

Studying the Child Actors of the Children of the Chapel
through Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*

By

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Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), based upon the events of Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 BC), tells the story of the love affair between Dido, the Queen of Carthage, and Aeneas, a Trojan hero and the founder of Rome. The play details their unofficial marriage and Dido's descent into madness when Aeneas chooses to pursue his destiny by sailing to Italy rather than remaining in Carthage with her. The play takes place between Mount Olympus – where Juno, the queen of the gods, and Venus, the goddess of love, are orchestrating all the events of the play, and earth where the humans must deal with the consequences of their manipulation by gods. *Dido* is a difficult play to categorize into a genre, because even though at times it seems like a comedy, the play ends as a tragedy with the suicide of Dido along with several other characters, and the cursing of Aeneas, a verbal assault that prophesizes the Punic Wars, three brutal wars fought between the people of Carthage and the people of Rome, the ancestors of Dido and Aeneas. Marlowe's *Dido* was originally performed by the Children of the Chapel, an early modern children's company in which each of the characters, whether an adult or a child, was portrayed by a boy.¹ While it may seem as though the plot of the *Dido* revolves around the affairs of adult characters, Marlowe also offers a metatheatrical critique of the children's companies by portraying the power dynamics of the adult managers and the boy actors in these companies through the interactions between adult and child characters in *Dido*.

¹ Presumably the taller, older boys would have played the adult characters, while the small, younger boys would have portrayed the child characters thereby making the power differences instantly recognizable to the audience members viewing the play, based on the height of the actors. While casting would also depend on which boys were available to act in any given play, this method of casting based on height seems very likely in *Dido*, because so many of the adult characters pick up the child characters and sit with them on their laps, suggesting that they would have to be strong enough to do so, i.e. Ganymede sits in Jupiter's lap in 1.1 and Cupid disguised as Ascanius sits in Dido's lap in 3.1.

Marlowe's *Dido* follows the events of books 1, 2, and 4 of the *Aeneid*, but Marlowe also adds other scenes to his rendition of Dido's story, including 1.1. This first scene of the play acts as a set piece for the play that follows and features Jupiter and Ganymede. It begins with a stage direction indicating that "Jupiter [is] dandling Ganymede upon his knee" (Marlowe 1.1.1). Jupiter, the king of the gods, then invites Ganymede, a former Trojan prince whom he has kidnapped and brought to Mount Olympus, to "play" with him (Marlowe 1.1.1). The word "dandle" seems innocent, defined as "to move (a child, etc.) lightly up and down in the arms or on the knee; to make much of, pet, fondle, pamper; to trifle, play, or toy with," but it can also have sexual connotations as well (*OED Online* "dandle, v."). Likewise, the word "play," in this context has a double meaning, because while Jupiter may be behaving like a fatherly figure towards Ganymede, the relationship of Jupiter and Ganymede in classical mythology suggests that this is not the case since in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter and Ganymede are lovers (Ovid 10.155-161). Just as this scene involving Ganymede can have multiple interpretations based on the way in which the wordplay and interactions between characters is interpreted, the child actors who portrayed these characters were thought to dual identities as well, being both harmlessly humorous and dangerously corrupting.² For example, in the middle of 1.1, another adult

² This conflict of opinion surrounding the boy actors and their dually innocent and sexual identities can be seen in the character of Cupid in *Dido* who is also an actor in this play, performing a role in Venus's plan to make Dido fall in love with Aeneas. In 2.1 of the play Cupid informs his mother that he will "so *play* [his] part" in her scheme (Marlowe 2.1.332-333, emphasis mine). The word "play" can mean "to act, to perform," "to engage in fun, games, or merriment," and "to engage in amorous play, to make love; to have sexual intercourse with" (*OED Online* "play, v."). Cupid utilizes all three of these definitions through his use of the word "play". For Cupid, making people fall in love is a game, because he can be impish at times. It is also a performance, because in order to infiltrate Dido's world Cupid pretends to be Ascanius (Marlowe 2.1.323). Cupid's role in Venus's plot also involves implied sexual connotations, because in order to accomplish his task he will have to seduce various characters and also fend off the amorous advances of other characters, i.e. Cupid makes Dido fall in love with him in a maternal way, and he rejects the love of the Nurse who wants to molest him (Marlowe 2.1.332-

character, Venus, enters the stage. Her reaction to seeing Jupiter with Ganymede is to accuse Ganymede of seducing Jupiter and to scold Jupiter for wasting his time “playing with that female wanton boy” (Marlowe 1.1.51).³ Venus is echoing an argument of some of the antitheatricalists who blamed the boys for seducing their adult audiences⁴. Marlowe’s inclusion of this scene in *Dido*, a scene that does not appear in Virgil, suggests that Marlowe intended to make a statement about the interactions between children by adults in the children’s companies. This paper will explore the ways in which the relationships between the characters of children and adults in *Dido* evoke those that existed between the masters of the Children of the Chapel and the boy actors in early modern England.

There are three child characters in *Dido*: Ascanius, who is a mortal child; Ganymede, a child who was immortalized by Jupiter; and Cupid, an immortal child.⁵ While these children lack physical power, they do have the ability to emotionally manipulate the adult characters, something that the boy actors of the children’s companies were credited with as well. This demonstrates the coexisting states of power and powerlessness of the child actors; they could make their audiences love them through their performances, but as children, they had no autonomy and could not choose to leave the company if they disliked performing.

333, 3.1, 4.5). Cupid is like the boy actors in that he looks innocent, but behaves flirtatiously, and is an actor who is compelled to perform at the behest of an adult – in his case the adult who controls him is Venus, in the case of the boy actors it was the adult managers of the children’s companies who told them what to do.

