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Willie Lieberman April 8, 2022

The Mystery of England's First Great Opera: Nahum Tate, Dido, and Womanhood

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Abstract

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By Willie Lieberman

Written in Restoration England in the 1680s by famed composer Henry Purcell (1659-1695) and maligned librettist Nahum Tate (1652-1715), England's first great opera, the tragic love story *Dido and Aeneas*, was completely original in many regards. Its plot and characterization of Dido, Queen of Carthage, as a simultaneously empowered, sexually unashamed, sympathetic, and mature heroine significantly veered from the three classical Dido traditions. Ancient Roman poet Virgil's "mad" Dido, his contemporary Ovid's "sympathetic yet pathetic" Dido, and the "chaste Dido" of Italian Renaissance humanists all forwarded sexist ideals that diminished Dido's power. Further, the opera's empowered depiction of Dido strayed from theatrical depictions of women in Restoration and post-Restoration tragedy, the Restoration lasting from the 1660s to the 1680s. In the so-called "she-tragedy" genre, female heroines generally had to be pathetic. Maybe they went mad because a man left them, or they had their purity stolen. The seventeenth-century European theatrical world was concerned with adhering to literary traditions, theatrical conventions, and standards for gender. So, what inspired the opera's original depiction of Dido as a woman who acted with agency, was unashamed of her sexual behavior, and remained sympathetic and even heroic? Previous scholarship solely attributes the opera's originality to political allegory, which is impossible to do. Due to paltry evidence, all we know is that the opera probably was written between 1684 and 1689, and there were three different monarchical reigns during that short period. Scholars ignore contemporary standards for theater and womanhood when they discuss the opera. Further, the scholars focus on Purcell instead of Tate. Thus, this thesis explores Nahum Tate's background and influences in tandem with the opera's scant contemporary performance history, typical depictions of women onstage in later-Stuart society, and broader standards of womanhood to uncover the real meaning behind this opera and reveal how theatrical representations of women and female sexuality reflected and reinforced standards of womanhood in later-Stuart England (1660-1714). While grounded in historical analysis, this interdisciplinary thesis engages with the academic fields of theater, gender, literature, and musicology. Finally, my experience as a trained opera singer informs my approach to Dido's character.

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INTRODUCTION

I. Great Opera

Dido, Queen of Carthage, sat in her court anxious about an unknown topic. Meanwhile her confidante, Belinda, encouraged her to open her heart to their Trojan guest named Aeneas. Dido was hesitant, but Aeneas eventually wooed her. Nearby, an evil Sorceress and her cadre of witches plotted Dido's downfall. They planned to separate Dido and Aeneas, who were celebrating their love in the woods away from Dido's court, by creating a storm. Once the two were apart, the Sorceress would send a magical elf in the form of Mercury to tell Aeneas the gods wanted him to leave Dido and continue his journey to Italy. The plan occurred exactly as intended. After meeting with the false Mercury, Aeneas returned to Dido's court and told her the gods demanded his departure. Dido felt betrayed and heartbroken. When Aeneas said he would stay because he still loved her, Dido made him leave. His disloyalty to her decimated any trust she had in him. Dismayed and emotionally depleted, Dido died. This was the plot of England's first great opera, *Dido and Aeneas*.

Written by the acclaimed composer Henry Purcell (1659-1695) and maligned librettist Nahum Tate (1652-1715) in England during the 1680s, this opera is considered great by today's scholars and audiences. The definition of a great opera is subjective, but I forward that a great opera is one that is popular and acclaimed. Moreover, the impact on audiences of a great opera's music or story can transcend its time. In 2018, musicologist Ellen Harris, perhaps the foremost scholar of this opera, described *Dido and Aeneas* as "the single, greatest all-sung operatic achievement of the English seventeenth century."[1] She continued that "Purcell's composition withstands comparison with operatic works from any period for its ability to express human

[1] Ellen Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1.

passion in a perfect blend of words and music."[2] Her opinion is not new. In 2009, cultural scholar Anthony Welch similarly deemed *Dido and Aeneas* "the great English chamber opera."[3] Scholar Holly Eastman wrote in 1989 that the opera "is still effective and moves us today."[4] In 1984, musicologist Curtis Price wrote that the opera was "understandably appealing to modern audiences" because of Purcell's effective interpretation of tragic emotions in his music.[5] The opera was popular earlier in the twentieth century, as well. Scholar John Buttrey wrote in his article from 1967 that *Dido and Aeneas* "is the first English opera which most people remember today."[6] In 1929, scholar J. A. Westrup attributed the opera's greatness to "Purcell's own individual genius" in his transformation of the libretto "into pure gold by his magic touch."[7]

An opera being considered great in one time period does not guarantee similar success in the time period it was written. *Dido and Aeneas* is an example of the prior statement. It was not admired or performed widely until the late nineteenth century, over two hundred years after Purcell and Tate wrote the opera. Not only did it evade acclaim for centuries, it was almost entirely forgotten. In Purcell's and Tate's lifetimes, the opera was never publicly performed. It received little attention until the 200-year anniversary of Purcell's death in the 1890s. Exploring why this opera failed to draw popular support contemporarily is key in illuminating the answers to my thesis's guiding questions: how could representations of women and female sexuality reflect and reinforce standards of womanhood in later-Stuart England (1660-1714)? How did this process limit female agency? How do the opera's idiosyncrasies prove that this process existed?

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[2] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 1.
[3] Anthony Welch, "The Cultural Politics of Dido and Aeneas," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21, no. 1 (2009): 1.
[4] Holly Eastman, "The Drama of the Passions: Tate and Purcell's Characterization of Dido," *The Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (1989): 364.
[5] Curtis Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 225.
[6] John Buttrey, "Dating Purcell's Dido and Aeneas," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 94 (1967): 51.
[7] J. A. Westrup, "Stages in the History of Opera: II. Early English Opera," *The Musical Times* 70, no. 1039 (1929): 798.

As popular entertainment and a mode of cultural expression, opera can tell us about an audience, and therefore a society. As consumers of popular entertainment, audiences and their tastes reflected the prevailing preferences of their time. *Dido and Aeneas* depicted an independent woman who acted with agency by rejecting her inconstant lover, Aeneas, and was unashamed of her sexual behavior. This key plot point differed from traditional tellings and preceding interpretations of the Dido legend where Aeneas abandoned Dido, who always killed herself because she was ashamed of her sexual behavior. Further, the environment in which Purcell and Tate wrote this opera typically prohibited women from emulating Dido's empowered sexual independence onstage and in society. Unlike Dido, the types of heroines seen on the Restoration and post-Restoration stage adhered to the societal standard because, as theater historian Elizabeth Howe noted, "power in the theatre lay with the audience on whose support the existence of the companies depended."[8] Thus, *Dido and Aeneas*'s lack of contemporary popularity might confirm how later-Stuart society controlled female bodies, defined the feminine ideal, and used the stage to enforce such standards.[9]

II. Why Womanhood?

Why explore womanhood during this period specifically? During the Restoration, the English began to reconceptualize sex and gender. Literary scholar Michael McKeon argued that once the Restoration began in 1660, after Puritan tyranny had ended, emerging shifts in scientific and social views of gender and sexuality provided the basis for the patriarchal system still in

[8] Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 26.
[9] Of course, one could claim the opera was unpopular because of the music instead of the plot. But, Purcell was the most popular English composer of his time, and the rest of his theatrical works were widely known and loved while he was alive. Tate, on the other hand, was disliked and, for the most part, commercially unsuccessful. He was the outlier in Purcell's success story.

place today.[10] In the first part of the seventeenth century, the established one-sex theory that "[m]en and women exist on a continuum whose basic discriminants are social rank, cultural role, and legal entitlements, not organic identity" prevailed.[11]

As the century progressed, though, there was a change. McKeon continued that "[i]n the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, England acquired the modern wisdom that there are not one but two sexes; that they are biologically distinct and therefore incommensurable; and that they are defined not by behavior, which is variable, but by nature, which is not."[12] This emerging scientific theory was called the two-sex theory. Men and women were naturally different from each other and thus had opposite purposes and qualities. Masculinity and femininity became more starkly defined, and sexual differences were amplified. Increasingly, some men expected the ideal, respectable woman to be constant and chaste, devoted to her family and husband, and therefore dependent on him. At the same time, there was a belief that women had an "excess of desire" that needed to be controlled.[13] Consequently, ideal femininity was linked to a control of sexuality.[14] Modesty was then moralized. Religion played a part in this process. Broadly, Christian submission meant believing that only God knew all the secrets of the body, and therefore the body was supposed to remain a mystery.[15] Gender historian Laura Gowing remarked that this "sense of mystery gave women, its best interpreters, some unusual authority; and it was also readily used to reinforce the patriarchal edifice."[16]

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[10] Michael McKeon, "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 301.
[11] McKeon, "Historicizing Patriarchy," 301.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Laura Gowing, "Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England," *Signs* 37, no. 4 (2012): 817.
[14] Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660–1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 5.
[15] Gowing, "Women's Bodies," 817.
[16] Ibid, 816-818.

The influence of shame and modesty determined who could talk about sexual matters in later-Stuart England, and how they could discuss the topic.[17] Gowing continued that "[m]arried women might say things that single women could not; men were often able to be blunter about sex than women."[18] Because they learned through experience, married women were often able to claim more knowledge of female sexuality and bodies than unmarried women in this period. In general, though, men had more of a right to comment on this subject than either married or unmarried women. Plus, by 1700, due to the advancement of medical science, aristocratic and bourgeois men gradually began to claim from married women the authoritative knowledge of female reproduction.[19] Female sexuality and women's bodies were scrutinized. Literary scholar Jean Marsden wrote more about why this facet of womanhood was important to the society of later-Stuart England:

> Female sexuality was the means by which power and property were handed down from generation to generation; women were the vessel not simply for the male seed but for the legitimate lines of inheritance. Properly managed, their fecundity ensured the orderly succession of property and power from father to son, reinforcing the patrilinear structures underlying early modem English society. Thus sociopolitical stability was dependent on patrilinear control of female sexuality.[20]

Accordingly, ownership and control over the female body was not always reserved for women. Gowing made the point that the centrality of the role female sexuality played in maintaining social and political structure meant that "[w]omen's bodies were, to varying degrees, common, and particularly so when they were single."[21] This seventeenth-century reality further enabled the spectatorship and analysis of women's sexuality and female bodies.

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[17] Ibid, 816.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid, 820.
[20] Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 5.
[21] Gowing, "Women's Bodies," 819.

Literary scholar Will Pritchard argued two additional reasons for this scrutinizing spectatorship. The first was that the return of Charles II "ushered in a simultaneous revival and transformation of the Cavalier ideal into something closer to libertinism," while the second was that soon after Charles II became king in 1660, professional female actors took to the stage for the first time.[22] This "increasingly public role for women paired with the popularization of a skeptical, hedonistic, voyeuristic male perspective" and the already present questioning of sexuality to create the conditions for this highly scrutinizing environment. The lingering pre-Restoration puritanical condemnation of carnal desire too collided with this newer wave of libertinism to create a society simultaneously excited and repulsed by presentations of female sexuality.

With the introduction of actresses came the introduction of more female roles on the Restoration and post-Restoration stages. Thus, debates surrounding female sexuality increasingly included discussions of how female sexuality existed in and interacted with the theater. Marsden wrote that "[n]ot only the drama of the period, but the extradramatic material, pamphlets, poems, prefaces, and reviews, focus[sed] incessantly on the sexual nature and behavior of women in the theaters, both those represented on the stage and those present in the audience."[23] How the sexuality of female characters could influence women in the audience was an important social issue at the time – and it was cause of anxiety. As we will cover in Part 2, the popular plays of the time included tragic, pathetic, powerless heroines whose deaths were often catalyzed by sexual shame. Sometimes, roles could be written this way to control the sexual behavior of the women in the audience – to warn them against partaking in sexual indiscretions. Given that

[22] Will Pritchard, *Outward Appearances: The Female Exterior in Restoration London*, Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-century Literature and Culture (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 22.
[23] Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 5.

"drama function[ed] as a technology of gender," studying a play and how it was received in this historical context can illuminate broader ideologies about womanhood and sexuality.[24] In this thesis, I will explore how and why *Dido and Aeneas*'s librettist, Nahum Tate, depicted Dido as simultaneously sympathetic, powerful, and sexually unashamed in a theatrical environment that discouraged these types of female characters. The opera's lack of contemporary performances will show that representations of women onstage generally had to accommodate or conform to the standards for gender at the time if they were to be successful.

