

When Greenblatt came up with the idea of "Renaissance self-fashioning", he introduced to Renaissance studies a notion of the "self" as a constituted category which is necessarily traversed by the social. The constituted "self" was hardly a new idea, but Greenblatt's appropriation and deployment of this notion inaugurated a new wave of interest in Renaissance literature. English Renaissance literature became a testing ground for Foucauldian ideas concerning the "self" as a pivotal effect of and foundation for the institution of early modern Western relations of power and knowledge, materialist notions of the Renaissance "self" as "... focus for the contradictions and instabilities of the [social] whole" (Dollimore, 1989: xxx), and so on.

It is hardly surprising that "self-fashioning", which underpins much of what we now think of as the New Historicism, is a term coined first in Greenblatt's discussion of Marlowe's plays. Almost all of Marlowe's protagonists foreground the "self", using "high astounding terms" (Tamburlaine, prologue: 5) to mark, describe, render visible their distinctive passage through the world. Tamburlaine inscribes himself on his environment through repeated acts of violent destruction, Faustus rejects God in order to live a life devoted to his personal desires, Edward pursues his "selfish" love for Gaveston to the point where it threatens his governance and by extension the whole of England, and Barabas' desire for money and vengeance overturn all other allegiances, even his love for his daughter. Greenblatt's point is that these monstrous humanists, in their tenacious insistence on and destructive creation of "self", are compelled to draw the terms they use for "self-expression" from the very social world they attempt to distance themselves from. Thus, for instance, Faustus and Barabas

... imagine themselves in diametrical opposition to their society where in fact they have already unwittingly accepted its crucial structural elements. (Greenblatt, 1977: 54)

For Greenblatt, then, and for his many followers, the autonomous, autochthonous "self" which appears during the Renaissance, is an impossible category, doomed to endless reinvention.

Amidst all this "self-fashioning", which has engendered a vast and diverse critical literature, one Marlovian protagonist is conspicuous in his almost perverse failure to author himself: Aeneas, in Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage. In fact, as the paucity of recent critical material on Dido indicates, Aeneas is one of the leftovers of the big New Historicist and Cultural

Materialist feast; he wouldn't "go down", so to speak. The contention of this paper is that Marlowe's Aeneas' exceptional status is of crucial importance in adding to our understanding of the emergence of the subject under humanism, and that he offers a way beyond historicist commonplaces concerning the creation of an autonomous "self" in the Renaissance.

Something that is almost immediately apparent in Dido is that every one of the many representations of Aeneas misses the effect of truth. There is very little sense in the play that the courageous Aeneas that is constantly being described by other characters has anything to do with the passive, traumatised character on the stage, an Aeneas who moves around rather like a lacuna at the centre of representations of Aeneas. As Roma Gill points out:

... Aeneas in Marlowe's play seems like the man-in-the-street, who was never meant for noble action but nevertheless finds himself, accidentally, at the centre of one. (1977: 150)

After Aeneas, the first mortal to speak in the play is Achates, who frames Aeneas in exalted terms:

Brave prince of Troy, thou only art our god,
That by thy virtues free'st us from annoy,
And mak'st our hopes survive to coming joys.
Do thou but smile, and cloudy heaven will clear,
Whose night and day descendeth from thy brows.
(1.1:152-156)

Achates' praise is followed by Ascanius' demand for food:

Father, I faint; good father, give me meat.
(1.1:163)

This is a demand Aeneas cannot meet:

Alas, sweet boy, thou must be still a while,
Till we have fire to dress the meat we killed!
(1.1:164-165)

Where Aeneas is described in terms of omnipotence, this potency is almost instantly undermined by his limitations in the practical world. This split between representation or

symbolisation and Aeneas' actual actions remains a constant theme in the play. The fact that in performance, Aeneas would have been played by one of the "children of her Maiesties Chapell" (from the cover folio of the play) would have rendered this split in a visual way: especially if we believe Jackson Cope, who argues in an article called "Marlowe's Dido and the Titillating Children" (1974) that the boy playing Aeneas was smaller than the boy playing Dido.

