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# DIDO AND AENEAS

## VIRGILIAN INFLUENCE ON HENRY PURCELL

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ENGLISH STUDIES

2018-2019

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## 1. Abstract

The *Aeneid* by Virgil has been admired and continually imitated along centuries, and it is one of the most important poems written in the history of western civilization after the *Bible*, as it served as a source of influence for many other poets and prose writers, including Henry Purcell. This paper examines how the adjustments made by Nahum Tate, the librettist of Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* –performed in 1689–, which, according to the title, the argument is based on the love story between the protagonist of the *Aeneid* by Virgil and the Queen of Carthage, underwent extremely significant changes in the characterization and motivation of its main characters. In this way, the main objective of this paper is to demonstrate that these changes, instead of two, lead to the description of four different protagonists: two Dido's and two Aeneas'. Besides, despite the fact that the relevance of the *Aeneid* is irrefutable in the composition of the libretto, Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) derives directly not only from the Virgilian text. Indeed, the script suffered a significant series of changes due to the influence of many Medieval and Renaissance authors, especially Dante Alighieri and John Milton. For that reason, this essay considers the implications of the transmission of Virgilian influence on writers from the Middle Ages. The new portrayal of the main protagonists –Dido and Aeneas– pointed out by the Alighieri and Milton in their works served as a reference for the librettist, as reflected in the symbolic changes made on the script. Accordingly, the motivation for taking into consideration these two author's influence to the opera is the perception of the characteristics that Aeneas and Dido and the main characters of the *Comedy* –Dante, Beatrice, Virgil– and *Paradise Lost* –Adam, Eve, Satan– have in common.

## 2. Introduction

The *Aeneid* had been admired and continually imitated along centuries since the Romans considered it a classic (Milch, 1966), to the point that T. S. Eliot explained that it is exceedingly suitable to say that Virgil should be the first classical poet to be called ‘the classic of all Europe’ (as cited in Martindale, 1997, p. 3) as he “occupied the central place in the literary canon for whole Europe for longer than any other writer.” (Martindale, 1997, p. 3). Nowadays, Virgil is considered one of the most influential poets of all times, since he has been a source of inspiration for many other writers, including Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate, the composer and the librettist of the opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689).

According to the title, the plot of the opera is based on the love story of Aeneas and Dido, characters of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Nevertheless, the modifications made by Tate on the libretto of the opera underwent extremely significant changes in the characterization of the main protagonists. This paper aims to describe the similarities and dissimilarities between the mythological characters Aeneas and Dido using Virgil’s descriptions given in the *Aeneid* and the same characters described in Purcell’s opera.

This essay is divided into five main sections. Firstly, I will show the overall plot of books I to IV of the *Aeneid*. Secondly, I will be focusing on Henry Purcell’s opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689). Then, I will follow with the receptions of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where I will describe how this work has been considered influential for so many different generations of writers, focusing on Dante Alighieri and John Milton. At the same time, I will analyze how in their attempt to develop a new Christianized view of the characters Aeneas and Dido, Dante’s and Milton’s approach is appreciated in the opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell. I will continue to point out the similarities and differences I have found regarding the main characters of both works and how the adjustments mentioned above lead to a new description of the characters. Finally, I will give the overall conclusion of this project.

## 3. Virgil

Publius Virgilius Maro, usually known as Virgil, was born in 70 B.C. in a small village set in the north of Italy. After finishing his studies at Cremona and Milan, he went to Rome and studied rhetoric and law. However, he realized that the career was not suitable for him, so

he committed the next years to the study of philosophy and literature (Milch, 1966; Corte, 1989).

He wrote his first major work, the *Eclogues* –also known as the *Bucolics*–, which is a collection formed by ten poems, between the years 43-37 B.C. Virgil managed to gain “a considerable place in the Roman literary world” (Milch, 1966, p. 6) because his works determined richness and a deep devotion for nature. Later on, in 29 B.C he published the *Georgics* (Milch, 1966; Corte, 1989).

In 27 B.C., Virgil became Caesar Augustus’ court poet and he was commissioned to write an epic poem glorifying the Roman *Princeps* (Milch, 1966; Corte, 1989). The composition of the *Aeneid*’s draft lasted eleven years and Virgil planned a three-year journey in order to get inspired to be able to finish the work. However, he became very ill on this first trip and died on his way back to Italy. In his will, he asked to destroy the unfinished manuscript of the *Aeneid*, but Augustus forbade his literary executors to destroy it and ordered the publication of the work. After the *Aeneid* was published, it was renowned by its readers as a masterpiece with a high degree of quality (Milch, 1966; Corte, 1989).

### 3.1. The *Aeneid*

The *Aeneid* by Virgil is considered, after the *Bible*, one of the most important works written in the history of western civilization (Milch, 1966). The overall structure of the *Aeneid* takes the form of twelve books which narrate, according to the legend, the adventures of the Trojan Prince Aeneas, who escaped from the destroyed city of Troy. After suffering numerous incidents Aeneas and his fleet sailed up the Italian coast to Latium in order to marry princess Lavinia, King Latinus’ daughter.

Nevertheless, one of the commonest significant current discussions regarding the structure of the epic deals with the division of the work. The main assumption is that the *Aeneid* could be divided into two halves –each of them composed of six books– (Corte, 1989). Moreover, other authors, like Duckworth (*apud* Corte, 1989) assert that the plot of the even books –II, IV, VI, VIII, X, and XII– is easier to be analyzed by the audience. On the contrary, the odd ones –I, III, V, VII, IX, and XI– serve to release the tension of the previous action. Furthermore, Duckworth proposes another division for the *Aeneid*, which would be divided as follows: a kind of trilogy composed by books I-IV, V-VIII and IX-XII. This division of

the epic is based on dividing the story into three great blocks: on the one hand, the love story of Dido and Aeneas; on the other hand, the journey of the hero through the Underworld; and finally, his arrival at Italy. On account of the fact that the main objective of this paper is to describe the similarities and dissimilarities between the Trojan hero and the Queen of Carthage described in the *Aeneid* and the same characters in the opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) by Purcell, I believe that it is convenient to focus only on the first trilogy proposed by Duckworth. For this reason, in this work, we are going to analyze only the books I-IV since the relationship between these characters takes place in these books.

