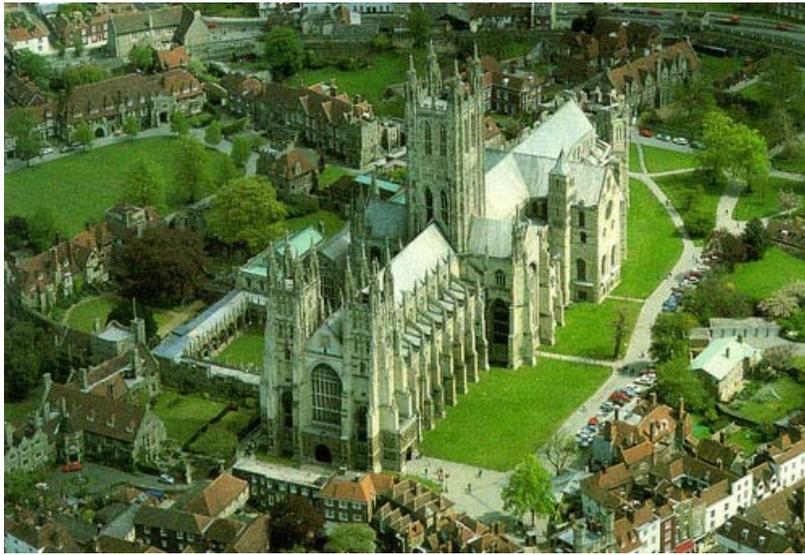


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Marlowe Society of America Newsletter

Vol. XXVII, No. 2, Spring 2008



Canterbury Cathedral

“And make me blest with your sage conference.” See p. 2

Letter from the new MSA President

It's a fine time to be a Marlovian! I am excited to serve as president of the MSA for the next four years, and I look forward to promoting Marlowe in all of the ways that this organization does so well.

For more than a year, the MSA has expanded its communication with the scholarly community at large and its membership specifically by maintaining a Website (www.mightyline.org) and publishing its newsletter, combined recently with the formerly separate publication of book reviews. The time may come when electronic publishing will be the primary means of communication with our current and potential membership, but for now there is comfort in the familiar materiality of hard copy. However, the Website does enable us to provide information throughout the year, not just in spring and fall, and it will be the site soon of a directory of membership. Already, the Website has an archive of newsletters in its “Members Only” section. Available but for now underused is a listserv and blog.

The MSA has had two sessions at MLA for years, but that's changing. The powers-that-be at MLA have decided that all affiliated organizations (including us, but also such as the

Milton Society and International Spenser Society) will have only one session guaranteed. If we want a second one, we will need to apply for it, and priority will be given to inter-organizational sessions. So I will be courting Spenserians, Miltonists, and Shakespearean for 2009 to see if we can join forces to maintain our visibility at MLA.

Marlowe scholarship is booming. *Placing the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, the latest editorial fruit of Sara Deats and Bob Logan, long-time nurturers of Marlowe research, came out in the spring of 2008. And early in 2009, *Shakespeare Bulletin* will publish a special issue edited by Pierre Hecker and me on Marlowe in performance. Elsewhere in this newsletter there is much information about the upcoming international conference in Canterbury. I know it will be fun; I know it will be stimulating; I wish every MSA member could be there.

I want to close with special thanks to out-going president, Bruce Brandt, for the leadership he has provided over the years in many capacities, but few so valuable as his four years at the head of the MSA. We are lucky to retain his services, along with those of also-past presidents Bob Logan and Sara Deats, on the executive committee. But I want to look ahead too. The MSA

Any and all inquiries, announcements, or submissions regarding the website, listerv, or Newsletter should be wrapped around a 1604 quarto of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and sent to:

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

Professor Charles Whitney
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MSA THEATER REVIEWS



Shakespeare Theatre's Charm Offensive with *Tamburlaine*

To celebrate the long-awaited opening season of Shakespeare Theatre's ambitious Harman Center for the Arts, Artistic Director Michael Kahn presented playgoers with Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II*. When Shakespeare Theatre announced the 2007-2008 season, I was elated by the prospect of seeing Marlowe come to life in D.C., especially since these performances were my first opportunities to see these plays on the stage. Alongside this, a well-designed Marlowe Symposium was presented by Shakespeare Theatre in November featuring speakers including John Archer, Sara Munson Deats, Mario Di Gangi, David Riggs, and Leslie Silbert, as well as actors who read selections of Marlowe's poetry.

