

Fortune's Breath: Rewriting the Classical Storm in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare

When the 1588 Spanish Armada encountered severe gales in the Northern Atlantic, which destroyed nearly a third of the fleet, English Protestant commentators claimed the storm as a sign that God was watching over England. As the pamphleteer I. L. reported in 1589, 'the breath of the Lords mouth hath...scattered those proud shippes, whose masts seemed like Cedars to dare the Sunne'.¹ Contemporary medallions struck to commemorate the English victory similarly declared that '*Flevit Deus et inimici dissiparunt*' ('God breathed upon the waters and scattered his enemies').² Such claims gained additional resonance after a second Spanish invasion fleet was wrecked by gales in October 1596, this time without any intervention by the Elizabethan navy.³ God, English Protestants declared, was protecting his new chosen nation, his 'little *Israel*'.⁴

While the connection between storms, divine providence and England's destiny that these responses to the Armada presume is especially intriguing, such discourses belong to a wider tradition of meteorological interpretation in early modern England. As Alexandra Walsham has shown, a whole range of celestial apparitions, from destructive tempests to spectral visions in the sky, were identified by contemporary pamphleteers, divines, and scholars as sermons inscribed by God.⁵ The apocalyptic framework through which these phenomena were read accords with a general tendency to look for omens of the future in a range of heavenly and meteorological occurrences, including tempests. Thus, as Gwilym Jones explores in his study of *Shakespeare's Storms*, various reports circulated about the significance of hearing thunder on a particular day: Thomas Hill, for example, notes in his *Contemplation of Mysteries* (1574) how 'The learned *Beda*

¹ I. L., *The birth, purpose, and mortall wound of the Romish holie League* (London: [printed by T. Orwin] for Thomas Cadman, 1589), A3v.

² Wallace MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993), 241.

³ Chris Fitter, 'Historicising Shakespeare's *Richard II*: Current Events, Dating, and the Sabotage of Essex', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11.2 (September, 2005), 1-47: 29.

⁴ I. L., A3r.

⁵ Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 329; 'Sermons in the Sky: Apparitions in Early Modern Europe,' *History Today* 51.4 (2001), 56-63: 58.

wryteth... [t]hat if thunder be first heard out of the South quarter, threatneth the death of many by shipwrack'; according to Leonard Digges, 'Some write (their ground I see not) that Sundayes thunder, should bring the death of learned men, Judges and others'.⁶ As in the case of the Spanish Armada, such prophetic interpretations (while denounced by many writers as superstitious) were often applied to meteorological events that were perceived to be politically significant for Elizabethan England. One instance is the 'prodigious storm' that occurred in March 1599, as 'the Earle of Essex parted from London to goe for Ireland': according to biographer Alison Weir, Francis Bacon would subsequently look back upon this 'furious' weather as an 'ominous prodigy' foretelling Essex's predestined downfall.⁷

In identifying the 1599 storm as an omen of Essex's future, it is possible that some early modern commentators may have recognised an intriguing literary parallel in Lucan's *De Bello Civili*. Edward Paleit has demonstrated the notoriety that comparisons between Essex and Lucan's Caesar, as drawn by Essex's supporter Henry Cuffe, acquired during the latter's 1601 trial for treason.⁸ In this context, then, it is interesting to note that Lucan's account of the cloudy skies that greet Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon posits a potential connection between the celestial phenomenon and Caesar's imperial destiny (*De Bello Civili* 1.233-35) – although, in Essex's case, the outcome of his 1599 battle for England's Irish empire was inconclusive, and even disastrous.⁹ While the phrasing of Lucan's counter-epic suggests some scepticism about meteorological portents, as emphasised in the translation of this passage penned by the Elizabethan dramatist

⁶ Thomas Hill, *A contemplation of mysteries* (London: Henry Denham, 1574[?]), H4r; Leonard Digges, *A prognostication everlasting of right good effect* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1592), B4v. Noted by Gwilym Jones, *Shakespeare's Storms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 44.

⁷ John Florio, *Queen Anna's new world of words* (London: printed by Melchior Bradwood [and William Stansby], for Edward Blount and William Barret, 1611), O4v; Alison Weir, *Elizabeth, the Queen* (London: Pimlico, 1998), 441. Cited by Jones, 45-6.

⁸ Edward Paleit, 'The "Caesarist" Reader and Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, CA. 1590-1610', *Review of English Studies* 62 (2011), 212-40: 226-7.

⁹ Lucan, *The Civil War*, trans. and ed. by J. D. Duff, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928).

Christopher Marlowe,¹⁰ stormy atmospheric conditions are a striking and significant element in various classical epics, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Virgil's *Aeneid*.

In terms of the early modern literary tradition, the latter text is an especially important source. Virgil's high status in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe is well-known, as is his reputation as the poet of empire. Craig Kallendorf notes that:

the Virgil that emerges from the schools as part of the common classical heritage of the ruling élites of the early modern West, [is] a Virgil whose language and sentiments encoded power and privilege, [and] who provided the model for the imperial expansion that projected the power of Europe onto every continent of the newly expanded world[.]¹¹

Within Elizabethan and Jacobean England, the cultural authority of the *Aeneid* was regularly appropriated in support of English colonial ambitions, and literary critics have been alert to the epic's influence as an archetypal narrative of conquest.¹² Yet, as Margaret Tudeau-Clayton has persuasively demonstrated, a confused medieval reception history ensured that the early modern Virgil was also identified as a mage until the early seventeenth century, with the *Aeneid* read as a prophetic text whose author had unique access to arcane knowledge.¹³ Such associations with elemental magic are equally intriguing in light of the prominence given to storm imagery within the *Aeneid*, in which tempests provide both an obstacle to and prophetic guarantor of Aeneas' imperial destiny: in early modern England, conjurors and witches were often credited with the power to summon storms.¹⁴

¹⁰ Christopher Marlowe, *Lucans First Booke*. In *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). See Chloe Kathleen Preedy, "False and Fraudulent Meanes"? Representing the Miraculous in the Works of Christopher Marlowe, *Marlowe Studies* 2 (2012), 103-24.

¹¹ Craig Kallendorf, *The Other Virgil: Pessimistic Readings of the 'Aeneid' in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14.

¹² See for example Donna B. Hamilton, 'Re-Engineering Virgil: *The Tempest* and the Printed English *Aeneid*', in *The Tempest and Its Travels*, ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion, 2000), 114-20: 114.