III. Acknowledging Nahum Tate: Historical Methods

Perhaps I was remiss to begin this thesis without quoting Dido's famed line, "Remember me, but ah! Forget my fate," as nearly every contributor to *Dido and Aeneas*'s historiography has done before me. [25] (8) The problem with this practice, however, is that while these scholars wrote about one of the most revered English operas of all time, they ignored Nahum Tate, the man who wrote the iconic lyrics. The literature surrounding Purcell's other operatic works, like *King Arthur* (1691), *Dioclesian* (1690), and *The Fairy Queen* (1692), pays adequate attention to Purcell's librettists. Rightly so, because his multi-talented librettists, like poet and playwright John Dryden (1631-1700) and actor and manager Thomas Betterton (1635-1710), played crucial roles in realizing these operas.

Conversely, Nahum Tate, *Dido and Aeneas*'s librettist, lived (and lives) in the shadows. Usually, when he is discussed, he is libeled. In a caustic review written in 1934, literary critic H.F. Scott-Thomas described Tate as "hobbling along, handicapped by his natural limitations

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[24] Ibid, 13.

[25] Quotations from *Dido and Aeneas* are from the 1689 libretto reproduced in Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate, *The Works of Henry Purcell*, v.3, *Dido and Aeneas*, ed, Margaret Laurie (London: Novello Publishing Limited, 1979), xiii-xx, and they will be cited parenthetically by page number from the original libretto in the following pages.

and his Irish birth and education."[26] Scholar Robert E. Moore prefaced his scathing commentary on Tate's work in 1961, stating that "[s]urely his shoulders have borne enough to bear yet more."[27] Musicologist Curtis Price deemed Tate's libretto for *Dido and Aeneas* "laundered and starched" in 1984.[28] Ellen Harris admitted in 2018 that Nahum Tate, "a poet of modest talents," should receive "[s]ome of the credit" for the opera's modern prestige and acclaim.[29] Harris's measured compliments are some of the kindest Tate has received in the scholarship of this opera. As we will cover in Part 3, Tate's work and career were similarly maligned in his time. The current and contemporary grievances leveled at Tate have obscured his role in the making of England's first great opera - and his role was important (especially considering how his relatively progressive depiction of Dido affected the opera's performance history).

Thus, I will center much of my thesis around Nahum Tate. In Part 1, I will explain how Tate's libretto differed from traditions and provide commentary on the existing scholarship's interpretations of the opera. Part 2 is devoted to exploring how the operatic Dido differed from the typical later-Stuart heroine and other international theatrical influences. Ruling out these influences will highlight how crucial Tate's personal background and influences were in inspiring the opera. In Part 3, we will explore Tate's life as we try to decipher why he empowered Dido with simultaneous, sympathetic exhibitions of power and sexual agency despite all theatrical conventions. If we view the creators of the opera as members of a historical audience, we can see how circumstances or influences in their everyday lives might have affected their art. In addition to analyzing Tate's various literary, personal, and professional

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[26] H. F. Scott-Thomas "Nahum Tate and the Seventeenth Century." *ELH* 1, no. 3 (1934): 253.
[27] Robert E. Moore, *Henry Purcell and the Restoration Theatre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 55.
[28] Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, 262.
[29] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 1.

influences, I will compare his older play based on the Dido story, *Brutus of Alba* (1678), to the opera's libretto.[30] The small but important differences between the older play and Tate's libretto will be key in my later argument. Further, this section will include a discussion of Tate's views of womanhood. In Part 4, the relevance of these views to the libretto will be explored alongside a short discussion of how sexualized spectatorship affected female actors. The discussion of female actors will show how the male gaze could limit female agency directly. Connecting the common struggles of Dido, women, and Tate himself will prove how this opera drew inspiration from historical debates of womanhood. By viewing *Dido and Aeneas* through this lens, we can determine why it was not shown to Restoration and post-Restoration audiences – its representation of womanhood did not align with those accepted onstage in later-Stuart England.

I came up with the idea for this thesis because I am a trained opera singer, and one of the first arias I learned was "Dido's Lament," one of the most famous arias of all time. I can understand the emotions Dido experienced because I have expressed them in my performances. Singing the vague, troubling lyrics to the somber yet striking music puts one into an emotionally vulnerable position. This perspective has informed my approach to the opera. I analyze her character with more nuance and attention to emotional depth than is seen in the scholarship. This way, we can have a more informed conversation about the true meaning behind England's first great opera and the historical factors that both delayed its success and inspired its originality.

[30] It is impossible to know which version of Virgil's *Aeneid* Tate read, but Janet Schmalfeldt asserts that he read Fanshawe's English translation due to its inclusion of witches. Janet Schmalfeldt, "In Search of Dido," *The Journal of Musicology* 18, no. 4 (2001): 596.

PART 1: THE MYSTERY

I. The Conflicting Dido Traditions

Written in the 1680s, this opera had classical origins. In order to understand the opera, it is important to have a sense of the many centuries of adaptations that would have influenced the late seventeenth-century depiction of Dido and Aeneas. There were important classical works and many translations that shifted the story and how the main characters were portrayed. In this section, I will unpack the traditions and predecessors, analyzing their treatments of Dido's infidelity and emotion.

A. The Virgilian Tradition: Mad Dido

Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BCE) told the story of Dido and Aeneas in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, which he wrote for ten years from 29 BCE until his death. The *Aeneid* was a tale about the founding of Rome. Virgil wrote the epic to hail Augustus in the wake of his controversial ascension to power in the new empire. Aeneas was supposed to represent Augustus. In Virgil's fourth book, Juno and Venus conspired to sequester Dido and Aeneas in a cave so they could consummate their union and join their countries. Dido exited the cave believing they were married, but Aeneas did not think they were married. Seeing that Aeneas was shirking his military duties and destiny, Jupiter sent Mercury (the real one) to tell Aeneas he had to continue his journey to Italy to found Rome.[31] Aeneas informed Dido of this command, and she was distraught. She went mad, tricked her attendant Anna into building a funeral pyre, and then stabbed herself with Aeneas's sword, cursing him all the while. This version of events was obviously quite different from Purcell's and Tate's, especially in its treatment of Dido.

[31] Aeneas had fled Troy when it was destroyed by Odysseus and the Greeks. Then, he arrived in Carthage.

Virgil emphasized Dido's pursuit of Aeneas by highlighting her passion. Dido's romantic conquest was scandalous because her husband Sychaeus died, and apparently, she disrespected him by desiring Aeneas. Thus, she initially kept her love hidden. Nevertheless, it overtook her:

> Oh, empty-minded prophets! In her madness,
> What use were prayers and temples? Flame devoured
> Her tender marrow. Her heart's wound throbbed in hiding;
> Soon Dido burned and raved all through the city.[32] (65-68)

Eventually, Dido succumbed to her craving for Aeneas. The two consummated their love, but Dido's shame defined the event:

> The Trojan lord and Dido found the same cave.
> Primeval Earth and Juno, giver of brides,
> Signaled, and in collusion lightning flashed
> At the union. On the mountaintops nymphs howled.
> From this day came catastrophe and death.
> No thought of public scandal or of hiding
> Her passion troubled Dido any longer.
> She called it marriage, to conceal her shame. (165-172)

Once the gods summoned Aeneas to Italy, Dido went mad. She was livid at his departure. While Aeneas claimed that "I never made a pact of marriage with you," Dido still felt betrayed and abandoned. (339) In her anger, she lambasted Aeneas, even threatening to haunt him:

> I hope that heaven's conscience has the power
> To trap you in the rocks and force your penance
> Down your throat, as you call my name. I'll send
> My black flames there. When cold death draws my soul
> My ghost will hound you. Even among dead souls
> In hell, I'll know when you are finally paying. (382-387)

Virgil depicted her passion as lovesick madness. Her heartbreak overtook her entire being. She killed herself with Aeneas's sword out of shame and devastation. Virgil portrayed Dido as abandoned, but still shameful, bitter, mad, and truculent.

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[32] Vergil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Sarah Ruden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). From here forward, I will cite parenthetically by line number.

B. The Ovidian Tradition: Sympathetic Dido

A second treatment of Dido emerged contemporaneously. Ovid's Dido, the sympathetic Dido, differed from Virgil's depiction. Ovid (43 BCE – 17 CE) was one of Virgil's Roman contemporaries, and his well-known works were notably different from Virgil's because they championed women. Ovid wrote the *Heroides* between 5 BCE and 8 CE, possibly responding to Virgil's *Aeneid*. The author wrote letters in the voices of women who often met tragic endings or brutal deaths after being wronged by men. One of the women who found herself a subject of Ovid in the *Heroides* was our very own Queen Dido of Carthage. The key difference in the two versions of Dido's tale was that Virgil painted Dido as wrong, while Ovid painted her as wronged.

Ovid's depiction of Dido in the *Heroides* was written from her perspective after Aeneas left her for Italy. In fact, she was writing *to* Aeneas, as the aptly chosen title "Dido to Aeneas" confirmed. She was hurt, enraged, and sorrowful. She felt betrayed, lamenting to Aeneas that he "must first be so fortunate as to find another love, another affectionate, constant Dido."[33] Dido describing herself as constant was key because inconstancy was a trait that Virgil made sure to instill in his erratic, guilt-ridden, and unfaithful Dido. Ovid, however, through Dido's voice, constantly blamed Aeneas. Dido continued that "you must again bind yourself by vows which you cannot keep."[34] With a controlled passion, she hurled vitriol at the deceitful man. There was much fervor in her words, but she did not, at any point, become unreasonable. She was a tragic victim.

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[33] Ovidius Naso, "Dido to Aeneas" in *The Epistles of Ovid*, trans. various (London: J.Nunn, 1813), http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0085%3Apoem%3D7. There are no line numbers in this edition, so the website is linked here.
[34] Ovid, "Dido to Aeneas."

Dido's expression of shame was more complicated in Ovid's tale than in Virgil's telling. She apologized to her dead husband and admitted that she was wrong to engage sexually with Aeneas: "O violated chastity, the vengeance due to injured Sychaeus, to whom (wretch that I am!) I hasten full of shame and anxiety."[35] She made very clear, however, that Aeneas tricking her into loving him was not her fault: "If I did err, yet my error claims an honorable excuse."[36] She was a trusting person "whose only crime is to have loved you too well."[37] While she was upset at Aeneas, she did not seek retribution: "Although thou deserves to perish, cruel and barbarous man, yet I am not of such value, that in flying from me you should lose your life."[38] She continued: "Though lost, I am anxious for your safety, and avoid doing hurt to one who has loaded me with injuries."[39] Eventually, she accepted that Aeneas had abandoned her. Dido concluded her letter with plans to end her life. Ovid highlighted Aeneas's wrongdoing throughout by writing the letter from Dido's perspective.

C. The "Chaste Dido" Tradition

The third tradition, "chaste Dido," characterized Dido as a celibate, devoted leader of her country.[40] Renaissance humanists, especially Petrarch (1304-1374), adored her. These humanists, interested in correcting historical inaccuracies, asserted that Dido and Aeneas lived three hundred years apart. Therefore, the two never would have met. In the chaste tradition, Dido's husband Sychaeus, ruler of Tyre, was murdered by his brother who desired Dido (and power). Dido escaped to North Africa and established Carthage with help from one of the region's rulers, Iarbas. Eventually, Iarbas became threatened by Carthage's expansion, so he courted Dido in

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] A scholarly discussion of this topic is summarized in Wendy Heller, "'A Present for the Ladies': Ovid, Montaigne, and the Redemption of Purcell's Dido," *Music & Letters* 84, no. 2 (2003): 197-199.

hopes of claiming her land. Dido rejected his advances and killed herself with her dead husband's sword to save her nation.

Petrarch's defense of Dido in *Trionfi* (1351) was spread throughout England with the help of Morley's 1554 translation. In it, he condemned Virgil and his followers for believing that Dido killed herself because of Aeneas. The following segment was from Morley's translation:

> Not that Dydo that men doth wryte,
> That for Eneas wyth death was dyte,
> But that noble lady true and juste
> For sychen her joye and hartes luste.[41]

He asserted Dido's devotion to her dead husband and country a second time:

> That for her husbande was content to dye –
> And not for Eneas, so affirme I.
> (Let the vulgar people then holde theyr peace!)[42]

Popularity of this chaste Dido increased throughout the rest of the sixteenth century due to her similarities with the famously virginal Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603).[43]

D. Sixteenth-century English Translations and Adaptations

The *Aeneid* and the *Heroides* were both key texts in the later English Renaissance. Reviving classical texts was standard practice during this period. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, translations of these Latin works began spreading throughout England.[44] The chaste Dido tradition also gained popularity in England during this time. Sixteenth-century depictions of Dido in England emulated all three traditions. These traditions are important to note because they established how England treated Dido. They set the precedent for English

[41] Diane Purkiss, "The Queen On Stage: Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and the Representation of Elizabeth I" in *A Woman Scorn'd*, ed. Michael Burden (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), 153. Morley's translation was quoted here.
[42] Quoted in Purkiss, "The Queen On Stage," 153.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Heather James, "Ovid and the Question of Politics in Early Modern England," *ELH* 70, no. 2 (2003): 345.

adaptations of the heroic, royal drama. Tate and Purcell would have felt their impact because they were well-acquainted with the English theatrical tradition.

