

Vincenzo Pasquarella

Christopher Marlowe's Representation of Love

*A Challenge to the English
Renaissance Amorous Discourse*



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Introduction

In the last few decades, academic interest in Shakespeare's contemporary poets and playwrights has increased considerably. Several studies have proved that writers such as Lyly, Nashe, Watson, and Marston brought a significant contribution to English Renaissance literature and culture, and favoured the emergence of Shakespeare's creative genius. Although Christopher Marlowe has long been included among these writers, the importance of *Hero and Leander* within both the playwright's macrotext and the tradition of English love poetry has been unjustly underestimated.

Considered by most critics as a fragment written during the early stage of Marlowe's artistic career, *Hero and Leander* has been the object of numerous textual corruptions and misinterpretations. Contemporary scholars unanimously agree that, in moving beyond Petrarchanism, Marlowe provides the readers of his *epyllion* with an original representation of love¹. How and to what extent this representation is original is, however, far less clear. Some critics believe that the originality of the poem lies in the overt celebration of sensual love². Others argue that the text is the result of the influence of Neoplatonic love philosophy on its author, and hence that it is pervaded by a moral tone³. Regarded as contradictory, these contentions have led some scholars to infer that *Hero and Leander* was left incomplete because Marlowe was unable to provide a suitable conclusion to a poem which conveys radically different messages⁴.

In this study, my aim is to suggest a solution to the issues raised in this critical debate, which will lead to a better understanding of Marlowe's poetics and of his artistic achievements. By analysing *Hero and Leander* in relation to *Edward II*, I intend to argue that the repre-

¹ See Neuse 425–26; Logan 290; Altieri 152; Koppenfels 129; Brown, "Breaking" 64, and Summers, "*Hero and Leander*" 147.

² See Banerjee 49; Adamson 81; Chou 530; Brown, "Gender" 160, and Roe, 38.

³ See Tucker–Brooke, "Christopher" 514; Walsh 39; Turner, "Pastoral" 397; Cantelupe 298, and Viviani, "*Hero and Leander*" 337–55.

⁴ See Ellis–Fermor 128; Morris 115; Hulse 123; Lerner 139, and Haber, "'True'" 386. For a more detailed survey on the major twentieth century critical discussions of Marlowe's *epyllion*, see Bakeless 2: 99–101.

sentation of love in both works is deliberately ambivalent. On one hand, the texts suggest that, through sensual love, the main characters ultimately intend to experience the union of their souls. On the other hand, they seem to seek sensual delight for its own sake. Created through skilful intertextual patterns of reference as well as an experimental use of several narrative and dramatic techniques, the ambivalence is intrinsic in the structure of the texts.

By providing an ambivalent representation of love both in *Hero and Leander* and *Edward II*, Marlowe brought a significant contribution to the cultural and literary process of radical change in the notion of love, which characterised English poetry and drama from the last decade of Elizabeth's reign to the first half of the seventeenth century. In the major narrative poems such as Lodge's *Scillaes Metamorphosis*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and Marston's *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalion's Image* (published in 1589, 1593, 1594, and 1598, respectively), as well as in plays including Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well that Ends Well* (written in 1604), and Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (composed in 1621), love is neither idealised nor the object of moral judgment, but it is presented as sensual experience *in actu*. Even though these works differ greatly, they share an emphasis on the effects of love, and on the actions and responses it exacts, rather than on love as a trans-human experience. Such an emphasis is particularly evident in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and *Edward II*.

The similar treatment of love in the two works, as well as their numerous textual analogies provide evidence that the *epyllion* was composed during the last years of Marlowe's life, when he wrote the history play, which is dated around 1591.

So far, a systematic analysis of *Hero and Leander* in relation to *Edward II* may have been discouraged by the consideration that the texts are remarkably different in many ways: they belong to distinct genres and were originally meant for a different addressee; the poem is written in couplets, whereas the play is in blank verse; in *Edward II*, staged actions, asides, actors' gestures, and stage properties are as meaningful as the dialogues and the soliloquies. Yet, textual evidence, which testifies that these works are closely interrelated, is so overwhelming that it makes it astonishing that this type of analysis has not

been attempted before, especially if one considers that some analogies between the texts have been noticed since 1931⁵. The analogies investigated in my dissertation fall into three main categories: rhetorical strategies, imagery, and intertextual patterns of reference⁶.

This study is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, I will provide a critical interpretation of the emblematic title–page of the 1598 edition of *Hero and Leander* published for Paul Linley, and of the history of the poem’s textual transmission in order to demonstrate that the text has been arbitrarily modified by modern editors and its message substantially reshaped since its early editions. The chapter will not include a critical survey of the textual transmission of *Edward II* because, as far as I am aware, the textual variants found in the early quartos do not affect the representation of love in the history play. Modern editors’ emendations which are relevant to my study are, however, discussed critically in the following chapters⁷.

