

## The Theory and Practice of Imitation in the (Polyphonic?) Dido-tragedy by Nicodemus Frischlin<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

In my study I will be focusing on the text transformation technique in the tragedy *Dido* by Nicodemus Frischlin (1547–1590) German Neo-Latin poet, this author's first imitational drama was published in 1581 in Tübingen. In the first half of my work, I summarize Frischlin's basic rhetorical principles, including his most significant ideas around imitation based on his 1587 oration in Wittenberg. Instead of precepts and definitions, the poet's rhetorical concept operates with concrete examples, written passages, authorial texts by which he aims to educate the reader. In the second portion of my study, I aim to answer the question of how polyphonic imitation works in the play, and how this creative method makes it more difficult to identify the imitative techniques in the text, such as paraphrase, cento and parody. As I delve into my topic, I wish to point to examples of the switch of rhetorical theory, that is, a divergence from the tradition of Melanchton's rhetoric textbooks, the connections between the different varieties of imitation techniques, genre transformation, the reinterpretation of the Virgilian epic into a tragedy.

**Keywords:** Nicodemus Frischlin, Neo Latin poetry, drama, Dido, imitation, rhetoric, polyphony

### 1. Introduction

Nicodemus Frischlin (1547–1590) was one of the most significant Neo-Latin poets and playwrights in 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany, however, posterity, from the very beginning has placed much greater emphasis

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on his exciting, multifaceted biography than his poetic oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> The volume containing the written version of the lectures from the memorial conference held in Tübingen commemorating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the author also reflect this tendency to have greater interest in his biography (Holtz–Mertens 1998–1999). The writers focus on the more interesting details of the poet's life and his social network when it comes to their analysis, the first two presented studies for instance deal with Friedrich Ludwig, Hereditary Prince of Württemberg's (1568–1593) court and rule. The prince first played the role of a patron in Frischlin's life, then in a twist of fate, later he would be the one to sentence the poet to incarceration in the Hohenurach Fortress. Volker Schäfer discusses the city of Tübingen in Frischlin's era as well as its university, while Hubert Cancik speaks of the contentious relationship between Martin Crusius and Frischlin. Frischlin taught Latin poetry and history in Tübingen from 1568 to 1582, and during this period he attracted the attention of almost the entire university faculty due to his professional (grammatical-rhetorical) and personal disputes with his colleagues, especially with Crusius, professor of Greek. He also had minor clashes with the local nobility. His speech *Oratio de vita rustica*, published in 1580, in which he denounced the nobility as corrupt, brought him even more under fire. Wilhelm Kühlmann analyzes precisely the oration which sealed Frischlin's fate, while Siegfried Wollgast compares the controversial poet to the agitator Thomas Müntzer. Among the authors who have concentrated on the biographical aspects of the subject is Casimir Bumiller, who deals with the fraternal relationship between Nicodemus and Jakob Frischlin.<sup>3</sup>

More recent international literature focuses on Frischlin's astronomical works, especially his carmen praising the astronomical clock in Strasbourg Cathedral and its makers (Kühlmann 2019, 49–81; Frick–Grütter 2021, 532–560.), his occasional poems, especially his panegyrics to the Habsburg emperors (Seidel 2018, 25–48),<sup>4</sup> and his dramatic works (Leonhardt 2008, 155–164; Kaminski 2008, 165–181; Niefanger 2008, 417–434; Kaminski 2011, 43–55; Hadley 2015). The Hungarian literature focuses on the Hungarian aspects of his entire oeuvre, such as the impact of Frischlin's private course in Wittenberg (1587–1588) on the Hungarian youths who studied there and on Hungarian literary thought. The poet's concept of rhetoric,

2 David Price lists the most important biographical summaries in the foreword to his monograph on Frischlin's work as a playwright. He begins with Carl Heinrich Lange's 1727 work in Latin, and concludes with Gustav Bebermeyer's glossary of the biographical encyclopaedia *Neue deutsche Biographie*, published in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. For more on Frischlin's biographical data and related literature, see Price 1990, 1–8; Wilhelmi–Seck 2004; Niefanger 2018; Hanstein 2018, 560–583.

3 Around a quarter of the twenty studies in the volume are about Frischlin's literary work, most of the authors approaching the subject from the biographical point of view, as well as from the perspective of cultural, social and religious history.

4 The Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II appointed Frischlin a poet laureate in 1576, and in 1577 he ennobled him for his glorifying poems.

which he described in detail in his speech at the launch of his course at Wittenberg, was based on teaching with exempla, i.e. concrete examples, readings, and texts by classical authors, rather than precepts and definitions (Kecskeméti 2004, 166–197; Kecskeméti 2007, 252–277; on Frischlin's fame and acquaintances in Hungary: Kecskeméti 2005, 93–110). Another interesting period from a domestic point of view is May–June 1584, when Frischlin was in the service of the Batthyány family in Németújvár. It was then that he published his *De ratione instituendi puerorum...*, a work primarily on educational methodology, but also important from the point of view of rhetorical theory, which was then reprinted twice in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1621, 1645) by Albert Molnár Szenci in the appendix to his *Dictionarium* (Imre 2009, 164–179).

Frischlin's dramas can be grouped into the following, sometimes overlapping categories: historical-political plays (*Frau Wendelgard*, 1579, *Hildegardis Magna*, 1579, *Julius Caesar Redivivus*, 1585), pedagogical dramas (*Priscianus Vapulans*, 1578), religious dramas (*Phasma*, 1580), biblical dramas (*Rebecca*, 1575, *Susanna*, 1577), and the so-called imitational dramas (*Dido*, 1581, *Venus*, 1584, *Helvetiogermani*, 1589) (categorization by Price 1990, 5). The last group draws attention to the fact that Frischlin's dramas should be approached not only from a thematic, ideological or functional point of view, but also from the point of view of humanistic creative techniques and formality. In a broader sense, almost all the plays can be included in the category of imitative drama, since humanist poetic practice tends to follow primarily ancient examples, specifically Aristophanes, Plautus and Terentius, in its own dramatic practice. At the same time, however, only in three of this plays he ventures to establish a close link with ancient texts and to use imitative textual techniques.

