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Irish Didos

Empire, Gender, and Class in the Irish Popular Tradition to Frank McGuinness's *Carthaginians*

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> Here in this province the whole principle of Empire is at stake: we, the people of Ulster, are the children of the Empire.
>
> Hugh Pollack, Empire Day 1922[1]

The British Empire evoked by Hugh Pollack when presenting his inaugural budget as finance minister of the first Parliament of Northern Ireland, was already fading in 1922, and always had mixed feelings about its Irish 'children', irrespective of their loyalties. In Frank McGuinness's *Carthaginians* (1988),[2] the central character, an openly gay nationalist male called Dido, reduces the representatives of empire into one 'faceless, nameless … working class boy sent here to oppress the working class'.[3] Derry may be 'a harbour. An empire. Part of a great empire',[4] but the greatness of empire was in very small supply in Northern Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s, and in *Carthaginians*:

> DIDO: They've got me. I join the dying. What's a Brit under the clay? What's a Protestant in the ground? What's a Catholic in the grave? All the same. Dead. All dead. We're all dead. I'm dying. They've got me. It's over. It's over. It's over. (*dies*) That's it. What do you think?[5]

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[1] Parliamentary speech, cited in Hume (1996: 159).

[2] I use here the considerably revised 1992 version of *Carthaginians* as reprinted in McGuinness (1996); the play's first performance took place in Dublin at the Peacock Theatre in 1988. On the nature and significance of the revisions especially in the area of gender see Harris (2009).

[3] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 334).

[4] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 310).

[5] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 344).

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McGuinness's Dido does not want to be remembered for his travails in navigating various British Army roadblocks throughout Derry to reach the other characters as they sit in the graveyard where the play is set. Nor does he aspire to a traditional patriotic memorial commemorating his work corrupting 'every member of Her Majesty's forces serving in Northern Ireland'.[6] Instead, he yearns to be commemorated by a nude statue with a blue plaque before his genitals describing him as 'patriot and poof', openly embracing both his gay sexuality (and sexuality in general) in ways that were neither normative nor accepted in either nationalist or loyalist culture in Northern Ireland of the time.[7]

In this chapter, I will re-examine the ways in which *Carthaginians* interrogates what empire means, the role ordinary people play in empires, and the legacies of these historically (and epically) unimportant subjects who do not, unlike Virgil's Dido, immolate themselves on grand pyres when their Roman lover has sailed away.[8] I will do so by placing McGuinness's version of Dido within the context of the complicated ways in which Rome, Dido, and Carthage have functioned in Irish popular and peasant culture from the 1700s onwards. In doing so I will complicate the view that *Carthaginians* 'draws subversive power from an identification between Ireland and Carthage that since the eighteenth century has focused Irish resistance to British colonial rule'.[9] In advancing that argument, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford investigates what is indeed an important strand of Irish historical and cultural understanding, one based around erudite manuscripts and lengthy printed volumes, perhaps most famously represented by Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn/ History of Ireland* (1630s).[10] It is, however, not the only tradition in play.

Classical Mythology in Irish Ballads

No discussion of the use and abuse of classical mythology and history in Ireland can be complete without taking into account their wide circulation in popular,

[6] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 302).

[7] Abdo (2007: 219) points out that Dido's proposed statue mocks both the traditional notion of masculine sacrifice and the nationalist 'myth of Ireland as beautiful maiden, Ireland as the woman with the harp, Ireland as mother'. Dido consistently refuses to be a martyr of the traditional Irish variety, popular as that role might be in Irish historical understanding; on this theme in the play see Ford (2001).

[8] Dido does just that, but not before cursing Aeneas and asking an avenger to 'rise from her bones' (4.625). Dido would have many afterlives, but the avenger to whom she alludes here is Hannibal, Carthage's greatest general, and the losing general in the Second Punic War that ultimately led to the final destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE at the end of the Third Punic War.

[9] Cullingford (1996: 222).

[10] On this see Cullingford (1996) and (2002: 99–110), Leerssen (1986: 41–71), and O'Higgins (2017: 28–33). On the social and intellectual circles in which Irish scribes and their manuscripts moved in Dublin see Ní Shéaghdha (1989).

cheap, and ephemeral forms of print. Of particular importance is the high volume of popular ballads inexpensively printed and sold in Ireland from the 1700s until the middle of the twentieth century.[11] These were mainly 'slip' ballads, cheaply printed on sheets of coarse paper, cut into slips, and costing a fraction of a penny.[12] Ballad singers were omnipresent in Irish towns and at Irish fairs, sometimes to the annoyance of the authorities, especially when they ventured into political territory.[13] Some, like the blind Dublin ballad singer Zozimus Moran (*c.*1794–1846), might fall back on classical examples to defend themselves: when arrested he claimed that he was doing nothing that had not been done before by Homer and Horace.[14] Ballads were omnipresent, both textually and orally, and were consumed eagerly by a range of individuals from the very poor, who could at least listen to and learn ballads even if they could not read or afford to buy them, to collectors like Sir Frederick Madden, one-time keeper of the manuscripts in the British Library, and whose massive collection is now held by Cambridge University. It is important to understand the massive reach, both regionally and temporally, of this popular material (some ballads, such as 'Glendalough', are still in circulation), especially compared to less accessible manuscript histories of Ireland and the more expensive printed and manuscript scholarly texts that Cullingford discusses. Where those texts traced connections between Ireland and the East, and rejected Roman models and origins for the Irish people, the ballads presented a different picture. They circulated in both oral and printed forms: printed material was of particular importance in the north and east of Ireland, which were highly literate regions for a country where literacy rates were generally lower than in England.[15] Belfast was a very important centre of regional printing, and the province contained a large number of regional distributors; their ballads helped spread an anarchic and sometimes confusing alternative version of the ancient world throughout the Ulster region in particular.

The Trojan War, Dido, and the Erasure of Aeneas

Heroes of the Trojan War were popular in Ireland. This is especially true of Hector, who is compared with Saint Patrick in 'The Irish Maniac' (Belfast); with two

[11] John Moulden's 2006 thesis is an excellent, if sometimes overwhelming, place to start with ballads; for popular printed material in general see Adams (1987).