Diane Purkiss, a scholar of English literature, wrote about playwright William Gager's *Dido* (1583): "Although retelling the Virgilian story, Gager allows the Petrarchan 'worthy' or 'chaste' Dido to inform his retelling so that this pure and successful ruling queen can be a metaphor for Elizabeth.[45] Gager compared Dido's greatness to queen Elizabeth's greatness only before Dido fell victim to "love-madness."[46] Addressing Dido in the epilogue, Gager wrote:

> But nevertheless, one by far surpasses you, Elisa the virgin queen, how many events has her dutifulness brought about! What kingdoms has she founded! What protection she gives to foreigners! She has deemed no Sichaeus yet worthy to be her husband, and no Aeneas inclines her heart.[47]

Equating chastity with righteous rule, Gager used the moralizing humanist tradition in his assessment of Queen Elizabeth and Dido. A female could only rule if she was pure and virtuous. These views were important to the cultural world of Tate and Purcell.

More relevant views of women and Dido could be seen in Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe's well-known *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), the satirical combination of all three traditions. This work set the foundation for the popular, satirical late seventeenth-century works about Dido and other classical women. In this play, Marlowe and Nashe depicted Dido as a flirtatious ruler with countless suitors whom she dismissed before meeting Aeneas. She did not reject them because she was chaste; she rejected them because she was a "tease" trying to make herself appear more appealing to Aeneas.[48] She flaunted her former suitors to him: "see where the pictures of my suitors hang… Some came in person, others sent their legates,/ Yet none

[45] Purkiss, "The Queen On Stage," 159.
[46] Ibid, 160.
[47] Quoted in ibid, 161.
[48] Ibid, 163.

obtain'd me. I am free from all."[49] Purkiss noted that Marlowe and Nashe used "the Dido story to debunk Petrarchan discourses, while covertly criticizing the idea that a woman could rule by turning the sober humanist Dido into a romping flirt."[50]

Interestingly, while adhering to the Virgilian plot, Marlowe and Nashe derived their erotic tone from Ovid, but "the Ovid of the *Amores* and the *Metamorphoses* rather than the Ovid of the *Heroides*."[51] Purkiss continued that "the shift from Virgil to Ovid marks a shift away from profitable humanism towards cynical Machiavellianism and erotic play."[52] In English drama, the three Dido traditions were in discussion with each other, and authors employed them to different ends in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Eventually, Dido's story made its way to Restoration England where Tate and Purcell adapted it into *Dido and Aeneas*, the second English-language opera in the history of the art form.[53]

E. Seventeenth-century Translations and Adaptations: The 'Anti-Virgil' Wave

Reception of Virgil in the seventeenth century was mixed. Charles II's return to the throne and the end of the Commonwealth catalyzed the widespread teaching of heroic texts during the 1660s while Tate and Purcell received their educations. These epic tales, specifically Virgil's *Aeneid*, which he originally wrote to celebrate Augustan strength, supported pro-monarchical themes relevant to the ascension of Charles II.[54] Tate and Purcell would have read such translations in school, as Virgil's *Aeneid* was a key text for nearly all English schoolboys.[55] Throughout the seventeenth century, the neoclassical trend seeped into the literary workings of

[49] Quoted in ibid.
[50] Ibid, 162.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Technically, the first English opera was John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* (1683), but this work's popularity has not stood the test of time.
[54] Anthony Welch, "The Cultural Politics of Dido and Aeneas," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21, no. 1 (2009): 6.
[55] Schmalfeldt, "In Search of Dido," 596.

England's scholars who wrote English translations during Tate's childhood.[56] For example, the seventeenth century saw translations of the *Aeneid* by John Vicars, Robert Stapylton, John Ogilby, Godolphin and Waller, James Harrington, Sir Robert Howard, Sir John Denham, and the Earl of Lauderdale. Because of the renewed interest in reviving the epics of old to flatter Charles II, the heroic genre reached a peak towards the middle of the century. Generally, the *Aeneid*'s translation and Virgil's reception in mid seventeenth-century England was positive. As the century progressed, however, Virgil's reputation plummeted. An anti-Virgil wave overtook certain English literary circles. In the 1697 dedication to his *Aeneid* translation, Dryden noted that "*Virgil* is attack'd by many Enemies: He has a whole Confederacy against him."[57]

What (or who) caused the changing tide? This "Confederacy" took inspiration from the French who, in the middle of the seventeenth century, criticized Virgil's anachronisms, as Aeneas and Dido could not have possibly met since Carthage and Troy did not exist at the same time.[58] French writers like Francois le Metel de Boisrobert (1592-1662) and Rene Rapin (1621-1687) also denounced Virgil's anachronistic treatment of Dido.[59] In doing so, they eliminated any elements of sexuality from the story, thus popularizing the chaste tradition. English writers eventually began to advance similar critiques, and around the time Tate wrote the libretto for *Dido and Aeneas,* an anti-Virgil feeling rose in prominence in literary circles, with Whigs like poet William Walsh its biggest promoters.[60]

English writers interpreted the anti-Virgil trend in multiple ways, and not all of them flattered Dido like the chaste tradition did. In fact, the most popular critical method was the

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[56] Karen Newman, "The French Disease," *Comparative Literature* 64, no. 1 (2012): 35.
[57] John Dryden, "Dedication of the *Aeneis*," in *The Works of John Dryden,* gen. ed. H.T. Swedenberg, Jr., 20 vols. (Berkeley, 1956-89), II, 277.
[58] Welch, "The Cultural Politics of Dido and Aeneas," 13.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, 13-14.

burlesque or satire, the most relevant of which was Charles Cotton's *Scarronides*. Written ahead of its English time in the 1660s, it took inspiration from French writer Paul Scarron's earlier *Le Virgile Travesti*.[61] Instead of championing Dido, these parodies exploited, embellished, and exposed Dido's emotions and sexuality in a demeaning manner to call attention to Virgil's ridiculous and historically inaccurate depiction. Tate had a close professional relationship with Charles Cotton, so Scarron's work could have influenced him.[62]

Tate also had tight professional ties with John Dryden, one of Virgil's biggest Restoration advocates, and one of the most prominent literary minds in English history. Yet, the Dido of Purcell and Tate was extraordinarily different from the Dido of Dryden in his influential translation. Dryden's Dido was a more sexualized version of Virgil's Dido. His negative portrayal of Dido echoed commonly discussed sentiments surrounding female sexuality in theater during the Restoration and post-Restoration periods. In his 1697 translation of the *Aeneid*, Dryden depicted Dido as: "Sick with desire, and seeking him she loves, From street to street the raving Dido roves."[63] Her desire was portrayed as a sickness, love-sickness, of which she could not cure herself. Dryden made Dido's lust shameful, even more so than Virgil did: "The pomp she shows, to tempt her wand'ring guest; Her falt'ring tongue forbids to speak the rest."[64] Dido's love madness broke her already weak resolve to stay away from Aeneas. After she fornicated with Aeneas, she attempted to justify her sins and hide her shame by claiming she and Aeneas were married:

> The queen, whom sense of honor could not move,
> No longer made a secret of her love,

[61] Andrew Pinnock, "Book IV in Plain Brown Wrappers: Translations and Travesties of Dido" in *A Woman Scorn'd*, ed. Michael Burden (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), 256.
[62] Christopher Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, ed. Sylvia E. Bowman (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 23.
[63] Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden (The Floating Press, 2009), 129.
[64] Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 129. As we will explore later, men accused women of inconstancy all throughout history, but especially in late seventeenth-century England when the opera was written.

But call'd it marriage, by that specious name
To veil the crime and sanctify the shame. [65]

She continued her relationship with Aeneas, abandoning her royal duties:

Whole days with him she passes in delights,
And wastes in luxury long winter nights,
Forgetful of her fame and royal trust,
Dissolv'd in ease, abandon'd to her lust. [66]

Again, Dido's sexuality was portrayed as shameful and irresponsible. Later, Aeneas left Carthage when the gods commanded him to continue his heroic journey. Dido was incensed. She hoped the seas would sink his ship. Her madness was clear when she threatened to haunt him:

Dido shall come in a black sulph'ry flame,
When death has once dissolv'd her mortal frame;
Shall smile to see the traitor vainly weep:
Her angry ghost, arising from the deep,
Shall haunt thee waking, and disturb thy sleep. [67]

Dido's shame overtook her, and when she decided to kill herself, it was "in vengeance of my shame."[68] She killed herself with Aeneas's sword. Dryden clearly depicted Dido as delusional, and her actions were the cause of her downfall. The diction in Dryden's version was more cutting than Virgil's diction. His altered translation showed how one influential seventeenth-century writer shaped classical works and his treatment of a tragic woman. This was the milieu in which Purcell and Tate created their seemingly inexplicable version.

II. Purcell's and Tate's Unprecedented Dido

Purcell and Tate composed *Dido and Aeneas* sometime during the 1680s, likely between 1684 and 1689. Due to a paucity of primary evidence, scholars can only guess the dates of its

[65] Ibid, 134.
[66] Ibid, 136.
[67] Ibid, 146.
[68] Ibid, 158.

composition and first performance. No matter its date of composition or premiere, the opera was a thoroughly unique intervention into both historical and contemporary treatments of Dido (and women in general). Purcell's and Tate's Dido fit neither the Virgilian Dido nor chaste Dido. She fell between the two traditions in that she did not exclaim her passions as much as Virgil's Dido, but she was still unchaste. For example, in Tate's libretto, Dido fornicated with Aeneas, but the whole scene happened completely offstage. The event was explicitly mentioned in only one line, and the line belonged to Aeneas: "One Night enjoy'd, the next forsook." (7) The one sexual line in the opera occurred once Aeneas returned from a hunting trip, after he slept with Dido. He delivered this vaguely phallic metaphor to the Queen and the rest of the hunting party: "Behold upon my bending Spear, A Monster's head stands bleeding." (6) None of Dido's lines were remotely sexual, but her sexual activity was clear.[69]

The Dido of Purcell and Tate was more Ovidian than chaste or Virgilian because she engaged in sexual activity while remaining sympathetic. Although Ovid was Tate's closest traditional influence, there are several remaining elements of Tate's libretto that neither Ovid's nor Virgil's interpretations included.[70] Firstly, Dido never mentioned her dead husband in Tate's libretto. She presumably acted as a single woman. She consequently never expressed shame for fornicating with Aeneas. Dido displayed shame in both Virgil's and Ovid's traditions, as well as in the vast majority of interpretations. Shame was key to Dido's story because it catalyzed her death. Thus, Tate removing shame from Dido's arc created a more empowered female character while calling into question the motivation for her death. Secondly, no real god sent Aeneas away; a sorceress and a group witches tricked him. In Virgil's and Ovid's stories, real gods commanded Aeneas's departure. This completely original divergence was significant because it transported

[69] In general, Tate's and Purcell's Dido is far less emotionally expressive than any other Dido.
[70] I omit the chaste tradition here because her story is completely different from Dido's in the opera.

the plot from the realm of mythology into a more real, although still supernatural, world. In Tate's story, there was human accountability and agency.

The final and most important difference concerned Aeneas's departure. Aeneas abandoned Dido in both Virgil's and Ovid's versions. Whether the narrative excused this act (in Virgil's) or villainized it (in Ovid's), Aeneas still left once gods told him to do so. Ovid's Dido was upset, yet she accepted his departure: "but a God commands you to be gone. I wish he had forbidden you to touch upon our coasts."[71] In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas asked Dido to come to terms with his exit: "Don't goad me – and yourself – with these complaints." (360) Virgil's Dido was distraught and tried everything to get him to stay for just a little longer. These efforts included instructing her confidante, Anna, to deliver a message to Aeneas:

> Where is he running? As a last sad love gift,
> He ought to wait for winds that make it easy.
> I do not plead the marriage he betrayed.
> Let the man go be king in charming Latium.
> I just want time, a pause to heal my mind
> And teach myself to mourn in my defeat.
> I ask this final wretched favor, sister –
> A loan – and I will give my death as interest. (429-436)

Unwavering, Aeneas continued his pious journey.

