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Christopher Holmes

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The Mismeasure of Marlowe: Reading in the Past

Christopher Holmes

Mentor: Professor Renata Kobetts Miller

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Christopher Holmes
cgh1@optonline.net

The Mismeasure of Marlowe: Reading in the Past

One: Prologue

Perhaps we have already lost Christopher Marlowe. Or, more correctly, maybe we have already lost him to anthropology. Perhaps reading Marlowe has become for us akin to reading Latin poetry, art of a past when little if any of the communion of literature can get through to us. We can admire, even revel in the artistry, but it is possible that the difference of cultures is too great to overcome. In a society like ours poetry itself, and even a poetic worldview is itself like a slowly diminishing number of lights, candles being blown out by a slow wind. Shakespeare will be among the last of those lights, as will Cervantes, The Bible, and a few others. Maybe Marlowe's light is already extinguished.

Reading the past is always difficult, especially when we are dealing with a man like Marlowe. Nearly everything we know about him is hearsay, but there is a tremendous amount of that hearsay so we have to give it weight. The character "Christopher Marlowe" makes Lord Byron look almost like a misbehaving school child. He was alleged to be an atheist and homosexual, in a time when those words meant different things than they do to us today, far more challenging things; to deny God and heterosexuality were fundamental challenges to the order of Being and power, flowing directly from God to (most perilously for Marlowe) the Elizabeth. In studying Marlowe we can realize that some of our cherished notions of rebellion have become so degraded as to mean very little. The Marlowe of rumor and, more importantly (and

more neglectedly) in his work, was a snarling rebel after one of his greatest creations, Barabas, the titular Jew of Malta, who goes to the boil snarling and cursing, unbroken. It would be a shame if we lost this Marlowe, especially in an age that needs him. But we few, who still cherish literature can perform a resuscitation on the work of this poet and playwright I consider wonderfully compelling. I adore the deadly over-drama of saying that we are attempting in this essay to reanimate Marlowe and how we read the past, so let's act like those are the stakes. Moving through a flamboyant age a little more flamboyantly, and a little more darkly, than a legion of luminous poets of the time, it is thrilling to think about his life, two of his greatest works, the criticism of those works, and the possibility of reading both Marlowe and other poets from his era. Ours is an ironic age. Finally we can examine briefly the question of how our age reads poetry, when even attempting that question might solicit, at best, an eye roll, and at worst lost party invites.

To encounter Marlowe criticism is to run headlong into a wicked mess. We live in an age of hyper-rationalism. The difficulties of dealing with Marlowe and the clash of ages has reduced many brilliant men and women to act like freshman English majors¹, attempting to spell out what exactly Marlowe is really trying to say, to give an official pronouncement to the real meaning of the play, often unmoored from the reality of Elizabethan culture while castigating past critics for doing exactly the same. Shakespeare criticism is vastly more complicated and nuanced, and is easier. In his introduction to Modern Critical Views: Christopher Marlowe, the editor of the collection

¹ Our perhaps grad students fretting over a thesis. Be that as it may.

of criticism Harold Bloom², writes that we “read Marlowe now as Shakespeare’s precursor,” and that Marlowe is a caricaturist that developed precious little as a playwright between *Tamburlaine* (1587) and *Doctor Faustus* (1593). That Marlowe has been almost utterly subsumed in the shadow of William Shakespeare is true, of course. It is an eclipse that seems the more cruel for Marlowe’s own popularity in his own day³. But the comparison can be very useful. They both began as Ovidian poets, both rare creatures that through the fantastical upheavals of religion, politics and language who were uniquely trained to be wondrous poets. They were the first generation to be educated in Latin in hundreds of years driven away from the stern Aquinas and Virgil, and toward the lusty bawd Ovid, the great Roman poet of love and sexuality. A Roman poet was expected only to create something beautiful, and his biography never defined the work; the real Ovid was there, always, but fully spectral, he could lightly dance wherever the necessity of a poem brought him. This is difficult concept for an age like ours, which loves rigid definitions of personhood, and it may be the greatest gulf we have between us and Marlowe.

This is not true of Shakespeare. We know less about Shakespeare than we do Marlowe. But Shakespeare is no cypher, despite the cliché of each age having their own Shakespeare. Our modern innards might twist internally at the very suggestion, but there really is something timeless about Shakespeare. In all of his works he is there, a poetic consciousness alive and coherent, only absent of a drive riddled with a foolish

² I might be wrong about this, but Harold Bloom may in fact have edited every single volume of literary criticism in the last twenty five or thirty years, and no matter the subject has somehow managed to bring up Hamlet in every single one. Still: I generally find him wrong, no matter the topic, but incredibly compelling. This might be a false memory, but I remember sitting in the library here and reading all of Professor Bloom’s Yeats book in one mammoth reading. I was fuming.

³ This seems more important the older I get, somehow.

and damaging adherence to creeds that our age finds irresistible. Because of his education, the disrepute of theaters, and his talents write drastically different plays as Hamlet⁴ and King Lear within the scope of just four or five years. Examining such a difference will help us immensely in fully understanding Marlowe. To my reading, Hamlet is a very Christian play; despite the madness of the human enterprise⁵ the order of being is preserved. The prince dies the rightful king, even if the reign is of mere moments. In the beginning of the play Hamlet insists several times that Horatio and Marcellus, with the Ghost of Hamlet's father in attendance swear on his sword, an unmistakable facsimile of a crucifix, to keep silent about what they have seen, and what they will see in his behavior:

HAMLET

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come;
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on,
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,
With arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
As 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could, an if we would,'
Or 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might,'
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
That you know aught of me: this not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you, Swear.

⁴ I'm well aware of the irony of chiding Professor Bloom about mentioning Hamlet every time he takes pen in hand, and then in the space of a few words doing it myself. Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. I contain multitudes. Or at least the sense to quote Whitman when cornered.

⁵ The madness of politics, plottings, and wicked machinations reached an apotheosis under Elizabeth, and almost certainly claimed Marlowe as a victim.

The play works out exactly as it should. It is not a tautology to understand that beyond play structure, the expectations of an audience, the confines of genre, the play's resolution happened as the universe (or whatever) has ordained.⁶

With *Lear*, it is remarkable how people writing today display their vast expertise on proper kingship, a topic not often studied in the last several hundred years, and with a limited audience even before then. It is common enough to read that the tragedy of *Lear* is propelled by his grave error of dividing his kingdom into thirds, which, as anyone with aspirations of leadership would know, is folly and will result in a whole big, ugly, bloody mess. I don't think so, however. *Hamlet* abounds with Christian images and language, "S'blood" (Christ's blood) and other Christian language fills the play. Not so in *Lear*; in fact, by my reading, there are none. It is a fully pagan⁷ play, and the universe of *Hamlet*, fully inhabited, is utterly empty here.

FOOL

Marry, here's grace and a cod-piece; that's a wise man and a fool.

KENT

Alas, sir, are you here? things that love night
Love not such nights as these; the wrathful skies
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,
And make them keep their caves: since I was man,
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry
The affliction nor the fear.

KING LEAR

Let the great gods,
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,

⁶ I would hate myself if I didn't point out that the late, lamented Charles Mark once told me that beyond anything else, character, verse, anything, genre was most important in understanding what Shakespeare was up to.

⁷ Another delightful happenstance of the Elizabethan age for poets was the cultural embrace of classical mythology. *King Lear* and many plays and poetry of this time are full of pagan idolatry, but it would be as unthinkable that someone be burned at the stake for like of it as in our own time. Maybe less.

That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
Unwhipp'd of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;
Thou perjured, and thou simular man of virtue
That art incestuous: caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
Hast practised on man's life: close pent-up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning.

Lear is not being punished by the Divinity, or suffering the result of his foolish choices. Am I alone in climbing out of bed one fine morning and seeing the birds chirping and feel a place for God, feel that some order to the world makes perfect sense, and then the next, with the same birds chirping, believe with heart and soul that the world is random and meaningless? I suspect that most people thinking deeply about matters of existence, and most artists, wallow and rejoice in the great human mud pit of uncertainty. In these few short years Shakespeare could utilize both views of the universe to serve his play. These are just two very obvious examples; *Measure for Measure*, glibly, is more Ovid, the history plays more Virgil. Our own age of hyper-rationalism and the sadly, starkly literal people thus created cannot countenance the idea Shakespeare could use both, and myriad things beside, to describe the world, each making it more human. Mercifully much of the Elizabethan age has been left behind, but the loss of majesty and scope is a deep sadness.

Our expectations are that a poem or other artwork expresses the soul or thoughts or general position of the creator, or, if you prefer to get all postmodern about it, the Author. The limits of this approach are rarely apparent to us, like a dog inside an electric fencing, which gives the illusion of freedom, and, let's face it (I'll speak for the canids) is a hell of alot better than being chain under a tree. This illusion carries with it

the notion, hardwired and imperturbable, that we are more free, more liberated, more receptive to art, (and here's the kicker) all of these things in all possible ways than any other culture of the past, never you mind a society that had a queen at the top, crushed by the superstition of religion, and often bedecked in frilly collars and tights. One can glimpse, with this perspective, the delirious freedom that the Ovidian vision gave to young Christopher Marlowe, the gleeful weightlessness of being like a poetic version of a young Muhammad Ali, floating, an opponent never punching where he is, and his commitment not to standing steadfast on the principle of being of rock fast principles, but instead of not getting hit. God and his order exists without question in *Doctor Faustus*; does anything exist beyond power in *The Jew of Malta* or *Tamburlaine*? Marlowe's constructions are not ours; presupposing our view of literature to be more free, or at least more free of a prejudiced eye is incorrect. The ontological constructions of his play worlds were never statements of faith. They were constructs that fed the fire of the play.