[12] There are considerable difficulties in referring to or citing ballads in any consistent fashion; unfortunately they are poorly catalogued, and printers, place of printing, and dates can be difficult or impossible to recover. Additionally, they can change considerably even within the same town. In the above, where possible, I cite from ballads I have physically seen, even if that sometimes results in quoting from some less ably printed, spelt, and punctuated specimens.

[13] Neilands (1991). [14] McCall (1894: 28–9).

[15] Literacy rates for men were above 50 per cent for Ulster and Leinster, compared to 30 per cent in Connaught (Higgins 2010: 30).

mythical Irish heroes in 'The Rigs of the Times';[16] and with Julius Caesar and Milesius in 'A New Song on the Times'.[17] On the non-professional stage, the prologue of Robert Ashton's massively popular tragedy *The Battle of Aughrim* refers to the doomed, but noble and brave, Irish losers of the battle as 'Hectors'. The ribald ballad 'The Cuckoo's Nest' by John Shiel[s] (*c.*1800–*c.*1860) reels off 'Hector Paris Achilos [*sic*] Patriclos [*sic*] and Hercules'. It is typical of these texts, however, that they display no comparable interest in Aeneas. Given this absence, we can see that in McGuinness's *Carthaginians* the lack of interest in Aeneas (who has no clearly identifiable counterpart in the play: see below) has parallels in earlier Irish popular tradition—which, in contrast to its silence about Aeneas, also shows a great deal of interest in Dido.

Dido frequently appears in one of the most idiosyncratic features of these ballads, the 'goddess routine', a feature borrowed from a Gaelic poetic form known as the *aisling* or 'vision' poem. In a traditional *aisling* the poet falls asleep, meets a beautiful woman with whom he instantly falls in love, and addresses her by comparing her to a range of classical women. The woman turns out to be Ireland, mourning, and usually closes the poem by giving a rousing prophecy of Irish success in the coming years and expressing support for the Jacobite cause. 'The Distressed Maid of Erin' from Cork (*c.*1790s; Madden Vol. 24)[18] is a good English-language example of the older goddess routine in which the 'distressed maid' is Ireland. In the second stanza the narrator compares her to the 'mother of Cupid' (i.e. Venus); in the third he says that if he had 'Homer's eloquence' then he would speak of her 'to each distant settlement', so much that she would attract Hector, Jason, Achilles, and Hercules—no mean haul of classical heroes. Two stanzas later he asks her,

> . . . are you the lightsome Dido or Proserpine
> Or the Queen who voluntarily did accompany,
> And was decoyed by Paris to Troy [i.e. Helen],
> And left many a list to muster her energy,
> Deranged by jealousy in pausing soliloquy [*sic*],
> Trying once more his sights to enjoy?[19]

The maid, however, refusing to be compared with any classical woman, declares herself Erin (Ireland personified), and the ballad ends.

[16] Ó Muirithe (1980: 59). [17] Ó Muirithe (1980: 134).

[18] See Moulden (2006: 580). The Madden Ballads are held at Cambridge University Library.

[19] The author also throws in Venus again at the end, describing her as 'a sporting roving frolicker, | From Paphos' grove, for the use of foreignors' [*sic*]: it is not clear if she or the grove is thought to be for the use of foreigners.

Ballads of this type, so-called 'hedge schoolmaster songs',[20] whether by schoolmasters or not, show knowledge of an enormous array of classical goddesses and heroines. The most popular were Aurora, Flora, and Pandora, because their names enabled the internal rhyming of which Irish ballads were especially fond. Also to be found, however, are Ceres, Cleopatra, Diana, Dido, Europa, Eurydice, Hebe, Helen, Juno, Medea, Minerva, Pallas (Athena), Polyxena, Procris, and Venus, along with many other far more obscure classical females. The range testifies to the force that these allusions had on their audiences, especially when employed en masse; we should not forget that ballads were written and sung to be *sold*, as well as enjoyed, and relied on wide popular appeal as texts worth carrying and committing to memory. Classical allusions and names were frequently tossed together in a heady mix, with little regard for different traditions, context or, often, spelling—a respect in which (aside from erroneous spelling) they resemble the quizzes that occupy the characters in *Carthaginians*, where all information is levelled to the same value, as I discuss further below.

As songs that were disseminated through performance and printing, without much idea of the precise storyline they were referencing, or much concern about it either, ballads changed across their various iterations even within a single town. For example, in 'The Tin Ware Lass', one edition by the Cork printer Haly[21] refers to 'Paris, Priam's darling son | by his beloved Hecuba'; this was printed as 'Paris prim a Darling son | by his beloved Ecobagh' by a different printing firm in Cork (J&H Baird), strongly suggesting that Hecuba/Egobagh is in a relationship with Paris that is very definitely not maternal. From such misprintings it is easy to see that the material travelled orally, and that it was extremely fluid and unstable. In 'The Flowers of Edinburgh', a macaronic Irish and English ballad,[22] the author differs from the tradition regarding who was at fault in Dido's departure from Tyre:

> I freely asked with submission whether she was Helen or Juno,
> Whom that great deity received as a host,
> Or Diana who delights in fields, or Venus who such
> beauty yields,
> Or Palace [=Pallas Athena] who destroyed the Greeks and
> dispersed thro' the shore,
> Or Dido who Pegmalion [=Pygmalion] discharged for being a
> tyrant queen,
> Or the charmer that caused all our harbours to groan.

[20] Henigan (2016: 111–50), and see further Mac Góráin (Ch. 7) on hedge schools.

[21] Joseph Haly, who seems to have pioneered ballad printing in Cork and whose firm lasted until the 1870s: Moulden (2006: 198, 204); Madden Vol. 24.

[22] Madden Vol. 24; on macaronic ballads see Ó Muirithe (1980).