¹³ Margaret Tudeau-Clayton. *Jonson, Shakespeare and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7-8.

¹⁴ Reginald Scot denounces such popular beliefs about 'Witches power in meteors and elementarie bodies' in his *Discoverie of witchcraft* (London: [printed by Henry Denham for] William Brome, 1584), C1r-1v. See Leslie Thomson, 'The Meaning of *Thunder and Lightning*: Stage Directions and Audience Expectations', *Early Theatre* 2 (1999), 11-24: 11-2; Jones, 10.

In the *Aeneid*, command over meteorological phenomena is reserved to the gods, as disturbances in the air play an explicitly functional role in bringing Aeneas' imperial destiny to fruition. Initially, the power to master storms belongs to Aeneas' enemies: bad weather is Ulysses' ally in the Greek invasion of Troy, rendering his wooden-horse trick plausible through the implied correlative that the god Neptune needs placating, while Juno instigates the storm that batters the surviving Trojans' ships as they flee the destruction of their city. Before long, however, these same violent winds give rise to Jove's resounding declaration of Aeneas' and Rome's destiny:

Thy kyngdome prosper shall, and eke the walles I thee behight:
Thou shalt see rise in *Lavyne* land and grow ful great of might.
And thou thy sonne *Aeneas* stout to heauen shalt bryng at last,
Amonge the gods be sure of this, my mynd is fixed fast.
...
Let it be so: let tyme roll on, and set furth their renowne.
Then shall be borne of Troian blood the emprour *Caesar* bright,
Whose empire through the seas shal stretch and fame to heaven upright[.]¹⁵

The storms, stilled by divine intervention, inspire the prediction that will resonate across the course of the poem. Jove's commanding authority over the elements anticipates the control that Aeneas will subsequently acquire, when he fulfils his destiny as empire-builder; here, Virgil asserts the marine and aerial dimensions of Roman power. Imperial fame itself is also carried on the wind: sometimes positively, when the divine messenger Mercury crosses the liminal space between earth and heaven, and sometimes in a more dangerous fashion, by the flying goddess Fama or Rumour. Fama's presence, while threatening in her prospective distortion of Aeneas' fame (she will later spread damaging rumours about his relationship with Dido), further reinforces the link between empire-building, individual renown and aerial power that Virgil creates: imperial success and future reputation rely on controlling the air, through which destiny is framed and fulfilled.

In her fascinating study of *Shakespeare's Troy*, Heather James concludes that Shakespeare appropriated, and contested, the political and literary tradition derived from imperial Rome in order

¹⁵ Virgil, *The whole xii bookes of the Aeneidos of Virgill*, trans. Thomas Phaer (London: [printed] by William How for Abraham Veale, 1573), A4v.

to legitimate the cultural place of the theatre in late Elizabethan and early Stuart London.¹⁶ This claim offers a suggestive insight into how literary echoes of Virgil's *Aeneid* might function in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Although not a focus of James' argument, the motif of the Virgilian storm is especially noteworthy in this regard, encapsulating themes of prophecy, imperial conquest, an authoritative textual legacy, and future reputation.¹⁷ That success in these areas revolves within Virgil's epic around the ability to command the air adds further resonance to the dramatic significance of this motif, at a time when new purpose-built playhouses were being constructed in the London suburbs, and indoor halls were being used predominantly, even exclusively, as dramatic venues: increasingly, the fictions staged at these locations could be conceived of as occupying a dedicated theatrical space. With actors and audience breathing the same air within the circumference of the building's wooden or wood-panelled walls, the atmospheric qualities of such theatrical space, arguably conceived of as an autonomous imaginative sphere,¹⁸ became significant to the ways in which early modern playwrights engaged with the concept of theatrical authority in their dramatic writings. In this sense, the fact that the *Aeneid* aligns control of the air with the prophetic promise of everlasting fame is intriguing, especially when the plays themselves fulfil the promise of the epic through their re-staging of the Virgilian narrative. The children's drama *Dido Queen of Carthage*, co-authored by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe,¹⁹ is one striking example of a play that combines a re-telling of the *Aeneid* with a

¹⁶ Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

¹⁷ By 'Virgilian storm', I mean a storm or atmospheric disturbance at sea that impacts upon an imperialising agenda and gives rise, either directly or indirectly, to a prophecy of enduring fame, as is the case in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*.

¹⁸ The idea that the imagination occupied a specific and autonomous cognitive domain was theorised by Aristotle in *De Anima*, and elaborated during the early modern period by Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Defence of Poesy*. See Aristotle *De anima*, III, iii, 427b, cited by Guido Giglioni, 'Fantasy Islands: *Utopia*, *The Tempest* and *New Atlantis* as Places of Controlled Credulousness', in *World-Building and the Early Modern Imagination*, ed. Allison B. Kavey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 91-118: 96; Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poetry*, in *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), 1-54: 8-9. For the idea that those involved with the early modern theatre may have identified it as a distinct imaginative sphere, see Paul Yachnin, *Stage-Wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and the Making of Theatrical Value* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), esp. xiv.

¹⁹ While Nashe's contribution to the play has been much debated, this article follows the 1594 title-page in crediting him with at least some involvement. See Christopher Marlowe, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, in '*Dido Queen of Carthage*' and '*The Massacre at Paris*', ed. H. J. Oliver, *The Revels Plays* (London: Methuen & Co., 1968), 1-90: xix-xxvii.

focus on questions of conquest and legacy, explored through the imagery of commanding the air. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, responding to this play, offers an alternative perspective on the story of Dido and Aeneas, as Shakespeare's Cleopatra comes to symbolically embody the tempest that contests empire. Finally, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare returns to these themes of controlling the air, imperial conquest, and the fashioning of personal and public legacies by staging the Virgilian storm as an explicitly theatrical event. Thus, in these works, Marlowe and Shakespeare utilise the motif of the Virgilian storm, which aligns aerial command with imperial destiny, to reflect upon the status of their own theatrical fiction – and to interrogate its future legacy.