### 3.1.1. Mythological background

Troy was a powerful city located on the western coast of Asia Minor, that after ten years of struggle against the Greeks<sup>1</sup>, they lost the war. When the warfare ended, the vast majority of the Trojan citizens were murdered or carried off into slavery, and only a small group of refugees managed to escape under the protection of Aeneas, who became their leader from there on. After several years of journey through the Mediterranean, the hero arrived in Italy and he married princess Lavinia, and together “the Trojans and Latins became fully integrated into one people” (Milch, 1966, p. 20). According to the legend, in 753 B.C., Aeneas’ descendant, Romulus, founded the city of Rome and conquered entire Western Europe (Milch, 1966).

### 3.1.2. The theme

The *Aeneid* is not a personal epic about the adventures of the Trojan hero Aeneas, but a national epic concerned about the role he played in founding the Roman nation, particularly emphasizing Roman’s most important qualities, such as the sense of responsibility. Moreover, Virgil believed that the reason why Rome reached the greatness, was because the

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<sup>1</sup>According to the deeds described in the *Iliad*, Paris, Prince of Troy, was asked by Jupiter to judge which of the three Goddesses –Minerva, Juno, and Venus– was the most beautiful. Each of them tried to bribe him by offering different gifts, but he ended up choosing Venus, who promised him to give him in marriage the loveliest woman in Greece. As a result, Paris kidnaped Helen, who was the wife of King Menelaus and declared war against the Greeks. Then, Agamemnon –the brother of Menelaus– was chosen commander-in-chief and sent the Greek army against the Trojans in order to recover his brother’s wife. After a war that lasted ten years, Menelaus was able to recover his beloved wife and returned alive to his homeland (Milch, 1966; Virgil, 2008).

Gods wanted it so. As for him, the destiny of all human beings was controlled by godlike beings and Providence ruled the world (Milch, 1966). Consequently, the *Aeneid* was designed not only to glorify the Roman *Princeps*' virtues but also to show how the role played by the personification of the divines –Aeneas–, led to the creation of such successful nation (Milch, 1966).

### 3.1.3. The meaning

The *Aeneid* has always been represented as an epic poem dealing with a great hero who is summoned to adventure by destiny and must fulfill his mission of founding Rome in order to ensure the prosperity of his descendants. However, Milch (1966) declares that what Virgil wanted to present in the poem were the major issues of his time, the Roman Republic was involved in several civil wars. A century later, when Augustus acquired the power, the order of the *Princeps* was restored and the government actively engaged in economic and social life. Nonetheless, many liberties of the former Republic were forsaken and this situation led to serious problems that Virgil recounted in his poem: the adaptation to the new imperial period, and how the citizens lived under this new regime. In addition, the poet prophesied a new Golden Age for Rome through the character of Aeneas, who would be the “personification of the most respected Roman virtues.” (Milch, 1966, p. 18). Bearing in mind that Augustus was supposed to be his descendant, this evokes an image of him sharing many of Aeneas' qualities and attitudes, and for this reason, his decisions would be justified (Milch, 1966).

### 3.1.4. Synopsis of the *Aeneid*

The epic recounts the function the hero Aeneas had in the foundation of Rome, and how the interference of the gods led him to success in his quest. Due to a prophecy that predicted the destruction of Carthage by a new civilization, Juno asks the God of the winds to sink the ships in which Aeneas and his crew were traveling with a storm. However, thanks to Neptune, the Trojan fleet reach the Libyan coast and he meets Dido at Carthage. Then, Venus allies with Juno to make the two of them fall in love so that the prophecy does not accomplish. When Jupiter realizes that Aeneas is decided to abandon his duty, he sends Mercury in order to remind him that he had to fulfill his destiny. So, Aeneas immediately

abandons Dido and leaves Libya, leading the Queen to take her life. The Trojan fleet land on the shore of Sicily and hold funeral games to commemorate Anchises' one-year death anniversary. Meantime, Juno sends Iris, who persuades the Trojan women to burn the ships so that they will be forced to establish in Sicily instead of continuing to search for Italy. That night, the ghost of Anchises appears to him, and advises him to listen to his friend Nautes' advice: they should leave some of the refugees behind. Then, Aeneas embarks on a new journey to Cumae, where he meets the Sybil, and he goes to 'the Underworld' in order to see his deceased father Anchises, who predicts the adventures his son will live on his return to the land of their ancestors. Finally, the hero arrives at his destiny, Latium, where King Latinus offers to Aeneas his daughter in marriage. Then Turnus declares war against them, and the Trojan hero manages to defeat him, ending the war.

#### 3.1.4.1. Book I

The poem starts with the poet invoking the Muse. He asks her what Aeneas did so that the queen of the Gods, Juno, full of anger tries to prevent that the demigod fulfills his quest of founding Rome. When the Trojan fleet arrives in Libya, and Aeneas and Achates set out to explore the countryside and they meet Venus who was disguised as a huntress. She indicates them that near there is a powerful city called Carthage, where Queen Dido rules. When they enter the city, Aeneas thanks the queen for her generosity and she orders a banquet in honor of her guests. Venus plans to make Dido fell in love with her son. Nevertheless, the queen was already in love with the demigod and in order to keep him in Carthage as long as possible, she asks him to recount the story of the fall of Troy and his journey.

#### 3.1.4.2. Book II

Aeneas begins to relate his narrative. He recounts the deeds of how after ten years of fighting, the Greeks invaded his homeland by tricking them with a massive wooden horse. Then, the enemy's entire army burned the city of Troy. Aeneas rushed into the battle but it was too late, however, he managed to rescue his family. After the hero convinced his father Anchises to leave the city with him, he discovered that his wife Creusa was missing. Aeneas ran back into the city looking for her but he could only find her ghost, who told him that a new destiny



awaited him. Aeneas came back to his father and son, where a group of Trojan refugees awaited his leadership.