Aside from the creative spelling, what is startling about this ballad is that it reverses the traditional story of how and why Dido left Tyre to found Carthage. Rather than leaving the city at the behest of her dead husband's ghost, who tells her he was murdered for his wealth by her brother Pygmalion (as reported by Venus in *Aeneid* 1), she is dispatched for being a 'tyrant'. In 'King Billy's Downfall' (1836), whose subject was the destruction of the statue of William III in College Green, Dublin, on 8 April 1836, Zozimus Moran relocates the scene of Dido's death back to her place of origin, Tyre, as he invokes the names of various legendary figures to swear that he played no part in destroying the statue:

> by our champion Fingal, who invaders beat all,
> by hebrew king saul, and Drumcondra big tree,
> by zozymus moran, and catholics shorn [?],
> by dido forlorn, at Tyre who did fall;
> by tighe's dirty breeches, that both stinks and itches,
> i ne'er had a hand in king billy's downfall.[23]

What is noticeable about these references is not just how they rewrite the story of Dido to suit the circumstances and to make a good line, but also how they completely exclude any reference to Aeneas—and even Carthage.[24] Dido as a classical female is a familiar figure in Irish ballads, even receiving the honour of having her name spelled correctly by printers such as Baird and Peter Brereton (active 1872–*c.*1879 in Dublin),[25] whose orthography was otherwise highly unreliable. One reason for Dido's popularity might be a fondness for invoking the names of classical wanderers, such as Ulysses, Jason, Medea, and Hercules, a development perhaps to be linked to the turmoil of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Ireland.[26] That said, we can also see that popular impressions of Dido were sometimes rather ambiguous ('lightsome' is not exactly a compliment, nor is 'tyrant').

However, while the tradition had space for Dido, it did not for the equally peripatetic Aeneas. No one who researches ballads can claim completeness, but so far I have encountered only a single Irish ballad in which he is mentioned, 'The Dear Belfast Maid'. Even there his appearance is fleeting. One printing claims that the dear Belfast maid is more gorgeous than Dido: 'Dido sure that virgin pure that for Anias [*sic*] sake had died' (Harding B 25 (165)); no printer); another, however,

[23] All spelling and orthography as printed; 'Billy's Downfall' (Madden Vol. 25).

[24] It is possible that the presence of Tyre, rather than Carthage, as the home of Dido is an influence from the more literary and historical traditions that were focused on Irish origins in the Lebanon: see Cullingford (1996: 225–8); the popular tradition is also fond of referring to the Irish as 'Milesians'. This suggests some interaction between the popular and more literary traditions, but charting those interactions is very difficult.

[25] See Moulden (2006: 968).

[26] In England the instability of the period for many members of the labouring classes was reflected in popular ballads in their use of transient and unsettled figures such as sailors: see Fumerton (2006).

replaces Aeneas with 'his', and prints the line as 'Dido sure that virgin pure that for *his* sake had died' (my italics). While errors in transferring names are common (e.g. Acteon becomes Action/action and Ulysses becomes Uclopeous in Roud V3060; and Dido is even misspelled as Deido, though as a one-time occurrence this is unusual in its rarity), the printer or copyist of the song nearly always recognizes a name as a name, and tries to replicate it as best they can; whoever cut Aeneas from the second printing seems not to have known either of his existence or his connection with Dido.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular Irish culture, then, as in McGuiness' *Carthaginians,* Dido was of far more significance and interest than Aeneas, who is essentially erased. Indeed, if we take into account that some of the ballads mentioned above were still being collected from ballad singers in the 1950s, we could extend this lack of interest well into the twentieth century. This is despite the fact that Aeneas was an important figure in Jacobite literature,[27] and at least one major eighteenth-century Irish-language poem, Donncha Rua McNamara's *Eachtra Giolla an Amaráin* (*c.*1745), used Aeneas as a parodic model for its author's travels and misfortunes.[28] It is also surprising because classical couples usually appear in the ballads as couples; it is common to hear of Jason *and* Medea or Orpheus *and* Eurydice, for example. The only other comparable omission is Andromache, who is also erased entirely, perhaps so that Hector can be a paragon of unattached manly beauty (it also did not help that her name does not lend itself to rhyme in English or Irish). Aeneas' erasure might be prompted in popular ballad-making by a desire to have Dido equally unattached, and by a belief that he was the least interesting thing about her and her story. Whatever the case, his absence gives a surprisingly high profile to Dido, comparable to that of Hector, in Irish ballads.

Popular tradition in Ireland treats Dido and her narrative as extremely malleable, then, and happily inserts her into an array of local contexts and comparisons. This is paralleled by Dido in *Carthaginians*, where McGuinness remakes her into a male, gay, working-class Derry nationalist, who controls no empire, but who embraces his sexuality and refuses to hide his desires. For both this drama and the earlier popular tradition, Dido is not the 'defeated queen' of the *Aeneid*,[29] but an independent character with her own story.

[27] Pittock (1994: 38–42, 66–8). See, for example, *The Young Ascanius* (1746), a popular account of Bonnie Prince Charlie's struggles on behalf of his deposed father after Culloden, and available widely in cheap chapbook format.

[28] His name is also transliterated as Donnchadh/Donough/Denis Ruadh McConmara. For a complete text see Hayes (1853), Ó Flannghaile (1897), Ó Foghludha (1908). For fuller discussion of the poem's interaction with the *Aeneid* see O'Higgins (2017: 95–8) and McElduff (2011).

[29] Quotation from Cullingford (1996: 223).

Virgil as a Love Poet

Parallel to these developments, Irish ballads were turning to the Virgil of the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics,* discarding his epic reputation and seeing him as a poet of love or of rural praise. 'O'Sullivan's praise of his Lovely Dame' (Haly, Cork) sees Virgil—as well as Ovid and Julius Caesar[30]—as a love poet, exclaiming:

> If Ovid and Caesar strenuously,
> Or Virgil whose fame increased indeed,
> In chorus praised their fairest queen,
> Were unlike my dame whoe'er she be.

