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**THE IRONIC NARRATOR IN CHRISTOPHER
MARLOWE'S *HERO AND LEANDER***

by

KYLIE LEMON

A THESIS

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in
The Department of English
to
The School of Graduate Studies
of
The University of Alabama in Huntsville**

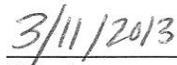
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

2013

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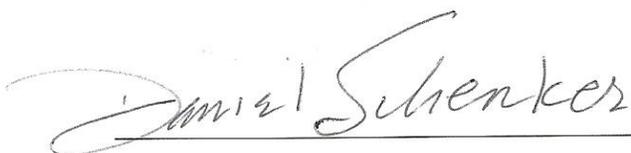
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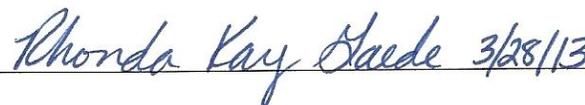
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ABSTRACT

The School of Graduate Studies
The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Degree: Master of Arts College/Dept: Liberal Arts/English

Name of Candidate: Kylie Lemon

Title: The Ironic Narrator in Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*

In his minor-epic poem *Hero and Leander*, Christopher Marlowe creates a narrator whose distinctive narrative presence and unique personality make him impossible for the reader to ignore. Existing scholarship often dismisses this narrator as an unintelligent and inept storyteller who is used by Marlowe to achieve a comedic effect; however, this study argues for a reevaluation of Marlowe's narrator as one who uses a sophisticated form of irony to achieve an alternative purpose. A close-reading of this narrator-character in light of Wayne Booth's and Linda Hutcheon's discussions of irony reveals a narrator whose use of seemingly contradictory statements, less-than-flattering descriptions of Hero and Leander, and ironic interjections enable him to alert his readers to a flaw in the relationship between the poem's title characters. In this way, Marlowe not only establishes a unique narrative voice, but he also uses his narrator as a vehicle to challenge the traditional reading of a popular mythological story.

Abstract Approval: Committee Chair



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project could not have been accomplished without the help of the many individuals who have served as my teachers, mentors, and colleagues throughout my time at the University of Alabama-Huntsville. First of all, I would like to thank those directly involved in this project. Dr. Jeffrey Nelson, thank you for initially encouraging me to pursue my thesis, and for serving as the director of my project; your constant support and regular feedback was a vital factor in the success of my project. Dr. Chad Thomas, thank you for serving on my committee and for offering valuable feedback for revisions; your suggestions went a long way to strengthen the overall quality of my project. Dr. Eric Smith, thank you for serving on my committee and for challenging me to consider aspects of my argument that I never would have considered without your insight and guidance. Your feedback helped me to see my project in a new light and forced me to think about the greater importance of my work.

I would also like to thank Dr. Alanna Frost for all of the support and guidance she has given me in the past two years. You have taught me so much about teaching writing, and I am grateful for all of the opportunities you have given me to continue improving as a teacher.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction.....	1
II. A New Perspective Regarding Marlowe’s Perplexing Narrator.....	4
III. Textual Clues and the “Scene” of Irony in Marlowe’s Work.....	13
IV. The Ironic Purpose of Marlowe’s Narrator.....	29
V. Conclusion.....	40
WORKS CITED.....	44

INTRODUCTION

Since it was first published in the late sixteenth century, Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, a unique translation of the famous poem written by Musaeus, has achieved considerable attention from readers and critics alike; however, the poem seems to have enjoyed a return to the spotlight by scholars in the later half of the twentieth century. Critics such as Robert E. Knoll, and W.L. Godshalk are specifically interested in the outspoken storyteller and creative personality that Marlowe crafted to narrate the well-known mythical tale. Through two separate textual analyses of Marlowe's work, these authors trace the narrator's thoughts and actions throughout the poem in order to expose the narrator as an unintelligent, long-winded, and inept storyteller. In a sense, these scholars, along with others, argue that the narrator is simply a satirical tool used by Marlowe for comedic purposes. It wasn't until the turn of the century that John Leonard suggested an alternative reading. Although the focus of Leonard's work is not on the narrator, in the midst of his discussion he offers the view that perhaps Marlowe's narrator is being *consciously* ironic and thus using his seemingly inept statements and behaviors to manipulate his readers. Although a new and interesting idea, the scope of Leonard's project prevents him from fully developing this discussion. It is this suggestion by Leonard that served as the seed for my study and the following discussion of Marlowe's narrator. This study seeks to explore the possibility that Marlowe's narrator can be read

as a reliable source of information and that he uses a sophisticated form of irony to alert readers to a new understanding of Musaeus's original poem.

Through a close textual analysis of the statements made by the narrator, along with a comparative analysis of Marlowe's work with that of his contemporaries, I will argue that not only can the narrator's statements and comments be interpreted as ironic, but the historical and cultural context in which Marlowe was writing supports the use and attribution of this irony. Considering the broader cultural context of Marlowe's work and the popular trend of literary translation that was taking place during the Renaissance, reading Marlowe's narrator as ironic may actually make more sense than the alternative reading. In the introduction to her collection, *Elizabethan Minor Epics*, Elizabeth Donno explains that during the Renaissance, "it was the young poet[s] then, intoxicated with the rimes of 'sweet-lipt Ovid,' who popularized the erotic epyllion. Utilizing some well-known myth for the core of their narrative, these poets stressed originality not of subject matter but of treatment" (18). In creating an ironic narrator, Marlowe achieves this "originally" in a way that a simple unreliable narrator does not. Indeed, when read ironically, Marlowe's narrator is not only unique but his ironic statements support a reading of the poem that challenges the traditional reading of the classical myth. The narrator's careful language choice casts judgment on the characters in the poem, and his seemingly contradictory statements lead the reader to question the sincerity of the love between Hero and Leander; in this way, Marlowe is able to offer a reading of the tragic tale of Hero and Leander unlike anyone else's.

In order to fully grasp the argument that I propose, it is imperative that readers understand the critical conversation regarding Marlowe's narrator to which I am

responding; thus, the first chapter of this study offers a detailed discussion of this debate and its pertinence to my project. In addition, a basic understanding of both the concept of irony (specifically in relation to the theories of Wayne Booth and Linda Hutcheon) and the historical and cultural context in which Marlowe was writing is essential to my argument; chapter two, therefore, contrasts Marlowe's work with the work of his contemporaries and also discusses how this context informs an ironic reading of the text. Finally, chapter three offers a close textual analysis of the poem with a focus on how the statements made and language used by the narrator can be read as ironic and thus alert the reader to an alternative reading of Musaeus's tragic tale of Hero and Leander.