Ruling Land and Sea in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*

Marlowe and Nashe's play *Dido Queen of Carthage* provides an early example of such self-conscious reflection upon the atmospheric qualities of the purpose-dedicated playhouse, through a narrative focus that is explicitly indebted to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Performed by the Children of Her Majesty's Chapel, it was probably written for an indoor hall venue: it may have been staged at the first Blackfriars theatre or, if completed after the Chapel Children's 1584 expulsion from that venue, either on tour or at court.²⁰ The Revels editor H. J. Oliver, recently seconded by Andrew Duxfield, proposes that the play may have also been performed at one of the outdoor amphitheatres, and the textual allusions to commanding the air might have gained a powerful new resonance on an open-air stage.²¹ Either venue would however have facilitated this drama's intriguing engagement with and conceptualisation of theatrical space as a distinct sphere to be manipulated

²⁰ The evidence of the title-page, and a potential allusion to this play in *Hamlet* (2.2.432-3), indicate that *Dido* was probably performed at least once (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, Arden Shakespeare [London: Thomson Learning, 1982 rpt. 2000]). See Oliver, ed., xxvi- xxx; Michael Shapiro. *Children of the Revels: The Boy Companies of Shakespeare's Time and Their Plays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 14-17. The play cannot be dated with any accuracy, but is usually presumed to precede *Tamburlaine* and therefore tentatively allotted to 1585-86, although it may be even earlier. For the alternative arguments for a post-1588 date, see Margo Hendricks, 'Managing the Barbarian: *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*', *Renaissance Drama*, 23 (1992), 165-88; and Martin Wiggins, 'When Did Marlowe Write *Dido, Queen of Carthage*?', *Review of English Studies*, 59 (2008), 521-41.

²¹ Oliver, ed., xxxii-xxxiii; Andrew Duxfield, "Where am I now?": The Articulation of Space in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, *Cahiers Élisabéthains* (forthcoming), n.p.

and controlled by the actors (in the sense of both characters and players) in Marlowe and Nashe's fiction. Through this thematic interest in spatial conquest and an expansive theatrical vision, *Dido Queen of Carthage* importantly anticipates and frames Marlowe's subsequent practice in the influential *Tamburlaine* plays and *Doctor Faustus*.

Written at a time when purpose-dedicated playhouses were still a comparatively new development, *Dido Queen of Carthage* vaunts the power of theatrical illusion in Marlowe's characteristic style. In a short induction, which self-consciously parodies the popular reputation of the boys' companies, the power of the adult gods (represented by Jove) is surrendered to the child-actor Ganymede. Jove promises that 'heaven and earth' will be 'the bounds of thy delight' (1.1.29-31), implicitly asserting the boy-player's authority over the playing space by gesturing to the airy region between the stage platform and the painted 'heavens' above: a promise that, in an open-air setting, might even have allowed the imagined sphere of illusion to figuratively expand beyond the limits of the playhouse by projecting theatrical authority beyond the stage canopy and into the sky overhead.²² Jove's verbal commitment is reinforced visually as he plucks feathers from Hermes' wings (1.1.38-41), which, given the latter's mythological roles of divine herald and conductor of souls to the underworld, symbolise control over and occupation of the liminal region between stage heavens and stage hell. Since this episode was most probably staged on a balcony above the main stage, the visual picture might well have complemented these verbal references to Ganymede's command of stage-space by placing the actor in a position to survey the audience. By connecting the gift of the feathers with Ganymede's 'fancy' (1.1.39), the play-text seems in addition to reinforce the real-life theatrical connotations at a linguistic level. A few lines later, Venus will identify Jupiter as 'playing' with 'that wanton female boy' (1.1.51): a charge that again echoes contemporary charges made against the children's companies,²³ but which is countered by Jupiter's

²² Contemporary accounts indicate that least some early modern theatres possessed a cloth or covering above the stage that was painted with stars and other celestial symbols, and represented the heavens. Even if the performance space did not possess such decoration, though, a gesture by the actor to the sky or roof would have conveyed the point.

²³ See for example Phillip Stubbes, *The anatomie of abuses* (London: [printed by John Kingston for] Richard Jones, 1583), L8r-8v.

proclamation of the future. At this point in the narrative, Ganymede's comprehensive authority over the fictional 'world' of *Dido* may anticipate the predicted destiny of Aeneas' son Ascanius, of whom Jupiter promises that 'no bounds but heaven shall bound his empery' (1.1.100). Possibly reinforced by the doubling of these two roles in performance, such linguistic echoes align control of the airy fictional sphere with imperial destiny, and foreshadow the Virgilian storm that follows.

This storm-scene is closely modelled upon Book I of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Spectators hear Aeneas' mother Venus complain that 'my Aeneas wanders on the seas / And rests a prey to every billow's pride' (1.1.52-3):

Poor Troy must now be sacked upon the sea,
And Neptune's waves be envious men of war;
Epeus' horse, to Etna's hill transformed,
Prepared stands to wrack their wooden walls,
And Aeolus, like Agamemnon, sounds
The surges, his fierce soldiers, to the spoil

(1.1.64-9)

This storm represents an obstacle to Aeneas' colonising destiny: literally, in threatening his life; and indirectly, by shipwrecking him upon Carthage's shore, where Dido will attempt to subvert his Roman destiny. The potential cancellation of Aeneas' future is captured by Venus' metaphors, which by uniting past and present trauma effectively freeze the progression of the narrative. The theatre thereby acquires command over the past, present and future, as well as both geographical places. Conflating the Trojan horse with the "sounded" waves, this passage advertises the versatility of the stage's wooden boards, which can be at once Troy and the Aeolian Sea, and celebrates the effects used to 'sound' the storm's presence. Indeed, the storm in question was probably signalled on-stage through acoustic effects such as the beating of drums, and possibly the rumbling of a rolled cannon-ball,²⁴ with the playhouse appropriating the martial soundscape that

²⁴ On the theatrical effects used to create storms on-stage, see Thomson, 14; Jones, 34. As Gwilym Jones points out, it is less likely that fireworks would have been used in an indoor performance due to the smell (128), and especially during the opening scene.

might more typically be associated with imperial conquest in the service of its own theatrical vision. At the same time, however, the fact that this illusory storm threatens ‘to wrack their wooden walls’ equally aligns these imagined ships with the physical confines of the playing space, threatening the fabric of the stage itself.²⁵ As with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, this ship-stage parallel would have been especially powerful within an outdoor playhouse,²⁶ but would still have been perfectly evident in the wood-panelled environs of an indoor hall. Exploiting the reverberating sound-effects, Marlowe and Nashe again hint that their illusion might even expand beyond the bounds of stage-heaven and stage-earth, swelling past the wooden borders of theatre-space into the world outside: in this fantasy of theatrical ‘empyry’, freed from vertical and possibly horizontal limits, there are ‘no bounds but heaven’ – which, in the classical form alluded to here, has already been brought within the parameters of the stage fiction in this opening scene.²⁷

