FROM THE MSA PRESIDENT

Scholarship and the MSA

The Marlowe Society of America’s goal of promoting scholarship on the life and works of Christopher Marlowe is one that we continue to meet with great success. Our sessions in Washington last December drew extremely large audiences; one was standing room only. As I write, the deadline for submitting next year’s programs has not yet arrived, but it is drawing close. From the submissions received thus far it is evident that our 2006 sessions in Philadelphia will rival last year’s success.

Our International Conferences, held every five years, offer another major forum for Marlowe scholarship. They too have been quite successful in creating opportunities for new work on Marlowe. For example, selected papers from the Conferences and the MLA sessions can be found in the following publications: “A Poet and a filthy playmaker? New Essays on Christopher Marlowe,” edited by Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama. (New York: AMS Press, 1988); Marlowe: History and Sexuality, edited by Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS Press, 1998); and Marlowe’s Empery: Augmenting His Critical Contexts, edited by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002). In addition, articles and chapters far too numerous to list here found early presentation at MSA sessions and International Conferences.

In another few months we will be issuing a call for papers for the 2007 MLA. As well, our next International Conference is only two years away (June 29-July 4, 2008). At that time, we will be in Canterbury where Marlowe was born and raised. It certainly is not too early for members to begin thinking about the work that they would like to present at this exciting venue.

Bruce E. Brandt
President, Marlowe Society of America

MSA BOOK REVIEWS
Edited by Charles Whitney
Inside, p. 7

From the Editor, MSAN

With this issue comes my turn to say goodbye, having enjoyed six interesting and fulfilling years editing our society newsletter. I have learned a great deal from a great many people over the past six years, met and corresponded with scholars, and felt very much in contact with the society in general. Rest assured, I won’t
be going far away and will continue as a member of the MSA for many years to come.

**Pierre Hecker** will edit the next issue as new editor of *MSAN*. Please address all correspondence to Pierre at:

Pierre Hecker  
Gustavus Adolphus College  
800 West College Ave.  
Saint Peter, MN 56082  
pierrehecker@hotmail.com

The Marlowe Society of America is an international scholarly society with much to share. Let’s stay in touch. Wherever you see Marlowe happening, do let the society know. *MSAN* provides a forum for reviews of films or theatrical productions of Marlovian drama as well as other brief articles and notes of interest to Marlovians.

**Charles Whitney** continues as MSA Book Reviews editor. For Charles’s contact information, see opposite column and Editor’s Note, p.7.
Abstracts of the MSA Session, "Marlowe’s Literary and Biblical Influences" Washington, DC, 2005

(Photos courtesy MSA President Bruce Brandt.)

Violence, Love, and Strife: Lucan’s Cosmology and Marlowe’s Hero and Leander

By

Pamela Royston Macfie
University of the South

Pamela Royston Macfie

In several charged passages in *Hero and Leander*, Marlowe incorporates images and phrases that closely derive from his translation of Lucan’s *Civil Wars*. Millar Maclure identifies three parallels between these works in his Revels edition of Marlowe’s poems and translations. Where Maclure, however, is interested in identifying isolated verbal echoes insofar as such echoes evince a distinctive, Marlovian turn of phrase, I am interested in the programmatic results of Marlowe’s returns to Lucan. Without variation, these returns inform those passages in *Hero and Leander* that associate erotic love with cosmic disorder. Each passage marks a crucial moment in the narrative of love; each, as this paper demonstrates, also marks the poet’s authority.

Marlowe’s allusions to Lucan occur in three interrelated passages. The first passage (1.97-102) describes the strangely galvanic atmosphere in which Hero and Leander meet; the second (1.188-91) conveys the elements’ preternatural response to that meeting; the third (2.287-93) associates the consummation of Hero and Leander’s love with elemental strife. In these passages, Marlowe does not recycle phrases from *Lucan’s First Book* for the sake of verbal economy. He yokes his exploration of erotic passion to the universal violence that is at once Lucan’s subject matter and his method. Doing so, Marlowe imparts strange energies not only to his subject matter of love, but also to his identity as a poet who writes of love’s dark complexity.

Alluding in *Hero and Leander* to certain metapoetic moments in Lucan’s furious text, Marlowe presents himself, at three strategic turns in a poem that overtly announces its debts to Ovid and Musaeus, as a new Lucan: a poet who defines his relationship with the literary past as an exercise in violent reversals.

How Marlowe Read Spenser:
A Suggestion

By

Steven W. May
Georgetown College

Steven W. May

A persistent problem in Marlowe studies concerns how the playwright managed to incorporate a number of passages from Spenser’s unpublished *Faerie Queene* into both parts of *Tamburlaine*. The two works were not
published until 1590, while the poets’ biographies argue that they could not have met before then, if ever. Apparently, however, a manuscript of the *Faerie Queene* circulated in England no later than 1588. The most compelling evidence for this assertion is Abraham Fraunce’s quotation of an entire stanza from Spenser’s poem in his 1588 *Arcadian Rhetoric*. The question remains, how did Marlowe gain access to the *Faerie Queene* some years before its publication?

While scholars have supposed that Fraunce received a copy of the poem from the Countess of Pembroke, to whom Spenser presumably sent a copy of his magnum opus, this seems to me a highly unlikely scenario. Confined to his public duties in Ireland, Spenser needed help in finding an English publisher for his lengthy poetic narrative. But neither the countess nor anyone in her circle would have felt obligated to help the poet accomplish this. It is more likely that Spenser dispatched a fair copy of the work to his old friend Gabriel Harvey. If so, Harvey could have shared the manuscript with Marlowe whom he may have considered a promising M.A. candidate and fledgling poet well-qualified to comment on Spenser’s work.