³ “Wanton” refers to “a person, a person's will, etc.: undisciplined, ungoverned; unmanageable, rebellious. Of a child (esp. in later use): disobedient, unruly; naughty,” but in the context of Venus’s words refers to a person who is “lustful; not chaste, sexually promiscuous.” (OED Online “wanton, adj. and n.”).

⁴ There were also many antitheatricalists who argued in defense of the boys, accusing the adult masters of the children’s companies of corrupting their boy actors.

⁵ Cupid’s identity as a child is ambiguous, because the notion of childhood is dependent on time, and as an immortal being he will present as a child forever.

Each of the child characters of *Dido* have different degrees of agency. Some of the child characters of *Dido* willingly obey the adult characters, such as Ascanius; some of them are placed in the service of the adults by their parents, such as Cupid, whose mother Venus often involves him in her plots; some of them are kidnapped and forced to do the bidding of the adult characters, such as Ganymede. This array of situations interestingly parallels that of the Children of the Chapel in their relationship to the company. Some of its members were actors by choice; some were placed in the company by their parents who hoped that their child would learn a profession; some of the children were impressed into the company, an early modern term describing the forcible incorporation of soldiers into the army, or children into an acting company (OED Online "impress, n.2."). These categories can shift and overlap as well. For example, even though Ascanius willingly follows his grandmother Venus, he does not consent to the somnolence that Venus imposes upon him, nor to his identity being used as a costume for Cupid to wear;⁶ and while there is no language in *Dido* to suggest that Ganymede willingly plays the role of Jupiter's lover, Ganymede does manage to make the best of his situation, negotiating for love-tokens in exchange for his affections – something that some of the impressed child actors did as well, forging successful careers as actors once they aged out of the children's companies and into the adult ones (Marlowe 2.1.323-327, 4.4.105-109). For example, Nathan Field, a boy actor who is directly mentioned in Henry Clifton's suit, a famous 16th century kidnapping case that will be discussed later in this paper, grew up to be a famous Elizabethan actor (Munro 38).

In order to study the nuances of the way in which power functioned and was exploited in the Children of the Chapel through *Dido*, it is important to note that the ability of the child

⁶ From scene 3.1 to 4.5, the majority of the play, Ascanius is played by Cupid in disguise.

characters, like the talent of the child actors, to emotionally manipulate adults, does not necessarily equate to their having power, because sometimes the children are being coerced to perform by their adult masters. For example, Cupid spends 3.1 making Dido fall in and out of love with Aeneas in quick succession. It is comical because Iarbus, the king of Gaetulia and one of Dido's suitors, is in this scene as well, and when Dido's affections shift back and forth for Aeneas, they change for Iarbus as well, leading to much comical confusion. This scene portrays Cupid as a mischievous character who manipulates the emotions of adults for his own amusement, but in actuality he is only following the instructions of Venus, as expressed in the previous scene (Marlowe 2.1.323-333). This scene also suggests the darkness of the comedy in this play as well, because the ease with which Cupid makes Dido fall in love with Aeneas, suggests that at the end of the play, he could just as easily extinguish her passion, thus preventing her madness and suicide in 5.1. However, Cupid disappears from the play at the end of 4.5 and while it is unclear whether Cupid would like to reverse Dido's emotions, regardless he cannot act without his mother's permission, and it can be assumed that at the end of the play Venus calls him back to Mount Olympus and like any child, when his mother calls him home, he must obey.

In order to understand the phenomenon of children's acting companies and the experiences of child actors in early modern England it is first important to define what it meant to be a child in this time period. The simplest definition of a child for the purposes of this paper is: a person who has not yet experienced puberty, which was assumed in the 16th century to take place around fourteen years of age (Kathman 221). This definition of children is significant because, the actors of the Children of the Chapel were usually between ten and fourteen years old, meaning that they were considered children according to the standards of early modern England (Munro 39). They were much younger than apprentices, some of whom would have

trained in the adult acting companies, who could be as old as twenty-two years old (Kathman 220).

The transition of boys into adulthood was signified, like it is today, by facial hair growing on their faces and deepening voices (Toulalan 137).⁷ However, unlike today, there does not seem to have been any conception of adolescence. Puberty, sexual maturity, was linked directly to adulthood, marriage, and procreation. This is evidenced by the legal age of marriage being fourteen for boys, the assumed age of puberty as well. The difference between children and adults was determined by physical sexual maturity in early modern England, rather than mental sexual maturity; and mental maturity does not necessarily coincide with physical maturity. Therefore in the early modern period a child could be considered to be mentally sexually mature, but not physically, having not yet passed through puberty. The debate over whether early modern children possessed sexual agency when they expressed themselves sexually or were being exploited is preserved through the texts of the antitheatricalists, some of whom were worried with the welfare of the boy actors and others who were concerned about the effect that viewing the boys had on their audiences. Perhaps some of the popularity of the children's companies can be credited to the fact that the child actors often performed bawdy roles in which they pretended to be sexually mature, while it was clear by their smooth faces and high voices that they were not (Toulalan 138). They are both imitating and satirizing the conditions of their own performance by playing histrionic versions of adults. This fluctuating identity between child and adult in the boy actors fascinated early modern audiences and the children's companies capitalized on this.