As the play continues, so do these associations between storms, imperial destiny, and the theatre. In accordance with Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the storms that “sack” Aeneas’ ships in the opening scene’s maritime restaging of the fall of Troy are characterised as the product of Juno’s alliance with Aeolus.²⁸ Subsequently, however, Juno and Aeneas’ mother Venus arrange an alliance that will result in a ‘match’ between the Trojan prince and Dido (3.2.77-80); in pursuit of this plan, Juno arranges another storm, as outlined to Venus:

This day they both a-hunting forth will ride
Into these woods, adjoining to these walls;
When, in the midst of all their gamesome sports,
I’ll make the clouds dissolve their wat’ry works,

²⁵ Marlowe would subsequently return to this notion of an assault on the fabric of the theatre in *Tamburlaine Part Two*, in which the protagonist orders his soldiers to ‘raise cavaleros higher than the clouds, / And with the cannon break the frame of heaven’ (2.4.102-3). Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, ed. J. S. Cunningham (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1981).

²⁶ As Brian Gibbons suggests, stage pillars might then correspond to masts. Brian Gibbons, ‘The Question of Place’, *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 50 (1996), 33-43: 42. Cited by Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 152-3.

²⁷ Marlowe’s interest in the expansion of spatial bounds has also been discussed by various critics including Stephen Greenblatt (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980], 193-222) and Emily C. Bartels (*Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993]), though with a less specific focus on the bounds of theatrical authority and the performative sphere.

²⁸ Virgil, A2r.

And drench Silvanus' dwellings with their showers.
Then in one cave the queen and he shall meet

(3.2.87-92)²⁹

That the emphasis is now on the enclosure rather than expansion of space, as the focus narrows from within encircling 'walls' to the even smaller and contained place of the 'cave', suggests that the potential restriction of Aeneas' imperial destiny is already anticipated within this exchange. Since a lasting relationship with Dido would halt Aeneas' geographical and colonial trajectory at Carthage, intent upon entrenching rather than expanding space (5.1.1-17), this storm, like the previous tempest arranged by Juno, represents a threat to the promised foundation of Rome and, by extension, Virgil's *Aeneid*. While *Dido Queen of Carthage* seems to deliberately mock Aeneas' heroic status at regular intervals, engaging in what Donald Stump terms the 'persistent deflation of Virgilian high seriousness',³⁰ the spatial imagery confirms that a threat to the prophesied future is nonetheless an equal constraint on the imaginative sphere envisioned by Marlowe and Nashe – it is through this Roman and Virgilian legacy, mocked by and contained within their dramatic framework, that the Elizabethan dramatists will extend their own surpassing fiction.

The play's closing contest between Aeneas and Dido, as each seeks control over the aerial imagery that represents imperial destiny, becomes especially significant in this regard. Here, Aeneas ostensibly surpasses the otherwise more convincing conqueror Tamburlaine. When the latter protagonist seeks to assault the heavens in *Tamburlaine Part Two*, his lieutenant Theridamis ruefully responds that '*if* words might serve, our voice hath rent the air' (2.4.121; my italics); in the earlier children's drama, however, Aeneas employs a very similar phrase successfully to repudiate Dido's claims as he departs for Italy: 'In vain, my love, thou spend'st thy fainting breath, / If words might move me, I were overcome' (5.1.153-4). Since sighs were theorised in early modern medical texts as the symptom of a body that has, quite literally, forgotten to breathe, the

²⁹ See Virgil, I3v.

³⁰ Donald Stump, 'Marlowe's Travesty of Virgil: Dido and Elizabethan Dreams of Empire', *Comparative Drama* 34.1 (2000), 79-107: 94

admonition aptly figures Aeneas' assumed control over the airy regions associated in this play with both imperial prophecy and theatrical fiction, while also foreshadowing Dido's fate.³¹

In *Dido Queen of Carthage*, the death of the conqueror's "wife" is exposed as the cost of empire-building, with her fiery self-immolation and descent into the pit below the stage contrasting with Aeneas' advertised departure to claim his imperial destiny. In this contest for control of the elements that figure the performative sphere, Aeneas emerges victorious: Dido is left short of breath, and subsequently banished from the stage platform, while he commands the weather and the sea. Having acquired such command following his initial shipwreck, Aeneas defies Dido's efforts to contain his future within the bounds of Carthage, which he once imagined as a complete 'world' (1.1.198).³² Thanks to his possession of 'silver whistles to control the winds' (4.4.10), gifted to him by Dido herself, Marlowe and Nashe's much-parodied Aeneas is able to partially regain his Virgilian stature:

Aboard, aboard, since Fates do bid aboard
And slice the sea with sable-coloured ships,
On whom the nimble winds may all day wait
And follow them as footmen through the deep

(4.3.21-4)

His power over the air and sea is explicitly characterised by Aeneas as the quality that will enable him to 'ascend to fame's immortal house' (4.3.9), conflating his imperial destiny and literary legacy. Shortly afterwards, he leaves, and Dido is left to long like Marlowe's Faustus for a control of the air that is ultimately futile and self-destructive: 'I'll frame me wings of wax like Icarus, / And o'er his ships will soar unto the sun' (5.1.243-4).³³

³¹ Carla Mazzi, 'The History of Air: *Hamlet* and the Trouble with Instruments', *South Central Review* 26.1 (2009), 153-96: 179

³² The term 'world' was commonly used in early modern English to denote the object of cosmography, the study of the earth and the heavens (*OED n.* II 8).

³³ Cf. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus: A- and B-texts (1604, 1616)*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester and New York, 1993), Prologue ll. 21-2.

Aeneas, whose imperial destiny is familiar to Elizabethan spectators but left unfulfilled within the play's narrative, thereby exceeds the 'bounds' of the theatrical illusion in performative as well as figurative terms: his Virgilian legacy requires the audience to project his achievements beyond the 'world' of Carthage and the playhouse's fictional sphere. While Aeneas' trajectory is linear, however, the play also posits an alternative model of theatrical engagement through Dido's mourning speech. Thus, although she too initially seeks to master the elements, enclosing sails 'pack'd' with wind in her chamber, and so 'drive' to Italy's shore (4.4.128-9), her ambitions increase until she hopes to bring all air within her own sphere: 'I'll set the casement open, that the winds / May enter in and once again conspire / Against the life of me, poor Carthage queen' (4.4.130-32). When these efforts at containing Aeneas' future by capturing the air fail, Dido then engages in a more extensive effort to command the narrative through Virgilian storm imagery. Mirroring Venus' previous tactics, she retreats into a restaging of the past that simultaneously envisions an alternative, cyclical future:

See, see, the billows heave him up to heaven,
And now down falls the keels into the deep.