It is far more likely, however, that Harvey loaned the *Faerie Queene* to Fraunce. By 1587 Harvey was practicing law at the Court of Arches in London, scarcely a quarter mile from Gray’s Inn where Fraunce was also preparing for a law career. Both men had been fellows of their Cambridge colleges in the early 1580s. They shared common literary interests, and they referred to one another in their writings. Moreover, Fraunce was an entrenched client of the Herbert-Sidney family who began his career as a publishing poet in 1587. Fraunce’s patronage connections and status at the Inns of Court qualified him to promote Spenser’s work effectively. And Fraunce could have become acquainted with Marlowe by this time through a number of plausible scenarios. Fraunce was a fellow of St. John’s College when Marlowe arrived at the University as an undergraduate, and Marlowe’s friend Thomas Nashe matriculated from St. John’s about a year before Fraunce left to study law at Gray’s Inn. Indeed, if common literary interests had already forged a tie between Marlowe and Fraunce, Abraham could have introduced Nashe to Marlowe before he left the University late in 1583.

Marlowe’s access to the *Faerie Queene* was not likely to have been mediated through Spenser’s alleged ties with the Herbert-Sidney families. Rather, both poets’ connections with Cambridge University offer a more likely explanation of how Spenser’s manuscript found its way to Marlowe no later than 1587. And this Cambridge connection provides as well our most promising lead toward answering the larger biographical question of how Marlowe managed the transition from Cambridge graduate student to London playwright (with or without an interlude as government agent overseas).

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**Apocalypse and Marlowe’s Tragic Vision**

By

Patrick Ryan

Texas A&M University, Texarkana

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**Patrick Ryan**

An earlier generation of critics, preoccupied with Christian humanism in Shakespeare’s historical dramas, underestimate Christopher Marlowe’s work, charging that it lacks a coherent view of history. According to one
influential critic, Marlowe sees “no pattern in history” because he fails to acknowledge the workings of divine providence and cannot unify his dramas under a “large scheme encompassing God’s plan for men extending over many decades” (Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, 1965, p. 131).

More recent criticism, also noting an “absence of the mysterious operations of divine providence” in Marlowe’s tragedies, focuses on his iconoclastic heroes who meet death after rising to power through force of their will (Tom McAllindon, *English Renaissance Tragedy*, 1986, p. 109-110; Stephen Greenblatt, “Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play,” *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 1980). Such readings have demonstrated that Marlowe’s tragic vision anticipates certain postmodernist assumptions about history (Sara Munson Deats, “Marlowe’s Interrogative Drama: *Dido, Tamburlaine*, Dr. Faustus, and Edward II,” in *Marlowe’s Empery*, 2002).

In my paper, I show that Marlowe frames his tragedies within a radical apocalyptic view of history propagated by Elizabeth’s church and state during the late 1580’s and early 1590’s, when Marlowe achieved success on the London stage. According to Tudor apocalyptic, divine providence allows cruelty and catastrophic violence in order to exact retributive vengeance against the elect and the rebrobe alike, an eschatology consonant with Marlowe’s tragic vision. To invoke Tudor apocalyptic historiography, Marlowe injects doomsday imagery into his scenes of climactic violence, especially his death scenes.

To begin, I review interpretation of *Tamburlaine* as the “scourge of god,” that is, an instrument of retributive providence (Roy Battenhouse, “Tamburlaine, the ‘Scourge of God’,” *PMLA*, 1941; Mark Hutchins, “Marlowe’s ‘Scourge of God’,” *Notes and Queries*, 2004). I focus on Tamburlaine’s siege of Babylon as allusion to St. John’s apocalyptic prophecies and show a woodcut depiction of the destruction of Babylon from Luther’s September Bible. With *The Jew of Malta*, I recall Tudor fear of Muslims as minions of Satan and Antichrist, and I review scholarship associating Barabas with Antichrist. Showing a woodcut illustration of St. John’s legendary torture in a vat of boiling oil, I relate Barabas’s death with the Book of Revelation. In his choice to dramatize *The Massacre at Paris*, Marlowe exploits Elizabethan fascination with Protestant martyrdom, a sign of the End Time according to Tudor exegesis propagated by Foxe in his *Actes and Monuments*. In *Massacre*, the lifeless body of the Admiral of France is hung from a tree, an *acte symbolique* recalling Jesus’ crucifixion and prophecy that the good would die like him, on a “green tree.” Finally, I examine christological and apocalyptic imagery in *Edward II* and illustrate my treatment with *The Harvest of the Wrath of God*, a panel in the Great East Window of Yorkminster, and an early Renaissance painting of *Christ Treading the Winepress* (see my “Marlowe’s Edward II and the Medieval Passion Play,” *Comparative Drama*, 1999).

My thesis is that, in his plays, Marlowe stages a coherent view of history that integrates St. Luke’s paradigm of historical recurrence with St. John’s apocalyptic prophecies.

*Tamburlaine*

Directed by David Farr at the *Bristol Old Vic* and the *Barbican*, October–November 2005. With Greg Hicks as Tamburlaine, Kolade Agboke as Usuncasane, Stephen Kennedy as Techelles, Chuk Iwuji as Theridamas, Rachael Stirling as Zenocrate, Jeffery Kisson as Bajazeth, Vinta Morgan as Mycetes / Callapine, David Hounslove as the Soldan / Orcanes, Tim Chipping as Cosrooe / King of Jerusalem, Will Tacey as Almeda / Meander, Ann Ogbomo as Zabina, Katy Stephens as Anippe / Olympia, Robert Vernon as Amyras / Ortygius, John Wark as Agydas / Calphysas, Ben Lambert as Basso / Celebinus, and Jordan Bolton and Ben Mailing sharing the rôle of Young Boy.