In this paper, I will deal in more detail with the first of these imitative dramas in the narrower sense, his five-act tragedy *Dido*, published in Tübingen in 1581, focusing strictly on the stylistic methods. In the first half of the paper, I will summarize Frischlin's rhetorical principles, including his most important ideas on exercitatio, imitation, based on his opening speech in Wittenberg, already mentioned. In the second portion of my paper, I will be discussing the foreword to *Dido* written by the author, the literature related to the play as well as juxtaposing excerpts from the main text with one another in search of the different characteristics of imitation techniques in this tragedy inspired by an epic poem and whether the methodological solution applied in the text is related to the concept of polyphonic imitation as used by Nicola Kaminski (1995, 79–135).<sup>5</sup>

5 Many thanks to Tünde Mór  for sharing her copy of the study with me.

## 2. Frischlin's theory of rhetoric

Nicodemus Frischlin discussed imitation as an integral part of contemporary literary practice in several works on rhetoric and poetics (e.g. *Rhetorica, seu Institutionum oratorum libri duo...*, *Oratio de imitatione...*, *Methodus declamandi in laudatione...*, *Oratio de praestantia et dignitate Virgilio Aeneidos...*), but the most complete summary of the subject is undoubtedly given in the introductory oration to his private course in Wittenberg (Price 1990, 27).<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the relevant train of thought in the opening speech of 1587, which is nearly sixty pages long, Frischlin states that he no longer wishes to discuss the study of eloquent speech (*ars oratoria*), because no one can give a more thorough and complete summary of this discipline than Melanchthon, and so the oration will be devoted to the exercise of rhetoric (*exercitatio*).<sup>7</sup>

By the rhetorical and poetic exercise (*exercitatio oratoria, exercitatio poetica*) Frischlin means the imitation of good authors, i.e. the emulation of the classics of ancient Greco-Roman literature. At the same time, he stresses that the essence of imitation is to create works similar to those of others, and that complete conformity with the model must be avoided at all costs, since this no longer means imitation but plagiarism, i.e. theft.<sup>8</sup> Frischlin believes that what Manilius says about astronomy is also true of imitation: "It cannot be described with eloquence, it can only be taught".<sup>9</sup> In keeping with this, he refrains from using ornamental rhetorical devices in his exposition of the subject, and formulates his message in a strictly didactic style, his primary aim being to show young students interested in the discipline of oration the way forward.<sup>10</sup> The first and most important rule to which Frischlin draws the attention of

6 The edition I use is: Frischlin 1596, 320-377. The Latin quotations in this study are given in my own literal or free translation of the content in prose translation, and any instances of deviation are indicated in the footnotes.

7 "Nam quod ad artem attinet, ea a Philippo Melanthono duobus libris ita comprehensa est, ut nihil in hoc genere... extet perfectius, nihil absolutius." (Frischlin 1596, 326). Erasmus and Melanchthon laid down important principles concerning imitation, but they did not discuss the subject comprehensively either from the point of view of theory or practice; Frischlin made up for this, developing the guidelines into a rhetorical system in his rhetorical theory (Price 1990, 28).

8 "Est enim exercitatio omnis, tam oratoria, quam poetica, fere nihil aliud, quam quaedam bonorum auctorum imitatio, et similium operum cum aliis effectio. Is enim optime censetur imitari aliquem auctorem, qui illi est in componenda oratione simillimus, non tamen idem. Nam eundem esse cum alio, non est imitari, sed furari, et omnino plagium comittere." (Frischlin 1596, 327). The modern idea that imitation genres should be excluded from the canon of acceptable genres on the grounds of copyright has occasionally emerged in the early modern era, for more on this see Saint-Amour 2003.

9 "Ornari res ista nequit, contenta doceri." (Frischlin 1596, 328-329).

10 "Nam in hoc argumenti genere tractando, magis scholastico, quam oratorio dicendi genere mihi utendum est [...] Non enim hic causam agemus coram iudice, sed modum iuventuti ostendemus, et viam, qua studiosi oratoriae incedentes, possint eum finem invenire, quem quaerimus." (Frischlin 1596, 328).

his audience is that it is very important to be gradual in the learning process, that theory should be gradually put into practice, and that the simpler exercises, the so-called preparatory or preliminary exercises (*praexercitamentum, praeludium, progymnasmata*), which are the subject of this oration, should precede the more complex poetic and rhetorical procedures (*declamatio*).<sup>11</sup>

In the section on phrases, Frischlin advises prospective orators not to follow Erasmus' example and try to blend verse and prose, or the formal and the informal speech, in imitation, because poetic expressions do not always lend itself well to oration.<sup>12</sup> As for a good vocabulary, it can be acquired by turning to the established authors, but many of the students do not read, so if they are forced to speak or write in Latin, they may feel like mice stuck in pitch for want of the right words.<sup>13</sup> They can also learn adequate vocabulary from the recognized authors, from what they read, rather than from the theoretical works of grammarians, who often arrive at certain conclusions by analogy rather than by reason. Frischlin gives the example of the word 'homo', which in theory, according to grammatical rules, can only be masculine, but in practice is understood to mean both male and female, so that in this case the grammatical category is not fully in line with the general meaning of the word in use.<sup>14</sup>

One of the basic tenets of Frischlin's concept is that it is unnecessary to spend too much time on rules (*praeceptum*), since in the teaching-learning process, textual examples (*exemplum*) prove to be much more useful than theoretical guidelines. The sometimes too rigid precepts are best illuminated by the more practical exemplars, so that rules can and should be learned from the readings, not from the textbooks.<sup>15</sup> This principle is also reflected in the dictionary (*Nomenclator trilingvis*)

11 " [...] singillatim proponantur quaedam transferenda in usum, donec oratoriae studiosus, recte doctus, tractare partes orationis Rhetoricae, tandem etiam possit orationem tractare integram." (Frischlin 1596, 328). Frischlin's posthumous oration, *Methodus declamandi* (1606), can be seen as a continuation of Wittenberg's oration on the preliminary exercises (Kecskeméti 2007, 274).

