

Arata Ide, *Localising Christopher Marlowe: His Life, Plays and Mythology, 1575–1593* (Boydell & Brewer, 2023). xxi+422pp. £85 (e-book £24.99). ISBN 9781843846932 (e-book 9781805431428).

LAURA ROMAIN
UNIVERSITY OF KENT

There is one question central to Arata Ide's study of the peripheries of Marlowe's life in *Localising Christopher Marlowe*, and that is: "[h]ow might a biographer today challenge the established narrative of Marlowe studies?" (1). Ide points to a relative paucity of documentary evidence about Marlowe's life, and the conjectural and myth-making work of past biographers. Thus, instead of perhaps reiterating conjecture in past biographical work on Marlowe, Ide aims to "examine with *historical truthfulness* these surviving documents through which we can see the important facets of his social experience; to reassemble Marlowe, even if the reconstructed portrait is not a fully rounded one" (2) and, therefore, to "place Marlowe at the centre of [his] research and to reassess his individual and collective experiences by using hitherto overlooked sources pertaining and peripheral to his life" (2).

In three major sections—"Life," "Plays," and "Myths"—Ide draws upon the archival work of William Urry and the biographical research of Constance Brown Kuriyama to stabilise the myths of Marlowe's biography with documentary evidence local but not always particular to Marlowe himself. The primary section, "Life," introduces this study on the periphery of Marlowe's reconstruction, with him at the centre of the matrix, albeit oftentimes quite distant to events and people described. For example, the first chapter, titled "Matthew Parker and the Norwich-Corpus Connection," focuses on the chamber plans of Corpus Christi some three years before Marlowe's matriculation as a way to demonstrate the "kind of microcosm of the social nuclei that spread dendrites of personal and political interconnections to cells in other colleges, cities, provinces, and the royal court" (33). However, in an effort to explain the connection of Marlowe's dissenters (in particular, Robert Greene) to a larger conspiracy against him, Ide seems to overshadow Marlowe entirely by covering some thirteen years of collegiate connection before Marlowe even enters the frame. The early chapters of the section on Marlowe's "Life" seem less about Marlowe himself, and more about drawing into focus Ide's meticulous prosopographical research surrounding Marlowe's peers, so that it may, by proxy, place their connections to Marlowe and their impact on his life into sharp relief.

In "Plays," Ide includes three chapters dedicated to Marlowe's more overtly political plays—*Dido, Queen of Carthage*, *Tamburlaine*, and *The Jew of Malta*—and reads these against the scholarly, civic and religious politics of Elizabethan England. Ide's close reading of the plays is remarkably refreshing as he avoids the pitfalls typical of analysing the plays within a vacuum. In one notable example from *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, Ide draws the reader's attention to contemporary

comparisons between Dido and Elizabeth I, where Dido becomes “a symbolic figure both of chastity—choosing to die for the nation rather than contemplate a royal intermarriage—and of female vulnerability, a ruling queen liable to destabilise the nation” (158). Through the words of Diane Purkiss, Ide reminds us that the Elizabethan people, especially towards the latter part of the 16th century, suffered analogous anxieties surrounding the matters of succession and national security, and that “[t]he figure of Dido offered a superb way to express both kinds of anxiety while hedging one’s bets and avoiding offence” (158). That politicism is inherent to art, and therefore drama, is a notion which Ide places at the forefront of his argument, and this is where his work on the discourses local and peripheral to Marlowe truly shines: through Ide’s analysis, we see the influential university politics which revolve around Marlowe, whose drama Ide places at the centre of this reading, as Marlowe draws from these surroundings and refracts rather than reflects them onto his audiences in a different yet still recognisable shape. Ide reinforces this attentiveness of Marlowe to such political intrigues when he suggests that Marlowe’s representation of the death of Ramus in *The Massacre at Paris* was influenced particularly by the “intensification of university disputes on logic, rhetoric, and divinity” (246). Therefore, he ascertains that Marlowe must have “considered the conflicts between the factions in the university as a religious war in miniature. He may have understood the nature of these controversies as a matter of politico-religious factionalism, as well as of belief or thought, that would sway the destiny of a young scholar” (246).

The final section, “Myths,” returns us to the mythmaking of Marlowe that is foreshadowed in the opening chapter. Here we find Ide’s attempt to interrogate and deconstruct popular myths shrouding Marlowe’s elusive figure: in particular, the myth of his atheism. In this final section, the peripheral discourses shift into clear focus as Marlowe’s dissenters are no longer background figures; Ide reminds us, in David Riggs’s words, that Marlowe is “an irretrievably textual being, the protagonist in a series of overlapping narratives that commences about six months before his death and persists on into its immediate aftermath” (270). However, whilst Ide admits that “it is a matter of speculation whether Greene’s connection with the Norwich-based faction at Corpus Christi played an important role in shaping his attitude towards Marlowe” (272), he argues that it was during his formative years in Norwich that his new project “employed the religious communal identity of Norwich in order to position himself as a godly writer against his literary rivals—particularly Marlowe” (272). Ide treads artfully the narrow line between conjecture and speculation here, the same line which Ide walked in the first section to introduce us to the remarkable possibility of Marlowe having been in Padua—should the document truly read Marlin rather than Martin (124).

Ide has taken a bold course of action in this new framework of biographical writing, particularly as he risks the threat of losing Marlowe amongst the work on the peripheral connections local but not specific to Marlowe himself. However, Ide demonstrates that if we change the focus on the lens by which we analyse Marlowe’s life, blurring our vision to him so we may more sharply see

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those around him on the periphery of his existence, we may better understand Marlowe's life by understanding the influence of those around him upon him.