MSA ANNUAL MEETINGS
WASHINGTON, 1996

Marlowe’s Imagery:
From Page to Stage

Sunday, December 29, 8:30–9:45 a.m. Idaho, Sheraton Washington. Presiding: Sara Munson Deats, University of South Florida.

1. "Discovering Persephone in Marlowe’s Hero and Leander," Pamela Royston Macfie, University of the South.


3. "Off Book: Faustus on Page, on Stage," Robert Kimbrough, Madison, WI.

The Other in Marlowe:
Jew, Oriental, Sodomite

Monday, December 30, 12:00 noon–1:15 p.m. Lanai 152, Sheraton Washington. Presiding: Robert A Logan, University of Hartford.


FOURTH INTERNATIONAL MARLOWE CONFERENCE

The Fourth International Conference of the Marlowe Society of America will be held at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, England, from Monday, June 29 to Friday, July 3, 1998. Although the topics to be covered at the Conference have not yet been decided, we welcome suggestions for panels, papers, abstracts, and proposals. All inquiries, suggestions, and submissions should be sent to Sara Munson Deats, Chair and Professor of English, University of South Florida, 4202 East Fowler Avenue, Tampa, Florida, 33620-5550 (e-mail: sdeats@chuma.cas.usf.edu).

"STRANGE AND WONDERFULL SYGHTS": MARLOWE’S PRODIGIES AND PORTENTS, MONSTERS AND MARVELS

An abstract of the paper presented at the 1995 MSA Meeting by Mark Thornton Burnett, The Queen’s University of Belfast.

This paper explores Marlowe’s Tamburlaine the Great in relation to Elizabethan "freak shows," in particular, and monster and progidy books, in general. It argues that monsters and prodigies constituted an area of vital enquiry in early modern scientific and popular discourses, and that Marlowe’s play is implicated in these discussions. In his actions, such as displaying the caged Bajazeth and the preserved Zenocrate, Tamburlaine can be likened to the fairground showman or entertainer. As he uses "monstrous" languages to contain his enemies, moreover, so do Tamburlaine’s enemies deploy a similar rhetoric in their attempts to explain the Scythian’s extraordinary rise to military preeminence. He is, for instance, seen in terms of giganticism, the hydra and "unnatural" offspring. Monsters and prodigies on earth have their counterparts in the skies, and an important subsidiary aspect of the play is the concern with prodigious happenings in heaven, such as falls of bloody rain and armies in the clouds. These phenomena occupy vexed places in Tamburlaine, and are finally constitutive of ideas of revelation and judgment, most succinctly described in the vision of Saint John the Divine. In the final scenes of the play, as Tamburlaine is defeated by the "monster" of mortality he is nudge by an invincible, invisible adversary.
MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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Overseas members: 1 year = $25, 3 years = $65
Graduate students: U.S./Canada = $10; Overseas = $15

MSA Newsletter publishes reviews of Renaissance, and especially Marlovian, drama; notices of recent and forthcoming publications; announcements; and brief articles or notes of interest to Marlovian scholars. The opinions expressed are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect that of the MSA. The editor reserves the right to refuse items, to ask for revisions, and to make stylistic changes that he deems appropriate. Send inquiries, announcements, and submissions to Professor Brandt at the above address. The deadline for the spring issue is March 15, 1997.

MSA Book Reviews publishes reviews of books on Marlowe and his period. Reviews, suggestions for reviews, and inquiries should be sent to the Reviews Editor:

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MARLOWE AND SHAKESPEARE’S AFRICAN QUEENS

An abstract of the paper presented at the 1995 MSA Meeting by Maurice Charney, Rutgers University.

Shakespeare’s relation to Marlowe needs to be established on conceptual similarities and not on the old-fashioned basis of verbal parallels. Sometimes Shakespeare is so close to Marlowe that he verges on parody, but most of the time he goes out of his way to conceal and obscure his verbal similarities.