To me and to others who attended both of the plays, the better production of the two was *Tamburlaine*. The play was a combination of Parts I and II, directed by Kahn and edited to a runtime of three hours and twenty or so minutes. Although he offers several reasons for wishing to stage this work, Kahn's attraction to Marlowe's story of *Tamburlaine* is surely rooted in a fascination with the playwright's linguistic pageantry. And, in addition to Marlowe's elaborate verbal displays, which are engrossing in and of themselves, Kahn no doubt realized an

opportunity to show off the new Sidney Harman Hall, a remarkably beautiful, well-considered space. Staging *Tamburlaine* afforded Shakespeare Theatre opportunities to display both Marlowe's mighty lines and the talents of their entire production organization to subscribers and to new audiences.

The production included lavish costumes, huge thrones of gold, a large, iron-barred cage, thundering drums, flags of war, a map that took up $\frac{3}{4}$ of the stage—and the impossible-to-miss giant chariot, which, if it had not appeared, would have been a disappointment. What better play to accord with the mission of Shakespeare Theatre "to provide vital, groundbreaking, thought-provoking, vibrant and eminently accessible theatre in a uniquely American style"? Kahn's staging of *Tamburlaine* allowed for massive amounts of pageantry on the Harman's 74 x 45 stage.

Considering this, his choice in casting Avery Brooks as *Tamburlaine* can be understood to make sense. Well-recognized for his roles as *Star Trek* Captain Benjamin Sisko and as Hawk in *Spenser: For Hire*, and for his deep, commanding voice, Brooks likely drew audiences in who may have been reluctant to see a "new" play with "old" language. For several early modern theatre scholars in attendance, however, Brooks was still finding his way into the role. In one performance, for instance, he tripped over his lines at least three times, thus giving show to what Gale Edwards (Director of *Edward II*) describes as the problem of keeping Marlowe's lines "buoyant." I found myself having a hard time believing Brooks' interpretation of *Tamburlaine*; I suspect this has to do with Kahn's direction to focus on the "human moments." And yet, while considering the older Brooks to be a boyish, ambitious shepherd was difficult, his display of reluctance regarding his sons' leadership abilities and his tender mourning for Zenocrate were easier to believe.

Strangely, numerous images of silver and white were edited out of the script. My heart sank with the absence of lines from speeches in 1.2 that included "Affecting thoughts coequal with the clouds" and "Brighter than is the silver of Rhodope, / Fairer than the whitest snow on Sythian hill." Similar omissions occurred in *Tamburlaine*'s 5.1 speech "Ah, fair Zenocrate!" However, to find so many other lines come alive was a delight. Memorable moments included Zenocrate's dying speech and numerous allusions to Livy and Ovid. The doubling of Bajazeth and the First Physician was also a treat.

The highlights of the performance were many, in part because I've longed to see these plays on the stage. A director and friend who shares my enthusiasm for Marlowe reiterated to me after seeing the play that "staging Marlowe presents all sorts of difficulties that staging Shakespeare does not." My agreement with him on this matter makes me all the more appreciative to have seen and learned from Kahn's production.

Sarah Scott
Mount St. Mary's University

Why *Tamburlaine*?

The Shakespeare Theatre Company opened its new Sidney Harman Hall in the Harman Center for the Arts in the fall of 2007 with productions of three plays by Christopher Marlowe: *Tamburlaine*, parts one and two opened to the public on 28 October, and *Edward II* on 27 October. In various forums and announcements to audiences, Michael Kahn, Artistic Director, explained the choice of Marlowe's plays to inaugurate the new stage. "Without Marlowe," he argued, "there would not have been Shakespeare," certainly not as Shakespeare became. Kahn thus opined that "to begin" was to begin with Marlowe. The choice to pair the *Tamburlaine* plays with *Edward II* was to dramatize Marlowe, early and late.

The "why" for Marlowe scholars would be expressed a little differently. Most of us do not need the justification of Shakespeare-in-waiting to bring us to performances of Marlowe's plays. We have too few opportunities to see any of the plays. Certainly for me, living in Little Rock, Arkansas, those opportunities are fewer still, so the Harman Hall multi-bill was not to be missed. And part one of *Tamburlaine* is my favorite Marlowe play. So, I looked forward to seeing the extravagant staging and to swooning at a testosterone-pumped *Tamburlaine* as he delivered that mighty, magnificent blank verse. The Kahn production fulfilled my expectations in the former, but Avery Brooks disappointed in the latter.