Turning back towards *Dido* and its metatheatrical qualities, the play directly references the nefarious tactics that the children's companies used in order to procure some of their actors,

⁷ This paper will only be examining the definition of male children since girls did not act in the children's companies or in the adult ones.

specifically the kidnapping and impressment of some of the children, by having the adult characters of *Dido* constantly handling the children, picking them up, or leading them around the stage. For example, as it was mentioned earlier, the play begins with Jupiter “dandling” Ganymede on his knee, a word which only appears in the play on one other occasion, when Dido “dandlest” Cupid, disguised as Ascanius in her arms (Marlowe 1.1, 5.1.45). Venus physically leads Ascanius around the stage by his sleeve, as indicated by the stage direction between 2.1.303-304, an unusually specific detail considering how sparse stage directions are in most early modern texts, and both his Aeneas and Venus are constantly compelling him to sleep – another form of physical manipulation (Marlowe 1.1.64, 2.1.316). A direct reference to the kidnapping of children is expressed by Ganymede who refers to himself as “[seeming] fair, walled-in with eagle’s wings” – alluding to the fact that Jupiter stole him from Troy in the form of an eagle (Marlowe 1.1.16). This reference is especially poignant since the character of Ganymede may have been portrayed by an actor who was a victim of kidnapping himself. Other more subtle suggestions of the practice of kidnapping children is found in the connections between the children of *Dido* and their connections to Helen of Troy: Ganymede is a Trojan prince, Ascanius is a Trojan boy, and Cupid sings songs that Helen taught him (Marlowe 3.1.27-28). Helen, like some of the boy actors in the Children of the Chapel, was kidnapped by Theseus as a child as well, a kidnapping that precedes her kidnapping by Paris when she grew up (Plutarch xxxi).

Ganymede is not the only child who is kidnapped in *Dido*. Dido herself kidnaps Ascanius, Aeneas’s son and sleeps with Ascanius in her bed, just as Ganymede sleeps in Jupiter’s bed. Dido loves Ascanius as a “mother” rather than a lover, as Jupiter loves Ganymede, but Dido still kidnaps Ascanius against his will. She sends him to stay with the Nurse, holding

Ascanius as collateral, in order to prevent Aeneas from finding him and sailing away to Italy (Marlowe 2.1.96, 4.4.32, 105-109). The Nurse is a completely willing participant in Dido's kidnapping scheme and while Ascanius agrees to call the nurse "mother," he only does so because she asks him to; the word "mother" is no more maternal with regard to the Nurse than if the word "father" had been used to describe the relationship between Jupiter and Ganymede (Marlowe 4.5.16-17). Like Jupiter and Dido, the Nurse is captivated by the beauty of the boy in her care and suggests that she would rape him if she was younger and stronger (Marlowe 4.5.30). The Nurse describes Ascanius as a "wag," a term used by Jupiter to describe Ganymede as well (Marlowe 1.1.23, 4.5.19). The term "wag" means "a mischievous boy . . . often as a mother's term of endearment to a baby boy," but the nurse's further description of Ascanius as a future "twigger," "a vigorous prolific breeder; an unchaste or lascivious person; esp. a strumpet, a harlot" indicate that the nurse does not use "wag" in the motherly way in which Dido uses the term to describe Ascanius at the banquet (*OED Online* "twigger, n," "wag, n.2."; Marlowe 4.5.20). *Dido* illustrates the culture of kidnapping that existed within early modern England by revealing it through scenes such as these featuring the Nurse. Cupid and Ascanius are never in any real danger because Venus will protect them; at the same time, however, *Dido* also demonstrates the real danger that children could find themselves in if they had no adults outside the company to advocate for their protection, referencing for example the situation that Ganymede finds himself, in which Jupiter owns him.

Despite their age, and categorization as children according to the definition of early modern society, the actors in children's companies were, like apprentices, considered commercial resources for financial gain by their masters, but unlike the apprentices they were

not protected by the law (Busse 77).⁸ In fact the laws functioned against them, as impressment was a legalized practice and endorsed by the Queen who used her own statutes in order to obtain talented children for her choir. These statutes were the same ones used by the masters of the children's companies in order to acquire their actors as well (Busse 97n11). The financial asset of these children to their companies was significant - some of the children were so valuable that members of rival companies would kidnap actors from each other in order to cause the other monetary injury. For example, in 1575 Sebastian Westcott reported that one of his "principal plaiers, is lately stolen and conveyed from him" (qtd. in Dasent 56). Westcott's complaint makes it clear that he sees the theft of his actor as a direct injury to himself, not just to his company, the Children of Paul's, that he was overseeing at the time of the abduction, because he views the actors as his property.

The system of impressing children was defended as an unofficial form of early apprenticeship, providing children with an education at the same time as training the children in a profession, unlike their peers who typically only started an apprenticeship after completing their education (Kathman 220).⁹ The company masters also claimed that this system was necessary because they needed actors with high voices to play the roles of women on stage. Since most apprentices were fourteen and older, thus having already entered puberty, it was more difficult to ensure that their voices had not broken yet. While this explanation seems logical, the masters of the children's companies had ulterior motives for advocating for this system: apprentices could quit their positions whereas impressed children rarely had any legal recourse if

⁸ The same adults who impressed children into the acting companies apprenticed others as well. For example, Thomas Kendall, one of the adults involved in the Children of the Chapel, also took on Abel Cooke as an apprentice in 1606 and he may have apprenticed other young men as well (Manly, Munro 38-39).

⁹ Of course, not all children went to school. Many entered the workforce without any formal education depending on the individual circumstances of their lives.

they wanted to leave the company (Munro 38-39). As well, the children's companies were not always educating the children, with the masters of the companies using the promise of education as a façade, especially those acting companies that were not directly associated with schools (Corrigan 74, Munro 17, 37).