TWO: Becoming Marlowe

Learning his Latin as a young man, Marlowe would have gone through the subject of poetry to get to what would be considered a higher, meaning of greater inherent worth⁸, oratory. But the immense freedom poetry must have stunned young Marlowe, who worked long days of neverending weeks in a nastily class-riddled society that worshipped language:

The poets 'license' to employ strange coinages positioned them at the margins of barbarism and propriety. Their equally notorious ear gave them the authority to determine what did and did not count as felicitous language. The poets freedom of

⁸ Important to consider "worth" for a society that was defined by the Word and the word.

speech was both driven by metre, which required makers to seek out variant coinages, and legitimated by metre, which enabled them to compose such usages into 'a just and lawful number of feet'. (Riggs, 56)

Much like other wonderful literary explosions⁹, The English at this moment thought very deeply about the word. The Word of God, the word of man, perhaps the words of women as well. The political and social churning made language both a tool for communication, and a means to soulful expression, as well as a fetish. There was no clear answer to the question, what constitutes art? These are old academic Medieval/Renaissance questions, but they are still enthralling: could a poem written in a vernacular language ever be worthy of deep consideration? Freedom of expression can live an immense life under such a time. For hundreds of years the educated were taught and spoke Latin. By the time of Marlowe's education, William Tyndale, the first successful translator of the Bible into English was killed, in part for daring such a thing. In classrooms at the same time as Marlowe were the men who would finish the job with the wonderful King James Bible, finished less than twenty years after his death at the age of twenty nine.

The use of rhetoric and the art of discourse to persuade and motivate was seen as divine offering, after Aristotle. Marlowe would have been taught Cicero, of course, and St. Paul and the other Church Fathers. His masters would have thought it very clear as to what truth their pupils would be persuading and motivating. This wonderful speech by the brilliantly malevolent, atrociously foul, utterly delightful Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* is made to a man he has never met, a slave he is considering buying:

⁹ I jump to point out another literary explosion: the Irish of the late 19th through the 20th century, the native language stripped away, dealing then, at the point of a bayonet, with an alien mode of locution. Thus: Joyce, Wilde, Shaw, Yeats, and the gang. Similarly, Indians writing in English today.

As for myself, I walk abroad o' nights,
And kill sick people groaning under walls:
Sometimes I go about and poison wells;
And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,
I am content to lose some of my crowns,
That I may, walking in my gallery,
See 'em go pinion'd along by my door.
Being young, I studied physic, and began
To practice first upon the Italian;
There I enrich'd the priests with burials,
And always kept the sexton's arms in ure
With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells:
And, after that, was I an engineer,
And in the wars 'twixt France and Germany,
Under pretence of helping Charles the Fifth,
Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems:
Then, after that, was I an usurer,
And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
And tricks belonging unto brokery,
I fill'd the gaols with bankrupts in a year,
And with young orphans planted hospitals;
And every moon made some or other mad,
And now and then one hang himself for grief,
Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll
How I with interest tormented him.
But mark how I am blest for plaguing them;—
I have as much coin as will buy the town.
But tell me now, how hast thou spent thy time?

(The Jew of Malta, Act II, Sc. 3, 179-206)

It is important to note how few critics will undertake to really stick their heads into Marlowe's Mighty Line; most make note of it as a given, as if it were sheer artifice and pretty nice, sure, but since we are deep critics we need more meaty bones to gnaw on. Barabas' terrifying words allows Marlowe to say what it would be cloying to actually say to an audience. Barabas is (in fine linguistic form) bragging, joking, perhaps partially telling the truth, discovering Ithamore's mettle and his desires, terrifying his future slave and property, and other things besides. It is immense in scope, listing with the weight of hyperbole but ringing with the truth of Barabas' leering, joyful evil. It is also funny. The marriage of rhetoric to poetry, given a voice and then a venue on stage.

If orators were advocates, poets were 'makers', articulate craftsmen who fashioned pleasing verbal artefacts out of nothing...These stereotypes laid the groundwork for Elizabethan ideas about what poets are and do. The poet was the orator's disreputable younger brother...The poet's powers of persuasion had no ethical agenda; his license to recombine syllables and words into seductively beautiful works of art knew no limits. His object was delight, and his notorious mentor was Ovid, the celebrant of wanton love and continuous change. Critics viewed the maker with mixed feelings of fascination and disapproval. (Riggs 58-59)

Mean old Francis Bacon wrote that poetry "commonly exceeds the measure of nature, joining at pleasure things things which in nature would never have come together, and introducing things which in nature would never have come to pass." Our Christopher Marlowe, wildly overeducated in a system that would normally never have even taught him to write his name, an education which was nominally meant to allow him to compete for a handful of jobs in positions in quiet, decidedly non-central parishes of the Church

of England, completely unfit for a trade or professions, and armed with the spirit of Ovid's juicy oeuvre, is set loose upon the world. Poetry is dangerous.

We are not nearly as sophisticated in a poetic understanding as we think we are; in fact I'd argue that we are becoming unable to think in the poetic, in even a small measure. Dr. Robert Sapolsky¹⁰, a professor of Neurobiology at Stanford University, a Macarthur genius, and general brilliant guy, has been studying stress for decades, and winning teaching medals. In one of his courses, available online, concerning the biology of human sexuality, Sapolsky shows a crack; an atheist, natural enough for his profession, he is not one of the dopey New Atheist crew, who are unafraid to say tyrannical things, make historical mistakes, make massive pronouncements on the likes of Aquinas and Plato and Joyce without ever bothering themselves to read them. Sapolsky is kinder to human foibles, believing it to all have a basis in biology. But at the end of a lecture, he quotes a study done in America where a depressingly high number of us believe in ghosts, and then, in shock, he says that a brutally high number of Americans believe in the Devil! The script for those of us (perhaps mostly on the left?) is familiar. O woe, for those of us fallen into the midst of those deluded masses!

But of course the Devil exists. How could the Devil not exist? The Devil is a poetic concept. It is Auschwitz and The Killing Fields and a million other terrors too plentiful to name or even have nomination. It is, finally, The Darkness. Whether it has metaphysical

¹⁰ Despite being a passionate reader and an irresponsible book hoarder, oddly the most depressing job I've ever had, and I've had many along those lines, was at a Barnes & Noble bookstore, years ago, working in the warehouse, opening the boxes as they came in. The one bright spot to standing knee deep in Regis' picks and whatnot was the free books publishers sent for the upper management of the store to read and love and put in a prominent place. Since the store management was a group of imbeciles, with no exceptions, I felt no compunction immediately stealing whatever looked good. Dr. Sapolsky's memoir of his years in Africa was in that pile, a brilliant book, A Primate's Memoir. Later, when I could actually afford to buy books, I bought several copies, distributed them to anyone interested, and wrote to Dr. Sapolsky and apologized for the theft. He forgave me, graciously, and signed a copy for my wife.

referent, I am, at this time, not in a position to say definitively. But it exists. Perhaps like Orwell's Oceania in Nineteen Eighty-Four, where the reduction and destruction of language would make the very possibility of rebellion, or even improper thought impossible, maybe our own culture, grown severe, delighted to decadence in our logic, and coldly autistic, doesn't have the language to discuss the poetic: the Devil can only be a red, horned guy with a little creepy little mustache and a long tail that lives in the center of the earth. If he isn't, then how can he ever exist? And how could anyone live in the molten core of the earth?

The plays of Marlowe are a victim of this occlusion of thought. Our artists, like ourselves, need definition. Believer. Christian. Atheist. Postmodernist. The will to define. We can't easily limit Shakespeare, but he has become the Undefined Great Writer. It will prove illuminating to see that beyond the cheerleading for science, and the general enstupidizing of our culture¹¹ that there is no liberation at all in the eclipse of a poetic vision in America and Europe and that the "freedom" is nothing more than the degradation of the species by brutish late capitalism. Marlowe is messy. And messy is bad for business.

The great rebel Marlowe--scapegrace, flamboyantly unrepentant, quick and harsh of wit, an atheist and homosexual, a brilliant and artistically daring Medieval man--is in criticism often bizzarely crafted into a haggard moralist. Or just a tad late for the liberation of the English Renaissance. It is easy enough to try and consider the redemption of Marlowe, the maligned man, even, perhaps, just to be contrary, especially when those estimations of character were often from a source like Thomas

¹¹ Christopher Hitchens wrote that our culture is "increasingly dominated by dunces and frauds." The word "enstupidizing" is all mine, though. I'm at work on a trademark application.

Kyd, who was tortured with an eye to getting information about his friend and likely bedmate Marlowe. It is quite understandable that a critic might try to see through the projection, to a man more gentleman than Elizabethan punk rocker. Also, we need to allow for the inescapable truth we do absolutely know: Marlowe was a guy who spent most of his time in a room working¹², just as all writers do, just as Hemmingway did, spending far less time punching bulls or running from boxers or whatever it was he did in his free time. But all the evidence points to Marlowe being an outlaw. He was a bad man. And what could be more glorious?