CHAPTER ONE

A New Perspective Regarding Marlowe's Perplexing Narrator

In *Hero and Leander*, Marlowe creates a distinct narrator; rather than accept the role of reserved storyteller, the narrator freely comments on the events unfolding around him, often interjecting his own thoughts and opinions directly into the narration of the myth. In this way, Marlowe introduces a narrative voice that is distinct from Marlowe's own and impossible for the reader to ignore. This narrator has gained a considerable amount of attention by scholars because many of his comments influence the way that the reader interprets (or misinterprets) the events of the poem. Despite the narrator's sophisticated language and intellectual persona, most critics question the reliability of Marlowe's narrator on account of the contradictory nature of his statements. W.L. Godshalk and Robert Knoll¹ are two of the most prominent examples of this view, and they argue that Marlowe uses the narrator's incompetence for comic purposes. In contrast, John Leonard² and Erich Segal offer arguments which shift the humor of the poem away from the incompetent narrator and over to the characters themselves. All of these scholars offer interesting and compelling views of the poem, but their arguments in

¹ The work of Paul M. Cubeta also takes a similar approach and Chiney Banerjee argues that while the narrator is serious, he still serves as a comic device in the poem.

² William Keach offers a suggestion similar to Leonard's although he sees the narrator's attitude towards the characters shifting throughout the course of the poem rather than staying consistently ironic.

regards to the narrator himself are problematic. Although Godshalk and Knoll are justified in the reservations they have regarding Marlowe's narrator, their focus on the unreliable qualities of this character fail to take into consideration the moments of clarity and sophistication that mark him throughout the poem. The scope of Leonard's project prevents him from developing a thorough perspective of the narrator's objectives, and Segal fails to consider the role the narrator plays in the textual account of the characters' actions.

The view of Marlowe's narrator as unreliable does not take into account the many times throughout the poem that he does accurately describe the story he is telling; therefore the reservations expressed by Godshalk, and Knoll are arguable. Although Godshalk's main discussion surrounds the ending of *Hero and Leander*, part of his argument relies on the connection that he sees between the narrator and the young lovers. Godshalk reinforces throughout his work that Marlowe's narrator "cannot be trusted" because his comments often do not seem to correlate with the action he is witnessing; in Godshalk's words: "a good deal of his interpretations seems to miss the point" (307). The problem, however, is that although he says that the narrator "seems to miss the point," he himself admits that at times we can accept the narrator's "vision" (309). So, can we truly categorize the narrator as inept? The narrator's incompetence is essential to Godshalk's overall conclusion because he sees a parallel existing between the narrator's inability to narrate the story effectively and the inability of Hero and Leander to continue having a love relationship at the end of the poem (312). He concludes that *Hero and Leander* is "Marlowe's human comedy, and the bumbling artist merely rounds out his picture of the human condition" (312). In this reading, Marlowe's narrator must be inept

in order to support his assertions, but this does not account for the complete picture we are given of the narrator throughout the course of the poem.

Knoll paints a similar description of Marlowe's narrator as "a pedantic, humorless romantic" who "does not perceive the implications of the dramatic situation he writes about" (129). However, rather than highlighting a parallel between the narrator and the lovers, for Knoll, the narrator's "obtuseness" simply allows the reader to laugh at him from the beginning of the poem until the end (129). This reading, like Godshalk's, represents a limited reading of the narrator as it only characterizes him according to his contradictory statements; it does not take into account all of the comments that the narrator contributes to the poem. This view of the narrator, however, is crucial for Knoll's argument because he believes that Marlowe's overall purpose in *Hero and Leander* is to imitate the story-telling technique used by Ovid in *Amores*, the *Amatoria*, and the *Remedia Amoris* (130). He asserts that just as Marlowe does in *Hero and Leander*, Ovid creates a narrator in these poems of "limited ability and makes sport of his lack of understanding" (130). Once again, it is a fundamental aspect of Knoll's argument that the narrator be read as unreliable, but it does not account for the numerous moments of clarity that the narrator does exhibit during his articulation of the myth.

Another limiting feature of Knoll's discussion is the fact that even though he acknowledges a difference between Marlowe and his narrator, Knoll provides no clear evidence or explanation as to how readers can confidently determine where the narrator's voice ends and Marlowe's begins; this makes it difficult to argue against the reliability of a narrator whose persona is not distinctly defined as a separate entity from that of the author. Knoll explains: "The narrator is clearly not Christopher Marlowe; for the narrator

speaks out several times in the first person” and “none of these first person references can be identified with Marlowe. The ‘I’ is clearly the conventional poet, and all the action is reported from his single, conventional point of view” (129). Unfortunately, Knoll’s discussion of the poem does not maintain a clear separation of the two; Knoll uses the two interchangeably by repeatedly commenting on both the narrator’s perception of events and also Marlowe’s own views. This can be seen in the following passage when Knoll points out: “The speaker sees love as cruel, but Marlowe and we see its violence as necessary to its joy” (136). Here, it is unclear how the separation between the narrator and Marlowe is being made. Knoll does address his cross-referencing by explaining that he believes that “we see each scene through two sets of eyes at once- one, those of a sympathetic romantic, the narrator; the other, the eyes of a man of experience, Marlowe himself,” but the discussion ends there (138). Readers are left wondering where the narrator’s voice ends and Marlowe’s begins, and this lack of distinction makes Knoll’s characterization of the narrator’s unreliability less convincing.

Despite my reservations about the view of the narrator in these two studies, it is important to recognize that Godshalk and Knoll both have good reason for their lack of trust in Marlowe’s narrator. While it is true that at times the narrator’s statements seem to slightly contradict the events unfolding in the story that he is telling, at other times the narrator accurately dictates the story. In fact, while both authors center part of their argument around the unreliability of the narrator, both also rely on the narrator’s account of events. For example, Godshalk tells us that the narrator “belabors a truism” when he makes a comment about how the lovers are over-ruled by fate, and in the next paragraph he suggests that his commentary indicates “possibly, a more profound vision of the

poem” (309). So, in quick succession, not only does Godshalk suggest that readers mock the narrator’s use of elevated language, but he also asserts that the narrator’s statements may in fact point readers to a valid understanding of the poem’s overall purpose. Why is it that Godshalk can sometimes trust the narrator, but at other times he cannot? Because the arguments of both Godshalk’s and Knoll’s articles depend on the unreliability of Marlowe’s narrator, it seems to me that these readings suppress any alternative interpretations of the narrator. Although we can— like Godshalk and Knoll— read the narrator’s contradictions as a result of his incompetence, we can just as easily look at them in another way.