#### 3.1.4.3. Book III

The hero and the rest of the Trojan survivors sailed off to find a new home. They tried to settle in several different places until they decided to sail to Delos in order to consult the oracle who advised them to settle in their ancestral land. Anchises thought that the land was Crete. Then, they built a small village there, but due to a terrible plague, people started dying. It is in that moment when the gods of Troy appeared to Aeneas in a vision and explained that the country the oracle was referring to was not Crete but Hesperia –Italy–. They sailed up again and landed on the Strophades where they were attacked by the Harpies. When the soldiers prepared to fight them, Aeneas got cursed by the leader of the evil creatures: the Trojans would not establish their city until the hunger forces them to eat their own tables. The crew left the island and continued their journey until they arrive at Carthage.

#### 3.1.4.4. Book IV

Aeneas finishes telling his story to the Queen of Carthage. Dido finds herself falling in love with the Trojan hero and she decides to confide her feelings to her sister, Anna. Nonetheless, Dido is confused because even though she loves Aeneas she had taken an oath of fidelity to her dead husband Sychaeus. After discussing the problem, Anna manages to convince her sister of confessing her love to the demigod, and it is in this moment when Juno spots an opportunity to prevent the Trojan hero fulfilling his goal of founding Rome, so, she allies with Venus. During a hunting expedition, Juno causes a sudden storm that makes Aeneas and Dido hide in a cavern, where the couple finally consummates their love. When Jupiter realizes that Aeneas abandoned his duty, he sends Mercury in order to remind him that he had to accomplish his destiny. Immediately, Aeneas gives instructions to his crew and makes the preparations for the continuation of the journey. Meanwhile, Dido comes to her lover and reproaches him for abandoning her, however, it seems that Aeneas does not care about it, remaining unemotional. Eventually, the queen decides to end her life after seeing the Trojan fleet leaving Carthage; with the help of Anna, she burns all the keepsakes of Aeneas and kills herself with the sword he has left behind.

#### 4. Henry Purcell

Henry Purcell was an English composer who was born in the year 1659 in London. In 1673, he became assistant to John Hingston, who was the guardian of the instruments of the king. The composer became the organ at Westminster Abbey for four years and he worked there for one more, where he dedicated to transcribe the anthem's organ parts. He was acknowledged as a songwriter since many of his compositions were reprinted even after his death. In 1680, he started working on a series of sonatas of which at least twelve of them were published three years later with a devotion to Charles II. In 1682, he was promoted to Westminster Abbey's organist, becoming one of the three organists of the Chapel Royal (Westrup, 2018).

Due to a fateful illness, he was unable to finish the music for the operatic version of *The Indian Queen* (1664), a tragedy by John Dryden and Sir Robert Howard. Nevertheless, the opera was completed by his brother Daniel after Purcell's death in 1695 (Westrup, 2018).

The ability of Purcell as a composer for the stage was blocked because there was no public opera in London during his career. The majority of his theater music was composed basically of instrumental music and tunes introduced into the spoken show, however, sometimes there were opportunities for further extended melodic scenes. Nonetheless, as Westrup (2018) affirms, it was not until 1689, when he composed *Dido and Aeneas* –Nahum Tate's libretto– that his work accomplished a high level of sensational power inside a restricted structure.

##### 4.1. *Dido and Aeneas*

*Dido and Aeneas* (1689) by Henry Purcell is considered one of the greatest operas ever composed. It was originally written for a girls' private school in Chelsea and performed by "Young Gentlewomen" in 1689 (Price, 1986; Harris, 1987). The achievement, nevertheless, was not only Purcell's. Harris (1987) mentioned that the plot of the play –the story of a young foreign prince who loves but abandons a woman– could be a portrayal of the myth of Ariadne and Theseus. However, Price (1986) declared that Nahum Tate's tragedy *Brutus of Alba, or The Enchanted Lovers* (1678), which is based on the book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*, was the most discernable precursor of Purcell's opera. Tate originally named the play "Dido and Aeneas", however, he dogged out the idea Geoffrey of Monmouth portrayed in his major work, *The History of Kings of Britain* (1136), that Brutus was the great-grandson of Aeneas

(Price, 1986). According to him, after the Trojan War, Aeneas, together with his son Ascanius and a group of Trojan refugees, sails off to find the land of their ancestors, Italy. There, they were received by King Latinus and after fighting against Turnus –the King of the Rutuli who went jealous upon him–, he married King Latinus’ daughter, and thus wins the kingdom of Italy. When the last day of Aeneas came, his son was selected as the new King and had a son named Silvius. His son secretly married a niece of Lavinia –Aeneas’ wife– and conceived a male child whose name was Brutus, the first King of Britain (Monmouth, 1966).

#### 4.1.1. Synopsis

##### 4.1.1.1. Act I

The opera opens at Carthage. Prince Aeneas and his fleet arrive at Libya after having been sailing in his search of Italy where he, following Jove’s commands supposed to settle their new home. Dido, Queen of Carthage, fascinated by his heroic accounts, falls in love with him, but she seems to be convinced that her love for the Trojan hero is unreciprocated. Belinda –the queen’s sister and confidante– tries to cheer her up. Then, Aeneas declares his love to the queen as he was captivated for her beauty and they get married. The event is celebrated with great joy by the prosperity that the royal union promises to both kingdoms.

##### 4.1.1.2. Act II

The action of this act takes place in a cave, where the Sorceress and her Witches plan to destroy Dido. The Sorceress’ intention is to disguise herself as Mercury, the messenger of the gods, and visit Aeneas to remind him what his duty is.

Meanwhile, the Trojan hero and his entourage go hunting and when he returns, he takes the head of a boar as a gift for his wife. Suddenly, the storm summoned by the Witches starts, and Aeneas remains alone in the forest where the false Mercury appears and warns him of Jove’s orders.

