Teaching Marlowe: Introduction

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Who taught thee this?[1]

It is a truth more or less universally acknowledged that if you teach Shakespeare, there are lots of excellent resources to help; there's even a journal dedicated to the subject.[2] But when it comes to Marlowe, with some honourable exceptions, it can seem as though there isn't much you can draw on.[3] This scarcity seems strange. Anyone who has studied or taught Marlowe—or who reads the contributions in this special edition—soon realises how fun and stimulating he is to work and think with. Indeed, claims made about the benefits of teaching Shakespeare now are also valid for Marlowe, whether framed in terms of engendering crude employability or invaluable criticality:

> [A]dvanced learners need increasingly sophisticated literary skills to face all complex texts. … All students need these skills to be prepared for university and employment in the twenty-first century … Where better to talk about complex identity issues than through complex texts?[4]

We might of course accept the concern that what we project onto Marlowe turns him into "a mythographic creation with which it is in our best interest to be complicit" if we want to

[1] Jacomo, *The Jew of Malta*, 3.3.70. All references to Christopher Marlowe, *Complete Plays and Poems*, ed. E.D. Pendry (London: Everyman, 1995).

[2] For relatively recent examples of attempts to enhance, survey, or theorise the teaching of Shakespeare, see Rex Gibson, *Teaching Shakespeare: A Handbook for Teachers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Martin Blocksidge, ed. *Shakespeare in Education* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003); Neill Thew, *Teaching Shakespeare: A Survey of the Undergraduate Level in Higher Education* (2006), English Subject Centre, accessed 4 July 2023 https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/report-13-teaching-shakespeare-survey-undergraduate-level-higher-education; G. B. Shand, ed. *Teaching Shakespeare: Passing It On* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009); James Stredder, *The North Face of Shakespeare: Activities for Teaching the Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Denise Albanese, *Extramural Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Sarah Olive, *Shakespeare Valued: Education Policy and Pedagogy 1989–2009* (Bristol, Chicago: Intellect, 2015); Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). The British Shakespeare Association has a whole journal devoted to the topic, edited by Myfanwy Edwards: *Teaching Shakespeare*, https://www.britishshakespeare.ws/education/teaching-shakespeare-magazine/; Emma Smith, ed. *Shakespeare Survey 74: Shakespeare and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[3] One such exception remains Liam E. Semler's invigorating and polemical *Teaching Shakespeare and Marlowe: Learning versus the System* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[4] Thompson and Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare*, 7, 8, 13.

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maintain (or exploit) his "cultural and…academic capital" and carry on being able to teach him.[5] However, we should also accept that just as scholars and audiences have always interpreted him in relation to their own contexts, so he speaks to the current (and recurrent) cultural and ideological concerns of those we teach.[6] As Emily C. Bartels puts it:

> To engage seriously with Marlowe, theatrically or critically, is (and was) not only to question Marlowe; it is (and was) also to question the ostensibly unquestionable mainstays of Western "civilization"—Christian doctrines, imperialism, capitalism, heteronormality, and the like—to step outside the status quo and its illusion of truth and see how or whether that "truth" or Marlowe's version of it measures up, and to invite controversy, challenge and change. It is (and was), in effect, to get political.[7]

Justifiably, Marlowe *now* is a posterboy for queer sexualities, anti-heteronormativity, and fluid, non-binary identities.[8] His works can help you see—with discomfiting force—how discrimination and othering occurs, how "difference is constructed, deconstructed, and even reconstructed by the 'other'," and how the past can provide evidence and tools for decolonising the present.[9] Apprehending his analyses of nation-and-empire-building, and the brutality, fragility, and costs of such coercive, exploitative projects equips us to conceive resistant, anti-imperialist, republican, devolved, transgressive political alternatives.[10] But even if you consider introducing such progressive critical contexts into pedagogy inappropriate, the fact remains those readings become most fully available as we appreciate that Marlowe also always repays what might appear to be "traditional" approaches too: close,

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[5] Lukas Erne, "Biography, Mythography, and Criticism: The Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe," *Modern Philology*, 103 (2005): 30.