...

Now he is come on shore, safe without hurt

(5.1.251-7)

By rewriting Virgil's version of Aeneas' future, albeit through what the play-text implies is a vain fantasy, Dido's final speech arguably sees Marlowe and Nashe anticipate what Heather James has termed 'Shakespeare's iconoclastic translations of empire', whereby the playwright "contaminates" the imperial tradition of Trojan Britain by staging competing interpretations; in James' reading such translation, a term with significant spatial overtones, 'conversely empower[s] the theatre as an independent sphere of cultural authority'.³⁴

³⁴ James, 33.

While Dido's vision reflects her traumatised state, then, it also aptly captures the complex temporality of dramatic performance, which is both finite in its span and, potentially, endlessly iterable. If Aeneas' future relies upon linear projection in space, generating the conditions needed for the creation of Virgil's epic and the legacy that it establishes for him, Dido dreams of an alternative temporal model in which immortality is conferred through containment and repetition. Thus Marlowe and Nashe present two alternative frameworks for theatrical authority within *Dido Queen of Carthage*. In one version, the protagonist expands beyond the containing boundaries of dramatic illusion, effectively invading audience-space to assert his destiny with their imaginative co-operation: a concept that Marlowe would subsequently develop within his *Tamburlaine* plays. From another perspective, however, the bounds of the fictional sphere also represent a kind of authority, although one that Dido herself is unable to master; the very iterability of performance offers a different form of theatrical legacy, as Marlowe will consider again in *Doctor Faustus*. Both versions, however, offer a vision of dramatic performance that, in asserting the spatial and/or temporal power of the imagination, might implicitly contest the writings of contemporary anti-theatricalists. Attacking the theatre several years before, Stephen Gosson had employed the imagery of ships, unruly winds and shipwreck to signal modesty and restraint: 'I will beare a lowe sayle, and rowe neere the shore, least I chaunce to bee carried beyonde my reache, or runne a grounde in those Coasts which I never knewe'.³⁵ In Marlowe and Nashe's children's drama, however, such restrictions are no obstacle, even to the often bathetic protagonists: Aeneas turns his 'wrack' on unknown coasts to advantage in pursuing a journey 'beyond...reach' of the play's limits, while Dido, anticipating Faustus, projects her imagination high into the heavens.

The New Augustan Empire: *Antony and Cleopatra*

³⁵ Stephen Gosson, *The schoole of abuse* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1579), A6r-6v.

For all Aeneas' flaws, the closing impression in *Dido Queen of Carthage* is that his vision of spatial expansion has, at least within this play, secured a more powerful legacy than Dido, if not a more lasting. In *Antony and Cleopatra* (c. 1606-7), however, Shakespeare offers an alternative comparison in which the linear imperial legacy of Augustus (and by extension Virgil's Rome) is contrasted to the defeated Cleopatra's powerful act of self-commemoration: spatially confined by the end of the play, she utilises tactics similar to Dido's to fashion her legacy for early modern audiences and the future, arguably with a more successful outcome. Although Shakespeare utilises the Virgilian storm motif in a range of plays, including *Julius Caesar* and of course *The Tempest*,³⁶ *Antony and Cleopatra* has an especially strong thematic affinity with *Dido Queen of Carthage*. In common with the latter drama, Shakespeare's play interrogates the connection between controlling the air, imperial conquest, and the fashioning of personal and public legacies, while Antony's defeat at Actium conflates the threats to empire posed by foreign queens and storms in the *Aeneid* when Cleopatra, who has come to embody the Virgilian storm, draws his fleet away from battle. While at points in this drama the tone hovers uncertainly between bathos and tragedy, as in *Dido*, James notes a conscious resistance to the imperialising legacy of Virgil's Roman epic, suggesting that both Antony and Cleopatra are intensely aware of the need to promote or disrupt the stories in which their meanings will be recorded: as early modern readers were aware, Virgil's Dido was partially modelled on Roman versions of Cleopatra, and so the *Aeneid* could itself be termed a threat to her reputation.³⁷

For Shakespeare's Cleopatra, this re-visioning project apparently begins with her spectacular entrance in her barge of state, which is reported by Enobarbus in a staged act of story-telling. The episode is reminiscent of Marlowe and Nashe's earlier play: as Richard Wilson argues, Enobarbus' account of Cleopatra's vessel recalls not only Shakespeare's direct source, North's translation of

³⁶ Robert S. Miola compares Cassius braving the storm in 1.3 to *Aeneid* 5.685-96, and also suggests that the image of the storm that Cassius summons in 5.1 evokes the tempests of the *Aeneid* and indicates 'the same grand workings of destiny'. *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 88, 111.

³⁷ James, 119; Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality and the Medieval 'Aeneid'* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 32.

Plutarch's *Lives*, but also the equally impractical and symbolic gallery of 'rivell'd gold', with masts of silver, that Dido promises Aeneas (*Antony and Cleopatra* 2.2.201-28; *Dido* 3.1.113-33).³⁸ While Wilson reads this inter-textual echo as Shakespeare's response to Marlowe's symbolisation of the Thames-side theatre as a ship (albeit one of fools),³⁹ however, the specific aerial imagery of both passages is at least equally important. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the initial focus is on the barge itself, whose 'purple' sails signify imperial authority and command of the elements. Yet such power resides in sensual invitation rather than martial force: it is the 'perfumed' scent of these sails that makes the winds 'lovesick with them' (2.2.203-4), anticipating how these same Nile winds will subsequently enhance the beauty of Cleopatra's complexion (2.2.211-5), and convey her 'strange invisible perfume' to the senses of those who behold her arrival (2.2.222-3). As Holly Dugan notes, Shakespeare's Egyptian queen is a master of multi-sensorial theatrical effects, with Enobarbus implying that Antony fell in love, not at first sight, but at first smell: 'hinged to the power of her perfumes, her influence extends beyond her immediate realm and works in subtle ways'.⁴⁰

Since such perfume disperses through the air to tease the senses, Dugan's insight further extends the play's consistent alignment of Cleopatra with the elements of water and air. While the Roman soldier Philo initially portrays this quality in a negative and belittling light, complaining that Antony's heart 'is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust' (1.1.2-10), Enobarbus soon corrects this impression. In Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra is not merely the target at which a commanding Antony directs the air, but rather its natural destination. Thus, while she sails the Nile, Antony

...did sit alone,
Whistling to th'air, which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra, too,

³⁸ Richard Wilson, *Free Will: Art and Power on Shakespeare's Stage* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 347; William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders, Arden Shakespeare (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Plutarch, *The lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. Thomas North (London: Thomas Vautroullier and John Wight, 1579), NNNN5r-5v.