David Farr’s production of *Tamburlaine* collapses Part One (which takes us up to the interval) and Part Two into one slick, smooth-
running production which comes in at 2hrs 50 minutes, including the interval. Much of this rapidity is due to the director’s smart seguing between scenes; typically, a group of characters finishing their scene will fall silent and immediately be plunged into darkness, while the lights seamlessly pick out a different group, already onstage, who immediately start speaking. The result is to counteract the static and repetitive feel of many of these scenes with a sense of paciness and drive.

This was a very Brechtian production. ‘It is definitely Marlowe, not Mother Courage?’ asked my husband as we took our seats, surveying the stark set of metal poles and the rows of clothes hung from rails for characters to don and doff outfits—and hence roles—onstage. The horse-kings strained and sweated as they pulled the chariot round and round the stage (‘I told you it was Mother Courage’ said my husband afterwards), and the closing tableau was accompanied by the bloodstained white outfits of the dead descending from on high and hovering above the characters’ heads. Those who were not acting often sat by the side of the stage, and the braining of Bajazeth and Zabina was signalled as much by loud music as by action. Against this backdrop, Greg Hicks’ rangy Tamburlaine characteristically stands in three-quarters profile, as if only temporarily pausing in his stalk across the globe, and rants and thunders in suitably splendid style, although the Barbican’s muffling acoustic worked its usual wicked magic here.

Apart from the cuts, which included the Prologue, almost the entirety of the Sigismund / Orcanes plot, and the speech of Tamburlaine’s doctor, Farr is generally faithful to the text, but there were one or two changes. Zenocrate’s ‘rape’ by Tamburlaine became her ‘use’, which is a good idea since the use of the word ‘rape’ in its sense of abduction rather than violation can only confuse modern audiences. More contentiously, perhaps, Tamburlaine burns not the Qu’ran but ‘the works of the prophets’, and a quick straw poll of the four people in my party who didn’t know the play produced a consensus that the books they had seen burned had been a few unspecified holy texts, probably including the Bible; he also vomits copiously (and convincingly) on stage, assigning an actual physical cause for his death in a way the text signally fails to do. The actual staging of the burning was one of the few spectacular effects, with an on-stage incinerator visibly ablaze. The burning of the bodies of Olympia’s son and husband was also accompanied by a substantial conflagration, though generally the ethos was very much poor theatre. Not so much a change but a deviation from what might have been expected was the fact that the map was visibly not Ortelius, but looked to be a much more large-scale and localised image of the areas with which Tamburlaine is most closely associated.

It is not easy to like Tamburlaine, and this production did not even try: there was no real sense of passion between Tamburlaine and Rachael Stirling’s austere, distant Zenocrate in her nun-like white gown, and only the most fleeting sense of camaraderie between him and his skin-clad lieutenants, who served mainly as largely silent audience for his feats. The sons were colourless, with Amyras and Celebinus, in their identical robes of purple, largely interchangeable, and only John Wark’s Calyphas making a brief bid for individuality even if not for likeability by smoking on stage. However, this submerging of the personal only enhanced the Brechtian sense of scope and sweep. Marlowe’s play may no longer be possessed of the same urgent energies with which, a year before the Armada, it spoke to nervous English audiences, but its amenability to the Brechtian paradigm shows that it still has many others.

Lisa Hopkins
Sheffield Hallam University

If Tamburlaine’s rival King Mycetes is right that “words are swords,” then The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe deftly cuts to the marrow of the mystery surrounding Marlowe and his works. Presenting an impressive range of topics and authors, the initial section includes brief chapters on Marlowe’s life, texts, style, religion, and reception. Four additional chapters focus on the major Marlovian works: Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta, Edward II, and Doctor Faustus. A single chapter is devoted to two shorter works, Dido, Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris. The final section of the book takes up patronage, geography, sexuality, and Marlowe’s afterlife. While not without minor blemishes, the seventeen essays in this book will prove invaluable to critics, scholars, and teachers of “the Muses’ darling.”

After a comprehensive Introduction by editor Patrick Cheney, David Riggs’s essay carefully considers Marlowe’s vexed biography, from his unorthodox religious beliefs, to his class consciousness, to his death at Deptford. Positing that Marlowe bursts on the scene at “the moment when atheism comes out of the closet and acquires a public face” (25), Riggs also perceptively points out that Marlowe’s experience at Corpus Christi College at Cambridge—“a mix of fee-paying gentlemen and base-born scholars”—surfaces often in the numerous instances of social conflict in Marlowe’s works (27). Steering away from Constance Brown Kuriyama’s conservative take on the death of the playwright, Riggs aligns himself with the more speculative versions of the murder, seemingly implicating even Queen Elizabeth, arguing that she “paid Marlowe the fatal compliment of taking him seriously, as a political agent to be reckoned with” (38).

