose and result (*That she may..., And by that means...*), this indifference to the main point of the entire Aeneas story indicates a basic irrationality, inconsistency, and self-contradictoriness in the goddess of love, especially in view of what she has heard from her father. (This is not to mention the needlessly extravagant means—manipulating Dido's will—employed for such prosaic and routine ends as repairing ships and victualling soldiers, which would have been much simpler and more straightforward without the messy intervention of Eros.) However, as will be seen presently,

¹⁶ Ed Paleit notes how, unlike in Virgil, laws and state apparatus are minimal in *Dido*, the emphasis instead falling “on the subjective experience of princes themselves,” in “*Dido, Queen of Carthage* and the Contradiction of Sovereignty,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies*, no. 5 (2025): 3.

¹⁷ As Lunney notes, it also “anticipates her collusion with Juno” (2.1.331n).

¹⁸ One could say that the goddess might here be envisaging a scenario in which Aeneas takes the throne of Carthage for some indeterminate time before moving on to Italy; but if she means this, why would she not say so clearly and directly?

Venus is not the only irrational goddess holding sway over the drama.

Perhaps no scene in *Dido* shows the oddity and centrality of Marlowe's gods so fully as Act Three, Scene Two. As with Act One, Scene One, Marlowe takes a Virgilian scene (*Aeneid*, IV. 90–128), and prefaces it with burlesquery of his own invention.¹⁹ The scene begins with a soliloquy from a Juno who seems virtually unhinged:

Here lies my hate, Aeneas' cursèd brat,
The boy wherein false Destiny delights,
The heir of Fame, the favourite of the Fates
That ugly imp that shall outwear my wrath,
And wrong my deity with high disgrace. (3.2.1–5)

If Venus has appeared illogical heretofore in the play, her sister here outdoes her. The reasoning of her speech (or rather the absence thereof), as with Venus, shows her up: if Ascanius is indeed to *outwear her wrath*—which must be taken to mean that he will survive the consequences of it or that he will in some sense flourish despite it—then why does she make to kill him? It is clear that this cannot be done; and indeed it is not finally done, despite her intention to do away with him then and there. Like her sister has done already, here Juno shows a self-contradictory attitude towards Fate and prophecy: whilst acknowledging the truth of these, she still wishes to act contrary to them by trying to murder someone who, she knows, must and will survive. Little wonder that she calls Destiny *false*, almost as if she wishes it to be false in the sense of *incorrect* whilst really regarding it as akin to a person who is *untrustworthy*. The bankruptcy of her reasoning is shown up all the more starkly as she goes on:

But I will take another order now,
And raze th' eternal register of Time.
Troy shall no more call him her second hope,
Nor Venus triumph in his tender youth,
For here, in spite of heaven, I'll murder him,
And feed infection with his let-out life. (3.2.6–11)

This is a logical impossibility and one, moreover, that she implicitly acknowledges: if the *eternal register of time* is what it is (say, the unchanging record of history leading up to and

¹⁹ Ziosi, *Metamorfosi*, 293; cf. Trollope's description of *Dido* as a "burlesque" (*Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris*, ed. H. J. Oliver (Manchester University Press, 1968), xix). I imagine that Trollope had scenes such as this in mind.

stretching indefinitely beyond the moment in which she is speaking), then it cannot, by definition, be *razed*. She wishes to act *in spite of heaven*, whilst also implying that this cannot be performed by anyone, mortal or immortal. Juno explicitly acknowledges this self-contradictoriness when interrogated by Venus later in the scene. Explaining (disingenuously) that she had no intention to kill or harm Ascanius, she says: “Bootless I saw it was to war with Fate, / That hath so many unresisted friends” (3.2.49–50). Indeed, Fate’s “friends” are celestially powerful; and the word *unresisted*, presumably chosen here because it was metrically opportune, seems equivalent to the more common *irresistible*. It is indeed *bootless*, or futile, *to war with Fate*, so why does she do it? It is as though the goddess’s will overpowers her intellect, so much so that self-contradiction does not matter—or even occur—to her.