#### 4.1.1.3. Act III

The account continues in the wharf, where the Sorceress and the Witches observe with joy all the preparation for Aeneas' departure. Then, Aeneas tries to persuade Dido that his intention is not to abandon her but to obey only the command of Jove. The hero comes back and explains that he decides to stay with her in Carthage and not to follow the God's orders. Nevertheless, the queen rejects him and encourages him to fulfill his destiny even though he abandons her. She knows that only her death remains after his departure, and she dies<sup>2</sup>.

### 5. Similarities and differences

#### 5.1. Intermediary sources of the *Aeneid*

When Christianity gained power Virgil was still considered a link to European civilization with Roman culture as a figure of Christian culture and also as a magician since, in the fourth *Eclogue*, he predicted a prophecy describing the coming of the savior of the world. Early Christians interpreted this prophecy as the birth of Jesus Christ (Eliot, 1957; Milch, 1966; Corte, 1989; Martindale, 1997). T. S. Eliot (1957) pointed out that as Virgil served as a source of influence for many other writers, the title of Christian guide was given to him. In fact, it is for that reason that, for example, Dante among other writers, saw Virgil as a master of how to create a new epic poem "onto an existing tradition of writing." (Burrow, 1997, p. 90). Furthermore, a possible explanation for the election of Virgil as Dante's guide is that as a result of a prophecy announced in his fourth *Eclogue*. Besides, Corte (1989) holds the view that it is for this reason that Virgil was selected by Dante to be the guide of his character through the 'Hell' and the 'Purgatory' in the *Divine Comedy*. As a result, Virgil's influence has been expanded through the whole continent and remain until the Middle Ages characterized as a great pagan prophet. For that, I will focus on demonstrating that Dante Alighieri and John Milton used Virgil as an influence on the creation of their works. At the same time, how in their attempt to develop a new Christianized version of Aeneas and Dido, Dante's and Milton's approach is appreciated in the opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell would be also analyzed.

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<sup>2</sup> In the libretto that has been used for the development of this paper, it is not specified how Dido dies. However, it can be appreciated that in the score there is a *diminuendo* a part of the descending of the musical notes of the instrumentation in the pentagram, which suggests that the character dies slowly, and does not have a violent death. It is also important to note that despite this nuance, in some performances, she commits suicide.

### 5.1.1. Dante Alighieri's and John Milton's influence on *Dido and Aeneas*

The poet of the *Aeneid* had a remarkable relevance in the composition of the libretto of the opera *Dido and Aeneas*. However, despite the fact that the influence of Virgil is irrefutable, due to the modifications made by Nahum Tate on the script, and therefore, the 'Christianized' portrayal of the main characters, it is inevitable to consider that the librettist's descriptions of them were probably motivated by the perception of the protagonists of Dante Alighieri's the *Divine Comedy* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

The changes made by Tate on the libretto of the play underwent meaningful adjustments in the characterization of the main characters. What is more, if a comparison of the characters is made, it can be noticed that both the 'Dido' and the 'Aeneas' portrayed in the opera are two completely different protagonists to which Virgil's *Aeneid* describes. While Virgil's 'Dido' has always been represented as a 'victim' of the young Trojan demigod, Tate's new reception of her makes Dido not a victim but a sinner. On the other hand, Virgil managed to portray in the *Aeneid* that Aeneas, as a hero, must be obedient to the Gods, and therefore to his fate; he is the perfect prototype of a Christian hero, "he is a man of mission; and the mission is everything." (Eliot, 1957, p. 128). However, we can appreciate how in the opera, the hero defies his fate and decides to stay with his lover in Carthage.

Accordingly, taking into account that both Dante and Milton were clearly influenced by the ancient poet, it could be said that these two Christian writers acquired the descriptions of the characters given in Virgil's epic and applied changes that lead to the development of a new Christianized version of them. As a result, the incentive for taking into consideration Dante's and Milton's relevance to Henry Purcell's *Aeneas and Dido* is the perception of the similar features the lovers share with the main protagonists of these two analyzed works.

#### 5.1.1.1. Dante's influence on Purcell's *Dido*

Virgil's presence in the poem<sup>3</sup> as both character and text, helped Dante capture the essence of Greek and Roman culture, and this confirms that not only the *Aeneid* but also Virgil

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<sup>3</sup> The *Divine Comedy* is an autobiographical poem written by Dante Alighieri in 1320 and it is composed of three major sections –*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*–. The narration recounts the deeds of how Dante the pilgrim escapes from the sins that have separated him from the right way to salvation: lust, pride, and avarice.

himself was a source of influence for Dante on the creation of the *Comedy* (Newman, 1986; Jacoff, 2014).

One of the most meaningful features regarding the Florentine's attempt to Christianize Virgil's protagonists is noticed in two different passages. Firstly, as Brownlee (1993) points out, textual parallelism is observed between Beatrice's reproach to Dante in *Purgatorio* and Dido's last words to Aeneas in the book IV of the *Aeneid*. The author explains that when Beatrice faces Dante for the first time after Virgil is sent back to Limbo, she reproaches her former lover for not being faithful. The reactions of the male characters are extremely opposite in these two scenes. Whereas Dante reacts to Beatrice's accusation crying, blaming himself of his unfaithful behavior, Aeneas seems to be not moved by the words of Dido: "The ice which clutched so tight around my heart Was changed to breath and water and poured him Trough mouth and eyes in anguish from my breast." (Alighieri, *Purgatory*, Canto XXX, 96-98); "Yet he briefly replied: 'That I owe you, my ruler, All you could list in your speech I would never deny. You have earned it.'" (Virgil, *Book IV*, 333-334). Furthermore, a second textual parallelism is seen between the disappearance of Beatrice and the departure of Aeneas in *Aeneid's* book VI. After having guided Dante to 'True Paradise', is time for Beatrice to disappear. So, Dante gives a sendoff speech and thanks his former lover, who in return, smiles at him for one last time. In the *Aeneid*, on the contrary, Aeneas seems to be contrite about his past actions, but this time is Dido the one who is not moved by the hero's speech (Brownlee, 1993). Therefore, bearing in mind that Dante's *Comedy* was considered to be a "Christian re-writing of Virgil's *Aeneid*" (Brownlee, 1993, p. 1), this evokes an image of the characters of Dante and Beatrice depicted as new Christian versions of the original lovers of the work by Virgil (Brownlee, 1993). Moreover, Nahum Tate probably took this new Christian adaptation of the characters for the portrayal of them in *Dido and Aeneas*, thus, it could be said that in the opera, Aeneas shares more features with Dante the pilgrim than with Virgil's hero.