In *Dido and Aeneas*, Aeneas genuinely offered to stay. Dido, however, turned him away. The scene proceeded as follows:

> Aeneas: What shall lost Aeneas do?
> How Royal fair shall I impart,
> The Gods decree and tell you we must part.
>
> Dido: Thus on the fatal banks of the Nile,
> Weeps the deceitful crocodile.
> Thus Hypocrites that murder act,
> Make Heaven and Gods the Authors of the Fact
>
> Aeneas: By all that's good,

[71] Ovid, "Dido to Aeneas."

Dido: By all that's good no more,
All that's good you have Forsworn.
To your promised Empire fly,
And let forsaken Dido Dye.

Aeneas: In spite of Jove's Command I stay,
Offend the Gods, and Love obey.

Dido: No faithless Man thy course pursue,
I'm now resolved as well as you.
No repentance shall reclaim,
The Injured Dido slighted flame.
For 'tis enough what e're you now decree,
That you had once a thought of leaving me.

Aeneas: Let Jove say what he will I'll stay.

Dido: Away. (8)

In a shockingly unprecedented reversal of Dido's story, she took control over her situation. She acted with agency.

III. The Scholarly Conundrum

Before exploring other ways Tate strayed from preceding traditions, I should provide some historical information, such as the dates of the opera's composition and premiere. Those dates, though, are another mystery entirely. Famed baroque composer Purcell and relatively obscure librettist Tate likely wrote this opera in the 1680s in England. Landing on a precise year of composition or premiere, however, has proven difficult for scholars studying the opera. In the 1980s and 1990s, the approaching three-hundred-year anniversary of Purcell's death in 1996 renewed the scholarly interest in the opera. Earlier, over the course of the twentieth century, scholars such as John Buttrey (1967), W. H. Grattan Flood (1918), and Margaret Laurie (1979)

suggested that the one surviving seventeenth-century libretto (from its 1689 performance at Mr. Josias Priest's boarding school for girls) was proof that this performance was the premiere.[72]

Up until the late 1980s, most scholars believed that Purcell and Tate must have written the opera around the time of the 1689 performance as an allegory for the ascension of King William III and Queen Mary II after the Glorious Revolution.[73] James II (1633-1701) took the English throne after his brother, Charles II (1630-1685), died. James II was openly Catholic, and the Protestants in England were worried that he would outlaw Protestantism.[74] They wanted William, Protestant Prince of Orange and grandson of Charles I, to overthrow James II with his wife, Mary, the Protestant daughter of James II.[75] And that they did. William and Mary came over from Holland and ascended the throne between 1688 and 1689. But they did not receive full public support, and Buttrey wrote that the opera was meant to represent fears of joint sovereignty and the dangers of a foreign prince (William III).[76] If Dido and Aeneas failed to unite as rulers, would William III and Mary II fail, too? This allegorical theory garnered support from academics interested in the opera for years.[77]

The tides turned in 1989, however, with the discovery of a libretto for a different opera performed at Mr. Priest's school. There was text printed on the libretto that stated the opera was previously staged in front of a king (either James II or Charles II).[78] Two main theories arose concerning the composition/performance years. One theory, forwarded by Andrew Walkling, was that Purcell and Tate must have written the opera in 1687 to comment on James II's

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[72] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 32-33. Ellen Harris provides a detailed rundown of this scholarly debate in this revised edition of her earlier book.
[73] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 33.
[74] Ibid, 35.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Buttrey, "Dating Purcell's Dido and Aeneas," 60.
[77] See Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* and Ellen Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).
[78] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 33.

(Aeneas's) religious disloyalty to his nation (Dido).[79] Bruce Wood and Andrew Pinnock proposed another theory in their 1992 article. It claimed that Purcell and Tate wrote *Dido and Aeneas* for Charles II's birthday in 1684.[80] Pinnock argued in a separate article that Aeneas was supposed to be Charles II, and the opera was playfully mocking his womanizing tendencies while placing him in a position of historical importance.[81] Today, there is no scholarly consensus. 1689, 1687, and 1684 are all accepted as plausible because there is no way to confirm any of the dates.

Because there is no consensus on the opera's dates, there is no consensus on the opera's meaning. Therefore, there is no consensus on why Tate strayed from preceding traditions. Scholars are aware of the differences between interpretations. Their eagerness to prove political allegory, though, stops these scholars from identifying more reasons for the differences between Purcell's and Tate's Dido and other retellings. Even if we do not know precisely which year Purcell and Tate wrote and premiered the opera, considering the time period's standards and practices can show how historical context shaped the work.

Further, the narrow focus on political allegory limits the scholars in identifying other ways in which *Dido and Aeneas* was exceptional. If we can find additional facets of *Dido and Aeneas* that strayed from the norm, we can gain more insight into the opera's meaning. Studying a theater-going audience's preferences might reveal artists' considerations when they created work for the public. For example, the opera's positive, nuanced portrayal of its leading female role was worlds apart from the typical portrayal of protagonist women in contemporary

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[79] Andrew R. Walkling, "Political Allegory in Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas,'" *Music & Letters* 76, no. 4 (1995): 541.
[80] Bruce Wood and Andrew Pinnock, "'Unscarr'd by Turning Times'? The Dating of Purcell's Dido and Aeneas," *Early Music* 20, no. 3 (1992): 373–90.
[81] Andrew Pinnock, "Which Genial Day? More on the Court Origin of Purcell's Dido and Aeneas, with a Shortlist of Dates for Its Possible Performance before King Charles II," *Early Music* 43, no. 2 (2015): 205.

tragedies. In the next part, we will examine how and why Purcell and Tate might have deviated from various theatrical standards.

PART 2: INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

I. English "She-Tragedy"

We know that *Dido and Aeneas* was markedly different from preceding interpretations of the story, but *Dido and Aeneas*'s depiction of its heroine was also unparalleled in Restoration tragedy where heroines were often portrayed as weak. These depictions were characteristic of the "she-tragedy" genre that became popular during the 1680s when Tate wrote *Dido and Aeneas*. As Marsden mentioned, many of the playwrights who contributed to the she-tragedy trend had an "obsession with portraying the woes of women, particularly those women who have, voluntarily or involuntarily, committed a sexual sin."[82] Two of the archetypes for heroines in English she-tragedy during the Restoration were the pure woman and the suffering woman. Sometimes she was both pure and suffering (a raped virgin, for example, was both). In either instance, playwrights tended to make their heroines pathetic, weak, and ashamed of sexual behavior if they wanted their leading lady to be liked.[83] Marsden continued that heroines in she-tragedy often "accept[ed] rather than challenge[d] their subordinate position within a patriarchal society" when they chose "to suffer rather than to act."[84] Further, "the heroines of she-tragedy are often established as icons of implicitly English feminine virtue," which is "first confirmed and then ultimately reified through the suffering the heroine endures."[85]

Playwrights, usually pandering to their audiences, often expected men and women in the audiences to have different reactions to she-tragedy. Generally, the combination of sexuality and suffering within she-tragedy was meant to induce passion in the male audiences. What was the early modern conception of passion? Political historian Kevin Sharpe provided a definition:

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[82] Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 62.
[83]Howe, *The First English Actresses*, 108.
[84] Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 64.
[85] Ibid.

> The idea of the passions as positive forces was not widely held in early modernity. Though the word signified the greatest of divine and human sacrifices – that of Christ – from its Latin etymology it signified a suffering or affliction, a *disorder* – often of the body – or an overpowering emotion or feeling. Often in early-modern discourse preceded by pejorative adjectives such as "base" or "wanton," the passions represented a loss of control, a surrender of the self to anarchic forces.[86]

Aristocratic and bourgeois men typically were invited to revel in passions. Meanwhile, female passion needed to be controlled, and many Restoration playwrights believed that "the gaze of the female spectator should," instead, "be veiled by tears and her response to theater to imitate passive virtue and identify with the object of the male gaze."[87] We can see how she-tragedy could reflect and reinforce societal standards for gender.

What did she-tragedy look like? Nathaniel Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1680), which retold the legend of the founding of the Roman Republic, was a "conventional" example of how playwrights typically portrayed women in tragedy.[88] One pure and honorable character, Lucrece, the wife of a Roman consul, killed herself because she was raped and felt as though her rapist stole her honor. Tullia, the queen, was the female villain in the play, and she ran over her father's body in a chariot.[89] She was villainized far more for this act than her son Sextus Tarquin was for raping Lucrece. The rapist did not make an appearance in the play. Teraminta, another suffering female character, killed herself because her husband Titus died. Theater scholar Jacqueline Pearson wrote that the play "polarize[d] two stereotypes of female behaviour, the female monster and the female saint, and allow[ed] few other possibilities for women."[90] Violence against women and obscene sexualization were also popular in she-tragedy. The language used to

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[86] Kevin Sharpe, "Virtues, Passions and Politics in Early Modern England," *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 5 (2011): 774.
[87] Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 69.
[88] Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women & Women Dramatists 1642-1737* (Hertfordshire, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), 46-47.
[89] In Roman historical accounts, she killed her father so that her husband could take the throne.
[90] Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*, 47.

describe women became much more explicit than it was earlier in the century.[91] Dryden's 1673 play *Amboyna* featured a character who was violently raped. Afterwards, the audience saw her tied to a tree with her breasts exposed. Rape and sexuality combined to sexualize suffering further.

Tate's Dido was different from these archetypes in the same way she was different from Dido traditions and retellings. She never expressed shame for fornicating with Aeneas. She turned him away because he was not devoted to her. Dido's actions here aligned with the "active suffering" of men in she-tragedy, as opposed to the pathetically passive suffering of female characters.[92] Unlike many of the tragic heroines whom Restoration men would have considered virtuous, Dido acted with agency. Plus, there was no violence or hyper-sexualization in the opera. Why did Tate make such a departure from these English standards? He was clearly unafraid to make significant changes to the stories he adapted. In the most successful work of his lifetime, Tate famously changed the ending of Shakespeare's *King Lear* so that Cordelia lived and wed Edgar.[93] Perhaps Tate gained inspiration for an alternate ending outside of Restoration England.

II. The Italian Ending

A possible source for Tate was the first operatic version of the Dido tale called *La Didone*, the ending of which was similar to Tate's *King Lear* ending.[94] In 1641, Italian composer Francesco Cavalli and his librettist Gian Francesco Busenello staged the opera. The plot largely

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[91] Howe, *The First English Actresses*, 50.
[92] Ibid, 65-66.
[93] Brian Walsh, "Nahum Tate (1652-1715)" in *The Age of Milton: An Encyclopedia of Major 17th-Century British and American Author*, ed. Alan Hager and Emmanuel Sampath Nelson (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 322.
[94] Schmalfeldt discusses *La Didone* in Schmalfeldt, "In Search of Dido," 584-615.

followed that of Virgil. Didone participated in a tryst with Aeneas, he declared he must leave, Didone became enraged, and she proceeded to pity and blame herself for her indiscretions and unchaste behavior. Because she felt so guilty, she tried and failed to kill herself. Didone awoke from her suicide attempt to save the life of Iarba, one of her suitors from Virgil's tale, because he tried to kill himself, too. And then they got married! The strange Italian opera with its befuddling ending is one of the only examples of a Dido retelling where the titular female did not die.[95] Nevertheless, Ellen Harris noted that this happy ending was a "concession to the convention of the *lieto fine*, or happy ending, of Baroque music drama."[96] It was similar to other Dido interpretations with its inclusions of a sympathetic male character in Iarbas and adhesion to contemporary theatrical practices.

Janet Schmalfeldt wrote of *Dido and Aeneas*'s operatic predecessor *La Didone* in her article "In Search of Dido." She noted that *La Didone* "thoroughly exemplifies the tendency for new versions of the Dido myth to be adapted to their own times."[97] How so? Busenello and Cavalli were both concerned with attaining their peers' approval, and happy endings to operas had become commonplace by the time they wrote *La Didone*.[98] The duo were also attuned to the ideologies surrounding sexual morality and female chastity prevalent in their circles. Here is Schmalfeldt's explanation for Didone's "Italian" fate and its authors:

> That Busenello was a member of an influential Venetian literary academy especially known for its misogynist proclamations on the "dangers of female sexuality" may shed some light on the fact that he portrays Didone first as a hypocrite – she rejects Iarba in the name of chastity but nevertheless dallies with Aeneas – and then as a repentant sinner, to be redeemed only by her faithfulness in marriage. Cavalli does his part by giving Didone an almost secondary role (she doesn't appear onstage until the second of three acts),

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[95] The other work where Dido did not die is Franceschi's and Pallavicino's *La Didone delirante* (1686). Dido married Iarbas in this version, too.
[96] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 49.
[97] Schmalfeldt, "In Search of Dido," 593.
[98] Ibid, 593.