In 'A new song called Margaret Allen' the singer calls upon 'Virgil or great Homer' to assist him in his praise of the lovely Margaret (Cicero is also cited later in the ballad). Elsewhere the ballad tradition paired Homer and Virgil to praise hurling games,[31] landscapes ('Glendalough'), and oratory ('Famed O'Connell the Shamrock shall Wear'). In contrast to Virgil, however, it was Homer who played an exemplary role in patriotic ballads.[32] As we have seen above, when Zozimus Moran was defending himself in court, he called on Homer and Horace as patriotic praise singers, *not* Virgil. In the words of an 1805 ballad from Laggan (a region in the north-east of Donegal close to McGuinness's birthplace in Buncrana), Virgil wrote 'Sylvanian lays',[33] not heroic stories. Just as Dido's story was being shaped to the needs of the ballad tradition, so, too, did Virgil undergo a transformation, and that transformation frequently erased his connections with epic, Dido, Aeneas, and even Roman imperialism.

Popular Culture and Rome as a Model

None of this means, however, that Roman imperialism and Rome are absent from popular and peasant culture. Given a chance, Irish peasants, both Catholics and Protestants, could enthusiastically embrace Rome as a potential historical model, and celebrate her imperial victories. A phenomenally successful folk drama, *The Battle of Aughrim, or the fall of Monsieur St. Ruth* (1728) by Robert Ashton, shows considerable interest in connecting its Irish characters with Rome, both in its

[30] Julius Caesar is not exactly known as a love poet, though Caesar did write poetry and Pliny *Ep.* 5.3.5 cites him as a precedent in lighter/scurrilous poetry. Caesar was known, however, for his intense and public relationship with Cleopatra, which may have been a consideration, although it is more likely that the audience had no knowledge of such details and simply enjoyed the lyrics at face value.

[31] Crofton Croker (1839: 153).

[32] E.g. 'The Brave Defenders'; 'Irelands (*sic*) Lamentation for her beloved Canning'.

[33] Adams (1988: 68).

classical form *and* as the seat of the pope.[34] According to the writer and one-time hedge-school student William Carleton (1798–1869), this work was 'acted in barns and waste houses night after night' throughout Ulster,[35] although it never got a single official production on an Irish stage.

The play is a dramatic rendering of the bloodiest battle ever fought on Irish soil, the decisive clash at Aughrim between the troops of William of Orange and those of King James on 12 July 1691 in the old calendar (22 July in the new). The French and Irish are led by the villainous Charles Chalmont, Marquis de St Ruth (who was decapitated by a cannonball during the battle), but it is the Irish and English officers who are the heroes of the piece. The English get saddled with an unlikely and tragic romantic subplot, while the Irish spend nearly all their stage time talking of or engaging in war, or, in the case of Patrick Sarsfield, occasionally accusing St Ruth of treachery towards the Irish. The Irish are also constantly and positively compared to Roman heroes. In the very first scene St Ruth enthusiastically describes Colonel Talbot as an 'Irish Scipio',[36] and, later in the same act, describes Sarsfield returning to the camp 'like Great Emilius, when he enter'd Rome | In Pomp, bedew'd with Macedonian Tears'.[37] 'Great Emilius', i.e. Scipio the Younger, not only defeated the Macedonians and the Greeks, but was responsible for the complete and utter destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE; that fact clearly gave the participants no pause when they spoke these lines. Significantly, no one in the play—English, Irish, or French—is very keen on being identified as a Carthaginian or even compared to Hannibal, its greatest general. After the inevitable Irish defeat, right as the play reaches its final moments, Sarsfield rants that he will not

> …beg for Charity and seek Relief
> Like *Hannibal* the *Carthaginian* Chief
> Who when by *Scipio* he was overthrown,
> He fled to *Africk* like a Vagabond,
> Cloath'd as a Slave, dejected and obscure,
> He wander'd all alone from Door to Door:
> Then shall an Irish Soul submit like him,
> To forfeit Honour, and renounce a King?[38]

[34] On the play see Adams (1987: 69); Wheatley (1999: 63–84). The *Battle of Aughrim* was deeply unusual in that it featured performances by members of both religious communities, bringing them together to perform Ireland's past, even if sometimes those performances ended in pitched battle between the two sides (Carleton 1896: 28). The play saw a huge number of printings, including many in Ulster: still extant are editions from Belfast (1767 and 1800), Newry (1781) and Strabane (1785); and we have most likely lost a number of other local editions (Adams 1987: 70).

[35] Carleton (1896: 26); Carleton was involved in productions, helping the illiterate to learn their lines. We know the play was performed elsewhere: for example, Thackeray mentions a production in Galway, and found it easy to obtain a copy of the drama while in that city (1843: 173).

[36] Ashton (1777: 19). [37] Ashton (1777: 27). [38] Ashton (1777: 50).

When General Dorrington asks Sarsfield to leave the field shortly thereafter he is careful to use examples of others who fled to fight another day, including Darius, the Persian king defeated by Alexander the Great, as well as Regulus, Paulus, and Scipio, all Roman heroes of the First or Second Carthaginian Wars. Given a choice, Irish peasant audiences did not necessarily side with Hannibal and doomed Carthage over the more militarily glorious Romans. In contrast to works aimed at other audiences, such as Lady Morgan's 1806 novel *The Wild Irish Girl,* which 'bristles with antiquarian allusions to the Phoenicians' and sees them as a positive model,[39] popular culture gives us a very different understanding of the roles that Carthage, Rome, Dido, and Aeneas played in Ireland.

Carthaginians and a Boy Named Dido

> Dido; a girl who makes herself ridiculous with fantastic finery. (Carlow)
> Didoes (singular *dido*); tricks, antics: 'quit your didoes.' (Ulster)[40]

The malleable legacy of Dido lived on well into the twentieth century and in sometimes rather startling ways. Uniquely among all classical figures, her name was used, at least in Co. Carlow until the early twentieth century, to refer to women who wore flashy clothing to the point of ridicule—queening it up a bit too much, one might say. Even gender fluidity makes it into the mix: a boy who attended school alongside McGuinness in Buncrana was called Dido, leading him to assume it was a man's name until he read the *Aeneid*.[41] McGuinness's Dido thus continues in a long tradition when he shrugs off social norms, dresses in miniskirts, embraces his sexuality, and plays continuous games with the other characters of *Carthaginians*. Irish popular culture of the nineteenth century would have had little trouble incorporating a male Dido who is erotic and unconstrained by the suffocating legacy of a Virgilian namesake who kills herself for love, whereas in late-twentieth-century Derry, prior to McGuinness's play being performed, the portrayal of these elements in a nationalist male caused considerable public anxiety.[42] Dido's cross-dressing and open homosexuality might have given the tradition some pause—but even then it was in

[39] Cullingford (1996: 226). [40] Joyce (1910: 247). [41] Lojek (2004: 180).