I want to look at the relation of Marlowe’s Dido Queen of Carthage to two plays of Shakespeare, Hamlet and Antony and Cleopatra. For convenience, I am omitting the role of Nashe in Dido. Although I concentrate on these two plays, I also take account of the wealth of Dido allusions in Shakespeare.

"Aeneas’ tale to Dido" in Hamlet occurs in a context that emphasizes that the play Shakespeare is talking about is, indeed, Marlowe’s Dido. This is the kind of private theater play that Hamlet finds to be "Caviary to the general." Again in the dramatic context, Aeneas’ tale to Dido is very relevant to the tragic matrix in Hamlet.

Dido is referred to often in Shakespeare as a classical exemplar of forsaken love. This has particular point for our understanding of Antony and Cleopatra, which is the natural culmination of Shakespeare’s preoccupation with Vergil’s Aeneid. There are some striking verbal parallels between Shakespeare and Marlowe, but the similarity is essentially one of conception and style. Dido and Cleopatra are both African queens, and Tamora in Titus Andronicus, although Gothic, is related to this pair. There is also a link between the male roles, and the conception of maleness, in Marlowe and Shakespeare’s plays.

FROM THE MASSACRE AT PARIS TO LA REINE MARGOT:
THE "BLOODIE MARRIAGE" OF THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION

An abstract of the paper presented at the 1995 MSA Meeting by Ellen C. Caldwell, Clarkson University.

In the St. Bartholomew massacre of 1572, some 3,000 Huguenots were killed in Paris. The occasion for finding so many Huguenot leaders unguarded and unprepared for this violence was the "marriage of peace" between Marguerite de Valois, sister of king Charles IX, with the young Huguenot prince, Henri Bourbon, king of Navarre. The lurid circumstances of the violence—a conjugal union—has since become the center of the tragedy in popular representations.
In Marlowe’s play the role of Margaret is quite small, but she and Catherine de Medici form the structural center of this drama. Just below the surface is the notion that (female) sexuality—because finally uncontrollable—has the potential force not only to create new life or a new civil order, but also to propagate violent disruptions to civil society.

Anne Dowriche’s *The French Historie* (1589) makes the same connections between the marriage and the political disorder, and the anonymous *Divorce satyrique* (1607) provides the first historical accusation of Marguerite’s sexual "depravity." Since this damaging portrait, literary representations have cast Marguerite as a lubricious but tragic queen. From the historical novel of Alexandre Dumas, *La Reine Margot* (1844-1845), to its film adaptations with Jeanne Moreau (1954) and then Isabel Adjani (two versions; 1994 and 1995), the figure of Marguerite de Valois has grown to balance that of her mother.

Using a comparative approach that crosses historical lines, this paper argues that by focusing on the conflation of Marguerite’s marriage and the St. Bartholomew massacre, literary reconstructions of the events have tended to read the violence in terms of female sexuality. Contemporary and later representations of the events thus allow one to read Marlowe’s play as something far more complex than tasteless, militantly anti-Catholic and anti-French propaganda. With this union Marlowe dramatizes the violent death spasms of an exhausted, emasculated dynasty across the bodies of both its female representatives.

**THE RICHARD LONCRANE RICHARD III**

Directed by Richard Loncraine. Based on the stage production directed by Richard Eyre. United Artists. Running time one hour and five minutes. With Ian McKellen (Richard), Annette Bening (Queen Elizabeth), Jim Broadbent (Buckingham), Robert Downey Jr. (Rivers), Nigel Hawthorne (Clarence), Kristin Scott Thomas (Lady Anne), Maggie Smith (Duchess of York), John Wood (King Edward), Adrian Dunbar (Tyrrel).

Having seen the Richard Eyre stage production of Richard III in London in August of 1990, I went to see the film version with considerable anticipation when it finally arrived in my neighborhood. The film, after all, arrived with positive advance notices:

"Richard III offers action-adventure in Masterpiece Theater trappings. Its welcoming title character and sinister host, Mr. McKellen, plays a black-hearted Alastair Cooke daring us to join him in a party game of murder for power. Who could resist?" (Holden).