Whenever Aeneas is called on to introduce, represent or give an account of himself, his answers sound like those of a particularly obtuse deconstructionist who has somehow stumbled onto the Renaissance stage. Dido's first question to him is:

What stranger art thou that dost eye me thus?
(1.1:74)

Aeneas responds by mirroring her question with his own, substituting a claim of identity with this echo:

Sometime I was a Trojan, mighty Queen;
But Troy is not; what shall I say I am?
(2.1:74-76)

The "I" which is repeated three times in these lines, or four times, if we count Dido's "eye me thus", serves less to affirm Aeneas' identity, than to divest him of it, ultimately functioning as a kind of tabula rasa for the inscriptions of the addressee of the question. The "I" is not so much a sign standing for a determinate subject, as a sign denoting Aeneas' subjection. It is Illioneus that constructs Aeneas in affirmative Virgilian terms (where the adjective and the name combine to suggest concordance between the innate quality and the appellation):

Renowned Dido, 'tis our General:
Warlike Aeneas.
(2.1:77-78)

Even to Dido's simple enquiry:

Aeneas, art thou there?
(3.1:98)

Aeneas responds in a way which obviates self-identification and affirms his subjection to the power of Dido's word:

I understand Your Highness sent for me.

(3.1:99)

In other words, Aeneas not only slips away from others' descriptions of him, but refuses to identify himself in any determinate way. Even in his lengthy account of the fall of Troy, where he has an opportunity to reconstruct his reason for being where he is (and therefore what he is, since he explicitly conjoins the where to the what in referring to himself as "sometime a Trojan"), he foregrounds the losses, abortive actions and missed encounters, accentuating his helpless gaze before the traumatic spectacle. He couches his aetiology in terms of impotence, inability and trauma, and prefaces his tale by refusing twice to sit next to Dido at the banquet table on the grounds of his "mean fortune" (2.1:88), thanking Dido in "all humility" (2.1:99) when her increasingly fractious invitations to join her at the table finally convince him, fainting bathetically before her feet (2.1:117), and failing to meet her eye until she commands him to (2.1:120). This is a far shot from Virgil's Aeneas, whose story issues from a position of patriarchal authority. Virgil describes the story-telling Aeneas as "pater Aeneas" (2.2). Virgil's Aeneas commands everybody's attention from his raised couch, and underscores the continuity between his present exalted position and his importance in the past by accentuating the large part he played in the story he is about to tell. It is not surprising that in Marlowe's play, Dido admonishes Aeneas to "remember who he is" and to "speak like himself" (2.1:101). She is foregrounding the gap between this passive, subject and abject Aeneas, and the representations that precede him.

In putting him in his proper place, attempting to articulate the displaced body on stage with its "real" speech, Dido refers not only to the difference between Aeneas in Carthage and Aeneas as a myth imported from Troy, but also to the difference between the Renaissance play and Virgil's epic. An Elizabethan audience would have realised by now that things are not going as they should, and "speak like thyself" is a way of marking that this Elizabethan retelling of the classical tale has lost its way, is failing to "remember who it is". Aeneas' incapacity to find a proper place in the way he is narrated is repeated in the uncertain status of Marlowe's retelling or remembering with respect to the authenticity of the classical original.

Marlowe's Aeneas, then, is a duplication of Virgil's Aeneas, in which something is missing,

although it is never articulated what this "something" is. In fact, the play progresses like a version of the fable of the emperor's clothes in which the emperor himself exclaims that he is naked, without effect.

Marlowe's Aeneas' relationship to symbolisation and to the past is illustrated in an exemplary way when he first encounters images of Troy on the foreign Libyan shore.

When Virgil's Aeneas arrives, the first signs of culture that he notices are gates, paved streets and signs of building and activity. This is linked to fertile images of spring and new birth, and makes Aeneas think of his own plans to build a new city. In a wooded grove, he then comes across a depiction of the battle of Troy, which Virgil tells us allayed Aeneas' fears and allowed him hope and confidence in the future. Virgil describes the painting first of all as "nova res oblata" (1:450) -- a strange thing put in Aeneas' path, although "res" refers not only to an object, but also to a state, a power or an experience. The "strange thing" is internalised or familiarised: it moves from being a power without to being a power that moves within. Virgil writes that Aeneas fed his spirit with the images, drawing attention to the inanimate, empty nature of the pictures and the vitality that the spirit finds in them (1:463-464). Virgil's Aeneas assumes these originally strange, dead symbols as his own, conceiving them as catalysts for movement in the present, and therefore as testimony to the possibility of a future.

In stark contrast, Marlowe's Aeneas is driven to something that resembles madness when he notices Priam's statue, the "strange thing" in his path. To Achates' dismay, who is scared that the citizens of Carthage will laugh at his leader (2.1:38), Aeneas seems to forget that he is not in Troy. He expresses a desire to be supplanted by the representations; to die so that they can live:

Achates, though mine eyes say this is stone,
 Yet thinks my mind that this is Priamus;
 And when my grieved heart sighs and says no,
 Then would it leap out to give Priam life.
 O, were I not at all, so thou mightst be!
 Achates, see, King Priam wags his hand!

He is alive; Troy is not overcome!