Laurie Maguire follows with a strong chapter on Marlovian texts and authorship. Her comment that Marlowe was not an “attached” dramatist, like Shakespeare, and, therefore, more like a member of a contemporary team of screenwriters, helps to illuminate Marlowe’s collaborative processes as well as to explain, in part perhaps, later charges of corrupted texts and mangled metrics (43-44). While I cannot agree with her championing of Thomas Merriam’s recent claims of Marlowe’s hand in six scenes of Titus Andronicus, as well as in Henry V and Edward III (52), I applaud Maguire’s discussion of the vexed notion of authorship in the early modern period.
The four essays that round out the first section are all admirable. Russ McDonald’s essay on style convincingly and articulately demonstrates how Marlowe was able “to flout cultural and artistic standards” to produce work by turns both innovative and conventional (55). Looking both “backwards and forwards” — that is by employing classical precedents to explore new worlds of knowledge — McDonald concludes that Marlowe’s verse foreshadows the “brilliant future of dramatic poetry over the next four decades” (56; 67). Focusing on the intersection of religion and politics, Paul Whitfield White traces the politics of church and state in the major plays, arguing that Marlowe questions “many of the verities that his audience took for granted about” these complex and controversial issues (70). James P. Bednarz’s piece places Marlowe in the tangled web of the Elizabethan literary and social scene, including his connections with Thomas Watson, Thomas Hariot, Sir Walter Ralegh, Robert Greene, and Shakespeare; Bednarz’s detailing of Greene’s competition with Marlowe is particularly compelling. The final essay in this group, by Georgia E. Brown, concentrates on Marlowe’s poems and classicism. Although using different evidence than McDonald, she reaches a somewhat similar conclusion: that Marlowe looks to an ancient past to create a new present. In Marlowe’s hands, she claims, “classicism renovates understanding and mints new forms” (124).

The middle of the book takes up the individual plays. Analyzing the dramas in terms of class, rhetoric, sexuality and spectacle, Mark Thornton Burnett carefully considers the two parts of Tamburlaine the Great. Sara Munson Deats examines both Dido, Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris, demonstrating how both plays “dramatize multiple inversions of accepted rubrics of politics, gender, and sexuality” (193). Julia Reinhard Lupton’s excellent essay on The Jew of Malta carefully careens from text to context, from the space of the play, to the place of the early modern stage, all the while focusing on the “shifting alliances in a public sphere characterized by ethnic, religious, and economic fragmentation” (144). Thomas Cartelli’s reading of Edward II astutely shows how “passion is discursively constructed and deployed” in Marlowe’s examination of “power politics” (169; 158). Privileging stage over page, Thomas Healy challenges readers to reconsider Dr. Faustus in light of the “cultural milieu from which it first arose” (174), reminding us that an early modern audience in the public theater would feel far less ambiguity about the meaning of either the “A” or the “B” text in performance than audiences do today.

The collection’s final section begins with Richard Wilson’s essay examining the Marlovian context of power and patronage, emphasizing the fact that the public theaters and their dramatists were always “reliant on some capricious patron for protection from commercial storms” (209). Connecting place and subjectivity, Garrett A. Sullivan’s piece concludes that Marlowe’s plays are less “arguments about the relationship of geography and identity” than “dramatic experiments in diversely configuring that relationship” (242). Dividing her investigation of gender and sexuality in Marlowe into “orderly unions” and “disorderly desires,” Kate Chedgroyd also points out that while women in Marlowe are “characteristically imaged as jewels to be exchanged by men,” they may also act as “disruptive and disorderly forces” (254). Lois Potter’s penultimate essay traces Marlowe’s four major plays in theater and film, from the earliest performances in the 1590s to the recent film versions by Derek Jarmen and others. She argues, correctly I think, that the most “remarkable development” in performance history is that Edward II now almost equals Dr. Faustus as “most performed and adapted” of Marlowe’s plays (272). The final essay by Lisa Hopkins considers Marlowe’s reception and influence, and she provides a detailed overview from Francis Meres to Anthony Burgess, Robin Chapman, and other contemporary writers, concluding that “Marlowe was not only dangerous in his own time, but can also still be used as a very sharp tool for probing and
examining what might be dangerous in other times too (293).

I’ve saved discussion of Cheney’s Introduction for last, in part, because it shares a minor problem with Hopkins’s piece. In tracing Marlowe’s critical heritage, both rely too much on secondary sources. Instead of consulting Swinburne, or Hazlitt, or Symonds (the list goes on and on), Cheney is content to cite from MacClure’s Marlowe: The Critical Heritage, a collection quoted no less than twenty times in his Introduction. Moreover, if Cheney had mined the original essays, he would have found some interesting critical nuggets: Swinburne, for instance, ranked Edward II over Dr. Faustus; Hazlitt thought the Jew of Malta to be “outrageous in plot”; Symonds concluded that Marlowe’s mighty line “tends to monotony.” That quibble aside, Cheney’s other claims are quite valuable: that Marlowe is the “founding father” of a line of English poet-playwrights; that he is “arguably England’s first canonical dissident writer;” and that the plays can be considered “republican documents” (12; 14; 15). Overall, then, this Cambridge Companion is a first-rate collection of essays, and it contains infinite riches for anyone interested in Marlowe the poet, Marlowe the playwright, or the mysterious Marlowe himself.

Robert Sawyer
East Tennessee State University


Zachary Lesser promises “a new kind of historical criticism, one that investigates the contemporary reception of early modern drama by focusing on the people who staked their money on their readings of plays” (4). He argues that publishers were essentially specialized and, thus, chose to publish one kind of book over another, depending upon its subject matter. However, publishers were not simply critics. Since each publisher was known for a certain kind of text, the publisher’s imprint re-authored the book with the publisher’s own ideological or philosophical agenda.