> while composing his noblest lament music for two additional female characters, the Trojan heroines Cassandra and Hecuba – both chaste, and both tragic victims of the Greeks.[99]

Busenello's and Cavalli's Didone was hardly an empowered figure. Misogynistic male conceptions and expectations of female sexuality defined the supposed heroine entirely.

So, did this Italian work or Italian conventions inspire Tate's *Dido and Aeneas* libretto? Likely not. Again, Tate was clearly unafraid to make significant changes to the stories he adapted, as evidenced by *King Lear*. *King Lear* is also evidence that he knew of this happy ending tradition. If Tate wanted to choose an ending that audiences would love based on the success of his *King Lear* retelling, he likely would have concluded the libretto with a blissful marriage between Dido and Aeneas. Further, while empowering, the ending Tate gave Dido was not necessarily happy. Perhaps Tate thought an ending with a happy marriage did not fit Dido's traditionally tragic arc. *King Lear* had obvious comedic elements, whereas *Dido and Aeneas*'s presentation was thoroughly somber.

This information is important because Tate purposefully strayed from the only operatic predecessor *and* his own popular work. He must have had a strong reason to give Dido her unique ending. If Italian society and its moral and artistic sensibilities did not foster an environment friendly enough to harbor such a noble and complex female character, and if no similar characters existed in English drama, which European society's literary contributions could have inspired Tate's decision to empower Dido?

III. The French Question

A. Compositional Competition

[99] Ibid, 594.

We know how Tate caught wind of the French anti-Virgil trend. But still, Tate's Dido did not fit perfectly into either the chaste or hyper-sexualized parodied depictions. Tate employed a distinctive brand of Virgilian critique in his depiction of Dido. She was powerful and sexual, but not overly sexual. Did Henry Purcell, then, have any French influences that could have affected the opera's depiction of a simultaneously powerful and sexual woman? To uncover this mystery, we must consider Purcell's musical roots. During the 1660s, the beginning of Purcell's music career, composer Pelham Humfrey was one of Purcell's instructors at Chapel Royal. There, he imbued Purcell's younger musical mind with a style popularized by French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. Musicologist Percy Scholes noted the following:

> The special tastes of Charles II were met by the importation of the element of French grace and expressiveness into English church music and it was Purcell upon whom, on Humfrey's death, fell the parti-coloured mantle of his teacher. A point not to be forgotten, then, in considering Purcell's style is that he was, in a sense, the musical grandson of Lully.[100]

This early connection between Lully and Purcell was a precursor for what might have occurred in the 1680s. If we compare Purcell's and Lully's works, we might be able to explain where Purcell and Tate got the idea for the ending of *Dido and Aeneas* and their depiction of Dido.

Let us consider Lully's 1686 opera, *Armide*. Lully and his frequent collaborator, librettist Philippe Quinault, created the French operatic genre *tragédie lyrique* that meshed dance and song with a recitative style. Lully wrote the music for many such operas, including one of his most respected and best-known works, *Armide*. Armide the character was a sorceress with countless crusading suitors after her heart, yet she was stronger than all of them – all of them except Renault. Eventually, she fell in love with him because of his immense power. She vacillated between love and fury, however. She and her allies engaged in a back-and-forth with

[100]Percy A. Scholes, "Henry Purcell--A Sketch of a Busy Life," *The Musical Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1916): 447.

Renault, employing demons and charms to enchant and entrap the knight. In one moment, she wanted to kill him, and in the next, her adoration for Renault overcame her. Renault's fellow Christian knights saved him. In the opera's finale, Armide was abandoned and distraught, and after having summoned demons to destroy her castle in a fit of rage, she flew away in her chariot.

Plenty of similarities existed between *Armide* and *Dido and Aeneas*. Both strayed from two of tragedy's common endings: shame that compelled a tragic heroine to marry in order to restore her honor, as in Cavalli's *Didone*, or uncontrollable emotions and hysterical suffering that led to the heroine's violent demise. The titular character in Lully's *Armide* exited triumphantly with Lully's bass underscoring her defiant departure. Similarly, Tate wrote a powerful woman who chose her own fate, and Purcell emphasized her impactful action with a grounding bass. Purcell included a Lully-esque dance portion and allegorical prologue, too. If Lully composed *Armide* before Purcell composed *Dido and Aeneas*, he could have inspired some elements of the opera.[101] When Lully wrote this opera, Purcell was trying to catch up with him to become Europe's premiere Baroque composer. Thus, Purcell, who learned Lully's style in his youth, might have mimicked Lully's style in *Dido and Aeneas*.

Dido's and Armide's arcs were not identical, however. While the men Dido and Armide opposed were weak, *Armide*'s audience pitied Renault, while *Dido and Aeneas*'s audience sympathized with Dido. Dido was a protagonist, and Armide was an anti-hero. Renault was likable, and Aeneas presented as a buffoon. While Lully's influence on Purcell was possible, even probable, it did not wholly account for their sympathetic yet powerful characterization of

[101] Again, we do not know exactly when Purcell and Tate wrote *Dido and Aeneas,* but we can safely say they wrote the opera and composed the libretto within five years of *Armide*'s creation. But even if Purcell wrote *Dido and Aeneas* before Lully wrote *Armide*, he would have been attuned to Lully's musical wavelength.

Dido. Where can we find inspiration for the thoroughly pro-Dido, anti-Aeneas (perhaps pro-female, anti-male) spirit seen in the opera?

B. French "Feminoids"

One could argue that Frenchman Jean Racine (1639-1699), one of the foremost theatrical writers of the seventeenth century, could have inspired Purcell's and Tate's portrayal of Dido. Racine, a neoclassicist, was known to subvert gender norms in his historical and mythological plays. French historian Richard Goodkin noted that Racine portrayed "feminoid" male characters as "hesitant, dependent, and passive" and "viriloid" female characters as "powerful, resolute."[102]

A problem in attributing Tate's Dido treatment to Racine's gender subversion is that if a Racine character was a "feminoid," he was not necessarily unlikeable. Goodkin wrote about Taxile, a "feminoid" character in Racine's *Alexandre le Grand* (1665):

> Taxile is heroic not in spite of his weakness as a soldier, but because of it; that he is not much of a fighter even once he has entered the field of battle reflects Racine's insistence on maintaining the consistency of his endearing feminoid's character to the very end. What makes Taxile heroic is his self-sacrifice in the name of love. [103]

Taxile was likable because he emulated the female trait that was desirable in the seventeenth century: passivity. Further, he was fully devoted to love. Like many women in tragedy, he would sacrifice himself because of his feelings. On the other hand, anything could have swayed Aeneas. Tate's Aeneas was devoted to Dido in one minute, and to his nation in the next. Plus, Aeneas was not heroic in any sense. He was brashly flimsy and flawed. His weakness was not endearing, and it was not traditionally feminine. Tate's Dido was not a typically masculine character either. She was sexual but not aggressively so. She had moments of hesitation as well as conviction. Neither Dido nor Aeneas fit into this neat gender dichotomy. So, if external traditional and

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[102] Richard E. Goodkin, "Gender Reversal in Racine's Historical and Mythological Tragedies," *Dalhousie French Studies* 49 (1999): 15.
[103] Goodkin, "Gender Reversal," 19.

theatrical conventions cannot explain Tate's nuanced portrayal of a powerful woman, I propose we look into Tate's personal life to find the answers.

PART 3: NAHUM TATE, THE LOST LIBRETTIST

I. Professional Evolution

Studying a librettist can be more helpful than studying a composer when attempting to uncover meanings of a work. An opera without lyrics is not an opera – it is merely a piece of music. To be sure, Purcell brought life to the characters and their words with his striking bass chords and compelling melodies, but there would be no story without Tate. The tale Tate told is unlike any other in the history of the saga's adaptations. Tate wrote a leading lady who transcended the common archetypes of the author's day – or any day before. Further, the writer refused to subscribe wholly to the three typical characterizations of Dido. In order to discover why Tate so significantly altered one of the world's most iconic classical legends in his libretto for *Dido and Aeneas*, we must explore the various influences on Tate's life and career that might have swayed his conception of Dido and his general point of view. And the influences were many. Just as Dido contained multitudes, Tate was a man whose personality, career, and background contained countless contradictory elements. Shifting loyalties and therefore unsteady relationships with his colleagues characterized Tate's long yet uneven career. Who was Tate as a person? Why was he such a contentious fellow? What qualms did his peers have with him? Most importantly, how did all these external factors affect his work? Let us venture into Tate's complicated life to solve the mystery of *Dido and Aeneas*.

A. Tate, the Maligned Man

Nahum Tate was most likely born in Ireland in 1652 into a line of Puritan ministers. Both his father and grandfather were named "Faithful," and Catholic rebels attacked and robbed Faithful the eldest in 1641. The rebels stole almost all his money, destroyed his property, and

killed several of his children in the attack.[104] This event probably strengthened the Tate family's already strong anti-Catholic sentiments, but did it effect Nahum's political leanings? After he graduated Trinity College Dublin in 1672 and moved to London shortly thereafter, he befriended John Dryden through his burgeoning involvement in literary circles. The two began to work closely on multiple projects. By the early 1680s, Tate started to solidify himself in the ranks of Tory poets like Dryden, Thomas D'Urfey, and Elkanah Settle – all collaborators with Henry Purcell. At this time, the highpoint of his career, Tate wrote his adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1681). This adaptation would become his most successful work while he was alive. By the late-1680s, however, Tate had grown distant from his former colleagues.[105]

What caused Tate's separation? As time went on, he became increasingly devoted to his religious convictions and adopted a proselytizing approach to writing. Once William III and Mary II ascended to power, Tate clung to the new Protestant king's vision of morally reforming society because it matched his own. Beginning in 1689, the majority of Tate's literary output revolved around praising the king and God. He became the Poet Laureate in 1692 and remained so until his death in 1715. He slowly, publicly became a Whig, scandalized by the debauchery of the theater world where he spent the formative stage of his career. As laureate, he took upon himself the duty of purifying theater by promoting religious values.[106] Towards the end of the seventeenth century, he wrote a piece titled "A Proposal for Regulating the Stage & Stage-Players" to promote the moral reformation of theater:

> All Endeavors for a National Reformation being likely to prove Ineffectual without a Regulation of the Stage, the following is humbly offered to Consideration. First, that supervisors of Plays be appointed by the Government. Secondly, that all Plays (capable of being reform'd) be rectify'd by their Authors if Living-and proper Persons appointed to

[104] Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 19.
[105] Walsh, "Nahum Tate (1652-1715)," 320-322.
[106] Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 32.

> Alter and reform Those of Deceased Authors and neither old or modern Plays permitted to be Acted till reform'd to thee satisfaction of the supervisors. Thirdly, that sufficient Encouragement be for such Persons a make ye Aforesaid Alterations &c as likewise for supervisors, and Penalties upon Default in Either. And this Matter so adjusted as to have due Effect, as long as any Stage shall be Permitted. Fourthly, the Theatres & Actors to be Under Strict Discipline & Orders, that no gentlemen be suffered to come behind the Scenes, nor Women in Vizard-Masques admitted to see a Play &c. Such Regulation of Plays and Play-houses will not only be a publique Benefitt, but also Beneficial to the Stage itself-if Continued: for whether the present stages be Reform'd or Silenc'd is left to the Government, but the one or Other is Absolutely necessary, (Endorsement.) Mr. Tate's Proposal for Regulating the stage,
> Rec'd Feb. 6, 1698-99.[107]

Tate was not the only person attacking the then current state of theater. The bishop Jeremy Collier notoriously denounced members of the drama community, like Dryden and D'Urfey, in *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) for promoting profanity and forsaking morality in their plays. While Tate was a member of this moralizing movement, his former theater community certainly did not agree with him.[108] As time went on, his work was "increasingly considered tedious and mediocre" by his former peers who often launched "satirical attacks" against him for becoming so publicly religious.[109] He died in debt, ridiculed, and widely forgotten.

B. A Rebel, Repressed

How did Tate's depressing life trajectory relate to his version of *Dido and Aeneas*, especially if most of the depressing phase began once his appointment as Poet Laureate began in the 1690s, years after he wrote the libretto? The answer might lie in his mental state when he wrote the libretto in the 1680s. At this point in Tate's career, he was still part a member of the

[107] Lambeth MSS. 933, Art. 57. Found in Joseph Wood Krutch, "Governmental Attempts to Regulate the Stage after the Jeremy Collier Controversy," *PMLA* 38, no. 1 (1923): 161.
[108] Krutch, "Governmental Attempts to Regulate the Stage," 153.
[109] Walsh, "Nahum Tate (1652-1715)," 322.

literary elite (well, as close to the literary elite as he would ever stand). The 1680s would have been the period when he began to feel weary regarding the moral faculties of his fellow writers and the theater scene in London. We know he harbored a distaste for them because of his later statements against the theatrical community. If Tate's morally and religiously based political convictions disagreed with theirs, he would not have been able to express openly these qualms without losing his privileged spot in Dryden's retinue. Tate teetered on the precipice of ostracization when a brigade of Tories attacked him for adapting Shakespeare's play *Richard II* into a production they believed satirized King Charles II and members of the Tory court party. After the court members banned the play in 1681, Tate attempted to defend himself, which would become a pattern in his career.