"This movie is the fetid, enthralling goods, the Nixon that Oliver Stone didn’t quite dare to make" (Corsiiss).

"This smart Richard III looks terrific, moves like the wind and rides the nerve of McKellen daring us not to enjoy its central monster’s evil panache" (Carr).
"The film is screen fantasy at its finest, combining elements of Hollywood spectacle with British acting tradition, and big-budget production design of 1930s sets with eternal themes of male power lust." (Meltz).

"This lush yet revaged backdrop, with its suggestions of Visconti and Bertolucci films set in the same period, established a familiar sense of an anxious, desperately hedonistic wartime society in which the usual rules of society are suspended. It is the perfect clay for Richard's purposeful military hands" (Brantley).

What I experienced was a parody of Hollywood films, at times mildly amusing, most of the time simply grotesque, a shallow, meretricious shadow of the stage production.

The film does more than strain credulity. At the beginning, Prince Edward and King Henry, together at Tewkesbury, forget to post any guards. A tank rumbles up and crashes through their headquarters. Richard leaps out and kills them.

At the end, the abandoned Bankside Power Station, which had been the Tower, becomes, it seems, Richard's redoubt for the final battle. Shrewsbury resembles the small unit struggles in the factories of Stalingrad during that pivotal battle. The analogy is that history itself can turn on the hinge of a tiny moment within a larger war. If Richard had had a horse to pull his staff car out of the mud. . . . But Richard, the Nazi here, has no air force. Until Dunkerque and the Battle of Britain, Hitler's Stukas and Me 109s had dominated the skies. But here, Air Marshall Stanley (who had never won the British Distinguished Flying Cross, one noticed) has the only airplane! If one imitates history, particularly on film, that history must be depicted with fidelity and not be "transparently fake" (Holden), particularly when the rest of the late '30s details, down to the smallest Tiffany pin, have been so meticulously recreated. But then it does not matter by the end of this travesty. We have to see horses, since they are mentioned in this botched-up film script, but they are as heavily anachronistic in an otherwise mechanized world as is an army that has tiger tanks but neither an air force nor some early warning system to show the blips of enemy planes.

Richard delivers the first part of the opening speech into a microphone at the Tewkesbury Victory Party and then to himself in the palace men's room. He includes a slighter borrowing from III Henry VI than had Olivier. He notices us halfway through the speech, accusing us implicitly of being Tom's peeping on his peeing. Unlike Kenneth Branagh's engaging iago in Oliver Parker's Othello, McKellen's Richard never does ask "us to join him," as Holden says he does. He sneers at us as he sneers at the feeble characters he manipulates in the film. The result is an alienation from him, as opposed to the fascinated emotional participation in his schemes and our sharing in his response to their success that Branagh's evil schemer invites.

Clarence's big speech is delivered irrelevantly to his guard as the former moves onto a grim circle of concrete surrounded by a foul moat. Clarence is willing to stay outside during a London soaker because it is his exercise period. The speech demands quiet and a reengendered fear. Here it is not only pointless, but largely lost to the downpour. Clarence is not drowned in that droll butt of malmsey but has his throat cut in a bathtub, a borrowing from the enforced suicide of the old capo in The Godfather.

Robert Downey Jr. (Rivers), apparently an American seeking a title, is imported into this production to provide a dash of sexuality and to be dispatched suddenly. He reads his few lines as if reciting today's specials. While simultaneously smoking, drinking brandy and being massaged by his friendly air stewardess, he is startled to see, with his final sunny beams, a knife emerge from his stomach. Trick or treat! This also borrows from The Godfather, where, as you will recall, a hood and his moll are tommy-gunned in bed while the christening is going on.