12 "Non igitur nihil imitandum est oratori in poëta [...] Erasmus certe Roterodamus, qualibet orator copiosus et elegans, hoc tamen discrimen in selectu verborum non ubique servavit. Itaque saepe poeticas phrases solutae orationi admiscuit." (Frischlin 1596, 332–333).

13 "Nam multi sunt, qui expetunt [...] verborum proprietatem [...] interim tamen neque ipsi legunt probatos auctores, ut hanc sibi verborum proprietatem inde comparent [...] Tum quando aliquid latine vel dicere, vel scribere coguntur, destituti propriis verbis, haerent tanquam mures in pice." (Frischlin 1596, 333–334).

14 "Nam in usu loquendi ad probatos auctores respiciendum est, non ad grammaticos, saepe aliquid sine ratione ex analogia proferentes [...] Homo [...] etsi ex communi sexu intelligitur, tamen masculino genere semper dicitur: Nemo enim malam hominem dixit." (Frischlin 1596, 338).

15 "Nam quid opus est diu immorari in praeceptis? Regulae enim non regulis, sed exemplis, quorum in vita summus est usus, declarari possunt, ac debent." (Frischlin 1596, 344).

published in Frankfurt in 1586, in which Frischlin compiled a substantial Greek-Latin-German vocabulary of 30,000 items from the works of the most eminent Greek and Roman authors.<sup>16</sup> He planned to add further volumes to the first edition of nouns, as the instructions for using the collection indicate: students should first read aloud, memorize and conjugate the nouns in the first volume, then the verbs in the second, and when they have acquired the necessary depth of knowledge, they can move on to the more complex linguistic elements of the dialogues in the third volume, the phrases and sentences necessary for independent composition.<sup>17</sup>

The first of the imitative preexercises (*praeexercitamentum*) Frischlin discusses is the simplest, the heterosis/metaphrase, which consists in changing the genre, text type or metre of the model work (e.g. from ode to elegy, from letter to dialogue, from hexameter to distich), while at the same time preserving the linguistic and content fidelity to the source.<sup>18</sup> Frischlin also illustrates what is meant by this concept by means of concrete examples, including the hexameter version of Horace's IV. 4. carmen (Frischlin 1596, 355), and then encourages the audience to try out the simpler transcriptions on their own, for example, as a first step, transcribing a shorter *Aeneid*-passage into distich, using the quotation from canto 6 (6,126–130) transposed into distich as a model (Frischlin 1596, 356).

The other such preliminary exercise is parody, for which Frischlin refers to the definition of Scaliger: according to this, parody writers strive to create a linguistically similar but substantively different textual version of the model, sometimes with a humorous tone and style. Frischlin also includes cento, a genre related to parody, since both

16 "Nam ex optimis quibusque Graecis et Latinis scriptoribus ingentem affero vocabulorum acervum, qui terdena millia vocabulorum Graecorum et Latinorum et Germanicorum continet. Huic libro, qui ante annum Francofurti excusus est, et magno labore, magnisque impensis meis confectus, iam debebat alter respondere, quem tribui verbis [...] Tertius [...] constabit [...] centum et septuaginta brevibus dialogis [...]" (Frischlin 1596, 344–345). Frischlin's collection of selected orations published in 1588 (*Selectae orationes e Q. Curtio, T. Livio, C. Salustio, C. Caesare, M. Cicerone...*) is also a product of the concept of exemplum in preference to praeceptum.

17 "Nam puero in scholis sic proponi potest: ut ante meridiem addiscat aliquot nomina, quae recitando simul inflectat, post meridiem e libro secundo aliquot verba nominibus respondentia, quae recitando itidem inflectat. Sic enim altius omnia inhaerebunt memoriae et suas ibi agent radices. Ad postremum sequenti in ordine Dialogos ediscat, et e simplicibus nominibus ac verbis consuescat phrasin constituere, et hoc modo usum sermonis, qui est in bonis auctoribus, sibi a teneris unguiculis familiarem facere." (Frischlin 1596, 345–346).

18 "Et quoniam in hoc primo genere scripta poetica permutantur numero, oratoria vero habitu orationis novo, et quia neutrum horum fieri potest sine heterosi, nos primum hoc praeexercitamentum dicemus heterosin vel metaphrasin [...] Verum enimvero etiam in poetica imitatione, saepenumero eadem prorsus retinetur sententia, eademque verba, tantum mutato numero." (Frischlin 1596, 352–353).

parody and cento poets work from the linguistic material of the source works and create a poem with a different message.<sup>19</sup>

In the words of St Jerome, Frischlin advises his pious audience to reclaim the illustrious sayings usurped by profane rhetors and poets by means of parody exercises, and then to take them to their churches and use them to glorify the Lord.<sup>20</sup> For example, he even prepares a Christianized parody of a maxim by Ennius and Horace. “Unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem.”<sup>21</sup> (Ennius: *Annales*, XII. 360), we obtain, by changing only one word, a sentence referring to Christ: “Unus homo nobis moriendo restituit rem.”<sup>22</sup> (Frischlin 1596, 366). Frischlin does the same for the Horace citation, thus we have “Nil desperandum Teucro duce et auspice Phoebus.”<sup>23</sup> (Horatius: *Carmen* I. 7,27) to “Nil desperandum Christo duce, et auspice Christo.”<sup>24</sup> (Frischlin 1596, 366).

The third type of preliminary exercises is paraphrase, which is closely related to the imitated model in terms of content, but has far fewer linguistic constraints: Frischlin, following the definition of Quintilian, understands the term as a more explicit and explanatory, but also more varied and ornate linguistic form of the source texts.<sup>25</sup> Frischlin cites as examples, among other things, the newly published paraphrases in the form of prose which he wrote for the six satires of Persius and the first two books of the epistles of Horace.<sup>26</sup> Frischlin’s aim in producing these commentary-like paraphrases was to illuminate the sometimes obscure

19 “Propero igitur ad alterum genus progymnasmatum, quod est similium fere verborum, sed dissimiliarum sententiarum, id quod sit per parodiam. Est enim parodia sententia inversa, mutatis vocibus, ad ridicula sensum retrahens, ut Scaliger finit [...] Ac tales sunt etiam Homerici centones et Virgiliani, quorum auctrix dicitur esse Proba Falconia, insignis poëtria.” (Frischlin 1596, 357–358).