Lesser looks at a variety of publishers and ties together texts that seem unconnected. For example, Lesser argues that if we are to understand why Thomas Archer was interested in publishing plays like The Roaring Girl, The White Devil, or The Insatiate Countess, we need to look at his non-dramatic publications; to understand why Walter Burre published The Knight of the Burning Pestle, we have to appreciate that Burre specialized in plays that “had been scorned by theatre audiences” (52); to understand why Thomas Walkley found Othello interesting and marketable, we need to look at his main publishing interest: parliamentary news. For the purposes of this newsletter, I will confine the bulk of my remarks to Lesser’s third chapter, in which he argues that the 1633 quarto of Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta can be read in relation to Nicholas Vavasour’s other publications.

Lesser begins by asking a logical enough question: why did Vavasour decide to publish The Jew of Malta in 1633, more than 40 years after it was first staged? Marlowe’s name hardly guaranteed sales. Lesser suggests that Vavasour published The Jew of Malta because he read it as a Laudian text. This is not to suggest that the play, which had been recently revived for court performance, was performed with a Laudian subtext, or that Vavasour was present for the court performance of the play. Instead, Lesser argues that “[b]y imagining why such an old play might have found new life at court, Vavasour became aware of the possibility of specializing on Laudian books, and he then built a career on this possibility” (83).

Of course, Vavasour was free to read the play in any way he wanted. But was it reasonable for him to expect his customers to do the same? Here, the evidence is scant. It’s true that Vavasour did publish a variety of Laudian or anti-Puritan tracts, but he started doing so only in 1635, two years after publishing The
Jew of Malta. Given the problem with this timeline, it’s difficult to agree with Lesser’s assessment that “The Jew must have seemed to him [Vavasour] to be as much about puritans [sic] as about Jews” (102).

Lesser is aware of the evidentiary problem, but offers only rhetorical locus pocus as a solution: “my work depend[s] on imaginative reconstruction” (17); its lack of evidence is “a blindness that also enables the entire project” (17); “perhaps we must always stake out ground somewhere between the idiosyncratic and the imaginary” (18); “I will to some extent be reading Vavasour’s career in reverse, working through the more clearly defined theology of the later books to imagine how the publisher and his customers might originally have read The Jew of Malta in 1633” (90).

Instead, Lesser might have built a stronger case by reading Dekker’s The Wonder of a Kingdome, published by Vavasour in 1636 but first performed in 1631, which clearly connects Puritans with Jews. In that work, Gentili is asked whether he might one day run out of gold, to which he responds, Barabas-like, that he knows of a Satanic source where gold runs as from “a spring.” The more tis drawne, the more it still doth rise, The more my heape wastes, more it multiples” (i.e. p.234; citation from The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker Vol. IV [London: John Pearson, 1873]). Further, in Act IV, Gentili offers his own version of Shylock’s pound of flesh bargain: 100 blows for 100 pounds. Linking Gentili to Jewish characters, Lesser might have substantiated his claim that Jews and Puritans were pretty much synonymous by the early 1630s.

Given that Lesser’s entire project depends upon such cross-readings, it is distressing to observe that his only reference to The Wonder of a Kingdome is erroneous and gleaned second-hand. He states that “towards the end” of the play Gentili rebukes a rackreenter as a “christian Iew” (104). But it is a soldier, not Gentili, who makes this remark.

It’s common for young scholars to want to strike out and say something new. All too often, however, their arguments fall flat. Lesser’s book suffers from the opposite problem. His argument is quite brilliant and original, in as much as it is trying to shift our attention away from what the author intended to what the publisher intended, but the critical evidence, at least in regard to Vavasour’s Laudian interest in The Jew of Malta, is either underworked or overlooked. This lack of sufficient archival evidence, I suggest, is more endemic of a tight job market—one in which young academics must rush a book to market in order to secure a decent job—than it is of a lack of intelligence or curiosity. Make no mistake about it, Lesser has opened up a new field here, one which offers scholars an innovative way of reading The Jew of Malta’s reception circa 1633. Since many Renaissance playwrights had very little control over the publication of their works, it does make sense to think about the circumstances of publication. In the case of Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta, Lesser offers us a valid reading of how Vavasour and his likely customers read a play that was written earlier and in a different context.

Jeffrey Kahan
University of La Verne


I routinely disappoint my undergraduate students by telling them that I simply don’t know the answer to many of the questions they want to ask about Marlowe. Neither, I firmly believe, does anyone else. It is a perhaps tedious but certainly essential aspect of working on any author of the period, and this one in particular, to accept that there are things we do not know about them, and it is rash and foolish to pretend that we do.

Park Honan’s new biography of Marlowe has been much hailed in the UK press, but actually it adds little to Kuriyama or Riggs and has not the caution of either of them. The really new material is
the information on the finding of the putative portrait of Marlowe at Corpus Christi. Declaring, reasonably enough, that ‘facts which relate to Marlowe are precious enough for us to be accurate about them’ (113), Honan devotes a number of pages to setting out new evidence on the precise circumstances in which the portrait was found in 1952 (not, as usually thought, 1953), by an undergraduate named Peter Hall (not the future director) when a new fire was fitted in his bedroom. Honan’s point is that the bedroom in question was in the area where the Parker scholars had been housed, and so the portrait is more likely to be of Marlowe than we have previously supposed. At least I think this is what Honan is saying, since he unfortunately manages to muddy the waters quite considerably by introducing details about another, quite separate room occupied at a different time by Hall which was close to an area at one point occupied by Marlowe. Honan calls this a ‘coincidence’, which is even ‘odder’, but it actually has nothing to do with the matter in hand – and even if it had, what could it possibly mean? As it stands, all it does is confuse the chronology of the paragraph and introduce a complete red herring. The portrait can only have been found in one of the two rooms occupied by Hall, not both, so why does it matter where the other room was? Honan’s triumphant conclusion that ‘the work was found in the Old Court, just across from Marlowe’s former bedroom’ (117) and his rehearsal of why there is no obvious answer to the question ‘If the sitter was not Marlowe, who else could he be?’ (116) do, though, make the case for the portrait’s being of Marlowe stronger.

