Christopher Marlowe’s influence in the development of dramatic satire has received little scholarly attention, with the exception of Ben Jonson’s homage to the poet’s neo-Ovidian love story *Hero and Leander* in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). In that drama, Lanthorne Leatherhead explains to Bartholomew Cokes that a faithful rendition of the epyllion would be “too learned, and poetical” to present to the fairgoers. For this reason he charged the aptly named Master Littlewit “to take a little paines to reduce it to a more familiar strain for our people” so as to make it “modern for the times.” True to his name, Littlewit reduces the poem to a puppet show. The Thames replaces the Hellespont to separate the young lovers, Hero becomes a “wench o’ the Bankside,” Leander a “dyer’s son, about Puddle Wharf,” and Cupid a drawer with a “pint of sherry” serving as a golden shaft. The adaptation famously diminutives the epyllion to vernacular farce brimming with slapstick, sexual innuendo, and bawdy language. But Jonson’s naturalization and distillation of the erotic epic to London is not original to him, as some have argued, but to Lording Barry, whose *Family of Love* (1608) predates Jonson’s play by approximately six years.¹ Barry’s play, then, supplies a missing ligature in the reception of Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, and Ovid in the early seventeenth century. It also suggests that

¹ Although the dating of the play’s composition is problematic, 1608 is likely. Authorship has also long been a question. *The Family of Love* has been attributed to Dekker, Middleton, Marston, and Lording Barry. Recently, Mac D.P. Jackson, Gary Taylor, and Paul Mulholland (1999) have argued Lording Barry is sole author, which has yet to be convincingly refuted.
Marlowe’s influence in the development of city comedy is more pronounced and varied than we might think.

The drama is overtly satiric, with an urban London setting and ambitious characters pursuing love, and sometimes fortune, while risking their marriages and alleged friendships. A set of characters typical of city comedy populate it: a doctor, an apothecary, a merchant, gallants, libertines, lovers, and so on. Yet, strangely, only a few of these are members of the notorious religious sect that forms the play’s title, Henry Nicholas’s *Familia Caritatis*. It seems to be something of a red herring. Virtually everyone, however, wants to participate in a society that takes a more liberal approach to physical love, a belief thought by many as a central tenant of the radical Familists. “Family of love” was a byword for libertinism.

The play alludes conspicuously to the work of other dramatists of the time, which was common practice. However, there are a large number of references to Marlowe’s plays and poetry. Simon Shepherd and other scholars have detected traces of *Doctor Faustus*, the *Tamburlaine* plays, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Hero and Leander*. It seems unusual, however, that a writer in the first decade of the seventeenth century would allude so frequently to the works of a long-dead playwright in order to help him satirize a “radical” religious sect. Barry’s act of imitation suggests his desire for kinship with his predecessor, an unacknowledged creator of city comedy.

The playwright’s use of Marlowe also indicates the importance of Ovid in *The Family of Love*. Barry explores two Ovidian traditions to which *Hero* belongs in this satiric, dramatic mode: one is that of a romantic Ovid, and the other is the cynical, satirical expression of the libertine. The play is part of the neo-Ovidian movement in
Western European literature and culture in the early seventeenth century that tends to show up in these forms. Though most of Ovid’s works were rendered into English in some form in the late sixteenth century, virtually the whole corpus is re-translated during the reign of James I. This aesthetic takes many literary forms, such as the straight metaphrase of George Sandys’s *Metamorphoses* and John Brinsley’s rendition of the epic into a school text; Francis Beaumont’s *Remedia Amoris*; and Thomas Heywood’s translation of the *Ars Amatoria, Love’s Schoole*. Marlowe’s *Elegies* were also frequently republished in the revolutionary decade of the 1640’s. Additionally, there are imitations of Ovidian forms, such as Donne’s *Elegies*, Drayton’s *Elegies*, and *England’s Heroicall Epistles* (1619). There is more. Given Ovid’s popularity, it is natural, then, that these movements would also be reflected in popular drama and courtly masques and that Ovidian types would appear, such as Volpone, and in the development of the “rake” character in the Caroline period, who can be traced directly to the “clownish teacher of love,” the *magister Amoris* from the *Ars Amatoria*.