20 “Divus certe Hieronymus [...] nos decere ait, ut profanorum rhetorum et poëtarum insignes sententias ab iniquis possessoribus auferamus, et in ecclesiam Dei, atque ad laudem et decus Domini conferamus.” (Frischlin 1596, 365–366).

21 “Through procrastination a man saved our state.”

22 “By his death, one man saved our world.”

23 “Teucer’s leadership and Phoebus’s prophecy give us hope.”

24 “Christ’s guidance and leadership give us hope.”

25 “Restat tertium progymnasmatum genus, nempe similium sententiarum, ubi dissimilia sunt verba, et dissimilis compositio, ut cum ex poëticis sententiis fiunt sententiae oratoriae, aut ex oratoriis poëticae, mutatis verbis et phrasi... discitur item ratio, aliquam nudam poëtae sententiam amplificandi et induendi ornatu oratorio. De hoc Quintilianus I. lib. 9. cap. Versus primo solvere, mox mutatis verbis interpretari, tum paraphrasi audacius vertere, quin et breviare quaedam, et exornare, salvo modo poëtae sensu, permittitur.” (Frischlin 1596, 368–369).

26 In the edition I used, the Wittenberg oration follows immediately after the Persius and Horace paraphrases.

ideas of the poets and to express them in a way that was comprehensible to the youth studying them.<sup>27</sup>

The oratio concludes with an outline synopsis in which Frischlin attempts to consider all the poetic and prosaic genres (*omnis oratio, sive sit numerosa, sive prose*) in a unified form, summarized in a rhetorical system. He classifies the odes, elegies, epigrams and satires, and a narrower thematic group of these, the genres of occasional poetry, the *epithalamium*, *epicedium*, *epitaphium*, *propempticon* and *panegyric*, into the category of *oratio demonstrativa (ad praesentes)*, or oratory for the audience present. The other type, aimed at contemporary audiences, is the *sermo*, i.e. the dialogic genres, the dialogues, the eclogues, the comedies and the tragedies, in which the characters converse directly with each other in person (*inter praesentes*), and the *epistola*, in which the parties interact indirectly (*inter absentes*).

Homer's and Virgil's epics are examples of fictional narrative (*narratio ficta*), or fables, written for a future audience (*ad posteros*), while the historiographical works of Herodotus, Livy, Caesar and Sallustius are examples of *narratio vera*, or histories for posterity. The last major group is made up of *institutios*, i.e. didactic genres, which are of interest to both present and future audiences (*ad utrosque*). Within this, Plato's *Republic* is addressed to the entire community (*publica*), to society, the second category, exemplified by the agricultural textbooks of Hesiod and Virgil, is aimed at the narrower family community (*domestica*), while the third block includes works of a scientific nature (e.g. grammatical, dialectical, rhetorical, theological, arithmetical, astronomical, medical, legal, musical) which aim to aid individual (*privata*) growth.

27 "Eisdem quoque temporibus et praecedenti anno meas in Persium, poëtam valde obscurum, paraphrases edidi, quibus mentem poëtae, ni fallor, sic explanavi, ut pueri iam possunt intelligere Persium [...] Sed et mea in omnes Epistolas Horatii exstat paraphrasis, quae hoc anno demum prodiit." (Frischlin 1596, 371). Frischlin also made similar paraphrases of Virgil's eclogues, the *Georgics* and the first two books of the *Aeneid*, among others: Price 1990, 28.

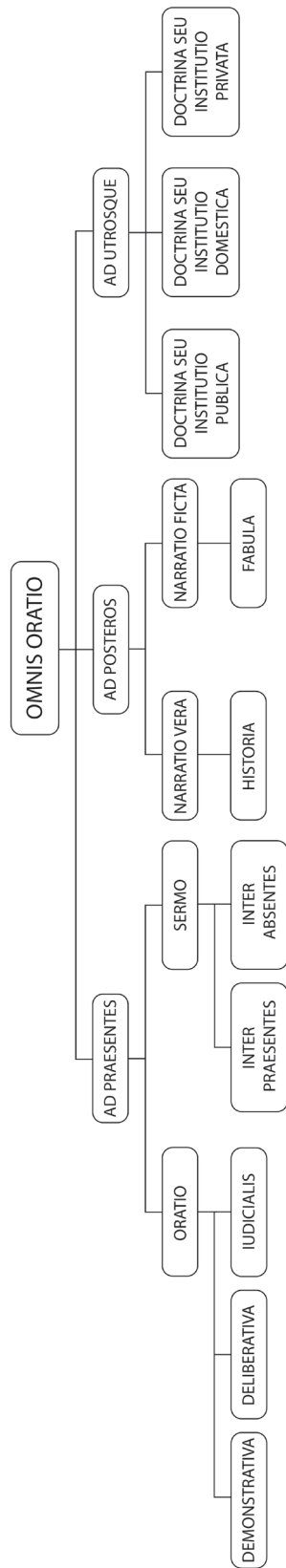


Figure 1<sup>28</sup>

28 The figure shows a simplified version of Frischlin's outline (Frischlin 1596, 378; Kecskeméti 2007, 274–275). The original table was republished: Price 1990, 49.

The closing figure is the visual representation of the basic concept on which Frischlin based his own rhetorical theory: according to this, there is a strong correlation between rhetoric and poetry, thus the different rhetorical procedures, speech modes and types of text (*oratio, sermo, narratio, institutio*) can be best mastered via *exercitatio*, that is, through *exemplae*, prosaic and lyrical genres, specifically by studying and imitating the works of classical antiquity.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. Imitation techniques in *Dido*

Frischlin begins his prologue dedicated to the Danish Otto Rosencrantz by justifying the choice of topic, according to which, his reason for re-imagining the *Aeneid* as a tragedy was the observation that nearly all volumes of the epic poem feature death, we read of the passing of significant characters (e.g. Anchises, Dido, Palinurus, Nisus, Euryalus, Mezentius, Camilla, Turnus), which makes the books tragic in nature.<sup>30</sup> The metaphor was an obvious option for the poet in this case, since the natural link between the two genres is well known from Aristotle's *Poetics*: "the iambic lampooners became writers of comedy, and the epic poets were succeeded by tragedians." (Aristotle 1922, chapter IV., chapter XVIII).