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury in 1564 into a purely riotous family. Marlowe's father, John, a shoemaker, was forever in court, suing or being sued, constantly brawling with neighbors, landlords, the people he bought from, as well as the people he sold to. His sister, at age fifty five, assaulted a neighbor; the next year she did it again, only with a knife. Another sister and her husband were twice cited for not taking holy communion, which was as much a political act as a religious one. Not atypical was the Elizabethan era of infant mortality: "Since fewer than two out of three children could expect to survive beyond the age of ten" (Riggs, 21). Far less typical was the city of his birth. Canterbury was a jagged place, old, even then, a walled Roman city surrounded by farmland. The Archbishop of Canterbury had led the Catholic Church since 597 AD, but through the upheavals of the Reformation, the English state religion changed three times between 1547 and 1558. Further the epidemic of plague of the late 1550's devastated the city, but eventually left it a great place to find a job, or, better, a trade. Into all of this strolled John Marlowe who "had secured a narrow foothold in the middling

¹² Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores*, undertaken when he was still an undergrad, must have taken a truly staggering amount of time.

classes--a notch below the gentry and members of the professions and a cut above day labourers and tenant farmers” (Riggs 19). It is important to note that Marlowe’s family was poor, but not the truly wretched lowest of Elizabethan poor, a poverty almost impossible to imagine. This is not to say that the position of the Marlowes was not perilous. Unlike the gentry, they had no hold on their position other than what they could grasp and struggle to maintain.

Christopher Marlowe was among the first generation to gain an education of full English Reformation effect, and that new pedagogy would have a profound influence on his life, and on the literature of the world. From the schools of this time a literary brilliance would emit one light after another. Besides Marlowe, there was Shakespeare (born in the same year), John Donne, George Herbert, Aemilia Lanyer, and many others. Schools became open to students as far down the class pole as Marlowe, but his status as non-gentry was always marked, and he was expected to accomplish extreme amounts of work, while the sons of the gentry would freely coast. Christopher’s place was always precarious; often a single rule violation or to catch the jaundiced eye of a dyspeptic and crabby teacher would have been enough to have him turned out.

“King Henry VIII founded petty schools ‘for the better bringing up of youth in the knowledge of their duty towards God, their prince and all other in their degree’. He and Elizabeth viewed the instruction of children...as a way of fashioning obedient subjects.” (Riggs 28). It takes no great detective work to read the service to the class structure here. It would be a lesson Marlowe must have had shoved into his brain every bare

moment of his education, but not, certainly with the outcome the masters would have hoped.¹³

Marlowe's education was more noteworthy because it was highly unusual of someone of his class to be educated through the university level. Not a moment of his education was independent of scholarships, and then the good graces of the scholarship underwriters. Many involved in the educational system of the time were steadfastly opposed to the education of these middling sons of lowly trades people. Marlowe always had to be the best, the quietest, and the best behaved.

When Marlowe reached the University at Cambridge, he was an expert in the poetics and rhetoric of Latin through the ceaseless study of grammar and metre. He was then plunged into the one consistent course for all of the students, the study of dialectic: in the words of his instructor, a Mr. Jones, dialectic was the "skill of arguing credibly on any topic whatever...an Art to reason probably, on both parts, of all matters that be put forth, so far as the nature of the thing can bear." This has great import when we look to Marlowe's atheism.

THREE: On Being an Atheist and Homosexual when that really Meant Something

What we know of Marlowe's "Atheist Lecture" comes to us from an enemy of his, Richard Baines, one of the vast numbers of people sprawled into the mass of Elizabethan underworld churnings.¹⁴ It was given before the Privy Council on May 30,

¹³ Curious to note how this effort failed, actually promoting a large agnostic sensibility, not to mention a pack of ne'er-do-well playwrights and poets. Similarly King James brilliant committee's job of translating the Bible in the hopes of political and religious cohesion never took; the country fell into civil war in a few decades. Ah, well: "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." (Job 5:7)

¹⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper and perhaps my capacity for detail to make a sound judgement involving minor figures of the Elizabethan underworld four hundred years ago. Baines was a spy, an informer, a Catholic priest. But was he really a Catholic? Just a spy? For our purposes let him be a villain,

1593, with Baines reciting a litany of atheistic remarks supposedly direct from Marlowe.

It is a tour of Elizabethan blasphemy including:

1e. That the first beginning of religioun was only to keep men in awe.

2a. That Christ was a bastard and his mother dishonest.

2d. That Crist deserved better to dy then Barrabas and that the Jewes made a good Choise, though Barrabas was both a thief and a murtherer.

3c. That if he were put to write a new Religion, he would undertake both a more excellent and Admirable methode and that all the new testament is filthily written.

2f. That St. John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and leaned alwaies in his bosome, that he used him as the sinners of Sodoma.

(Kocher, 160)

and, most famously:

2g. That all they that loue not Tobacco and Boies were fooles.

Keeping in mind of course that Baines was trying, or perhaps needed, to get Marlowe strung up, and there must be a certain skepticism; there is an immense amount of hearsay. The list can't be completely accurate unless a person was auditioning for the role of Satan in some Elizabethan meta-play. But much of this sounds like Marlowe.

But it also sounds like disputation. Marlowe was bringing out of the university closet the soul of dialectics. It is worth repeating that dialectics was not a course taken, it was the overriding concern of the entire school, the sea in which they all swam. At Cambridge he would have engaged in arguments exactly like some these specified, including about how the awfully written was the New Testament, and that the beginning of religion was to keep humanity in awe. This was not Hegelian thesis, antithesis, and

even though it is conceivable he isn't. Kyd was tortured, and gave up the goods on Marlowe, almost certainly because of Baines. Perhaps he too was tortured or threatened. But he seems a creep to me.

synthesis, with the muddled bit of truth, or logic, or something in the convergence. Nor was this Aristotle with his original conception of logical construction: if the first two statements are true then, sure the third must be true as well. Who could argue that? But the Cambridge scholars aimed at more than what they considered rote, machine logic, they wanted to reach into the esoteric, or even the unanswerable. Of course the instructors at the university trusted that the arguments would nudge all towards the truth of religion and the belief that God's political order was more than incorrectly appropriated awe. The students were expected to be able to argue both sides of questions like these. Again we start at the Romans, as if dialectics was run from the machinations of Cicero to Elizabeth.

There is no small measure of first outrage and then, as the years went on and attitudes changed, hero worship in the tradition of the charges of atheism and homosexuality against Marlowe. As we have said, there is scant evidence that he was both, but where there is a constant funnel of smoke, as the man said, there must be someone flaming. It is perhaps more likely that Marlowe, adrift in the class war of Elizabethan England, filled with the glory of disputation and alight with the boundless wit of a poetic genius, took the common arguments out of the closet and onto the stage and page. Kocher regards Marlowe's atheist lecture as the first and one of the finest (we can add perhaps the most dangerous to its author) statements of human freethinking. That is true. But Marlowe was a freer thinker than the freethinkers. Homosexuality and atheism meant a great deal more to the Elizabethans than they do to us, and Marlowe

refused to bow, not in the direction of the Queen's legitimacy to rule, nor to our smug sense of Marlowe as a rebel we could get along with. Non serviam, indeed.¹⁵

The astounding translators of the King James Bible, despite being company men, all, could even enliven Leviticus, that highly peculiar litany of repetitive rule listing, no Bathsheba, no Absalom, or even Nathan up a pole, just a listing of what not to do, most of them just plain odd to us and anyone else not on hand for the writing of it. How can any Divinity not Him half-mad or with a lousy sense of humor care if your clothes had mixed fibers? Worse, He has a really drastic hang up about menstrual fluid. But the most famous passage today of that book is 18:22:

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it *is* abomination.¹⁶

Artfully, if a little louche for most refined tastes, the next verse says

Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it *is* confusion.

In a neat little construction that demonstrates the emphasis these straightlaced churchmen were trying to make, writing what King James hoped would be the definitive cohesive religious text, so all could unite under God and King where the emphasis is always order.

¹⁵ I'm sure Joyce and Marlowe would despise each other, and I'd fear for Joyce's safety. He was no brawler, and bad eyes to boot. One likes to daydream about Wilde in such company.

¹⁶ This is the only verse of the Bible that directly deals with homosexuality. There is a huge loophole here, isn't there? It mentions only men laying with men. Tough luck, lads. But ladies, you have the Divine green light.

Homosexuality is a moral issue for us, almost completely. Sure, fanatical anti-gay marriage advocates have crowed that the country will fall apart, and that God will Himself punish our outrageous behavior with plagues and famine and locusts and whatnot. It seems absurd to us, but as Adam Nicolson writes that when Osama bin Laden was asked in October 2001 if he was responsible for the anthrax attacks, he answered 'These diseases are a punishment from God and a response to oppressed mothers' prayers in Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine and everywhere.' it was the kind of remark "which would not have raised an eyebrow in Jacobean England." (Nicolson, 239). To us, or to me, at any rate, bin Laden (or the homegrown sort, more mouthy than less dangerous, like Pat Robertson) invoking God's holy wrath now seems like a dagger thrown from the sky. It is fully archaic. Order was the goal and the vision and the passion of the Elizabethans; unmoored from the Elizabethan and Jacobean concept of society, this Biblical injunction needs to shift as we see Marlowe..

Homosexuality, as we think of it, did not exist before the absolute need for children both to till the soil, take care of the elderly as well as to repopulate the village. Contemporaries of Marlowe that went on after his death to create the magnificent King James Bible into English were, as I've mentioned, were all men, all strong Church of England supporters, strong denouncers of Puritanism and Catholicism, an Elizabethan ideal of a kind of salariman. They were educated men, and they were brilliant, many of them, and their translation is scintillating. They were conservatives in the truest sense, men of the Word, as it were. And while they translated Leviticus 18:22, and believed in it, it would be an easy bet that every single one of them would have had homosexual experiences during their youth, and many lived their whole lives in the company of men,

at least the entirety of their education until they were able to afford to settle a household. To our sensibilities it strikes us as hypocrisy. The Bible outlaws it and so that would put an end to that discussion, one might think, one way or another. But we should think here of order, an order the translators of the Bible were trying to stake down like tent posts, forever. What is being spoken here is not necessarily the quiet happenings between men, but of precious order, which is threatened if any part of the divine orchestration of England is threatened. Elizabeth and James were placed there by God, and the society filtered down as it should have, with a man marrying a woman and producing children.