In *The Family of Love*, Barry uses the romantic and cynical Ovid to structure his drama and advance ideas of protestant companionate marriage and women’s self-determination. In the London milieu the dramatist portrays, his satire is largely about how men often misunderstand women’s desires—with disastrous results. They oppress their wives, daughters, nieces, and lovers by assuming that their masculine perceptions of feminine propriety are those that women seek to embody but in fact do not. Instead, they want to be free from such constraints. *The Family of Love*, then, is very much of its time. Whereas some may think that Barry employs Marlowe’s Ovidian epyllion to mock notions of romantic love, he often uses the poem in the play for another purpose. As
overblown and hyperbolic as its echoes and conventions might sound in the character of
the heroine, Maria, the playwright strongly hints that its more romantic, earnest, honest
view of love and relationships is a preferable alternative to the cynical masculine Ovidian
perspective so often advanced in *Family* as represented by the libertinism of Lipsalve and
the cynicism of Glister and the misogyny their lines promulgate almost unconsciously.
The lovers’ inflated language may sound not so strange if we think about some of our
experiences of falling madly in love, and it helps the play fulfill the most important genre
convention of comedy. It should end with a marriage or a dance, preferably both.

The difference in world views held by Glister and Maria emerges early in the first
scene, which demonstrates Marlowe’s influence on the play’s theme when Maria argues
cociferously with her guardians Dr. and Mrs. Glister, for their approval of Gerardine, her
intended. Her uncle is opposed to the match, for although Gerardine may be a gentleman,
his lands are “in statutes.” Maria, heir to her father’s fortune that her uncle manages,
could not care less. She is in love. Glister’s clichéd Ovidian-Petrarchist arguments to
convince Maria to change her mind are futile: “Love is a cold heat, a bitter sweet, a
pleasure full of loss.” He doesn’t even seem to believe them, and we learn later that his
experience in love is much more complicated than he lets on to his niece. He’s having an
affair with Mrs. Purge, and he has fathered at least one “natural” child “in the country.”
Clearly, Maria’s conception of love and marriage is preferable to that of her guardian,
whose perspective has only given him unhappiness and complications.

Maria’s counterargument adopts the principle that the wily narrator of *Hero and
Leander* advances. It is, essentially, romantic. Consider these lines from Marlowe’s erotic
poem: “It lies not in our power to love, or hate, / For will in us is over-rul’d by fate.” The
young female lover’s lines in Barry’s play are essentially the same: “Who can resist the influence of his stars, / Or give a reason why ’a loves or hates, / Since our affections are not rul’d by will, / But will by our affections?” Maria’s unconscious (or conscious) allusion to Marlowe’s more romantic version of Ovid discredits her uncle’s view and lends a legitimate Ovidian authority to the notion that the promptings of romantic love are ungovernable, an idea that controls the drama. It also introduces a comic perspective, as well as a constant theme in the play: repressing natural desire is folly. Bottom’s famous line “reason and love keep little company together nowadays,” in another play that relies heavily on Ovid’s influence, makes the same point.

Barry employs Marlowe’s more romantic, passionate perspective to satirize the likes of Lipsalve, always drooling, always preying on another’s intended. Maria’s counterargument to her uncle’s cynical view summarizes this:

My body you may circumscribe, confine
And keep in bounds; but my unlimited love
Extends itself beyond all circumscription.

This positive, hopeful, romantic, loving perspective appears again and again in *Hero*, even in the apparent critique of those who “Compile sharp satires,” Ovidian cynics apparently, “their violent passions to assuage,” yet they are doomed to fail, since “faithful love will never turn to hate.”

This perspective extends itself throughout the play, and seems to climax in the defeated Lipsalve’s admission “there’s some providence / Which countermands libidinous appetites,” which predicts the ultimate failure of the cynical masculine Ovidian viewpoint in Barry’s play. Truly, Lipsalve would have done well to heed Leander’s admission:
“God knows I cannot force love.” You might say that it worked for Gerardine because it worked on Maria.

At the play’s outset, Barry co-opts Marlowe’s vivid narrative poem to participate in the culture of the neo-Ovidianism of the time. We are invited to contrast the idyllic “green” world recalled by Maria’s direct allusion to *Hero and Leander* with the gritty urban *milieu* of seventeenth-century London. Clearly Maria is no coy votaress. She is a feisty, clever young woman which she makes clear as she ascends the stairs, as the stage direction indicates: “O silly men, which seek to keep in awe / Women’s affections, which can know no law.” This is also symbolic of her resolve to self-determination. But by invoking this early modern neoclassical tradition, courtesy of Marlowe, Barry invites readers to conclude that Maria may not be that different from her 1590’s antecedent. Maria can be seen as sort of Hero of her age. And in some ways, as writers of epyllia, such as Shakespeare, Lodge, and Marlowe strongly hint, their heroines are not so very different from us.

