

*“Didone regina di Cartagine” di Christopher Marlowe: Metamorfosi virgiliane nel Cinquecento.* Antonio Ziosi, ed. and trans.

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It may be surprising and perhaps even a tad embarrassing for Marlowe scholars in the United States and the United Kingdom that the most up-to-date and thoroughly commented edition of *Dido, Queene of Carthage* should be in Italian; but here it is. With a hefty 121 pages of introduction and 68 pages of endnotes, Ziosi's edition presents his own translation of Marlowe's play together with an English parallel text taken—with a few carefully noted exceptions—from Fredson Bowers's revised old-spelling edition

from 1981. The translation renders Marlowe's blank verse in a mostly free meter that only "where possible" uses the most obvious Italian equivalent, hendecasyllabic verse (140). The introduction offers a comprehensive overview of the classical contexts and of the place of *Dido* in Marlowe's career, in addition to discussions of a number of single scenes. Ziosi's detailed notes explore the parallels to the Virgilian and Ovidian intertexts. In a similar vein, Ziosi's introduction and notes are indebted to criticism on the complex interrelationship of Virgil and Ovid in Marlowe's career, as evidenced from his comprehensive research and bibliography.

Perhaps a reason behind the relative critical neglect of Marlowe's play is precisely that it requires the kind of classical training that Ziosi shows in abundance. His edition therefore serves *Dido* quite well in terms of examining the learning of its author: part of the introduction has the heading "nell'officina di Marlowe," which may look bold but is also very much justified. As regards the translation of *Dido*, this too shows merits in terms of legibility and stylistic faithfulness to the original. It does not attempt to reproduce Marlowe's occasional end rhymes or—as noted—his meter. This seems a wise choice, given Ziosi's stated ambition to instead reflect the syntactical, rhetorical, and stylistic characteristics of *Dido*.

At the same time, the very comprehensiveness of Ziosi's research and discussion leaves some question marks as to the purpose of his study. As its title suggests, it is the play's relation to the classical heritage that is at the focus; on the first page of the introduction, Ziosi declares that his study "indaga la ricezione rinascimentale di Virgilio e di Ovidio attraverso l'analisi della prima tragedia di Christopher Marlowe" ("examines the Renaissance reception of Virgil and Ovid through an analysis of Christopher Marlowe's first tragedy," 9). At the same time, his ambition is to offer "un'analisi complessiva di questa tragedia" ("a comprehensive analysis of this tragedy") and "affrontare seriamente il rapporto di Marlowe (e forse di un'intera epoca) con la poesia latina" ("seriously approach Marlowe's relation [and perhaps that of an entire era] to Latin poetry," 59). Ziosi's intentions seem somewhat conflicted: is this primarily a discussion of the Renaissance reception of Virgil and Ovid or a study of Marlowe's play?

Thus, for all its expansiveness, "*Didone regina di Cartagine*" may not quite be a "comprehensive analysis" of *Dido*, but it certainly leaves few stones unturned in its exploration of classical parallels. This undisputable strength of Ziosi's book is in a certain sense also its weakness: the promised "analisi di alcune scene di *Dido*" in the last thirty-five pages of the introduction mostly turn out to be lengthy discussions of various classical and Marlovian intertexts rather than actual analyses of the play. As a consequence, *Dido* at times almost disappears under the weight of the intertextual framework. Other aspects of the play remain relatively underexplored: for example, staging conventions and their possible rapport with classical drama receive relatively little attention, even if Ziosi shows awareness of the theatrical context.

Some minor question marks can be raised on individual details. It sounds odd, for example, to suggest that "nessuna delle opere di Marlowe fu stampata prima della sua morte" ("none of Marlowe's works was printed before his death," 61). This is only true if we ignore the two *Tamburlaine* plays, which of course lacked Marlowe's name on the

title page but nonetheless appeared in 1590, well before his death. There are moreover some errors in the transcription of Bowers's edition: "fye" for "flye" (2.1.322), "te" for "the" (3.1.88), and "worts" for "worths" (3.4.41). Finally, it may be mentioned that although Ziosi's research is solid, with the exception of Ruth Lunney's chapter on *Dido* in Sara Munson Deats and Robert Logan's anthology *Marlowe at 450* (2015), his bibliography lists no work on Marlowe's play from 2012 and later. This is despite the appearance of significant articles by Sheldon Brammall, Mathew Martin, and Chloe Preedy that could have enriched Ziosi's discussion of politics and classical heritage.

These points notwithstanding, Ziosi's study remains an impressive piece of scholarship: well informed on the classical contexts and strikingly thorough in its examination of how they inform *Dido*. As such, it is a most welcome contribution both to the criticism on this still neglected play and the wider discussion of classical reception in the Renaissance.

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