Sidney Harman Hall is a huge space. Its orchestra and mezzanine have terrific sight lines (the balcony, not so much). The stage itself is enormous, and Kahn's production filled it with properties and players, exploiting the Cecil B. DeMille dimensions of the play. The doors onto the stage—especially the central door—were outsized, and through them came properties that dwarfed the humans to which they belonged. At the opening, for example, Mycetes comes swooping in seated on a throne-and-a-half. *Tamburlaine* later appropriates this property for his confrontation with Bajazeth, who has a throne-and-a-half of his own. The face-off of III.iii takes place with the warlords thus seated, and there is plenty of room on the cushions of each for Zenocrate and Zabina to exchange insults when the men exit to battle. The cage is a giant cart; the wheels, to one of which Zabina is tethered, look nearly six feet tall. The moment that every Marlowe fan anticipates—the entry of *Tamburlaine* in his chariot, drawn by the defeated kings—was spectacular: Kahn used the huge central opening for the entry, an outsized chariot, and the kings harnessed three across to pull it in. Less was done with Zenocrate's coffin, which was not onstage throughout the final scenes but was returned as property for *Tamburlaine*'s death.

I hate to complain about Avery Brooks in the part of *Tamburlaine* because I sound like one of my students, unable to rise to the fiction of theater. And Brooks does have a beautiful, deep, and commanding voice. That voice should have been perfect for the part. But, when I saw the play in early November, Brooks was having some trouble with the verse. Each stumble undercut the expansive certitude with which *Tamburlaine* presents himself. A friend seeing the production on the same evening I did joked that Brooks's age made the ambition of *Tamburlaine* to conquer the world seem like a late-career move, as though he had been happy enough as a marauding shepherd for last twenty-five years but suddenly got

the itch for global domination. And, as a distracting reinforcement of the actor's maturity, Brooks's *Tamburlaine* moved around the stage with an odd hitch in his step – yet another friend called it "arthritic" – that made me think too often of the character's historical counterpart, Timur the lame.

Michael Kahn's *Tamburlaine* is the first production of the play that I have seen live. I have watched an archival, taped version of the RSC production starring Antony Sher, which was filmed in the Pit at the former London home of the company and not at the Swan (its original venue). I thus have little more than my imagination to influence my opinion. Too much like Charles Lamb in his objection to staging *King Lear*, I am very glad to have seen *Tamburlaine* at the Harmon Center but disappointed not to have seen the *Tamburlaine* constructed for me on the page by Marlowe.

Roslyn L. Knutson
University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Life is a Cabaret, Old Chum: *Edward II*

It feels churlish to complain about Shakespeare Theatre Company's production of *Edward II*. After all, beggars can't be choosers, and we are certainly beggars when it comes to full-scale productions of Marlowe's plays, usually happy when the odd theatrical bone is tossed our way. Many of us were understandably excited at the prospect of *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II* being the choices to inaugurate the new (and hugely expensive) home of STC. Great productions can lead to renewed interest in performing an author's plays, and perhaps this would be a watershed. After all, it's been ten years since Rupert Everett's cameo in *Shakespeare in Love*, and Johnny Depp's Marlowe doesn't seem ready to materialize anytime soon – we need something to keep us going!

Well, we should have moderated our hopes. These were not game-changing productions. If anything, the shows left audiences and certainly many critics more convinced than ever that Marlowe's principal interest is as a gauge of Shakespeare's greatness. The new Sidney Harman Hall has been much written about; I'll just add that the acoustics of the place leave something to be desired, and the actors were still struggling to make the space work for them. The result was a whole lot of yelling – a mode that the company could just about get away with for *Tamburlaine*, but which for *Edward II* did not work so well.

Gale Edwards, the director for *Edward II*, sets the play in a quasi-Edwardian period, a fantastical Roaring 20s, with gaudy costumes, semi-naked and (anachronistically) cut bodies, waxed chests, jazz, champagne, and everything else one could hope for at a half-decent parade. Just in case we don't get it, we are treated at one point to one of the bishops, dressed in his clerical robes, being fellated by a kneeling acolyte – or maybe it was just a random boy toy. The society in this version of *Edward II*, in other words, has a thriving gay subculture, replete with elaborately designed and choreographed all-male Bacchanals. Edwards does have an eye for pageantry (or maybe her set designer Lee Savage and costumer designer Murell Horton do),

but it all felt a bit like *Cabaret* without Joel Grey or even Alan Cumming, which is not a *Cabaret* I'd be quick to recommend.