It may be difficult to think of an age in which multiple and apparently contradictory qualities are rubbed so closely together but the multiplicity-- the love of *mixture*, which took such striking form in the hugely exaggerated hermaphrodites which decorated so many of the great Jacobean interiors--was something from which the King James Bible would draw its vitality.

(Nicolson 145)

To speak nothing of the works of Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson. There was also a purely class element to the love of the mixture; Boys and men, almost always the children of Gentlemen, would share their beds with other boys and men. The poor were too busy wallowing in the mire to have it off, and could always be exploited as a public relations scapegoat for any form of action counter the stated purpose of the regime.

Officially homosexuality was a crime punishable by death, but that was almost never enforced and then in cases of an older man raping a child.

Like the notable Biblical translators and all of the age's educated men, homosexual activities were no doubt part of Marlowe's upbringing and his education.

The venerable custom of sleeping with a same-sex bedfellow, the exaltation of male friendship, the fear of being emasculated by heterosexual passion...and the recovery of greek and Roman gender systems, all served to legitimate homoerotic affection, especially in the universities. Love between men was intrinsic to the humanist educational programme. Yet the medieval-Christian impulse to demonize homosexual acts persisted regardless. The so called buggers, pathetics, ingles, cinaeduses, catamites, Ganymedes and sodomites who performed such acts were still regarded with horror and disgust. The law too was equivocal on the issue. Tudor parliaments made sodomy a crime punishable by death, but the offence was almost never prosecuted, and then only in the cases where a man had raped a boy...The question of whether Marlowe was a homosexual is misleading. Marlowe's contemporaries regarded sodomy as an act of seditious behaviour rather than a species of person. The crime of sodomy became visible in connection with other offences--blasphemy, treason, counterfeiting, sorcery" (Riggs 75-77)

Marlowe's actual sex life will never be known, nor, in the limited and circumscribed manner of our moment, his orientation, but he did share his bed through all of his schooling with another male. For most of Elizabethan society the complicated mixture of human variety, of what was said and what was kept quiet, what was lauded and what was derided, and what affirmed the political order and what undermined it, was not hypocrisy. It was to Marlowe. His Edward II falls not because of his nearly open homosexuality, and that with a commoner, but because he was a lousy king. If the king

is gay, and loves a commoner, and God does not rebel, what can that possibly say about God and Divine rule? We are mere steps away from peasants of the world, unite! But we are also far from our own need to see Marlowe as a rebel of human and homosexual liberation. It is too easy to see in Marlowe a man from the deep sea of the literate past coming to us now, a ghost of validation of our own vision of the creation. It is too easy to see in Marlowe a fabulous guy that would go on The View to talk about how he supports gay marriage. It is what we want to see in him. However a snarling poetic genius with no boundaries unsettles and terrifies, not the least reason being that we need desperately to believe that we are more sophisticated than the Elizabethans. We have Twitter! Harold Bloom expresses the critical facility to make Marlowe a petty moralist:

What the common reader finds in Marlowe is precisely what his contemporaries found: impiety, audacity, worship of power, ambiguous sexuality, occult aspirations, defiance of moral order, and above all a sheer exaltation of the possibilities of rhetoric, of the persuasive force of heroic poetry. (Bloom, 1)

He was an anarchist before there were such things, and that doesn't make us any less uneasy than it would have Elizabeth.

Elizabethan England revived a return to the fullest, non-churchy version of Roman civilization in religion. The political visage of Elizabeth's rule was Roman:

Under Elizabeth I, external conformity became the master principle of church discipline. The queen took a firm Calvinist line of questions of doctrine, but imposed control over her Church through legally enforceable

types of ritual observance--many an anathema to Protestant reformers.

While Elizabeth outlawed variant forms of religious practice, she maintained a tolerant stance on the question of belief. (Riggs 43)

Consider poor Pontius Pilate¹⁷, having to deal with the rebellious Israelites who wouldn't, for their own bizarre reasonings, submit to the state religion, which no one in Rome cared if you actually believed or not. The space in your own head was beyond full grasp of the Imperium, besides you could always think what you want, who could care? Thinking doesn't ever make it so. The state religion was first and foremost a supplication to Caesar. Centuries on, young schoolboy Marlowe would have had to act as if he were, without any doubts, adhering to the purest Church of England teachings, with no Puritan, and certainly no atheistic sentiments. Nominally the point given in allowing and endowing the education the son of a person of the trade classes was to have bodies to fill vacancies in remote Church of England parishes.¹⁸ But certainly that world must have seemed small to a young Marlowe, even if it would have provided for an income. We need hardly say that Marlowe never openly rebelled against God during his education, or it would have ended. But he never took Holy Orders either.

To doubt or reject the existence of God, or, as it was more commonly held at the time, to doubt that God intervened directly in the affairs of humans, was fine if kept to oneself:

¹⁷ Ecce homo! The Bible is like Shakespeare, it is who has the important lines, and Pilate has a bunch of great ones, second only to Christ, I think. Quid est veritas?

¹⁸ The idea that training a young man in Latin so that they were fully fluent, and filled with Latin poetry, metre, and rhetoric so they could be a prelate in a country parish seems like a lousy plan. But it is a remarkable thought to consider Marlowe as a madman Anglican priest. We have Donne in such a role, and he made a wild show of it.

The tacit acceptance of hypocrites...explains why unbelievers rarely came out of the closet. Despite the widespread perception that atheists were a major public menace, hardly anyone was accused of openly attacking religion. There was biblical precedent for this compromise. 'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God' (Psalms 13:1), but the fool kept his mouth shut in public. Christopher Marlowe was the great exception that proved the rule. Closet atheists were part of the social order; open atheists cried out for swift and violent retribution. (Riggs 44).

I would disagree with Riggs on his naming the quiet unbelievers hypocrites. Power was clearly visibly utilized in Elizabethan England, and it was a power which had little sense of humor in any shenanigans that threatened order. The society provided, in a very real sense, a good deal of freedom of thought, which is no small thing, and did allow the mad rush of literary genius to flow with a very vibrant society. But I'm convinced that Marlowe would have vehemently (and disgustedly) disagreed with me. To play it only where the rules allow does make you a hypocrite. Marlowe knew what his society provided, and thought that it would have to expand to include him. Ultimately it didn't. It is our privilege to look upon a free man.

The cornerstone of Elizabethan belief was obedience. True obedience depended on faith, the gift from God. But into the odd mix of language and religion came the dogma of Calvin. The grotesque, soul disfiguring and spiritually genocidal mania of Calvinism must have made an immense impact on Marlowe. There were a limited number of saved¹⁹ and you were either in or you were out, since before time began, and if you

¹⁹ The number was set, of course: 144,000. The limits were fierce and there was no campaigning for a seat.

were out, nothing was going to change that fact. Perhaps in Marlowe's classroom the boys would look around at each other and wonder which few would be saved, and which of the many would be damned. You were supposed to be able to feel the truth of your predestination in Calvinist theology²⁰ in your heart. If the gospel spoke to your heart you were among the elite, if it didn't, you were to be counted amongst the preterite damned. This must have been both scary and liberating to a young Marlowe, who might rage too at the injustice of the presumed salvation of the aristocracy. Armed with dialectical skill, a head overflowing with Latin and poetry, and afire with Ovidian sensuality, Marlowe was let loose upon his world. Understanding his knowledge and passions, and the world he burst forth into, will unlock Marlowe from the obscuring past, and our own needy longing for a definitive. It will help find our footing in reading his plays.

FOUR: Misreading Marlowe

I've leant²¹ very heavily on David Riggs' wonderful book, The World of Christopher Marlowe for the biography of Marlowe and his era. Perhaps slightly long of detail, the book is luxuriantly exhaustive, smart, and compulsively readable, which is, shall we say, not always the case with so informational a biography. Very little of the book is directly about Marlowe, which must be clear at this point, because we know so little about the man. Riggs uses the small amount of information that we know specifically about Christopher Marlowe (a birth certificate or attendance records at Cambridge, say)

²⁰ It is amazing how rarely Calvinism (or any Western religion) is examined today as political. Calvinism seems like one of a number of crude attempts to "rescue" Christianity from the poor, whom you don't want at the castle gates nor the gates of St. Peter.