Honan’s careful attention to fact in this instance is unfortunately counterbalanced by some really bizarre speculation elsewhere in the book. Honan writes, for instance, ‘It is not certain whether or when Marlowe, in a bright doublet, sailed through the Paris embassy, but there are signs that he delivered and picked up letters there. For one thing, he became familiar with the French capital; he depicts Paris with easy confidence’ (150). Despite his own admission that we have absolutely no evidence for when such an event might have occurred (leaving aside for a moment the question of whether it actually did or not), Honan then goes on to claim that ‘In Paris...Marlowe seems to have absorbed a French view of the Tartar warrior, Timur or Tamerlane, or at least he offers a more nearly French than English idea of the hero in both parts of Tamburlaine’ (151) – in which case it must, of course, have been before 1587.

Equally cavalier is the assertion that ‘Stephen Gosson of St George’s parish, only a few years older than Marlowe, had left the King’s School to begin his career as a playwright, embittered anti-theatrical pamphleteer, then Catholic monk in exile, and finally Reformed priest’. Gosson’s status as a monk abroad, perhaps, is open to question; we lack evidence to settle the matter in his case’ (61), while the apparent revelation that ‘The initials of the surnames of most of Marlowe’s jurors come from the first part of the alphabet (A, seven Bs, C, two Ds, ff, G, H, R, and W)’ (354) is simply odd: what possible bearing can this have on events? And what is one to say of the splendidly asinine speculation offered in answer to the question ‘What was said when Burbage’s wine flowed? “There was no talk about literature or the arts, or friendship or nature or morality or personal relations or the ends of life”, reports an observer who heard of a dinner attended by dramatic and other writers in London some years before the First World War. Possibly among male playwrights in the capital, a few things had hardly changed in 400 years” (292). It’s hard to say why we actually bother to study the past at all, if we can just infer it from the present.

Honan has also strayed surprisingly far from the beaten track in some others of his speculations. For instance, he takes seriously the possibility that Marlowe might have been involved while at school in writing a play called Timon which satirises Drake’s circumnavigation of the globe, something first put forward by John Baker, who does not stick at some fairly wild speculations surrounding not only the oeuvre but also the identity of Marlowe, and indeed Honan himself suggests that it is just possible that Marlowe did survive 1593. Conversely, he is not generous to more established scholars: S. P. Cerasano features in notes as ‘C. P.’ but does not appear in the index, any more than do Roma Gill, Patrick Cheney, and many others I
could name, while David Riggs is dismissed without even being named in the remark that ‘A recent book, for example, offers a confused picture of his six and a half years at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge’ (1). There is also a surprising disregard of the traditional conventions of scholarship in the many references along the lines of ‘It has been argued that his missions began in the latter academic year, and fresh evidence supports this’ (147), which have no accompanying note.

Even more startling is the sudden and entirely unheralded question which Honan asks in the middle of his discussion of Doctor Faustus: ‘Was Marlowe impotent?’ (214). How could we possibly know, and why is he so sure that it would matter if we did? When this is closely followed by the assertion that ‘he draws on himself, as a writer must’ (215), I feared for a moment that we were about to descend to schoolboy humour, but in fact Honan is genuinely wedded to an aesthetic of valuing personal experience, as when he feels called, in the middle of a discussion of Marlowe’s time in Flushing, to tell us that ‘I myself have known its blustery January winds, cold streets, and white, frozen-looking seabirds’ (269). The question about impotence is perhaps not, from this perspective, wholly gratuitous, and indeed it is not even rhetorical, because even more surprising than the fact of his asking it is that Honan actually answers it: ‘The truth of the matter is that he was extremely interested in desire, and also in what we might call the mythology of desire, or the boasts, the wishes, and hunger of the young in relation to the uncertainties of performance’ (214-15). No such defence, though, can be offered the assertion that ‘Some years later, it appeared that Marlowe’s crimes had begun with a seduction at Corpus Christi College: the evidence involves a species of pederasty’ (249), this is simply tendentious muckraking; the episode referred to is that of Mr Fineux of Dover, and the nub of it concerns religion, not sex.

Other things that are mysterious to most writers on Marlowe are equally not so to Honan. If he does not quite say it, he certainly implies that Frizer killed Marlowe to please Thomas Walsingham, and draws an implicit parallel with the murder of Becket (348-9) – who will rid me of this turbulent poet and spy? With a rare failure of certainty, he offers two possible motives for Frizer: either that he ‘stood to gain from a rich and varied flow of benefits which could accrue to Thomas, if no albatross hung on the master’s neck’ (349) or because ‘jealousy, too, can move a knife’ (349). I’m glad that in this instance, at least, Honan can accept that we simply do not know what actuated Frizer. I only wish he could show the same tolerance of uncertainty in other areas of Marlowe’s biography.