Leonard and Segal view Marlowe’s poem differently in that they attribute the humor of the poem not to the narrator’s incompetence, but to the characters themselves; however, both authors fail to fully develop how this argument affects our view of the narrator. In Leonard’s account of Marlowe’s narrator, he chooses— like Godshalk and Knoll— to focus on the discrepancies between the events occurring in the poem and the narrator’s explanation, but he sees these discrepancies as a conscious choice made by the narrator to appear inept and thus accomplish an ulterior motive. Leonard cites Godshalk throughout his essay and agrees with his general description of the narrator as “inept,” but he takes his reading one step further by suggesting that Marlowe uses the narrator’s unpredictability to manipulate his readers (57). Like Knoll, Leonard notices that the narrator assumes a tone characterized by a “wry, understated humor,” but he proposes that (rather than an imitation of Ovid) the narrator is actually “being consciously ironic” in order to discredit Hero (58). He concludes: “by feigning ineptitude, the narrator makes Hero’s actions speak for themselves— and they compromise her more effectively than any

cynical comment by him could do” (61). Through this reading, Leonard is able to suggest an alternate interpretation of Marlowe’s “inept” narrator. The “bumbling,” “obtuse” narrator of Godshalk’s and Knoll’s readings becomes a cunning storyteller who feigns incompetence in order to highlight the actual shortcomings of a character within the poem. The problem with Leonard’s argument is that it is only part of his greater project; as a result, he only briefly discusses this characterization of the narrator before moving on to other problematic aspects of the poem (61). If the narrator has an ulterior motive for being ironic throughout the poem, what else might his comments reveal to the reader when looked at from this perspective? Is his motive, as Leonard suggests, to discredit Hero, or is Marlowe using this narrator for some other purpose? Leonard succeeds in shifting the humor of the poem away from the narrator’s ineptness over to Hero’s compromising actions; but leaves room for further discussion to take place.

Segal’s work, like Leonard’s, also highlights the problematic nature of the characters themselves; however, his discussion fails to take into consideration the role that the narrator plays in this condemnation. Comparing Marlowe’s work to Gongora’s translation of the same myth, Segal suggests that both authors create an imitation of Musaeus’s original poem that reveals “cynical views of conventional love” (350). In his discussion of *Hero and Leander* in particular, Segal exposes the artificial qualities and lustful behaviors of Marlowe’s title characters to point out the “false and unnatural quality” of the love between them (351). Segal makes a compelling case for the characterization of Hero and Leander’s relationship as one centered around pure lust as opposed to love, but he is unable to spend much time fully developing these ideas because so much of his argument is related to the comparison between Marlowe’s and

Gongora's translations. In addition, by leaving the narrator out of his discussion, Segal fails to acknowledge the difference between Marlowe the poet and the speaker whom Marlowe created. This is the same problem that Knoll experiences in his study. In Segal's case, several times he references Marlowe's use of harsh language and images to describe the love of Hero and Leander, but are these the words of the poet or of the narrator? Godshalk brings up this exact question when he asks: "How ultimately do we distinguish between Marlowe and the narrative voice?" (307). Godshalk concludes that we are "stuck with the narrator. It would be helpful to see certain passages as Marlowe's own guideposts to the reader; the guideposts are, however, simply not there" (307). Indeed, we are "stuck with the narrator," so despite Segal's compelling reading of the relationship between Hero and Leander, this discussion cannot be fully complete without some acknowledgement of the role that the narrator serves to both the poem itself and the characterization of the lovers. It is easy to forget who is telling the story and thereby confuse Marlowe with his creation, but Marlowe's clear characterization of a separate narrator cannot simply be ignored.

Although much of the scholarship surrounding the narrator of *Hero and Leander* suggests that Marlowe created for his readers a narrator that "cannot be trusted," in light of the work that has been accomplished by Leonard and Segal, a new perspective on Marlowe's narrator needs to be explored. I argue that an alternative reading of the narrator as ironic not only accounts for the contradictory statements that he makes throughout the poem, but also explains why at times, he does demonstrate a coherent understanding of the story he is narrating; moreover, this reading informs a compelling

view of the narrator's overall purpose in the poem as that of a character placed by Marlowe to point out the lustful nature of the well-known tragic lovers.

Taking into consideration Marlowe's historical context, my discussion demonstrates the possibility that in *Hero and Leander* Marlowe actually creates a sophisticated narrator that *can be trusted*, and whose ironic presence throughout the poem enables Marlowe to write a translation of *Musaeus* that most likely shocked and impressed his contemporaries because of its stark diversion from the original, and its utilization of a new type of narrator. By incorporating a narrator who uses judgmental language, intentionally contradictory statements, and periodic interjections all throughout the course of the story he tells, Marlowe develops a persona whose conspicuous presence in the poem cannot be ignored by the reader. Add to this the fact that Marlowe's readers were exceedingly familiar with narrator's tale, and the conditions become extremely suitable for the successful use of irony to take place. The alterations Marlowe makes to the myth of Hero and Leander would have been apparent to those familiar with it and, in turn, those changes would have alerted Marlowe's readers to the ironic nature of his narrator's comments. Indeed, when the poem is read in this way, it becomes clear that everything that the narrator says can be interpreted as ironic and that this irony serves a greater purpose in the poem. Rather than simply being a verbatim translation of Ovid or Musaeus, Marlowe's translation instead establishes him as someone who cannot only write like the greats, but as someone who can take the work of the greats and do something new and unexpected. The irony employed by Marlowe's narrator serves to accentuate a fundamental flaw in the relationship between Hero and Leander; thus, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* challenges the traditional reading of an extremely popular

myth. In Marlowe's version, Hero and Leander are not the most tragic lovers of all time; rather, their relationship is purely sexual in nature, and Marlowe uses his ironic narrator as the vehicle by which he is able to expose this negative view of the tragic lovers.