²¹ Google Drive's spell checker informs me this isn't a word. I guess they don't know everything.

which is to see one particular Elizabethan person sideways. It is sharply observed, and treats Marlowe more than an idiot savant poetic genius, who understands form and little else. But early in the prologue to the book, discussing Faustus, Riggs writes:

The contrast between the hero's bookish life fantasy life and the exterior world that he is up against gives Dr faustus a subjective depth that was new to European theatre. A decade later, during the golden age of Spanish drama, the novelist Miguel de Cervantes incorporated this contrast between fantasy and reality into prose fiction. In his novel's most famous moment, Cervantes' hero Don Quixote charges into a bunch of windmills, imaging they are evil giants. His squire points out that they are windmills, but the would be knight remains deluded, explaining that an evil magician 'has turned these giants into windmills in order to deprive me of the glory of defeating them'. Dr Faustus inhabits an older, more supernatural plane of reality than his Spanish contemporary does. The enchanted landscape of *Dr Faustus* is haunted by demons that expect the audience to believe in them. Where Dr. Faustus is possessed, Don Quixote is crazy. Where *Dr Faustus* comes at the end of a waning tradition of medieval religious drama, *Don Quixote* marks the birth of the modern novel. (Riggs 3)

The World of Christopher Marlowe is a sophisticated book, but the above sentences, written early in the book to signal who Marlowe should be for us, is an example of the sophistry that engulfs Marlowe criticism. A writer who has spent a massive amount of time invested in Marlowe, his world and his writings, tosses off a simplistic critique of Dr Faustus. Since the supposed shift from medieval Faustus to Enlightened Cervantes, there have been approximately one hundred billion horror movies, novels and plays

made, with an audience willing to believe in spooks.²² The above is reductive, and unpleasantly so; as this cast off wisdom this is none, because it deranges the scope of those works. The delicious question behind Don Quixote²³ is, how crazy if the old guy, if at all? The glee of running into a windmill, and the utter sensibility of not doing so, strikes many readers as the point. Hell, maybe Don Quixote knows exactly what he's doing, even if he might be nuts: better, some might feel better to run headlong into windmills than to sit in a cubicle clawing one's way to middle management. *Doctor Faustus* is delightful because Marlowe can take the form of a morality play (and firmly and indisputably, the play exists within a Christian universe) and use it to expand, just like a poet who limits him or herself to sonnet form. Leo Kirschbaum wrote about the experience of the playworld of Faustus acting as a conduit for creativity which has had little influence in Marlowe criticism:

As one reads *Doctor Faustus*, the play itself, after having perused modern appreciations of it, one is almost shocked. There seems to be so little relation between the artifact itself and the comment upon it. The reason for this false criticism is not far to seek. There are elementary principles without which neither Shakespeare nor Marlowe-nor any competent dramatist, we may add-can be dealt with justly. What these principles are cannot be too often repeated. The Elizabethan dramatists themselves knew what they were doing. They knew that they were writing plays. They recognized and utilized the peculiar opportunities which the form allowed them. They knew what the special relationship in the theatre between the play and the audience allowed and demanded. We constantly forget that a play is a play. (Kirschbaum 225)

²² I myself once saw a ghost quite plainly, and I'm a materialist, sort of. A story for another thesis, perhaps.

²³ Still my favorite novel. Just so we all know I stand on the matter.

Shakespeare is always like a stiletto; his plays are set in locations--Rome, Elsinore, Venice, and so on--that bear little resemblance to the real places. They serve the play. In Shakespeare the creeds that must be publically confirmed are always (quietly) confirmed, and the rest is invention. Marlowe runs headlong into them. It is impossible, I think, to read Marlowe now, or even to have watched his plays being performed in the Elizabethan age, and not wonder just how the hell this guy thinks he'll get away with this. The desperate flailings of criticism to unite moral decency and beauty with ability and talent showcased its own limitations when it ran into Marlowe and untold numbers of other artists. The context of a play needn't exist outside the story in reality or even as a philosophical argument.

During the eighteenth century Marlowe the embodiment of all the proscribed excesses, practically ceased to occupy a place in English literature. Seldom reprinted, little discussed, and never performed, his works dropped into the limbo of subliterate, from which the gradual forays of antiquarianism and the enthusiasm of certain romanticists were to rescue him in the nineteenth century.

(Levin 24)

But our liberation from the necessity of the pure is a false one; our own blindness can be more profound. Sticking with a ready storyline, a story line the real life post apocalyptic survivors of the twentieth century can live with, Charles Isherwood writes in the New York Times, about dual performances of "The Merchant of Venice" and "The Jew of Malta":

Still, Mr. Abraham approaches Barabas, at least at first, from a psychologically realistic perspective...This might seem an admirable attempt to humanize a brutish caricature, but it is an incongruous and

frankly hopeless pursuit that reaps fewer dividends as the play becomes more gleefully violent. Barabas is a monster not a man, and audiences should be trusted to set aside his ostensible status as a Jew and enjoy him for what he is: a character possessed of a hideous but spellbinding vitality and an irreverent wit gleaming with malice. Mr. Abraham draws plenty of humor from Barabas's sardonic asides to the audience, but vitiates the character's power by not taking his grotesqueness too seriously, as if to do so would acknowledge some kind of truth in the awful stereotype.

(NYT February 5, 2007)

The response in Europe and America to racism, homophobia and anti semitism is to exile it from our thoughts, its name never to be spoken, with the bulk of the ignorance coming from the supposedly most progressive of us.²⁴ *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* didn't tell us, once, what we wanted to hear about goodness and art and value, which can strike the modern as a bit cute, if damaging. But our own sculpting of literature to fit our demands of what it must be hides an even greater sickness.

Who in their right minds would argue that Marlowe is more pious than Milton?

Wicked degenerate Marlowe versus Mr. Religion.

Mephostophilis has adumbrated some of the darker aspects of *Paradise Lost*; and *Pandemonium* is a Marlovian apocalypse; but there is likewise Eden, and Milton out Marlowe's Marlowe when he blazons it forth in comparisons and superlatives. When Milton's dramatis personae transcend their classical prototypes, as they invariably do, it is not vainglory but an act of piety...The Marlovian act of temptation is given

²⁴ Again, so we all know what page we are on, I am, solidly and proudly, a man of the left, just scared of the dominance of liberal pieties. I didn't survive an Irish Catholic childhood to succumb to any dogma not nearly so robust.

monumental treatment by Milton..[who] resists where Marlowe succumbs.
(Levin 23-24)

Wicked Marlowe, the consensus is, is lesser than Milton. That judgement stems more, I'd argue, about our demands for the two authors than from their talents. Who can compare talents so diverse, anyway? Marlowe is unsettling, always. Milton is brilliant, and we know his creeds, and we know of his politics in a time long gone, and thus mostly unthinkable to ourselves, and so, of little import. We know Milton as a defender of freedom of religious speech, as well as blind and brave. We know the wildman Marlowe, buggerer and snarling unbeliever, who died sordidly.²⁵ Milton is pure: a believer, enlightened, the author of a national epic vast in poetic scope. But cast differently Marlowe was simply a brilliant poet who liked to have a good time, impulsive, and unwilling to curtail saying what he truly thought. And Milton was a man who aided and abetted a genocidal maniac in Oliver Cromwell. "The curse of Cromwell" is still a well understood pejorative in Ireland. It is too messy to admit that the Irish were the prototype for future English colonies, and that country a God-forsaken tortured colony that was fully of the third world until well into the later part of the twentieth century because of it. This Milton, the disciple of the pillager Cromwell, is too messy, and too far into the past to need to be cleaned up. We all love London, don't we?²⁶ We are uncomfortable with Marlowe because nothing will stay in place. And so to understand Marlowe may be a fight that we in our time can't win, but maybe we can if gird ourselves with Emerson: "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." No more

²⁵ Marlowe's death was widely seen as proof of divine justice at work in the lives of men.

²⁶ I would rather go to London a ten times than Dublin once. Please don't tell anyone.

constancy for us. It is always unsettling to read Marlowe, and we don't like to be unsettled or think of the darkness. Let's think of the darkness.

Harold Bloom's introductory essay on Marlowe writes that "there has been a fashion, in modern scholarly criticism, to baptize Marlowe's imagination, so that the writer of tragic caricatures has been converted into an orthodox moralist." (Bloom 1). He goes on to quote Frank Kermode on what he calls the "scholar's case"²⁷ of a moral Marlowe.

Thus Marlowe displays his heroes reacting to most temptations that Satan can contrive; and the culminating temptation...is the scholar's temptation, forbidden knowledge....[Marlowe's] heroes do not resist the temptations, and he provides us, not with a negative proof of virtue and obedience to divine law, but with positive examples of what happens in their absence. Thus, whatever his intentions may have been, and however much he flouted conventions, Marlowe's themes are finally reducible formulae of contemporary religion and morality. (Bloom 1)

If a critic as erudite as Kermode can miss that the stage is a place to dance upon, and the limitations set by a play's universe can create a place to dance with the truth, then it

²⁷ I quote Bloom quoting the great Kermode because after searching for the original quotation everywhere, and not finding it, I wrote a lovely email to Professor Bloom asking where he got that quote, and thinking perhaps that I was going to take Kermode's side in the thing, wrote back to me almost immediately. I reproduce his response exactly here:

²⁷"Dear Mr. Holmes:

²⁷I am the only source, not Frank Kermode.

²⁷Harold Bloom"

²⁷

is no wonder we are at a loss with Marlowe. It is often with a certain smug triumph that critics point out that Doctor Faustus is, in form, a morality play, and thus Christian in sentiment. Consider the morality play itself, then. Almost universally it is taken as a holy relic, an agent of a religious sentiment now delinquent of our more attuned sensibilities. This is reductionism which creates the lie. The delightful story of the production of one morality play, acted amongst the celebrations of King James I (himself a very literate man, a theologian and a philosopher in his own right) for his brother-in-law Christian IV, King of Denmark and Norway, was no grand exception to the staging of these plays.

