

The Year's Work in Marlowe Studies: 2024–2025

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During the last two years, numerous scholars explored Christopher's Marlowe's works, providing academics across the globe with new and innovative approaches to his poetry and prose. While articles and book chapters covered all of Marlowe's plays, *Doctor Faustus* inspired the largest number of scholarly pieces, due to the continuing popularity of the Faustus story. *The Massacre at Paris* also generated significant interest because of the five hundredth anniversary of the Saint Bartholomew Day's Massacre (1572). Recent attentiveness to Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare and other playwrights continued to interest scholars as well, with several pieces considering how Marlowe's literary style helped shape English drama during the early modern period and beyond. Marlowe's use of literary techniques and the importance of his unique writing style also generated considerable interest, with pieces exploring the playwright's use of hyperbole, punctuation, and dramatic apostrophe. Additionally, early modern ideologies concerning racial and religious "others" informed much scholarship during this period, particularly in relation to *The Jew of Malta*. Finally, two books focused on Marlowe appeared in 2025: Stephen Greenblatt's *Dark Renaissance: The Dangerous Times and Fatal Genius of Shakespeare's Greatest Rival* and Ian McAdam's *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*.

Dark Renaissance

Stephen Greenblatt's most recent book, *Dark Renaissance*, explores the life and times of Christopher Marlowe, offering a picture of the playwright as gifted, dangerous, and subversive. While grounded in extensive knowledge of early modern England, Greenblatt's account of Marlowe often swings to speculation, due to the paucity of information about Marlowe's writing partnerships, work as a spy, and untimely death. The Marlowe that emerges is a tragic figure, endlessly learning and reading, probably queer, and definitely a religious skeptic. Greenblatt, to his credit, investigates not just Marlowe's experiences as a cobbler's son from Canterbury who studied for the priesthood at Cambridge and eventually became a well-known poet and playwright; he also turns to Marlowe's works, arguing that

“he made it possible to write in a new way about violence, ambition, greed, and desire.”¹ A more thorough review appears in this issue, but in brief, Greenblatt’s biography sheds light on the Elizabethan world Marlowe inhabited even if mystery continues to shroud his personal life and beliefs.

Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration

In his monograph, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, Ian McAdam explores Marlowe’s influence on Shakespeare, contending that “Marlowe’s depiction of a heroic struggle towards masculine self-cohesion, burdened by a self-thwarting and largely incoherent theology . . . provides the main available mode of self-conception” that Shakespeare employs in his dramatic works.² McAdam’s study begins with an examination of “the psychological challenges posed by conceptions of Christian atonement” during the Renaissance.³ For McAdam, Marlowe’s probable interest in Arian heresies resulted in his development of characters that struggle to successfully construct their masculinity in light of Calvinist theology. Therefore, in the second chapter of his book, McAdam suggests that *Dido Queen of Carthage* was influenced not just by Ovid and Virgil’s accounts of the fall of Troy, but also by the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, which alludes to Marlowe’s play in the title character’s discussion of Aeneas’ retelling of the Trojan War, also engages with Calvinism according to McAdam. Hamlet’s “lack of an integrated masculinity,” McAdam contends, stemmed from Marlowe’s skeptical engagement with determinism and inspired Shakespeare’s decision to create “an aesthetic space in which ethical reflection facilitates the acceptance of a more responsible imaginative (and imagined) self.”⁴

In his third chapter, McAdam, critical of computerized textual analysis and recent claims of Marlowe’s co-authorship of the *Henry VI* plays, notes that he remains “doubtful of a direct attribution to Marlowe” and instead argues that Marlowe was inspired to compose *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* by Shakespeare’s first tetralogy.⁵ Additionally, McAdam claims that both playwrights were influenced by the transition between books 1 and 2 of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, which he believes highlights the “tension between salvific

¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Dark Renaissance: The Dangerous Times and Fatal Genius of Shakespeare’s Greatest Rival* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2025), 284.

² Ian McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2025), 13.

³ McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, 16.

⁴ McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, 81, 10–11.

⁵ McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, 85.

grace and the more classical or pagan demands of self-discipline.”⁶ In Marlowe’s plays, the theological implications of Spenser’s work result in characters who struggle with atonement doctrine, while in Shakespeare’s plays, characters are able to engage with their dependance on the divine in a more detached way, leading to their ability to fashion themselves as emotionally mature and masculine. McAdam continues his exploration of the two authors’ history plays in his next chapter, “The Shadow-King: Shakespeare’s Development of Humanist History.” Here, McAdam argues that the images and themes Marlowe uses in *Edward II*, including sun imagery associated with kingship and the ethics of clandestine murders, are reworked by Shakespeare in *Richard III*. After his analysis of the influence of Marlowe’s *Edward II* on Shakespeare, McAdam explores *Titus Andronicus*, contending that Shakespeare drew inspiration from the plays of Thomas Kyd and George Peele in his evaluation of human embodiment. The chapter closes with a discussion of *Edward III* and *King John*. Drawing on his own idea of the secular Christ, which he defines as an ideal but ultimately unrealized “personal competence or mastery” that is separate from theological dogma, McAdam suggests that Shakespeare develops characters who display these tendencies.⁷ Specifically, McAdam points to the Bastard in *King John*, arguing that this character is “socially radical, self-determining, [and] proto-Protestant.”⁸

McAdam’s final chapter examines Shakespeare’s treatment of homoeroticism in *Richard II* and *Venus and Adonis*. Arguing that Shakespeare’s representation of Richard as a weak king is a clear echo of Marlowe’s *Edward II*, McAdam views the second tetralogy as Shakespeare’s attempt to interrogate “his own strategies of masculine self-fashioning and self-identification” while simultaneously containing the homoerotic impulses found in Marlowe’s work.⁹ In his conclusion, McAdam returns to the theme of Marlowe’s influence on Shakespeare, ultimately suggesting that the boy Mamillius in *The Winter’s Tale* functions as a spectral Marlovian presence both because of his inability to complete his ghost story and his untimely death.

Doctor Faustus

As is true most years, articles and book chapters focused on *Doctor Faustus* dominated scholarly works published during the last two years, with eight separate pieces appearing in

⁶ McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, 94.

⁷ McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, 7.

⁸ McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, 173.

⁹ McAdam, *Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Religious Toleration*, 177.

journals and edited collections. Most of these works take up religious themes in Marlowe's play, examining how the playwright engages with Calvinist theology, spiritual transgression, and the performance of contrition. Tom Rutter, for instance, compares the kisses between Faustus and the conjured Helen to those of Romeo and Juliet when they first meet. He argues that while Marlowe's scene functions a critique of idolatry, Shakespeare's invokes Marlowe's blasphemous condemnation to showcase the warm and human relationship developed by the two young lovers. As Rutter notes, both scenes include language about giving away the soul and receiving sin, which he argues is an example "of a broader tendency in Shakespeare's play to rewrite as erotic moments" those that in Marlowe's plays "are associated with spiritual transgression or terror."¹⁰ Faustus's encounter with the counterfeit Helen includes obvious religious language that positions her as an object of veneration and idolatry. Romeo and Juliet's initial kiss echoes the kiss found in *Doctor Faustus*, but Juliet, rather than agreeing with Romeo's belief in the holy power of her kiss, "insists on her humanity, her susceptibility to taint from the sin that he says she has taken from him."¹¹ Shakespeare, Rutter contends, uses numerous phrases and ideas from Marlowe's works, but in his analysis, all of these borrowings tend to reimagine moments of spiritual blasphemy as scenes of romantic and erotic love. Therefore, while both plays do share similar language about the idolatrous aspects of sensual relationships, Romeo and Juliet's initial kiss echoes that of Faustus and Helen "precisely so that it can be discarded in favor of the moving and reciprocal relationship that develops over the course of the play."¹²

Jan van Dijkhuizen also considers religious themes in *Doctor Faustus*. In his study of remorse and contrition in Marlowe and Shakespeare, van Dijkhuizen contends that these emotions are ambiguous or missing from *Doctor Faustus*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. Noting that early moderns considered remorse, or the sorrow for and moral acceptance of guilt for wrongdoing, a prerequisite of forgiveness, van Dijkhuizen links Faustus's inability to repent to his inability to feel contrition. Indeed, theological language at the end of the play suggests that Faustus's lack of remorse may be due to God's hardening of his heart, although Faustus does not "identify the agent of the hardening of his heart, and therefore leaves unexplained

¹⁰ Tom Rutter, "Rewriting Idolatry: *Doctor Faustus* and *Romeo and Juliet*," *Comparative Drama* 58, no. 3 (2024): 342.

¹¹ Rutter, "Rewriting Idolatry," 347.

¹² Rutter, "Rewriting Idolatry," 360.

the cause of his inability to repent.”¹³ While Faustus considers the possibility of contrition while awaiting his mortal end, he distracts himself by focusing on the passage of time, revealing that he, like Shakespeare’s characters Claudius and Lady Macbeth, is “incapable of genuine or sustained remorse for sin in the first place.”¹⁴

Brice Peterson and Garrett A. Sullivan also investigate *Doctor Faustus* through a religious lens, analyzing how Marlowe depicted the protagonist’s spiritual fate. Noting that Calvinism taught that the elect truly lived on both the earthly and heavenly plane “while the reprobate are always already dead,” the authors sought to understand how Marlowe conceived of the damned Faustus in light of Calvinist ontology.¹⁵ Rather than asking if Marlowe adopts a theological position, Peterson and Sullivan argue that Marlowe examines the implications of Calvinist theology in light of Faustus’s belief that he is biologically alive but spiritually dead. The doctrine of double predestination as espoused by Calvin means that those who are regenerate will experience “a living death,” while those who are degenerate experience a “dead life,” meaning that the damned are only alive in their own imaginations while on this earthly plane.¹⁶ Marlowe uses his tragedy to explore not what causes Faustus’s damnation but instead how his belief in his damnation impacts his experience of living. While contemporary theologians delineated three estates that the redeemed experienced as they moved towards heaven (generation, degeneration, and regeneration), Marlowe “presents Faustus’s moving through the estates of man in the wrong order and in a perverse fashion.”¹⁷ Therefore, Marlowe depicts Faustus as being “graced with doctor’s name,” rather than receiving Christ’s grace, which leads to the title character’s degeneration as revealed through his fall into pride and necromancy. The authors also point to language used at the conclusion of the play, noting that Faustus refers to his death in past tense, showing his awareness of his damnation and the inevitability of an eternal death. Faustus’s use of magic, his fantasies of temporal and spatial control, and his desire for knowledge, Peterson and Sullivan suggest, function as “compensation and diversion from his reprobation” rather than the causes of his damnation.¹⁸ In the end, neither Faustus’s illicit knowledge nor his ability to conjure Helen of

¹³ Jan van Dijkhuizen, “‘Contrition, Prayer, Repentance: What of Them?’ Ineffective Remorse in Marlowe and Shakespeare,” in *Reading Images from the Past: In Honour of Karl A. E. Enenkel*, ed. Walter S. Melion, Christoph Pieper, Paul J. Smith, and Anita Traninger (Brill, 2025), 90.

¹⁴ van Dijkhuizen, “‘Contrition, Prayer, Repentance,’” 93.

¹⁵ Brice Peterson and Garrett A. Sullivan, “Living and Dying in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*,” *Renaissance Drama* 53, no. 1 (2025): 32.

¹⁶ Peterson and Sullivan, “Living and Dying,” 35.

¹⁷ Peterson and Sullivan, “Living and Dying,” 41.

¹⁸ Peterson and Sullivan, “Living and Dying,” 46.

Troy provide him with pleasure; instead, his skills only point to his dissatisfaction and highlight the falseness of his regenerative abilities. Marlowe, therefore, “stages how an early modern Christian could conceptualize their life as if it were a kind of death,” devoid of the hope and true contentment available to those assured of a heavenly life beyond the mortal realm.¹⁹

Tyler Dunston’s article takes a different approach, exploring not only the impact of Calvinist doctrine on *Doctor Faustus*, but also the play’s “relationship to impatience and delay in the context of its pacing and its poetics.”²⁰ In particular, Dunston sees parallels between Marlowe’s use of metrical suspension and Faustus’s religious skepticism, which echoes John Calvin’s explanation of a condition of “perpetual suspense” experienced by Christians trying to understand God without the benefit of Scripture.²¹ The play’s audience, Dunston argues, continually experiences a similar state of suspension because the possibility of Faustus’s salvation or damnation remains in doubt until the play’s end. Marlowe heightens the feeling of tension experienced by Faustus by emphasising the doctor’s impatience at the start of the play and his request for more time in the final scene. Additionally, Marlowe’s use of a variety of literary devices enhances the play’s tension. Dunston points out that Marlowe frequently uses trochaic substitution in iambic pentameter lines, which “creates a rushed, falling sensation” and suggests “a rhythm of rushing forth and slowing down” that heightens audience anxiety.²² Marlowe also employs a medial caesura in the final scene of both the A and B texts, which “emphasizes Faustus’s separation from God,” and highlights Faustus’s tragic inability to accept the doubt that leads to faith.²³

Mark Scott’s article, in contrast, focuses on the play’s performance, exploring Faustus’s ability to blur the line between illusion and reality for spectators. Drawing from a “model of theatrical exchange” in which the player’s action and the audience’s imaginative effort work together to create meaning, Scott argues that the success of the play lay in its ability to dispel the boundaries “between onstage and offstage worlds.”²⁴ Faustus, in a sense, becomes a player, distracting himself from his potential damnation by creating staged

¹⁹ Peterson and Sullivan, “Living and Dying,” 52.

²⁰ Tyler Dunston, “‘The Stars Move Still’: Haste, Delay, and Doubt in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 5 (2025): 31.

²¹ Dunston, “‘The Stars Move Still,’” 32.

²² Dunston, “‘The Stars Move Still,’” 38.

²³ Dunston, “‘The Stars Move Still,’” 45.

²⁴ Mark Scott, “In this show let me an actor be: Joining in with *Doctor Faustus*,” *Comparative Drama* 58, no. 1–2 (2024): 62.

spectacles, while simultaneously inviting the audience to vicariously experience his damned state. Indeed, similar to arguments made by Peterson and Sullivan, Scott contends that Faustus's understanding of himself as damned would have resonated with Marlowe's original spectators, many of whom, due to the uncertainties evoked by Calvinist theology, feared they too were doomed to hell. Furthermore, Faustus' theatricality as well as his frequent use of third person point not only to the character's sense of a bifurcated self but also to "his possession of a spectacularized sense of self," which positioned him as both spectator and actor. Ultimately, the play forces the audience to imagine they, with Faustus, reside in hell, thus "encouraging them to turn their scrutiny from the stage onto themselves—and each other."²⁵

Two articles considered the textual history of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. In a short piece, Darren Freebury-Jones examines David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen's claim that a collaborator likely penned the comic sections of the 1604 quarto of *Doctor Faustus*. While scholars suggest either Thomas Nashe or Henry Porter as likely candidates, analysis of their works to determine stylistic similarities has been problematic due to the lack of extant dramatic works by the two authors. Relying on Pervez Rizvi's electronic corpus of 527 plays from 1552-1627, Freebury-Jones matches the phrases found in these works to those found in Marlowe's play. He concludes that Porter's plays, in particular *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon*, share more similarities with *Doctor Faustus* than any of Nashe's works; therefore, for Freebury-Jones, "Henry Porter is a likelier candidate than Nashe for Marlowe's collaborator on *Doctor Faustus*."²⁶

Jonathan Pinkerton also considered the creation of the *Doctor Faustus* text, focusing on the 1663 publication of the play and its differences from the 1631 edition. During the thirty plus years between these two printed editions of the play, censorship, the closure of playhouses, and the tumult of the English Civil Wars led to fewer publications of dramatic works. Following the Restoration, the demand for printed plays increased, although many of these editions were heavily censored, including what is now referred to as the C-text of *Doctor Faustus*. The 1663 edition's textual revisions included the comparatively minor removal of expletives as well as more substantial structural changes such as the addition of a comedic musical subplot and the replacement of the papal court scene with a Babylonian

²⁵ Scott, "In this show," 76.

²⁶ Darren Freebury-Jones, "Marlowe's Collaborator on *Doctor Faustus*," *Notes and Queries* 71, no. 3 (2024): 308.

court scene. Previous scholars argue, and Pinkerton agrees, that George Jolly, an actor and producer who flourished after the Restoration, likely rewrote and revised the play for its dramatic production. The text, however, was most certainly published by William Gilbertson, a printer known for his publication of dramatic comedies. In addition to the inclusion of new scenes and a comedic musical number, Gilbertson changed the woodblock print on the title page of the 1663 text, resulting in the new woodcut's prominent placement of a cross, which suggests the "literal centrality of Christianity in the thematic content of the play."²⁷

Additionally, Pinkerton theorizes that the change from blackletter to roman type reflected a desire to appeal to a growing number of middle-class readers. In short, Pinkerton proposes that the alterations Gilbertson made to the work "made the play more publicly palatable" and "financially viable," although ultimately the C-text was the last edition of *Doctor Faustus* printed in the seventeenth century.²⁸

Finally, while many critics have examined *Edward II* through a queer lens, Yuri Suzuki considers homoerotic desire in *Doctor Faustus*, focusing on the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles. She argues that the central characters' continual use of the term "sweet" to refer to each other as well as their shared space of the private study suggest the queer possibilities of the work. Mephistopheles's goals, according to Suzuki, are not the destruction of the earth, nor are they obedience to Satan; instead, she believes that Mephistopheles seeks "a connection with the newly met man somewhat at a personal and emotional level."²⁹ Faustus's longing for the devil, in contrast, originates from his desire for academic and divine understanding, which is gradually transferred to Mephistopheles. Suzuki contends that their shared reading of heretical texts in the space of Faustus's private study "foregrounds the two men's physicality and physical closeness," suggesting not only the dangers of heresy but also the danger of sodomy.³⁰

Tamburlaine

Five pieces about Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays appeared during the last two years, with three exploring different facets of the playwright's writing style. Matthew Hunter, in his article "Bombast Circumstance: Linguistic Creativity and Aesthetic Judgment in Early

²⁷ Jonathan Pinkerton, "Cut is the Branch: *Faustus*'s C-Text," *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 4 (2024): 143.

²⁸ Pinkerton, "Cut is the Branch," 147.

²⁹ Yuri Suzuki, "'Sweet Mephistopheles, tell me': Desire Between the Scholar and the Devil in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," *Textual Practice* (2025): DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2025.2551326>

³⁰ Suzuki, "'Sweet Mephistopheles,'" n.p.

Modern Tragedy,” surveys early modern writers’ use of bombast, or exaggerated utterances that do not match the play’s action. Although often denigrated by critics, bombast, according to Hunter, is not an artistic failure, but instead is valuable because it captures the tragic condition of characters. While Hunter also analyzes the plays of Shakespeare and Kyd, he views Marlowe as the originator of bombast’s use in tragedies, arguing that this literary device was “exuberantly established in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*.”³¹ In particular, Hunter examines Tamburlaine’s speech to his army before the battle with Mycetes, noting that the oration includes excessive language and grand expression that work to inspire other characters and assert Tamburlaine’s will. While Marlowe’s use of bombast does not always fit the occasion, Hunter contends that “precisely because it fails to fit, bombast offers early modern tragedians with a form of linguistic creativity that aptly captures something important about the tragic condition, which is the incapacity to find language that is, in any sense, ‘right.’”³²

Goran Stanivukovic similarly investigates Marlowe’s “rhetorical exuberance,” focusing on bombast and asyndeton, or “a list of words mostly without a conjunction.”³³ Defining Marlowe’s style as Asiatic due to its use of “verbal excess,” Stanivukovic speculates that the playwright likely found inspiration for his style from the works of Cicero and George Whetstone.³⁴ This Asiatic style informed Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, and, according to Stanivukovic, in turn served as a model for Shakespeare’s own use of hyperbole and repetition, which was adapted to strengthen the emotional power of his plays.

Matthew R. Martin also explores Marlowe’s style in his article, focusing on the playwright’s use of punctuation. Asking if there is “a discernable relationship between style and the development of punctuation in Early Modern English dramatic texts,” Martin compares the use of the comma in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* plays and Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*.³⁵ He finds that while Marlowe frequently uses commas to show a flow of language and to string together phrases that allow for a sublime feeling, Jonson tends to use dashes rather than commas in his writing, and when he does employ commas, Jonson does so only

³¹ Matthew Hunter, “Bombast Circumstance: Linguistic Creativity and Aesthetic Judgment in Early Modern Tragedy,” *English Literary History* 91, no. 1 (2024): 40.

³² Hunter, “Bombast Circumstance,” 43.

³³ Goran Stanivukovic, “*Tamburlaine*’s Asiatic Style and Shakespeare’s First Plays,” *The Explicator* 83, no. 1 (2025): 32.

³⁴ Stanivukovic, “*Tamburlaine*’s Asiatic Style,” 32–35.