By apparent contrast, when Venus enters to save her grandson, she appears, almost, for a moment, a defender of the good:

What should this mean? My doves are back returned,
Who warn me of such danger prest at hand,
To harm my sweet Ascanius’ lovely life. (3.2.21–23)

It seems as though she may here be about to present a contrast to the violent Juno. But reader and audience are soon disabused of any such impression: it is the same violent, irascible, and irrational goddess that we have seen, only perhaps this is her at her worst:

Avaunt, old witch, and trouble not my wits! [...]
Out, hateful hag, thou wouldst have slain my son,
Had not my doves discovered thy intent:
But I will tear thy eyes from forth thy head,
And feast the birds with their blood-shotten balls,
If thou but lay thy fingers on my boy. (3.2.25, 32–6)

As the goddesses continue this almost pantomime discussion, Juno disingenuously tries to play the conciliatory part—though what she has to gain from this it is hard to say—whilst Venus shows her familial piety via defensiveness, possessiveness, and threats of violence which make little logical sense: how can the eyeballs be torn from a purely spiritual being? And in what sense can the queen of the gods be an “old witch” or “hateful hag,” terms of abuse which imply a human subject? Once again, as with Act One, Scene One, Marlowe seems to be offering a challenge to the intellectual mainstream of the sixteenth and recently preceding centuries in emphasising the materiality and the physicality of his gods, eschewing

any higher spiritual or moral signification or even metaphysical status. The scene concludes with their opportunistically-made and obsequiously-described “amity” and “eternal league” (3.2.67–68), though we know that it will not be amiable, eternal, or even a league. We are in Machiavelli’s world of *realpolitik*—a view in which we know Marlowe had great intellectual interest—played out on a cosmic level and in comic tones.²⁰

II

In *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, the gods play, by virtue of their distinctiveness and ontological difference from the drama’s mortal characters, a structuring role: the drama is inaugurated by an image which encapsulates in symbolic form the various mythical escapes of Jupiter; its plot is propelled in Act Three and late in Act Two by Venus, Cupid, and Juno; Aeneas vows at the end of Act Three to stay with Dido, but has his mind changed by his offstage, reported dream vision of Mercury in Act Four, Scene Three; after vacillating again in Act Four, Scene Four, it is Mercury’s theophany early in Act Five that is decisive in prompting his final departure and the dénouement of the play. These theophanies in *Dido* are akin to pillars which assist in structuring the play.²¹ It is surely significant, then, that Act Four alone contains no gods²² (save for Act Four, Scene Five, a brief, thirty-seven-line comic epilogue in which Cupid toys with the Nurse and which serves, to my mind, as a concise and pithy reinforcement of the destructive power which love, figured in the persons of Venus and Cupid,²³ has over the play’s mortal characters). It is, moreover, the only act to employ a range of Christian ideas and language (though not necessarily to Christianising ends); this will be explored later. It is consequently in Act Four that the play’s mortal characters give the impression more strongly than at any other time of being profoundly conditioned by arbitrary forces outside of their control or knowledge—or even their wildest guesses—as a consequence of which their freedom comes close (though not, I think Marlowe emphasises,

²⁰ Cf. Duxfield, 28.

²¹ Cf. Matthew Proser, “*Dido Queene of Carthage* and the Evolution of Marlowe’s Dramatic Style,” in *A Poet and a Filthy Play-Maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama (AMS, 1988), 83–97.

²² Timothy Crowley notes that Act Four is also “radically non-Vergilian” in “Arms and the Boy: Marlowe’s Aeneas and the Parody of Imitation in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” *English Literary Renaissance*, no. 38 (2008): 430.

²³ Godshalk, 17, reads the gods as embodiments of character psychology. Of course, in the imagination of the play, they also exist literally and concretely, influencing the world and having lives of their own.

completely, since free choices are still apparently made)²⁴ to being utterly compromised. With the gods largely out of the way, their effects are felt all the more strongly. The responses, thoughts, and reactions of the human characters come to the fore, telling us much both about what sort of universe they think themselves to inhabit, as well as what sort they really do.