(2.1:24-30)

He repeats his desire not to exist three lines later:

Ah, Troy is sack'd, and Priamus is dead!

And why should poor Aeneas be alive?

(2:33-34)

Far from feeding his spirit with the empty images, the empty image here seems to feed on Aeneas' spirit. Marlowe's Aeneas is mortified by the signifiers of the past. He experiences himself as the "nova res", the strange thing, and the desire that is inculcated in him by the picture is not aligned to agency and rebirth, but is a desire for death. The symbols extend no version of the future, but only of a past that renders the present unbearable. Aeneas longs to go backwards, not forwards, in time:

O, yet this stone doth make Aeneas weep!

And would my prayers...

Could give it life, that under his conduct

We might sail back to Troy, and be reveng'd...

(2.1:15-18)

It is interesting, also, that unlike Virgil's Aeneas, Marlowe's Aeneas does not find himself in the picture. This echoes his more general decentrement in relation to the illustration as a kind of signifying emissary from the past. His gaze is captured in deathly fascination by Priam alone, who functions more like a Medusa than as a saviour; more as an unbridgeable chasm between the past and the future, than as an index of their continuity.

Aeneas experiences a traumatic distance from the symbols that precede him. He cannot articulate this distance as something positive: it is a form of paralyses, a death wish, an experience of exile or estrangement. He is not comforted by the survival of the familiar, but oppressed by it, a stranger to his reflection in the symbolised past. If Carthage is a kind of way-station in his colonial exploits, an Other on the way to the reinstatement of the Same, it is interesting that Aeneas experiences not Carthage, but himself, as the Other, as a point of invisibility in Carthage's construction of him in conventional Virgilian terms.

What are we to make of this Marlovian protagonist who refuses to name, and who cannot be named? When Dido claims that Aeneas' "eyes shall be my looking glass" (3.1:85) she articulates something of his passivity: he is a mirror for the desires of others, and a patently unsuccessful mirror at that. The text suggests that he is different from the ways in which he is named, anticipated, but the difference is never supplied with a positive content; it exists only in the sense that the naming seems to overshoot its mark, or seems to refer to a subject that is not present. Nor does Aeneas attempt to inscribe his presence: he seems more interested, in his "self-constructions", if one can call them that, to illustrate his absence or render his invisibility.

In order not to view Aeneas as an aberration in a world populated with "selves" who attempt to seize agency and authority, who aspire to become self-enclosed centres of meaning and power, it is necessary to extend the historicist understanding of the subject under humanism. The humanist subject is not merely a "self", an ego.

One avenue for such a re-definition is through Jacques Lacan, who has for too long been regarded as a sort of "shady", over-theoretical historicist, who tends to litter the clinical pre-subjective processes of history with unnecessary transcendental notions. Especially in his later writings, Lacan emphasises how the subject is not simply a name for the misrecognition of "self" in the symbols of culture, but is a result of the "... split that makes the subject as such distinguish himself from the sign in relation to which, at first, he has been able to constitute himself as subject." (Lacan, 1991: 141) What Lacan means by this, is that no representation can produce an absolute, resolute identity. The subject, the "I" as something which perceives itself as ineffably different from his or her symbolisation in the public domain of language, is a result of this necessary failure of symbolisation to render a determinate, believable identity. In her book Read my Desire: Lacan against the Historicists, Copjec summarises the Lacanian argument in the following way:

The fact that it is materially impossible to say the whole truth -- that truth always backs away from language, that words always fall short of their goal -- founds the subject. Contrary to the idealist position that makes form the cause of being, Lacan locates the cause of being in the informe: the unformed (that which has no signified, no significant shape in the visual field) and the inquiry (the question posed to representation's

presumed reticence). (1994: 35)

Lacan's point is not that there is some transcendental subject "beyond" language, but that the necessary failure of language to supply determinate meanings creates the possibility of imagining a subject "beyond", which can never be realised, but exist only as the invisible in the visible, something desired. "Desidero," writes Lacan, "is the Freudian cogito." (1991: 154) Lacan sometimes refers to this desiring subject, the consequence of the fact that there is "... an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued..." (ibid) in the field of signifiers, as the barred subject -- the subject with no signifier that can represent him or her adequately. Elsewhere, he conceives of the subject as something that both creates and is a consequence of the impossible element, the void, in terms of a vase: "If the vase may be filled, it is because in the first place in its essence it is empty." (1992: 120)