Aristotle admonishes poets not to try to turn epic works into tragedies as a whole, but only in parts, so that the plot remains sufficiently simple and eventful (Aristotle 1922, chapter XVIII.). Frischlin did the same when he attempted to transform the fourth book of the Virgilian epic into a tragedy, following ancient models and examples (e.g. Euripides, Sophocles, Caecilius, Actius, Ennius, Seneca), which he said was his first attempt of this kind, but he intended to do the same with the other books. Frischlin defines his own work as a paraphrase, adding that he

29 *Oratio de imitatione* reflects a similarly synthetic vision, in this speech Frischlin also aims to prove the connection between rhetoric and poetry, as well as the kinship between all the different types of texts and speech: Price 1990, 48.

30 "Omnes Virgilianae Aeneidis libros esse tragicos, aut certe instar tragoediarum, nemo ignorat, qui in hoc auctore paulo diligentius est versatus [...] Nam etsi primus liber comoediae videtur similior, quam tragoediae (si ad laetam catastrophem respicias), tamen in aliis omnibus tristes sunt magnarum personarum exitus." The edition I use in this paper: Frischlin 1585, A2r. The character of Dido, who is driven to her doom by her excessive sentimentality, may remind the reader of Euripides' *Medea*, a similarity that inspired several early modern humanists who produced various dramatizations of the Dido episode in the 16th and 17th centuries, both in vernacular and Latin, for more on this see Heesakkers 1984, 145–197.

is aiming for a much freer imitation of the model text than his ancient predecessors, but he does not specify what he means by this.<sup>31</sup>

Frischlin's aim with *Dido* is the poetic-rhetorical training of pupils, and he intends to use the play in his own school of poetics,<sup>32</sup> from which the students will first learn the classical phrases, the rules of metrics and the rules of eloquent, poetic oration style, and then, during the theatrical presentation of the tragedy, they will also learn the appropriate gesticulation and pronunciation techniques.<sup>33</sup> The latter is intended to inspire young people with an enthusiasm for oratory, so that, as adult men, they will be more willing to speak in public.<sup>34</sup> In the figure that concludes the Wittenberg oration, tragedy was included among the *sermos*, suggesting that the genre is a suitable vehicle for both interpersonal communication and the practice of rhetorical situations in public. In this context, the preface to *Dido* can be interpreted as a cross-section of the Wittenberg oration and as a "textbook" example of its concept.

If we look at the literature on the play, we find contradictions in the definitions of genre or creative technique. David Price describes *Dido*, which falls into the category of imitative drama, as a verbatim paraphrase. This is misleading, since the specificity of paraphrase is that it is quite different linguistically from the source text, and so cannot be "literal" unless the author is referring to fidelity of content with this term (Price 1990, 5).

Chris L. Heesakkers discusses the early modern tragedies' interpretation of the Dido episode in his study, including Frischlin's version. While he does not explicitly attempt to define the genre or identify the textual technique, he does make indirect references to it.

31 "Nam eodem modo Euripidem et Sophoclem suas ex Homero confecisse tragoedias animadverto, quo Caecilius, Actius, Ennius, et alii sua composuerunt apud Latinos dramata. Nec dubito, quin hisce initiis cothurnatus Seneca ad latinam tragoediam scribendam nunc olim prodierit. Quorum ego exemplum imitari constituo, et quidem multo, quam illi fecerunt, liberius [...] Primam vero nunc edo e quarto libro tragoediam, in quo explicando, et paraphrasi reddendo, nunc versor [...] idem praestabo in caeteris omnibus, quod in hoc quarto libro praestiti." (Frischlin 1585, A2v–A3r).

32 Frischlin was teaching poetry at the University of Tübingen in 1581, and one of the key elements of his 'lectiones poetices' was precisely the practice of paraphrasing (Price 1990, 30).

33 In the 1580s and 90s, Strasbourg, where Frischlin's *Dido* was being published at the time, had a thriving theatrical tradition, with Michael Hospeinius's *Dido* tragedy being staged in the city in 1591. It is therefore possible that, in addition to the school performance of the play in Tübingen, to which Frischlin refers in the preface, there were other performances, for example in Strassburg, but I cannot provide any concrete data to support this (Heesakkers 1984, 149).

34 "Volo enim iuventutem exercere in mea schola poetica, ut primo ediscant Virgilii phrasin, et genus illud dicendi grandiloquum, ac numeris vinctum. Deinde volo illos haec eadem, quae edidicerunt, in scena recitare, ut non solum memoria illorum crebro usu acuatur, sed etiam decori gestus, et apta pronuntiatio condoceatur. Volo denique animum accendi et excitari in tenera aetate, ut aliquando viri facti promptius et cordatius coram aliis, praesertim in coetibus et conventibus publicis, loquantur." (Frischlin 1585, A2v–A3r).

He analyzes Petrus Cunaeus' 17<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript version of *Dido* by contrasting it with Frischlin's, citing the close adherence to the source material as one of the similarities between the two versions, which may be a characteristic of cento or parody. Considering Heesakkers' other 17<sup>th</sup> century autograph parallel by an unknown author, cento is likely. The work in question was given the title *Cento Virgilianus* by one of its former owners, as the text of the tragedy is extremely closely related to its source, with only 150 of the 1003 lines of verse considered independent of the model in whole or in part (Heesakkers 1984). Heesakkers' argument is strengthened by the fact that George Hugo Tucker, in his major survey of cento, mentions Frischlin among the centonists working in the circle of Emperor Rudolf II, and calls his two plays, *Dido* and *Venus*, cento-plays (Tucker 2013, 3–67, 59).

Thus, the preface to *Dido* and the related literary works define the genre of the play or the creative technique at work in the text as a mixture of paraphrase and *cento*, but parody can be equally relevant given the readings in the Wittenberg speech, which served as a conceptual basis for Frischlin's poetic practice. Moving forward, I will illustrate the functioning of these imitative techniques through the first scene of the first act of *Dido*.