[42] The production that McGuinness directed for Druid in 1992 was scheduled to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday, and toured to Derry only after considerable controversy about the character of Dido and the play's bad language: see Foley (1992); Lojek (2004: 127). On the slow road to the legalization of homosexuality in Ireland, which occurred only in 1993, and the appeals of gay rights activists to models from classical Greece, see Walshe (Ch. 12).

the nature of popular tradition to reshape characters, even eminent ones, to the needs of the moment.

But if McGuinness's Dido manages to escape the tragic role that a Dido is traditionally expected to play, he is surrounded by characters who have all in some way failed to properly play the social roles expected of them, and bear the scars from their attempts: Maela, a loving mother, lost her child to cancer on the day of Bloody Sunday and cannot accept that death; Greta mourns a brother that never existed and as a result of an early hysterectomy feels less than a full woman; Sarah left Ireland for greater things but became a drug addict and prostitute in Amsterdam. The men fare no better: Seph refuses to speak after informing on an IRA operation; Paul is building a pyramid of rubbish to bring back the dead as the only way to deal with the pain he sees around him; Hark acts the hard man, but did not volunteer to go on hunger strike with other IRA prisoners. No one in this play can comfortably fit into the roles they were handed by tradition and society, but Dido seems untroubled with that, even as the other characters struggle with their pasts.

The Rejection of Epic and High Tradition

Carthaginians opens as if it were firmly within high tradition, as the strains of the aria 'When I am Dead and Laid in Earth' from Purcell's seventeenth-century opera *Dido and Aeneas* echo across the stage while three women in a graveyard worry about the fate of a dying bird. The stage directions for the first production directed that the graves resemble the burial chambers at the Irish Neolithic site of Knowth,[43] evoking the more elevated world of Punic round towers from Carthage and the noble Irish past that Cullingford discusses.[44] The most monumental feature that Carthage and Derry share, great defensive city walls, is not mentioned at all, however. What we get instead is Paul's pyramid of rubbish under construction—an example of how in this play great imperial and military symbols are replaced by ones that might hold great hopes, but are nonetheless built out of waste material discarded by the city. After the opening strains from Purcell, we hear a few lines of David Bowie's 'Amsterdam' sung by Sarah, followed by a dirty joke. Shortly thereafter, Dido appears, he, too, singing, with slight changes, the second verse of 'Danny Boy' as he wheels a pram filled with deliveries for the women (perhaps poking fun at the expense of the abandoned Dido in the *Aeneid,*

[43] Gleitman (1994: 65).

[44] In the production for Derry these ancient grave markers were replaced by 'huge, set flats of layered headstones coloured in psychedelic strokes of orange, red and blue' (Foley (1992: 37)).

who wails that Aeneas hasn't even left her a 'little Aeneas' to comfort her (4.328)). In this way, we are separated from high tradition as quickly as it was invoked, a move that will be replayed throughout the drama.

At the moment of Dido's arrival the women's discussion moves from death to survival:

> MAELA: Hello, Dido. How are you, son?
> DIDO: Surviving, Maela. How are yous?
> MAELA: Grand. Surviving.[45]

The audience knows that Maela is barely surviving. Before Dido arrived she was singing happy birthday to her dead daughter and refusing to acknowledge her death. Dido's arrival brings back basic and physical concerns: food, coffee, cigarettes—and the payment for them. From the start Dido is openly concerned with money and its acquisition, telling Greta, who complains about his late arrival, 'Listen, wagon. I'm not running a charity service. Business, baby. I've other commitments.'[46] This Dido, a 'queen of Derry', neither wants nor can afford to be hosting guests night after night, even if he might stretch to a few cigarettes and some other treats for Hark (who gives Dido his regal title, and not as a compliment).[47]

Dido's unepic nature is further highlighted by the story of how he got his name. He claims he was named by a beautiful, drunk Lebanese man, whom he stumbled across on the docks:

> DIDO: When he gave me the flowers I was sure I'd scored and then he put his hand on my face and I thought, Yippee, but he just knelt down on the ground like this. (*kneels*) He said, 'Listen, listen to the earth. The earth can speak. It says, Cease your violent hand. I who gave birth to you will bring death to you. Cease your violent hand. That is my dream. I pray my dream comes true.' I said, 'I pray your dream comes true as well, but failing that I'll settle for Derry City winning the European Cup.' He smiled and called me Dido. I'd never met him or any like him before. It was like as if he knew me. I turned on my heel and ran like hell. (*He rises.)*
> HARK: Derry City will never win the European Cup.
> DIDO: Where's your loyalty? We need to build up a good team. Local, loyal.[48]

We are far from any epic model here. McGuinness's Dido wanders along the docks while looking for paid sex and comes upon this Lebanese man, a potential 'john' pointedly named John. In contrast, Virgil's Dido meets a princely Aeneas, enhanced

[45] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 301).
[46] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 301).
[47] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 364).
[48] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 326).

in beauty by his mother Venus, in the middle of her people as her city rises around her (*Aen*. 1.494–508). The fact that Dido's encounter in McGuinness is with a man from Lebanon, the region from which Dido set out for Carthage, complicates matters even further: is it Dido or John who is playing Aeneas here? Between this and Dido's words about building a 'loyal' team, which hints at loyalism (i.e. political allegiance to the British crown), or at least echoes it,[49] one begins to wonder exactly what sort of figure he is: is he supposed to be a victim or an oppressor? Or, like Dido, can he simultaneously be both?