CHAPTER TWO

Textual Clues and the “Scene” of Irony in Marlowe’s Work

Although the term itself was not widely used during the Renaissance, the concept of irony was utilized and understood by Marlowe and his contemporaries. D.C. Muecke explains that “the word ‘irony’ does not appear in English until 1502 and did not come into general literary use until the early eighteenth century,” but despite this absence of ironic vocabulary, English “was rich in colloquial terms for verbal usages which we might regard as being embryonic irony” (17). By the time Marlowe was writing, the use of irony was well established in literary works; in fact, in his 1589 work of poetic criticism, *The Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham offers an entire chapter on the “sensable figures altering and affecting the mynde by alteration of sence or intendements in whole clauses or speeches” (196). Throughout this chapter Puttenham discusses different aspects of language that today might be considered ironic in nature; he writes about the use of riddles, proverbs, sarcasm, and hyperbole among others (196-206). Although his definition of “ironia” as “the dry mock” does not encompass all that our modern conception of the term “irony” entails, the examples he provides to illustrate the various derivations of “ironia” suggest a notion of irony that is similar to our modern understanding (199-201). The similarities between our modern definition and Puttenham’s explanation can be seen in Muecke’s more recent study of irony; in it, he

agrees with Chevalier's assertion that "The basic feature of every irony is a contrast between a reality and an appearance" (33). He asserts that irony differs from deception, however, in that "in irony the real meaning is meant to be inferred either from what the ironist says or from the context in which he says it; it is 'withheld' only in the weak sense that it is not explicit or not meant to be immediately apprehensible" (Muecke 35). The similarity of this definition to that of Puttenham's suggests that even though the term used to identify irony has changed since the Renaissance, the general concept of irony has not. But, short of asking the author his intentions, how do we know if something is ironic? In regards to *Hero and Leander* specifically, how do we know that Marlowe intends for his narrator to be ironic rather than inept? With the help of Wayne Booth's and Linda Hutcheon's discussions of irony, I will offer possible answers to these questions.

In his well-known *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Wayne Booth provides a discussion of the common features that appear in ironic works; Booth suggests locating these formations in a text as a methodology for recognizing irony in a written work, and this method can be applied to Marlowe's minor epic poem. Booth asserts that "ironic reconstructions depend on an appeal to assumptions, often unstated, that ironists and readers share" (33). In addition, he identifies clues within the text that may indicate irony such as the following: contradictory statements, a speaker that "betrays ignorance or foolishness," a disruption in the style of the speaker, and a "conflict between the beliefs expressed and the beliefs we hold and *suspect the author of holding*" (57-73). So, according to Booth, if a close textual analysis of a work reveals the presence of the features listed above, there is a chance that irony is at play. However, Booth also asserts that in addition to identifying

clues within the text, the reader must have some inclination “to reject the intended meaning”; the reader must be “unable to escape recognizing either some incongruity among the words or between the words and something else he knows” (10). This is where the “shared assumptions” mentioned above become incredibly important because they enable the reader to “get” the ironic meaning. While Booth’s method helps to establish the possibility of irony in Marlowe’s poem, the problem with a text like *Hero and Leander* is that a 21st-century reader is not always going to have the experiences and shared assumptions necessary to be alerted to an ironic purpose, even if one does exist. In order to better enable ourselves to judge the likelihood of irony in a given text, it becomes imperative that we take into consideration the historical context in which the text was first published.

While Booth looks specifically at the common features of ironic texts, Linda Hutcheon looks at the broader context or what she terms the “scene” in which irony occurs, and her explanation of this “scene” enables us to think about the larger historical and cultural context in which Marlowe was writing. She argues that the “scene” of irony is a “social and political scene” that happens “as part of a communicative process” (4; 12). According to Hutcheon, irony is dependent on the “discourse” in which the irony occurs; in other words, irony’s “semantic and syntactic dimensions cannot be considered separately from the social, historical and cultural aspects of its contexts of deployment and attribution” (17). What this means is that in order to understand if an ironic reading of a text is possible, we must not only look at the text itself, but at the larger context in which it was first published. Hutcheon goes on to explain that irony “happens because what could be called ‘discursive communities’ already exist and provide the context for

both the deployment and attribution of irony” (18). These “discursive communities” thus establish a target for the irony— that is, those people who will understand and respond to the ironic features. As Hutcheon states, “it is the overlapping of some of the communities of ironist and interpreter that sets the stage for the transmission and reception of intended ironies” (20). Without these communities of shared knowledge and as Booth suggests “shared assumptions,” the ironic meaning would be lost. The question we must ask in regards to *Hero and Leander*, then, is whether or not Marlowe was a part of a discursive community that would “get” his irony? In order to answer this question, we must closely examine the “scene” in which Marlowe was writing the poem.

Evidence of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* was first recorded in 1593 and the first official printed edition came in 1598 amidst a flood of similar works of poetry that have been termed “minor epic” or “epyllion.” William Weaver explains that these poems “filtered erotic, epic, and mythological themes through the sieves of wit, learning, and rhetoric” (388). Fueled by the practice of “literary imitation” that so often took place in sixteenth century schoolrooms, most of these poems offered unique translations of works originally written by Ovid and other early poets (Donno 1). However, as Roma Gill points out, these translations were not simply verbatim transcriptions into English, but imitations that took the original source and offered a new or different interpretation (337). Gill suggests that the term “competition” might be a more appropriate term than “imitation”— at least in regards to the work of Marlowe (337). By examining not only Marlowe’s sources, but the other minor epic poems that were influencing and being influenced by Marlowe’s work during the Renaissance, we can begin to see how the context in which Marlowe was writing created an environment that was especially

conducive to the production of irony. In addition, a comparative analysis of Marlowe's narrator with those used by his contemporaries reveals the way in which Marlowe was able to construct a special type of narrative voice in order to offer a unique interpretation of the traditional myth.