³⁹ Wilson, 347.

⁴⁰ Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 20-1.

And made a gap in nature.

(2.2.225-8)

The air's movement implicitly directs the spectator's gaze, as Shakespeare exploits atmospheric imagery to delineate the dimensions and directionality of his theatrical illusion. The 'gap' that is imaginatively projected upon the aerial sphere mirrors the way in which Cleopatra herself has, famously, become a curious absence within the poetic blazon constructed by Enobarbus,⁴¹ which refers to virtually everything but her body. Jonathan Gil Harris has persuasively shown that it is precisely this absence that makes her so desirable to her on-stage Roman audience; drawing a comparison with the Ovidian myth of Narcissus, he notes that Cleopatra is depicted as possessing both an ineluctable power to 'make hungry' and a frustrating insubstantiality.⁴² Enobarbus' claim that 'she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies' (2.2.237-8) also again invokes her airy qualities, in a possible echo of Hamlet's claim to 'eat / the air, promise-crammed' (3.2.93-4).⁴³ Indeed, his report continues to stress Cleopatra's spectacular, otherworldly power; to see her, the air defies natural limitations and creates a vacuum that echoes her own absent-present quality in this description, while Cleopatra herself is, in contrast to Marlowe and Nashe's Dido (*Dido* 5.1.153-4), able to 'breathless, pour breath forth' (*Antony and Cleopatra* 2.2.242). Throughout, in fact, Shakespeare underscores Cleopatra's airy and 'breathing' qualities, which are contrasted with those of her Roman rival(s): thus Octavia, according to a messenger's report, shows 'a statue [rather] than a breather' (3.3.21).

⁴¹ James, 138-9.

⁴² Jonathan Gil Harris, "'Narcissus in thy Face': Roman Desire and the Difference it Fakes in *Antony and Cleopatra*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (1994), 408-25: 411-12.

⁴³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson Learning, 1982 rpt. 2000). For an account of how Hamlet's claim may also represent a response to contemporary anti-theatricalism, by framing the play as 'wholesome', see Carolyn Sale, 'Eating Air, Feeling Smells: *Hamlet's* Theory of Performance', *Renaissance Drama* 35 (2006), 145-68: 146-7. Sale's claim that Shakespeare was countering contemporary charges that the theatre was a site of contagion is especially intriguing in relation to *Antony and Cleopatra*, since perfume was regularly used during this period as a cure for infectious diseases, specifically the plague. See William Bullein, *The government of health* (London: Valentine Sims, 1595), C6v; Thomas Lodge, *A treatise of the plague* (London: Thomas Creede and Valentine Simmes for Edward White and N[icholas] L[ing], 1603), C4r; Dugan, 18.

The distinction between Octavia as static object of sight and Cleopatra's immersive power, her 'strange invisible perfume' (2.2.222), accords with what Mary Thomas Crane has identified as an important contrast between Roman and Egyptian modes of perception: while the Romans in this play understand their world primarily in visual terms, Egyptians inhabit the earth and engage with it through all of the senses.⁴⁴ It is such inhabitation of the elements, as part of the ongoing association between Cleopatra and the air, which allows the Egyptian queen to embody within herself the Virgilian storm that both impedes and validates Roman imperialism, and so contest its legacy. At first, Enobarbus draws this link between Cleopatra and the storm in tongue-in-cheek fashion, announcing that: 'We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report... [S]he makes a shower of rain as well as Jove' (1.2.153-8).⁴⁵ Yet such associations become serious at the Battle of Actium; here Cleopatra's unsettling relationship with the winds of imperial destiny brings Antony's fleet to grief as, unlike Dido, she fulfils the fantasy of having her lover carried to her on the wind:

She once being loofed,
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,
Claps on his sea-wing and, like a doting mallard,
Leaving the fight in height, flies after her.
I never saw an action of such shame

(3.10.18-22)

In this instance Cleopatra's captivating qualities, which draw the air and hence the sail-driven ships after her, prove unhelpful to her cause. Wrecking Antony's ambitions, she furthers those of their mutual enemy Octavian, who (in terms reminiscent of Virgil's *Fama*) has already voiced his rival claim to command the airy environs of Shakespeare's drama: 'I have eyes upon him [Antony],

⁴⁴ Mary Thomas Crane, 'Roman World, Egyptian Earth: Cognitive Difference and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Comparative Drama* 43 (2009), 2.

⁴⁵ Harris notes that critics have also interpreted such qualities as a sign of Cleopatra's stereotypically 'leaky' femininity, in accordance with early modern humeral theory (409). See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. 23-63.

/ And his affairs come to me on the wind' (3.6.63-4). Thus the encounter between Antony and Octavian's forces at Actium can from one perspective be read, like the closing scene of *Dido Queen of Carthage*, as a contest between two different models of commanding the theatrical sphere; here, Octavian's form of aerial coercion proves more effective in battle. As Canidius ruefully concludes, in another allusion to the threat of breathlessness, 'Our fortune on the sea is out of breath' (3.10.25). Antony, his commander, is deeply disturbed by such implications, in line with the Virgilian notion that control of the air and sea frames imperial destiny: while not precisely a storm, Antony's defeat at Actium is attributed to misdirected air currents, another disruptive meteorological phenomenon that might 'sheweth tempest'.⁴⁶ For Antony, then, surrendering his authority to Cleopatra's changeable lead threatens his sense of self. After under-stage music subsequently symbolises the departure of his guiding spirit Hercules, he perceives an unfixity in the air that reflects his own dissolving identity:

That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water...

My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body. Here I am Antony,
Yet cannot hold this visible shape

(4.14.9-11; 12-14)

As Wilson notes, Antony's reflection upon the subjective interpretations which one cloud might invite recognises that representation can 'mock our eyes with air' (4.14.7), in a possible reflection on Shakespeare's own stage and story.⁴⁷ Recognising that he has lost control of his own self-representation as a result of this defeat, he experiences his failure as, in Heather James' terms, a radical anamorphosis into empty "signs", which are indefinitely subject to refiguration.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See William Fulke, *A goodly gallerye* (London: [William Griffith], 1563), G2v; also Jones, 79-81.