Claire M. Busse hypothesizes that there is relatively little evidence available about the specific experiences of the child actors, in comparison to information regarding the management of the children's companies in general is because the child actors did not earn wages and could not hold shares in their companies; information regarding the economics of a company was the most important to record, not the human cost of running a successful children's company (Busse 81, 98n19).¹⁰ When child actors are mentioned, they are referred to in the same manner as a list of inventory, because they were like company property (Van Es 199-200). There are however, some surviving accounts of child actors, including Salomon Pavey, Thomas Clifton, and Thomas Tusser and these give modern scholars insight into early modern society and children's companies (Busse 81).

Thomas Tusser, for example, wrote a poem about his experiences as a child who was selected to be a chorister for St. Paul's Cathedral, on account of his talent for singing (Tusser Aar). In his poem "The Auctors Life," Tusser writes:

¹⁰ Busse also argues that the individual performances of the child actors and their popularity allowed the children to gain some control over their lives as members of a children's company – the better a child could act, the more popular they were, and the more money they made. Even though the children could not keep the money, the individual boys could obtain the social currency of fame (Busse 80). The currency of name recognition is found in *Dido* through the character of Aeneas. As soon as he reveals his identity in 2.1, Dido immediately recognizes who he is from all of the stories she has heard about him and gives him food and shelter – his survival is dependent upon his name being recognized. Likewise, the boy actors were expendable due to the acceptability of impressment. However, those who were famous, such as Pavey were more likely to receive better treatment than those who were unknown, because there were more people outside of the companies interested in them and their wellbeing.

Then, for my voyce, I must (no choyce)
Away of force, like poesting horse,
For sundry men had placards then
such childe to take:
The better brest, the lesser rest,
To serve the Queene, now there, now here
For time so spent, I maye repent,
and sorrowe make. (Tusser Aar)

The “placards” that Tusser refers to are the same statutes that allowed the masters of the children’s choirs and companies to impress children, even against the will of their parents, and Tusser makes it clear that he was indeed taken against his will (Tusser Aar).¹¹

While Tusser eventually grew up, left the choir, and had a successful career, the case of Salomon Pavey is the story of well known child actor died at the age of thirteen, too young to transition out of the Children of the Chapel and prove himself as an adult (Riggs 91).¹² Pavey’s memory is preserved in an epitaph that Ben Jonson composed upon his death. Jonson writes in epitaph cxx titled Epitaph on S.P. A Child of Queen Elizabeth’s Chappel:

Weepe with me all you that read
This little storie:
And know, for whom a teare you shed,
Death’s selfe is sorry.

¹¹ Tusser went on to study at Eton College and King’s College. He is best known for writing *A Hundreth Goode Points of Husbandrie* (1557), a book that was reprinted sixteen times and to which four hundred additional points were added over the course of the editions. An updated version of this text appeared under the new title *Tusser Revivius* in 1710 and 1744 (Sununu 714).

¹² Salomon Pavey is also sometimes referred to as Salathiel Pavey.

'Twas a child, that so did thrive
In grace, and feature,
As Heaven and Nature seem'd to strive
Which own'd the creature.
Yeeres he numbred scarce thirteene
When Fates turn'd cruell,
Yet three fill'd Zodiackes had he beene
The stages jewell;
And did act (what now we mone)
Old men do duely,
As, sooth, the Parcae thought him one,
He plai'd so truely.
So, by error, to his fate
They all consented;
But viewing him since (alas, too late)
They have repented.
And have fought (to give new birth)
In bathes to steepe him;
But, being so much too good for earth,
Heaven vowes to keepe him. (Jonson Yyyiiv-Yyyiir)

Jonson seems to express sincere grief in this epitaph, but it is notable that he remembers Pavey through his identity as the child actor, not the real boy that he was. No one records the stories that Salomon enjoyed, the games he liked to play, or the way he interacted with his

friends, etc., only the characters he played on the stage.¹³ Pavey is described in Jonson's poem as a "creature," and a product and possession of the stage, i.e. "the stages jewel," not as a boy (Jonson Yyyiiv). Essentially he did not exist for Jonson, and probably many of his other fans, outside of his roles on stage.

The poem focuses on Pavey's portrayal of adults as it argues that he played the roles of "old men" so well that the Parcae, the Fates, thought that he was one and mistakenly took his life too early (Jonson Yyyiir). As Busse notes there are connections between the Fates who take children and the adult managers of the children's companies who kidnap children and determine their fates for them as well (Busse 97n12). Pavey himself, for example, was kidnapped and impressed into the Children of the Chapel at the age of ten and therefore his career as a child actor, while successful, was not one in which he had any choice (Riggs 92). Busse also argues that there is a connection between what happens to Pavey in this poem and what happened to Thomas Clifton, another boy who was abducted and impressed into the Children of the Chapel; just as the Fates decide to keep Pavey, even once they become aware that taking him was a mistake, the managers of the Children of the Chapel refused to release Thomas Clifton back to

¹³ A modern example of this phenomenon can be seen in the way that JonBenet Ramsey, a young girl murdered in 1996, is remembered in North American culture – as a pageant girl, rather than a real child who happened to participate in pageants, but also probably attended school, had hobbies, and played with friends etc. (Conrad 319). Although it may seem as though conceptions of childhood have dramatically shifted from the early modern period to the present, I believe that there are more similarities between our attitudes towards children than we would like to acknowledge. I believe that this is most evident when comparing the early modern children's companies and modern child beauty pageants, i.e. both feature child performers, who are dressed in child-size versions of adult clothes, made up to look like adults, taught to perform by adults, and are placed in performance venues by adults, in which they compete for fame and money. Some of the children probably enjoy performing and some probably do not; some children probably quit as soon as they age out of pageants and some probably continue, using their experiences performing as preparation for careers involving performance in their adult lives. In all these ways the child actors of the early modern children's companies are very similar to the child competitors of the modern beauty pageants.

his father, Henry Clifton, even when they realized that they had taken a nobleman's son. It was not until Henry Clifton took the managers of Children of the Chapel to court that he was able to secure the liberation of his son from the company (Busse 97n12).