In the opening scene of the play, Queen Dido, in desperation, asks her sister Anna for advice on what to do about her tormented love for Aeneas, which leaves her no peace. Anna encourages her sister to take the heroic Trojan as her husband, because with such a man, the Queen and her people could live in peace and happiness. Frischlin transforms the third person singular prologue from the fourth canto of *the Aeneid*, which introduces Dido's speech, into a monologue in the first person singular person of the protagonist, following the same pattern in content, but using more selective and explanatory language, i.e. paraphrasing the source text.

<i>Aeneid</i> , Book 4, Lines 1–10. <sup>35</sup>	<i>Dido</i> , Act 1, scene 1, lines 1–13. <sup>36</sup>
<p>„But anxious cares already seiz'd the queen:            She fed within her veins a flame unseen;            The hero's valor, acts, and birth inspire            Her soul with love, and fan the secret fire.            His words, his looks, imprinted in her heart,            Improve the passion, and increase the smart.            Now, when the purple morn had chas'd away            The dewy shadows, and restor'd the day,            Her sister first with early care she sought,            And thus in mournful accents eas'd her thought:”</p>	<p>„Juno, queen of the heavens, regent of the sky! What pain do I hold close to my soul? What sort of tortuous love wounds my heart? What fire burns me from within? What sort of passion of the soul overcomes me? Not even the rest of night, deep sleep can free me from my troubles. Whether the golden Sun walks the fields with Apollo's torches, whether night wraps its dark mist round the sky, whether the dawn should break through the moist blanket of dew with its celestial chariots, the virtue of that man, the authority of his tribe ever returns to memory, and his face, his visage is always before me, carved into my mind, his words I can never forget. But behold, here is my sister, should I remain silent or open my mouth to speak?”</p>

**Table 1.**

The following text in which Dido presents her troubles to Anna is almost taken word for word from the source material. The bold text in the table above shows the passages that were used in Frischlin's work unaltered, and the examples in which the poet alters the part of speech (e.g. *violo* – *violem*) or the verb conjugation (e.g. *animos* – *animum*, *potui* – *potuerim*) or uses a synonym (e.g. *Anna* – *soror*, *caede* – *nece*, *tellus* – *terra*, *pater omnipotens* – *Iuppiter*, *sepulcro* – *tumulo*) have been indicated in italics.

35 Translated by John Dryden. Available online: <https://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.4.iv.html> (last viewed: 2025. 03. 03.).

36 “Regina coeli, Iuno, dominatrix poli! / Quod vulnus alo? Quo saevo amore saucior? / Quo carpor igni? Quo feror animi impetu? / Non me quies nocturna, non altus sopor / solvere curis. Nam mihi, seu lampade / terras Apollinea aureum Solis iubar / lustrat, nigrave nox polum caligine / involuit, humentemve amictum roscidis / Aurora bigis coelitus dimoverit, / semper animo virtus viri, semperque honos / gentis recursat, semper infixi obviant / vultus et ora, nec animo verba excidunt. / Sed en, adest soror, tacebon an eloquar.” Frischlin 1585, A4v.

	Vergilius: <i>Aeneid</i> <sup>37</sup>	Frischlin: <i>Dido</i> (1585, A4v-A5r.)	
9.	'Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent!	O Anna soror, insomnia ut me terrificant?	14.
10.	Quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes,	Quis hic novus successit hospes sedibus?	15.
11.	quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!	Quem se ferens vultu virum? Quam pectore	16.
12.	credo equidem, nec vana fides, genus esse deorum.	forti, et alacribus armis. Venere natum Deae	17.
13.	degeneres animos timor arguit. heu, quibus ille	haud dubito. Degenerem animum arguit timor.	18.
14.	iactatus fatis! quae bella exhausta canebat!	Sed o quibus iactatus ille est casibus?	19.
15.	si mihi non animo fixum immotumque sederet	Quae bella, quas clades canebat? Si mihi	20.
16.	ne cui me vinclo vellem sociare iugali,	non ita animo fixum hoc, et immotum foret,	21.
17.	postquam primus amor deceptam morte fefellit;	ne cui velim annecti iugali vinculo,	22.
18.	si non pertaesum thalami taedaeque fuisset,	postquam Sichaei morte primus me viri	23.
19.	huic uni forsam potui succumbere culpae.	amor fefellit, si maritalis tori	24.
20.	Anna (fatebor enim) miseri post fata Sychaei	non antehac taedaeque pertaesum foret,	25.
21.	coniugis et sparsos fraterna caede penatis	huic forsam uni potuerim succumbere	26.
22.	solus hic inflexit sensus animumque labantem	culpae, o soror (fatebor hoc enim) post coniugis	27.

37 Source of Latin text: The Latin Library, available online: <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen4.shtml> (last accessed 03/03/2025). In English: "My dearest Anna, what new dreams affright / My lab'ring soul! what visions of the night / Disturb my quiet, and distract my breast / With strange ideas of our Trojan guest! / His worth, his actions, and majestic air, / A man descended from the gods declare. / Fear ever argues a degenerate kind; / His birth is well asserted by his mind. / Then, what he suffer'd, when by Fate betray'd! / What brave / attempts for falling Troy he made! / Such were his looks, so gracefully he spoke, / That, were I not resolv'd against the yoke / Of hapless marriage, never to be curst / With second love, so fatal was my first, / To this one error I might yield again; / For, since Sichaeus was untimely slain, / This only man is able to subvert / The fix'd foundations of my stubborn heart. / And, to confess my frailty, to my shame, / Somewhat I find within, if not the same, / Too like the sparkles of my former flame. / But first let yawning earth a passage rend, / And let me thro' the dark abyss descend; / First let avenging Jove, with flames from high, / Drive down this body to the nether sky, / Condemn'd with ghosts in endless night to lie, / Before I break the plighted faith I gave! / No! he who had my vows shall ever have; / For, whom I lov'd on earth, I worship in the grave." / She said: the tears ran gushing from her eyes, / And stopp'd her speech." Translated by John Dryden. Available online: <https://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.4.iv.html> (last viewed: 2025. 03. 03.).