The final chase scene up the steps and along the floor of a ruined building is on loan from a thousand old films—how many detectives and courageous cops have pursued their culprits upward into the scaffolding? How many criminals have run out of ammunition and tossed their guns away in disgust? How many crooks or crookbacks have tumbled from their perches? Richard falls away into the flames, a Faustian end, as Al Jolson warbles the 1925 song, "Sitting on Top of the World." Yes, it is meant to remind us of James Cagney walking the last mile in a '30s flicker, but the sudden intrusion of Jolson is inconsistent with the tunes that have been a leitmotive here. Marlowe's "Come Live With Me, and Be My Love" is sung by a chanteuse at the outset, as a bandleader made up to look like Glenn Miller waves his stick. It might have been fun had we heard versions of "It Was a Lover and His Lass" or "O, Mistress Mine" with Bert Ambrose or Ray Noble settings in the background from time to time, but the promising beginning is not pursued.

Richard does put on a 78 as he delectates over photos of Hastings' execution by hanging. Hitler had watched the films of the slow strangulation of the Stauffenberg plotters in July 1944. Later, Richard eavesdrops on the garrotting of Buckingham, who is cut off, it seems, with piano wire, as the Stauffenberg conspirators had been. In the 1990 stage version, however, Hastings' head had been brought to Richard in a bucket. He reached delicately into the bucket,
apparently to close Hastings’ eyes. It was macabre, but funny.

The film erases the play’s rhythms—Richard’s brilliant step-by-step progress to the throne and the nemesis that begins at the moment he “is seated” are gone here. Even the sequence of frantic reports in 4.4.495 ff. is edited out, although we do get Richard’s striking of the messenger who brings word of Buckingham’s capture and Richard’s subsequent “I cry thee mercy.” In the inherited script, however, the striking is motivated by Richard’s belief that here is more bad news. What we get, as Holden says, “is little more than a collection of famous speeches connected by the Cliff notes.” It is as if some of the original words are obligatory amid the dreary drift of a ’30s world ignoring the Depression around it and colluding in a slide towards war. Holden calls the film “a glib equation between the rise of Fascism and upper-class ennui. But it makes that equation with such a campy exaggeration that it finally seems tongue-in-cheek.” If so, why? It is Richard who shows us how effete and/or naive his rivals are. All that reinforcement from the film diminishes Richard’s brilliant skill in exploiting weaknesses which would probably be survivable if not for his malevolence. And, of course, the reality of Hitler’s pre-war Germany needs no fictional embellishment. Many upper-middle-class German men were happy to accept honorary colonels in the SS and thus join the fashionable uniformed set of the late 1930s. We do see Buckingham do precisely that here.

This production has almost no humor. Richard does turn to us to say “I am not made of stone,” but otherwise the film’s literalization of what even Richard recognizes as improbable fiction flattens the story into sheer and unrelenting grimness. We don’t want require a comic Richard—this is an evil character—but we do need some variation in tone.

Richard does not appear “aloft, between two Bishops” (First Folio), but is secreted in a room with two musicians. This is a modern analogue to that old time religion, one assumes, but it is not as funny as the scene can be as scripted.

Buckingham does not get his amusing line “This general applause and cheerful shout / Argues your wisdom...” Buckingham and Richard do not create for the Lord Mayor the farcical pretense that Lovel and Ratcliff are enemies approaching (III.v.18-19). And Richard does not say to Buckingham, after all the talk of bastardy, “Yet touch this sparingly, as’t were far off; / Because, my lord, you know my mother lives.”

The effort here goes into a simulation of Nazism. Like Hitler, Richard operates from a railway car. Buckingham, in uniform, looks just a bit like Herman Goering, Ratcliff like Martin Borman, Catesby like Rudolph Hess and Tyrrel like the model of a perfect Aryan. The hall in which cheering brown shirts greet Richard is a colorized replica of the one filmed by Leni Reifenstahl on the night of the 1934 Nuremberg Party Conference.