Just as Barry fashions Maria as a Hero for the early seventeenth century, her lover Gerardine is naturally her counterpart, her Leander. Gerardine’s comments on Maria’s bedroom, with their elevated register, indicate his amorous attitude toward her: “This is the chamber which confines my love, / This is the abstract of the spacious world. / Within it holds a gem so rich, so rare.” That he says this to his male companions rather than romantically to Maria proves his sincerity. One might note ruefully that this is exactly the sort of language these libertine peers would like to co-opt for purposes of seduction, worthy of the cynical part of Ovid himself. In any case, this impassioned, deeply feeling statement made for no ulterior motive seems a corrective or opposite of the exchange
between Purge, “O women, what are many of you?”, and Lipsalve: “Why disease to bachelors and plagues to married men.” One can hardly envision chambers or gems resulting from such cynical jeers.

As Marlowe supplies Leander with inflated rhetoric, Gerardine’s subsequent wooing echoes lines from Marlowe’s poem, as well. His sententious pronouncements, “Love suppress’d fares like a raging fire / Which burns all obstacles that stop his course / And mounts aloft” are those of Hero and Leander: “Thus while dumb signs their yielding hearts entangled, / The air with sparks of living fire was spangled” and “now begins Leander to display / Love’s holy fire, with words, with sighs and tears.” The Ovidian canard about the folly of repressing love applies to both Gerardine and Leander, for no disingenuous uncle or mildly rebuking father can hold back impassioned lovers, no matter how much the ancient conventions of comedy dictate that they do. As Marlowe’s narrator, lifting directly from the Amores, wisely opines: “Love resisted once, grows passionate, / And nothing more than counsel lovers hate. The play’s idealization and romanticisation of Gerardine’s Ovidian love talk is made all the more amusing by Maria’s response to it: “O rare conceit.”

Even Gerardine’s advances employ carpe diem arguments similar to Leander’s, but unlike his Marlovian predecessor, he is sincere. Consider some of his amorous overtures: “Come, sweet Maria, […] / Let’s take advantage”; “let our breaths engender / A generation of such pleasing sounds/To interchange delights / O my blood’s on fire! / Sweet, let me give more scope to true desire.” To a cynic this would be an excellent means of seduction. But not so for Gerardine with his honourable intention to marry, even as he seems to recall Leander’s arguments about “The idol which you term
virginity,” that is not “essence subject to the eye.” Generally, the exchanges of Gerardine and Maria in their over-the-top Hero-and-Leanderism, while heartily comedic, are not the object of the satire. Barry emphasizes that, for all of their foolishness, they are young, impassioned lovers who hope to find their match in each other. At this stage in the play, and throughout, we want them to be together. For both, love is the “power predominate, more to be admir’d / Than able to be expressed.”

Such a union is preferable to the prospect of Maria’s would-be suitor, Lipsalve. A young, tactless lover, comic and overstated, he implies that no woman alive, no matter how desperate, would want him. He is a libertine, one of the “silly men” that Maria criticizes to whom she could never give her “heart / Matter of joy, mix’d with astonishment.” The rake’s comments on frustrated women with their pent-up desires, well-beyond garden-variety misogyny are those repeated often in Ovid. Lipsalve’s song, for example, channels the libertinism some saw in the classical poet’s works:

Let every man his humour have,
I do at none repine;
I never regard whose wench I kiss,
Nor who doth the like by mine:
Th’ indifferent mind’s I hold still best,
Whatever does befall;
For she that will do with me and thee
Will be a wench for all.

Too, Lipsalve’s adage “there’s variety in love” reflects the cynical parts of Ovid. His desire to conjoin without any emotional involvement seems coarse and stupid compared
with the longings of Maria and Gerardine. For this reason Barry satirizes his behaviour and those others in the play who share it. The most dramatic instance of this is when both Lipsalve and his libertine companion Gudgeon are literally “purged” by one of Dr. Glister’s enemas as punishment for their advances on his wife. This seems to be an emblem of Barry’s role as purgative satirist in writing city comedy.