The act begins exploring such ideas immediately by portraying the human responses to Juno's storm. Moreover, as the act continues, this effect is compounded by the subjects of the following scenes: Iarbas's sacrifice to Jove in the second scene; Aeneas's report of his dream vision of Mercury in the third. The long Act Four, Scene Four is the most godless of all, but it is in a sense the fruit of all the divine manipulation seen heretofore in its dramatisation of the unravelling of Dido's sanity. As for the response to Juno's storm in Act Four, Scene One, various aspects stand out: alongside a sense of wonder, there are also foreboding, strangeness, oddity, and even the suggestion of black magic. Achates opens the act by remarking on the strange suddenness of the storm: "Did ever men see such a sudden storm, / Or day so clear so suddenly o'ercast?" (4.1.1–2), whereon Iarbas takes up the suggestion, giving voice to his sense of the supernatural, which is, as it happens, well-founded if not entirely accurate. He says: "I think some fell enchantress dwelleth here, / That can call them forth whenas she please" (4.1.3–4). It is indeed supernatural, but the "enchantress" in question is the queen of the gods herself. That she is aligned with a figure of black magic, such as is invoked by the name of Sycorax in *The Tempest*, for example, is telling:²⁵ in such a universe as *Dido's*, the action of its inimical gods is hard to distinguish from that of a *fell enchantress*. After a brief amplification of the sense of strangeness from Anna, Achates invokes a Faustian sense of devilry: "I think it was the devils' revelling night, / There was such hurly-burly in the heavens" (4.1.9–10). It is a curious remark to make: a classical pagan, effectively living in the bronze age, evokes a quintessentially medieval mental picture of the infernal in order to describe the Macbethian "hurly-burly" which he sees in the heavens. This is an unusual moment. Whereas Shakespeare, for example, is happy to mix Christian images into his pre-Christian plays (such as the monastery in *Titus Andronicus* or the church spires in *King Lear*), Marlowe generally maintains a sound sense of

²⁴ Cf. Smith, 79–83; *pace* Brandt, 15–16.

²⁵ On Shakespeare and *Dido*, see Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith, "What is a Source? Or, How Shakespeare Read His Marlowe," *Shakespeare Survey*, no. 68 (2015): 15–31 and references.

period where he can. Here, however, he draws on different, even contrary world pictures in order to make his points more strongly: that what the mortals have seen in the heavens is “out of joint” (4.1.12) and that the order of the day, as the play goes on, is disorder, irrationality, and self-contradictoriness, whether that consist in a heaven seemingly at war with itself (as indeed it is, the Juno–Venus league opposed to that of Jupiter–Fate)²⁶ or an individual caught in a *psychomachia* (be that of logic via self-contradiction, such as Juno or Venus, or of passion, such as Dido).

Intriguingly, at this point in the play, it is Iarbas, not Dido and Aeneas, who comes into focus. Aeneas and Dido “come forth the cave” (4.1.16, repeated in line 17). Iarbas explodes with anger, making moral judgements which, on reflection, are puzzling:

Come forth the cave! Can heaven endure this sight?
Iarbas, curse that unrevenging Jove,
Whose flinty darts slept in Typhoeus’ den,
Whiles these adulterers surfeited with sin.
Nature, why mad’st me not some poisonous beast,
That with the sharpness of my edged sting,
I might have staked them both unto the earth,
Whilst they were sporting in this darksome cave? (4.1.17–24)

In what sense can Aeneas and Dido be called *adulterers*? Neither is married; they are widower and widow. Perhaps, making recourse to Latin, Iarbas is thinking of the secondary meaning of *adulterare*, “to pollute,” or even of the verb’s literal, etymological meaning (*ad-*, “to” + *alterum/alteram*, “the other”). Marlowe is building here on Virgil’s sense that they have committed a fault (*culpa*). But in the universe of *Dido*, governed by gods who themselves apparently have no morality, it is difficult to see whence Iarbas derives his criteria for making such strong—or indeed any—moral judgements. It seems therefore that, rather than offering a rational case for Dido and Aeneas’s having done wrong, Iarbas, stung by jealousy, is—like other characters—temporarily throwing reason to the wind here and is seeking to describe events as best suits him and his purposes. He is, without knowing it, adopting some of the opportunism we have seen in Venus and Juno. Just as Dido herself does later, he is trying to write a certain type of story. There is another important point which comes out in this speech. It is easy to see how a tragic error as well as irony might be at work here: Iarbas curses Jove for being “unrevenging” but, in the classical pagan economy of the

²⁶ Cf. Summers, 31.

play, with which an educated Elizabethan would have been familiar, it could be taken as implicit that Jove will indeed take revenge, not on Aeneas, but on Iarbas himself for the impiety expressed here towards the king of the gods. This is not shown explicitly, but it is suggested by all the sufferings, ironies, and finally the tragic end of the prince of Gaetulia. Faustus, too, makes an unwise curse just before completing his dramatic trajectory when he cries: “Curst be the parents that engendered me!”²⁷ Just as Faustus, having allied himself with infernal powers (where with the Christian God he might have been forgiven for having broken the fourth commandment), finds damnation, so Iarbas here forsakes Jove, even if only momentarily, for the goddess Nature in a move which rarely works out well for early modern pagan characters—witness Edmund in *King Lear*. In essence, I think Marlowe portrays here what would, in mainstream Aristotelian tragic theory, constitute Iarbas’s chief tragic error or sin, his *hamartia*. The play’s other unhappy mortal characters, it will be seen, have equivalent moments.