With the text of *Hero and Leander*, Marlowe specifically names the "divine Musaeus" as his main source for the myth, but it is possible that Ovid's "Heroides XVIII-XIX" also influenced his writing. These sources offer Marlowe the underlying tragic storyline of Hero and Leander, but they both use narrative voices that are drastically different than the one used by Marlowe in his interpretation. In *The Divine Poem of Musaeus*, the narrator seems to offer an unbiased, straightforward telling of the tale. Musaeus's narrator is outside the action of the story and rarely offers any commentary or opinions related to the events unfolding around him.³ In fact, Musaeus does not offer any characterization whatsoever in regards to the narrator, and this gives the impression that the narrator and the poet are one and the same. In contrast, Ovid's "Heroides XVIII" is narrated by Leander and "Heroides XIX" by Hero. "Heroides XVIII" is written in the form of a letter from Leander to Hero, and we are thus given access to Leander's own thoughts and feelings. In the first line, Ovid's Leander refers to himself in third-person, but throughout the rest of the piece, the first-person narration allows us to follow the events of the poem through his eyes. Similarly, "Heroides XIX" is Hero's response to receiving Leander's letter. Told from Hero's perspective, Ovid allows his readers to glimpse the fears, insecurities, and love that Hero feels for Leander. Although the basic

³ The narrator does offer one parenthetical statement about beauty in line 56, and another brief comment about love in lines 281-284. All other parenthetical references made by the narrator offer additional information or background information regarding the story, but these two moments are the only two moments of direct commentary made by the Musaeus' narrator throughout the course of the poem.

storyline for Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* can be traced to these two original sources, Marlowe's narrative structure is drastically different. His method of narration, however, may not have been completely his own creation.

Another source that may have influenced Marlowe's distinct narrative voice was Thomas Lodge's *Scillaes Metamorphosis*; Marlowe, however, takes Lodge's example and alters it slightly for his own unique purposes. Published in 1589—well before Marlowe's poem was first recorded—Lodge's work is “an Ovidian narrative of love” that helped to establish many of the standard characteristics of the “erotic-mythological verse narrative” (Donno 6). *Scillaes Metamorphosis* chronicles the love story of Glaucus, but Lodge offers a narrative perspective that is very different from that of *Musaeus* or Ovid. Lodge's poem is framed in such a way that the narrator acts as a central character in the action of the poem; that is, he is physically present in the scene and describes the events unfolding around him. The poem begins with the narrator walking along in the forest lamenting the sorrows of his life when he encounters Glaucus who attempts to ease the narrator from all of these sad thoughts. Soon they are approached by many “Nimphes” and others gods and goddesses, and the narrator describes for the reader the interactions between these mythological beings.

Throughout the course of the poem, the narrator witnesses the tragic story of Glaucus and Scilla, and often reveals his own emotional response to the events occurring around him. For example, before the full tragedy unfolds, the narrator admits that “within my heart a sodein joy did move” while he was watching the Nimphes playing and Venus praising Glaucus (Lodge 94.6). Another way that the narrator becomes a distinct character throughout the poem is in his repeated references to his muse and direct

interactions with the characters. Early in the poem the narrator exclaims: “My wandering lines, bewitch not so my senses:/ But gentle Muse direct their course aright/...Yeeld me such feeling words, that whilst I wright/ My working lines may fill mine eyes with languish” and at the end of the poem, Glaucus tells the narrator to leave and “let the world and ladies knowe/Of Scillas pride” (Lodge 73.1-5; 130.2-3) By characterizing the narrator in this way and by creating this type of narrative framework in the poem, Lodge is able to establish a clear separation between himself and his narrator. In *Hero and Leander*, Marlowe makes a similar distinction. Just as Lodge does, Marlowe creates a narrator that has a distinct personality in the poem. The main difference, however, is that Marlowe’s narrator is a casual observer; he simply narrates the events as they unfold as opposed to being a direct part of the action. He still has his own unique voice and offers judgments and commentary related to the poem’s characters and their actions, but he is not directly involved in the events. In this way, Marlowe offers his own distinct narrative perspective in *Hero and Leander*.

Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* is another poem that helped establish what became standard characteristics in the minor epic poetry published during the English Renaissance; however, although similar in their use of mythological conventions and subject matter, Shakespeare and Marlowe differ in the narrative persona they create to narrate the myth. Donno refers to *Venus and Adonis* as the “second prototype of the erotic epyllion” behind Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*; she explains that “impressionable Elizabethan poets, essaying the ‘first fruits’ of their endeavours, turned either to Marlowe or to Shakespeare and, very frequently, to both” (10-11). Shakespeare’s poem offers a similar courtship between two lovers, but rather than the male seducing the female, the

roles are reversed— Venus is the one pursuing Adonis. When viewed beside *Hero and Leander*, it is apparent that Shakespeare and Marlowe were writing in the same time period, genre, and with many of the same works as source material. Both authors use highly decorative language, refer to mythological beings, and write about the sexual encounter between two characters. Yet, despite the fact that they are similar in their conventions, and mythological source material, Shakespeare and Marlowe do not use the same narrative perspective in their poems.

In *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare employs a narrator that more closely resembles Ovid's objective, third-person narrative technique than the first-person narrative voice used by Lodge and Marlowe. Although Shakespeare's narrator at times uses adjectives and metaphors that could be read as casting judgment on the characters, he never speaks directly from a first-person point-of-view and does not offer commentary in response to the actions of the characters in the poem. For example, after the reader witnesses the developing anger in Adonis during an exchange with Venus, the narrator explains that Adonis betrays this anger through his looks by saying, "His meaning struck her ere his words begun./ And at his look she flatly falleth down" (462-463). Just after relaying this information to the reader, the narrator inserts a side comment as a plausible explanation for Venus's reaction; he says: "For looks kill love and love by looks reviveth" (464). Here, this interjection comments on the events occurring in the poem, but it does not offer the narrator's own response to or judgment of the situation; rather, it simply helps the reader to understand Venus's strange reaction. The response of Shakespeare's narrator in this situation is very different and much less judgmental than the frequent interruptions and comments made by Marlowe's narrator throughout *Hero and Leander*.

Although Marlowe may have been influenced by much of this early epic poetry and that of his contemporaries, he created a narrative voice in *Hero and Leander* that is distinctly his own. Steering away from the objective third-person narrator of *Musaeus* and also avoiding Ovid's use of the personal narrative voice, Marlowe produces a narrator-character that slightly resembles the narrative voice that was first introduced by Lodge. Granted, Marlowe may have borrowed from Lodge the idea of a first-person narrator that has a distinct personality in the poem, but it is here that the similarities between Lodge's and Marlowe's narrators cease. Rather than being a part of the action of the story, Marlowe's narrator serves as the storyteller whose technique is one that is categorized by the frequent use of aphorisms, judgmental language choice, and interjections about the character's actions that all take on an ironic tone. The following examination of Marlowe's narrator in comparison with the narrators used by Marlowe's contemporaries reveals not only evidence of several of Booth's textual clues or indicators of irony, but it also affirms that the historical context in which Marlowe was writing was filled with a community of readers and writers who would pick up on the ironic tone of Marlowe's narrator.