Lisa Hopkins
Sheffield Hallam University


Dido’s Daughters is undoubtedly an intellectual tour de force, but it works slightly less well as a book. Margaret Ferguson sets out to explore literacy, an issue that is so basic to literary studies that it has largely been overlooked, yet the questions it raises are fundamental to any reading of Medieval and Renaissance culture. Who read the books we study and how? What does it mean to call someone illiterate between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (the period covered by the book)? Does the charge of illiteracy refer to illiteracy in Latin, or in the mother tongue, and, if to the latter, which mother tongue, when ideal French and ideal English are concepts invented by clerks with their own ideological investments? Are there different ways of comprehending texts, different kinds of competence, which mean that one isn’t illiterate in a cultural sense, although one may not be able to read and write alphabetically? How might the accusation that others are illiterate function in the context of a particular social, cultural or political quarrel?

Ferguson is particularly interested in the ways literacy interacts with ideologies of gender and empire during the period that has
traditionally been seen to mark the birth of capitalism, of nation states and of modernity. She rejects Adam Fox’s claim that, by the sixteenth century, the term literacy had come to mean what it means for us: competence in both reading and writing the vernacular (p.67). She also has some very interesting things to say about the roles literacy continues to play in the implicit (or explicit) visions of cultural and national value that academics elaborate in their own work. As Ferguson cautions us, at the very start of the book, “Instead of asking, “What is literacy?” we might ask, rather, “What counts as literacy for whom, and under what particular circumstances?” (p.4).

Ferguson’s book is first and foremost a feminist study and is of paramount importance for anyone who is interested in the question of whether women had a Renaissance, but it is equally important for students of empire, of reading, of translation and of the myths surrounding Dido, Queen of Carthage. Issues such as Richard Mulcaster’s call for a national language, or the Renaissance obsession with puns, become even more interesting fields of critical opportunity when one realizes the extent to which standards of appropriate language practice varied according to social standing, and when one is made aware of the sheer complexity and irresolvability of debates about what counts as foreign in linguistic and national domains. Ferguson’s work unsettles commonplace assumptions, sharpens the questions we ask and opens up new areas for study, but be warned, this is a very long book, that could have been trimmed without losing its impact and sometimes the arguments are hedged with such copious and careful detail that they become stalled.

In a sense, Ferguson is to be celebrated because the detail helps to disrupt easy reading and any complacent assumptions the reader might hold. What she repeatedly succeeds in conveying to the reader, often with dazzling acuity, is a sense of the conflicting interpretations of a text that are made available by the different competencies and backgrounds of readers. To take one example, she argues that Christine de Pizan writes for different literacies, for both auditors and readers, and sees on the ability of some of her audience to read French, but not Latin, as an opportunity to revise misogynistic classical myths. De Pizan also exploits “doublet” phrases, not only to slip in conceptual alternatives, but also to appeal to different levels of linguistic competence (pp.115 and 185-186). Ferguson exposes what has deliberately been left unsaid in the texts she studies, and reconceives history as a series of potentialities, and less as a story of actualities, with the result that her study questions what has seemed to be the inescapable association between the rise of alphabetic literacy, capitalism and modernity (pp.377-78). Theories of literacy in the Renaissance helped define the Medieval period as one of unreason, as non-Western, oriental, old, but not antique or classical, in opposition to the true and good modernity that inherited Rome’s cultural legacy. In fact, people lacking a proper grammar-school education could be mocked as illiterate in a language that could be described as a Latinate vernacular, as English was being standardized through school exercises involving English-Latin translation, and through rules of syntax, diction and grammar that were based on Latin. In Ferguson’s hands, the texts she reads become much more challenging and politically engaged than they are often acknowledged to be, but the occasional disadvantage of her intelligence and phenomenal learning is that the arguments sometimes get lost in complication.

The first section of Dido’s Daughters is a wide-ranging and very careful reflection on modern theories of literacy and on medieval and Renaissance deployments of literacy in the long and uneven processes of nation-building and gender differentiation. After this more general, theoretical introduction, the second section of the book offers very detailed case studies of four literate women – Christine de Pizan, Marguerite de Navarre, Elizabeth Cary and Aphra Behn. Once again, this section is packed full of astute analysis, but the case studies actually focus on a small number of texts by each writer, and even, in the case of Navarre, a tale within a text, and
these chapters are very long. Ferguson invokes Dido as a guide into the issues raised by her book because Dido is a maker, receiver and subject of narrative, and because her story is repeatedly invoked in discussions about the origins and legitimacy of the Roman empire. In the Vergilian tradition, Dido is marginalized and left behind, so that Aeneas can set sail again and pursue his destiny as founder of Rome, but another narrative tradition survives in which Dido does not even meet Aeneas, let alone become his poor, passionate victim. In this tradition, Dido is usually called Elissa, and she founds the city of Carthage but remains true to her dead husband, killing herself rather than agreeing to marry Iarbas, whose land she had colonized for her new city. Dido is both a colonizer and a victim of colonialism, and the competing stories about her career focus attention on the nature of history and fiction, on sexual propriety, on appropriate male and female roles, and on the dangers of sexual and linguistic intercourse with strangers. Dido builds a city and so becomes an important figurehead for female writers and readers who build “cities” in the field of letters generally occupied by men. Ferguson is particularly interesting on the ways de Pizan presents Dido as an important, but ambivalent, figure who tells lies to gain land, but who also establishes laws and rules by reason. Equally interesting are her remarks on Behn’s invocation of Astraea, or Elizabeth I as a chaste Dido, as the figurehead for a less patriarchal form of imperialism. Neither does Ferguson indulge in a crude romanticization of women, in an attempt to draw up some kind of united front of gender, but she shows how “symbolic mothers and daughters operat[e] in morally shady territories, against as well as in alliance with each other”(p.21).