In the play Christopher Marlowe wrote, Edward's real crime isn't that he's in love with a man, it's that he's a weak king. His sybaritic inclinations are far more damaging than his homosexual ones; it's his frivolity and decadence, his inattention to matters of state, that really get him into trouble. As for Mortimer (a suitably sinister Andrew Long) *et al.*, they act less out of homophobia than out of a mixture of (at best) patriotic concern for the welfare of the realm and (at worst) greed and hunger for power.

It was hard to tell in this production whether Edward and Gaveston's public displays of affection were meant to be shocking to the onstage court, or to us, or both. But if Edwards thought she could *épater le bourgeois* with a little bit of guy/guy kissing she either underestimates her audience, or hasn't watched TV in 20 years. I mean, even Republican politicians in D.C. have gay children these days. Marlowe here is again less concerned with sex than with class – what's *really* appalling about Gaveston isn't that he's homosexual, but that he's – brace yourself, grandma – a commoner. So, ok, Edwards wants to make a statement. But as numerous other critics have noted when discussing this production, Tony Kushner already made it in *Angels in America* (in 1990, almost 20 years ago – can you believe it!?). *Angels* was radical then; this, by contrast, in its apparently heartfelt attempt to be outré, seemed almost, well, quaint.

The play's (in)famous ending is one thing you want to get right. This massive upping of the dramatic ante – so horrific, so base, so fraught in its meanings – should lay waste to an audience, should leave it in speechless shock. At the performance I saw, the choreography of the brutal moment was sloppy, awkward, and not even remotely persuasive. The director's reluctance to fully reckon with the bleakness of the ending was compounded by something new: in this version, Gaveston comes back as an angel (wings and all, hence the talk about Kushner) and he and Edward lovingly dance together. Is there an *Edward II* B-text I don't know about?

The performances were uniformly decent, if uninspired. Edward's ~~beard~~ queen, played by Deanne Lorette, learns over the course of the play the kind of cunning and guile it takes to survive in the English court, and Lorette did a good job of playing that arc. Wallace Acton and Vayu O'Donnell, as Edward and Piers respectively, were both good, their performances full of clarity and specificity (if not a lot of range). But I was – and this, in the end, is the harshest criticism of all – unmoved by any of them.

Was it a bad production? No, not bad. Nor was it particularly good. It all just felt like a squandered opportunity, a missed chance to show that Marlowe is a great playwright in his own right, and not just as an appetizer to Shakespeare.

Pierre Hecker
Carleton College

Tamburlaine and *Edward II*

by Christopher Marlowe
Shakespeare Theatre Company
Sidney Harman Hall
Washington, D.C.
November, 2007

Tamburlaine:

Michael Kahn, Director; Lee Savage, Sets; Jennifer Moeller, Costumes; Mark McCullough, Lighting.

The cast included: Avery Brooks (Tamburlaine); Mia Tagano (Zenocrate); David McCann (Bajazeth); Franchelle Steward Dorn (Zabina); Floyd King (Mycetes)

Edward II

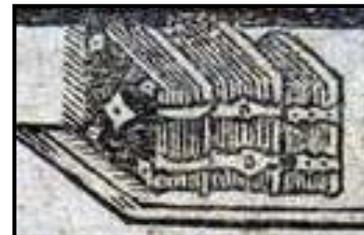
Gale Edwards, Director; Lee Savage, Sets; Murell Horton, Costumes; Mark McCullough, Lighting.

The cast included: Wallace Acton (Edward); Deanne Lorette (Queen Isabella); Vayu O'Donnell (Gaveston); Andrew Long (Mortimer)

A Plea to MSA Members

We would like to be a better resource of information and notices for all things Marlowe, and to make better use of our listserv. But to do so we must rely on the support and involvement of our members. So, if you know of a performance, or event, or any other tidbit of Marloviana, please, please, please pass it on to us. The most efficient way is to email me directly with your news: phecker@carleton.edu

Also, we would love to expand our range of contributors; if you've got an idea for a piece or a review, please get in touch.



MSA BOOK REVIEW Charles Whitney, Editor University of Nevada at Las Vegas

Parker, John. *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007. Xviii +252 pages.