The Thomas Clifton case is arguably one of the most important cases concerning child actors and the children's acting companies in the early modern period. It brings attention to the methods of the children's acting companies in acquiring their actors, the statutes that legally empowered the masters of these companies and encouraged them to continue their behavior, and it names other child actors, who, like Thomas, had been forcibly impressed into them, valuable evidence considering how little information is available concerning the child actors themselves. This case also illustrates that while the children's companies were popular institutions in the early modern period, the public was not always aware and accepting of their practices. This is evidenced by the fact that Thomas Clifton was kidnapped in 1600, Henry Clifton brought his case to court in 1601, and by 1606 Nathaniel Giles, one of the masters of the Children of the Chapel, who is also specifically mentioned in Henry Clifton's suit, was banned from training children to be "stage players," a result that may have been spurred by the collective public outrage and disgust at the activities of the Children of the Chapel and the children's companies in general as exposed by the Clifton case (Smith 185).

In Henry Clifton's case the induction of Thomas Clifton into the Children of the Chapel is alleged to have happened in the following way: on the thirteenth of December 1600, James Robinson, Henry Giles, Nathaniel Evans, and possibly others, kidnapped Thomas Clifton while he was walking home from school. They then took him away to the Blackfriars playhouse and forced him to become a member of the Children of the Chapel, threatening to beat him if he did not memorize his lines (Fleay 129, 131). The violence that Thomas experienced through the

practice of impressing children is palpable in the case that his father presented to court. The suit alleges that the masters of the company did

with greate force & violence . . . seise & surprise [Thomas Clifton] . . . [and] to the greate terror & hurte of him [did] . . . hall, pull, dragge & carry away . . . Thomas Clifton unto the said playe howse in the black fryers . . . as a prisoner, committed to the said playe howse amongste a companie of lewde & dissolute mercinary players, purposing in that place . . . to use and excersize him . . . in acting of parts in base playes & enterludes, to the mercinary gayne & pryvate comoditie of them. (qtd. in Fleay 129-130).

Through emotional descriptions such as this, the Clifton case exposed the unpleasant side of the children's companies, public institutions that were easily romanticized in society, because the ways in which the children came to be in the company were not always public knowledge. Some of the other children mentioned in the case who shared a similar experiences with Thomas Clifton were,

John Chappell, a gramer schole scholler of one Mr. Spykes schole neere Criplegate, London; John Motteram, a gramer scholler in the free schole at Westminster; Nathan Field, a scholler of a gramer schole in London, kepte by one Mr. Monkaster; Alvery Trussell, an apprentice to the one Thomas Gyles; one Phillip Pykman and Thomas Grymes, apprentices to Richard and George Chambers; Salomon Pavey, apprentice to one Peerce. (qtd. in Fleay 128)

It should be noted that the same Salomon Pavey for whom Jonson wrote the epitaph is the one mentioned in this suit, as well as the famous Elizabethan actor Nathan Field.

It took Henry Clifton, a nobleman, with connections to the privy council, a year to have his case heard, indicating how difficult it was for any parent to successfully reclaim a child from the acting companies once the statutes authorizing impressment had been invoked; if even very financially prosperous and politically powerful individuals such as Henry Clifton had such difficulty freeing their children it can only be assumed that most other parents would have found it almost impossible to advocate effectively for their offspring. Henry Clifton's suit, however, was successful in the end as Thomas was released and Evans was reprimanded for his behavior, leading to his disassociation with the Children of the Chapel. This is not to suggest that this was the end of the kidnappings, but that the Clifton case had a significant impact on the management of children's companies due to the very public exposure of their unsavory practices (Manly, Munro 17; Corrigan 75).

All three children, Tusser, Pavey, and Clifton were targeted by the children's choirs and companies for their talent and were loved by their audiences for their aptitude for performing. While it is unclear whether early modern society as a whole condoned the actions of the children's companies, their continued success even after the Clifton case suggest that they were, because if individuals were buying tickets to see the performances of the child actors, at rates which made the children's companies so successful that they were considered sincere competition for the adult companies, audiences must have overlooked the indiscretions of the children's companies in favor of being entertained by the boy actors (Busse 79).¹⁴ This attitude is symbolized in *Dido* through the presence of Mercury asleep on stage during the first scene. Mercury has no lines during this scene and his lack of overt opinion concerning Jupiter's

¹⁴ A modern example of this can be found in the popularity of TLC's show *Toddlers and Tiaras*. While modern society condemns those who sexualize children, *Toddlers and Tiaras* evidently has enough viewers to stay on television, indicating that in some way modern society is condoning the exploitation of children as well.

relationship with Ganymede can be compared to the way in which early modern audiences willfully chose to ignore the troubling aspects of the management of the management children's companies (Marlowe 1.1).

