Sexuality and Citizenship is a welcome study of the Elizabethan epyllion. As the title of the book suggests, Ellis’s primary concern is to place the epyllion at the intersections of politics and sex. Rather than opposing the epyllion to epic, Ellis argues that the epyllion was a particularly ironic, Ovidian version of the epic concerned not with the consolidation of national memory but with a moment of transition in which feudal ideology was giving way under the pressure of late Elizabethan juridical and legal innovation. Written against Petrarchan submission, the epyllion responds to this innovation by imaging a new masculine citizen defined by erotic possessiveness. Central to Ellis’s argument are the Inns of Court. Produced largely by and for members of the Inns of Court, Ellis argues, Elizabethan epyllia reflect on and fantasize about this moment of transition through the figure of the adolescent boy who must overcome the dangers of being an object of attraction for both women and older men in order to achieve maturity and social status. Ellis reads this central narrative of the epyllion as one fundamental project of the Inns of Court, where adolescent boys went to achieve status and find a career. Regardless of whatever sexual practices went on at the Inns of Court, an issue that Ellis does not take up, Elizabethan epyllia develop a version of masculine citizenship for the Inns of Court, one based on the rejection of pederastic, sodomitical, and Italian sexualities associated with humanism in favor of a heterosexualized English masculinity rooted in rhetorical force.

A large part of this book’s appeal is the detailed attention that Ellis gives to a wide array of well-known and lesser-studied works, from Marston’s Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image, Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis, and Marlowe’s Hero and Leander, to works like Peend’s Hermaphroditus, R.B.’s Orpheus His Journey to Hell, and Heywood’s Oenone and Paris. Although the book is loosely organized as a history of the genre, individual chapters cluster poems to explore central themes and poetic strategies such as the epyllion’s relation to Petrarchanism, the role of the beautiful young man, ekphrasis and the “political economy of vision” (144), figures of women and the problem of sexual violence, and the representation of international trade. This range can give the book a digressive feel (which Ellis notes). At the same time, Ellis demonstrates the richness of this relatively little studied genre. His analyses are fascinating, provocative, and often deeply insightful. Throughout, Ellis’s claims for the cultural work of the epyllion are persuasive, but some readers might want a more rigorous account of genre. It is probably most accurate to say that Ellis understands genre to be fundamentally responsive. In his analysis, the epyllion is defined as a poem written with an “Ovidian sensibility” that addresses political issues of nationhood through sexuality (8). This open-ended definition allows Ellis to exclude some clearly Ovidian poems, like Drayton’s Endimion and Phoebe, and include some poems that are arguably but not obviously Ovidian, like John Beaumont’s Metamorphosis of Tobacco. He also includes The Rape of Lucrece, which some readers might find surprising.

Aside from its wide-ranging arguments and points of reference, Sexuality and Citizenship will be of interest to Marlovians for two main reasons. The first is Ellis’s
fascinating reading of *Hero and Leander*. Following Leonard Barkan’s readings of humanism and homoeroticism, Ellis connects the Neptune digression with the Mercury digression, arguing quite persuasively that *Hero and Leander* is split between a desire for humanist homoeroticism and the realization that this world has been violently overcome as new forms of masculinity emerge. In the process, Ellis gives a sophisticated and insightful reading of Marlowe’s heightened sense of artifice, which he implicitly poses against Leander’s violent and imposing rhetoric. Throughout the poem, Marlowe distinguishes and emphasizes word over thing, which leads to idolatry and fetishism in Sestos, as words become things, and in Abydos it leads to evasion, as things seem to hide behind words. While Leander literally evades homoeroticism, Marlowe shows how this evasion is part of an emergent masculinity which leaves humanist homoeroticism behind. The second reason Ellis’s book will be of interest to Marlovians is that he subtly places Marlowe as a singularly significant figure within the history of the epyllion. Marlowe (who was not to our knowledge associated with the Inns of Court) exposes the “fantasy at the heart of the genre” (15), which subsequent writers aggressively avoid. Writers like Thomas Edwards in *Narcissus*, John Weever in *Faunus and Melliflora*, and Francis Beaumont in *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* explicitly take Marlowe as a model. But they celebrate emergent forms of masculinity and at the same time reject the humanist forms of homoeroticism whose passing Marlowe mourns. More than just a history of misreading or misappropriation, Ellis elaborates a literary history in which subsequent writers’ discomfort with Marlovian eroticism becomes symptomatic of broader cultural formations.

Graham Hammill  
University of Notre Dame