We get a brief touch of Zeffirelli at the end. Richmond and Elizabeth have been married. Their wedding night is also the eve of battle. Dawn comes to their rumpled sheets. Kate Steavenson-Payne who had been pulled empty-faced from place to place throughout the film, finally gets a line. I expected her to say, “Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.” Richmond blows her a kiss and strides cheerily off to war. He rides around in a gun truck during the battle, firing his machine gun at anything that moves, imitating Michael Dukakis in his tank, trying to look like a Republican in 1988.

The film does have a few good moments, like a cut from King Edward pulling oxygen into his wasted lungs to one of Richard smoking and about to burn Clarence’s pardon. We observe Edward’s survivors from his deathbed, as if his shade has hung around for an instant before being sent to wherever it is going. As young York says “that you should bear me on your shoulders,” he jumps on Richard’s back and throws him to the platform of the railroad station where Richard writhes in agony. This is a violent homage to Olivier, who had shown his naked hatred for a terrifying instant when York had taunted him about his lumpy back. We watch Richard’s coronation and then, after a glimpse of Lady Anne’s vacant face, see the same thing in black and white. It is as if Lady Anne were hallucinating until we realize that we are in the royal screening room as the royal party watches a newscast. Later, we learn that Lady Anne is a heroin addict. We know that she is dead when a spider crawls over an unblinking eye. The young princes play at war, one wielding a biplane above a toy locomotive. But the film provides no sense of Richard’s “playing,” either as actor or as intellectual athlete. McKellen’s “Richard,” as Rafferty says, “is a dull, efficient, affectless sort of monster.” He was not much more than that in the stage version, but a complete script permitted McKellen to suggest the concentric circles of institutionalized evil radiating outward from the still center which his presence created. The effect was achieved because he stood alone on a vast stage, not surrounded by the busy ’30s mise en scene that Loncraine constructs. As with other anachronistic productions of the script—I think of the Papp/Antonio Much Ado of the 1970s—we have two plays competing against each other, with the Shakespeare script a distant runner-up. On stage, McKellen did not need Olivier’s “startling animal vitality” (Rafferty). On film, however, he needed Hitler’s mesmerizing presence. Another actor might bring that to Richard III, but I don’t think it is inherent in the role. The script and the analogy are probably incompatible,
as some critics argued of the stage production (Berkowitz, Nightingale), but it worked on stage because it was suggested in the ways stage can suggest, rather than enforced in the ways film must convince.

Richard Eyre's stage version was the imitation of an action. We watched the virtuoso performance of McKellen and Richard. On stage, McKellen, with one hand, extracted a cigarette from a silver case and lit it—a performance in itself. The closest he comes to this facility on film is to pull a ring from his hand with his teeth then place it on Anne's finger. On stage, McKellen accosted Lady Anne as she pursued the journey on which Henry VI lay. His wooling was self-amused and convincing. On stage, McKellen could convince us of an ironic distance which the many closeups in the film erase. In the film, the scene occurs in a white-tiled mortuary, as Anne mourns not Henry VI but Prince Edward, plugged through the head. As Terence Rafferty says, the sequence lacks an "appalling magnetism...potent enough to win the grieving widow over. As the charmless McKellen and the wan Thomas play it, Anne's capitulation is wholly incomprehensible, not a breath of sexual passion is visible." Furthermore, McKellen seems to be playing the scene "straight" in the film. Afterwards, as Ben Brantley says, "he Waltzes though the casualty-cluttered corridors of a hospital to a jazzland beat, like the boy who has just won the girl in a 30's musical." On stage, McKellen had a mourning band already in place as he entered the scene in which the others learn that Clarence is dead. That band predicted the fascist armbands to come. Buckingham threw his own armband on to the empty throne as he said, "Made him king for this?" In the film, Buckingham says the line just before his windpipe is shut. In Richard's stage dream, Lady Anne (Eve Matheson) danced briefly with Richmond (Colin Hurley) and Richard, suddenly desiring what he had cast away, felt a stab of sexual jealousy. In the film, a sweating Richard hears angry voices from the past. The formal, stylized dream is discarded, one assumes, for something more psychologically plausible. But a surreal moment had come earlier when a boar-faced Richard embodied Stanley's dream. That is an isolated effect that might better have tasted the cutting room floor, like the rest of the film. McKellen virtually throws the subsequent soliloquy away, sweating and mumbling.