⁴⁷ Wilson, 310-11. Cf. *Hamlet* 3.2.367-73.

⁴⁸ James, 128.

Cleopatra, conversely, finds in the very diffuseness of the air the quality that will enable her to fashion her theatrical legacy. First, she follows Marlowe and Nashe's Ganymede in imaginatively appropriating Hermes' command over the liminal spaces of the stage-world, dreaming of Antony's bodily ascent and then fixing his image aloft through her words. The passage's assertion of control over theatrical space may also have been realised physically, since it seems possible that a ghostly tableau, staged upon the balcony, might have accompanied this imaginative resurrection of Antony:

His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon which kept their course and lighted
The little O, the earth...
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder

(5.2.78-85)

Seeking to deify her dead lover through supernatural allusions, and identifying him too as an embodiment of the storm,⁴⁹ Cleopatra here anticipates the culminating performance with which she outfaces Caesar and captivity.

At this latter point, the ongoing narrative conflict between the divergent models of theatrical ownership and occupation espoused by Octavian and Cleopatra reaches its height. Railing against her state of captivity and Caesar's desire to place her on show in a visible spectacle of his triumph, the Egyptian queen characterises Roman space as a threat to her 'air':

[...] Mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded
And forced to drink their vapour

(5.2.208-12)

⁴⁹ Gwilym Jones notes that 'the two phenomena of the storm and the earthquake are fundamentally related in early modern writing' (87), with the earthquake identified by early modern thinkers as a type of storm: see 97-8.

There may be an underlying metatheatrical playfulness, with the boy actor reminding his audience of the inevitable overlap between an elevated sphere of stage-illusion and audience-space; in one sense, this player's attempts to craft a new realm of the imagination is quite literally permeated by the 'thick', 'gross' breath of those standing immediately before the stage, as well as the sound of the windlass that would '[u]plift' Caesar's captive before the eyes of the crowd.⁵⁰ Since 'thick' air was also often identified as a cause of plague, Shakespeare may also be implying a contrast between the perfumed healing power of Cleopatra's 'sweet balm' and the diseased atmosphere of Rome (5.2.310); the air was understood to be particularly 'thick' around the bodies of the recently dead, and 'balm' might alternatively be connected with funeral ritual, Cleopatra's vision of forced performance is also woven through with the traces of her death.⁵¹

While such imagery here is a reminder of the stage's permeability, exposing Cleopatra to the threat of contagion, Shakespeare's protagonist transforms potential vulnerability into a source of strength. Because her power cannot be fully seen or known, Crane argues, it cannot be captured by sight, the Roman vehicle of mastery.⁵² In this sense Cleopatra, whose 'immortal longings' drive her transformation into 'fire and air' (5.2.280; 288), perhaps epitomises the newly immersive experience of early modern theatre. An audience would always have filled stage-space with their 'thick breath', but the early modern development of a dedicated performative sphere conversely enabled the theatre's own immersive potential. As for Marlowe and Nashe's *Dido*, Cleopatra's quest for command of her literary legacy is framed by an expansive relationship with temporal and spatial bounds: noting that Antony is termed the 'demi-Atlas of this earth' (1.5.24), a symbol of global authority, while Cleopatra is the 'day o'th'world' (4.8.13), Wilson persuasively suggests that 'together they constitute a theatre of the world'. Yet while in his interpretation, 'their defeat suggests the playhouse's vulnerability',⁵³ it seems that Shakespeare's conclusion, while not entirely

⁵⁰ For an alternative reading of the mechanical effects that Shakespeare is invoking, see Wilson, 343.

⁵¹ Mazzi, 175-6; 170.

⁵² Crane, 11. See also Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, 'Hamlet' to 'The Tempest'* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 177.

⁵³ Wilson, 324-5.

positive, carries a greater sense of hope: while in political terms it is Caesar's own theatrical vision that triumphs, the immersive model favoured by Cleopatra (and to a lesser extent Antony) continues to extend its influence over the closing moments of the play. Indeed, Holly Dugan suggests that, in death, Cleopatra may even succeed in partially transforming her substance: the ultimate act of self-reinvention.⁵⁴

Whereas Marlowe and Nashe's imperialist conqueror Aeneas imagined the expansion of the theatrical sphere as an aggressive assault on the playhouse walls, Shakespeare here suggests a subtler yet perhaps more extensive diffusion: a kind of theatrical osmosis, comparable to Cleopatra's 'strange invisible perfume' in its effect (2.2.222). Ultimately, even the new Augustus Caesar (real-life patron of Virgil) recognises and elevates the imaginative power of Cleopatra's fiction-making within the dramatic sphere of Shakespeare's play, which sets the "breathing" legacy of Antony and Cleopatra alongside the static, statuesque strategies of Roman commemoration: while Cleopatra resembles Marlowe and Nashe's Dido in prizing the iterability inherent to theatrical performance, her more adept establishment through 'fire and air' (5.2.288) of her own legacy might be attributed to her prioritisation of change, rather than adhering to the model of strict repetition that Dido favours. As Cleopatra earns her reputation for 'infinite variety' (2.2.246), Caesar responds by literally raising her and her lover into the liminal region above the stage platform, in a striking closing spectacle: 'Take up her bed... No grave upon the earth shall clip in it / A pair so famous' (5.2.355-8). Despite this closing attempt to impose an imperial Roman interpretation through tableau, however, the real victor of this contest for theatrical authority and commemorative control is Shakespeare's drama, and the literary fame that it claims through the immersive capacity of his theatrical illusion.

Conclusion: Shakespeare's 'Brave New World'

⁵⁴ Dugan, 22.

