Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify by Andrew Duxfield (review)

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final chapter. That piece, "Shattering the Glass Menagerie," by Terry Galloway, M. Shane Grant, Ben Gunter, and Carrie Sandahl is engaging on the page and evokes the potential of Johnston's premise.

Ann M. Fox's essay, "Reclaiming the Ordinary Extraordinary Body: Or, The Importance of *The Glass Menagerie* for Literary Disability Studies," deserves particular praise in this strong collection. This essay is in sharp alignment with the overall objectives of Johnston's volume, including when Fox writes that

> we can find examples of disability representation that, when more carefully parsed, suggest that disability has been an integral subject for and part of social protest for longer than we might suspect…. That is important to critics like me *and* to readers new to disability studies: it encourages us to reclaim disability history in ways that, while acknowledging ableism and oppression, also fully appreciate its presence as generative, innovative, and creative. It suggests there are opportunities to explore disability *and* these plays anew, an exciting situation for both the critic and the artist (132, emphasis original).

Fox then turns to demonstrate what that careful parsing might look like when considering *The Glass Menagerie*: both scholars' responses and theatre practitioners' insights are included. Fox's consideration of how actors with disabilities might transform and recharge this play suggests the theatrical merit of such contributions.

Johnston's work demonstrates the benefits of thinking creatively about how to navigate ableist attitudes and structures. Throughout, she makes a convincing case that disability has a historical role in modern theatre *and* that attentiveness to disability theatre practices offer creative, compelling choices within this art form. The creative impact of a sustained inquiry into disability theatre is apparent throughout this work; often, the political reverberations are evident as well.

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Andrew Duxfield. *Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify.* Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. Pp. viii + 164. $112.00.

Scholarship has often focused on the role of excess in the plays of Christopher Marlowe, from his overreaching protagonists and their aggrandizing dreams of imperial expansion or accumulation of riches and knowledge to the sumptuousness of the playwright's "mighty line" and the exotic worlds created by Marlowe's language. Andrew Duxfield's study instead focuses on "the process of reduction and the ideal of unity" exhibited in Marlowe's tragedies (1). Noting the widespread concerns in the 1580s over "the discordance of society and desire

for a move towards unity" (3), Duxfield argues that Marlovian drama explores such anxieties but does so in tension with his more typically noted emphasis on expansion, renegotiating and undercutting any attempt at reduction via the sheer ambiguity of the plays (1). The drive to unity as Duxfield describes it encompassed state, personal, and spiritual concerns (5), and is treated skeptically by Marlowe, who consistently produces an air of "moral ambiguity" in his tragedies, often through irresolution (5).

The first chapter, on *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, argues that Marlowe "presents the world as an indeterminate and ambiguous place which is resistant to reductive, unifying projects" (37), focusing on the moral ambiguity of Marlowe's Aeneas (his indecisiveness and lack of chivalry) and his failure to live up to Virgilian expectations. Authority itself is ambiguous in the world of *Dido*, where the petty and humanized role of the gods serves "to deny the audience a stable moral framework on which to build their interpretation of the play" (22). "Moral indeterminacy" is also fostered by the dichotomizing of duty and desire in this play, which serves as an "integral device" for the interrogation of authority (28). The reduction of the *translatio imperii* myth to a vehicle for English imperial propaganda is resisted and problematized, and the attempt to unify through "national self-fashioning" (33) is seen as highly fraught.

The megalomaniac Tamburlaine's attempts to "subdue the known world and unify it under his yoke" (39) is the focus of chapter 2, where the infinite variety of the world ultimately cannot be reduced to a map to confute blind geographers. Duxfield argues that a "profound uneasiness" accompanies the plays' attempts at colonial and cartographic reduction (46), and that Tamburlaine's ultimate failure is the result of the disjunction between his reductive view of the world and himself (he thinks only in absolutes) and the more complex reality. The moral, physiological, and religious ambiguities of the protagonist are examined, the latter (especially his oscillation between acknowledging various faiths and remaining atheistic) preventing him from "creating a spiritually unified self-projection" (54). Familial and emotional factors further contribute to the fundamental inability of Tamburlaine to reduce complexity to a unified and unitary identity (63).

In chapter 3, Doctor Faustus's failure to achieve the "unification of knowledge" he so desperately craves (66) is seen as the source of his tragedy. The ambivalent nature of the protagonist's moral identity and the play's inherent generic ambiguity (caught midway, as it were, between a medieval morality play and a Renaissance tragedy, as numerous critics have noted) exacerbate the situation: the play displays "a sceptical awareness of the incompatibility of different ideologies that co-existed in this period" (87), offering to be everything but failing to unify as any one thing. An especially interesting contribution in this chapter is the reading of Marlowe's

play through the lens of Hermeticism and its attempts to reconcile religion with the pursuit of knowledge to "potentially provide a solution to the religio-political schism of the time" (87).