Understanding the power dynamics between child actors and their adult audiences and handlers is further complicated by the commercial appeal of the theatres. The fact that some of the impressed children, such as Nathan Field, remained actors even after they became adults and gained autonomy, suggests that some of the boy actors enjoyed their profession and the fame and financial rewards that could accompany it. The commercial nature of theatres is emphasized in *Dido* through the prominence of love-tokens and bribes in the text. As Lucy Munro argues, the professional and financial success of the children's companies, was based on the desirability of the actors – the audience members would exchange the price of a ticket for the performance of love (Munro 145). In *Dido*, the character of Ganymede calls attention to this practice of selling love by offering to exchange a hundred hugs for an earring and a brooch, and Jupiter agrees to the transaction saying, “and [you] shall have, Ganymede, if thou wilt be my love” (Marlowe 1.1.42-49).¹⁵ Furthermore, in *Dido*, Jupiter gives Ganymede a necklace, “the linked gems” that Juno wore on their wedding day, trying to buy Ganymede's love and also performing a mock marriage ceremony with the exchange of jewelry and sexual relations (Marlowe 1.1.42-43). Juno's accusation that Jupiter is “lustful” and that Ganymede is an “adulterous child,” further references the ‘marriage’ agreement between Jupiter and Ganymede sealed by the jewels (Marlowe 3.2.18).

Just as Jupiter uses jewels to seduce Ganymede, Dido uses the love-tokens that Sychaeus used to woo her in an attempt to woo Aeneas, offering him her “jewels . . . golden bracelets, and

¹⁵ In early modern society a “Ganymede” was a boy prostitute, alluding to Ganymede's relationship with Jupiter in classical mythology (OED Online "Ganymede, n.").

. . . wedding ring.” (Marlowe 3.4.60-63). When Dido gives Aeneas these love-tokens she says, “be thou King of Libya, by my gift,” indicating that Dido considers herself married to Aeneas through this exchange, which makes her pain at his departure all the more devastating (Marlowe 3.4.64). Dido falls in love with Aeneas in the first place because Cupid turns himself into a love token in 3.1 and hangs on Dido’s neck like Jupiter’s “linked gems,” allowing Cupid to get close enough to Dido to pierce her with his arrows (Marlowe 1.1.42-49, 3.1.30). Jupiter tells Ganymede that he can “trick [his] arms and shoulders with [his] theft,” the jewels, his marriage-bed (Marlowe 1.1.45). In this context, “trick” means, “to dress, array, attire; to deck, prank; to adorn,” but “trick” can also mean “to deceive by a trick” and trickery is often associated with spirited children like Cupid, Ganymede and the child actors (*OED Online* “trick, v.”).¹⁶

Opinions concerning the treatment of the actors in the children’s companies are complicated by the fact that children were seen as possessing emotional power and sexual agency in early modern England even if they did not possess physical or legal power.¹⁷ Early modern children had a greater understanding of sexuality than many modern children because

¹⁶ Some of the child characters in *Dido* are more innocent than others, which is especially evident when it comes to exchanging love tokens. Venus initially tries to woo Ascanius with the promise of treats, “sugar almonds, sweet conserves” and the Nurse, later in the play, tries to woo Cupid in the shape of Ascanius with fruits, “plums, . . . almonds, . . . figs, and dates, / dewberries, apples, yellow oranges,” things which seem like they would appeal more to children than money (Marlowe 2.1.304-311, 4.5.4-6, 5.1.4-7). When Venus offers Ascanius expensive items, such as “a silver girdle and a golden purse,” Ascanius appears to be no more interested in them than the treats, and likes the idea of them as beautiful objects more than as items that he can use for their monetary value (Marlowe 2.1.306). Ascanius’s innocence in *Dido* can be attributed to the fact that of all the child characters, he is the youngest: Ganymede’s physical body is frozen at the time in which he was kidnapped by Jupiter, but mentally he may be much older than a typical child and Cupid likewise is mentally older than most children, because he has been a child forever and therefore has had more time to mature than Ganymede.

¹⁷ The text of *Dido* may seem to suggest that Marlowe was uncomfortable with the idea of child sexuality by setting its metatheatrical plot in a mythical past, thus distancing the events of the play from Marlowe’s own time, but it is important to remember that even early modern children’s company plays set in contemporaneous England heavily referenced sexuality, such as Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

lower and middle class children often slept in the same bed as other family members and servants and upper class children often slept in the same room as their nurses (Flather 70-71).¹⁸ Hallways were not a typical feature of early modern homes, suggesting that families would have had little privacy from each other as they had to pass through each other's rooms in order to walk through their homes (Gibson 13). The sexual innocence associated with childhood in modern culture is a privilege that many early modern children did not have access to due to the living conditions of the time, and therefore while the physical age of an early modern individual might indicate that they are a child, mentally these children were much more aware of the sexual concepts and language that many modern children are shielded from (Cook 8).¹⁹ In order to effectively study the children's plays it is important to recognize the vastly different understanding of childhood in the time in which they were written and performed.

In the 16th century sexuality was understood to be something that could be independently harnessed by children, rather than something that was necessarily imposed upon them. For many modern readers, the sexuality that the children of *Dido* display is extremely uncomfortable, especially since the responsibility for sexual behavior is often placed upon characters who are the objects of desire rather than those who act on their desire, which in modern times is understood to be victim-blaming. In *Dido*, Marlowe demonstrates the early modern culture of victim-blaming through allusions to Helen, a character who Dido insinuates, on multiple occasions, is responsible for the Trojan War (Marlowe 2.1.292, 300, 5.1.146-148). Helen did not kidnap

¹⁸ For the same children early modern children were often not shielded from the reality of death, since sick family members were often treated in their own homes, in their own beds (Gibson 13-14).