On the other hand, another extremely significant point to take into consideration is the allusion to the character of Dido. Her presence in Dante's poem, is, undoubtedly, eminently important, since the romance between the Queen of Carthage and the Trojan Prince recounted in Book IV of Virgil's epic served as an extremely symbolic influence for the Florentine poet. Aeneas' abandonment has been depicted as the cause of Dido's death since ancient times. However, Dante goes further in the *Divine Comedy*, and places Dido's soul in 'Hell', more specifically in the second circle, where the lustful souls are punished. This

brings up to the following query of whether the poet's reasons to place Dido in *Inferno* and not in *Limbo*, in *Purgatorio* or in *Paradiso*. One of the most striking aspects of this question is that since Dido's soul is a non-Christian one, she could not be placed in 'Paradise'. As Jacoff (2014) states, the souls of the pagans were forbidden to enter the 'Paradise' since they never knew Jesus Christ and "did not adore God as was needful." (Jacoff, 2014, p. 149). Nonetheless, he does not place her in Limbo either, –the first circle of Hell– where dwell the souls of the virtuous pagans that were not baptized, like the most influential poets in the Middle Ages, Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, as this quote suggests: "Homer is he, the poet sovereign. Horace the satirist comes on his heels, The third is Ovid, Lucan follows last." (Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto IV, 86-88). Therefore, after dying, the soul of the Queen only could end up in 'Hell' or in 'Purgatory'. However, the reason why she winds up in 'Hell', is as a consequence of the way she dies. In the *Aeneid*, after being abandoned by Aeneas, Dido decides to end her life after the Trojan fleet left Carthage; with the help of her sister, she makes a pyre built with the keepsakes of Aeneas and kills herself with his sword. Nevertheless, instead of placing her in the seventh circle of 'Hell' where the souls of those who attempted suicide reborn in the shape of a tree, Dante places her in the second one, where the lustful souls are punished. Furthermore, we must not forget that whereas noble suicide was accepted by the Romans as a virtuous death, Christian theology rejects suicide, which is portrayed as one of the worst deadly sins (Cusack, 2018). For Christianity, self-murder is considered to be a direct attack against God, who is the creator of mankind. In the following quote, we can observe how Dante seems to believe that Virgil's Dido committed suicide out of lust, so he emphasized that her sin was lust, not killing herself, and that is the reason why he placed her in the second circle:

This is the state, I learned, to which condemned  
Are carnal sinners who subordinate  
The rule of reason to their appetites (...) Next comes the  
shade of her who for love's sake  
Herself did slay and to Sichaeus's ash  
Was faithless. (Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto V, 38-61).

In addition, for Dante who was a Christian writer, the previous example depicts the way in which the Queen of Carthage denies God and the right way to salvation on account of abandoning herself to the tempest of her carnal desire. Therefore, Dante's reception of Dido is not as a victim of Aeneas but as a sinner. This new view of Dido as 'a sinner' has essentially served as a reference for Purcell –and Tate– among other writers, and their

portrayal of the female character in the opera *Dido and Aeneas*. In the play, the librettist decided to adjust Dido's fall, probably influenced by Dante's characterization of her in the *Inferno*. As in the *Comedy*, Purcell's Dido is characterized as dying for lust. In fact, the idea of the Queen herself knowing that after Aeneas' abandonment only death remains for her, is seen in this quote: "Death is now a welcome guest, (...) Remember me, but ah! forget my fate!" (Act III, 59-61). Actually, in this scene, she recognizes that she "alone must take responsibility for her fall from chastity." (Harris, 1987).

#### 5.1.1.2. Milton's relevance to Purcell's Aeneas

A comparison between the *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*<sup>4</sup> (1667), which has been considered a classic and the last great composition of the English Literature and deals with the biblical account of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of the Eden, is inevitable owing to the classical features that the latter shares with other classical epics: the division into twelve books, the beginning *in media res*, as well as the invocation of the Muse (see text 1 on the Appendix) among others (Verbart, 1997). However, even though in *Paradise Lost* he makes allusions to the accounts of the *Aeneid*, Milton corrupts the image Virgil received over the previous centuries transforming "Aeneas' heroic incapacity (...) into Satan's vain aspiration to achieve some heroic conquest" (Burrow, 1997, p. 89) and in this way he accentuates a resemblance between the demon and the pagan hero. Milton's approach to the use of classical elements was that he wanted *Paradise Lost* to be the first English epic and wished to show that his epic poem was, without a doubt, much greater than the classical ones (Newman, 1986).

Milton's allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid* can be seen through its characters as a portrayal of the romance between Aeneas and Dido. To start with, in the view of Verbart (1997), a verbal parallelism is observed between Adam's first words to Eve and the last words of Aeneas to Dido in the 'Underworld': "back I turned, Thou following criedst aloud, Return fair Eve, Who, fly'st thou? Whom thou fly'st, of him thou art, His flesh, his bone;" (Milton, IV, 480-3); "Don't walk way, don't draw yourself back from my eyes as I watch you. Who are you

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the year 1630, Milton, who –like Virgil– was influenced on his preparation as a writer by Alexandrian pastorals (Newman, 1986), composed pastorals which showed his "efforts to shape a Virgilian career for himself" (Burrow, 1997, p. 87) and delicately adapted the language used by Virgil in his fourth *Eclogue* to a Christian purpose (Burrow, 1997).



running from? Fate gives me this last chance to address you.” (Virgil, VI, 465-466). The author explains that while the speech of Adam leads to the beginning of a happy romance, Aeneas’ words conclude theirs.