Lipsalve’s speeches to Gerardine in their debate about the nature of women echo misogynist commonplaces in early modern and medieval Europe, and in Ovid. For example: “Women’s smiles are more of custom than of courtesy. Women are creatures: their hearts and they are full holes.” The narrator of Hero and Leander makes a similar statement when he says “All women are ambitious naturally.” But Barry’s play does not validate Lipsalve’s unfortunate observations. Gerardine’s lack of affirmation demonstrates this. What Lipsalve thinks women are like is a basic misunderstanding of, and intolerance of, women’s desire for freedom, equality, self-determination, a satisfying love life, and a happy marriage. Maria fashions her own agenda in pursuit of these things. She is indeed aggressive, and “ambitious,” and may indeed seem changeable to men who think of this masculine perspective as normative. Moreover, at the end of the play, both Mrs. Glist and Mrs. Purge, the two married women in the drama, note that men are fickle and don’t understand women. Maria wants to avoid their fate.

The playwright employs again Marlowe’s poem to critique the Ovidian cynicism of Lipsalve when the libertine, believing Gerardine has departed the city, adopts the disguise of sincerity. The clownish would-be “circus rider of love” dissembles to be Maria’s ardent, sincere, and passionate suitor in the hopes that she will be fooled. Maria, with some direction by her concealed lover who looks on, pretends to believe Lipsalve’s
strategem. She exclaims from her balcony to the gull below: “Whom do I see? O, how my senses wander! / Am I not Hero? art not thou Leander?” And, a few lines later she asks her nurse to “fetch my ladder of ropes, Leander’s come.” In this exchange, which includes Lipsalve’s comic parroting of Gerardine’s overheated yet sincere love talk, Maria makes fun of his obvious machination. Also, she makes fun of herself by exhibiting a level of self-awareness of the language she uses. For her lover’s amusement, and hers, she deploys the same language to mock the foolish profligate. Thus, Maria engages in a kind of self-distancing here, which draws her closer to her lover through humor, thus creating a sort of ironic, comic conspiracy. She knows who she is, as most others in the play fail to know themselves.

The two role models that Maria has available are the play’s wives, Mrs. Purge and Mrs. Glister. Unfortunately, neither is a desirable alternative or a true role model. Mrs. Purge, the unfaithful wife of the apothecary, is the lover of Glister, the play’s embodiment of the cynical Ovidian perspective. Mrs. Glister is the unknowing dutiful spouse who, while she may think she is in a companionate marriage, is not. Neither marriage is fulfilling for the women involved, or, for that matter, for the men. For the four extremes that the two married couples represent (cuckold, cuckolder, married mistress, unloved wife), there is no mean. Gerardine represents a type of spouse who may provide at least some of the fulfilment that Maria seeks, and who loves her truly. Naturally, then, her promise, “What more remains to do / We’ll consummate at our next interview” is sincere, and that Gerardine is happy to validate this with a line such as “So shall I bear my prisonment with pleasure” suggests that she has chosen wisely, with her heart. Neither Mrs. Purge nor Mrs. Glister can experience this happiness, not just because
their husbands are inadequate but because they are incapable of these feelings themselves.

[Material removed for the purpose of keeping to a conference length.]

Barry satirizes the Family of Love in his drama to ridicule outmoded theatrical representations of love in the London milieu he portrays. Ironically, and with the help of Marlowe’s Ovidian narrative, the playwright mocks an idealized concept of amorous devotion (spiritual and physical) in order to rehabilitate it. The passages that Barry employs seem to follow a general but studied pattern in which he uses his theatrical predecessor to mock libertine attitudes. Between Shakespeare’s 1599 paean to Marlowe in *As You Like It* and Jonson’s comic distillation in *Bartholomew Fair* is *The Family of Love*. The acts of imitation on the part of Marlowe’s successors writing city comedy suggests a type of kinship among the playwrights, and to some extent validates the idea of Marlowe as a creator of city comedy. Barry’s play not only forms an important ligature in the reception of Marlowe in the early seventeenth century, but it also should be considered when we interpret the work of the Restoration and Caroline parodists of his epyllion, including James Smith (1651), Matthew Stevenson (1680), William Wycherley (1669), and Alexander Radcliffe (1696).