[6] See the critical survey of the critical heritage in Adam Hansen, "Marlowe and the Critics," in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 346–56.

[7] Emily C. Bartels, "Introduction," in *Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Emily C. Bartels (London and New York: G. K. Hall, 1997), 7.

[8] See, for example, Gregory Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Sarah Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark and London: Associated University Press, 1997); Paul Whitfield White, ed. *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality: New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe* (New York: AMS Press, 1998); David Clark, "Marlowe and Queer Theory," in Bartels and Smith, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 232–41; and Timothy Francisco, "Marlowe's War Horses: Cyborgs, Soldiers and Queer Companions," in *Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture*, ed. Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 47–66.

[9] Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 1993), 14.

[10] See, for instance, Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counternationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Republican Authorship: Lucan, Liberty, and the Sublime* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2009); and Jenny Mann, "Marlowe's 'Slack Muse': *All Ovid's Elegies* and an English Poetics of Softness," *Modern Philology*, 113.1 (2015): 49–65.

formalist, readings, or emphases on his fascinating, mischievous engagement with Classical cultural models and linguistic tropes.[11]

If we think beyond misleading distinctions, we can also see that in a world no less polarised than the early modern period, how Marlowe learned, and learned to write, has much to teach us as we teach now. Marlowe's ability to anatomize ambiguity and stimulate uncertainty responded to—and exploited—his audiences' ambitions and anxieties. But such ability also derived from what he did as a student, that is, "write *controversiae*, arguing now one view of a topic, now another," and "master *imitatio*, in which he borrowed phrases from many texts in order to craft a new, compelling speech."[12] This mode of education prized *argumentum in utramque partem*, "the cultivation of the scholar's power to speak persuasively for diametrically opposed positions."[13] In our current crises and emergencies, we urgently need ways to remind ourselves to help each other do this safely. Simply put, whatever you're into, Marlowe has a lot to offer teachers and students alike.

We would be the first to recognise that this special edition will not necessarily fulfil the desires of every "studious artisan" who encounters it for what they need for teaching Marlowe, and even if it did, given teachers' pay, terms, and conditions neither will it necessarily furnish readers with what *Doctor Faustus* terms "a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honour, and omnipotence" (1.1.53–55; let's recognise, too, that in a damning judgement on scholarship, Faustus's heart "pants and quivers" when remembering he has been "a student here these thirty years," and he wishes he had "never read book," 5.2.45–47). Yet we would also do well to remember that, as Tamburlaine puts it, "Nature… / Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds" (1.2.7.18–20). This special edition includes a range of established and emerging scholars and teachers to address the scarcity of materials on teaching Marlowe. It seeks to develop the conversations already taking place, to offer a space

[11] Harry Levin's coverage of style and poetics (and much else besides) remains compelling (for scholars and students) in *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954); but see also Russ McDonald, "Marlowe and Style," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55–69. On Marlowe and his influences from antiquity, see Georgia E. Brown, "Marlowe's poems and classicism," in Cheney, *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, 106–126; Sarah Carter, *Ovidian Myth and Sexual Deviance in Early Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); and M. L. Stapleton, *Marlowe's Ovid: The Elegies in the Marlowe Canon* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

[12] Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe: Poet and Spy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 54–55. On the value the kind of education Marlowe received, see also Scott Newstock's *How to Think Like Shakespeare: Lessons from a Renaissance Education* (Princeton and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[13] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 297. See also Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

for thinking differently about Marlowe (even if that just means thinking beyond the UK exam-board staple of *Doctor Faustus*), and to extend the franchise of what we know can be done with him, to empower teachers and their students.