In the second place, significant features regarding Milton’s attempt to Christianize the characters of Virgil’s *Aeneid* have been noticed: the similarities between the cave scene in the *Aeneid* and Eve’s fall in *Paradise Lost*; in fact, Dido’s death and therefore the hostility between Rome and Carthage because of Aeneas’ abandonment is represented by Eve’s fall. Besides, in both scenes, the supernatural characters involve themselves with the heroines: whereas Satan tempted Eve to eat the Forbidden Fruit, Juno causes a sudden storm that makes Aeneas and Dido hide in a cavern, where they consummate their love (Calloway, 2005). This leads to a self-destructive behavior on the behalf of the female protagonists, and for this reason, as pointed out by Verbart (1997), they think that the only solution to their suffering is suicide. In addition, the reaction of the male characters is extremely opposite in these two passages. Whereas Adam shows sympathy to Eve, as it can be provided in this quote: “soon his heart relented Towards her, his life so late and sole delight, (...) As one disarmed, his anger all he lost, And thus with peaceful words upraised her soon.” (Milton, Book X, 940-946), the Trojan hero seems to be not moved by Dido’s pleas (Verbart, 1997). Another piece of evidence that shows that these two scenes are deeply connected is the fact that neither Sychaeus –Dido’s deceased husband– nor Adam are witnesses of these events (Calloway, 2005). Bearing this in mind, we can conclude that what Calloway (2005) is theorizing here is a clear parallelism between the Fallen Angel and the Trojan Prince’s behavior. Therefore, it could be said that as it happens with the character of Dido in the *Comedy*, something similar occurs with ‘Aeneas’ in *Paradise Lost*, since Milton tried to portray Adam as the new Christian version of the Trojan hero Aeneas. Besides, we can appreciate how Tate probably took Milton’s view of the male protagonist in order to create the ‘Aeneas’ of the opera.

Another indisputable resemblance between both poems is noticed; in Book XI of *Paradise Lost* God decides that Adam should eat the Forbidden Fruit and live forever with Eve. So as they do not longer belong to the Eden he sends Michael to banish them. On the other hand, in Book IV of the *Aeneid* Jupiter sends Mercury in order to remind Aeneas that he must accomplish his duty. As a result, the involvement of the messengers with the heroes is crucial in both scenes as they act as the ones in charge of reminding the heroes that they have a task to fulfill and in turn, they introduce their departure (Verbart, 1997). Nevertheless, while

Mercury's speech in the *Aeneid* (see text 2 on the Appendix) leads to Aeneas' abandonment and therefore Dido's suicide, the words of God in *Paradise Lost* result in Michael showing Adam the events that will arise after their banishment from the house of God. Regarding its content, "(...) he shall ascend The throne heredity, and bound his reign With earth's wide bounds, his glory with the heavens." (Milton, Book XII, 369-371), it seems to be announcing the return of Christ for the salvation of mankind (Power, 2014). Taking this into account, it is inevitable to think that Nahum Tate used Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a source of influence, since the substitution of the pagan gods by the Sorceress and the Witches in the opera remarks the attempt of Tate to put them in the same level, and portrayed both as 'false Gods'. In other words, Milton's attempt was to emphasize the superior grace of the Christian God in comparison to the gods in the *Aeneid*, to the point of, in some way, turning the ancient gods of classical mythology into ruthless and merciless monsters.

## 5.2. Two Dido's and two Aeneas'

As I have pointed out earlier, it is a fact that Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* derives directly not only from Tate's previous tragedy, *Brutus of Alba, or The Enchanted Lovers* or from the accounts recounted in the book IV of the *Aeneid* but also from the intermediary influences such as the *Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost*. According to Harris (1987), the changes made by Tate on the libretto underwent extremely significant changes in the characterization of the main characters. We can appreciate four symbolic adjustments after comparing it to the original story: firstly, the substitution of the Roman mythological characters by the Witches, which leads to the second point of the discussion. As the intention of the gods is not the same as the one of the Witches, therefore there is no manipulation on the behalf of the mythological figures; thirdly, there is not-violent death for the queen of Carthage; and finally, Aeneas's opposition to fulfill his destiny. The main objective of this section is to demonstrate that these adjustments, instead of two, lead to the description of four different protagonists: two Dido's and two Aeneas'.

As far as the first change is concerned, the replacement of the divine creatures by the Sorceress and the Witches led to one of the most important innovations of the work, as several writers addressed. In Virgil's epic, the gods manipulate Dido and Aeneas in order to "play out their assigned roles in history" (Harris, 1987, p. 21), as it is portrayed in the following quote:

Dido and Troy's chief come down together inside the same cavern. Earth gives the sign that the rites have begun, as does Juno, the nuptial Sponsor. The torches are lightning, the shrewd sky's brilliance is witness, Hymns for the wedding are howling moans of the nymphs upon high peaks. (Virgil, IV, 165-172)

In it, we can appreciate how Juno causes a sudden storm that makes the couple consummate their love, and therefore, Aeneas falls into the temptation and abandons his quest. As a result, Jupiter sends the messenger of the Gods, Mercury, so that he reminds the hero that he had to accomplish his duty.

On the contrary, through the opera, Tate remarks that the motivation of the Witches just excel on the destruction of the female protagonist as it can be provided in this scene: "The Queen of Carthage, whom we hate, As we do all in prosperous state. Ere sun-set shall most wretched prove." (Act II, 9-11), and they are portrayed as the antagonists of the play (Harris, 1987). However, it might be convenient to note that the function of both mythological characters is exactly the same: both served as a reminder to Aeneas that he had to abandon the Queen of Carthage in order to fulfill his duty. As previously stated, it could be said that Milton 'corrected' Virgil and created an 'evil' image of the Roman Gods in order to emphasize the superior grace of the Christian God. This situation leads us to observe a clear influence of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Tate's attempt to put in the same level the Roman Goddesses and the Sorceress, and portrayed both as 'false Gods'. Moreover, Harris (1987) notes that the substitution of Witches do not excel just to maintain the supernatural aura of the play but also because they were popular additions to the drama of the seventeenth century since, in this period, Puritanism was in the spotlight.