¹⁹ Daniel Thomas Cook discusses the construction of childhood in "When a Child is Not a Child and Other Conceptual Hazards of Childhood Studies." His article does not specifically address early modern ideas of childhood, but I believe that his ideas concerning the definition of childhood in general are relevant to my paper.

herself, nor did she instruct Agamemnon and Menelaus to retaliate against the Trojans, but she is still blamed for the Trojan War. In this way she is similar to the boy actors, whom the antitheatricalists charged with inciting the sexual thoughts and feelings of their adult audiences. Perhaps the greatest difference between children and adults with regard to sexual agency in the early modern period is that children could inspire desire, but they did not often pursue it. For example, when Venus bribes Ascanius with the gift of Cupid, Ascanius sees Cupid as a playmate not a lover. If Venus had gifted Cupid to an adult, there would probably be very different connotations to this scene (Marlowe 2.1.307).

As Joann Conrad notes, “the blurring of boundaries between children and adults [often] results in conflicted responses of titillation and outrage, provocation and desire,” which perhaps explains some of the vehemence of the antitheatricalists (Conrad 319; Holland 134). Some anti-theatricalists accused the children of sexually corrupting adults by inspiring them with lust. In *The Chapel Children Stript and Whipt* (1569), a lost play, the anonymous author describes,

her maiesties unfledged minions flaunt[ing] it in silks and sattens: Even in her maiesties chapel do these pretty upstart youths profane the Lordes Day by the lascivious writhing of their tender limbs, and gorgeous decking of their apparel, in feigning bawdrie fables gathered from the idolatrous heathen poets. (qtd. in Chambers 34-35)

According to the author of this text, the child actors were beautiful and sexually pleasing, but dangerous to adult patrons of the theatre who could be corrupted by them.

In *Th’ Overthrow of Stage Playes* (1599), John Rainolds states similar sentiments concerning the child actors, comparing the effect of the boy players on their audiences to the sting of poisonous spiders:

As certaine spiders, if they doe but touch men onely with their mouth, they put them to wonderfull paine and make them madde: so beautifull boyes by killing doe sting and powre secretly in a kinde of poyson . . . can wise men be perswaded that there is no wantonesse in the players partes, when experience showeth (as wise men have observed) that men are made adulterers and enemies of chastitie by coming to such playes? That the senses are mooved, affections are delited, heartes though strong and constant are vanquished by such players? That an effeminate stage-player, while hee faineth love, imprinteth wounds of love? (Rainolds Dv)

Rainold's comparison of the love of boys to the poison of spiders, is similar to Marlowe's association of love with the poison of serpents. In *Dido*, Dido compares Aeneas to a serpent and his love to poison after he rejects her. She says: "O serpent that came creeping from the shore/ And I for pity harboured in my bosom,/ Wilt thou now slay me with thy venomd sting/ And hiss at Dido for preserving thee?" (Marlowe 5.1.165-168). Cupid makes Dido fall in love with Aeneas and his arrows, not unlike the teeth of a serpent, provide the "sting" to which she refers (Marlowe 5.1.167). This is an image that not only links Marlowe's symbolism to those of some of his contemporary antitheatricalists, but also strengthens the connection of Marlowe's text to Virgil's *Aeneid* as the association of love and poison appears in the Virgil's textual imagery first.

In the *Aeneid* language concerning love and poison appears in book 7 when Juno sends Allecto, one of the Furies – a goddess of revenge, down to earth to corrupt Amata in her sleep, in order to make her hate Aeneas and favor Turnus's marriage proposition for her daughter Lavinia. The language in this scene is highly sexualized:

Now [Allecto]

Plucked one of the snakes, her gloomy tresses,

And tossed it at [Amata], sent it down
Her bosom to her midriff and her heart . . . and the serpent
Slipping between her gown and her smooth breasts
Went writhing on, though imperceptible
To the fevered woman's touch or sight, and breathed
Viper's breath into her . . .
It twined itself, and slid around her body.
While the infection first, like the dew of poison
Fallen on her, pervaded all her senses,
Netting her bones in fire. (Virgil 7.475-490)

This passage is not often studied in relation to Marlowe's *Dido* because the events of this book within the *Aeneid* occur after the story of Dido, but it is significant for understanding the imagery of love and poison, sexuality and corruption in *Dido*, concepts which are intimately intertwined in this play.

It should be noted, however, that for every antitheatricalist accusing the child actors of corrupting their adult audiences, there was one blaming the adults for corrupting the children. For example, in *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (1580), Anthony Munday writes that the boys are "trained up in filthie speeches, unnatural and unseemlie gestures, to be brought up by these schoole-masters in bawdrie, and in idleness" and William Crashaw in *The Sermon Preached at the Crosse*²⁰ (1609) writes that "he that teaches children to play, is not an instructor, but a spoiler and destroyer of children: they know they [i.e. those who teach children to play] have no calling, but are in the state like warts on the hand, or blemishes in

²⁰ Paul's Cross

the face' (Crashaw Zv, Munday Hvv-Hvir). These selections from antitheatricalist texts demonstrate some of the complications for modern scholars trying to study the understanding of children in early modern England, since even people alive at the time were divided in their thoughts concerning interactions between children and adults.