In the second chapter, I will analyse same–sex love imagery by applying Van Gennep’s notion of liminality. In his *Rites de Passage*, the anthropologist explains that life is characterised by three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. He defines the second stage as a “limen”. Before acquiring a well–defined position in society, subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity – a sort of social limbo which has the features neither of the preceding, nor of the following stage (14 ff.). Through a close reading of the texts, I intend to prove that characters such as Leander, Neptune, Edward and Gaveston are liminal lovers, who ultimately seek sensual pleasure for its own sake, and voice an original amorous discourse. Created through puns, allusions, metaphors and intertextual patterns of reference, the discourse is polysemous, and hence it crosses the boundaries of time, age, sex, and literary genres.

⁵ See Praz, “Christopher” 210–11. Further mention of the analogies between these text is included in Morris 77, Holmes 151, Heaney 27, and Tromly 158.

⁶ By “intertextual pattern of reference”, I mean, like Segre, the interrelations which concern specifically textual passages (107 ff.). See also Pugliatti 389–93. For a critical survey of the major interpretations of the notion of intertextuality, cf. Allen, *Intertextuality*, and Bernardelli.

⁷ The earliest edition of *Edward II* is an octavo, but most modern editors refer to it as a quarto because the cut double sheets went through the press in this manner.

The representation of love in both *Hero and Leander* and *Edward II* is ambivalent, as I will demonstrate in the third chapter, focused on the function of sight. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first two sections, I will show that the main characters' love experience is delineated by recalling key notions in Neoplatonic love philosophy: they fall in love through sight, and they are ultimately driven by a genuine desire to enjoy a higher form of beauty. Since, as argued in the previous chapter, lovers are presented as attracted by sensual pleasure for its own sake, the texts are enriched with a thematic ambivalence which is never resolved once and for all. The ambivalence is further developed by suggesting that, in beholding their own beloved, lovers seek sensual delight, as I will argue in the third section.

In the last section, I intend to prove that, under the influence of the major Renaissance theories of perspective, Marlowe enhances the ambivalence through an experimental use of several narrative and dramatic techniques such as the narrative voice, asides, doubled roles, and staged actions.

In the last chapter, I will investigate the references to "maskes" in Leander's speech to Hero, and Gaveston's soliloquy. By analysing the texts in relation to Marlowe's literary and cultural context, I will argue that beyond both references there lie allusions to the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Employed by Leander and Gaveston as seductive strategies, the allusions provide important insights into the nature of their affection. As the *Commedia dell'Arte* was based on ironic and parodic exploitation of Petrarchan and Neoplatonic love conventions, the allusions heighten the thematic ambivalence within the texts⁸.

For convenience, I will retain this reference throughout my study.

⁸ Throughout my study, I will conform to the MLA documentation style (cf. J. GIBALDI, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, New York, The Modern Language Association of America, 1999).

The history of textual transmission of Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*

“Noch bei der höchst vollendeten Reproduktion fällt eines aus: das Hier und Jetzt des kunstwerks — sein einmaliges Dasein an dem Orte, an dem es sich befindet”¹

(Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*)

My study (and this chapter, in particular) is based on a theoretical assumption which is increasingly accepted by contemporary scholarship: an appropriate interpretation and critical appreciation of a literary text is not possible without an investigation into its textual variants and a knowledge of the history of its transmission. It is undeniably true that methodologies and the ultimate aim of textual critics differ substantially from those of literary critics. And it is likewise true that such a high level of specialisation is required in both fields that it may seem inconceivable for a scholar to be a textual as well as a literary critic.

Yet, it is worth pondering over what is usually taken for granted. Two features deeply link textual to literary critics: firstly, both are involved in deciphering a literary work; secondly (and most importantly), the texts that they deal with are not given once and for all, but they are the result of a complex ongoing process of which their creation and interpretation are only two stages. The notion of an abstract, trans-historical “text”, on which all the major literary theories of the twentieth century implicitly rely, is a fallacy because it fails to recognise that, far from being unquestionably right, the choices made by editors and publishers of a literary work contribute to reshaping its meanings, thus influencing the readers’ interpretation. As Roger Chartier rightly argues:

¹ “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” 222. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The translation is by Harry Zohn, and is included in Arendt’s edition.

Readers [...] never confront [...] texts detached from any materiality. They hold in their hands or perceive objects and forms whose structures and modalities govern their reading and hearing, and consequently the possible comprehension of the text read or heard. In contrast to a purely semantic definition of the text, which characterises not only structuralist criticism in all its variants but also literary theories concerned with reconstructing the modes of reception of works, it is necessary to maintain that forms produce meaning, and that even a fixed text is invested with new meaning [...] when the physical form through which it is presented for interpretation changes².

To agree with Darnton, “The history of reading will have to take account of the ways that texts constrain readers as well as the ways that readers take liberties with texts”³.

This awareness is essential to a literary critic, especially when dealing with poems such as Christopher Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* that has been arbitrarily and substantially modified since its first publication, in 1598. In this chapter, I intend to prove that, throughout the centuries, the textual integrity of Marlowe’s *epyllion* has been undermined seriously and its original message obscured. The choices made by Chapman, the early publishers and the modern editors of the poem have greatly contributed to strengthening the assumption that the poem is a fragment. Far from conforming to Marlowe’s aesthetic criteria, these choices have led readers to neglect that the amorous discourse in the *epyllion* is deliberately complex, so it can not be read in the light of coherence and clarity.