Faith, Hope and Charity then appeared one by one to make their speeches. Faith was so drunk she couldn't get a word out; Hope couldn't stand upright and had to withdraw; only Charity, clearly the greatest of these, could say what she had to say...before returning to the lower hall where she found both Hope and Faith 'sick and spewing.'
(Nicolson 119)

Clinging to the tradition of a Christianity as absolute as ours, and a morality play which guides the faithful along that absolute path, and thus creating a Finally Moral Marlowe is more than a mistake. It is to cling to the easily understandable at the expense of the real. Faustus is a bookish type²⁸ given great powers. The tendency of critics to moralize Marlowe is surpassed only by the willingness to criticise Faustus' imbecility. Those great and terrifying powers, and all the guy does is yank the Pope's chain and screw Helen of Troy? No way, the argument goes, not me--I'd be doing, you know, noble

²⁸ Ahem.

stuff. What we fear, I suspect, is that Faustus really is an extraordinary man. And in this play world at least, God exists. It terrifies to think that perhaps Faustus is the last man, the rebel. If God exists, as he does without question in *Doctor Faustus*, and we are utterly subject, without failure, to His Judgement and His rules, what can we ever be except slaves?²⁹ In a time when religion and spirituality are viciously proscribed, and the perimeter of detail guarded closely, by atheists, evangelicals, and all in between, this idea will not be an easy one.

Bloom asks of Kermode is “final reduction” the real aim of art? It should never be, but in criticism it too often is. And we should add, that final reduction is at the soul of a scientific capitalistic one. The most famous speech in the play is said by Faustus, smitten with the conjured Helen of Troy, as Mephostophilis seeks to keep him from thinking of heavenly salvation.

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies.
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.

this Riggs writes that

The apparition of Helen fills the scholar’s humdrum surroundings with imaginative splendour. He finally gets what he wants: the most beautiful woman in the best book ever written, Homer’s *Iliad*. Dr Faustus’ belief that the answer to his question...is yes reminds the spectator that this is not

²⁹ Faustus always reminds me of another last man, Orwell’s Winston Smith: “If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is extinct; we are inheritors. Do you understand that you are alone?”

that face! From the standpoint of an early modern Christian, what Dr Faustus sees is a succubus--a devil who assumes the form of a female (Riggs 2-3)

in order lead men into sin. Too much criticism, and certainly criticism confronted with the complexity of Marlowe, transmutes into an odd mathematics: literature as a form of problem solving. It is like taking a chainsaw to a tree to see how old it is. Riggs is reducing a wonderful, wicked moment to splinters. Sure, finally that isn't Helen. I suppose. But does the real Helen exist? Did she? Did anyone, if they are fully in the past? And if it looks like Helen, and Faustus gets to sleep with her, it must echo somewhere in our brains, *that could be me, but I simply don't dare*. Faustus holds fast to throughout the play, even, unlike most of us, he is given direct proof of a non-material existence.

Surrounding Faustus, masquerading as the faithful, is the timid. It is no wonder that Heaven takes such trouble to get Faustus back. We can assume, given the pious in this play, that The Kingdom of God is populated by mediocrity and the sheepish gawkers that get an eyeful of Helen, but sink back into their sackcloth robes. Faustus, dumbly, perhaps, but strikingly, dares. Of course, if Faustus is a slave, like all of us, residing under the Master's Heaven, Faustus' resistance is the ultimate insult, and his refusal of offered redemption is both grotesque and glorious at once. He is the last man, take him at his worth.

Bloom reduces Marlowe to caricaturist, one subsumed, as all else is in his scholarship, by Shakespeare. Bloom isn't alone. Edward A Snow writes, intriguingly, helpfully that

Perhaps the most difficult thing about writing on Marlowe is finding some way of formulating and discussing his themes that will not betray the radically questioning nature of his work. For instance, if we were forced to venture a statement about the central topic of Doctor Faustus, it would probably not be untrue to suggest that the play, like all of Marlowe's work, is about the fulfillment of the will. Yet this would scarcely suggest the extent to which the play puzzles about what the will is, and what fulfillment consists of, and how words like "will," "want," and "have," can victimize the speaker who tries to make them serve his purposes.

(Snow 171)

This is good stuff, but Snow immediately starts to break it all down into manageable pieces. Let's not make that same mistake. The need to solve a literary problem can be irresistible, but Doctor Faustus works best in ambiguity. Faustus himself, has, at the least, poor impulse control, and he might be brilliant, but his focus is easily changed, even when dealing with his eternal soul. He remains committed in the play to this physical life; facing damnation, directly, with no metaphor in between him and Hell's gate, all the agents of evil need do is simply remind Faustus that if he repents he'll be torn to pieces. Surrounded by nondescript weaklings for whom piety is the timid default choice, what could Faustus' repentance ever be but a gross acquiescence? Early in the play, his delight is in what he will find after selling his soul:

Evil Angel

Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all nature's treasure is contained.
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and Commander of these elements.
Exeunt Angels.

Faustus

How am I gluttred with conceit of this!
Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
Resolve me of all ambiguities,

Perform what desperate enterprise I will? (Act I, sc. i, l. 74-80)

Faustus never wavers in his choice, although he frets for his outcome. He laments his inevitable end, but never once fully repents, or repudiates his choice. Faustus always seems to want to figure out a way to have the life of wealth and general mayhem he has enjoyed as well as be saved. That way isn't impossible, for, we are told, with God all things are possible, but first the will of Faustus must be broken. And that is to be tested against the silent all powerful will of Heaven. Beyond all else a slave must obey, and Faustus does not. Born of a poor family, his head filled with a vast education after countless hours of study, he chooses the world outside the university door. Either Faustus is painfully stupid, or this is no base morality play, and I don't think Faustus is stupid. He makes mistakes; the first scene of the play, of Faustus alone with his books, discounting the various fields of study contained within, is full of miss and partial translations. And after having sold his soul, *and actually talking face to face with a devil*, he says: "Come, I think hell is a fable. (l.v. 130). Oh, boy, genius scholar, way to use that big brain of yours.

Richard Dawkins³⁰ and other simpleton thinkers of today wonder why believers in Heaven don't just kill themselves, or at least hasten their death, perhaps resorting to lots of wild living, booze, and smoking. Philosophically there is a non-simple argument made by people who have, you know, read books and thought about things a little. But what answer is there for Faustus, who has proof of the other world and still clings to this life? Not much, for a maliciously gleeful poet like Marlowe, because what could we do for Faustus? Pray for his soul? Try to convince him of the joys of heaven? Some of

³⁰ An interesting scientist, but he should leave religion to people who think about the subject a little bit more deeply, your author wrote, for the politeness that was in it.

us might not be much good at that. And Faustus is a hard man to convince. Facing the end, Good Angel (rather irritatingly it must be said) is there to rub it in a little, when Faustus might, might be passed redemption:

Good Angel

Oh Faustus, if thou had'st given ear to me,
Innumerable joys had followed thee.
But thou did'st love the world.

So much of the bad criticism of this play might derive from an understandable denial against what Marlowe thinks about the human condition; that Faustus, a befuddled over-educated fool may be the best we can achieve in a universe where we are eternal slaves.

An interesting moment often tellingly ignored or stumbled over badly by critics is a technical problem for a writer; Faustus first, above all else, wants to know the secrets of heaven and earth, the profoundest scientific knowledge. And how can a writer display onstage that which he doesn't know? Faustus can ask, and we'd love to overhear the answer, but those questions will remain unanswered, at least in the concrete sense. Marlowe uses this tic, as he does everything else, purposefully. Our sophisticated selves deflect such a question without thought, either in nihilism or religious certainty, but it is, either way, a zero of postmodern reckoning, meaningless, and treated as such. It might once have been rendered down into a political question, but no longer. But Marlowe provides a dramatic answer, which may be our only true knowledge in this life, holy words from a devil. Before he has sold his soul, Mephostophilis claims to be in damned, and in hell standing alongside Faustus:

Faustus

Where are you damned?

Mephistophilis

--In hell.

Faustus

How comes it then that thou art out of hell?

Mephistophilis

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.

Think'st thou that I that saw the face of God,

And tasted the eternal joys of heaven

Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,

In being deprived of everlasting bliss?

Disclaiming, after the deed of his soul is sold, that he considers hell and damnation an old wives tale:

Mephistophilis

But I am an instance to prove the contrary,

For I tell thee I am damned, and now in hell.

Faustus

Nay, and this be hell, I'll willingly be damned.

What sleeping, eating, walking and disputing?

Maybe thinking does in fact make it so. This life is a paradise and, eventually for Faustus, a perdition. Faustus is a free man, In the murk of human reckoning, Faustus' soul is his own, and his heaven was chosen, fully and unbowed, freely, ungainly, stupid,

and glorious in rebellion. Maybe Faustus does the best humanity can do in freedom. It is not an idea that is easily accepted today, if we are even capable of asking it.

Finally Faustus fails; few who are consumed bodily into hell can be considered a success. As we begin a study of *The Jew of Malta* I was struck that the play isn't about greed at all, but power. Money can ordain power, certainly, but Barabas is no lover of cash for cash's sake. He is interested in power. Of course in our minds it is hard to extract the two concepts to any degree, as if they were indivisibly the same.³¹

FIVE: The Monster of Malta

In James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, our young sulky semi-hero Stephen says that a merchant "is one who buys cheap and sells dear, jew or gentile, is he not?" Some of us might fancy ourselves steel-eyed men and women of hard material truth, like Machevill. "I count religion but a childish toy/and hold there is no sin but ignorance." (Prologue, I.

³¹ as I've read through all of the pop New Atheist books, nearly every single one at some point will quote the first verse of John Lennon's great song, 'Imagine':

³¹Imagine there's no heaven

³¹It's easy if you try

³¹No hell below us

³¹Above us only sky

³¹Imagine all the people living for today

³¹And not one, not a single blessed one has ever quoted the third verse:

³¹Imagine no possessions

³¹I wonder if you can

³¹No need for greed or hunger

³¹A brotherhood of man

³¹Imagine all the people sharing all the world

³¹One can only conclude that to live without God is fine, but to live without capitalism unimaginable.