In the very next scene, in a curious piece of stagecraft, Iarbas is centre-stage again in order to make sacrifice to Jove, just after having cursed the god a scene before. He realises he has made a tactical misstep, if not a moral error: he wants to “pacify that gloomy Jove / Whose empty altars have enlarged our ills” (4.2.2–3).²⁸ Again, as an educated Elizabethan would immediately have understood, Iarbas might have found forgiveness with the Christian God, but we have seen nothing in the petty vengefulness of *Dido*’s gods to suggest that Iarbas’s sacrifice will be efficacious. Rather than a real relationship with or devotion to a god—as can be seen in some classical pagan literature—he assumes the rather empty, functional “*do ut des*” system of pagan worship: “I give, that you might give.” Accordingly, Iarbas’s sacrifice is ironically efficacious on one level and inefficacious on another:²⁹ it is inefficacious overall because Iarbas’s “ills” only increase from here onwards, even when he thinks they are about to end, as when he gifts Aeneas his rigging in Act Five. However, with

²⁷ *Dr Faustus* [A-Text], 14.110, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsay (Penguin, 2003).

²⁸ Intriguingly, *gloomy* is used three times in this part of the play: twice here (4.2.2, 4.2.6), and in the previous scene with reference to Aeolus (4.1.28). The characters are dimly intuiting, perhaps, what sort of gods they have to deal with. Alternatively, this confused mixture could suggest the inscrutability of *Dido*’s cosmos; as David Orvis notes, Jove is “anything but ‘gloomy’” (“‘Lustful Jove and His Adulterous Child’: Classical *Paidierastia* as Same-Sex Marriage in Marlowe’s *Dido Queene of Carthage*,” in *Performing Pedagogy in Early Modern England: Gender, Instruction, and Performance*, ed. Kathryn Moncrief and Kathryn McPherson (Ashgate, 2011), 109).

²⁹ Brandt, 48–9; Summers, 29.

typically Greek irony, his sacrifice is efficacious only on the most literal and unhappy level. One wish is granted: “Redress these wrongs and warn him to his ships” (4.2.21).³⁰ Jove does indeed do the latter through Mercury’s repeated missions to Aeneas; the Trojan is indeed “warned” to his ships. But this is precisely what will provoke the suicide of Iarbas’s beloved, therefore prompting his own. No wrongs will really or finally be redressed—if “wrongs” exist at all in such a universe—and this literal granting of his prayer will do nothing to help Iarbas to his (idea of) happiness. The conditional with which Iarbas prefaces his prayer helps to explain this unsatisfactory Jove and his cosmos: “Now, if thou be’st a pitying god of power, / On whom ruth and compassion ever waits ...” (4.2.19–20). But ruth and compassion do not wait on Jove; rather he is waited on by an unscrupulous Ganymede; allegorically, Jove is attended by Lust and Leisure. In the end, just like Dido’s final prayer to the “gods that drive the starry frame / And order all things at [their] high dispose” (5.1.302–3)³¹ and Anna’s final intention to kill herself so “[t]hat gods and men may pity this [her] death” (5.1.326), Iarbas’s prayer is doomed to a cruel, fatal irony even in its very presuppositions about what sort of world he inhabits.

The scene concludes with Anna’s revelation of love to Iarbas, to which he is indifferent. Two religious ideas enter into the discussion here which are important to Marlowe’s shaping of the play. Firstly, just as we have seen Iarbas’s *hamartia*, which, as argued above, apparently seals his fate, so, I contend, Anna here commits an idolatry against the gods when she says that “Anna [...] doth admire thee more than heaven” (4.2.46). Again, we have been given ample evidence that these jealous and petty gods will not like how she phrases this declaration of love: worship, they would insist, is due to them alone.³² It is also important—especially given the mentions in this act so far of Christian ideas such as devils, adultery, and sin—that Anna employs a Christian intonation in calling Iarbas “Hard-hearted” (4.2.54). Why does Marlowe bring in such ideas in the fourth act, and that act alone? I think that he deliberately weaves this fabric of Christian allusion into Act Four because it is a powerful interpretative apparatus which would have been available as a sort of second nature to much of his audience, and which he can therefore use in order to guide reader and

³⁰ Brammall notes that Iarbas’s prayer is a turning point in Virgil (393).