The possibility of religio-political unification is pursued further in chapter 4's focus on both *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris*, and the tension in each between the "multitude" and the "individual." In Malta, Barabas famously occupies a "paradoxical state of belonging and not belonging" (90), effectively sacrificed by the governor in order to bring about the greatest good for the multitude. The tension between unity and individualism is played out through this concept of the "multitude," and Duxfield argues that "Machiavellianism is symptomatic of a broader interest in the notion of the multitude as a unified collective" (90), especially as discussed in Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. Religious unity serves a political purpose as an "expedient fiction" in Marlowe's Malta (105), where the state is shown to constantly suppress competing ideals "in order to keep alive the impression of a common interest" that is politically useful (107). "Collective endeavour collides with individual interests" in Marlowe's Paris too, where Papists and Huguenots are not so dissimilar after all and the sympathies of the audience are manipulated once again (107). Somewhat disconcertingly, unity and the concept of commonality are suggested most strongly during the "series of ritualistic murders" (111). The temporary unity achieved by the Guise serves only a private interest and "in no way serves the interest of a common good" (114).

Duxfield's final chapter addresses Marlowe's last and most ambiguous of plays, *Edward II*, and its undermining of "the validity of the concept of unitary natural order" (117). That the play is predicated on disunity is obvious enough; Duxfield argues, though, that reunification is not possible in Edward's world, where the fine balancing of competing factions' interests prevents audience sympathy from firmly attaching to any one particular group, and where each faction is ultimately codependent on others for its very existence, rather than offering an independent unified front against the other factions. The play is riddled with tensions and contradictions: the king, for example, must maintain separation from his subjects (the barons) yet wants to dissolve that separation to be united with Gaveston (144). The urge and simultaneous inability to control and unify the "limitless variety" of the world (148), to reduce it to something coherent or manageable, is characteristic of the 1580s and 90s in England (147) and a hallmark of Marlowe's dramas.

One is left wondering what Ashgate's demise will mean for Marlowe studies. Sara Munson Deats and Robert A Logan's *Christopher Marlowe at 450* (2015) and their *Placing the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (2008); Logan's University Wits

volume on Marlowe (2011) and his *Shakespeare's Marlowe* (2007); M. L. Stapleton's *Marlowe's Ovid* (2014) and his co-edited (with Sarah K. Scott) *Christopher Marlowe the Craftsman* (2010); these are just some of the landmark Marlowe publications of recent years, fostered and supported by Ashgate. Duxfield's book is a worthy inclusion in this lineage, and Marlovians will have to wait to see what Routledge intends to do in the critical space they've acquired.

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Kurt A. Schreyer. *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii + 258. $49.95.

This is a first book, with all that that implies: the courage of discovery, wide reading, an assurance about putting past (and not so past) scholars right while approving the methodologically congenial, as well as confidence in its argument. The risk is always that in the search for support in like-minded books, scholars fail to consider the assessments of and reactions to those books; it is difficult not to believe what we want to be true, and perhaps we don't talk enough with people from other disciplines. The title is clear: it belongs to the growing chorus that insists upon continuity between an undemarcated "Middle Ages" and a "Renaissance" that focuses on Shakespeare in order to claim for him immediate experience of the Mystery Plays, those cycles that made summer holidays attractive for pageantry. Although Schreyer certainly knows that he should be careful, he cannot help slipping into making Shakespeare the center. Writing about how theatre audiences might have learned to recognize the below-stage trap as a door to Purgatory, he claims that "before and during Shakespeare's boyhood, the teachings, objects, and practices associated with Purgatory underwent a profound repudiation" (114), using Shakespeare as a proxy for a period of confusion as well as change. He forgets the huge variety of the population.

His major success is to have used the succeeding announcements known as the Chester Banns, official documents now available in the REED (Records of Early English Drama) volume for Cheshire, which supported the continuation of cycle plays for the civic pride of Chester, their guilds, and people who came to watch them. That is, they resisted attempts to suppress old-fashioned religious plays in order to support a complex and popular civil activity based on tradition and historical precedent. It is amusing to find Ranulph Higden, the fourteenth-century translator of Bartholomeus Anglicus as well as a certain amount of historiography, being referred to as one of the Ancients of the city. But it must be