

*Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify*. Andrew Duxfield.

Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. viii + 164 pp.  
\$109.95.

---

---

This study argues that Marlowe's ambiguity reflected and interrogated the political appeals for unity at the end of the sixteenth century. Elizabethan England demonstrated anxiety about the threat from Spain and religious controversies embodied in the Martin Marprelate pamphlets and the rise of the Jesuits. The playwright, cynical and subversive, challenged simplistic thinking about these issues, using *Doctor Faustus*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and *Edward II* as his means. Hence Duxfield's introduction occupies itself not with the plays but with texts of cultural history devoted to contemporary discord authored by polemicists as diverse as Robert Hitchcock, George Wither, and William James.

Chapter 1 asserts that *Dido* mirrors the discourses of empire and imperialism that Elizabeth encouraged. The second chapter explains how Tamburlaine's ultimately doomed attempts at conquest mirror England's fear of failure in this type of colonization. Chapter 3 posits that Faustus's chief failure is to unify knowledge, an impossible quest in a world defined by self-interest, hypocrisy, and religious fraud. The next section investigates these problems further in *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris* by focusing on the marginality of Barabas and the Huguenots. Chapter 5 traverses much of the same ground in *Edward II*. Though the king and barons prize and seek

political harmony, the play shows, through its ambiguity and indeterminacy, that idealization may actually interfere with practical attempts to unify a culture and a country.

Duxfield follows the critical tradition in Marlowe studies that views his work as “interrogative and transgressive” (11). Although the book is serviceably written, it could add more to the discussion than it actually does. It partakes rather more than necessary with the dissertation form on which it is based. Much of the criticism that the text engages is dated, the many large block quotations tend to distract the reader from the argument, and verbal tics such as “the fact that” should have been noted and excised by an attentive copyeditor. Yet several of the book’s insights foretell greater work to come. *Dido* reveals Marlowe’s recognition that Virgil’s epic itself is “embedded in a discourse of political legitimization achieved by telling stories” (31). Barabas “asserts his independence by distancing himself from reductive notions of Jewishness” (94). Marlowe “presents the world as an indeterminate and ambiguous place which is resistant to reductive, unifying projects” (37).

The chapters are moderately well organized so that one paragraph seems to lead to another. The style is unpretentious and sensibly restrained in syntax, theory, and jargon. The book unquestionably shows a good working knowledge of Marlowe’s plays, and consistently stays on the topic of unity and fragmentation and the contemporary angst about it in the late sixteenth century.

M. L. Stapleton, *Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne*