



Marlowe Society of America Newsletter

Vol. XVII, No. 2, Fall 1997

MSA ANNUAL MEETINGS Toronto, 1997

Marlowe and Performance

Sunday, December 28, 1:45-3:00 p.m. Tudor 8 and 9, Royal York. Presiding: Sara Munson Deats, University of South Florida.

1. "Marlowe Reruns," Roslyn L. Knutson, University of Arkansas, Little Rock.
2. "Marlowe Our Contemporary: *Edward II* on Stage and Screen," Deborah Willis, University of Calif. Riverside.
3. "Staging *Doctor Faustus*: the A and B Texts." David M. Bevington, University of Chicago.

Rabbits and Ducks: Dual Perspectives In Marlowe's Poems and Plays

Tuesday, December 30, 1:45-3:00 p.m. Tudor 7, Royal York. Presiding: Viviana Comensoli, Wilfrid Laurier University.

1. "*Desunt Nonnulla*: Sexual Politics and the Ideology of the Fragment," Gregory William Bredbeck, University of California, Riverside.
2. "Navarre Before and After: *The Massacre at Paris* and Oath Breaking," Paul John Voss, Georgia State University.
3. "Manliness and Sexuality in *Edward II*: Taking a Perspective on His Wanton Humor," Robert Alexander Logan, University of Hartford.

Call for Papers

The Marlowe Society solicits papers for its December 1998

sessions at the MLA Convention in San Francisco. Send abstracts or papers of fifteen-minute length by March 1 to President Sara M. Deats, 9049 Quail Creek Drive, Tampa, Florida 33647.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL MARLOWE CONFERENCE: A PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Dear Colleagues:

The year 1997 proved to be a rewarding one for Marlowe scholars. As announced in the Spring Marlowe Society Newsletter, one of the seminars at the 1997 Shakespeare Association of America meeting in Washington (March 26 to March 29) was devoted to the study of Marlowe, and fourteen scholars assembled to debate "the place of Marlowe" in the development of the early modern drama. In addition, *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality*, the long-awaited collection of essays from former Marlowe Society meetings, edited by Paul Whitfield White and published by AMS Press, will be in the bookstores this fall. Finally, the Marlowe Society has scheduled two stimulating sessions at the MLA Convention in Toronto this December.

Next year promises to be equally exciting. The Fourth International Marlowe Conference will be held at St. Catherine's and Corpus Christi Colleges (Cambridge University, Cambridge, England) from June 29 through July 3. I have already received a number of paper proposals and will welcome additional proposals for papers of no more than twenty minutes in length. In addition, I invite suggestions for seminar sessions focusing on Marlowe. Please send all suggestions for papers, sessions, and seminars to me at the following address before Nov. 15:

Sara M. Deats
9049 Quail Creek Drive
Tampa, Florida 33647

Acceptance letters with forms for pre-registration and room

and board preferences should be sent to participants by early January.

The preregistration fees for the conference are \$75.00 for participants and \$35.00 for non-participating companions. The basic cost for room and board at St. Catharine's and Corpus Christi is 65 pounds per person per day; at the current exchange rate, this is around \$100 per day. This cost includes single rooms with en suite baths, breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea (all at St. Catharine's) and a full-service dinner in the stately dining hall of Corpus Christi, where Marlowe would have dined 400 years ago. This cost also includes a banquet and two receptions. Those participants who do not select room and board at St. Catharine's and Corpus Christi but who wish to attend the banquet must pay an additional \$34.00.

Since most of the participants in the Conference will probably spend the weekend following the Conference in London, we will try to arrange a group excursion to a production at the new Globe Theatre. No information on the 1998 season at the Globe is available as yet, but the public relations director has promised to inform me as soon as the schedule of plays is established. For participants who are planning to stay over and visit Stratford-on-Avon, the following plays are scheduled for the summer season, although the actual dates of the individual plays have not yet been determined:

Two Gentlemen from Verona
Romeo and Juliet
Merchant of Venice
Twelfth Night
Measure for Measure
The Tempest
Bartholomew Fair

More information on the seasons of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Globe Theatre Company will be forthcoming in the Spring Newsletter.

I urge all studious artisans of Marlowe to join us at the Fourth International Marlowe Conference, which I feel certain will provide a world of profit and delight to all of us.

Sincerely,

Sara Munson Deats
President
Marlowe Society of America

MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Sara M. Deats, President
Robert A. Logan, Vice President
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Roslyn L. Knutson, Treasurer
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MSA Newsletter Editor
Paul Whitfield White, *MSA Book Reviews* Editor

All business and organizational correspondence except for memberships should be addressed to the President.

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New memberships and renewals should be sent to the Membership Chairman:

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Membership Fees

U.S. and Canada: 1 year = \$20 US
3 years = \$50 US
Overseas members: 1 year = \$25 US or £16 Sterling
3 years = \$65 US or £42 Sterling
Graduate students: U.S./Canada = \$10
Overseas = \$15 or £10 Sterling

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

The deadline for the Spring issue is March 1 and for the Fall issue Sept. 1.

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

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THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY SEASON AT STRATFORD

The 1997 season of the Royal Shakespear Company at Stratford-Upon-Avon provides a fascinating trek through the history of early English drama, and I suggest that the pilgrim who journeys to Stratford should try to view the plays chronologically. The rich and varied season includes *The Creation* and *The Passion*, a conflation of the medieval mystery play cycle; *Everyman*, the most popular and anthologized of the morality plays; *The Spanish Tragedy*, the drama that initiated the revenge tragedy mode; *Much Ado About Nothing*, one of Shakespeare's most popular festive comedies; *Hamlet*, one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies and the culmination of the revenge tradition; *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare's only domestic comedy (a kind of early modern sit com); *Cymbeline*, one of Shakespeare's late romances; and *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare's final history play and probably his last dramatic composition. The repertory also features plays by Henrik Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. Below are selected reviews of these productions.

The Mysteries

I begin my reviews of the RSC's splendid season where the English drama began, with the English mystery plays, those wonderfully comic, rustic dramatizations of Biblical stories performed in cycles by the craft guilds from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. In creating their own original scenario of these cycles, RSC dramaturge Edward Kemp and director Katie Mitchell eclectically select from all four extant cycles—York, Towneley, Chester, and N-Town—focusing on the neglected N-Town version supplemented by material from continental sources. The resultant script is thus highly innovative and markedly different from previous adaptations that I have seen.

In the six-hour production of *The Creation* and *The Passion*, which I will treat as a single two-part drama, fifteen indefatigable thespians enact the saga of Christian history from Creation to Resurrection, heroically performing over seventy roles within the cramped confines of the RSC's The other Place. This epic tale of faith and betrayal, of righteousness and wickedness is acted in stark simplicity on a stage bare of sets and almost devoid of props by an ensemble of actors wearing similar costumes of coarse undyed cloth, with the action moving fluidly from scene to scene without interruptive gaps.

As *The Creation* opens, the silence of the pitch black theatre is broken by the groans of God in labor as He begets the world. The rising lights reveal God stretched on the stage floor, literally naming life into existence, while sound effects punctuate every stage of God's making. All misogynistic elements are erased from the RSC's treatment of the Creation and Fall. Following the P-version in Genesis, God fashions Adam and Eve simultaneously and they enter the acting area

naked, although still caked with the mud from which they were formed. Like a gleeful child, God relishes His new creations and begins tutoring them in the lesson of obedience. As we all know, Adam and Eve disastrously flunk their first exam, but the RSC version allows our first parents to be tempted by the serpent in tandem, thus relieving Eve of the primary stigma of the Fall.



Paul Hilton, Jesus

Photo: Ivan Kyncl

The following three hours dramatize humankind's catastrophic failures and momentary successes. Cain kills his brother Abel; Lamech slays his father Cain and his son Jabal; Noah proves faithful and saves the world—significantly, this Mrs. Noah, although petulant, is not shrewish; Abraham passes the test of piety with highest marks; and Moses overcomes his stutter to proclaim God's law to the people. David Ryall's God appropriately dominates these episodes, a benevolent, avuncular Creator, alternately delighted with humankind, befuddled with their waywardness, and angry at their perversity. At all times He is the teacher: instructing Adam and Eve in agriculture, Noah in carpentry, and Moses in both masonry and morality. Finally, thwarted by humanity's seemingly incurable learning disabilities, God decides to come to earth to teach His children directly.

The second part of *The Mysteries* dramatizes God-in-Man as teacher. Omitting all the narratives surrounding the Nativity, *The Passion* opens with Jesus' baptism by John,

which marks His debut as a prophet, and the following episodes detail His often frustrated efforts to tutor His followers in the classrooms of Galilee and Jerusalem. The familiar Biblical events gain spontaneity and emotional impact through the power of Kemp's verse and the charisma of Paul Hilton's Jesus, portrayed as a remarkably engaging, affectionate, enthusiastic teacher trying desperately to communicate His radical concepts to His obtuse students. All teachers will empathize with Jesus' exasperation at His students' failure to learn and will share His satisfaction when, after the resurrection, His disciples gain some limited understanding of His transforming message. Many scholars will also identify with Matthew, Jesus' bespectacled chronicler, consistently inscribing in his pocket notebook so that future generations can read Jesus' message in the Gospels and see His life and ministry performed in the mystery plays.

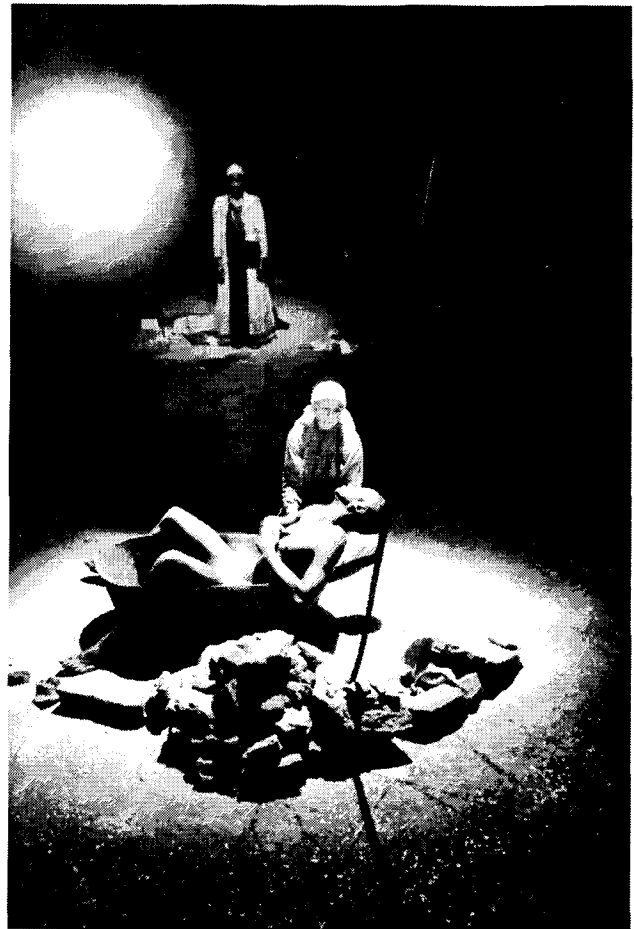
Unlike most productions of the mystery plays (both medieval and contemporary), the current version minimizes spectacle and mutes the homespun comedy. The result is a naturalistic production, distinguished more by its simplicity and solemnity than by the humor and pageantry normally associated with these cycles. However, in this case, less proves to be more, and the superb performances of the ensemble cast, the potency of the simple lines, and the intimacy of the small acting area allow the audience to experience with unusual immediacy and empathy one of our culture's master narratives, which begins with the creation of a perfect world and ends with the salvation of a corrupt one.

Everyman

Most educated individuals have encountered the fifteenth-century morality play *Everyman* sometime during their high school or college careers, but few have had the opportunity to see it performed. The RSC provides this rare occasion in its 1997 season at Stratford, staging the morality play in the intimate setting of The other Place with a cast of six diligent actors valiantly doubling (and tripling, and quadrupling) in the play's twenty-four roles. Although *Everyman* is more an intriguing historical artifact in the dig of English drama than a stimulating dramatic vehicle, I was fascinated to see performed an example of the type of play that so excited the average theatre-goer in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England.

However, audiences have changed enormously in the last five hundred years. The directors of *Everyman* thus faced the formidable challenge of translating a static, emblematic, didactic play into a kinetic engrossing drama for an audience schooled on realistic, action-packed theatre and cinema. To meet this challenge, directors Kathryn Hunter and Marcello Magni pull all available shenanigans from their bag of stage tricks. Some of these innovations include: Death transformed into a smoky, sultry temptress in a slinky black gown; Fellowship, Kinsman, and Cousin presented as Zorbaesque drinking pals, cavorting to the strains of the grapevine; the last rites staged as a wild dance by a quartet of shaman salesmen,

rattling relics while chanting ecclesiastical slogans. Moreover, if the ghost of Zorba presides over the episodes with the first trio of friends, the specter of Fellini inspires the second triad, transmuting Five Wits into a juggler performing magical tricks and swallowing flowers, representing Strength as a circus strongman, and costuming Beauty as an androgynous bald man wearing a motorcycle helmet, a bustier, and a mismatched pink pump paired with a black motorcycle boot. Whether these interpolations enhance or detract from the play's impact probably depends upon the expectations of the spectators.



Josette Bushell-Mingo, Knowledge; Myra McFadden, Good Deeds; and Joseph Mydell, Everyman
Photo: Ivan Kyncl

However, some of the directors' innovations are unquestionably effective. Stressing the inherent symmetry of the playtext, this production achieves a striking concentric symmetry, ending much as it begins. The play opens with Everyman lounging naked in a bathtub, washed assiduously by a gnomish charwoman, and concludes with the hero sprawled in the same tub, now filled with grave dirt, ministered to by the same actor, this time impersonating Good Deeds. Fortunately, an optimistic coda to this dire ending allows Everyman to ascend a ladder to be wrapped in a snow white robe and embraced in a Pieta-like tableau in the arms of an angel. Thus despite the numerous hells-a-popping interludes sometimes enlivening and sometimes distracting from the action of the play, the denouement powerfully communicates the message

of hope and redemption that probably explains the drama's durable popularity. In *The Mysteries*, we experience the saga of humanity's creation, fall, and salvation; in *Everyman*, we participate in the more intimate drama of the fall and redemption of the individual human soul.

The Spanish Tragedy

In 1592, at the Rose Theatre, Lord Strange's Men revived *The Spanish Tragedy* (probably written around 1586-87), igniting all London in a blaze of excitement. Thomas Kyd's gory play proved so popular that it spawned dozens of imitations and generated an entirely new dramatic mode, the revenge tragedy. For its 1997 season, the RSC mounted at the Swan Theatre its own riveting version of this blood and gutsy horror play, a no-holds-barred production that crowds the stage with sword play, mace duels, nine bloody deaths, a bit-off tongue, gouged eyeballs, and recurrent hanging corpses. All the ingredients of the traditional revenge tragedy are stirred into this gory broth: madness, suicide, delayed revenge, the degeneration of the revenger, the Machiavellian villain, and the play-within-a-play, the latter presented rather incongruously through a babble of different languages, even as Hieronimo says it should be, although this option is not included in the standard

text of the play and thus is rarely realized in performance. And, of course, there is the ghost wailing (in this performance, frothing) for revenge.

The interpretation of the ghost and his manipulator Revenge offers a challenge and a choice to any director of the play. Director Michael Boyd envisions Revenge as the master puppeteer, yanking the strings of the play's choleric characters as he internally coerces them to violence. The play opens with Revenge cuing the lines of the newly-slain Andrea's opening soliloquy and his disembodied voice periodically echoes from the theatre rafters while his hooded, spectral figure stalks the cast. The face of Revenge remains cloaked until the denouement, when striding center stage to dispense rewards and punishments, he strips off his hood to reveal the gloating Hieronimo. This double-casting of Hieronimo and Revenge (recalling the similar double-casting of Ferneze and Machiavel in the RSC's 1987 production of *The Jew of Malta*) dramatically demonstrates how even a good, just man can be possessed by the poisonous contamination of revenge. Later, in an epilogue absent from Kyd's playtext, the production concludes with Revenge again cuing the lines of a newly-slain victim of violence—this time Horatio—as the bloody dance of death begins again, choreographed by Revenge. Director Boyd thus graphically scrawls in blood his interpretation of the drama's message: when revenge assumes control of human hearts, society is plunged into a cycle of chaotic carnage.



Declan Conlon as Pedringano

Photo: Clare Parks



Alex Jennings, Hamlet; Diana Quick, Gertrude; Paul Freeman, Claudius

Photo: Ivan Kyncl

I applaud the consistent excellence of the cast in creating the play's difficult roles, often tearing a passion to tatters without tumbling into melodrama. Bearing a striking resemblance to Ben Jonson, who played Hieronimo in the play's 1597 revival, Peter Wight endows the bereaved father with both pathos and power; Siobhan Redmond invests the role of Bel-Imperia, unchaste yet resolute, with a mixture of sensual vitality and poignant vulnerability; and Robert Glenister achieves an icy evil as Lorenzo, the first stage Machiavel. Moreover, although the production is long, the brisk pace and rambunctious action speed the three-hour traffic of the stage.

But be forewarned, this production is not for the faint-prone. Toward the end, the stage becomes so puddled with plasma that after the final curtain, two attendants must mop the boards before the actors can take their curtain calls. However, for the student of the drama with a strong stomach, *The Spanish Tragedy* is highly recommended.

Hamlet

The RSC stages *The Spanish Tragedy* as vintage Elizabethan drama; it produces *Hamlet* as a modern dress anachronism. In treating so differently these two dramatic cousins, born only fourteen or so years apart, the company regrettably loses a

once-in-a-life-time opportunity of tracing the dramatic affinities of the two greatest exemplars of Elizabethan revenge tragedy.

Like the ghost of Andrea controlling the action of *The Spanish Tragedy*, the spirit of Baz Luhrmann's commercially and critically successful cinematic *Romeo and Juliet* hovers over the RSC *Hamlet*, influencing directorial decisions. Both adaptations employ modern costumes, naturalistic dialogue, mundane settings, and quotidian props to stress the relevance of these two tragedies to the modern condition. Moreover, similar visual icons pervade both dramas, which juxtapose towering statues of the Andes Jesus—offering nurture, comfort, and peace—with brandished pistols—spitting vengeance, pain, and death. Both dramas thereby remind audiences of the Christian values sadly ignored in the violent nightmare societies of the two plays. Finally, both adaptations exploit the drug culture to explain the frenzy that the early modern society signified as madness.

However, unlike Luhrmann, who scarcely blots a Shakespearean line, RSC director Matthew Warchus employs radical editing to shape (or rough-hew) his contemporary *Hamlet*. Lost on the cutting room floor are Marcellus, Bernardo, Fortinbras, the armed ghost, and the besieged state. Other castoffs include Hamlet's meditation on the "vicious mole of nature" and his revealing "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy, as well as household maxims

like "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" and "Hoist with his own petard." Lost also is the restoration of order at the play's denouement as well as Fortinbras' final tribute to Hamlet, the king who might have been. Warchus thus scrupulously expurgates all references to the state, totally erasing the play's political resonance. What remains is an intensely probing study of a wealthy, modern, dysfunctional family.

This version also mutes the revenge tragedy elements of the play and with them many of the drama's vexing (and intriguing) conundrums. Edward Petherbridge's ghost, transformed from the ominous, armored apparition on the parapet into a decorous tuxedo-clad specter at the wedding gala, is singularly gentle and undiabolical. Alex Jennings' Hamlet, although often manic, remains unquestionably sane, whether the wind be southerly or northerly, and the derangement of Derbhle Crotty's Ophelia seems largely drug induced. Finally, Jennings' Hamlet neither degenerates nor ameliorates, although his gratuitous pumping of bullets into the corpse of Claudius at the end of the play might be intended to stress his possession by the spirit of revenge.

Hamlet admonishes the players to "Speak the speech" "trippingly on the tongue," and clear, naturalistic diction emerges as the hallmark of this production. He also warns the players not to overact and Warchus' actors certainly heed this advice, never tearing a passion to tatters, although, in their consistent underplaying, they occasionally forget the second half of Hamlet's caveat, "Be not too tame neither. Moreover, in attempting to stage a *Hamlet* for our time, Warchus frequently evokes highly intelligent performances from his cast—particularly Jennings, who delivers his lines with unusual clarity, coherence, and verve. However, what this production gains in lucidity and credibility, it often loses in richness and complexity. In stripping the play of its political implications and minimizing its metaphysical nuances, Warchus has reduced Shakespeare's sweeping study of what it means to be human in a chaotic world into a wrenching domestic drama; he has contracted the universe into a parlor. Thus, although the spectators viewing the current RSC *Hamlet* will still enjoy exciting theatre, they will not experience the play that Shakespeare wrote.

Sara Munson Deats

University of South Florida

THE DARKENED PROSERPINA IN MARLOWE'S *HERO AND LEANDER*

An abstract of the paper presented at the 1996 MSA Meeting by Pamela Royston Macfie, The University of the South. [The text published in the Spring issue was incomplete].

Critics have traditionally emphasized that Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* is libertine, erotic, and playfully excessive. Such tendencies do characterize the poem, described by one of Marlowe's contemporaries as 'a luscious marrow-bone pie for a young married wife' (*A Mad World, My Masters* 1.1.44-5).

But for all its playful eroticism, *Hero and Leander* is also a haunting and haunted text. If, as David Lee Miller has argued, *Hero and Leander* tells the story of a place, that place is a watery grave, a place of bodies and psyches in dissolution. From his opening description of the Hellespont, "guilty of true love's blood" (I. 1), through his description of Venus's temple and its scenes of "heady riots, incest, rapes" (I. 144), to his final description of Hero's bedchamber as the realm of Dis (II.323-26), Marlowe persistently suggests two things: (1) that his poem surrenders itself to the space of death, and (2) that the poem imagines this space in terms of female sacrifice, violation, and shame.

A number of violated women haunt Marlowe's final presentation of Hero. The presentation of Hero, trembling in love's strife, as a bird, "which in our hands we wring, / Forth plungeth, and oft flutters with her wing" (II.289-90) explicitly invokes Ovid's presentation of Philomela, after her violation by Tereus, as a trembling dove, which smears its blood over its own plumage ("utque colomba suo madefactis sanguine plumis / horret adhuc avidosque timet, quibus haeserat, unguis" [*Metamorphoses* VI.529-301]). The comparison of Hero, as she slips from Leander's grasp and gaze, to a mermaid (II.314-15) recalls her earlier presentation as Diana before Actaeon (II.260-66). The personification of Night, "mock'd" by the "flaring beams of day" until, "o'ercome with anguish, shame, and rage, / [she] Danged down to hell her loathsome carriage" (II.332-34) mirrors Hero's shamed exposure in the dawn cast by her own blush.

The allusion to Proserpina correlates and extends these allusions. Like Philomela, Proserpina is raped. Like Diana, she suffers violation in a place of primal, virgin spring. Like Night, she dwells in the underworld. The allusion to Proserpina unfolds, of course, from Marlowe's description of Leander's final possession of Hero's naked body: "whence his admiring eyes more pleasure took / than Dis, on heaps of gold fixing his look" (II.325-26). But this allusion, like that to Philomela, is more explicit and more complex than other commentators have noted.

Considered in relation to the blush that exposes Hero to Leander's gaze, the Proserpina allusion invokes, yet darkly transforms, *Metamorphoses* V.568-71. There, Ovid describes Proserpina's transformation by Jupiter's decree that she may return to the upper-world for half of every year. Proserpina's transformation is manifest in a blush: her face glows even as the sun, which was previously covered with watery clouds, emerges from those clouds ("vertitur extemplo facies et mentis et oris; / nam modo quae poterat Diti quoque maesta videri / laeta deae frons est, ut sol, qui tectus aquis nubibus ante fuit, victis e nubibus exit"). Recontextualizing the language of a similar metamorphosis experienced by Ceres in *Fasti* IV.615, Proserpina's blush confirms the mysteries of emotional recuperation even as its likeness to the emergent sun anticipates her own emergence from darkness. The dawn that breaks from Hero's face signifies something altogether different. Through altered allusion, Marlowe suggests that Hero, in contrast to Proserpina, experiences a loss that is irreversible. Proserpina's facial radiance celebrates her return

to light. But Hero's blush, importantly revised in Chapman's account of her suicide, functions as the crucial cue in her translation to darkness.

RECENT STUDIES IN MARLOWE

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