	Vergilius: <i>Aeneid</i> <sup>37</sup>	Frischlin: <i>Dido</i> (1585, A4v-A5r.)	
23.	<b>impulit. agnosco veteris vestigia flammae.</b>	<i>fatum Sichaei, et triste parricidium,</i>	28.
24.	<b>sed mihi vel tellus optem prius ima dehiscat</b>	<b>sparsosque coniugis nece patrios lares,</b>	29.
25.	<b>vel pater omnipotens adigat me fulmine ad umbras,</b>	<b>hic solus inflexit animum, ac sensum impulit,</b>	30.
26.	pallentis <b>umbras Erebo noctemque profundam,</b>	<b>agnosco veteris flammae aliqua vestigia.</b>	31.
27.	ante, <b>pudor, quam te violo</b> aut tua iura resolvo.	<b>Sed mihi prius vel terra dehiscat infima,</b>	32.
28.	ille <b>meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores</b>	<b>vel Iuppiter adigat me ad umbras fulmine,</b>	33.
29.	<b>abstulit; ille habeat secum servetque sepulcro.</b> <sup>38</sup>	<b>umbras nigras Erebi, profundum in Tartarum,</b>	34.
30.	sic effata sinum lacrimis implevit obortis.	<b>Quam te pudor laedam, aut modum violem tuum.</b>	35.
		<b>Qui primus abstulit amores meos, habeat sibi,</b>	36.
		<b>servetque tumulo.</b>	37.

Table 2.

Frischlin continues this parody- or cento-like passage with a long section of dialogue. In the *Aeneid*, there is a conversation consisting of a single exchange, Anna responding to her sister's complaint in a long soliloquy,<sup>38</sup> which Frischlin expands into a dialogue with multiple

38 Canto 4, lines 31-59: "O dearer than the vital air I breathe, / Will you to grief your blooming years bequeath, Condemn'd to waste in woes your lonely life, / Without the joys of mother or of wife? / Think you these tears, this pompous train of woe, / Are known or valued by the ghosts below? / I grant that, while your sorrows yet were green, / It well became a woman, and a queen, / The vows of Tyrian princes to neglect, / To scorn Hyarbas, and his love reject, / With all the Libyan lords of mighty name; / But will you fight against a pleasing flame! / This little spot of land, which Heav'n bestows, / On ev'ry side is hemm'd with warlike foes; / Gaetulian cities here are spread around, / And fierce Numidians there your frontiers bound; / Here lies a barren waste of thirsty land, / And there the Syrtes raise the moving sand; / Barcaean troops besiege the narrow shore, / And from the sea Pygmalion threatens more. / Propitious Heav'n, and gracious Juno, lead / This wand'ring navy to your needful aid: / How will your empire spread, your city rise, / From such a union, and with such allies? / Implore the favor of the pow'rs above, / And leave the conduct of the rest to love. / Continue still your hospitable way, And still invent occasions of their stay, / Till storms and winter winds shall cease to threat, / And planks and oars repair their shatter'd fleet." / These words, which from a friend and sister came, / With ease resolv'd the scruples of her fame, / And added fury to the kindled flame. / Inspir'd with hope, the project they pursue; / On ev'ry altar sacrifice renew: / A chosen ewe of two years old they pay / To Ceres, Bacchus, and the God of Day; / Preferring Juno's pow'r, for Juno ties / The nuptial knot and makes the marriage joys." Translated by John Dryden. Available online: <https://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.4.iv.html> (last viewed: 2025. 03. 03.).

exchanges by interpolating Dido's continuous feedback in his own paraphrased version. Here, the poet introduces syncretism by subtly weaving Christian ideas into the words spoken by the pagan heroine of the play. Thus, he confirms what he anticipated in the *Praefatio*, that the ancient Greco-Roman authors could provide their audience with models for living a pious life, not only with models of rhetorical speech.<sup>39</sup> Dido, in the conversation with her sister below, exhibits virtues such as selflessness, innocence, honesty, certainty in faith and hope.<sup>40</sup>

**Dialogue between Anna and Dido from Act 1,  
Scene 1 (lines 37–79.)**

Anna: What pleasure do you take in mourning the dead forever? Why do you torment your soul with bitterness, sister? What will thou choose? Will you sacrifice your life to departed spirits, or marry again? Or have you other plans? Which is it? Hast thou henceforth to spend thy youth in eternal loneliness and sorrow, ignorant of Venus' gifts and of the blessing of children? Hitherto, no suitor in Tyre or Africa has been able to banish thy grief, nor Iarbas of Numidia, whom thou hast despised, nor any other prince who makes glory of Carthaginian triumphs for yourself. But this love, which is happiness for you, you no longer deny, sister, don't you?

Dido: But I came to this decision.

Anna: Have you forgotten on whose land you have settled, who surrounds you? On one side is the wild Numidia, and shallow waters hostile with reefs; on the other side is the coast desolate with drought; on this side are the cruel Getuls, and on that the raging Mazags our neighbours.

Dido: The innocent is protected by his honour, the surest bulwark against the weapons of the enemy.

Anna: Surely it is often the case that honour is trampled in the mud by violence, and that cruel human hatred mar pious faith. But even if there were no outrages against you in this land, do you not think of the war that is brewing in Tyre, of the terrible threats of your brother Pygmalion? I do believe, indeed, that it was by

39 "Nam meos ego auditores et amo et diligo, ut qui non modo illorum linguas eleganti oratione ex Caesaris et Virgilii libris, sed etiam vitam et mores eorum propositis exemplis virtutum ex iisdem informare studeo." (Frischlin 1585, A3r).

40 For example, the passage in which Dido speaks of the innocent not needing armed protection because their honour protects them from the enemy can be paralleled with the corresponding line in Psalm 25: "Let innocence and honour protect me, for I am waiting for you". And Dido's last words in the first scene remind us, among other things, of Romans chapter 8, which speaks of the certainty of Christian hope.

the gods, by the pious Juno, that the Trojan ships were brought here. Thou shalt see how thy city is renewed, and how its houses thrive on such a marriage. And how great will be your glory when your Punic cities are protected by Trojan arms!

Dido: Admit that only what Jupiter says is right, and Juno, who takes heed of the marriage bond, and Liber and Ceres! Let them graciously approve this marriage!