At least this Dido's decision to flee is sensible: to anyone who has read the *Aeneid* and knows that Dido's affair with Aeneas ends with her suicide, McGuinness's Dido turning on his heel and fleeing was the most sensible option. Noticeably, whatever lasting effects this scene had on him, Dido finishes by being more interested in Derry City's unlikely hopes for football glory than anything else. 'Local, loyal', indeed. *Carthaginians* delights in shrugging off moments (first encounters, naming scenes) that would occupy an epic text for lines and lines; whether Derry City wins or loses is also of great importance and will receive as much attention.[50] Dido's naming is important, and presented in language that suggests how significant the encounter with John was. When he describes his first meeting with Maela in the graveyard while looking for suicide sponsors he uses far less elevated language.[51] Dido's name is also one that can be reshaped. Before the *Aeneid*, Virgil's Dido is a sailor, a wanderer, but she is also a settler looking for land to occupy; in the *Aeneid* and other texts she is fixed in Carthage and its environs, to the point of tragedy.[52] McGuinness's Dido is also a settler, with all that implies: he moves into Maela's house without her permission, telling her, 'I've moved into it for safety. Don't thank me. You're doing me a favour as well.'[53] The implication that the property has been occupied because its owner is not managing it appropriately echoes the land-politics and settlement issues in Northern Ireland, adding a further layer of complexity to the play's engagement with Virgil.

At the same time, Dido is also the most mobile character in *Carthaginians*. He may bear the name of a Punic queen, but he gets to move around like Aeneas, and even flees awkward situations like him. When he is not running away from Lebanese men, he is being carried out of the cinema, having been overcome by the

[49] Thanks to the editors for this suggestion.

[50] We might parallel here the ballads' fondness for evoking great classical heroines and heroes to talk about local beauties, events, and even in one case a garden.

[51] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 304).

[52] According to Timaeus, a Greek historian of the third century BCE, Dido did not meet and fall in love with Aeneas, but instead killed herself to avoid marriage to Iarbas, an African king, and to stay true to her first husband (a similar story is told in Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 5.17.5–6). Dido thus saves her city and her chastity in one move. This was the version picked up and made perhaps most popular through Justin's *Epitome of Roman History,* a text which was popular and quite cheaply available in England and Ireland in the nineteenth century (it is attested in Irish hedge schools, and appears frequently in catalogues of cheaper printed material).

[53] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 306).

gore of *Poltergeist* for the fifth time,[54] or wandering in graveyards, or flirting his way through checkpoints. When Hark viciously spurns and expresses his disgust for him,[55] rather than mope and mourn, Dido retaliates by smushing a pile of sausages into his chest.[56] Moments later he exclaims, 'Jesus, I wish I could meet somebody. Somebody really rich and wonderful. I need money.'[57] It is clear that this Dido, unlike his Virgilian counterpart, is never destroyed by his love affairs and will be able to move on from Hark. McGuinness rejects the epic Dido's noble but despairing death, and substitutes resilience, albeit a mercenary kind of resilience, for the original despair. Throughout *Carthaginians*, then, as we have seen, motifs and indicators of high culture and traditional epic are evoked only to be drawn down to popular and human levels, whether it is drama, love affairs, music, naming scenes, or colonization. It is not only Dido who is reshaped; rather, the whole structure and content of the play demand to be read as reclaiming and reshaping key indicators of culture for a world of ordinary, working-class imperial subjects.

Dido as Storyteller

In the *Aeneid* Dido falls in love with Aeneas at a banquet, where he tells the story of the destruction of Troy, a story she ends up making him tell over and over, night after night (4.77–9). In doing so, she forces her guest to become a storyteller of what is the worst night of his existence, the night he saw his city destroyed. It is a powerful story and through it Dido falls in love with Aeneas. But it is also a story that cannot but make intolerable demands on him: each night he must describe the disappearance, murder, rape, and enslavement of his friends and family. McGuinness's Dido is not so cruel; rather than force others to tell him their sufferings, like Virgil's Aeneas he creates stories (as Maela says, 'Dido always had a way with words').[58] In *Carthaginians* his literary achievement is represented by *The Burning Balaclava,* a play that is justly described by the other characters as 'shite'.[59] It was written by Dido in the persona of Fionnuala McGonigle, a French woman who has changed her name in empathy with the sufferings and changed name of ~~London~~Derry.[60] Names in *The Burning Balaclava* are meaningless except by the very precise criteria of Northern Ireland: every character is named some variant of Doherty, but the differences in spelling, e.g. Dogherty and Docherty, indicate—to those in the know—different religious backgrounds.[61]

[54] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 374).
[55] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 313–15).
[56] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 324).
[57] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 325).
[58] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 330).
[59] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 344).
[60] On self-dramatization by characters in McGuinness's drama see Dean (1999).
[61] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 331).

In this play within the play, Dido alone takes on two roles, perhaps mirroring the way his own character incorporates elements of both Dido *and* Aeneas.[62] He plays Doreen O'Doherty (most of the characters play a role of the opposite sex), a suffering Derry woman with a cocker spaniel named Boomer, *and* a 'faceless, nameless' working-class English soldier who is in deep torment because 'he is a working class boy sent here to oppress the working class'.[63] The soldier's torment, however, does not stop him from shooting Doreen's dog as a representative of the bourgeoisie. The highest rank anyone gets to play is that of a savage Royal Ulster Constabulary Sergeant (Dogherty), who beats Catholic suspects over the head with a crucifix and strangles them with rosary beads.[64] It is remarkable that although all the cast later call the play 'shite', they nevertheless participate enthusiastically, whether they are called on to re-enact their own oppression, albeit in ridiculous forms, *or* to perform the actions of their oppressors. In the play they lay down their lives, but through the power of drama they rise again—as they hope the dead in the graveyard will. All this Dido achieves through his storytelling.

Class and Gender in *Carthaginians*

The Burning Balaclava, the play produced by the characters in *Carthaginians*, horrifically distorts some iconic moments of the tragedy that unfolded on 30 January 1972, known as Bloody Sunday, when the British Army shot dead thirteen protestors on a march for civil rights (a fourteenth later died of his injuries) and falsely claimed the victims were rioting or carrying weapons. Seph plays a priest, Father O'Doherty, who has lost his voice and communicates via semaphore, evoking a famous photograph of Father Edward Daly waving a blood-stained handkerchief as a white flag in front of others carrying a body. Father O'Doherty uses his sheet to communicate more mundane matters, such as saying hello and the like,[65] and occasionally less mundane ones, such as going on missions of peace to Protestant areas.[66] In Dido's version of these events there is no one in charge—no officers giving commands, no British authorities, no leaders of the various nationalist and loyalist factions. Nor does the play feature any of those brought in after Bloody Sunday, such as Lord Chief Justice John Passmore Widgery, to whitewash the deaths.