To begin with, throughout *Hero and Leander* the narrator's fondness for aphorisms becomes apparent. After introducing and individually describing Hero and Leander, the narrator begins sprinkling aphorisms about the nature of love throughout the narration of the myth. These aphorisms appear frequently throughout the text and usually come in direct response to what is happening in the poem. Most importantly, they mark an abrupt change in the style of the narrator's speech, and this is one of the features that Booth identifies as an indicator of irony in a text. The fact that they often occur in quick

succession whenever the relationship between Hero and Leander is being discussed further alerts the reader to a possible ironic meaning behind the statements. For example, the narrator explains how all who viewed Hero were “enamored” by her and how many men would fight each other in her presence in order to gain her favor— many being moved to intense rage and violence (115-127). The narrator then inserts the following aphorism in response to this description: “For faithful love will never turn to hate” (128). This comment helps to highlight the fact that none of the men who are acting in this hateful fashion are actually in love with Hero; they are just lusting after her beauty. Even more interesting though is the fact that later in the poem Leander betrays his anger towards Hero when she is constantly resisting his advances. At one point she is so concerned that “Fearing her own thoughts made her to be hated./ Therefore unto him hastily she goes,/And like light Salmacis, her body throws/ Upon his bosom, where with yielding eyes,/ She offers up herself a sacrifice,/ To slake his anger” (528-532). It would seem that there is an irony in the narrator’s earlier statement since the title lovers of the poem seem to be contradicting the narrator’s description of love. There are throughout the rest of the poem similar moments when the narrator offers an aphorism that comments on or responds to the events being dictated by him, and often these statements contain an ironic undertone. Donno suggests that this “gnomic quality” may have actually been imitated by some of Marlowe’s contemporaries— specifically Thomas Edwards (12).

In *Cephalus and Procris* (1595) Edwards retells the tragic story of these two lovers through the eyes of a narrator that is very similar to Marlowe’s. Like the narrator in *Hero and Leander*, Edwards’ narrator does not sit back and let the story objectively unfold; rather, he is quick to offer his own insights in regards to what is happening in the

poem, and often these insights come in the form of aphorisms about the nature of love and lovers. These moments occur throughout the piece, but one particular example takes place right after Cephalus continues to resist the advances of the god Aurora; after explaining Aurora's displeasure, the narrator points out: "For love is pittillesse, rude, and impartiall,/ When he intends to laugh at others fall" (271-272). Although Edwards' characterization of a narrator who uses aphorisms to comment on love is similar to Marlowe's, the function of aphorism in the narration of their respective poems differs for each. Whereas the aphorisms in Edwards' poem seem to accurately describe the action or characters being addressed, the aphorisms in Marlowe's poem contradict the behavior being shown by the characters and thus give the narrator a witty and ironic purpose.

In addition to the narrator's tendency to use ironic aphorisms, many of the other statements and interjections that he makes also contain a hint of irony, and these features contribute to the uniqueness of Marlowe's narrator. Throughout *Hero and Leander*, the narrator offers a series of contradictory statements that often cause scholars to call the narrator "inept" or "foolish." Yet, the presence of these contradictions and of a seemingly "ignorant" narrator are two of the textual features that Booth highlights in his discussion of ironic markers. So rather than indicate a shortcoming of the narrator, these contradictions may in fact reveal an ironic narrator whose aim is to alert the reader to an alternative meaning. The narrator's description of the initial meeting between Hero and Leander provides a good example of a scene where one of these contradictions takes place. The narrator explains that when the characters first met, "These lovers parled by the touch of hands;/ True love is mute, and often amazed stands" (185-186). Here, the narrator seems to suggest that Hero and Leander are deeply in love because they need not

speak, but only touch hands; however, Leander's actions directly following this episode do not consist with this assertion about the powerful nature of love. Instead of staying "mute" and "amazed" in Hero's presence and content with the "touch of hands," Leander instead "like a bold, sharp sophister," begins his nearly 150-line attempt to seduce Hero with his words (197-340). Leander's clear contradiction of the narrator's earlier statement about love highlights the narrator's ironic purpose. These contradictions continue to appear so frequently throughout the remainder of the poem that the reader begins to expect them and thus pick up on the ironic nature of the narrator's comments. Again, it has been suggested that Marlowe's contemporaries may have sought to mimic this "witty, ironic strain" that was so unique to him (Donno 12).

John Marston's *The Metaphorphosis of Pigmaliions Image* (1598) employs a narrator whose comments contain a similar hint of irony and in turn give the poem a comedic tone. In his retelling of the story of how the sculptor Pigmalion fell in love with one of his creations, Marston incorporates a narrator whose witty comments help to increase the reader's amusement. Throughout the poem, the narrator offers comments about the nature of love based on the actions and feelings of Pigmalion towards his creation. For example, the narrator explains how Pigmalion is constantly admiring and complimenting every aspect of the statue's features and then suggests: "Loves eyes in viewing never have their fill" (7.6). Later, the narrator also relates Pigmalion's reaction to the narrator's own life when he say: "O that my Mistres were an Image too,/That I might blameless her perfections view" (11.5-6). The irony and amusement in these two statements lies in the fact that the narrator is not commenting on "real love" or even a "real" person. Pigmalion claims to be in love with an object, not a person, so the fact that

the narrator is making judgments about the nature of love based on this example is absurd. The irony embedded in the narrator's statements thus makes the already comedic behavior of *Pigmalion* even more amusing. Once again, even though Marston employs a narrator that is similar to Marlowe's, what sets Marlowe's narrator apart is that his irony is used not just for pure amusement, but rather to suggest a particular reading of the characters themselves.