> I am not ignorant of the posture of Affairs in King Richard the Second's Reign, how dissolute then the age, and how corrupt the Court; a Season that beheld Ignorance and Infamy preferr'd to Office and Pow'r, exercis'd in Oppressing, Learning and Merit; but why a History of those Times shou'd be suppress as a Libel upon Ours, is past my Understanding…[110]

To make matters more frustrating for the undercover Whig writer, the Tory authorities squashed the play without reading it first.[111] But why did this suppression matter?

Tate might have written *Dido and Aeneas* in the way he did as a sort of protest against his community of writers. Tired of the criticism and unfair suppression he faced in the Tory community he ethically abhorred, Tate strayed from his own Dryden-approved 1678 play *Brutus of Alba* based on the Dido legend when he wrote the *Dido and Aeneas* libretto. In the play's very preface, Tate admitted he planned to title the play "Dido and Aeneas." But, his friends, like

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[110] Found in Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 79. Spencer notes that this portion of Tate's six-page Epistle Dedicatory was "advertised in *The Term Catalogues* in November, 1684 (ed. Arber, II, 98), although it was published with 1685 on the title page. The Prologue and Epilogue were published separately in 1684." This would have been around the time of *Dido and Aeneas*'s possible creation date.
[111] Ibid.

Dryden, discouraged him from doing so because "it wou'd appear Arrogant to attempt any Characters that had been written by the incomparable Virgil."[112] In *Brutus of Alba,* Brutus was Aeneas, and as implied by the title, he was the central figure in the play. Tate capitulated to Dryden and the literary community so drastically that he changed the names of all the characters. He called his later libretto *Dido and Aeneas,* the change in focus of the title indicating his growing confidence to stand up against his community.

One of the starkest changes in *Dido and Aeneas* from its progenitor *Brutus of Alba* was Tate's treatment of Dido's victimhood. At the apotheosis of *Brutus of Alba* when Brutus stated the necessity of his Italian departure to the unnamed Dido figure, the Queen of Syracuse, she was tearful. He saw her sobs and stated that "Twere Woman's Fraud t' have ruin'd with your Smiles, / But to betray with Tears, the Crocodile's."[113] Tate was directly comparing Dido and Cleopatra when he used the weeping crocodile metaphor in *Brutus of Alba,* but he was not the first to do so. Anthony Welch noted that in the *Aeneid,* Virgil "had linked Dido thematically with the archetypal eastern queen of the Nile" because the two female rulers "embodied the irrational, wily and prevaricating social world of the southern Mediterranean."[114]

This practice held its weight hundreds of years later in seventeenth-century English theater, first in Shakespeare's play, *Antony and Cleopatra*. Welch continued that "Tate would have known Shakespeare's portrait of Cleopatra as a seductive spinner of tales, deeply preoccupied with the power of language, and eager to craft her own role in history."[115] Shakespeare's portrayal of the queen inspired Dryden when writing his own 1677 play, *All for*

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[112] Nahum Tate, preface to *Brutus of Alba: or, the Enchanted Lovers* (London: Printed by E.F. for Jacob Tonson, 1678), sig. A3.
[113] Tate, *Brutus of Alba: or, the Enchanted Lovers,* 31.
[114] Anthony Welch makes excellent commentary on this matter in Welch, "The Cultural Politics of Dido and Aeneas," 18.
[115] Ibid.

Love, where he called the icy and conniving Cleopatra a "False Crocodyle."[116] Many scholars noted that Dryden's play provided the model for *Brutus of Alba*, as the two playwrights conterminously created these works within the same community.

The role of the crocodile, however, was switched in *Dido and Aeneas*. In the style of Ovid's "From Dido, to Aeneas," Tate's Dido lambasted Aeneas:

> Thus on the fatal Banks of *Nile*,
> Weeps the deceitful Crocodile.
> Thus Hypocrites that Murder &,
> Make Heaven and Gods the Authors of the Fact. (8)

At this point in the plot, Aeneas had already approached Dido, informing her that the false Mercury who he thought was real had commanded him to leave Carthage. Dido accused the inconstant man of crying fake tears and castigated him for denying accountability. Here, the hero was Dido, who addressed Aeneas with sharp conviction while remaining earnest in her emotional expression. The audience sympathized with her instead of Aeneas. This reversal showed Tate's rebellion against his literary community, especially because this community was pro-Virgil. Tate's change of both title and portrayal of his characters indicated his growth between the late 1670s and mid 1680s and lent legitimacy to his increasing confidence to act on his distaste towards those who stifled him.

C. Ovid and Antipatriarchal Manhood

How do we know that Tate portraying Dido contrarily to the wishes of his peers was a rebellion against his suppressive professional community, instead of a simple creative liberty taken without underlying motives? The answer might lie in the foremost literary influence on Tate's work. We covered the similarities between Ovid's and Tate's interpretations, especially in

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[116] John Dryden, "*All for Love,"* in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956-89) XIII, 44.

their joint vilification of Aeneas. We have not yet explored Tate's reverence of the poet in general.[117] Ovid was a well-known figure in the Restoration period, and he was met with mixed reception. His work was mocked in Restoration burlesques where "the behavior and motivations of the women transformed from honorable to wanton."[118] Matthew Stevenson's *The Wits Paraphras's, or, Paraphrase upon paraphrase in a burlesque on the several late translations of Ovids Epistles* (1680) was a prime example of this type of mockery. On the other hand, he had many supporters. A plethora of Ovid translations were published around this time – including several by Tate. Tate collaborated with Dryden in 1680 in his translation of the *Epistles* and continued to translate Ovid throughout his career, playing a key role in the recreation of Ovid's works during the Restoration.[119] In 1697, Tate said of Ovid that "he is so Natural a Writer, that he cannot fail of being agreeable in any Language he shall be made to speak."[120] While Dryden was the most prolific Ovid translator of the Restoration, Tate nonetheless played a leading role in Ovid translation.

We know that Tate admired Ovid the writer, but what of Ovid the man? Why was Tate's adoration of Ovid important? Ovid's impact on Tate's life could have also inspired his moment of rebellion. If Tate did indeed feel alienated internally in the 1680s, that feeling could explain his adoration of and presumed emotional connection to Ovid because Ovid himself was the victim of exile. Ovid was brutally banished from Rome in 8 CE for reasons that will never be known with certainty. He claimed that his exile was a mistake, but several scholars posited that

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[117] Perhaps the most in depth comparison of Ovid's work and Tate's work is Wendy Heller's address of the topic in Heller, "'A Present for the Ladies,'" 189-208.
[118] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 47.
[119] Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 50-51.
[120] *Ovid's Metamorphosis Translated by Several Hands and Edited by N. Tate*, ed. Nahum Tate. Vol. I (London: 1697), sig. A6.

Emperor Augustus expelled Ovid because he pushed back against the ruler's moral reforms.[121] For years scholars have claimed that by changing the traditional narrative of the male-centric ancient legends he adapted, Ovid was rebelling against his own exile.[122] Ovid taking on a woman's voice, especially in the *Heroides*, was his way to complain and *lament* about his expulsion; in these stories, someone (most often a man) subordinated a woman who was then powerlessly trapped in an unfortunate circumstance.

This expression of exile and self through art possibly inspired Petrarch, proponent of the "chaste" Dido tradition. Italian Studies scholar Julie Van Petegham noted that Petrarch had a "strong familiarity with the Italian Ovidian tradition" and an "interest in self-identification with Ovidian characters" that was especially evident in his "frequent identification with the women in Ovid's stories in the *Canzoniere.*"[123] Further, Petrarch was, at times, taken with the idea of exile in his works. Comparative Literature scholar Benjamin Boysen remarked on Petrarch's use of exile:

> Petrarch's preoccupation with exile is not only extraordinarily passionate; it is also untimely and original. His intellectual and poetic praxis is accompanied by an obsession with exile, whose intensity and transformations offer him a hitherto unseen freedom, enabling him to create his own self as his own artwork. He orchestrates an all-embracing exile whose ruptures and upheavals secure him an indeterminacy and potentiality out of which he is free to stage himself independently: Exile becomes a strategy with which he endeavors to achieve the possibility of being his own creator or author. [124]

Thus, Ovid potentially inspired Petrarch's promotion of the traditional tale of chaste Dido's exile.

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[121] P. J. Davis, "The Colonial Subject in Ovid's Exile Poetry," in *The American Journal of Philology* 123, no. 2 (2002): 257.
[122] Laurel Fulkerson, "The *Heroides*: Female Elegy?" in *A Companion to Ovid*, dir. Peter E. Knox (Chichester/Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 78-89.
[123] Julie Van Peteghem, *Italian Readers of Ovid from the Origins to Petrarch* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 223.
[124] Benjamin Boysen, "The Triumph of Exile: The Ruptures and Transformations of Exile in Petrarch," *Comparative Literature Studies* 55, no. 3 (2018): 483.

Since Tate lived in an exile of his own, he too might have appreciated Ovid's self-expression through women. Late in his life, Tate went so far as to liken himself to the banished poet in what one historian described as a "bitter contribution to a volume entitled *Memoirs of the Mind and Queen's-Bench.*"[125] Tate was complicated because he operated between conflicting spheres. His personal background as a devoted Puritan created ideological dissonance with his professional place in the Dryden-dominated, Tory-fraught literary and theatrical community. Caught between the two worlds most important to his lived experience, maybe Tate tried to assimilate to them throughout his life, picking up pieces and bits of both to contribute to his own belief system.

This proposed endeavor would have been difficult to execute, however. The librettist and playwright's failure to fit simultaneously into both crowds during the 1680s could have left him feeling like an outsider to his own life, lost in the labyrinth of late-Stuart society, unable to fully commit to either of the pathways before him: buying into the debaucheries of the theatrical community or shunning them in favor of a more conservative, religious environment like the one in which he was raised. Similarly, Dido was caught between two worlds: personal devotion to Aeneas and public duty to Carthage. She was trapped in a position in which she did not place herself. In portraying Dido as a wronged woman, Tate could have been imitating Ovid and complaining about his situation through his written works *before* he was able to ever write publicly about his disapproval of the contemporary state of theater without jeopardizing his career. By the 1690s, his career was stable because of his tight connection to the monarchy forged by similar proselytizing goals. Only then would he have been free to express his concerns.

[125] Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 38.

In the article, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500-1700," Alexandra Shepard discussed gendered subordination, writing that by the late seventeenth century, "[p]atriarchy involved complex axes of subordination that could transcend or cut across distinctions of sex," and therefore, "while patriarchal imperatives privileged most men above most women, they also privileged several men above many others."[126] Thus, some men "resisted patriarchal norms and also pursued alternative codes of manhood."[127] Tate very well might have been one of these "others" who found redemption by expressing himself as Dido, albeit covertly, as a form of what Shepard called *antipatriarchal manhood*.[128] If Ovid expressed himself as his female characters, and if Tate found similar comfort in the female expression, he could have used it to make a stand. We can see this idea in Tate's reversal of the crocodile tears line. By framing Aeneas as the villain, Tate gave Dido, and himself, more power.

But still, Ovid's Aeneas abandoned Dido, while Tate's Dido shunned Aeneas. Why did Tate change Aeneas's departure and give Dido control over her situation? What if his hatred towards the playwriting community was caused not only by their suppressing of his work, but by their disgusting portrayal of women on stage?