³⁵ Matthew R. Martin, “Punctuation and Style in Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* and Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*,” *Ben Jonson Journal* 31, no. 2 (2024): 140.

grammatically. The differences in comma usage, Martin notes, find their basis in a seventeenth century shift from rhetorical to grammatical understandings of commas. Thus, Marlowe's commas aid in his grand rhetorical style while Jonson's commas point to a greater focus on grammar as an emerging cornerstone of dramatic writing.

Other approaches to *Tamburlaine* explore Marlowe's depictions of ancient Persia and consider his symbolic use of crocodiles. In his article, Francesco Dall'Olio explores Marlowe's use of narrative patterns found in Herodotus's and Xenophon's texts on ancient Persia, contending that the plays reveal not only Marlowe's debt to classical authors but also his ability to rework tropes to appeal to a popular audience. Thus, while "Tamburlaine's dramatic arc is structured according to a narrative skeleton that mirrors the life of Cyrus" found in classical texts, Marlowe complicates the story by presenting Tamburlaine both as a conquering hero (similar to a great king like Cyrus) and as a greedy ruler destined for defeat due to his embrace of decadence.³⁶ In short, while Marlowe's work found its inspiration in Greek literature, the playwright offered viewers a more nuanced title character who exemplified contemporary positive stereotypes of Persian empire building while simultaneously demonstrating the cruelty and greed associated with ancient Persia.

In their brief article, Li Guijie and Lihui Liu consider Marlowe's use of the figure of the crocodile. Although most medieval and early modern readers thought of the animal as a representation of hypocrisy and greed, Marlowe fashions crocodiles as passive figures linked to negative stereotypes of Egyptians. By using terms like "faint-hearted" to describe the crocodile, Marlowe, the authors argue, creates "an image of harmlessness, inert stillness and lethargy," thereby suggesting that Egypt will be subjugated to Tamburlaine's imperial power.³⁷ Ultimately, the writers contend that by depicting the crocodile as a tamed and docile creature Marlowe suggests the "symbolic appropriation of African landscapes" and assuages contemporary fears of Muslims by proposing that, like crocodiles, these people and their governments can be reconceptualized as "a comprehensible theatrical order that affirms the spectator's cultural authority through staged mastery."³⁸

³⁶ Francesco Dall'Olio, "'The seat of mighty conquerors': Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and the Influence of the Ancient Persian Empire," *Skenè: Texts and Studies* 5, Classical Receptions in Early Modern English Drama (2025): 233.

³⁷ Guijie Li and Lihui Liu, "Crocodile Narratives and the Construction of African Natural Space in *Tamburlaine the Great*," *The Explicator* (July 2025): <https://doi.org/10.1080/00144940.2025.2532667>.

³⁸ Li and Liu, "Crocodile Narratives," n.p.

The Jew of Malta

Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* attracted the attention of four different scholars in 2024 and 2025, with two exploring the playwright's treatment of religious and ethnic "others," one examining representations of conversion in the play, and one offering new insights into Marlowe's source materials for Malta. In a chapter from his monograph, *Early Modern Others: Resisting Bias in Renaissance Literature*, Peter Herman looks at religious prejudice and religious toleration as represented in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*. These authors defended Jews, Catholics, and Muslims in their works, Herman argues, by resisting "anti-Jewish stereotypes" and emphasizing the hypocrisy of Christian characters.³⁹ Herman contends that while Marlowe's play does connect Barabas to Machiavelli, the work also frames the Jewish character in a positive way by crediting his wealth to intelligent, honest, and expansive trade relations. Additionally, Marlowe depicts the Christians as hypocrites who lie and steal. Admittedly, Barabas commits numerous crimes, including murder, but Herman reminds readers that "his nefarious deeds are usually in response to someone else's provocations."⁴⁰

Clare Merrick also considers those othered in early modern society, but instead of viewing *The Jew of Malta* as evidence of Marlowe confronting antisemitism, she posits that Marlowe's play serves to "emasculate Barabas" and highlight "his alien nature as a marginalized Jew" through its depiction of the cauldron.⁴¹ According to Merrick, the use of cauldrons in plays by Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Middleton "illustrates the perceived threat that marginalized figures could pose."⁴² Although typically associated with women's domestic work, the cauldron often symbolized the hellmouth, or a visual representation of the entrance to hell. Merrick argues that just as the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Middleton's *The Witch* are demonized because of their misuse of this symbol of their femininity, Barabas too becomes associated with the feminine. His use of the cauldron also "feeds into contemporary anti-Semitic rhetoric which sought to 'feminise' the male Jew and portray him as both lesser and unnatural for being like a woman."⁴³ Moreover, by depicting Barabas as a poisoner, Marlowe further feminizes him and draws parallels between the

³⁹ Peter Herman, *Early Modern Others: Resisting Bias in Renaissance Literature* (Routledge, 2024), 96.

⁴⁰ Herman, *Early Modern Others*, 97.

⁴¹ Clare Merrick, "The Cauldron and the Threat of the 'Other' in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Middleton's *The Witch*, and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 5 (2025): 69.

⁴² Merrick, "The Cauldron and the Threat," 48.

⁴³ Merrick, "The Cauldron and the Threat," 69.

character and Roderigo Lopez, Elizabeth's Jewish physician who was accused of trying to poison the monarch in 1594.

Emily Parise, in an article from *Early Theatre*, also explores *The Jew of Malta*, contending that through his varied depictions of conversion in the play, Marlowe challenges contemporary ideas about how conversion operated. Noting that conversion required public performance and speech acts, Parise interprets most conversions in the play as nonperformative speech acts, or speech acts that work "by not bringing about the effect that they name."⁴⁴ Although Marlowe's contemporaries regularly relied on outward markers to signify conversion, this play calls into question the authenticity of conversion by staging spiritual "transformations" that outwardly perform faith but privately reveal that changes in religion are "purely invested in the secular, the nonreligious, or the dissembling."⁴⁵ Ferneze, for instance, uses conversion as a political tool by punishing the Jewish members of his community with forced conversions when they failed to give all their wealth to the state. Abigail's two conversions likewise challenge viewers' ability to judge the veracity of conversion, as "her first false conversion makes it impossible to assess the truth of her second conversion, as . . . audiences only have her word to judge the honesty of her intentions."⁴⁶

Marlowe's ahistorical depiction of Malta is the focus of Bomin Kim's short piece in *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*. To understand why Marlowe describes a Malta both unfamiliar to his original audience and less celebratory of the resident Catholic Knights Hospitaller than most contemporary accounts, Bomin analyzes Marlowe's sources. Marlowe probably consulted two works written by the Protestant Italian humanist Celio Secondo Curione, which, in contrast to English narratives about Christian partisanship during 1565 siege, satirized Catholic beliefs and practices. Additionally, in his rendering of Suleiman, Curione depicts the Ottoman ruler's complaints against the Christians' piracy as valid. Although many scholars posit that Marlowe, due to his work as a spy, had access to privileged sources about Malta, Bomin suggests the playwright chose to rely on Curione's works due to their more nuanced and skeptical approach to Malta, which aligned more closely with Marlowe's authorial intent.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Emily Parise, "Conversion as Nonperformative Speech in *The Jew of Malta*," *Early Theatre* 28, no.2 (2025): 209.

⁴⁵ Parise, "Conversion as Nonperformative Speech," 212.

⁴⁶ Parise, "Conversion as Nonperformative Speech," 215.

⁴⁷ Bomin Kim, "Possible Sources of Marlowe's Heterodox Malta," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 37, no. 1 (2024): 27–32.

Edward II

While most recent scholarship about *Edward II* has explored the text through a queer lens, critics in the past two years have examined the play not only in its relation to homoerotic desire but also through psychological, linguistic, and ideological lenses. These new approaches include considerations of word usage, temporality, and skepticism that reveal the play's ability to speak to our current age. In a chapter from the edited collection, *The Monarch and the (Non)-Human in Literature and Cinema* (2024), Joe Keener focuses on the ways the play conceptualizes time and the cognitive processes involved in understanding temporality. Using Matthew Wagner's theory of "temporal thickness," or "the layering of past, present, and future as one experience," Keener posits that *Edward II* is "haunted by a sense of a time past and a concern that time is running out."⁴⁸ The characters' concern with temporality, in turn, is reflected through the work's shifting concepts of kingship and the crown and is understood by the audience as a continual renegotiation of meaning. Edward, for example, initially views the crown as synonymous with his kingship, while Mortimer Junior understands the crown as both tangible and symbolic. Ultimately, because of his cognitive failure to perceive the crown as symbol, Edward becomes "ineffectual in multitudinous ways," which leads to his downfall.⁴⁹ Spectators too, according to Keener, process a range of different manifestations of Edward, viewing him variously as a fictional character, a cultural construction, an actor, and an historical figure. Each of these differing understandings of the tragic king reflect cognitive processes that in the end position Edward as a weak person, clearly separate from the crown but "incapable or disinclined to accept" the idea of separation between the monarch as ruler and the monarch as individual.⁵⁰

In his thoughtful article, "The Confounding Gloss: Reading the Lowne in *Pericles* and *Edward II*," Stephen Spiess calls for greater editorial attention to words with multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings, particularly those words that establish how early modern people conceived of class, race, and gender. To highlight the problems with editors' "definitional structure that suppresses the semantic conflicts" inherent in many Renaissance words, Spiess examines how the word "lowne" has been understood by the compilers of

⁴⁸ Joe Keener, "Time-Haunted Mutability, Cognition, and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*," in *The Monarch and the (Non)-Human in Literature and Cinema: Western and Global Perspectives*, ed. Nizar Zouidi (Routledge, 2024), 213.

⁴⁹ Keener, "Time-Haunted Mutability," 221.

⁵⁰ Keener, "Time-Haunted Mutability," 216.

modern play editions and how these readings often close off meaning.⁵¹ The various definitions of “lowne” present in modern editions of *Edward II* and *Pericles* highlight the instability of the word’s meaning. Speiss found that “lowne” sometimes implies criminality, idleness, and roguishness, but other times the term functions objectively by merely designating a person of lower status. These definitions, he contends, point “us toward a certain kind of person: young, male, lower status, intellectually inferior, transient, immoral.”⁵² However, most editors have failed to recognize that “lowne” can also apply to a woman, despite the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s inclusion of a definition of “lowne” meaning a sexually promiscuous woman. The instability of the term becomes even clearer when considering its use in *Edward II*, as the application of “lowne” to Gaveston may position him as not only lower class but also a female strumpet. Such an expanded reading is confirmed by Michael Drayton’s depiction of Gaveston as a “girle-boy” in his 1597 *Englands Heroicall epistles*.⁵³ Speiss’s examination of the use of “lowne,” therefore, highlights how recognition of various and sometimes conflicting definitions can help readers understand texts more fully and supports his call for editors to rethink their processes. By revealing but not resolving meaning, editors can provide readers with a new kind of historicism “that takes seriously the conditions of semantic possibility.”⁵⁴

Myra Wright examines Marlowe’s aquatic descriptions in *Edward II*, arguing that focusing on water helps us understand the sensual relationship between the king and his lover as well as the political corruption seeking to drown the main characters. Gaveston, in particular, frequently refers to himself as watery figures such as Leander who swam to his beloved across the Hellespont and as an angler who entices his prey. While these images work to position Gaveston as Edward’s seducer, they also reflect Gaveston’s continual movement across the English Channel. Water imagery is also used against the lovers and ultimately against the king. Edward’s enemies, for example, compare Gaveston to a torpedo or flying fish, a creature that traditionally left its proper domain, suggesting the courtiers’ condemnation of the class differences between the king and his lover. Finally, both men end their lives in or near watery spaces as the king dies in the sewer of his castle and Gaveston is beheaded in a trench, which also hints at wastewater. According to Wright, in the end,

⁵¹ Stephen Speiss, “The Confounding Gloss: Reading the Lowne in *Pericles* and *Edward II*,” *Modern Philology* 121, no. 3 (2024): 297.

⁵² Speiss, “The Confounding Gloss,” 303.

⁵³ Speiss, “The Confounding Gloss,” 318.

⁵⁴ Speiss, “The Confounding Gloss,” 325.

“waterways are indices of the human as pollution,” representing the court’s moral decay.⁵⁵ However, Marlowe’s use of watery language to describe the relationship between Edward and Gaveston also points to an alternate view of water as erotic and playful. Thus, water figures as both positive and negative symbol throughout the work, highlighting its fluidity as a signifier.

Mickael Popelard, in his 2024 article, examines how Marlowe engages with doubt, arguing that skepticism in *Edward II* “is neither a conscious, thinking process nor a philosophical instrument for the discovery of truth . . . but rather the epistemic consequence of a dramatic trajectory.”⁵⁶ Thus, according to Popelard, Marlowe’s play traces the movement of the main characters from confident belief in love to uncertainty in love’s ability to provide them with a “solid escape out of scepticism.”⁵⁷ Indeed, at the start of the play both Edward and Gaveston, as well as Mortimer and Isabella, express firm certainty in their love, ignorant of any way that their bonds could be severed. The political world, however, reveals cracks in the characters’ belief in love’s permanence, becoming “a force which tears the characters apart and dislocates the strongest relationships.”⁵⁸ The main characters’ frequent use of words such as “true” and “false” highlight the play’s concern with fluctuating understandings of truth, while the gradual replacement of the language of love with statements about duplicity and uncertainty demonstrate the shift from firm faith to skepticism.

While most recent scholarship on the play eschewed queer theory in favor of alternate approaches, two scholars chose to examine *Edward II* through a queer lens. Although most queer approaches to the play reveal a “critical orientation toward catastrophe” by linking Edward’s sexual orientation to his tragic death, Emily King suggests it may be more productive to think through how the play queers time.⁵⁹ By decentering the reading of Edward’s end, King aims to discover “traces of what might have been,” which she suggests are present in the play’s grammatical shifts, imaginative offerings, and rewritings of history.⁶⁰ Marlowe, she argues, uses “a grammar of possibility,” or “subjunctive mood,” which is shown through Edward’s and Gaveston’s continual references to possible futures that would

⁵⁵ Myra E. Wright, “Sink or Swim: Knee-deep in Marlowe’s *Edward II*,” in *Water and Cognition in Early Modern English Literature*, ed. Nicholas Helms and Steve Mentz (Routledge, 2025), 109.

⁵⁶ Mickael Popelard, “Knowledge, Love and Epistemic Uncertainty in Marlowe’s *Edward the Second*,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 4 (2024): 116.

⁵⁷ Popelard, “Knowledge, Love and Epistemic Uncertainty,” 117.

⁵⁸ Popelard, “Knowledge, Love and Epistemic Uncertainty,” 123.

⁵⁹ Emily L. King, “Queering History in Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 63, no. 2 (2025): 144.

⁶⁰ King, “Queering History,” 145.

allow them to freely enjoy their time together. As King notes, “the very nature of the subjunctive mood broadens the set of possibilities through imaginative language and queers linear time by rejecting strict teleology.”⁶¹ Thus, although the future Edward envisions ultimately fails, moments of possibility emerge when readers pay close attention to Marlowe’s embellishment of history and use of the counterfactual. And these moments that propose a hypothetical future for the king and his lover offer spectators and readers “how else a history that has yet to pass might have transpired.”⁶²

Jason O’Toole also examines queer desire in the play, focusing on how Marlowe uses touch to define the homoerotic relationships in the play. Therefore, within the play, touch functions not just as a pleasurable sense, but also “a complex, primal and powerful force” that can connote power and violence as much as affection and intimacy.⁶³ While O’Toole surveys a wide range of approaches to the queer relationship between Edward and Gaveston, he argues that within the work it is “the ambition of the lower-class favourite rather than his desire” that serves “as the driving influence behind sexual touch.”⁶⁴ Thus, while Marlowe’s use of touch shows the intimacy between the king and his lover, these moments also highlight how Edward’s personal desires frequently override his expected public role as king. As O’Toole notes, by deciding to publicly embrace Gaveston, Edward allows his lover to overstep the expected boundaries of social class and assume equality with the king. Such touch challenges Isabella’s position as queen consort, demonstrating Edward’s communication of favor through physical touch. In the end, in Marlowe’s play touch emerges as a political tool that shapes power relations and challenges the hierarchal structure of English society.

Dido, Queen of Carthage

Two scholars focused on *Dido, Queen of Carthage* during the last two years. Heather James, in her article, considers how the original audiences of the play, particularly those from the Inns of Court, would have reacted to its performance by grammar schoolboys. James notes that English grammar schools, which gave pride of place to Troy’s legend of imperialism, regularly taught both Virgil and Ovid, associating the former with “moral and ideological

⁶¹ King, “Queering History,” 155.

⁶² King, “Queering History,” 161.

⁶³ Jason O’Toole, “The Employment of Touch in Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 5 (2025): 164.

⁶⁴ O’Toole, “The Employment of Touch,” 167.

use,” and the latter with “poetic pleasure.”⁶⁵ Marlowe’s play, with its focus on the impact of the Trojan War, would have reminded spectators of their own grammar school education and made them question whether the work promoted Virgilian traditionalism and discipline or Ovidian eloquence and imagination. For James, *Dido* lacks the moral purpose and pietas found in Virgil’s account. Thus, while Virgil’s *Aeneid* offers an Aeneas comforted by artwork depicting Troy, Marlowe’s Aeneas responds to the Trojan war emotionally. In the end, James believes that while Marlowe uses Virgil to craft *Dido*’s plot, the rhetoric he employs is more elegiac, suggesting his reliance on Ovid.

Ed Paleit, in his piece, asks “just what kind of monarch is the protagonist of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*?”⁶⁶ Virgil’s *Aeneid*, he notes, presents Dido as capable female ruler overseeing a monarchical republic, but Marlowe’s play interrogates her position in a more nuanced way that reflected contemporary debates about women rulers. According to Paleit, *Dido* “advances a striking and in certain respects *un*-political or even anti-political portrait of princely power and identity.”⁶⁷ Marlowe, rather than focusing on the politics of rule, centers his story on the personal and subjective experiences of Carthage’s queen, which Paleit argues are shown through two different ways the playwright conceptualizes the construction of royal power. First, Dido and Aeneas’ royal status is based not on their political acumen, but instead on their sex appeal, meaning their power is founded on their visual aesthetic. Second, monarchy, Paleit contends, “equates royal status with subjective autonomy and unfettered agency, and with the experience of being singular and superior to others.”⁶⁸ In Marlowe’s play, Dido attempts to gain psychological control over Aeneas, but vacillates between displaying her royal power and surrendering her authority to him. Initially, she offers Aeneas companionship, which Paleit contends is “a form of intimacy that permits inequality and may even rely on it.”⁶⁹ However, as the play progresses, Dido struggles to maintain her status as sovereign while continuing her relationship with Aeneas, even offering the crown to her sister if Aeneas will return and live with her. In the end, her suicide functions as “an act of sovereign self-cancellation,” which Paleit reads as the result of her “failure to sustain

⁶⁵ Heather James, “The Traumas of Troy and the Elizabethan Schoolboy in Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” *Anglia* 142, no. 3 (2024): 532.

⁶⁶ Edward Paleit, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage* and the Contradictions of Sovereignty,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 5 (2025): 1.

⁶⁷ Paleit, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” 4.

⁶⁸ Paleit, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” 9.

⁶⁹ Paleit, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” 11.

personal autonomy.”⁷⁰ The play, then, explores how a ruler loses power when they are compelled to recognize another individual’s subjectivity and realize the true nature of their own sovereignty.

The Massacre at Paris

In the last two years, six separate articles about *The Massacre at Paris* appeared in academic journals. These pieces explore Marlowe’s sources for his play and his engagement with religious history, as well as detail a new translation of the work recently performed to commemorate the 1572 St. Bartholomew Day’s Massacre. In her piece, Joanne Hill explores Marlowe’s characterization of Henri of Navarre, contending that the playwright “elicits and reflects a variety of views towards the Huguenot leader among Protestant playgoers,” thereby pointing to “the risks and benefits of assisting Navarre’s forces.”⁷¹ Henri’s requests for assistance from the English, Hill notes, met with differing responses from various Protestant groups; moderate Protestants advised the queen to remain uninvolved, while Puritan sympathizers pushed for English intervention. Elizabeth chose to assist Henri monetarily but explained her decision in political rather than religious terms, reflecting both her pragmatism and the often unreliable actions of the French leader. Attitudes towards continental Protestant refugees also varied greatly during this time, with some supporting the foreign Calvinists and others protesting their presence in the nation. Marlowe wrote *The Massacre* a few years after the assassination of Henri III and the work reflects contemporary fears about a wide-scale war against European Protestants that might be lost without English assistance. Hill argues that Marlowe, by inserting Puritan rhetoric in the mouths of Huguenot victims, sought “to intensify his Protestant and Puritan spectators’ fears that their religious beliefs could make them the next targets.”⁷² However, the play also encourages the audience to question the abilities and trustworthiness of the Huguenot leader, Henri of Navarre, by showcasing both his naïve faith and his sudden shift to “heroic Protestant warrior” in the second half of the play.⁷³ Additionally, the work highlights the heavy loss of English soldiers who assisted the Huguenots, reflecting the unpopularity of the French campaigns for many lower class English people. In her final analysis, Hill argues that Marlowe’s ambiguous representation of Henri

⁷⁰ Paleit, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” 18, 19.

⁷¹ Joanne Hill, “Unreliable Allies in an Uncertain World: Warnings from History in Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 4 (2024): 10.

⁷² Hill, “Unreliable Allies in an Uncertain World,” 16.

⁷³ Hill, “Unreliable Allies in an Uncertain World,” 17.

“as a brave and devout warrior who fights for the defence of Protestantism, but also as an unreliable and power-hungry opportunist” reflects contemporary English attitudes towards the French king and to the Huguenots.⁷⁴

Jeanne Mathieu also focused on Marlowe's approach to history in her analysis of *The Massacre at Paris*, arguing that the playwright intensified the visual and aural elements of the action “to construct a new historic reality” and reshape the audience's understanding of the massacre.⁷⁵ By comparing Marlowe's play to the account of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre found in François Hotman's 1573 pamphlet *A true and plaine reporte of the furious outrages of France*, Mathieu shows how the English author heightens the audience's experience of violence while simultaneously amplifying the conflict between Catholics and Protestants. As Mathieu points out, Marlowe alters the accounts of murders found in Hotman's pamphlet to arouse greater hostility towards Catholics and to position the murdered Protestants as martyrs for their faith. The murder of the Huguenot leader Admiral Coligny, for instance, is framed as the result of a doctrinal conflict and takes place in his bed, which “is reminiscent of the traditional pictorial representation of martyrs portrayed tied to bed, racks, or torture beds.”⁷⁶ The play also reveals the inability of language to solve religious issues, exacerbates the harshness of the words used by Catholics, and repeatedly shows Protestants prevented from speaking back to their Catholic opponents. The use of sound further enhances the audience's understanding of Catholic atrocities as bells ring out not to call the faithful to prayer but instead to signal acts of murder and violence. Mathieu further suggests that the sound of the bells and the movements of the characters on stage “may have reminded the audience of a hunting party,” with the Catholics as hunters and the Protestants as their prey.⁷⁷ All of these sensory elements allow the audience to vicariously experience the massacre and to fear French Catholic cruelty.

Joseph Khoury's exploration of *The Massacre at Paris* also considers Marlowe's approach to the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre. While critics have often labeled the play an inferior work, Khoury argues that not only is the play an important exposé of political propaganda and religious intolerance, but also a response to Anne Dowriche's 1589 poem, *The French Historie*. As the playwright's aim, according to Khoury, was to present “a

⁷⁴ Hill, “Unreliable Allies in an Uncertain World,” 21.

⁷⁵ Jeanne Mathieu, “Rewriting History for the Stage: The Theatricality of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (1592),” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 4 (2024): 27.

⁷⁶ Mathieu, “Rewriting History for the Stage,” 28.

⁷⁷ Mathieu, “Rewriting History for the Stage,” 38.

contested perspective on history rather than an ideological one,” examining Marlowe’s account against that of the Puritan Dowriche offers scholars a way to assess Marlowe’s more circumspect interpretation of the events.⁷⁸ Dowriche’s support for the French Huguenots is evident throughout her poem, but most obvious in her portrayal of Catherine de Medici as “clearly villainous, politically shrewd, and virulently Catholic.”⁷⁹ Additionally, Dowriche models her work on John Foxe’s martyrology, linking her account to a broader providential history about the persecution of true and heroic Christians. Dowriche’s aim, Khoury argues, is to offer readers a moral tale and to denigrate Catherine de Medici and the French monarchy as tools of Satan and followers of Machiavelli. While stark differences between the two accounts exist, Khoury notes that both writers use Machiavelli to help interpret the historical events. The Italian author’s famed book, *The Prince*, was well-known in England by the time Dowriche and Marlowe penned their work, although most English readers treated it with ambivalence and many remained confused by the distinction between a Machevill and a Machiavellian character.⁸⁰ Marlowe’s more nuanced narrative reflects his understanding of Machiavelli by highlighting the hypocrisy and duplicity of not only Catholics, but also Protestants. Marlowe’s main alteration of Dowriche, Khoury contends, is his depiction of Guise, who is presented as “a Barabas-like Machevill bogeyman,” while his Catherine de Medici is less adept and less bloodthirsty than Dowriche’s.⁸¹ Indeed, according to Khoury, it is Marlowe’s Henri III who is presented as the true Machiavellian in the play as his sincerity and integrity are continually questioned in *The Massacre*. Marlowe’s play, therefore, offers audiences a memorable account of the French Wars of Religion, emphasizing the duplicity and hypocrisy of both sides of the religious divide, and warning his audience about the dangers of religious radicalism.

Cristiano Ragni, in an article published in *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, examines the depiction of Henri of Valois in *The Massacre*, arguing that rather than characterizing the monarch as a weak king, Marlowe represented him as an astute political strategist who sought

⁷⁸ Joseph Khoury, “Marlowe’s Reading of Machiavelli and Anne Dowriche’s *The French Historie*,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 5 (2025): 136.

⁷⁹ Khoury, “Marlowe’s Reading,” 139.

⁸⁰ The Machevill was a stage figure used to poke fun at Machiavelli. Depicted as diabolical, cunning, and manipulative, the Machevill, according to most scholars, was based on the medieval Vice character rather than on Machiavelli himself. The Machiavellian, in contrast, is a character that follows the political maxims of Niccolò Machiavelli and usually, like the rulers praised in *The Prince*, succeeds as a leader. For more on this topic, see Margaret Scott, “Machiavelli and the Machiavel,” *Renaissance Drama*, New Series 15, Modes, Motifs, and Genres (1984): 147–74.

⁸¹ Khoury, “Marlowe’s Reading,” 150.

to end the French religious wars. According to Ragni, one of Marlowe's primary sources for the final years of Henri's reign was Giordano Bruno's positive account of the king in *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (1584). By using this source, as well as a range of contradictory contemporary sources, Marlowe "erases the differences between the two opposing religious factions" and reveals the dangers of using God's name to promote violence.⁸² While Marlowe likely read many of the pamphlets that condemned Henri as power-hungry, sexually promiscuous, and ineffectual, his play represents a very different ruler; Marlowe's Henri develops throughout the work, moving from a zealot Catholic actively engaged in the suppression of the French Huguenots to a wise monarch who sought an alliance with the Protestant Navarre and tried to bring peace to his people. To prove this point, Ragni examines Henri's speech following the murder of the Duke of Guise, arguing that Henri not only admits his past political blunders but also realizes the danger of religious extremism for the French nation. Marlowe's play also stresses that a major part of Henri's political shift stemmed from "the persistent invocation of an alliance between France and England" that most European thinkers agreed would lead to peace across the continent.⁸³ Indeed, on his deathbed, Marlowe's Henri III reminds his people of the importance of an English alliance. Marlowe's positive portrayal of Henri III finds its basis in the work of Bruno, who not only had firsthand knowledge of the French monarch's court, but also paid tribute to the king in his treatise on the arts of memory, *Cantus Circaeus* and in his dialogue *Lo Spaccio de la Bestia Trionfante*. In these works, Bruno connects the Circe myth to King Henri's moderate political reforms and praises the monarch as a modern Hercules. Furthermore, Ragni sees links between Bruno's criticisms of Christianity and its use as a political tool and Marlowe's own skeptical exploration of religion within the play. One of these links is Marlowe's inclusion of dialogue imagining Henri destroying Rome and taking the pope's "triple crown" for himself, which Bruno hints at in his *Lo Spaccio*. Thus, while most contemporary pamphleteers and chroniclers denigrated Henri III, Marlowe, like Bruno before him, presented the French king as a moderate who tried to end the wars of religion.

The 450th anniversary of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre inspired a Marlowe Festival held in Rheims and Paris that included a staging of Marlowe's play in French. In their article, Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise and Christine Sukic detail their translation process for

⁸² Cristiano Ragni, "'Ne'er was there King of France so Yoked as I': Henry III of Valois, Christopher Marlowe, and Giordano Bruno," *Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies* 118, no. 1 (2025): 5.

⁸³ Ragni, "'Ne'er was there King of France,'" 9.

the version used in the festival and trace the history of *The Massacre at Paris* in French translation. Recent French interest in Marlowe's work, due in part to the award winning 1994 film, *La Reine Margot*, based on a novel by Alexandre Dumas as well as Marlowe's play, helped motivate the translators. Miller-Blaise and Sukic believed a new translation was warranted as earlier French translations of the play failed to maintain the rhythm of Marlowe's poetic text and were wordier and more cumbersome than the English version. Therefore, the writers decided to translate the play "with a more historically-minded view of Elizabethan drama" and "with greater attention to form and lexical exactness."⁸⁴

In their analysis of French translations of *The Massacre of Paris*, Miller-Blaise and Sukic found that none of the nineteenth-century translations were performed and all were translated in prose rather than poetry. Gustave Masson, in his 1879 translation, denigrated Marlowe and treated the play as a history rather than literary work, while Félix Rabbe's 1889 translation included praise for Marlowe's literary innovation, but crafted a text Miller-Blaise and Sukic found overly wordy. Twentieth century translations of the play included Jean Paris' 1954 version, which incorporated militant political commentary and Jean Vauthier's translation, which was used in a notable 1972 production but failed to stay close to the original text. Indeed, Miller-Blaise and Sukic characterize Vauthier's work as "not exactly a translation ... but rather a re-writing of the play, to the point of being sometimes difficult to understand."⁸⁵ Composed for particular productions of the play, the first two twenty-first century translations used verse rather than prose but significantly altered Marlowe's text; Dorothee Zumstein's 2017 translation, for instance, added new characters, giving greater importance to the character of Marguerite de Valois than the original, and composed a section that stood in for the "missing parts" of Marlowe's play. After their study of earlier French translations of *The Massacre at Paris*, Miller-Blaise and Sukic set out to remedy the faults of previous translators. To maintain a similar rhythm and keep the poetic structure, they translated English iambic pentameters as French decasyllables, which they argue "helped us to keep alive the tension of the original play and language."⁸⁶ Miller-Blaise and Sukic also tried to retain the order of the English lines and to keep the wording short. Their translation was used in two different performances associated with the festival, one with professional

⁸⁴ Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise and Christine Sukic, "A Massacre at Paris in French Translation: from Page to Stage," *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 4 (2024): 46.

⁸⁵ Miller-Blaise and Sukic, "A Massacre at Paris in French Translation," 52.

⁸⁶ Miller-Blaise and Sukic, "A Massacre at Paris in French Translation," 55.

actors and one with drama school students, and according to the authors, confirmed “the aptness of verse for performance.”⁸⁷

Geoffrey Marsh’s article on *The Massacre at Paris* explores the possible influence of a London government official named John Welles on the works of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Drawing on a range of records, including parish account books and a burial register, Marsh argues that Welles likely met both playwrights and may have provided oral accounts of the St. Bartholomew Day’s Massacre to Marlowe. All three men—Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Welles—lived in the same neighborhood of Bishopsgate at different points during the years 1587 to 1593. Marsh traces the history of the area and Marlowe’s residency at Norton Folgate, a liberty connecting Bishopsgate to Shoreditch, suggesting that Marlowe chose this area because of its nearness to theaters. Additionally, Marsh theorizes that Marlowe would likely have attended plays at the Bull Inn’s theater and would have walked by Welles’ nearby house frequently. Welles served the queen as an overseas courier, carrying messages from Elizabeth I to other European courts, which made him “one of the most travelled inhabitants in the parish” and likely one of the most familiar with French politics.⁸⁸ However, in 1589 Welles became embroiled in the French religious crisis. While serving as a courier following the murders of the Guise brothers, Welles was arrested by Catholic forces in Normandy, presumably because they suspected he was a Protestant spy; his subsequent imprisonment in Rouen lasted nearly two years. Marsh surmises that the composition of *The Massacre at Paris*, which required a nuanced understanding of France’s religious and political struggles, may have been shaped by Marlowe’s discussions with individuals familiar with current French events. John Welles, due to his extensive knowledge of France, seems a likely candidate as a source for Marlowe’s familiarity with recent French history. The two men might have met during one of Welles’ sojourns in England and Marsh offers several possible dates when Welles and Marlowe were both in London. Additionally, the inclusion of a messenger character in *The Massacre*, according to Marsh, might be “a nod by Marlowe to the profession which had provided his sources.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Miller-Blaise and Sukic, “*A Massacre at Paris* in French Translation,” 59.

⁸⁸ Geoffrey Marsh, “The Bull Theatre, Bishopsgate Street and John Welles: A Creative Nexus for Marlowe, Shakespeare and the Inspiration for *The Massacre at Paris*?,” *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 5 (2025): 98.

⁸⁹ Marsh, “The Bull Theatre,” 118.

“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”

While most scholars writing about Marlowe’s influence limit themselves to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Christopher Warley considers what a close reading of “The Passionate Shepherd” might tell us about how the German philologist, Erich Auerbach, and his modern interpreter, Jacques Rancière, conceived of Renaissance aesthetics. Noting that recent scholarship has viewed the arts of the “Renaissance” as either a beautiful cover for modernity’s darker aspects such as imperialism and capitalism or as a “nostalgic alternative to modern disaster,” Warley offers a corrective.⁹⁰ Guided by Rancière’s theory of “aesthesis,” or that modern art celebrates diversity and is connected to lived experience, Warley sees Renaissance art as the start of this movement. For him, the early modern arts produced “a rebirth of the aesthetic understanding of human life as historically diverse” and Marlowe’s famous poem serves as an example of this conviction.⁹¹ “The Passionate Shepherd” inspired numerous imitations, which Warley argues occurred because the poem is an “invitation to live,” initiating the purpose of art for the modern age: “to rebirth life, to live again in history.”⁹² In this pastoral piece, Marlowe’s speaker offers pleasures related to the natural world, but overreaches, extending his invitation outward, beyond the frame of the poem. For Warley, “Marlowe’s proof of pleasures violates” the ancient idea that art must be unified, or that the words and their affect should be in harmony.⁹³ Instead, Marlowe’s shepherd points to excessive pleasures beyond the world of the poem, making his invitation not just a seduction, but also a new way of understanding the pleasure we receive from the arts. Thus, Marlowe exemplifies Auerbach’s claim that mixing different types of writing and violating classical decorum allows authors and readers to embrace earthly life in a way medieval art could not permit. Indeed, for Warley, the poem usefully vacillates because it endorses a “human sensuality that both emerges out of Christianity’s capacity to depict the everyday and reacts violently against it by stressing its Ovidian worldliness.”⁹⁴ Walter Raleigh’s poetic response, “The Nymph’s Reply,” works in a similar fashion, offering readers “pleasures that had never before been thought of, emerging out of vacillations, created by a mixed style whose fecundity awaits future flowerings.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Christopher Warley, “A Proof of Pleasure: Renaissance in Rancière, Auerbach, Marlowe,” *English Literary Renaissance* 54, no. 1 (2024): 112.

⁹¹ Warley, “A Proof of Pleasure,” 112.

⁹² Warley, “A Proof of Pleasure,” 115.

⁹³ Warley, “A Proof of Pleasure,” 118.

⁹⁴ Warley, “A Proof of Pleasure,” 124.

⁹⁵ Warley, “A Proof of Pleasure,” 125–26.

Authorship, Collaboration, and Publishing

Marlowe's collaborations with other writers, his influence on other poets and playwrights, and the publication of his works continue to stimulate scholarly debate. Darren Freebury-Jones examines the collaborations between other early modern playwrights and Shakespeare in his recent monograph *Shakespeare's Borrowed Feathers* (2024). In a chapter devoted to Christopher Marlowe, Freebury-Jones explores Shakespeare's extensive allusions to and borrowings from Marlowe's poems and plays. He points to direct quotations from Marlowe's works found in *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* as well as noting the influence of *Edward II* on Shakespeare's history plays, particularly *Richard II*. Additionally, Freebury-Jones contends that Aaron's list of the violent schemes in *Titus Andronicus* shares marked similarities with those of Barabas in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. Relying on collocations and N-grams to recognize strings of words, Freebury-Jones contends that Marlowe's works influenced not only Shakespeare, but also Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, and Thomas Lodge. He does, however, question the reliability of some stylometric methods, contending that many of these techniques strip language of meaning and cannot be verified by other methods. Indeed, for Freebury-Jones, studies using Word Adjacency Networks (WANs) and Zeta methods that identify characteristic features of an author's word choices, are questionable as they "seldom tally with long-standing methods proven to be reliable."⁹⁶ Therefore, in his concluding paragraphs, Freebury-Jones warns his readers to treat the recent attribution of the *Henry VI* plays to Marlowe with skepticism.

Jonathan Pinkerton's piece focuses not on Marlowe's collaboration or influence but instead examines the role of the publisher Edward Blount in the promotion of Marlowe's works, particularly after the author's untimely death. Blount, an important part of the publishing consortium for Shakespeare's *First Folio*, worked in London, printing mostly secular works, including Pierre Charron's *Of Wisdom* in French as well as texts by Jonson, Chapman, and Lyly. Pinkerton argues that Blount's most significant role, though, was as the "executor of Marlowe's literary will."⁹⁷ Not only did Blount publish the 1598 edition of *Hero and Leander* and *Lucan's First Book*, but he also provided a dedication to the first edition of

⁹⁶ Darren Freebury-Jones, *Shakespeare's Borrowed Feathers: How Early Modern Playwrights Shaped the World's Greatest Writer* (Manchester University Press, 2024), 67.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Pinkerton, "Blount, Marlowe, and the First Folio," *Actes des Congrès de la Société Française Shakespeare* 42 (2024): n.p. <http://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/8546>

Hero and Leander. Even his publication of Shakespeare's *First Folio*, Pinkerton suggests, may have been "a continuation of his duties as 'literary executor' to Marlowe."⁹⁸

Edward John Stein also considered Marlowe's legacy through his examination of a dedicatory poem included in the 1630 publication of John Taylor's *Workes*. This poem, attributed to R. H. and entitled "To My Worthy and Well-Deserving Friend, Our Well-Known Hydropoet, John Taylor," incorporates two allusions Stein finds noteworthy. The first, an allusion to *Hero and Leander*, "casts Taylor in mock-heroic terms" through its reference to the waves caressing Leander and because of R. H.'s understanding of Marlowe's poem as an example of wittiness and ingenuity.⁹⁹ Stein speculates that the Latin phrase "Ut Nectar Ingenium," employed as an epigraph in most publications of *Hero and Leander*, was associated with the cultural practices of tavern wits, including jesting and drinking. Thus, the allusion to Leander as a paper boat lovingly kissed by the waves of the Thames "converts the earlier poet's homoeroticism into an expression of homosocial affection" associated with Taylor and other tavern wits.¹⁰⁰ Stein also notes an additional allusion in the introductory poem to the reception of Ben Jonson's play, *The New Inn*, which had met with audience disdain one year previously. By advising Taylor to avoid looking to the Thames for inspiration as Jonson had done, R. H. praises Taylor's work while simultaneously attacking both Jonson and Marlowe as poets who wrote not to please their readers but themselves. Stein speculates that while the initials R. H. may allude to Robert Herrick, he believes the poet responsible for this dedicatory work was Richard Hatton, who not only sought to emulate Marlowe by translating the works of Ovid, but also likely viewed Taylor "as a kind of English Leander" able to swim the tide of English literary taste.¹⁰¹

Marlowe and Religion

Not surprisingly, as Marlowe's religious beliefs or lack thereof have fascinated critics for centuries, several pieces explored the playwright's engagement with faith and doubt. In his article, Cristiano Ragni argues that his contemporaries labeled Marlowe heretical and subversive not because he questioned the veracity of scripture, but because he dared to write plays that publicly communicated his belief that religion was used by those in power to keep

⁹⁸ Pinkerton, "Blount, Marlowe, and the First Folio," n.p.

⁹⁹ John Edward Stein, "Allusions to Marlowe and Jonson in a Dedicatory Poem in Taylor's *Workes*, with an Attribution to Richard Hatton," *Notes and Queries* 71, no. 1 (2024): 81.

¹⁰⁰ Stein, "Allusions to Marlowe and Jonson," 82.

¹⁰¹ Stein, "Allusions to Marlowe and Jonson," 84.

people in line. Noting that Marlowe's reputation as an atheist and subversive figure is often based on what we know of his life and works, which "have risked being used to signify everything and the opposite of everything," Ragni takes an historical approach, consulting the 1593 documents that reported Marlowe's suspected atheism as well as examining contemporary religious debates.¹⁰²

Ragni covers the events of 1593 in detail, focusing particularly on reports written by Richard Baines and Thomas Drury accusing the writer of atheism. While Ragni notes that "accusations of atheism such as these could be merely used as an easy way to smear enemies," he suggests the claims might be true, especially the one penned by Baines.¹⁰³ Arguing that these "documents likely report Marlowe's personal belief on the Scriptures," Ragni offers a list of four beliefs Marlowe probably held: the unreliability of scripture; the earthly and queer nature of Christ; the chicanery of Moses and St. Paul; and the exploitative use of religion to control the masses.¹⁰⁴ These beliefs, Ragni contends, were not new, but instead stemmed from anti-Christian thought dating back to the beginning of the faith. Early philosophers such as Celsus, who believed that Christianity weakened the Roman state and needed to be eliminated, and Arius, who questioned the Trinity, shared similar beliefs with Marlowe. The playwright's views also echo those of Porphyry of Tyre and Julian the Apostate as Marlowe likely viewed Christianity as a superstition counterfeited by those in power to more effectively govern the people. Such views, also posited by Marlowe's contemporary, Giordano Bruno, underscore Marlowe's religious skepticism and are aligned "with age-old, heterodox discourses against Christianity" that were disseminated throughout Europe in the early modern period and "shared by all those who wanted to put an end to the wars of religion."¹⁰⁵

Traces of Marlowe's atheistic beliefs, Ragni argues, are also found in several of his plays, which frequently attack the hypocrisy of Christians and religion in general. *The Massacre at Paris*, for instance, presents religion not as a unifying force, but instead as a political tool that fails to stop atrocities and sectarian violence. Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* also critiques Christianity, revealing the hypocrisy of Catholics, who preach humility and sexual purity but fail to adhere to their own precepts. Furthermore, through his representation

¹⁰² Cristiano Ragni, "'Scorning both God and his Ministers': at the Origins of Marlowe's Atheism," *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 4 (2024): 93.

¹⁰³ Ragni, "'Scorning both God and his Ministers,'" 96.

¹⁰⁴ Ragni, "'Scorning both God and his Ministers,'" 97.

¹⁰⁵ Ragni, "'Scorning both God and his Ministers,'" 102.

of individuals feigning religious belief in *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe suggests to audience “that it was better to dissimulate a religious belief than hypocritically think that truth had anything to do with religion.”¹⁰⁶ Even his early dramatic works, the *Tamburlaine* plays, depict a ruler who overturns the political and religious orders of his enemies while creating rituals and spectacles that evoke religious practice and are used as tools to stabilize Tamburlaine’s rule.

Literary Techniques

A significant number of academics explored Marlowe’s innovative use of language, focusing on the playwright’s utilization of hyperbole, imaginative wording, and dramatic apostrophe. Linc Kesler, in a chapter from his recent book, *Time and Causality in Early Modern Drama* (2024), investigates the changes Marlowe made to drama during his brief life. The two most important innovations, Kesler contends, were Marlowe’s use of iambic pentameter and his “dedication to a more explicit and encompassing valorization of imagination.”¹⁰⁷ In both *Doctor Faustus* and the *Tamburlaine* plays, Marlowe works within the established traditions of psychomachia found in chronicles and mystery plays but by emphasizing the individuality and end of these characters, redefines tragedy as “bounded, contained, and constrained.”¹⁰⁸ Additionally, through his introduction of the Machiavel in *The Jew of Malta* and the use of Machiavellian characters in other works, Marlowe allowed viewers to experience and imagine an expression of will beyond traditional Christian theology. In his tragic plays Marlowe also introduced “a linkage between more extended planning, plotting, and deception,” as well as comedic elements. Kesler argues that these two innovative components offered audiences a new way of thinking about drama. Furthermore, Marlowe’s plays staged a new type of power based on characters’ abilities to invest and make money, which was often associated with characters deemed unfamiliar or other. In short, Kesler views Marlowe’s work as ushering in “new ways of thinking about action, time, and identity.”¹⁰⁹

In her chapter from an edited collection on early modern literary engagements with history and form, Gail Kern Paster examines how playwrights employed dramatic apostrophe, or “a moment when a speaker, propelled by intense emotions, turns away from his/her immediate circumstances and hails an outside force, an abstract idea, or a person

¹⁰⁶ Ragni, ““Scorning both God and his Ministers,”” 106.

¹⁰⁷ Linc Kesler, *Time and Causality in Early Modern Drama: Plotting Revenge* (Routledge, 2024), 109.

¹⁰⁸ Kesler, *Time and Causality*, 112.

¹⁰⁹ Kesler, *Time and Causality*, 119.

living or dead not physically present.”¹¹⁰ This technique, based on classical rhetoric, expressed the strong emotions of the speaker and stirred the imaginations of the audience. As this technique points to “a world demonstrably elsewhere,” Paster contends it offers both formalist and historicist scholars “a powerful tool for the period-specific expression of heightened feeling and the willful articulation of desire.”¹¹¹ Paster points to both *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus* as examples of plays that incorporate this literary technique. In *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe uses the dramatic apostrophe to convey verbal and military power, assigning this type of language to the titular character as well as his opponents. In the case of *Tamburlaine*, most of his apostrophes reflect his desire for the achievement of land, power, and Zenocrate. Those of Bajazeth and Zabina, in contrast, “reveal their wretchedness in a world made hellish by *Tamburlaine*.”¹¹² In *Doctor Faustus*, the main character’s dramatic apostrophes address the cosmos, which Paster argues reflect Faustus’s desire for agency and for extended time on earth. In the play’s final scene, for instance, Faustus’s addresses to the cosmos reflect his competing desires “to turn away from and come back again to the natural world he must leave behind.”¹¹³ Paster also considers the dramatic apostrophes found in Shakespeare’s works, noting that while Marlowe’s characters tend to address natural and cosmic forces, Shakespeare’s speakers address the material world, abstract ideas, and the dead. For Paster, Shakespeare’s use of the apostrophe heightens spectator’s awareness of the character’s desire for emotional connection with others or showcases their contemplation of ideas beyond their immediate circumstances. In the end, Paster argues that the dramatic apostrophe allows these writers “to introduce ideas and forces relevant to the speaker and his world but otherwise unable to be staged.”¹¹⁴

In a chapter from his book, *Performing Ethics in English Revenge Drama: Wild Play*, Noam Reisner examines another early modern literary technique—dramatic hyperbole. Arguing that Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* and its enactment of excessive revenge influenced both Shakespeare and Marlowe’s dramatization of excess, Reisner explores instances of disproportionate madness and revenge in *The Jew of Malta*, *The Massacre at Paris*, *Richard III*, and *Titus Andronicus*. Not only do Shakespeare and Marlowe mimic Kyd through

¹¹⁰ Gail Kern Paster, “Stand Still, You Ever-Moving Spheres of Heaven”: Form and Feeling in Dramatic Apostrophe,” in *New Essays on History and Form in Early Modern English Literature*, ed. Nick Moschovakis and Gail Kern Paster (New York: Routledge, 2025), 114.

¹¹¹ Paster, “Stand Still, You Ever-Moving Spheres of Heaven,” 115, 116.

¹¹² Paster, “Stand Still, You Ever-Moving Spheres of Heaven,” 119.

¹¹³ Paster, “Stand Still, You Ever-Moving Spheres of Heaven,” 122.

¹¹⁴ Paster, “Stand Still, You Ever-Moving Spheres of Heaven,” 129.

hyperbolic acts of revenge, they also, Reisner suggests, engage with Kyd's "fascination with the collapse of Christian humanist virtue ethics and its idealized culture of letters."¹¹⁵ Kyd's play, Reisner argues, centers on the pain of one revenger and explores the tension between revenge and damnation, while Marlowe and Shakespeare "focus only on the ruinous consequences such revenge acts have when pursued in the interest of audience pleasure outside a clearly defined moral framework."¹¹⁶ Thus, while Kyd uses letters in his play to show the moral bankruptcy of the aristocracy, Marlowe and Shakespeare employ literary texts or conventions as deadly props and as ways to expose or inspire crimes. For instance, in *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas uses forged letters to set Abigail's lovers against each other, which results in their deaths. Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* also employs letters and books to entrap victims and reveal the perpetrators of Lavinia's rape and dismemberment. Furthermore, Reisner argues that while Kyd's play enhances "the revenger's moral damnation as a premeditated murderer" by making Hieronimo delay his revenge until the concluding act, Marlowe and Shakespeare employ a "theatre of excess," which raises different ethical concerns.¹¹⁷ For Reisner, the later playwrights, through their use of violent spectacles, force audiences to question the morality of enjoying scenes of excessive bloodshed rather than ask them to consider the ethics of revenge.

Hieronimo's dilemma in *The Spanish Tragedy*—his inability to "find adequate satisfaction to what he has lost and suffered"—results in extreme grief, which Kyd stages through dramatic hyperbole.¹¹⁸ As Reisner points out, such excessive language, for early moderns, risked turning a serious work into farce. Yet Kyd used rhetorical hyperbole "to transport the audience into the passions which feed the revenge plot and give it its shape," and this technique was later employed by Marlowe and Shakespeare.¹¹⁹ Marlowe, for example, places central figures like Faustus and Barabas in enclosed spaces like studies or counting houses, which allows these figures to initially voice their concerns and exaggerate their fears in a private space made possible by the public stage. As the play progresses, though, Marlowe's characters move from victims to revengers, developing their rhetorical hyperboles to express their control of situations and spaces. In the case of *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas, at last undone by his excessive language, dies with an "apostrophe to his tongue,"

¹¹⁵ Noam Reisner, *Performing Ethics in English Revenge Drama: Wild Play* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 80.

¹¹⁶ Reisner, *Performing Ethics*, 81.

¹¹⁷ Reisner, *Performing Ethics*, 90.

¹¹⁸ Reisner, *Performing Ethics*, 91.

¹¹⁹ Reisner, *Performing Ethics*, 95.

which not only highlights the character's formidable use of speech but also his difference from Kyd's Hieronimo, who chooses to bite out his tongue rather than proclaim its power. Shakespeare, in *Titus Andronicus*, uses dramatic hyperbole not just to stage the suffering and manipulation of characters, but also to "comment on those who indulge in hyperbole in the interests of grandiloquent poetic-dramatic effects in a tradition of excessive theatrical violence."¹²⁰ Indeed, in this play, Shakespeare frequently has characters offer beautiful poetry in response to the bloodshed they witness or endure, thus making the victims communicate the unspeakable violence they encounter with dissonance. These moments of dissonance, Reisner suggests, "serve to embroil the audience in a wildly discomfiting experience of aesthetic alienation" and force them to question their potentially pleasurable response to violence.¹²¹ In his conclusion, Reisner argues that Marlowe's plays use the rhetorical power of the dramatic hyperbole primarily to show how characters work through their grief and define their own desire for power, while Shakespeare's plays, especially *Titus*, offer audiences a world where the loss of power and speech "creates the conditions for excessively violent mimetic theatrical performance" and moral ambiguity.¹²²

In his article, Michael West examines a related innovation employed by Marlowe—the spectacles he crafted. While scholars have typically focused on Marlowe's "mighty line," West contends that the pageantry, iconography, and costuming in the plays provided spectators with striking images that enhanced meaning. In *Dido*, for example, dialogue regularly references both costuming and physical locations, while in the *Tamburlaine* plays, "stage directions for initial entrances are sometimes described at length."¹²³ Likewise, Marlowe often highlights the physical appearances of characters, including focusing on Tamburlaine's facial features, which original audiences, relying on the pseudo-science of physiognomy, would have interpreted as proof of his fortunate destiny. Additionally, "the striking visual tableaux" found in the *Tamburlaine* plays "conflate words and theatrical images" to reveal Tamburlaine's power and his need to continually reassert his control and forge his identity.¹²⁴ In *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas' wealth and position are shown through costuming and props, while his tragic end includes the spectacle of his fall into the cauldron, which West interprets as a moment "of theatrical illusion in the service of a more

¹²⁰ Reisner, *Performing Ethics*, 102.

¹²¹ Reisner, *Performing Ethics*, 104.

¹²² Reisner, *Performing Ethics*, 110.

¹²³ Michael West, "Language and Spectacle in Marlowe's Dramaturgy," *Studies in Philology* 122, no. 3 (2025): 296.

¹²⁴ West, "Language and Spectacle," 298.

conventional Christian morality.”¹²⁵ Turning to *Doctor Faustus*, West considers the costuming of Mephistopheles, who first appears as a dragon and then as a friar as well as the play’s special effects. In the conclusion of the play, West notes, Marlowe “deploys lavish visual resources in a Catholic manner to dramatize damnation’s stridently physical torments.”¹²⁶ Finally, *The Massacre at Paris*, which presents the onstage killings of nearly 20 people, relies on excessive stage violence to tell the story of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. For West, Marlowe’s reliance on spectacle and visual allowed viewers to understand action as more trustworthy than rhetoric and reassured them “about the legitimacy of what they paid to see.”¹²⁷

Marlowe and Immigration

Emma de Beus, in a piece examining early modern English anxiety regarding religious and political refugees, focuses on Marlowe’s *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris*. As de Beus notes, the English of the 1590s regarded aliens, or legal outsiders, both as sources of anxiety and as people deserving empathy. Marlowe’s plays center on French aliens, showcasing the ambiguous feelings of the English towards the French religious wars in *The Massacre* and investigating the fraught status of Isabella as both alien and queen consort in *Edward II*. During Marlowe’s era, around 50,000 foreigners from the continent, most of them religious refugees, moved to England. Met with both compassion and fear, these refugees became a focal point of English politics, facets of which are explored in Marlowe’s plays. As a French woman, *Edward II*’s Isabella is an alien, but as queen consort, she continually “shows that she is willing to, and does, put the good of England above her own personal happiness.”¹²⁸ Part of Isabella’s attempt to aid her adopted country involves her efforts to remove Edward’s lover, Gaveston, from England. Her reference to Gaveston as the king’s “minion,” de Beus suggests, connects to *The Massacre*, as Henri III’s favorite, Epernon, is also called a “minion.” Both men, she contends, are identified as unwanted aliens, and the term “minion” functions as a synecdoche of the relationship between the two plays and their overlapping themes. In particular, de Beus points to the shared composition dates of the plays and the political climate in England at that time, which included heightened concerns about

¹²⁵ West, “Language and Spectacle,” 304.

¹²⁶ West, “Language and Spectacle,” 309.

¹²⁷ West, “Language and Spectacle,” 319.

¹²⁸ Emma de Beus, “Aliens and Anxiety: Insurrection and Religious Violence in Marlowe’s *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris*,” *English: Journal of the English Association* 73, no. 283 (2024): 265.

foreigners residing in London and fears about the monarchical succession. Isabella's dual identity as an alien and an English wife connects her to the refugees in Marlowe's London who were likewise attempting to unify their two identities in their new home. Marlowe depicts the French queen as capable of inspiring the sympathy of Edward's courtiers through her use of the complaint both as political and personal tool. Yet, she also exemplifies contemporary fears as she is a woman, a Catholic, and French, which likely recalled Elizabeth's earlier possible marriage to the Catholic Duke of Alencon. Therefore, Isabella's depiction in the play mirrors contemporary attitudes towards aliens as she is both a sympathetic figure and a threat to English identity. Although both plays feature emotional tragedy, *The Massacre* relies on violent action while *Edward II* shows how a foreign woman "functions as a symbol of England's continuity in the face of adversity."¹²⁹ Yet, de Beus argues the works parallel each other through their references to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, which resulted in many French Huguenots moving to England, and Isabella's return to England with the determination to better her adopted land. Isabella, according to de Beus, demonstrates "that she is not an alien to be feared for her foreignness, but rather is an immigrant intent on serving" England.¹³⁰ In her final appearance, Isabella, while no longer a figure of empathy, cannot be viewed as a cause for anxiety as she acknowledges her son's authority, thus putting her new country before her personal desires.

Marlowe in Slovenia

In his 2024 article, Andrej Zavrl examines the reception of Marlowe's works in Slovenia, considering the response of Slovenian authors and critics to the playwright, the translation of his works into Slovenian, and three separate stagings of his work on the Slovenian stage. While Shakespeare was popular with nineteenth century Slovenian Romantics and at least one notable author from this era owned editions of Marlowe's plays, the playwright did not gain major attention until the last half of the twentieth century. In 1972, Marlowe's work was performed for the first time in Slovenia, when a Celje theater put on *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*. Although the performance met with criticism for its failure to modernize and its ineffective use of devils, Zavrl notes that the production, "inspired the first Slovenian translation of Marlowe, made by Janez Menart."¹³¹ Menart's translation of *Doctor Faustus*,

¹²⁹ de Beus, "Aliens and Anxiety," 271.

¹³⁰ de Beus, "Aliens and Anxiety," 273.

¹³¹ Andrej Zavrl, "Christopher Marlowe in Slovenia," *Journal of Marlowe Studies* 4 (2024): 64.

together with translations of Kyd and Jonson's plays, appeared in 1976 and included an introduction to Marlowe's literary canon as well as a brief biography of the playwright. In these introductory remarks Menart praised the *Tamburlaine* plays, *Edward II*, and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, while denigrating *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris*, the latter of which he found "badly constructed and poorly motivated."¹³² Although Menart's translation of *Faustus* stayed in print and appeared in Slovenian literary anthologies, Marlowe's status as a writer worthy of critical attention remained doubtful and those scholars who mentioned Marlowe regarded him as a minor Elizabethan playwright and focused primarily on his atheism. Only after Slovenia's independence, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, were works by Marlowe staged again.

The Slovenian National Theatre staged *Edward II* in 2005, subsequently printing a production program that included critical articles about Marlowe and his work. While five of these pieces were translations of English or German pieces, three were penned by Slovenian critics. These three articles, Zavrl notes, present Marlowe as an innovative playwright who "broke away from medieval Christian doctrine" and dealt with subversive topics such as homosexuality, human agency, and "the questionable legitimacy of all churches."¹³³ A year later, the same theatrical group performed *Doctor Faustus*, using Menart's translation and also offering a production program with critical articles. Only one of these pieces was penned by a Slovenian writer, Diana Koloini, who praised Marlowe as a brilliant playwright while simultaneously characterizing him as religiously and politically subversive.

Only one book-length study of Marlowe in Slovenian exists—a 2016 monograph by Andrej Zavrl. Lamenting that few Slovenian authors have written about Marlowe, Zavrl describes the author's Slovenian reception "as a sequence of isolated events, mostly concentrated around translations and performances of Marlowe's texts, but without any real tradition."¹³⁴ Indeed, in Slovenian scholarship about the author, critics tend to oversimplify the author by focusing on his reputation as an atheist and sodomite. Some even perpetuate misconceptions about Marlowe, including claims that he killed another man with a sword, that he was murdered due to his Scottish sympathies, and that he had a criminal record.

¹³² Zavrl, "Christopher Marlowe in Slovenia," 66.

¹³³ Zavrl, "Christopher Marlowe in Slovenia," 69.

¹³⁴ Zavrl, "Christopher Marlowe in Slovenia," 70.

In his analysis of Slovenian translations of Marlowe's work, Zavrl examines how these works compare to their source texts, focusing on the ways translators broadened or narrowed meaning through word choice. First, he turns to Janez Menart's 1972 translation of *Doctor Faustus*, observing that Menart often used the word "God" when the English text used "Jove." These decisions rendered the text potentially more blasphemous than the original. Additionally, Zavrl questions Menart's lexical reduction of the text, which divests the translation of the theological complexity of Marlowe's play. Srečko Fišer's 1996 translation of *Edward II* is the second work Zavrl analyzes. Focusing on the translation's representation of queer desire, he finds that terms that reference Edward's relationship with Gaveston, such as "unnatural" and "minion," are rendered in Slovenian through a variety of different terms, usefully expanding meaning. Zavrl also considers two translations of Marlowe's poem, "The Passionate Shepherd," noting that both "radically narrowed the interpretative potential by assigning the speaker male gender and the addressee female gender."¹³⁵

While it is possible English or German traveling actors performed Marlowe's work in what is now Slovenia during the early modern period and records prove that a few Slovenian directors considered staging a Marlowe play during the first half of the twentieth century, the first known performance of a Marlowe play occurred in 1972. In this performance of *Doctor Faustus*, the director chose to have a cross-dressed male actor play Satan but used a woman actor to play Helen, which Zavrl argues reinforced gender stereotypes. The 2006 performance of the play cut many of the roles, depicted Faustus as a clown-like figure, and emphasised the psychological struggles of the protagonist. These directorial choices met with criticism from reviewers, one of whom described the performance as "an empty, superficial and aestheticized image without tension."¹³⁶ Zavrl also found the 2006 production of *Edward II* problematic in its depiction of the king as a childish and mentally incompetent figure and in its use of homophobic body language. These directorial decisions, Zavrl contends, left spectators "with the dilemma of whether the King's love was to be taken seriously and evoke sympathy and affection, or just another element of his childish willfulness and foolish stubbornness."¹³⁷ In his conclusion, Zavrl explains that while Shakespeare's works have been studied and regularly performed in Slovenia, Marlowe remains less well known in the

¹³⁵ Zavrl, "Christopher Marlowe in Slovenia," 80.

¹³⁶ Zavrl, "Christopher Marlowe in Slovenia," 82.

¹³⁷ Zavrl, "Christopher Marlowe in Slovenia," 83.

country and is primarily referenced as Shakespeare's predecessor. His article, as well as the twenty-first century stagings of Marlowe's work, will hopefully change this situation and inspire other scholars in Slovenia to explore the Marlovian canon and recognize the importance of Marlowe to the study of English Literature.

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