

Christopher Marlowe, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, The Revels Plays, edited by Ruth Lunney (Manchester University Press, 2023), hb, ISBN 9781784993986, £85.00.

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In the General Editors' Preface that accompanies all entries in The Revels Plays series, after all the features of these editions have been enumerated and justified, the editors end with their hope that "plays edited in this fashion will promote further scholarly and theatrical investigation of one of the richest periods in theatrical history" (xi). Not only is Ruth Lunney's excellent new edition of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* certain to do so, but her contribution could very well serve as the model for future entries in the series. Thoroughly researched and argued, this edition is a testament to prolonged engagement with Marlowe, his plays, and early modern English theatre more broadly.

In editing *Dido*, Lunney makes a series of important arguments. Her first point, one she makes in both her acknowledgments and introduction, is that a stand-alone volume of Marlowe's play is long overdue. Her entry in the Revels Plays catalogue represents "the first individual volume of the play in English since the quarto of 1594, and (in English) the first scholarly edition since H. J. Oliver's 1968 Revels and the first comprehensive account of the play since M. E. Smith's monograph '*Love kindling fire*' in 1977" (xiii).¹ As anyone who has worked on the play or sought to teach it can attest, this is a welcome development. And as "Appendix 2: List of Modern Productions" shows, from 2001–2018 *Dido, Queen of Carthage* has been performed at least seventeen times with four productions in 2013 and three more in 2018. The play's treatment of gender, sexuality, imperialism, and trauma filtered through the aftermath of Troy and Aeneas and Dido's star-crossed relationship clearly resonates with twenty-first century sensibilities. It was well past time for a new edition of this fascinating play.

Lunney's nearly 100-page introduction offers an extensive overview of *Dido*, ranging from matters concerning the text itself, authorship, performance (early and modern), sources, and history of criticism. A lengthy section is dedicated to the authorship matter, noting that Thomas Nashe's name on the 1594 title page has been the source of much debate. Drawing

¹ See Christopher Marlowe, *Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris*, The Revels Plays, ed. H. J. Oliver (Methuen, 1968) and Mary Elizabeth Smith, "*Love Kindling Fire*": *A Study of Christopher Marlowe's The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage* (Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1977).

on her 2020 co-authored essay with Hugh Craig “Who Wrote *Dido, Queen of Carthage*?” Lunney decisively asserts Marlowe as the play’s sole author.² Additionally, Appendix 1 considers (and promptly dismisses) various verbal resonances or “Nasheisms.” What emerges here is an impressive display of insight and erudition. Not only does Lunney carefully lay out her argument, but she swiftly dispenses with the entirety of the supposed evidence for co-authorship, even going so far as to take issue with the very term “Nasheism,” labeling it “misleading” and claiming it “should be discarded” altogether (13). The persuasive argument that emerges here is that rather than Nashe having fingerprints in *Dido*, *Dido* has fingerprints in Nashe.

In her summary of critical approaches, Lunney notes *Dido*’s path from a play largely disregarded as juvenilia to one that currently generates a real diversity of approaches. Tracing the scholarly trends from the Virgil-Ovid debate to a focus on gender and politics to an interest in imperialism and colonialism, Lunney asserts that *Dido* is “resistant to tidy critical analysis” and is a play “of multiple potentialities, resolved and unresolved” (49). This claim is one she returns to throughout the course of the edition, extending it to performances as well as interpretation. Her point is underscored particularly well in the section on modern productions where an overview of numerous contemporary versions is accompanied by additional analysis focused on two recent contrasting visions: the productions of 2017 by The Royal Shakespeare Company and 2013 by Edward’s Boys, Stratford, Oxford. Complementing the section are two photographs taken from different performances, visually highlighting the play’s openness to diverse approaches.

Annotations have long been a point of pride for The Revels Plays and Lunney offers two sets: those appearing beneath the text of the play on each page and a set of longer notes that come at the end. As a result, the play text remains unencumbered by editorial apparatus and only the most pertinent information is immediately accessible. Even so, the annotations threaten to overwhelm the play, often taking up much of each page. Given Marlowe’s use of source material and the subsequent scholarly discussions that have emerged, this is to be expected. The longer notes expand on this work, offering important historical and cultural context as well as relevant scholarly contributions to our understanding of this play, other works by Marlowe, and his contemporaries. On the whole, these notes leave the reader with the impression that Lunney grasps the play at a molecular level and hasn’t just read but has

² See Ruth Lunney and Hugh Craig, “Who Wrote *Dido, Queen of Carthage*?,” *The Journal of Marlowe Studies* 1 (2020): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.7190/jms.v1i0.92>.

thought deeply about virtually everything written on and around this play. Combined with the introduction, this is an impressive feat of scholarship.

The Revels Plays *Dido, Queen of Carthage* is strikingly rich, an indispensable volume for students of early modern literature. While the hardback is listed at £85.00, a more reasonably priced paperback will be issued shortly for £25.00. There is a real pleasure to be found in the pages of this new edition. While the text contains multitudes and will ably support whatever use a reader chooses, this *Dido* rewards careful, deep reading and study. Lunney's wealth of knowledge is on full display and conveyed with a firmness that it is never pedantic or prone to jargon or obscurity. It is clear she cares deeply about *Dido* and the reader is left with the impression that they're being guided through the play by a hyper-competent guide who is thrilled to share their knowledge, but only insofar as you're interested to travel with them. The book is dedicated to five decades of Lunney's students who, she humbly notes, "gifted me understanding." This new edition of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, the very first of its kind, is a gift to us all.

Bibliography

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