Not only do the narrator's ironic statements set him apart and help him to achieve a specific purpose, but the adjectives, metaphors, and other language choices used by the narrator often take on an ironic tone as they cast explicit judgment on the characters and their actions. From the beginning of the poem, the narrator relates Leander to a "bold, sharp sophister" and suggests that in his first conversation with Hero, Leander "accosted her" (Marlowe 197-198). Before Leander even speaks the narrator describes him in such a way that suggests that Leander is false and forceful in his interactions with Hero. In addition, the narrator consistently employs words such as "amorous" and "enamored" to describe Leander and the way in which he and other men viewed Hero (Marlowe 51;118). According to the OED, these words often had a sexual connotation during the time that Marlowe was writing. Enamored was not merely to be in love but "inflamed with love" and *amorous* was often used in a way specifically "pertaining to (sexual) love"; thus, the choice of these particular words suggests this sort of lustful relationship between Hero and Leander ("Enamoured"; "Amorous"). The narrator's use of these descriptive phrases becomes ironic because they are markedly different than the positive language that was originally used to describe the lovers by *Musaeus* and *Ovid*. *Musaeus*'s "sweetly grac't Leander" and "Gracefull Hero, borne of gentle blood" whose

“kinde cares cost their dearest breath” are perceived very different in Marlowe’s version. (32; 47; 20). This is just one way that Marlowe uses his narrator to encourage a new reading of the relationship between Hero and Leander.

This idea of employing a judgmental narrator is not unique to Marlowe; in *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* (1602), Beaumont’s narrator casts similar judgment on the characters. He refers to Salmacis as a “proud lascivious Nymph” and also suggests that she has a “lustie thigh” (Beaumont 135;107) In contrast, the adjectives used to describe Hermaphroditus are “wel-shapt,” and “lovely,” and he is further described as “beauties chiefe king” and “fairer then the god of love” (Beaumont 14; 79). From these examples alone, the reader gets a sense of how the narrator feels about each of these characters. In this way, the narrator’s use of language to cast judgment on the characters is similar to Marlowe’s narrator, but Beaumont’s narrator doesn’t seem to have a greater purpose in doing so. Whereas Marlowe’s narrator seems to offer a purposefully suggestive reading of the character traits associated with Hero and Leander, the language used by the narrator in Beaumont seems to just be the inherent by-product of a first-person narrative perspective. Beaumont’s narrator is also similar to Marlowe’s in that he offers commentary about the nature of love and direct references to the actions of the characters. The main difference between the two, however, is that Beaumont’s narrator comments much less frequently than Marlowe’s, and most of his comments simply provide additional information or background knowledge about the events happening in the poem. Only at the very beginning of the poem does the narrator offer commentary directed at and judging the actions of the characters. Despite their similar use of language, Marlowe is unique in his ability to use his narrator’s language in tandem with

ironic commentary to compel the reader toward a new and different reading of the classical myth of Hero and Leander.

When compared with the narrators used by his contemporaries, Marlowe's stands out because of the ironic force he uses to inform his readers, and a brief examination of this narrator in *Hero and Leander* confirms its presence in the text because many of Booth's ironic identifiers are present within the poem. Booth lists contradictory statements, and a seemingly ignorant narrator as features of the text itself that often indicate an ironic presence, and both of these features appear in Marlowe's work—particularly in relation to the narrator. Moreover, the contradictory statements in Marlowe's work often come in the form of aphorisms commenting on the nature of love; these aphorisms mark both an abrupt change in the style of the narrator's speech, and a conflict between the character's actions and the perception by Marlowe's readers of how two people in love would behave—two more features identified by Booth as markers of irony. In regards to the cultural context, Marlowe's work appears in a discursive community, which resembles the “scene” of irony described by Hutcheon. As shown in the comparison between Marlowe's work and his contemporaries, Marlowe was one of many writers during the Renaissance completing translations of Roman and Greek myths in the minor epic style. Douglas Bush explains that “Musaeus enjoyed a special fame among writers of the sixteenth century because he was regarded as the earliest of Greek poets” and also because “the somewhat unclassical quality of the Greek poem commended itself to Renaissance taste” (126). This community of writers would have been familiar with not only Marlowe's sources, but with other translations; therefore, any subtle changes or areas where Marlowe strayed from the original source would be readily

apparent to this group of readers. They would inevitably pick up Marlowe's ironic intentions. Even outside of this group of writers, the broader cultural context surrounding the work would have also been very much familiar with the original story of Hero and Leander; according to Bush, "a multitude of readers knew the story through the letters in the *Heroides*" and "in England there were countless allusions to the tale" (126). It has also been noted that in 1592 Abraham Fraunce was said to have exclaimed: "Leander and Heroes loue is in euery mans mouth" (qtd in Bush 129). The popularity of the original myth to both Renaissance writers and readers constitutes the "scene" that, according to Hutcheon, is essential for irony to take place. The discourse of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was thus especially conducive for Marlowe to write a translation of *Musaeus* that introduces an ironic narrator; his irony, in turn, would not have been lost on his readers. With the "scene" in place and the textual clues present throughout the poem, it simply takes a subsequent close reading of the poem for the ironic nature of the narrator's comments to emerge.

CHAPTER THREE

The Ironic Purpose of Marlowe's Narrator

Rather than being a part of the action of the story, Marlowe's narrator serves as a storyteller whose technique is categorized by the frequent use of aphorisms, judgmental language choice, and interjections about the character's actions. Although at first glance many of these statements seem to contradict the actions of the characters or fail to describe the characters adequately, when looked at more closely, it becomes apparent that all of the narrator's comments can be read as ironic. Taking into account both the existence of textual features in the poem that have been flagged by Booth as indicators of irony and also the fact that the literary community in which Marlowe was writing resembles the "scene of irony" described by Hutcheon, the idea of an ironic narrator becomes increasingly convincing. Even more compelling is the realization that when the narrator is read ironically, his storytelling technique not only becomes unique, but he also seems to accomplish an ulterior motive. Whereas the myth of Hero and Leander is traditionally read as the most tragic of love stories with the relationship between Hero and Leander epitomizing true love, the version told by Marlowe's narrator paints the relationship in a more negative light. By incorporating a narrator who uses seemingly contradictorily statements and less-than-flattering descriptions of Hero and Leander,

Marlowe not only establishes a narrative voice that had not been seen before, but he uses his narrator as a vehicle to challenge the traditional reading of the mythological story.