Anna: Well, do at once what you must, ask permission of the gods, and make sacrifices to them, and please your guests, and give them excuses why they should stay longer: There is still a cruel storm at sea... Orion threatens rain, and the sky is gloomy over the water... The broken Trojan ships cannot yet be put to work on the high seas...

Dido: You give me good advice, and feed my doubting soul with the greatest assurance of the fulfilment of my hopes.

Anna: Let us go quickly to the shrines and ask the gods for help!<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion – Is *Dido* a polyphonic tragedy?

From the first scene of the first act of *Dido*, we can also see examples of how Frischlin uses the techniques of imitation, paraphrase, cento,

41 “[...] AN. Quid iuvat te perpetim / lacrymare mortuum? Quid animum questibus / graves tuum soror? An sepultos iudicas / curare manes, sine nugas, an secus? / Quid? Solane deinceps perennem lugubri / vultu iuventam transiges, nec praemia / Veneris, nec ullos noris ex te liberos? / Esto, procorum nullus ante flectere / aegram potuerit, non Tyro, non Africae / despectus ille Numidae Iarbas, non duces / alii, triumpho quos honorant Punici, / etiamne placito amori huic obstes soror? / DI. Sententia est. AN. Annon tibi in mentem venit, / quorum solo consederis, qui limites, / hinc Numidia infraenis, et inhospita Syrtium / vada, hinc siti deserta regio, hinc aspera / Getulia, hinc late furentes Mazages. / DI. Pudor innocentem proteget, tutissimum / adversus hostium arma propugnaculum. / AN. Saepe pudor armis vincitur saepe improbus / mortalium furor probam laedit fidem. / Et ut hostium neminem habeas in his locis, / non bella cogitas Tyro surgentia, / fratrisque Pygmalionis atroces minas? / Equidem Deis reor auspiciis, et propitiae / Iunone, cursum habuisse Phrygias huc rates. / Quam tu dehinc urbem novam? Quae surgere / connubio tali videbis moenia? / Quantis tuum se rebus attollet decus, / si Punicas urbes Phrygum arma protegant. / DI. Videre quod verum est loqui, modo Iupiter / et Iuno, cui iugale curae est vinculum, / et Liber et Ceres, benigne hic annuant. / AN. Nunc ergo, quod factum est opus, veniam Deos / posce, et sacrum lita, et hospitibus indulgeas, / caussamque nectas hic morandi longius, / dum saeva hyems pelago fremit, dum nubilus / minatur Orion, et intractabile / coelum mari imminet et Phrygum quassae rates / pelagi laborem perpeti non sustinent. / DI. Recte mones, dubiamque mentem spe foves / certissima. AN. Quin ergo adimus ocyus / delubra, pacemque ibi Deorum exquirimus.” (Frischlin 1585, A5r-v).

parody and dialogue to divide the different dramatic parts (S. Horváth 2006, 541–564, 546). Dido's first utterance is the narrative proemium that introduces the fourth canto of the *Aeneid*, and in the Anna-Dido dialogue it is also the protagonist's responses that will be of interest from this point of view. In the details of Dido's individual utterances, which fit into the Christian paradigm and seem alien to the hero's cultural orientation, that we will discover the secondary voice, the authorial language, so to speak. Moving on to the second scene of the first act of *Dido*, we find another precedent for the following narrative locus of the *Aeneid* as spoken by one of the characters, namely the goddess Venus (Frischlin 1585, A5v–A6v. cf. *Aeneid*, canto 4, lines 65–89, Lakatos–Szabó 1967).

In addition to the mixing of narrative and character voices, the alternation of textual techniques (paraphrase – cento/parody – paraphrase – cento/parody...), which the reassessment/rereading of the first act proved to be continuous and regular, is also noticeable in this play. But it is also striking that Frischlin does not want to conform to the normative rules and prescriptions of poetics. In *Dido*, the paraphrased passages bear the marks of both cento and parody, just as the reverse is also true, and even in the case of cento or parody passages, it is impossible to decide clearly which is which. Frischlin's play can therefore be considered a paraphrase, a cento or a parody, since the characteristics of the three imitative techniques are present (and sometimes mixed) in the text,<sup>42</sup> as far as the analysis of the first scene of Act I shows, and this may explain the conceptual confusion in the accompanying text and in the relevant literature.<sup>43</sup>

To sum up, we can say that *Dido* corresponds to the polyphonic concept of imitation that Nicola Kaminski outlines in connection with the two Frischlin comedies *Hildegardis Magna* and *Helvetiogermani*, although not without some restrictions. Kaminski sees the difference between these comedies and the two imitative plays, *Dido* and *Venus*, considered a counterpart to *Dido*, precisely in the monotony of the latter's speeches, yet she gives a contradictory example from the tragedy *Venus*, when Frischlin presents the pleading words of Aeneas from the

42 It is possible that the term 'free imitation' in the preface refers to this formal-technical-linguistic diversity, to the simultaneous use of different imitative procedures, i.e. within a single work of art. The versification is also varied, with long and short lines in a wide range of combinations of regular and irregular metrics. Cf. „Polyphony [...] extends to word, thought, manifestation, language and genre.” (S. Horváth 2006, 545). For more on Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, see Bakhtin 1984, 5–46. The connection between imitative text-forming techniques and polyphony is also shown by the term *carmen harmoniacum* used for cento: Alsted 1630, 554.

43 Andor Tarnai writes about the general experience of parody that it is often from the individual works, which are called paraphrase, cento or parody in a given period, that the actual rules for a given technique or genre must be deduced. The rules sanctioned by theory are therefore not as sure a guide as one might at first think (Tarnai 1990, 444–469).

first canto of the Vergilian epic (lines 91–101), in a derisive tone spoken by Iuno (Kaminski 1995, 129–130). There is no example of such a re-styling in the opening scene of *Dido* that I have examined, but it is certain that this promising opening already bears signs of formal, technical, linguistic and content polyphony, for instance the emotional charge that Dido's first speech brings to the objective prologue introducing the fourth canto of *the Aeneid*. Even though I did not undertake a complete analysis in my present study, I hope my observations contained herein will serve as a basis for further more detailed research toward supporting the hypothesis above.

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