II. Tate, Seventeenth-Century Feminist?

A. "A Present for the Ladies"

There is evidence that suggests Tate had a vested interest in protecting women. One such piece of evidence is his 1692 book that he titled *A Present for the Ladies, Being an Historical Account of Several Illustrious Persons of the Female Sex*. This book was part of a

[126] Alexandra Shepard, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 290.
[127] Shepard, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen," 190.
[128] Ibid, 191. Shephard discusses three other types of manhood, their meanings, and applications.

growing pro-female literary movement revived by philosopher John Locke's defense of females in *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). This movement was a continuation of the Renaissance debates on *querelle des femmes* (French term for "the woman question") where both men and women issued their opinions. Notably, in 1529, German scholar Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) wrote his well-known *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* where he argued against sexist views and depictions of women in a long history of literature and writings. His general point was that women deserved more power in public because they could be more capable than men. Agrippa asserted throughout that the misogynistic beliefs behind female oppression were born from male prejudice, not nature as men had claimed for hundreds of years.[129]

In *A Present for the Ladies*, Tate similarly issued grievances with the ways men had depicted and described women for thousands of years, defending a plethora of mythological, historical, biblical, or literary female figures. In his introduction, Tate took it upon himself both to commend the women he mentioned and disparage the men who unfairly slandered them:

> We tax them with Inconstancy, whereas they are seldom or never seen to change, without just grounds, when they have once condescended to dispose of their Hearts. Which is so far from being reputed a Crime in our selves, that it is almost scandalous for a Man to be thought a Constant Lover. Neither is this wholly to be imputed to the Degeneracy of the present corrupted Age, since it was practis'd by several Men of the first Rank, in former times: for was not Theseus as inconstant to *Ariadne*, as the effeminate *Paris* to *Oenone*? Was it not Ingratitude of Heroes that more than half furnish *Ovid* with Subjects for his Epistles?[130]

A substantial series of claims, indeed. Tate strongly highlighted the hypocrisy men exhibited when they deemed inconstancy a female trait. Mentioning Ovid in this quote, he made clear that

[129] Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and Albert Rabil, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[130] Nahum Tate, *A Present for the Ladies, Being an Historical Account of Several Illustrious Persons of the Female Sex* (London: Printed for Francis Saunders, at the Blue Anchor in the New Exchange in the Strand, 1693), A2-A3.

men wronged women, not the other way around. They had been doing so not just in the "Degeneracy of the present corrupted Age," but for centuries.

Tate continued to defend women throughout the book. To cover the entire piece would be a thesis itself, as the virtues he detailed were many. Divided into chapters, he discussed the following qualities: "The Dignity and Pre-eminence of the Female Sex in the Manner of their Creation," "The Sovereignty and Force of Beauty," "The Vertues, Graces, Arts, Sciences described as Female," "Their Commiseration and Charity," "Women eminent for Learning," "Of their Prudence and Discretion," "Their Generosity and Magnanimity," "Their Constancy and Stability of Mind," "Their Temperance, Meekness, Innocency, Modesty, Chastity," "Conjugal Affection and Piety towards Husbands," "Their Piety towards Parents, and other Relations," "Their Devotion or Piety towards God," "Their Fortitude," "Their good Services to their Country," "To Kingdoms and States," and "Their Capacity for Government."[131] Tate thought highly of women, and he disapproved of the way men treated women.

In the final pages of the book, Tate addressed his fellow men and made a request: "That we should at last render to this Noble Sex their just Respect and Honour. That we should no longer look upon them as the Entertainments of idle Hours, but place them in that venerable Esteem that is due to their Merit."[132] Here, Tate stated that women should not be male entertainment. His statement could have applied to a prostitute, or a female actor, or any woman. Women were not, and are not, their bodies. Women were not objects onto which men could or should have projected their insecurities. Women were not simply sexual beings. They were dynamic. Tate conveyed throughout that he believed women were, in many ways, better than men and should have been treated with respect.

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[131] Tate, *Present.*
[132] Ibid, 100.

B. Reforms and Regulations

Tate was not making empty claims. He made strides in his professional life to improve lives of real women. We discussed the wave of theater regulation in the late 1690s in which Tate partook. One of the reforms in Tate's statement demanded that "Theatres & Actors [were] to be Under Strict Discipline & Orders, that no gentlemen be suffered to come behind the Scenes, nor Women in Vizard-Masques admitted to see a Play." He railed against the frequency with which female actors became mistresses of male audience members. While one could argue that Tate was restricting the activities of the female actors and perhaps even limiting their income, I believe that Tate was trying to convey that men keeping mistresses diminished female agency. Theater scholar Lesley Ferris commented on the practice of being "kept":

> It was the expected custom for the men of the court to keep a pretty female actor – just one of their many expenses in an age of public display. Any potential power a woman might have had on stage became diffuse and deflated by the way Restoration drama objectified her. Her stage mobility gave her potential for social mobility, but her status as a commodity on public display neutralized this possibility. [133]

Whether or not being a sexual liaison advanced the female actor's finances, the act was degrading and took away the female actors' ability to be empowered professionals.

Tate was trying not only to rid the theater of the female actor-prostitute connotation, but to take sexualized spectatorship out of the theater with his mention of "Women in Vizard-Masques." Sometimes, the women attending a show were more of a focus than the actual women onstage, and this practice was the case especially when there were women in the audience wearing vizard masks. Used too during the reign of Charles I, the vizard mask was originally intended to protect a woman's innocence and hide her from the desirous glares of perverted men.

[133] Lesley Ferris, *Acting Women: Images of Women in Theatre*, (London: Macmillan, 1990), 70.

The anonymity gave them freedom to spectate without worrying about being spectated and worrying about appearing virginal.[134]

Tate was aware of what the mask had turned into, though. Despite the original purpose for the mask having been literally innocent, it became denigrated and sexualized during the reign of Charles II. Pritchard explained the mask's evolution: "By rendering women unknowable, the mask also piqued curiosity. In this respect, it served as a provocation as well as a prohibition."[135] The practice became tied to prostitution; these women wanted to be figured out. To be revealed. And they wanted the men in the audience to reveal them. Pritchard continued that "the wearing of vizard masks became so disreputable a practice that some forgot it had ever been innocent." [136] Many came to believe that prostitutes wore the masks initially, and non-prostitutes had begun to wear them over time to tempt men. The very practice meant to shield women from sexualized stares ended up accomplishing the opposite due to the collectively promiscuous male spectatorship that permeated later-Stuart society. In his attempt to ban vizard masks from theaters, Tate wanted to protect women from the male assumption that they were prostitutes.

Evidently, Tate wanted to change the perception of and reality for women in theater and society. His ideas strengthened once William III and Mary II appointed him Poet Laureate in 1692. In the latter half of his career, Tate began to express explicitly qualms that he might not have been able to divulge while he remained in the Dryden fold. Thus, it was possible that Tate's antipatriarchal manhood and his favorable depiction of Dido were infused with an actual animosity towards men, collectively. What if Tate was trying to redeem not only himself, but all women? What if we looked at Dido as an embodied expression of Tate's frustration not only

[134] Pritchard, *Outward Appearances*, 106-107.
[135] Ibid, 107.
[136] Ibid.

with his own position in society, but with women's position in society? Maybe Tate championed Dido because he related to the struggles of womanhood. In Part 4, we will read the libretto through the pro-female perspective with which Tate very well might have identified.

PART 4: DIDO AS A SYMBOL OF FEMALE LIBERATION

Dido and Aeneas might have been a protest against sexist societal and theatrical standards. The way male poets treated Dido for thousands of years resembled Restoration men's typical treatments of both female actors and women (and how Tate's colleagues treated him). Generally, these women and Dido were bound to behavior or archetypes determined by men or the male conception of womanhood. No matter the tradition, men usually diminished Dido's agency. We can see this same broad pattern unfold in the world of theater with she-tragedy and in Restoration society with the prevailing expectations for female behavior and conceptions of womanhood. If a female actor wanted to play roles that did not match her sexual reputation, her career likely would have struggled. If women did not moderate their behaviors to exhibit the later-Stuart idea of virtue, they were less attractive marriage options. And if Dido's end was her own choice – not a result of being abandoned or widowed in all preceding traditions – and not a result of her sexual shame like in contemporary theater – it is unlikely that her story would have been told. Tate's Dido did choose her own fate, though. How, then, did *Dido and Aeneas*, now among England's most celebrated operas (and one of the greatest Baroque operas), reach the professional operatic stage and gain the public spotlight that remains strong today?

Well, the answer is simple. It didn't. The opera was never professionally performed as a stand-alone piece in Purcell's or Tate's lifetimes. Charles Gildon's *Measure for Measure* (1700) used it as a plot device, and it was an afterpiece (theatrical work that was shown after the main entertainment) for a couple of plays in 1704. It was then forgotten for several decades. There were a few performances in the late eighteenth century, but it did not reach the acclaimed status it boasts today until the late nineteenth century, over two-hundred years after it was written.

Why was this opera unsuccessful in the early modern era? In the introduction, I stated that as public entertainment, opera can tell us about an audience (and therefore society). Tate's uncommonly positive and empowering attitude towards women, plausibly inspired by his relation to their struggles, created a character whom the male audiences likely would have despised. This opera having been unpopular can tell us more than it would if it had been popular. The rest of my thesis will explore how this opera related to the societal control of women's bodies and sexuality onstage and in later-Stuart society. First, to show how tangibly the male gaze limited the female actors' abilities to act with agency, I will explore how female actors' careers were influenced by the expectations of male audience members.

I. Female Actors: The Identity Quandary

In 1711, playwright and critic John Dennis wrote the following:

> For it has been a Complaint of Two Thousand Years standing, that Poets have been us'd to violate their Subjects, and to force their Characters out of complaisance to their Actors, that is, to their Interest. Most of the Writers for the Stage in my time, have not only adapted their Characters to their Actors, but those Actors have as it were sate for them.[137]

He was right. Theater historian Elizabeth Howe stated that "Restoration playwrights were severely limited in the characters they could create because of the audience's intrusive awareness of the female actor's own personality."[138] Whether or not female actors as people were similar to the roles they played was a question some later-Stuart aristocratic and bourgeois men frequently pondered. Theater historian Thomas A. King argued that this "demand to conflate" the female

[137] John Dennis, *Critical Works* vol. I, ed. E. N. Hooker (Baltimore: 1939-45), 418.
[138] Howe, *The First English Actresses*, 102.

actor and her role "underlay the voyeuristic dynamic that has since been characteristic of Western theatre."[139]

For an audience to believe a performance, the female actor usually had to be like her character. If she was not, her career could suffer. We can see this reality play out in the case of Anne Bracegirdle (1672-1748). Anne Bracegirdle was one of later-Stuart England's most prominent female actors. What made Bracegirdle unique compared to other female actors at the time was her turbulent professional trajectory. Bracegirdle, like other female actors, was limited to portraying few, specified female archetypes.

The heroine archetypes in she-tragedy projected a "blameless vulnerability."[140] Anne started her career playing the raped virgin archetype in plays like *The Rape* (1692) by Nicholas Brady and *Alphonzo King of Naples* (1691) by George Powell. She portrayed characters who typically fell from grace due to enduring sexual assault or some other significant misfortune. And she excelled. Because she maintained the appearance and public assumption of her virginity in her real life, she swiftly became the rising female actor in her community before she endured a potentially career-destroying episode. This experience was not unlike those endured by the women she played.

One major downfall of being a female actor during her era was that the audience, mostly controlled by male expectations, was unable to distinguish between reality and the play. So, one is not likely to be flabbergasted to learn that one of Anne's male admirers, Captain Richard Hill, assumed she was having an affair with her frequent male costar, William Mountfort. In December of 1692, he became enraged and attempted to kidnap and rape the female actor with

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[139] Thomas A. King, "'As If (She) Were Made on Purpose to Put the Whole World into Good Humour': Reconstructing the First English Actresses," *TDR* 36, no. 3 (1992): 80.
[140] Diana Solomon, "From Infamy to Intimacy: Anne Bracegirdle's Mad Songs," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1.

his friend, Charles Lord Mohun.[141] When their plan failed, they killed her costar in cold blood. Anne was, luckily, unharmed physically. Her career, however, was not unscathed.

Her reputation rendered her unable to avoid negative public attacks on her character. She was accused of personifying a "satirical elegy" and a "saucy novel."[142] The anonymous novel, *The Player's Tragedy* (1693) was based on the real people involved in the incident. Most significantly, its author portrayed Bracegirdle as lascivious and the Captain as justified in murdering her. When the novel's Captain character confessed his love, Bracegirdle replied that he should "go to some Country Village, where perhaps you may find some believing Romantick Virgin, that may gratifie your curiosity," since he would never find romance with a female actor.[143] Because audiences believed Bracegirdle was no longer virginal like her typical roles suggested, her professional opportunities temporarily waned.[144]

A few years later, more troublingly, she began playing the madwoman, another main female archetype featured in late seventeenth-century English theater. In the aftermath of her traumatic attack, "Bracegirdle's sung expressions of madness, where the referent hinted at her own state of mind, led audiences to respond to both character and actress."[145] Bracegirdle reclaimed power over her unfortunate situation to become more renowned and successful than she had ever been before. Interestingly, she is even thought to have played Dido in one of the few public stagings of the very opera we are studying, Henry Purcell's and Nahum Tate's *Dido and Aeneas*.[146]

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[141] Solomon, "From Infamy to Intimacy: Anne Bracegirdle's Mad Songs," 3.
[142] Ibid, 4.
[143] Quoted in Solomon, "From Infamy to Intimacy: Anne Bracegirdle's Mad Songs," 5.
[144] Ibid, 6.
[145] Ibid, 1.
[146] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 72.