In the first piece, "'Fond and Frivolous Gestures': A Blocking Workshop on Marlowe's Tamburlaine," Chloe Preedy and colleagues discuss a course called "Theatrical Cultures" offered at the University of Exeter, UK. They share their experience of and pedagogical reflections on teaching Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Parts One and Two*, as productions by the Lord Admiral's Men at the Rose, with a particular focus on the learning context for the blocking workshop used as a part of a "learning-by-doing" methodology. Students delivering lines, wielding swords and crowns, and imagining how a chariot might navigate the available space, also recognise moments of potential bathos and physical comedy, hinting at the "frivolous gestures" that Marlowe's publisher sought to remove from the 1590 play-text. Chris Orchard's article, "Asynchronous Edward: Comparing online responses to gender in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* and Elizabeth Cary's *The History of the Most Unfortunate Prince Edward II*," shifts our focus to the US, but continues to emphasise the significance of students' voices and experiences by considering discussion board responses to both Marlowe and Elizabeth Cary's renderings of Edward II. How students react to a series of online prompts designed to gauge how they understand ways in which male and female writers might differ in how they interpret and present the same characters in the same historical period suggest both the benefits of online informal writing and comparative readings. Back in the UK, but this time considering pre-university education, Tom Barnes's "'Why, this is hell, nor are we out of it': The Problem with Marlowe in UK English Secondary Schools (and How to Get Over It)" argues that the changes to the secondary school English curriculum brought in by the 2010 British government have had a detrimental effect on the teaching of early modern theatre in general, and on teaching the plays of Marlowe in particular. Notwithstanding this critique, Barnes suggests some methods whereby the teaching of *Doctor Faustus* can be made to work even within these confines. Tony Perrello's piece, "Dido American Style: Teaching Rhetorical Tropes for Fun and Profit," also situates the teaching of Marlowe in relation to broader socio-cultural and ideological concerns, to reaffirm the vital contention that writers like Shakespeare and Marlowe are in fact crucial for the success of students as citizens-in-the-making. Focusing on Marlowe's deft use of language, especially figurative language, Perrello provides warm-up exercises and detailed lessons focused on rhetorical tropes in Marlowe's *Dido, Queene of Carthage* to help determined educators of all career stages connect

Marlowe's complex figures to the tricks of speech and labyrinthine logic used by politicians, advertisers, and influencers—discourses that students must master if they are to succeed in today's linguistically thorny marketplace of ideas. Comparably, in "Assessing Marlowe" Adam Hansen discusses the equally socio-culturally motivated reasons behind the use of a mode of assessment on a module dedicated to Marlowe in Northumbria University, UK—a "critical introduction"—reflecting on the pedagogical drivers, implications, and challenges of this mode of assessment, how students respond to it, and how it helps them engage with Marlowe's diverse works, and cultural capital more broadly. Other pedagogic tools and devices are discussed by Andreas P. Bassett in "Marlowe in Sheets: Teaching Christopher Marlowe's Books Through Digital Materiality." Marlowe in Sheets is a digital humanities project that provides access to the printed works of sixteenth-century English dramatist and poet Christopher Marlowe in the form of uncut paper sheets in downloadable PDFs, offering Marlowe's books as they were originally produced by stationers and encountered by readers during the English Renaissance. Bassett shows how users in the classroom can gain valuable insights into the nuances of pre-modern print culture by actively participating in the physical (re)making of Marlowe sheets into small-format books, involving processes such as printing, collating, folding, cutting, trimming, and stitching. These immersive, hands-on experiences provide educators and students an accessible way to explore the book-historical contexts that underlie Marlowe's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printed works. In the final essay, Paul Frazer brings us back to Northumbria and Carthage by outlining an approach to teaching *Dido* in relation to political origin-stories, then and now. Using Frazer's approach, students are encouraged to read and understand Marlowe's political satire of Britain's dubious origins-myth: the ancient settlement of Brutus the Trojan. The work students complete on *Dido* is designed to not only strengthen their critical thinking about how origin stories can be politically useful, but also for the capacity of readers of early modern drama to question them.

All the pieces assembled here are intended to be *useful* to you. That said, in our teaching and scholarship, we draw on the diversity and brilliance of current critical work on Marlowe, but you might reflect that other critical or pedagogic innovations can enhance teaching Marlowe even more, including work on Marlowe and ecocriticism, or Marlowe and critical race theory, for example. Who better to progress that work than, well, *you*? In that spirit, we hope that this collection of essays provides a starting point for further innovation and dissemination in Marlowe studies. As Marlowe's Machiavel tells us, there is no sin, after all, but ignorance.

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