Thus, the collective designation, Dido’s daughters, could include historical and fictional men who come under Dido’s influence and lose, or loosen, ideals of masculinity that are associated with Rome. As Dido’s daughters criticize aspects of absolutist political ideologies from within they explore language as an instrument of empire and refigure hierarchies based on gender. As a consequence, literacy is defined as something which is both progressive and destructive, both a tool of freedom and the instrument of domination. For Ferguson literacy is not only a matter of varying degrees of alphabetic competence, but also a kind of social competence which sets up particular social relations with interpersonal, intercultural, international and interlingual dimensions. Each of her literate women explores divided loyalties, whether erotic, familial or political, and engages in the competitive business of rewriting sources. De Pizan, Navarre, Cary and Behn all deal with women who are subjects of imperial regimes but are simultaneously rulers of new worlds, indeed, they each explore the dialectical relationship between the victimized and the ruler, and focus attention on the issues of property, theft and the relativity of legal systems. Given Ferguson’s careful demonstration of the ways literacy is equated with different kinds of property, including land, daughters, slaves and movable objects, by these writers, it would be interesting to explore their attitudes to more obviously literary kinds of property and even the afterlife of these texts as words pass through different hands.

Renaissance historians continue to uncover England as a hybrid, mixed nation, and Ferguson’s study participates in this movement, transforming the English nation into a site of contested meaning rather than a phenomenon with precise, specifiable and unchanging features. For example, her chapter on Elizabeth Cary explores how one English Catholic articulates political resistance and critique by exploiting the resources of language theory, particularly the Roman Catholic theory of equivocation, which interprets Christ’s language as a literary language of irony and indirection (pp.268 and 272-83). The chapter on Cary reveals the complexities behind the idea of public speech (for men as well as women) and offers new ways of reading silence, not only as passivity, or as the expression of orthodox forms of chaste female behaviour, but as an erotically charged disputational strategy (p.287), or as a
polemical form of reticence that constructs an internal mental space and a private realm of free spirituality, that historians normally associate with Protestant individualism. The chapter on Cary also provides a potentially productive context in which to reread The Merchant of Venice as The Tragedy of Mariam develops parallels between the situations of Jews and Roman Catholics in nations that are trying to impose racial and religious uniformity (pp.324-29).

The hybridity of England as an imperial nation, and of her language of imperialism, are conclusively demonstrated in Ferguson’s chapters on de Pizan and Navarre which analyze the interlocking histories of French and English in relation to Latin. My only reservation about her analysis of the multiple languages spoken in the territories claimed by late Medieval French and English monarchs, a multiplicity which included craft languages, Latin, regional languages and dialects, and which was often negatively gendered as feminine (pp.88-91), is that she overplays the characterization of Latin as a fixed, immutable god-given language, at the same time as she emphasizes what she terms “the humanist investment in ‘uniformity’” (p.107). Such statements need some qualification given Latin’s own slippery propensity to pun and wordplay, and humanism’s interest in marking social distinctions through signs of behaviour, dress and speech. At times, Ferguson makes both Latin and humanism more classical and pure than they are, while she tends to associate Latin with written texts and the preservation of the past, and the vernaculars with orality and the present, yet it seems possible that the illiterate could acquire an aural/oral knowledge of Latin, by listening to the mass, in much the same way that the vernacular was transmitted orally.

For all its occasional moments of reader unfriendliness, Dido’s Daughters is an excellent analysis of the costs and benefits for specific individuals of the changing significance of literacy as a sign of social distinction, a significance that is shaped, as Ferguson proves, by ideologies of gender, status, religion and race. As Ferguson is at pains to show, these literate women do not occupy an apolitical, private space, but exploit the resources of spirituality to challenge political and theological hierarchies based on the division of labour. As these daughters explore their relation to powerful words, they elaborate different models of family relationships. De Pizan, for example, replaces the father-daughter paradigm, which is one way of characterizing the relationship between a masculine source and his female literary descendant, with a model of sibling rivalry in which both female writer and male source are readers and compilers of prior sources, while Behn explores the consequences of absent fathers, including absent kings, and their replacement by false fathers like Byam in Oroonoko. Yet, as these writers give voice to the marginalized, they also suppress marginal voices, as they set out on their own quest for authority. Literacy has no single meaning and does not work in a single way. It can enslave and liberate. Indeed, as Ferguson intriguingly argues, while we may set up literacy as a supreme cultural value, Behn exploits an identification with the partially literate, or imperfectly literate figure of Shakespeare (p.338), to give herself authority, while Dryden, in his edition of English translations of Ovid’s Heroides (1680), which includes Behn’s free translation of Oenone’s complaint to Paris, actually praises Behn because she does not know Latin, and her partial literacy puts the full literacy of the male contributors to shame (pp.7-8). Illiteracy, like literacy, can function in multiple directions, and can even confer authority, as well as shame.

Georgia Brown
London
RECENT STUDIES IN MARLOWE


Hutchings, Mark. “‘And Almost to the Very Walles of Rome’: 2 Tamburlaine, II.i.9.” *Notes and Queries* 52.2 (June 2005): 190-92.

Keck, David. “Marlowe and Ortelius’ Map.” *Notes and Queries* 52.2 (June 2005): 189-90.


Pettitt, Tom. “‘Skreaming like a pigge halfe stickt’: Vernacular *Topoi* in the Carnivalesque Martyrdom of Edward II.” *Orbis Litterarum* 60.2 (April 2005): 79-108. [This paper was originally presented at the MSA International Conference, Cambridge 2003. Electronic offprint (PDF) is available from the author: pettitt@litcul.sdu.dk]

(RB.)

(NB. This entry is reprinted to correct my error last issue in Prof Pettitt’s email address. RB.)