We suspended our disbelief for the stage version and were pulled into a nightmare world of black uniforms, kleig lights, and summary executions. The stage forced us in its suggestions with our imaginations. The grim rooms around the single light bulbs under which prisoners were interrogated became visible to us and multiplied into other countries and other times. We could sense, just out of sight, the thousand outstretched arms of the Reifenstahl film and the clump of the goosestep down the Champs-Elysee (or Oxford Street) in 1940. By trying to make it "real," the film does not permit us to believe any of it.

Olivier's film is Oliviercentric, as are all the films in which he directed himself, and contains more language than film can easily accommodate. But Olivier brought a malign sexuality to the role and gave us a splendid Shrewsbury, his map in the dust suddenly materializing in soldier, halberd, and horse. It also had Claire Bloom, John Gielgud, and Ralph Richardson. It is hardly Olivier's best Shakespeare film, ranking, I think, well behind his Henry V and Hamlet. The Olivier version, however, looks very good beside this new Richard III. This film "is as unnaturally proportioned as its hunchbacked central character," says Rafferty. The inherited material has been pulled, twisted, and hollowed out into a "Friday 13th" or "Pulp Fiction," with more than just a hint of Richard Dreyfuss's Ludicrous Richard III in "The Goodbye Girl." To witness Shakespeare subjected to the most blatant of Hollywood cliches is to be reminded of Doctor Johnson's statement on another topic: "It is not done well, but then, one is surprised to see it done at all."

H. R. Coursen
University of Maine, Augusta

NOTE

WORKS CITED:


MARLOWE CAME TO MADISON, WISCONSIN

Last Spring, Robert Kimbrough announced in this Newsletter his plans for a production of Doctor Faustus to open over Labor Day Weekend for a run of ten performances.

In his description of the project, Kimbrough said: "My goal is not to present a classic play to an audience, but to draw the audience into Faustus's story in order to experience that story with Faustus."

My ultimate goal is to prove that drama is realized ultimately only through an audience, stimulating and engaging its thoughts, laughter, and tears. I wish to show Madison theatergoers that Marlowe's Doctor Faustus is a great play not because it is greatly written, not because it is 400 years old, but because it simply and completely entertains, broadly and deeply."

It looks like Kimbrough reached his goals—all performances were full-house, the entire run having sold out right after the opening weekend.
One reviewer said, "Honest Puck Productions' ambitious staging of Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus is reminiscent of some of the bold storefront theater productions that took Chicago by storm in the early 1980s."

Another, "It is an astonishing, heady, vibrant production of Doctor Faustus, beautifully conceived and directed by Kimbrough (who also adapted the script from the original 1604 and 1616 versions)."

And yet another, "Madison's newest theater troupe, Honest Puck Productions, sets a high standard for themselves with their inaugural offering, Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus." Nearly everything about the production is exciting, starting with its confident professionalism in spite of its do-it-yourself status and its staging at the storefront Brave Hearts Theatre."

Kimbrough will be talking about the production at the Marlowe Society's first session at the MLA in December. He will also bring still shots, slides, and a video.

RECENT STUDIES IN MARLOWE


Holmes, John Randall. "Lay for Pleasure Here a Space: Figure/position in Marlovian Dramaturgy." Dissertation Abstracts International 56 (1995): 559A.


FROM THE EDITOR

MSAN depends upon the membership for its contents. Reviews of films or productions relating to Renaissance and especially Marlovian drama, brief articles and notes on Marlowe or matters related to Marlovian studies, announcements and calls for papers, and ideas or experiences relating to teaching Marlowe are welcome. Send submissions to Bruce E. Brandt, Editor, MSAN, English Department, Box 504, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD 57007. Send contributions for the next issue of MSAN by March 15, 1997.

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