Furthermore, another potential difference between Tate's libretto and Virgil's epic regarding this topic is the fact that the opera was seen as an allegory of the political circumstances in England at that period (Harris, 1987). In 1680, James II, who was supposed to succeed his brother –King Charles II– openly recognized himself as Catholic. For this point, two interpretations were taken into consideration. The first perspective was proposed by John Buttrey. He suggests that the opera emphasized the concern of the British nation about the current foreign ruler of the country, William, Prince of Orange. According to Harris (1987), Buttrey seems to base his assumptions on the Prologue of the play, which regarding its content, "Phoebus rises in the chariot, over the sea." (Prologue), might remark the arrival of William –who was a Protestant– at England. Curtis Price, on the contrary, concentrates on

the worries of the Protestants about Catholicism, and in particular about the exile of James II (Harris, 1987). Moreover, this might reinforce the idea of Tate's intention to depict James II as Aeneas, who is disorientated by the deceptions of the Sorceress and her entourage of Witches' –the representation of the Catholics– to abandon Carthage –which might symbolize England– (Welch, 2009).

The second change deals with the responsibility Dido must take for falling into her carnal desire. As explained, the substitution of the Roman deities by the Witches leads to an extremely significant adjustment in the characterization of the Queen of Carthage, because these evil beings, unlike the Goddesses in the *Aeneid*, are not responsible for the queen's decision of breaking her vow of chastity. As there were no goddesses to arrange the union between the hero and the heroine, there is a key to make this union possible (Harris, 1987). In the following quote, we can observe how relevant the role of the Second Woman is, because the confession of Dido arose as a result of her words: "Fear no danger to ensue, The hero loves as well as you, Ever gentle, ever smiling, And the cares of life beguiling, Cupids strew your path with flowers. Gather'd from Elizian bowers." (Act I, 35-40). In other words, the quote suggests an urged union in order to strengthen the kingdom of Carthage, and as a result, Dido ends up succumbing to the Trojan Prince "against her better judgment" (Harris, 1987, p. 14), and therefore she breaks her vow of chastity, which makes her the one and only responsible for her fall. Moreover, I would like to add that within the Puritan tradition, as they were a patriarchal society, while spinster women were to remain chaste, men did not have to. This idea is seen in this scene, in which the fleet of Aeneas prepares to leave Carthage while, not only Dido but the ladies the sailors spent their time with, are left behind forever:

Come away, fellow sailors, your anchors be weighing, Time and tide will admit no delaying. Take a bouze short leave of your nymphs on the shore, And silence their mourning With vows of returning, But never intending to visit them more. (Act III, 1-6)

So, owing to the fact that Dido is a woman reinforces the idea of her being the one culprit of her actions, because she was supposed to remain as a 'chaste' queen after her husband's death, as the next quote suggests: "Grief should ne're approach the fair." (Act I, 8). Moreover, even though in the opera Tate seems to omit the cause of the queen's anxiety, it could be said that due to its background, the term 'grief' might symbolize that Dido is concerned about the oath of abstinence she made to Sychaeus (Price 1986).

Regarding the third adjustment, the librettist decided to end the tragic love story by replacing Dido's suicide with a non-violent death. The reason why he probably chose to change this specific scene could be because of the influence of Christianity. What is more, the word 'suicide' derived from the Latin term *suicidium*, and it was introduced to the English language in the seventeenth century (Cusack, 2018). The Christians of the Middle Ages were familiar with this term, as they were influenced by the definition given by Augustine of Hippo in *The City of God*, who defined it as follows: "a detestable and damnable wickedness." (Augustine, 2009 as cited in Cusack, 2018, p. 3). Self-murder is rejected by Christian theology, as it is considered to be both, a sin and a crime against the Lord and it is described as one of the worst deadly sins. Moreover, Cusack (2018) notes that according to medieval Christian creeds, women were associated to sin, and therefore to the Devil –the enemy of God–, because they thought that women were, as Eve did in the *Genesis*, going to yield to "demonic temptation and possession." (Cusack, 2018, p. 9). However, it is not possible to consider that Tate intended Dido to remain alive. As previously mentioned, *Dido and Aeneas* was originally written for a private school for girls. So, the moral of the opera might consist of teaching them that they must not succumb to young men's charms if they did not want to end up like Dido. All sin must be paid, and the one of the queen was precisely to lose her chastity, thus her life. This idea is seen in the following quote: "On thy bosom let me rest. More I would but death invades me. Death is now a welcome guest. When I am laid in earth my wrongs create" (Act III, 56-60). The noun phrase 'welcome guest' may be a symbol of the revelation mentioned above, since in this scene, we can appreciate how Dido is aware that death will invade her by force and take control of her body. But she will let death take over her because she knows that she has lost her reputation as a woman. In this way, the idea that Tate intended to leave Dido alive is inconceivable. As mentioned above, it is most likely that both the composer and the librettist of the opera *Dido and Aeneas* were influenced by prior Christian works like the *Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost* –both analyzed in this paper– when deciding the changes made to the libretto. However, even though there are clear similarities between the two scenes it might be imperative to mention that the one of Dido's fall differ in two key aspects: on the one hand the way in which the queen dies and the decision of Aeneas to remain with her in Carthage.