³¹ Summers, 39.

³² One wonders if “atheistical” Marlowe might have thought of the Hebrew scriptures’ characterisation of YHWH as “jealous”; but, with his linguistic awareness, I myself doubt he would have fallen into the trap of confusing the various meanings of the word *jealous* in this way.

audience into the value judgements which, this essay contends, he wishes them to make both of the universe of *Dido* and of its divine government.

The *hamartiae* of Iarbas and Anna prepare us for Dido's central error, which is seen in Act Four, Scene Four. The queen begins the scene quite collected. She blames the "foolish Trojans" (4.4.5) for their hasty, discourteous departure. She is even haughty: "Unworthy are they of a queen's reward" (4.4.12). When she later chides Aeneas and Achates, the Trojans come across more like chastened schoolboys than classical heroes, a humorous effect intended for and heightened by the boy players (regardless of whether or not the play was ever performed by them).³³ It is when Aeneas makes his disingenuous—indeed baffling—point that Dido still has his son, making it impossible that he should leave (an irony, since neither of them knows that she does not: she has Cupid, the god who is driving her to her demise) that she becomes apologetic and loses much of her vim and vigour: "Aeneas, pardon me" (4.4.31) and, in her fresh obsequiousness, decides to crown him:

to make amends,
Wear the imperial crown of Libya. [...]
And punish me, Aeneas, for this crime. (4.4.33–34, 36)

Already in this volte-face and its excess is seen the unravelling of Dido's mental integrity. Also evident, however, is her mistaken belief about the world in which she lives when she compares Aeneas to Jove, recalling the divine court of the play's beginning:

Now looks Aeneas like immortal Jove.
Oh, where is Ganymede to hold his cup
And Mercury to fly for what he calls? (4.4.45–47)

But she, not Aeneas, is like Jove in her lavish gift-giving to a callow and unappreciative lover. If this Aeneas resembles any of the play's gods, he is most like his opportunistic and self-contradictory mother, notwithstanding Dido's later angry denial of his divine lineage and link to Venus (5.1.156). Out of touch with reality, Dido's ever-encroaching madness turns from political imprudence to outright tyranny:

Those that dislike what Dido gives in charge
Command my guard to slay for their offence.
Shall vulgar peasants storm at what I do? (4.4.71–73)

³³ See Jackson Cope, "Marlowe's *Dido* and the Titillating Children," *English Literary Renaissance*, no. 4 (1974): 315–25.

In her loss of self-government, she naturally—an orthodoxy of political philosophy in the period—loses her ability to run the state justly, too.³⁴ When she applies the same tyrannical attitude to the Nurse in Act Five, Scene One, Marlowe is at pains to underline the importance of Dido's political and personal moral error, whilst also confirming her in it.

So far, Dido has been flirting with perdition. I posit that what she says next is the mistake which seals her fate:

The ground is mine that gives them sustenance,
The air wherein they breathe, the water, fire,
All that they have, their lands, their goods, their lives,
And I the goddess of all these, command
Aeneas ride as Carthaginian King. (4.4.74–78)

If, as argued above, it is true that Iarbas and Anna doom themselves through the *hamartia* of speaking ill of the gods, then it follows that Dido does the same here in this moment of *hubris*;³⁵ indeed, the errors of Anna and Iarbas function as useful prolepses for the audience in identifying this tragic *hamartia* here. For good measure, she compounds this with a couple more instances of the same. When Aeneas refers to the destinies leading him to another land, she contradicts and opposes them: “Speak of no other land, this land is thine” (4.4.83).

Shortly after, in an unhinged soliloquy, she remarks:

O blessed tempests that did drive him in,
O happy sand that made him run aground,
Henceforth you shall be our Carthage gods. (4.4.94–96)

It is a speech replete with ironies: his arrival marked the beginning of her downfall, so these elements can hardly be said to be happy or blessed for bringing him in. Moreover, the storm was Juno's, via Aelous; but, rather than praise the goddess who is patroness of Carthage, she wishes to worship the elements which are under divine sway but which have no divinity in themselves. Of course, Dido is speaking in a fit of passion here and does not seriously want to inaugurate a new cult to tempests and sands. All the same, considering the gods which this play presents, one can imagine that she has said little to ingratiate herself with them. Towards

³⁴ See, for example, James Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Belknap, 2019).