Like the Dido of Tate and Purcell, Bracegirdle acted with agency when she took control of her own fate. Bracegirdle was an admired celebrity in her world, while Tate's Dido remained in the shadows for over a century, largely unseen by early modern audiences. While feigning madness was key to Bracegirdle's success, honest and powerful composure led Tate's Dido to oblivion. Seeing how Bracegirdle's inauthentic yet practical acquiescence brought her success shows just how much male expectations restricted the female actor's ability to live according to her own preferences.

II. Neoclassical Expression of Women's Emotions

This male suspicion surrounding the cohesion of the female exterior and interior is also important because it was a feature of neoclassical theater. In plays inspired by neoclassical standards, women hiding their emotions was standard practice. In Tate's libretto, there were multiple instances where Dido suppressed her emotions. Before I argue that these occurrences might have represented the lack of freedom in expression afforded to women (and Tate), I must address the following question: how do we know Dido's emotional suppression represented the struggles of those subjects if hiding emotions was standard in theater at the time? I will return to Racine, neoclassical exemplar, to explain how Dido's containment diverged from the standard depictions of emotional suppression on the neoclassical stage. More specifically, I will contrast Dido and Phedre, Racine's best-known character in his best-known work, *Phedre* (1677).[147]

Like Dido, the titular Phedre was royalty. Unlike Dido, Phedre had a husband, but he was absent at the beginning of the play. After rumors of his death circulated, Phedre finally confessed her long-suppressed romantic feelings for her stepson, Hippolytus. She had not planned to reveal

[147] Purcell and Tate certainly knew of this play due to its sweeping popularity.

these feelings, but her emotions controlled her. Sensing Hippolytus had feelings for someone else, Phedre felt rejected and spiraled into a mad, nearly suicidal hysteria. When her husband returned alive, Phedre was wracked with guilt and had to hide both her passionate and shameful feelings. Out of jealousy towards Aricia, Hippolytus's love interest, Phedre claimed that Hippolytus made advances towards her, not the other way around. Phedre's husband, Theseus, sent him away. Hippolytus died during some epic display of heroism. Consequently, Phedre confessed her guilt and killed herself.

In Racine's mythological adaptations, women were able to be "heroic without being masculinized" in that "their power is not drawn from positions of strength, but rather from their strong reactions to positions of weakness."[148] This statement works for Phedre, who never claimed a position of power. Yes, she was afforded less freedom than Dido because she had a husband. But, more importantly, her "feminine" passions controlled her every move. Rejection and jealousy incited her drastic reactions. While Phedre made a point of concealing these passions, she was never successful. She constantly vacillated between tormented repression and visceral confession. Phedre was a jealous, anguished, ashamed woman whose passions were her downfall. Following the neoclassical tradition of character consistency, she remained true to her emotional volatility throughout. This character consistency was a facet of neoclassical theater that later-Stuart men would have appreciated. From the start of the play, they would have known that although the female characters were concealing their feelings, their unruly desires would have revealed themselves eventually. And this reveal would be the woman's downfall. While the audience would have sympathized with Phedre, she still followed this theatrical standard. The female mystery is again solved onstage.

[148] Goodkin, "Gender Reversal," 24.

Tate's Dido, on the other hand, concealed her feelings to a different end. She hid her emotions in the beginning of the opera, but the audience never discovered which emotions she concealed. When she did reveal her emotions at the end, she subverted two contemporary expectations. The first was her broach of character consistency. Dido's demure beginning would have led the standard neoclassical later-Stuart audience to believe she would remain demure due to character consistency. The second broken expectation regarded the content of her emotions. As we will see, her guilt was not her downfall like it was in *Phedre* or most Dido interpretations because she knew she had done nothing to warrant a guilty emotional response. Her emotional release was unrelated to the secret passion for Aeneas the audience would have assumed was consuming her from the inside. Through her controlled and warranted anger, and especially through her rejection of Aeneas, she made Aeneas's (and society's) culpability evident. Thus, in her subversion of neoclassical standards, she acted from a position of power, unlike Phedre.

Some might argue that being a woman automatically put Dido into a position of weakness. This statement certainly applied to women and female actors in later-Stuart England. I contend, however, that Dido's arc was a tale of how women could break from the constraints of society using power inaccessible to them everywhere besides fiction. The libretto was purposefully aspirational. Tate, who very well might have identified with female struggles, fantasized a world where a woman could break free from a male-controlled society. Tate transformed Dido from a woman who concealed her emotions out of fear of judgment and scrutiny into one who acted with agency and gained control over her narrative.

III. The Libretto

Dido was demure throughout the opera, hiding her emotions until the very end. In the first act, nearly all of Dido's lines were about concealing her feelings. She never declared why she was inwardly distraught. The first act began with Belinda, Dido's confidante, telling Dido to "Shake the Cloud from off your Brow… Fortune Smiles and so should you," to which Dido replied:

Ah! Belinda I am prest,
With Torment not to be Confest.
Peace and I are strangers grown,
I languish till my grief is known,
Yet wou'd not not have it Guest. (3) [149]

When Belinda responded "Grief Increasing, by Concealing," Dido stated that "Mine admits of no revealing." (4) These were Dido's first lines in the opera, so it was likely Tate wrote them with care. Dido felt pressured to hide on the outside what she felt on the inside. She would struggle until people knew her suffering, but she was not at liberty to express those feelings. As a public figure whose power and position relied on public opinion, Dido felt obligated to maintain a favorable exterior. Like Dido, society women's positions relied on their reputations, so they usually had to moderate their exteriors. Tate, too, had to hide his true feelings towards his contemporaries to be respected in his professional circle while he wrote the libretto.

When Aeneas arrived and courted Dido, he was initially met with Dido's resistance. Aeneas practically begged her to love him, singing "Let Dido Smile, and I'll defie, / The Feeble stroke of Destiny." (4) If Dido showed that she wanted Aeneas – if she showed her true feelings – she would reveal them through a smile. Of course, facial expressions often indicated true feelings to later-Stuart men, so why would the case be different onstage? Belinda intervened, telling Aeneas to "Pursue thy Conquest, Love – her Eyes, / Confess the Flame her tongue

[149] The grief in question is presumably caused by the death of Dido's last husband, which is not included in the libretto but is featured in the *Aeneid*.

denyes." (5) Here, we see a description characteristic of the ones later-Stuart men would use to describe women. Again, the face was telling of the female interior. All these lines followed standard societal and neoclassical expectations.

The third act contained the climax and confrontation. Aeneas was tricked into leaving, and before he arrived to tell her, Dido already knew. She entered the stage with Belinda and recited the following line:

> Your counsel all is urged in vain,
> To Earth and Heaven I will complain.
> To Earth and Heaven why do I call,
> Earth and Heaven conspire my fall. (8)

Later, when Dido called Aeneas a hypocrite, she said that men "Make Heaven and Gods the authors of the fact" when they do wrong things. (8) They blamed the ills of the world on higher powers like gods or nature, never taking accountability. Tate's libretto was unique in this way. A human tricked Aeneas into leaving, and he blamed the gods. In both Virgil's and Ovid's traditions, real gods sent Aeneas away. In Tate's libretto, only men were the makers of Dido's misfortunes. When later-Stuart society, but mostly aristocratic and bourgeois men, made assumptions about the true nature of womanhood, they literally *made* the assumptions. Society, not nature, was responsible for creating the conditions in which women had to modify their behavior.

In the two previous quotations, Dido equated men to higher powers like "Earth and heaven" because men were causing problems for her in the real world. When Dido sang the famous "Remember me, but ah! forget my Fate" line, "me" was Dido herself, and her "Fate" was the male-created circumstance that led her to act. If analyzed through the pro-women lens, we hear in Tate's words a desire for women to be seen for who they were, unmasked. He wanted women to be free of derogatory, societal, sexist standards. In this completely original line, we

hear Tate's own desire to be remembered for who he was, not for the community in which he was stuck. Read in these terms, Price referring to "but Ah! Forget my fate" as a "pathetic injunction" hardly seems fair.[150]

Dido's death was freedom. It was a "welcome guest." (8) Why would death be welcome? Death could be a metaphor for retreating from public life – the death of her public image. When a woman was so constantly wronged and scrutinized in a society where most men had more power than most women, retreating from public life might have been the most peaceful option. Dying was Dido's way to reclaim power, and Tate imagined a world where he and women could break from the constraints in which men placed them. Saying no to fame and scrutiny was the best way to preserve one's dignity and authenticity.

That is exactly what Tate did. Once he became Poet Laureate, he retreated from society life. He stopped writing for the theater. He wrote religious songs, defended women, and spoke out against the morally corrupt theater community, finally doing what he wanted to do all along. Nahum Tate could have been as famous as Dryden, but chose, for his own happiness, to just be him. This reading of the opera makes Tate's rebellion all the clearer. Maybe Tate never intended it to be performed popularly if he knew it would not have been received well at the time. If this was the case, then Tate's rebellion against his community and standards of womanhood would have caused no consequences for his professional career. Perhaps the opera was meant to be a private, cathartic release.

[150] Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, 258.

CONCLUSION

Like many scholars, musicologist Curtis Price claimed that "the most obvious reason why *Dido and Aeneas* was not publicly performed during the composer's lifetime is that it was an affront rather than a compliment to the new monarchs."[151] As mentioned in the introduction, the common belief in scholarship is that the opera was some sort of allegory for the monarchy. Price and others believed that the opera was meant to warn King William against cheating on Queen Mary, but that it would have been more offensive than not.[152] We now know, however, that Purcell and Tate possibly wrote the opera as many as five years before these monarchs ascended the throne. This evidence is crucial in strengthening the plausibility of my hypothesis – regardless of the exact year it was written, the opera was not fully shown because the audience would have disapproved of its progressive portrayal of womanhood.

More evidence that supports my claim is the context in which productions featured the opera in 1700 and 1704, especially the former. In 1700, the opera was used as a plot device within Charles Gildon's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, originally performed in 1604. In Gildon's version, the deputy, Angelo, condemned to death Claudio for fornicating with Julietta. Angelo's chief minister decided to produce a court production of *Dido and Aeneas* so that Angelo would have mercy on Aeneas (Claudio) and Julietta (Dido). Instead, Angelo understood himself as Aeneas, and he understood Isabella, Claudio's virgin sister who begged Angelo to spare him, as Dido. Angelo aimed to takes Isabella's virginity. *Measure for Measure* had a happy ending because Isabella kept her virginity.

Within the play, the opera was a moral instruction meant to warn girls that if they were sexual, they would have to suffer the consequences of their sexuality. If Dido represented Julietta

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[151] Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, 262.
[152] Ibid.

or Isabella, she was still meant to be seen as powerless and pathetic.[153] Again, her sexuality was turned against her. Even if Gildon depicted the male characters as philandering, and the audience sympathized with Dido, viewers did not respect her. Dido was not a character that anyone in the audience, especially women, was supposed to respect or emulate in any regard. Gildon used her as a tool to control women. To keep them virginal. Bracegirdle, the frequent actor of women whose madness spawned from honor and chastity being stolen, likely played Dido in both the 1700 production and at least one of the 1704 afterpieces.[154] The role could only be understood and appreciated in the terms of the time.

Dido and Aeneas massively grew in popularity two-hundred years later in Fin-de-Siecle England. During this time, first wave feminism was rising. Plays about New Women (the cultural image of a rebellious woman who defied standards for her gender and chose her own destiny) emerged around the same time *Dido and Aeneas* underwent its Renaissance. Female playwrights were even writing successful plays about women who defied social norms. In later-Stuart England, aristocratic and bourgeois men often determined how female characters and women behaved. In late nineteenth-century England, however, women were beginning to act with agency by taking control of their own narratives onstage and in society. *Dido and Aeneas*'s eventual popularity could very likely have been a result of changing standards of womanhood.

Studying this opera in tandem with societal standards for womanhood is historically useful. Tate and his libretto have not been seriously discussed until now. By exploring Tate's various literary, personal, professional, and broader cultural influences and intentions, we have uncovered the true meaning of England's first great opera. When we connect this meaning to the

[153] Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, 55.
[154] Ibid, 56.

opera's lack of contemporary performances, we see how much power theatrical representations had in publicly enforcing standards of womanhood.

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