In Virgil's *Aeneid*, when Dido discovers Aeneas' intentions to abandon her, he reproaches him for his actions, but he seems to be unmoved because of her words and he leaves Carthage. Yet, the queen decides to end her life, and with the help of Anna, she burns all the

keepsakes of Aeneas and kills herself with the sword he has left behind. In the opera, however, the false Mercury reminds Aeneas that he must abandon Carthage in order to fulfill his duty of founding their ancestral land –Italy– and restore Troy, as this scene shows:

Tonight thou must forsake this land, The angry god will brook no longer  
stay. Jove commands thee waste no more In love's delights those  
precious hours, Allowed by the almighty powers, To gain th' Hesperian  
shore And ruined Troy restore. (Act II, 52-58)

When the hero enters the scene, he tries to explain to Dido that it is not his intention to abandon her but to obey only Jove's commands. Nevertheless, she orders him to leave. Aeneas changes his mind and decides not to fulfill his destiny, but it is too late, and Dido cuts him off and rejects him. Then, she threatens to take her own life if he does not leave Carthage, so, the Trojan Prince departs with his fleet. The play ends with the scene of Dido admitting that only death remains after his departure, and she dies:

Thy hand, Belinda, darkness shades me, On thy bosom let me rest. More  
I would but death invades me. Death is now a welcome guest. When I  
am laid in earth may wrongs create No trouble in thy breast, Remember  
me, but ah! forget my fate. (Act III, 56-61)

Consequently, the previous quote “death invades me. Death is now welcome guest.”, which is a portrayal of the female character, alludes to Dante's *Comedy* as analyzed in this essay. Bearing in mind that Tate took Dante as a source on giving relevance to the image of the Queen of Carthage, it can be concluded he used ‘the correction’ made by the Florentine poet in the *Comedy* regarding the place to which the soul of Queen would correspond, in order to justify the ‘Dido’ of the opera. Therefore, it could be said that due to Dante's influence on the creation of the new version of the libretto, Tate decided to adjust the scene of Dido's death, leading to a fundamental change in the characterization and motivation of this female character. Furthermore, in the opera, the reason for her fall was the loss of the attribute of chastity (Harris, 1987).

Finally, moving to the last basic adjustment, probably the most noticeable difference between the *Aeneid* and the opera deals with Aeneas' opposition to abandon Dido. In Virgil's epic, news of marriage between the Trojan Prince and the Queen of Carthage reaches to Iarbas, King of Numidia and rejected suitor of Dido. Enraged, he begs Jupiter not to allow the hero to stay in Libya, so the King of Olympus sends Mercury for the sake of making

Aeneas remember that he had to accomplish his destiny. Immediately, Aeneas decides to leave and gives to his crew instructions to prepare the ships. In this specific part of the poem, Aeneas remains unemotional to Dido's reproaches, as we can provide in this quote:

Now, a few words in defence. This escape: slipping out like a bandit,  
*That was not* what I hoped. Don't *twist* my words. And I never Formally  
wed you not did I endorse any contract as "husband". If fate's orders  
allowed me to live out the life of my choosing, Putting my anguish to  
rest as myself would wanted, Troy is the city where I'd be now. (Virgil,  
IV, 337-342)

Nonetheless, in the opera, it is shown how even though Dido orders him to leave, the hero is the one who begs the Queen for a place in Carthage, as he is determined not to bring to completion his destiny and disobey the King of Olympus in order to remain with her. As previously noted, as Tate's male protagonist shares more features with Dante's and Milton's main characters, it might possible that Tate tried to develop a new Christianized version of the male protagonist. In fact in the following quote, we can observe how relevant the role of these medieval writers is when the Trojan hero decides not to follow Jupiter's orders and decides to stay with Dido: "In spite of Jove's commands I'll stay, Offend the gods, and love obey." (Act III, 41-42). Additionally, as a matter of fact, there is a key element that can be found in both, the *Divine Comedy* and in *Paradise Lost* that the epic of Virgil lacks: 'love' (Eliot, 1957). As noted by T. S. Eliot (1957), Virgil managed to portray in the *Aeneid* that Aeneas, as a hero, must be obedient to the Gods, and therefore to his fate. He is described as the perfect prototype of a Christian hero, for which he states that "he is a man of mission; and the mission is everything." (Eliot, 1957, p. 128). Accordingly, adding the element of 'love', Tate creates a new type of hero who prioritizes his own feelings over the commands received by a deity. All in all, Tate's characterization of Aeneas in the opera keeps him from being depicted as a Christian hero, in fact, he could share more features with this new kind of hero.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, although the opera composed by Henry Purcell was clearly influenced by Virgil's *Aeneid*, there have been also intermediary sources that have contributed to the creation of the final version of the libretto. Consequently, four symbolic changes can be

appreciated: firstly, the substitution of the Roman mythological characters by the Witches. In this change can be seen how the characters, compared to the epic by Virgil, are no longer manipulated, since the only motivation of the Witches is to end with the life of the Queen of Carthage. This adjustment leads to the second point of the discussion: since the intention of the Sorceress and the Witches is not to bring the protagonists together, but to separate them, the guilt of succumbing to Aeneas' seduction is only Dido's. On the other hand, in the opera, the death of the heroine is not a violent one, unlike in the *Aeneid*, Dido does not commit suicide. This was probably removed from Tate's libretto owing to for Christianity, self-murder is seen as a capital sin, and as Dante did in the *Divine Comedy*, Tate 'corrected' Virgil and portrayed her dying for lust and not for killing herself. Finally, the last adjustment made by the librettist underwent a significant change in the characterization of the character of Aeneas: the hero's opposition to fulfill his destiny led to the description of a new type of character that prioritizes his own feelings over the commands received by a superior being. Moreover, owing to the fact these adjustments were applied to Tate's libretto, instead of two –Dido and Aeneas– four different protagonists differ in the two works that were taken into consideration: two Dido's and two Aeneas'.



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## 8. Appendix

### **Text 1**

Sing heavenly Muse, that on the secret top

Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire

That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,

In the beginning how the heavens and earth

Rose out chaos: or if Sion hill Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed."

(Milton, Book I, 6-10)

### **Text 2**

'You, *laying* foundations for mighty

Carthage!' he said. 'Obsessed with your wife, you're now building

a lovely

City for her. You've forgotten your own obligations and kingdom!

Heaven's own king, who spin both the sky and the earth with his

power,

Sends me to you himself, directly from gleaming Olympus,

Tells me himself to convey these instructions through swift-moving

breezes:

(Virgil, Book VI, 265-270)