14-15). *The Jew of Malta* is critically considered the finest of Marlowe's plays, but rarely is its full import acknowledged. It is always a danger to generalize about an age, and there can be little doubt that the Elizabethan audience was of many and varied positions on a good many things. It was an age that thrilled in complexity. But Marlowe saw less complexity than simple hypocrisy. Barabas is a shocking character, almost alone in the canon, because he charges into the palace where power resides and he never so much as cringes. In fact he takes delight.

LODOWICK.

Whither walk'st thou, Barabas?

BARABAS.

No further. 'Tis a custom held with us,

That when we speak with gentiles like to you,

We turn into the air to purge ourselves,

For unto us the promise doth belong.

With such an introduction to *The Jew of Malta*, Harold Bloom, forever on the lookout for antisemitism³² champions the play, as the one superior moment, and one alone, of Marlowe over Shakespeare, of the sublimity of Barabas over Shylock, *The Jew of Malta* over *The Merchant of Venice*. Bloom is really big on the ranking and influence thing, so this admission of anyone, at any time, being greater than Shakespeare is worth our attention.

Barabas defies reduction, and his gusto represents Marlowe's severest defiance of all moral and religious convention...Shylock ...is essentially the timeless anti-Semitic stock figure, devil and usurer, of Christian

³² If I had a Bible handy, I would swear on it: this will be the last Bloom related footnote you will ever read from me. In Bloom's introduction to *Modern Critical Views: The New Testament*, he devotes nearly the entire introduction to the antisemitism of the NT, which, as valuable as that discussion is, it might just, ah, be a rather narrow view as to the entirety of the thing.

tradition. Barabas delights because he is a free man, or if you would prefer, a free fiend, at once a monstrous caricature and a superb image of Marlowe's sly revenge upon society. (Bloom 2-3)

For our own age, certainly, Shylock fits. He is nebbishy and humanized in a way that speaks to the TV movie redemption of our desires. Barabas is none of this. Shylock has Shakespeare's great art in his invention, but it would be unthinkable for Shylock to utter the amazing speech that I quoted in its entirety in the beginning of this essay, of Barabas' wild and gleeful boasting of his lurid, utterly unrepentant wickedness. Nor in the lines below verbally taunting men who mean him harm³³:

ITHAMORE

Look, look, master. Here come two religious caterpillars.

BARABAS

I smelt 'em ere they came.

ITHAMORE

God-a-mercy, nose! come, let's begone.

BARNARDINE

Stay, wicked Jew; repent, I say, and stay.

JACOMO

Thou hast offended, therefore must be damned.

BARABAS

I fear they know we sent the poisoned broth.

ITHAMORE

And so do I, master; therefore speak 'em fair.

BARNARDINE

Barabas, thou hast...

³³ Spotting Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare is best left to professionals and those who embrace pure obsessiveness more than I do, but I think it is possible to hear a prefiguration of Hamlet's verbal taunting of Polonius in these lines.

JACOMO

Ay, that thou hast...

BARABAS

True, I have money. What though I have?

BARNARDINE

Thou art a...

JACOMO

Ay, that thou art a...

BARABAS

What needs all this? I know I am a Jew.

BARNARDINE

Thy daughter...

JACOMO

Ay, thy daughter...

BARABAS

Oh, speak not of her; then I die with grief.

BARNARDINE

Remember that...

JACOMO

Ay, remember that...

BARABAS

I must needs say that I have been a great usurer.

BARNARDINE

Thou hast committed...

BARABAS

Fornication? But that was in another country;

And besides the wench is dead. (IV.sc.1)

Bloom ends his essay: "Barabas and Tamburlaine seek their own freedom, and ultimately fail, but only because they touch the outer limits at the flaming ramparts of their world." (Bloom 6). A.D. Hope, an Australian poet, writes of *Tamburlaine*:

The metaphysical conception on which the play is based is this theory of a universe in which order is a creation of strife and values are determined by strife...I imagine that the reason why the view of life on which Tamburlaine is based has been overlooked is simply the fact that it is so strange and so repugnant to most minds that it would never occur to them to take it seriously. The mere notion of accepting, even for the sake of argument, a thorough-going morality of power, aesthetics of power and logic of power...these are ideas which the mind boggles at entertaining. And when it does so, many events in the play are bound to appear senseless, extravagant, or merely revolting. (Hope 48-49)

Bloom expands on Hope's argument by curtailing it. "I would go further and suggest that there is no other morality, aesthetics, or logic anywhere in Marlowe's writings." (Bloom 5). Ok, sure.³⁴ But that isn't an author's sleight of hand, it is a deliciously non-philosophical statement of being, and, if granted, which we are bound to by tacit agreement as an audience to the work, wouldn't all other themes be contained within? Love, faith, what are these? What is true for Tamburlaine is true for Barabas, and few critics recognize the fullest sense of the work, exactly because, secular age or not, most minds rebel instinctively against a universe with no point except the will to power. Marlowe, it cannot be repeated enough, is not positing a philosophical idea; it is a dramatic one, a poetic one. We often can no longer recognize the poetic if it came along and poisoned a convent full of nuns.

This is not an area for satire, or, more correctly, not simply for satire. Poetry is not words on the page, but power. A.D. Hope again on Tamburlaine, but he could be

³⁴ I'll remind you there was no Bible, so one more Bloom footnote. He contradicts himself in this argument in his introduction to Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. For who is the Judge except this principle of power and strife personified? Now I'll just promise no more Bloom footnotes, except if Leopold pops up somehow.

writing on Barabas as well, exchanging Barabas the supremely gifted and perfectly corrupted merchant/evil doer for the general :

Poetry is his medium, as power is his nature and his genius. Poetry shares the supremacy of nature, for it is the natural language of beauty, of intellect and of power, the three perfect things...the absolute morality of power which the play exemplifies is allied to the absolute standards of poetry, which it recognizes. For poetry accepts only success, and grants lasting life only to absolute success.

Can we even read Marlowe this way anymore? That one word in the above quotation, “absolute” already fills us with qualms of word and meaning, perhaps then dread. Beauty now is a far less majestic and meaningful term. In fact, the entirety of the English language is less majestic, less ambiguous, less messy, less poetic.

SIX: Other Readings, Other Conclusions, and Our Marlowe

The aforementioned Professor Robert Sapolsky writes wonderful essays on a vast number of topics, mostly aligned with his areas of scientific research, but sometimes not. They are well written, funny, informative, and entertaining. But Sapolsky’s professional publications are completely inaccessible to me, and they would be to any layperson; I took a crack at “Acute Corticosterone treatment is sufficient to induce anxiety and amygdaloid hypertrophy.³⁵ and should not recommended it except to a highly particular audience, you know who you are. Sapolsky is versed in art, music, and poetry, as well as being one of the most respected scientists in the world, and a highly

³⁵ Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2008; 105 (14): 5573-8

appreciated teacher. With this in mind, we can ask, what do we need an English Department for anyway?

It is a question that comes up, beyond the fevered, tortured mind of an aggrieved freshman being forced to read *Moby Dick*, or, of course, a slightly older grad student feverishly, quiveringly, typing out his thesis. If anyone can sit down and read *Hamlet* or Don Quixote and appreciate them, what is it exactly that an English department or an English Professor, does? Having lived and studied through the late 1980's and early 90's, I remember a wall of horrifically written postmodernist criticism crashing down upon my poor head, and despite being a true believer I couldn't believe this infernal scramble of words is where where the language landed.³⁶ Curiously that was the same moment in history, more or less, when the long history of the amateur scientist finally became an impossibility. Dr. Sapolsky and his sort, whose quotidian work day was filled with knowledge unimaginable to a generation before, filled with dendrites and neurons and whatnot, were the only people who could fully comprehend the material. I don't doubt that professional jealousy crept into English departments--not just anyone can do this, dammit! Criticism fully took the form of a kind of science. Plato wanted to banish the poets, but wrote about it beautifully.³⁷

But it is my (somewhat pollyanna-ish) assertion that the study of English literature is the teaching of joy, that miraculous burst of passion in recognition of something-- ourselves, beauty, meaning, something-- in the few words on the page, and the few words spoken, about a text. It is the essence of mess. And these are lean times. Our

³⁶ As a young bomb thrower, I loved Derrida and Foucault, but, at least in translation, I found them horrifying to actually read; looking back though, the very idea of having to read anything by Houston Baker fills me with dread.

³⁷ I can't read Greek; I'm told this by them that knows.

current version of rationality has masqueraded as something other than capitalism unleashed. What word or thought means anything? David Foster Wallace, in a book review about the postmodern critical divide of whether the Author is dead or not, writes that “for those of us civilians who know in our gut that writing is an act of communication between one human being and another, the whole question seems sort of arcane.” (Wallace 144). Maybe the final reduction Kermode spoke of should be limited to that communication, and we should fully conflate all of the details contained therein.

Consider: writing on Yeats, Edward Said wrote:

Yeats is very much the same as other poets resisting imperialism: in his insistence on a new narrative for his people, his anger at schemes for partition (and enthusiasm for its felt opposite, the requirement for wholeness), the celebration and commemoration of violence in bringing about a new order, and the sinuous interweaving of loyalty and betrayal in a nationalist setting.