John Parker's important new book is a sweeping account of the Christian heritage of pre-Shakespearean drama. The book interrogates this heritage at its roots, offering a reading of the biblical and medieval pretext of Marlovian drama that, by virtue of its sheer scope, stands to energize religious-minded criticism of early modern drama as well as Marlowe scholarship. Parker's argument is that the anti-Christian strain of Marlovian theater marks not the secularization of Christian drama but its precondition, a function of the myth of Antichrist lying at the heart of Christian aesthetics. The book develops this thesis over four chapters and a lengthy introduction, beginning with the gospels and early Christian commentary—in which Parker establishes the necessity of Antichrist as play-actor and image-maker for the early church's assertion of Christ's divinity—and closing with readings of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, *Tamburlaine*, and *Doctor Faustus*. In between, Parker shows how medieval drama, from the cycles to *Everyman*, relied on this Antichristian hermeneutics to mask an economic and commercial underpinning that anticipated the post-Reformation professional stage. The weight of the supporting research is extraordinary. Parker brings to bear on medieval and Reformation criticism a vast cross-section of New Testament, apocryphal, and patristic scholarship, largely uncharted by early modern literary studies. Marlowe features as a bookend in this ambitious study, but one that supports Parker's claim that the sacred and secular always constituted "adjacent rooms" (p. viii) implied by one another in Christian aesthetics.

Unlike Bevington, Parker asks how medieval drama anticipated Marlowe by looking backward, not forward. The guiding insight of *The Aesthetics of Antichrist* is that the romantic conception of Marlowe's Faustian bid is not a problem of modernity but of medieval drama's deeply biblical tradition. Jesus himself, Parker argues in the first part of the book, had the original "Faustian appearance" (p. 27) in that the central task for both gospel writers and commentators like Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine was to distinguish the orthodox Christ from the dialectical counterpart of his anti-Christian and heretical imitators. The myth of Antichrist thus served to overlay the "oppositional mimesis" (p. 38) constitutive of Christianity with the significance of a typological drama, whereby Christ emerges both as an image of the demonic miracle worker and its spiritual and apocalyptic supercession. Parker's aims here are both polemical and programmatic. In the Hegelian overtones of his preface, Parker wishes to establish that Christianity is a form of "pure spirituality...because it is art" (p. x). This is a critique of Christianity, and by it Parker means that Christian allegoresis attempts to substitute an aesthetic discourse for its own internal divisions, a problem which Parker sees reproduced in literary criticism's tendency to equate medieval drama with forms of the sacred. Parker has in mind here scholars like Sarah Beckwith, whose powerful notion of "sacramental theater" as participatory community idealizes, he suggests, the more basic challenge of mimetic representation at stake in the York and Chester cycles' depiction of biblical *miracula*—namely, the elaborate suspension of disbelief required of a medieval audience to affirm the dramatic images of Christ's miracles over those of his mimetic counterpart, Antichrist (p. 68). In Chapters 2 and 3, Parker turns this critique toward a more positive case about the

role of money and commercial exchange in the eucharistic and "parabiblical" economy of late medieval drama. These pages are some of the most serious and persuasive of Parker's book. Chapter 2 shows, for instance, how the figure of filthy lucre, or blood money, in *Mankind*, *Everyman*, and the Towneley plays stems from the early Christian tradition of Judas as Antichrist, whose exchange of money for blood re-figures the "price of blood" (*pretium sanguinis*) in the Latin Vulgate as Christ's "precious blood" (*pretiosus sanguis*, pp. 105-6). At the heart of the dialectical aesthetics of Antichrist, in other words, is the fetishization of capital, whereby eucharist and atonement anticipate Barabas's "infinite riches," just as medieval drama contains within it the germ of the commercialized, secular stage.