Instead, *The Burning Balaclava* presents a plebeian British Empire violently tormenting working-class Irish nationalists, and a degraded version of empire in which two sets of plebeian groups struggle in an endlessly replicating series of atrocities. In *The Burning Balaclava*, the cast swap their gender and religious

[62] I owe this suggestion to the editors of the volume.
[63] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 334, and see also 344).
[64] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 333).
[65] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 336).
[66] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 341).

identities, but not their class. This is not unique to this part of *Carthaginians*, however. Elsewhere in the play it is suggested that changing gender is easier and more natural to imagine than altering one's class. Greta reports that when she got her first period her mother told her it came from the tooth fairy,[67] an unconvincing explanation that resulted in Greta's belief that she was turning into a man. When Sarah exclaims at the weirdness of her reasoning, Greta replies, 'Don't knock it if you haven't tried it. Whenever I was feeling lonely, it was some consolation to think I'd grow into my own brother. And I grew out of it.'[68] *Carthaginians*, then, repeatedly insists that gender fluidity is more attainable than class mobility.

Quizzes, Ballads, and the Value of Knowledge

Carthaginians also uses the quiz format to further drag Carthage, Rome, Virgil, and other elements of high culture into direct contact with popular culture. The play's quizzes do not distinguish between so-called 'high' and 'low' categories of knowledge: sometimes the quizmasters ask about composers and history, while other questions are based on the trivia of captains of sports teams and TV shows. Since the players get two points for knowing who won an Oscar as well as for knowing who wrote the *Aeneid*, the quiz levels the value accorded to certain types of information. In this respect the quizzes of the play resemble the ballad tradition: everything goes in, and everything has equal value, whether it is Dido, Venus, or a particularly good-looking woman or garden. In *Carthaginians*, quizzes also bring the characters together in the brief flourishing of the 'Derry Renaissance', whose sole product is quiz night, and which ends its brief and glorious reign in a single pub due to an unfortunate incident involving mustard, a cat's posterior, and animal protection.[69] Throughout the play quizzes continue to bind the characters in rituals of question and answer, and help them to restore each other in moments of crisis. When Maela finally accepts the death of her daughter and breaks down at the horror of it, and of Bloody Sunday, and cries out to Dido to take her to mass, the other characters respond by improvising a quiz to bring her back to them:

DIDO: Who wrote *The Firebird,* Maela?
Silence
Who, Maela?
MAELA: No.

[67] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 349.
[68] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 349). The first production of the play was more interested in issues of gender and gender fluidity than subsequent versions; many of the changes between the versions involved cuts in this area: see Harris (2009).
[69] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 355–8).

PAUL: *The Firebird,* who wrote it, Maela?
MAELA: Stravinsky.
PAUL: What nationality?
MAELA: Russian.[70]

On the other hand, quizzes also move on relentlessly from question to question. The minimal time they allow for reflection troubles some of the characters:

PAUL: I was at a quiz tonight, but I said nothing. I used to run it. Questions and answers. What's the capital –? Who won an Oscar for –? Who captained Arsenal –? Fuck sports questions. Selling out. Who wrote *The Aeneid?* Virgil. Who did Virgil guide through the city of hell? That's a tough one, boys. Who will guide me through this city of hell?[71]

Paul is silenced because this quiz, which takes place outside a graveyard, does not allow for further reflection on the correct answers. Once back in graveyard space, however, he finds himself able to break out of the structure of quizzes and turn the conversation where he wants it to go:

PAUL: Roman. This city is not Rome, but it has been destroyed by Rome. What city did Rome destroy?
GRETA: Carthage.
PAUL: Correct. Two points. Carthage.
GRETA: How are we in Carthage?
PAUL: Tell them you saw me sitting in the ruins, in the graveyard. I live in Carthage among the Carthaginians, saying Carthage must be destroyed, or else – or else –
GRETA: What?
PAUL: I will be destroyed. I would like to go to Carthage.
GRETA: I would like to go to Rome.
PAUL: I would like to see the pyramids. I'm building a pyramid. But I'm no slave. I am Carthaginian. This earth is mine, not Britain's nor Rome's. Am I right?[72]

The character who turns out to be obsessed with Carthage and the *Aeneid* is Paul rather than Dido.[73] He repeatedly brings us back to them, but in deeply unstable ways, as the passage above shows. The most famous person to sit in the ruins of Carthage was not a Carthaginian (there were few of them still alive when it fell), but Gaius Marius, a general of the late Roman Republic, who sat there and wept when he was on the losing side of a bloody civil war, making him an appropriate analogue, in some ways, for a man despairing in the middle of another. It was

[70] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 352).
[71] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 309).
[72] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 309–10).
[73] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 365; cf. 368–9).

Cato the Elder who pushed his fellow Romans to raze Carthage by repeatedly stating that 'it must be destroyed'. These allusions suggest that Paul wants to visit Carthage as a *Roman* destroyer or as a tourist, not a mourner. We might even call him an Irish Scipio (another Roman who wept outside Carthage as he was destroying it), as Talbot and Sarsfield were termed in *The Battle of Aughrim*. Such shifts and connections easily destabilize the identification of those in the graveyard with those Carthaginians who sat in their city waiting for the Romans to come over the wall and end their city's existence, and suggest that even those who reject imperialism are not free from its seductions.