Scenes of hunting in *Dido* illustrate the antitheatricalists' claims that observing the plays of the children's companies carries dangerous consequences.²¹ Just as in Rainold's quote in which he claims that loving boys is like taking poison, love in *Dido* has deadly consequences as well: Dido's sister Anna loves Iarbus, but Iarbus loves Dido, who is in love with Aeneas, except he is in love with his own destiny, and in the end everyone, except Aeneas, dies (Marlowe 5.1.312-328, Rainolds Dv). In *Dido*, even while the characters are supposedly hunting deer they are all hunting each other as well. In the early modern period, the word "deare" can refer to the animal of a deer or to someone who is dear, like a lover (*OED Online* "dear, adj.1, n.2, and int."). Dido was successfully hunted by Cupid and thus has been compelled to love Aeneas.

Furthermore, in 1.1 Venus appears to Aeneas disguised as a huntress, including a bow and arrow:

It is the use for Tyrian maids to wear
Their bow and quiver in this modest sort
And suit themselves in purple for the nonce,
That they may trip more lightly o'er the lawns,
And overtake the tusked boar in chase. (Marlowe 1.1.204-208)

Venus is the goddess of love, but love is a dangerous force in *Dido*. The connection between love and hunting is emphasized again in 3.4, when Dido and Aeneas consummate their marriage

²¹ Hunting is a sport that contains many similarities with acting and performance, because both involve special words, actions, and costumes. (Marlowe 1.1.204-207).

during the hunt. For example, when Aeneas compares his love affair with Dido to that of Mars and Venus, Dido reminds him that Mars and Venus were caught in a net, a tool for hunting, by Venus's husband (Marlowe 3.4.4-6, Ovid 4.166-189).²²

After having sex with Aeneas, Dido is literally consumed with passion. In the *Aeneid*, Dido is explicitly compared to a hunted deer, as she suffers from the love with which she has been inflicted:

Unlucky Dido, burning, in her madness
roamed through all the city, like a doe
hit by an arrow shot from far away
by a shepherd hunting in the Cretan woods –
hit by surprise, nor could the hunter see
his flying steel had fixed in her;
but though she runs for life through copse and glade
the fatal shaft clings to her side (Virgil 4.95-102).

This passage is significant because it directly compares the arrows that Cupid uses to induce love with the arrows used to hunt demonstrating the beautiful as well as destructive nature of love in *Dido*.

Another comparison between Marlowe's *Dido* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, is that in *Dido* the Punic Wars start in the hunting scene - after Dido and Aeneas have sex during the hunt, Dido falls in love with Aeneas; when Aeneas does not return the passion that Dido feels for him, she curses him and it is this curse that portends the Punic Wars (Marlowe 5.1.304-308). The start of the war between the Trojans and the Latins in the *Aeneid* begins with a deer hunt as well,

²² Vulcan suspected that his wife, Venus, was cheating on him and made a trap to catch her and her lover, Mars (Ovid 4.166-189).

initiated when Ascanius, “passionate for the honor of the kill” shoots a beloved doe, which angers the Latins and instigates conflict between them and the Trojans (Virgil 7.682).²³ The word “hunt” also appears in *Dido* as “sport” (*OED Online* “sport,v.”). For example, in 3.3, Dido says, “All fellows now, disposed alike to sport./The woods are wide, and we have store of game” (Marlowe 3.3.5-6). “Sport” can also mean “to engage in amorous behaviour or sexual activity” as it is used when Iarbus remarks that Dido and Aeneas are “sporting” in the cave together (Marlowe 4.1.24, *OED Online* “sport, v.”). Passion and sexuality are closely entwined with hunting and death in *Dido*, an idea expressed by John Rainolds in *Th’ Overthrow of Stage Playes*, discussed earlier in this paper (Rainolds Dv).

Marlowe’s *Dido* is a metatheatrical critique on the conditions of performance in the early modern children’s companies. Some of the child actors were forced into the children’s companies and some joined willingly; some of the adult masters of the children’s companies exploited their positions of power and others did not. The treatment of the child actors in the children’s companies is reflected through the interactions between child and adult characters in *Dido*, revealing the dark side of the children’s companies by addressing the kidnapping and commodification of children that some of the companies practiced. The ending of *Dido*, concluding with the deaths of Dido, Anna, and Iarbus, when in the *Aeneid*, only Dido dies, may be read as Marlowe’s warning against the dangers of playing with and abusing power; Marlowe demonstrates the powerlessness of the boys in the children’s companies, despite their emotional power as actors on stage, by ending the play by reminding the audience of the powerlessness that all the characters have in comparison to the gods. All of the characters in the play, no matter how

²³ Allecto, the same goddess whom Juno uses to make Amata hate Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, makes sure that Ascanius’s arrow does not miss and puts Ascanius in a position to hunt and kill the doe (Virgil 7.683-685).

old they are or their position in society are at the mercy of the gods, usable and disposable in favor of the gods' own plans. In this sense all the characters of *Dido* whether they are children or adults are like the child actors who portrayed them, wavering between states of seeming power and ultimate powerlessness. The dramatic shift in the tone of *Dido*, between the last scene and all those that have preceded it, from a darkly comedic play to a tragedy, leaves the audience shocked and perhaps a little unsatisfied with the outcome of the plot, but in this way Marlowe exhibits the unresolved issues surrounding the children's companies in early modern society through the unsettling conclusion of the play.

Marlowe leaves readers and viewers of *Dido* with a sense of complexity over the events of the play and the reality of the children's companies, giving insight into the way the plays were acted and received. There are no simple answers to the complex questions about the role of children in early modern society, but Marlowe's metatheatrical treatment of the children's companies in *Dido* makes it clear that these companies and the child actors that performed as a part of them were very much a part of the culture of early modern England and it is important to acknowledge this in order to study the children's plays and give them the critical attention they deserve.

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