1.1 The meanings and functions of the emblematic title–page of Linley’s 1598 quarto

One of the distinctive features of the history of transmission of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* is the conviction that the text is a fragment. This conviction was not questioned until 1934, when Bradbrook noted that, although the *epyllion* does not conclude with the death of the main characters, its final lines are an appropriate ending⁴. Brad-

² Chartier 50-51.

³ Darnton 79.

⁴ Bradbrook “*Hero and Leander*” 64.

brook's contention gave rise to a lively debate over this issue. In agreeing with her, some scholars have argued that, far from being self-evident, the idea that Marlowe's poem is a fragment was created by Blount, the publisher of the earliest quarto, who had the rubric "*Desunt nonnulla*" (i.e. "some things are lacking") printed at the end of the poem⁵. Other critics have read the several allusions to the death of the main characters within the text as evidence that Marlowe meant to provide his poem with a tragic conclusion, and hence that the poem is incomplete⁶.

While this contention is legitimate, the allusions pointed out by the critics may be explained as Marlowe's deliberate attempt to remind his readers of the traditional conclusion of the mythical tale, thus stressing that his version is original. The emblematic title-page of Linley's quarto, the earliest edition which presents Marlowe's poem along with Chapman's presumed continuation, provides further evidence in support of Bradbrook's contention and testifies to the crucial role played by Chapman for the transmission and interpretation of the text (fig. 1).

In his study on printers and publishers' devices in early modern England, McKerrow describes the emblem in question as follows, "51x45 mm. Framed device apparently representing a flower open in the beams of the sun, and another, on the same stalk, closed at night"⁷. From the depiction of their leaves and corollas, it can be deduced that the flowers represent two marigolds. Above the closed marigold, there is a scroll with the motto "*Non licet exigvis*" (i.e. "It is not permitted to those of mean spirit"). Above the scroll, there are five objects, presumably representing torches. Above the frame of the emblem, there is the legend "*Ut Nectar, Ingenium*" (i.e. "Genius is like nectar").

The picture of the emblem recalls the physiological property of marigolds which open in the sunlight. This property was known in Renaissance England. In his herbal, Henry Lyte explains, "The Mari-gold [...] doe[s] close at the setting downe of the Sunne, and doe[s] spread and open agayne at the Sunne rising" (116). Accordingly,

⁵ Cf. Campbell, "*Desunt*"; Gill 185; Tromly 161; Grande 25, and Darcy 27.

⁶ Cf. Tjarks; Miller, "The Death" 764, and Haber 374–75.

⁷ McKerrow *Printers* 124.

Shakespeare refers to the marigold as the flower “that goes to bed with the Sun, / And with him rises, weeping”⁸.

Renaissance emblematisers provided this property with an allegorical interpretation. In regarding the sun as a simulacrum of divine intellect, they considered the marigold a byword for virtue, and often associated it with their patrons. Paradin points out that he dedicated the emblem representing a marigold to Margaret, Queen of Navarre, in order to “evidently expresse, how that she referred all her cogitations, affections, vowes, words & deedes to almightie God, onely wise, and euerlasting, as one that meditated vpon heauenly things with all her heart”⁹.

In early modern England, marigolds had a religious connotation, and were often employed to decorate graves, or in wedding ceremonies¹⁰. Poets and playwrights were aware of the implied symbolism of these flowers, and exploited it in their works¹¹. Shakespeare provides a significant example of how the semantic implications of marigolds may be explored fully. In the first scene of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a boy sings an epithalamion dedicated to Theseus and Hippolyta. The song includes the following lines:

- 7 Prim—rose fist borne child of Ver,
 Merry Spring times Herbinger,
 With harbels dimme.
 Oxlips, in their Cradles growing,
 Mary—golds, on death beds blowing,
 12 Larkes—heeles trymme. (I.i.7–12)¹²

⁸ *The Winter's Tale* IV.iv.105–6. The text is quoted from Wells's edition. Further reference to Shakespeare's texts is from this edition.

⁹ Paradin 46, fig. 2. Other instances may be found in H. PEACHAM, *Minerva Britannia*, London, W. Dight, 1612, sig. D3^r; G. FERRO, *Teatro d'Imprese*, Venice, Giacomo Sarzina, 1623, p. 370 (fig. 3), and G. WITHER, *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne*, London, Robert Milbourne, 1635, p. 209 (figure 4).

¹⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the cultural connotations of marigolds in Renaissance England, cf. Macht.

¹¹ See, for example, the poem *A Nosegay Always Sweet* 1–4; Spenser's *Virgils Gnat* 665–69, and Shakespeare's *Pericles* IV.i.13–17.

¹² As is known, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was not entirely written by Shakespeare, but textual scholars attribute the first act of the play to him. For a more detailed analysis of the authorship of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, cf. Proudfoot.