History and Memory

The repetition of historical knowledge or trivia in quizzes is a key way in which characters in *Carthaginians* defuse situations or speak of their desires, as if only in repeating fragments of history can they find their footing once more amid the horrors of Derry, and face the truth. But this approach to history has a levelling effect: the fate of empires and great cities has the same value as remembering that Frank McClintock and his lovely legs captained Arsenal in 1971[74]—and missing the latter point prompts as much self-reflection among the characters as questions about Carthage or the *Aeneid* do, highlighting how trivial information is placed alongside great historical questions and tragedies. Gleitman notes that in this respect *Carthagianians* resembles the pyramid that Paul is building: 'this play – with its allusive title and its wealth of allusions to other texts is constructed from a long swath of cultural material leveled to a common factor, like the trash of the pyramid, and piled into a structure.'[75] This aspect of the play is troubling within the larger context of the role of memory in Ireland: memory, representation of the past, and performing the past, whether through parades or other means, has particular resonance in Ireland, where 'perhaps more than in other cultures, collective groups have… expressed their values and assumptions through their representation of the past'.[76]

But to what memories do the characters in *Carthaginians* give cultural weight? What great loss do they enact on the stage for us, comparable to the great loss of Aeneas suffered by Dido in Virgil? The answer is the enactment of Bloody Sunday, and the recognition of the names and identities of the slain, and of the streets in which they lived. Historical figures have cried over Dido from St Augustine to William Carleton; in contrast, McGuinness's characters take as their concern the mourning of ordinary imperial subjects for other ordinary subjects. These dead

[74] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 363). [75] Gleitman (1994: 65). [76] McBride (2001b: 3).

were not just residents of Derry, of an ancient town with famous walls; they lived along small streets, in particular neighbourhoods with their own meanings and histories. This is how Paul remembers the dead of that terrible day in the last scene of the play:

> Bernard McGuigan, forty-one years, Inishcairn Gardens, Derry. Patrick Doherty, thirty-two years, Hamilton Street, Derry. Michael Kelly, seventeen, from Dunmore Gardens, Derry. William McKinney, twenty-seven, from Westway, Derry. James Wray, twenty-three, Drumcliffe Avenue, Derry. Hugh Gilmore, seventeen years old, Garvan Place, Derry. Jack Duddy who was seventeen, Central Drive, Derry. William Nash, nineteen, Dunree Gardens, Derry. Michael McDaid, twenty-one, Tyrconnell Street, Derry. Gerald Donaghy, seventeen, Meenan Square, Derry. John Young, seventeen, Westway, Derry. Kevin McElinney, Knockdara House, Waterside, Derry.[77]

In contrast, when Maela earlier described Bloody Sunday and its body count,[78] she mentioned no names: just streets and the rising number of the dead as she moves through the city. Catalogues of troops, their leaders, and their origins have been a feature of epic since Homer's 'Catalogue of Ships' in book 2 of the *Iliad*. However, in *Carthaginians* no admirals or generals are named; instead, we hear the names of ordinary people living ordinary lives until the day of their deaths, and, as the drumbeat of repetition emphasizes, all from one city, Derry, not all Ulster, Ireland, England, Greece, or Italy, as in the *Aeneid*'s catalogues (7.647–817; 10.163–214). These people came from 'little streets', to borrow from W. B. Yeats's 'No Second Troy', first published in 1916; and when little streets get 'hurled upon the great' in Ireland, things do not go well for the little streets. The epic catalogue is transformed and humbled by Paul, just as he reduces the colossal architecture of pyramids to a construction of insubstantial rubbish.

Conclusion

Empire is an engine whose fuel is the labouring classes and the poor. Rome's late Republican army was increasingly drawn from its landless urban poor after an expanding Roman state imposed impossible demands on, and chewed its way through, the smallholders who were supposed to make up its backbone. The British Army in Northern Ireland was made up of working-class boys and men from economically deprived areas of England, sent to Northern Ireland under the

[77] On the records of those who died during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, see also Alden (Ch. 16).

[78] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 351–2).

command of officers who came from a different class. Those who died on Bloody Sunday at the hands of the army were also working-class young men, whose lives in those moments did not matter particularly to anyone in charge. *Carthaginians* brings to the fore that the costs of empire are not generally paid for on the floors of senates or in the houses of the wealthy; they are paid for by the poor, the working classes. Even the prophecies of fated, proper, and eternal rule in which empires invest are punctured:[79] *Carthaginians* has no time for prophets. At the end of the first scene Paul attacks St Malachy, an Ulster saint and author of dire (and surprisingly popular) prophecies:

> He saw the end of the world. He prophesied it. He saw the waters rise over Derry. He saw the Foyle and the Swilly meet, and that will be Derry gone. He saw it, but will he stop it? No. He sees the state of this town, but so do I see it. And I will search every dump in this town for rubbish. I'm building a pyramid. When the dead rise, I'll walk into the pyramid again and walk away from this town and the state it's in. And if I find St Malachy hiding in this city, I'll kill him, I'll kill him, I'll knock his teeth down his throat.[80]

St Malachy might have written apocalyptic and biblical fantasies of a great cataclysm swallowing Derry, but the pyramid of *Carthaginians* is decidedly non-epic.

The only way to escape from the demands of empire is to reject historical models and refuse to accept them as destiny, to see instability as a form of possible escape, to reject that Dido, for example, must mean only one thing: suicide and the loss of empire. In doing so, in refusing to die for a non-existent Aeneas or even for Hark, McGuinness's Dido 'survives rejected love, does not die, does leave Carthage.'[81] As the other characters sleep in the graveyard, waiting for the dead to rise, he creeps away from them and out of the city, in a final scene where he has all the words: 'If I meet one who knows you and they ask, 'How's Dido? Surviving. How's Derry? Surviving. Carthage has not been destroyed. Watch yourself.'[82] With these words he leaves, reversing not only the fate of Dido, but that of the working-class soldier whose part he plays in the lines quoted at the start of this chapter. But even as Dido escapes Derry and his own fate, he carries with him an ambiguity that would have been familiar, at least in part, to earlier audiences who listened to ballads and performed their history in the *Battle of Aughrim*.

[79] See, for example, Jupiter's words to Venus in the *Aeneid* that Aeneas' heirs will be given 'empire without end' (1.279, where 'without end' is both spatial and temporal) and are destined to be 'lords of all' (1.282).

[80] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 308).

[81] Lojek (2004: 125).

[82] McGuinness (1996 [1992]: 379).