Marlowe's Aeneas is precisely such an empty place in the speech of others. He is, in a sense, simply a name for the element that is lacking in Marlowe's retelling of Virgil's classic; a placeholder for desire. Humanism -- and humanism is a subject Lacan never tires of, although it is largely implicit, and not explicit, in his work -- is absolutely dependent on imparting that "I am not that". This, incidentally, is Lacan's definition of hysteria, which explains why he conceives of the humanist subject as constitutively hysterical. For the humanist subject to conceive of him- or herself as in some way apart from what Montaigne calls "... the fashions and forme customarily received," (1980: 118) he or she must construct a sceptical attitude towards all representation. Humanism therefore conceives of the possibility of doubting all signification, which in turn creates the possibility of thinking the complete annihilation of signified reality, a potentiality Montaigne registers and recoils from:

Those which attempt to shake any Estate, are commonly the first overthrown by the fall of it. (1980: 119)

In most of Marlowe's other plays, the "I am not that" is pacified by one or the other response, a filling of the empty vase, to use Lacan's metaphor. Thus Tamburlaine instates his expansive ego in the place of more conventional systems of order and belief, Faustus imagines an indefinable, forbidden plenitude and joy into the gap left by his humanist scholarly doubt, and so on. But Aeneas is what remains when the entire fullness of experience, every Montaignian

"private fantasie" (1980: 121) is subtracted from the Renaissance humanist subject: a void at the heart of representation. As Shepherdson observes:

The question of the subject in psychoanalysis is... distinct from the constructed subjectivity of historicism, understood as a discursive formation, precisely to the extent that the subject in psychoanalysis is conceived in relation to this "cost", this traumatic residue that remains, even in not belonging to the symbolization that seeks to pacify and regulate it. (1994: 162)

This notion of a "traumatic residue" helps us to situate Aeneas in Marlowe's oeuvre by conceiving of the "self" of humanism in relation to the failure of symbolisation. It also helps to explain something of the way some of Marlowe's other protagonists cling to their desires even when it is clear that there is no benefit in doing so. For instance, in continuing to insist on his dissident position beyond any notion of his "own good", in keeping his pact with the devil even where it is clear that it would be both acceptable and expedient to break it, Faustus transcends the historicist "containment" reading where Faustus' imaginary "freedom to evil" is simply part of the dominant discourse's process of self-validation. In following his word to the death, he demonstrates how the humanist inevitability of doubt, the humanist hysteria, remains difficult to control and to integrate into the operation of ideology. Ultimately, it is dissidence or difference itself that propels Faustus, and no longer the award of "goods".

Aeneas, then, can be conceived as a formal element, a name that is ineradicably different from itself, that creates the possibility of a humanist subject. Aeneas is never a subject in the sense of imagining himself as possessing agency, or really in the sense of imagining himself at all.

Aeneas as a name for the failure of signification arises at the intersection of two re-tellings. Firstly, Dido constantly remarks on how Aeneas should behave or speak, re-marking him to accord with the narratives revolving around his role in the Trojan war that preceded his physical arrival. Something of his disturbing nature -- and of the comical nature of the play -- arises from the lack of success she experiences in returning him to the narrative she has in mind. The second re-telling is Marlowe's retelling of Virgil's story. Although the differences seem slight, Marlowe's tale is not a duplicate of Virgil's, but a remark on it. In a sense, it fails deliberately

as a Virgilian epic: it is a failed retelling. As such, it articulates an important dimension of what humanism was originally, from the point of view of the Renaissance humanist texts themselves -- not so much a new vision of the world, but a failed return to the classical world. The humanist subject is a result of this stutter in repetition: the subject exists first of all as a failed encounter with the past, a *nova res*, a gap that opens in the classical world as it is re-told, re-imagined, returned to. Aeneas as Dido's object of desire parallels the Virgilian text as Marlowe's object of desire. The humanist world is originally conceived as an unsuccessful return to history, which perhaps goes some way to explain Marlowe's Aeneas' obsession with the past in contrast with Virgil's Aeneas' obsession with the future. Even where Marlowe's Aeneas finally seems to be about to build a new Troy, he names it not after himself, or after his son, but after his father: the motion in Dido is always backwards, one of retrospection, a kind of capture in the virtual influence of the past, in what Lacan would call the Name-of-the-Father:

Ilioneus: But what shall it be call'd? Troy, as before?
Aeneas: That I have not determin'd with myself.
Cloanthus: Let it be term'd Aenea, by your name.
Segestus: Rather Ascania, by your little son.
Aeneas: Nay, I will have it called Anchisaeon,
 Of my old father's name.

(5.1:18-23)

Aeneas, the new Troy, the Renaissance itself, find their meaning first of all in a problematic of retelling, a lacking element at the heart of history, and at the heart of symbolisation: not in any determinate activity of "self-fashioning".