Lingering throughout these chapters is the specter of the Baines' note, whose language of Moses as "Jugler" and the New Testament as "filthily written" derives, Parker implies, from Christianity's own contrafactual logic. Chapter 4 on Marlowe makes the analogy explicit, opening with an extended comparison of Marlowe to Thomas Beard. The "two future adversaries and scholars of Antichrist" at Cambridge in the 1580s, Parker claims, would become dialectical counterparts—"One of them a clear-cut Christian, the other his demonic opposite" (p. 183). This somewhat strained anecdote sets up a reading of Beard's *Theatre of Gods Judgments*, in which Parker sees a similarity between the iconoclasm of Beard and Marlowe, in that both embraced a dramatic aesthetic in which "God appears in Satan" (p. 192). The rest of the chapter follows this ampersandic approach, with readings of *The Jew of Malta* and (the biblical) Barabbas, *Tamburlaine* and Paul, and *Doctor Faustus* and Simon Magus. Parker's fascinating section on *The Jew of Malta* revives the issue of blood money, reading the New Testament exchange of the thief Barabbas for Christ (both are named "Jesus" in early Matthean accounts) as a trace that aligns Marlowe's Barabas with the mimetic and economic confusion of the Gospel story of redemption. This reading is important, for it offers *The Jew of Malta* criticism a way outside the controlling Reformation idioms of Jewish-Christian typology, with its relegation of the Judaic figure to the sign of the "dead letter" superceded by the aesthetics of Christian tragedy. The material on *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus* is perhaps less consequential. Parker reads in both plays a gnosticism inherent in Pauline theology and the apocryphal legends of St. Peter, which seek to displace Antichristian threats (Paul's own anti-Christian past, and Peter's magical competitor Simon Magus) by recourse to a theology of Word and Spirit. In *Tamburlaine*'s soliloquy on beauty, "Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend" (2.7.21), and Faustus's vision of Helen, Parker sees the Marlovian aesthetic as a dramatic imperative to "see the invisible" (p. 236). What we might normally historicize as Reformation problems here, Parker ascribes to Marlowe's "resacralization" (John Cox's term) of the "belated and depraved divinity" of historical Christianity (pp. 197, 244).

On this point, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist* does not answer the question Marlovians will most want to ask of it: Is Marlowe a symptom (and thus victim) of the dramatic effect encoded by the contradictions of medieval and biblical Christianity, or is he the "demonic" subversion that exposes its corrupt core? An epilogue to the book would prove helpful here; yet Parker's

method, in its effort to challenge religious historicism's neglect of aesthetics, resists the historicizing impulse implied by such questions. Some of them are relevant. For instance, conspicuously absent from the book, given its titular subject, are the essential studies of Antichrist in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g., Richard Bauckham, Christopher Hill, and Anthony Milton). These studies show, in particular, how the image of Antichrist in the Western apocalyptic tradition changed in the late Reformation amid the hardening of confessional divisions and the increasing identification of Antichrist with Rome—a context which surely complicates Parker's clear-cut dichotomy between the Puritan Beard and the author of *Massacre at Paris* as one simply of "Christian" and "demonic." Equally surprising is Parker's decision not to include any reference to the coining debacle at Flushing, which would seem only to bolster his case for the monetary fetishization at bottom of Marlowe's alleged heresy. For those attuned to such matters of biography and religious history, Parker's wider interest in dialectical critique, and his often bracing wit in pursuing it, may prove distracting. For those, however, who have always sensed in Marlowe's plays a more fundamental challenge to the Christian legacy—one exhausted neither by the terms of Reformation division nor by promethean

ambition—Parker's book charts a new path that will surely realign the critical conversation.

Joel M. Dodson
University of Notre Dame

Editor's Note. *MSA Book Reviews* provides descriptions and evaluations of recent publications on Marlowe and his period. It gives both new and established Marlowe scholars a forum for expressing their views from a variety of critical approaches. Although reviews of books are the norm, appraisals of recent articles on Marlowe are also welcome. The reviews should be no more than 1000 words in length and should cover the book's purpose, contribution, scholarship, format, and success in achieving its purpose. The editor reserves the right to ask for revision and to make stylistic changes thought appropriate. The substance of the review and its judgments remain those of the review's author (and do not necessarily express the opinions of the MSA). Reviewers should be members of the MSA. Contact information for the editor can be found on page 3.

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Hannah K. Ebner, Carleton College

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- Bevington, David. "One Hell of an Ending: Staging Last Judgment in the Towneley Plays and in Doctor Faustus A and B." "Bring Furth the Pagants": *Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*. Eds. David N. Klausner and Karen Sawyer Marsalek. *Studies in Early English Drama*, 9. Toronto, ON: U of Toronto P, vi, 2007. 292-310.
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- Foster, Brett. "Sympathy for the Devil: The Lives & Afterlives of Christopher Marlowe." *Common Review* 5.4 (Spring 2007): 6-16.
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Thank you and congratulations to this year's presenters at the two Marlowe Society of America sessions at the MLA Conference in Chicago, seen below rocking some fashionable name tags and discussing all things Marlowe. Georgia Brown had to miss the fun; her paper was read in absentia by Roslyn Knutson.



Sarah Scott and Mathew Martin



Laura Grace Godwin



Kirk Melnikoff and Su Fang Ng

Open for Marlowe