(Veese 129)

This is at once astoundingly uplifting and heartbreakingly silly. Yeats wasn't the same as other poets resisting imperialism. Said never once mentions that Yeats was a Protestant, an Anglo-Irishman.³⁸ This doesn't negate Said's stance, but it is a peculiar and unfortunate omission. If the best poet writing in Hebrew in Israel was a Palestinian, or, better, if the generally acknowledged greatest scholar in African American literary

³⁸ Said does mention, in passing, in *Culture and Imperialism* that Yeats was of English heritage, which does not come close to a full disclosure of the divisions in Ireland at the time. That is sort of like saying Bill Clinton was of English heritage, which he is. The division of Anglo to native was drastic and insisted upon, and in this context demonstrates part of Yeats' astounding brilliance.

studies was white, it would not make their work less legitimate³⁹ but it would certainly be of note. The full power of Yeats' work was to take a "doggerel" culture and assume it had massive heft, fully the equal of the empire next door, and his talent was such that he was able to pull it off. His struggles with Irish culture cut loose from the purely theoretical are seamed throughout "Easter 1916" and other places. Even a brilliant guy like Said doesn't know what to make of the Irish, and makes them full kith and kin, just to get them out of the way, and on his side. But not making a note that Yeats was Anglo-Irish is a drastic omission, and an unfortunate mistake, not one that would have been made by a single person living in Ireland or the United Kingdom at the time. But Said's thoughts on Yeats contains within it the solution to our critical limitations; taking on a poet, he has brought us into literature, politics, colonialism, the commonality of those colonized people, the limitations of how poetry is considered, and more. It is a teaching moment, and that is a glory. In a mistake, Said makes Yeats an even more fulsome poet.

We have as an example of what a delightful mess can be in what Said wrote about Yeats, which is both foolish and brilliant, instructive and thought provoking. Bertrand Russell, who once had a spot of bother at this very institution, wrote in the Introduction to Why I Am Not A Christian: "I think all the great religions of the world--Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Communism--both untrue and harmful. It is evident as a matter of logic that, since they disagree, not more than one of them can be true." The statement is both inspiring, a statement of human freedom, and, again, quite silly.

³⁹ Could such a person liberate the subtle bias that only proper races and genders should study their assigned place in scholarship?

This statement is of freedom, and at the same time, is no less a statement of global dominion than anything the Pope might have said. Consider this just a few pages later, writing of the “First Cause” philosophical position: It is exactly of the same nature as the Hindu’s view, that the world rested upon an elephant and the elephant rested upon the tortoise; when they said, “How about the tortoise?” the Indian said, “Suppose we change the subject?” This is madness, suffocatingly imperialistic⁴⁰ and genocidal-- completely terrifying. As we’ve stated before, God, The Devil, and the rest are poetic concepts before they are reasoned ones; that came much after. An odd bunch of nomads wandering the Negev desert, looking up into the stars, solved the problem of their own existence in terms of the poetic. The dominion of reason did not hold then, but was represented by their lives. Logic was the cycle of their year and their lives with in that year.

Bertrand Russell could make this ugly statement, understanding nothing of a culture and a religion (with 700 million adherents!), but still be a voice for justice and freedom. Russell had great style, and was a brave and noble thinker, and a flawed but insistent, voice, for human freedom. Russell and Said uncorked poetry and politics and religion; flawed as it may be I would love to see Marlowe unleashed as well. The light upon his work fading very slowly. Marlowe wrote very well, and he wrote with fire. That which should warm us to his work might be what keeps us at distance, because of an illusion that we’ve solved the big questions, or, worse, that the big questions are meaningless to ask, so why bother? Oscar Wilde’s wonderful quips about the nature of art and the

⁴⁰ I studied English at Binghamton in the late 80’s and early 90’s. Every single sentence uttered contained either the words postmodern, reification, or imperialism; I was loathe to use it here, but I couldn’t think of any other word that fit. Apologies.

artist seem quaint, now: *the artist is the creator of beautiful things*, or, *to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim*. But for Marlowe I would wish another Wilde-ism: *the critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things*.

It might be a wonderfully neat rhetorical trick for a guy, filled with sad desperation, but a lovely heart all the same, trying to claw his unsteady way through a thesis, to write that it might be helpful to look by way of comparison to Marlowe to how we view the poetry of “Marlowe’s complete opposite, George Herbert.” But that would be deceitful, as they were men of a similar time, and each of strong poetic gifts. But Herbert, who, by all accounts, left London to live quietly in a rural parish had exactly no Elizabethan punk at all in his soul: he was a vicar and the maker of Christian verse. But Herbert’s poetry contains conceits of a shocking audacity. It is easy to be struck breathless by them, even for the non-believer. But here is the matter similar to how we understand Marlowe. In George Herbert, how do we, in our secular age, consider a religious poet? I think the comparison with the critical mismeasure of Marlowe will be very illustrative. We miss Marlowe just as we miss Herbert. And what that says about our own critical eyes is very telling. In many ways Herbert is an even more difficult poet to live beyond anthropology than Marlowe.

With the growth of the secular society, and the problems we have seen considering Marlowe’s work, it will be beneficial to consider Herbert’s place in our reading consciousness. Can we talk about him without engaging his faith? Is to read the poems of George Herbert without faith, are all we left with is literary archeology? Are we sweeping dirt off the remnants of a civilization that can inspire our awe but of a belief

system that we regard as primitive? Can we do other than to condescend? Stanley E. Fish's essay, "Letting Go: The Dialectic of Self in Herbert's Poetry" quotes the third stanza of Herbert's "The Flower"

We say amiss
This or that is,
Thy word is all, if we could spell. (19-21)

In other words, that everything is God, and all distinctions are non-existent. Fish's thesis is that Herbert intended his poetry to be an experience of letting go of one's concept of self, or at least a self distinct from the divine, "to read Herbert's poems is to experience the dissolution of the distinctions by which all other things are." (Fish, p. 89). Fish notes quite convincingly that Herbert's pronouns grow less specific during a common run of his poetry: that it becomes very difficult to understand what the correct referent of a pronoun may be, and that an examination of a line might leave us saying, who is the "he?" The Speaker? God? The answer is, of course, "Thy word is all." Fish wants us to consider the implications of God being all things:

Herbert's poems characteristically ask us to experience the full force of this admission in all of its humiliating implications. If God is all, the claims of other entities to a separate existence, including the claims of speakers and readers of these poems, must be relinquished...There is nothing easy about the 'letting go' this poetry requires of us. (Fish, 87)

I find this tremendously convincing, but Fish's essay runs into a barrier of reading Herbert and not having that final discussion, the one of faith, the ultimate rightness or wrongness of Herbert. Certainly the standards of being a professional in this field, and the mores of our multicultural, secular society, make leaving out a truly religious discussion almost a necessity. It might be a pragmatic impossibility, but the question of faith still looms.

Taking Fish's central thesis as our guide, armed with the shield of faith, two issues immediately occurred to me, considering Hebert in this light. One, that the condition of God's totality, and our existence in such a universe thus logically mandates that we are slaves, was proffered first, and in a much different way, by Marlowe in *Faustus* and two, that these poems are not *sui generis* as Fish implies; Herbert's poems, it seems to me, are clearly in the form of sermons. Any preacher worth listening to would claim that he or she was operating as a vehicle of the Holy Spirit. And as with any good preacher, the message is uplift and salvation; any dimwit can do hellfire. Herbert sees only glory, Marlowe gleefully sees decay and maelstrom.

It is striking how upbeat Herbert is. *Faustus* is the last free man, a puerile knucklehead, to be sure, but a man whose sin is refusing to kneel. *Faustus'* desire for knowledge is rapacious, and leads him to sell his soul for knowledge and power. He is given several chances to repent, as if the thought of his non-submission was the affront to God that He couldn't allow. Facing his damnation, he cries out, "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament. One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ! Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!" (Marlowe, 336). *Faustus* knows that what is required of him is repentance, and he never capitulates. The closest he comes to repentance comes as he is being literally dragged into Hell: "I'll burn my books!" (Marlowe, 338). That isn't exactly donning the hairshirt. Herbert makes what can seem a logical necessity, put forth by the brilliance of Marlowe, that if God exists, and is all, then we are slaves, be a phrasing for human salvation. The shocking conceit of "The Pearl. Matthew 13:45" lists several arguments of this world against the existence of God, or at least against living in a Christian manner, that in fact empower

that salvation. Herbert and Marlowe may seem odd bedfellows for an essay, but they clearly swam in the same water and would have understood each other, if perhaps not liked each other. It is telling that we assign them roles in our literature that make them much simpler to categorize.

Finally we are left with words. The Jew heading toward his boiling death:

BARABAS. And, villains, know you cannot help me now.
Then, Barabas, breathe forth thy latest fate,
And in the fury of thy torments strive
To end thy life with resolution.
Know, Governor, 'twas I that slew thy son.
I framed the challenge that did make them meet.
Know, Calymath, I aimed thy overthrow,
And had I but escaped this stratagem,
I would have brought confusion on you all,
Damned Christian dogs, and Turkish infidels!
But now begins the extremity of heat
To pinch me with intolerable pangs.
Die, life! Fly, soul! Tongue, curse thy fill, and die!

It is within my most treasured self to become overly dramatic.⁴¹ But I don't think it is too far to suggest that a certain light is being eclipsed, by a rampaging and rapacious capitalism and a dead eyed devotion to rationality . Masquerading as freedom of thought, our vistas have very limited horizons. But allowing Marlowe to pass into the darkness where he is read and wondered at by people in narrow fields of the academy is sinful. The works of Christopher Marlowe are a communion of the shrieks emitted by our souls, of the fear of the dark, of the fear of death, of despair, of void of meaning: the

⁴¹ One hates to blame an irish childhood for everything, but, you know.

mess of our life, both woeful and sublime: the poetry and the glorious mess of Marlowe can make our bleached flour, beer commercial, sweatshop clothing world just that more inhabitable, more humane, and more human, which is itself a miracle.

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