³⁵ Cf. Summers, 34–35 and Smith, 89.

the end of the scene, in her second long speech to Aeneas's rigging, which shows her mental wellbeing at particularly low ebb, she abruptly abandons these idolatries for a sort of Lucretian atheism: "The water is an element, no nymph" (4.4.147). The philosophy may seem suddenly arrived at and in stark contradiction with what she has said before, but to the gods, we have to conclude, it is all the same wrongdoing, and the inconsistency is consistent with both with the madness of Dido and with the general air of inconsistency seen in most characters throughout the play.

After the comic if uncomfortable interlude between Cupid and the Nurse in Act Four, Scene Five, Aeneas begins the final act with the declaration of triumph and, therefore, of a comic ending to the story: "Triumph, my mates, our travels are at an end" (5.1.1). Indeed, he, assuming that his decision to stay in Carthage will stand, thinks that this is a happy ending. Appropriately, it is a god, Mercury, who is to convert this into the tragic ending which, by virtue of knowing the story in advance, the audience expect, and which perfectly fulfils the Aristotelian criterion of the tragic reversal (*peripeteia*). Accordingly, the tone of this theophany is unusual: this is a singularly dour Mercury when compared with the playful trickster who is often presented in classical literature, or indeed as will be seen in *Hero and Leander*; and this Act V theophany, far from those beneficent ones seen in Shakespeare or in those romances which preceded Marlowe's career such as *Clyomon and Clamydes*, brings no happy resolution, but the opposite. The last divine word in this god-filled play leaves a bitter taste.³⁶ To complete this important pivot in the drama, Marlowe adds an Aristotelian recognition (*anagnorisis*) too: Aeneas, understanding that Ascanius has all this while been replaced with Cupid, acknowledges the unreality of his and Dido's love:³⁷

This was my mother that beguiled the queen
And made me take my brother for my son.
No marvel, Dido, though thou be in love,
That daily dandlest Cupid in thy arms. (5.1.42–45)

It is intriguing here that Aeneas should use the verb *dandle* in speaking of Dido and Cupid, a verbal echo which again connects the Queen of Carthage with Jove, whose dandling of

³⁶ This god also proves self-contradictory, since he apparently thinks Ascanius to be both of the highest importance and, a few lines later, not at all important (5.1.38–39, 5.1.51–52)

³⁷ That he does not mention this revelation to Dido is apparently an oversight on the Trojan's part, but is again consistent with the air in Marlowe's Carthage of the island of the lotus-eaters (a comparison made by Richard Martin, 61, and J. B. Steane, *Christopher Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge University Press, 1964), 39).

Ganymede commenced the play; it is more so when one realises that these are the only two uses of this peculiar verb in Marlowe.³⁸ This linguistic tie signals that whatever the mortals do, they cannot escape the net in which the gods, by the very nature of things, hold them. It is with unconscious irony that Dido, using the same image, had insisted on the opposite during the cave scene. Replying to Aeneas's odd allusion to the adultery of Mars and his mother Venus, she remarks: "Why, that was in a net, where we are loose" (3.4.4). In *Dido*, the characters are necessarily caught in the gods' net, even when they feel or think themselves to be "loose." The irony is accordingly striking in the next line: "And yet I am not free. — Oh, would I were!" (3.4.5). Yet her imprisonment is far worse than she imagines: she is not the slave of some amorous passion to which she essentially consents, but has had her entire will, character, and selfhood overtaken by Cupid's divine interference.

It is appropriate, then, that Dido and Aeneas's final conversation, despite its admirable dramatic tension, is largely a fruitless arguing over the same set of moot points—Dido would have Aeneas stay, but Aeneas must go—making use in so doing of a rich treasury of grammatical devices and vocabulary to emphasise their lack of freedom: a plurality of modals such as *must* (93, 101, 110, 123, 127), *can* (103, 119, 121), *could* (126), and *will* (98, 117, 118, 120) appear, invariably used to describe the curtailment of the protagonists' freedom, along with such adverbial phrases as *of force* (101), as well as combinations of these: *can hardly go* (103), *may not stay* (104). In amongst these Aeneas explains: "Yet must he not gainsay the gods' behest" (5.1.127). This clear formulation, the culminating point of their discussion, leads Dido to her overwhelming question: "The gods? What gods be those that seek my death?" (5.1.128). Although the later pyre and triple suicide may form the visual and theatrical climax of the play, I believe that its philosophical and intellectual climax lies here in this rhetorical question. Its grammar—the interrogative *what*, the distal *those*, the subjunctive *be*—all work together to emphasise her incredulity and scepticism with thunderous effect. However, although it is a powerful statement of disbelief and protest, the irony is once again at her expense. She asks: "Wherein have I offended Jupiter / That he should take Aeneas from mine arms?" (5.1.129–30); but, as shown above, we have a perfectly plausible set of *hamartiae* for this tragic heroine, and it is easy to see how the gods of *Dido* have no forgiveness, salvation, or even consolation to offer. (In Virgil, by