Shakespeare would return to the motif of the Virgilian storm in a number of subsequent plays, including most strikingly *The Tempest* (1611). In a play that both alludes to the *Aeneid* and, ‘in narrative and phrase, is constituted of its parts’,⁵⁵ Shakespeare engages in a striking and extended reflection on theatrical world-making. Roland Greene, exploring the ‘island logic’ of the early modern period, notes that such world-building rests on the extent to which *The Tempest* ‘is not only a function of insularity but a play of encounters’.⁵⁶ It is Prospero’s command of the air, and specifically his ability to fashion his own version of the storm that opens the *Aeneid*, that enables such duality within his island world: in this sense, *The Tempest* returns to the tension between enclosed space and an expansive sphere of illusion that is so central to the contest for future meaning within *Antony and Cleopatra*. Indeed, as Richard Wilson notes, the later play’s self-conscious meta-theatricality seems to closely echo the ethereal world of Shakespeare’s Egypt: Antony’s comparison of his ‘wreck’ to the ‘rack’ of a cloud machine (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.14.7-11) prefigures Prospero’s reference to the ‘insubstantial pageant’ that fades and dissolves to ‘Leave not a rack behind’ (*Tempest* 4.1.154).⁵⁷

Shakespeare’s interest in the relationship between Virgil’s literary legacy, the ‘insubstantial’ sphere of fictional illusion and theatrical power is evident from the opening scene of the play, which reverberates to the acoustic effects of a staged storm: ‘*A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard*’ (1.1.0 SD).⁵⁸ As many critics have noted, the audience are at first encouraged to recognise this gale as “real” within the fiction of the play: Jones, for example, notes Shakespeare’s sustained engagement with nautical technicalities, as the scene works to diminish the intrusiveness of its own ‘aesthetic framework’.⁵⁹ Yet this illusion is soon undone: having responded to the shipwreck in

⁵⁵ Hamilton, 119.

⁵⁶ Roland Greene, ‘Island Logic’, in *The Tempest and Its Travels*, ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion, 2000), 138-48: 138.

⁵⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman, Norton Critical Editions (London: W. W. Norton, 2004); Wilson, 33.

⁵⁸ As with *Dido Queen of Carthage*, it is likely that this storm was created primarily or exclusively through sound effects, rather than through the use of fireworks: see Jones, 128.

⁵⁹ Jones, 127-8.

terms that evoke an Aristotelian theory of theatrical spectatorship,⁶⁰ Miranda learns from her father Prospero that the sight before her is simply that: a ‘spectacle’, wrought by his ‘art’ (1.2.25-32). Shakespeare’s protagonist here subsumes the Virgilian storm within his own sphere of authority, perhaps implicitly gesturing, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, to the fabricated nature of imperial legacy, including that enshrined by the *Aeneid*. Crucially, however, Prospero’s ability to secure his own destiny through such manipulation of his island’s atmosphere depends upon his command over Ariel, the personification of theatrical storms and embodiment of the air. In this sense, as Jerry Brotton notes, Prospero may again invoke the figure of Aeneas, tamer of the sea (and winds).⁶¹ Yet the fact that both Prospero’s art and Ariel’s power is closely aligned with the insubstantial force of the theatre’s illusory sphere suggests that Prospero the imperial coloniser may equally share Cleopatra’s vision, utilising the very diffuseness of the air to secure his future legacy.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero’s move from command of, to immersion in, the air of the island culminates in the epilogue, as he extends such immersion into the space of the audience themselves. Inviting the ‘[g]entle breath’ of the spectators to fill his sails (ll. 11-3), as produced by the wind of their applause, Shakespeare’s protagonist offers an ostensibly more modest model of theatrical space than that found in Marlowe and Nashe’s children’s drama *Dido Queen of Carthage*. Rather than project the trajectory of the illusion outwards into the audience, as Aeneas sought in the earlier drama, Prospero’s lines instead invite the audience inwards, in a positive reworking of the mingling of breaths that Shakespeare’s Cleopatra so feared (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.208-12). Yet the protagonist’s pose of submission is arguably qualified by the fact that the audience’s powers are allied here with those of Ariel, spirit of the theatrical air: gently, subtly, Shakespeare’s illusion insinuates itself through the air of the playhouse. Prospero’s plea for liberty from confinement belies the fact that the island fiction he inhabits has already slipped its spatial and temporal bounds:

⁶⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 102 n. Cited by Elizabeth Fowler, ‘The Ship Adrift’, in *The Tempest and Its Travels*, ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion, 2000), 37-40: 38.

⁶¹ Jerry Brotton, ‘Carthage and Tunis, *The Tempest* and Tapestries’, in *The Tempest and Its Travels*, ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion, 2000), 132-7: 136.

the epilogue, with its address to the contemporary audience, reaffirms what Brotton terms the play's power to shuttle 'between the weft of the present and the warp of the past.'⁶²

The Virgilian storm, with its prophetic associations, figures this temporal command, as its ethereal and acoustic impact anticipates the associated expansiveness of the theatrical sphere in the drama of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Through a classical motif aligned with imperial legacy, these two dramatists interrogate the status of their purpose-dedicated theatre, and the capacity of the drama to engage in illusory world-making. That such associations between meteorological phenomena, the space of the theatre, and the drama's future meaning were recognised by contemporaries is suggested by the connection between false fortune-telling, storm-effects and the playhouses that John Melton draws in his well-known 1620 denunciation of astrological superstition:

Another will fore-tell of Lightning and Thunder that shall happen such a day, when there are no such Inflammations seene, except men goe to the *Fortune* in *Golding-Lane*, to see the Tragedie of Doctor *Faustus*. There indeede a man may behold shagge-hayr'd Deuills runne roaring ouer the Stage with Squibs in their mouthes, while Drummers make Thunder in the Tying-house, and the twelue-penny Hirelings make artificiall Lightning in their Heauens.⁶³

This bathetic portrait of the contemporary theatre would have been familiar enough to Marlowe and Shakespeare, with *Dido Queen of Carthage* and (to a lesser extent) *Antony and Cleopatra* engaging in the belittling of their protagonists even as these dramas construct expansive spatial and temporal visions: grandiose claims of authority are often qualified or undercut, even as the aerial imagery hints at the potential power of the performative sphere. While Marlowe's protagonists often assert their conquering power, such claims are rarely unambiguously endorsed, while in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's characters seem to profit most from defeat, submission, and containment, which then leads to a subtler diffusion of the theatrical illusion. As

⁶² Brotton, 132.

⁶³ John Melton, *Astrologaster, or, The figure-caster* (London: printed by Barnard Alsop for Edward Blackmore, 1620), E4r.

the influential classical commentator Seneca wrote, it is the ‘*moving* air that is an unconquerable thing’ (my italics).⁶⁴ Thus a theatrical authority framed through the motif of the Virgilian storm acquires the greatest spatial and temporal potential when characters, narrative and performative sphere seem to elude the grasp of playwright, players and audience alike, within the moving, “breathing” world of early modern theatre.

⁶⁴ *Naturales quaestiones*, 2: 178-81. Cited by Mazzi, 159.