³⁸ See Robert. J. Fehrenbach, Lea Ann Boone, and Mario A. Cesare, *A Concordance to the Plays, Poems, and Translations of Christopher Marlowe* (Cornell University Press, 1982).

contrast, Juno, pitying the dying Dido, sends Iris to ease her passing.) The contradiction at the centre of Dido's tragic arc is summed up in what she says next: "Oh no, the gods weigh not what lovers do. / It is Aeneas calls Aeneas hence" (5.1.131–32). It is eloquently put, but it is like Sidney's mere "wailing eloquence":³⁹ we have seen ample demonstration of the gods' intimate involvement in the love-lives of mortals; indeed it was the gods that designed and initiated the whole affair.⁴⁰ The ultimate irony is not only that she is wrong in saying that "It is Aeneas calls Aeneas hence," but that it is not even truly the real Dido who wills him to stay; rather, it is the travesty into which Cupid and Venus have turned Dido's erstwhile stately and impressive character. She wishes that the gods might care less than they truly do: as Stanley Pease wrote of Virgil's Dido, she thinks she lives, or she wishes she lived, in the universe of Epicurus with its far-off and therefore liberty-ensuring gods,⁴¹ but she really inhabits Marlowe's variation on a classical pagan cosmos where the gods stand in an odd, unjust power relationship to the mortals who happen to live under their sway.⁴² After this argumentative apex, it is little wonder that the two characters give up their "warring with Fate" and symbolically embrace the inevitable by speaking in the Latin of the *Aeneid*.⁴³ Thereafter, Aeneas departs and Dido, Anna, and Iarbas go to their deaths.

III

This essay has argued that *Dido*, in a particular form of "interrogative drama"⁴⁴ indebted to Marlowe's education, explores and argues for the absurdity of paganism, at least in so far as

³⁹ Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, in *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler (Clarendon Press, 1962), 38.11.

⁴⁰ Grande, 89.

⁴¹ Stanley Pease, "Some Aspects of the Character of Dido," *Classical Journal*, no. 22 (1927): 246.

⁴² Cf. Diana Henderson, *Passion Made Public: Elizabethan Lyric, Gender, and Performance* (University of Illinois Press, 1995), 134. Henderson intriguingly compares Marlowe's gods with those of Euripides, 144. On Euripides in early modern Europe see Carla Suthren, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Reception of Euripides*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2018. For *Aeneid* IV as classical tragedy see Ziosi, *Tragedia*, 8–10, 23, and Mary-Kay Gamel, "The Triumph of Cupid: Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage*," *The American Journal of Philology*, no. 126 (2005): 613–14. Brammall argues that the mortals see themselves as living in Ovid's universe, though it turns out to be Virgilian (397).

⁴³ The shift to quoting Virgil's Latin has perplexed and disappointed some critics. For the best account of its effectiveness, see Rick Bowers, "Hysterics, High Camp, and *Dido Queene of Carthage*," in *Marlowe's Empery: Expanding His Critical Contexts*, ed. Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Delaware University Press, 2002), 103.

⁴⁴ See Sara Munson Deats, "*Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *The Massacre at Paris*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 193–206. (Deats has explored this notion in several works, but this essay is the most pertinent here.)

it is presented in (this version of) the Dido and Aeneas story. If true, this draws in a number of other considerations. As has been seen repeatedly, Marlowe's gods and, later, his mortal characters, present a sort of impaired reasoning faculty which renders many of their decisions and statements bizarre, self-contradictory, and potentially meaningless. Marlowe imbues the play's characters with this deliberately, I believe, as a key ingredient in mounting his critique. The threat of meaninglessness is ever-present in *Dido*; it is, in the end, "much ado about nothing." I have also argued for an off-stage divine action whereby mortal characters, in their ignorance, make some claim which damns them in the eyes of the gods. This is a riskier argument since it is never explicitly stated. Nor are its interactions with the (limited but finally irremovable) human freedom on which the essay has insisted very clear. But even if this point is mistaken, it should not affect the main thrust of the essay. Marlowe's knowledge of the Aristotelian theory of tragedy has also been assumed in order to make this case, particularly of the concept of *hamartia*, which would have been easy enough for him to access first- or second-hand.⁴⁵ The proof is there, I think, in the fact that *Dido* works almost perfectly as a classical Aristotelian tragedy (allowing for the usual Elizabethan freedom with the unities).⁴⁶ The essay has also explored the implications of Marlowe's critique by asking what kind of cosmos the play's mortal protagonists find themselves in. It has been shown that it is one in which prayer, though often engaged in, proves useless and in which hopes are consistently dashed, a universe that encapsulates the idea of "the vanity of human wishes." Whenever a mortal character desires a certain result, they are unknowingly either pitting themselves against or allying themselves with an immovable Fate, but invariably without having any effect upon it.⁴⁷ It is also seemingly a cosmos where evil acts are fated to happen and yet one in which no wrongs are ultimately "redressed" (and indeed one in which it may be nonsense even to speak of "wrongs").

Cui prodest? It does seem that in this play the only major characters to get what they wish for are Venus and Cupid. (The Trojans care about the founding of Rome, but not their leader.) Judith Weil notes that the trivial cosmos of *Dido* seems guided more by Eros than by Jove and, as Tom Rutter notes, Venus's concerns remain more maternal than they are

⁴⁵ See Ziosi, *Tragedia*, 54–6.

⁴⁶ Cf. Richard Martin, 64.

⁴⁷ Pace Smith, 75–77, who thinks *Dido*'s Fate fickle and changeable.

imperial or cosmic.⁴⁸ Since her will is tied to arbitrarily-chosen ends and lacks any transcendental tie, say, to Fate or to the good, her wants and the actions she embarks on in order to obtain them make little sense. Even family loyalty—*pietas*—is thus hollowed of meaning. In such a world there can be no sense of satisfaction when Fate duly runs its course, consigning as it does so (relatively) innocent victims to the flames, and leaving political discord in its wake in Carthage, Gaetulia, and the surrounding area (5.1.141–45). This furnishes a cosmos robbed of classical virtues such as Goodness, Justice, Mercy, and Order. I wonder whether Marlowe did not want in such a portrayal of the gods and the universe to invoke something like the Euthyphro problem where, seeing a scission between the divine will (or, crucially, wills) and the essence or form of the good, the question is raised of which determines which. For the world of *Dido*, it would seem that there is no easy answer to such a question, perhaps because the play shows goodness up to be an empty idea for that world. Finally, then, as Virgil himself writes, Love wins all (“*Omnia vincit Amor*”;⁴⁹ but it may be that such a Love and such a Victory, like Time in *The Winter’s Tale*, happen to “please some” though they will certainly “try all.”⁵⁰

What of the mortals, in all this? To borrow an idea from Rilke, they are never quite at home in their interpreted world.⁵¹ Iarbas, Anna, and Dido all try to manipulate the world around them in order to bring about their idea of happiness. But, being caught in what George Steiner calls the “ironic abyss” between knowledge and action that is intrinsic to the mindset of the Greek conception of tragedy,⁵² their actions, re-manipulated and rendered nonsensical by the irrational interferences of the gods and flatly contradicted by the dictates of Fate, lead more or less directly to their destruction. As often in tragedy, be it modern or classical, the characters do retain, or at least claw back, a certain dignity; in *Dido* this takes the form of a typically Stoic embrace of suicide—of divorcing oneself from the (in this case, unjust) world. It is only after Anna’s words (some of the only truly loving words spoken in the play)—“Ah, sister, leave these idle fantasies. / Sweet sister, cease. Remember who you are.” (5.1.262–63)—that Dido is able to recollect herself enough to bring about what to a classical or

⁴⁸ Weil, 18–19 (cited by Brammall, 392); Tom Rutter, *The Cambridge Introduction to Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 105.

⁴⁹ Virgil, *Bucholice*, ed. and trans. Luca Canali (BUR, 1978), x.69.

⁵⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. Susan Snyder and Deborah T. Curren-Aquino (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.1.1

⁵¹ Rilke, “Elegie I,” *Duineser Elegien / Sonette an Orpheus* (Insel, 1974), ll. 12–13.

⁵² George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (Faber, 1961), 7.

classically-minded audience would be a dignified end. And yet, as seen, Anna and Dido's final cosmic statements, though attempting to comprehend the universe and to reconcile their unhappy fates with it, are contradicted by what we have witnessed before in the play. We, as audience and readers, know too much. We are the ones invited by Marlowe to weigh this world in the balance, whereon it will—indeed must—be found wanting.

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