Arguably, one of the most perplexing aspects of *Hero and Leander* is the series of contradictory statements made by the narrator throughout the poem. These statements are often the focal point of criticism by scholars who see the narrator as “inept,” but when read as ironic, these statements are revealed as *seemingly* contradictory and serve a greater purpose. These statements often come in the form of aphorisms about love and occur in the poem when the narrator describes an encounter between the lovers, Hero and Leander. Although the narrator’s aphorisms make universal statements about the nature of love, the problem is that directly following these statements, Hero and Leander often display contradictory behaviors. In this way, the narrator is able to point out a fundamental flaw in the relationship between Hero and Leander by way of these ironic statements. Rather than telling the tragedy of true love, when read ironically, Marlowe’s work instead exposes the artificiality of the love between Hero and Leander and highlights the lustful nature of the relationship between the two characters.

The irony of Marlowe’s narrator is illustrated in the initial encounter between Hero and Leander. During this episode, the narrator makes a statement regarding the nature of love, but the behavior of the lovers immediately following contradicts the narrator’s words. As Hero and Leander first meet, their hands touch: “He started up, she blushed as one ashamed, Wherewith Leander much more was inflamed./ He touched her hand, in touching she trembled” (181-183). The narrator then asserts, “Love deeply grounded, hardly is dissembled” (184). So, the narrator is saying that when love is firmly established, it is rarely disguised or concealed from others. Most would agree with

the narrator that the initial meeting between Hero and Leander seems to be a heartfelt exchange; however, what happens after this contradicts this statement and calls to question Leander's true feelings. Instead of simply accepting this tender moment between them, Leander instead begins to try to seduce Hero with words: "And now begins Leander to display/ Love's holy fire with words, with sighs and tears,/ Which like sweet music entered Hero's ears,/ And yet at every word she turned aside,/ And always cut him off as he replied" (193-196). Rather than being wooed by his words, Hero is turned off by them. Leander, however, continues his pursuit and does not seem to take into account Hero's feelings; instead, he seems to be only concerned with trying to convince Hero to give up her virginity to him. Once again, Leander's actions do not seem consistent with the narrator's description of love, and if read ironically, the narrator's statement points out the possibility that Leander's interest in Hero may not be wholehearted but lustful.

Another ironic statement made by the narrator during this same episode seems to accentuate the fact that Leander is only interested in a sexual relationship with Hero. After the lovers' hands touch in the earlier scene, the narrator claims, "True love is mute, and oft amazed stands" (186). The narrator says that when two people are in love, words are not necessary to convey the feeling—the love is obvious to the lovers themselves and those around them. Before the narrator makes this statement, Hero and Leander are having this awestruck reaction to each other; however, after the narrator speaks, Leander's behavior quickly changes. Leander breaks the silence and spends the entire next stanza trying to persuade Hero to be intimate with him: "Fair creature, let me speak without offense,/ I would my rude words had the influence/ To lead thy thoughts, as thy

fair looks do mine,/ Then shouldst thou be his prisoner who is thine” (199-202). Again, the irony of the narrator’s statement about love becomes apparent in Leander’s blatant contradiction of it. Rather than emulate the narrator’s assertion that “true love is mute,” Leander instead spends several pages trying to convince Hero that she should give up her virginity to him. Here, the narrator suggests that if Leander were truly in love with Hero, he would not be so adamant in seducing her— especially since it requires her to break the vow of chastity that she made to Venus.

Despite Hero’s resistance, Leander is relentless in his pursuit, and as he tries many different techniques in an attempt to seduce Hero, the appearance of the narrator’s aphorisms about love continue to ironically call attention to Leander’s obvious contradictions of them. When Hero and Leander are alone in her tower for the first time, Leander begins to make progress in persuading her to give up her chastity; this progress can be seen in the following lines: “The more a gentle pleaseing heat revived, Which taught him all that elder lovers know,/ And now the same ‘gan so to scorch and flow,/ As in plain terms (yet cunningly) he craved it,” and elicits this comment from the narrator: “Love always makes those eloquent that have it” (552-556). Here, the narrator asserts that love causes eloquence, and it makes sense that lovers seem to know exactly what to say to each other in times of need or in terms of expressing their passion. The irony lies in the fact that in this scene Leander is being “cunning,” not eloquent. He is deceitfully attempting to trick Hero into being intimate with him by using every possible rhetorical strategy that comes to mind. The only reason that he does not succeed is because at the last moment, she flees from him: “Like to the tree of Tantalus she fled,/ And seeming lavish, saved her maidenhead” (560-561). Leander, however, fails to accept all of these

rejections as a sign that Hero is unprepared to break her vow of chastity; rather than taking her feelings into consideration, he instead continues his pursuit on the following evening. This episode is just one of many moments throughout the rest of the poem where the seemingly contradictory statements made by the narrator can actually be read as ironic. When looked at in this way, previous interpretations of the narrator as a “bumbling artist” [Godshalk] or a “pedantic, humorless romantic” [Knoll] no longer seem sufficient. Rather than indicating a fundamental flaw in the abilities of Marlowe’s narrator, the ironic statements instead reveal a sophisticated narrator who seeks to expose the artificial nature of the relationship between Hero and Leander. Godshalk’s “inept” narrator is thus revealed an authoritative voice used by Marlowe to guide the reader to a particular understanding of the poem.

With this newfound authority, all of the narrator’s statements and language choices take on an ironic tone and alter our reading of the poem. Looking back, it turns out that although subtle, the narrator’s choice of language and imagery casts judgment and sheds negative light on the relationship between Hero and Leander. For example, the narrator describes the day that Hero and Leander are struck by Cupid’s arrows and made to fall in love as a “cursed day and hour” (131). The fact that the narrator uses the word “cursed” to characterize their union automatically calls to question whether or not the relationship is going to be a positive one. The language used by the narrator to describe the reaction of each character when they are struck by “love’s arrow” also carries a negative tone. The narrator says: “Thence flew Love’s arrow with the golden head,/ And thus Leander was enamored...Relenting Hero’s gentle heart was struck,/ Such force and virtue hath an amorous look” (161-166). Here, the adjectives “enamored” and “amorous”

become ironic because they characterize the moment when Hero and Leander are struck by Love's arrow as one centered completely on lust rather than love. Even though this should be a tender and heartfelt exchange, the narrator's language reveals the beginning of Hero and Leander's relationship in strictly sexual terms, which automatically suggests a purely sexual relationship as well.

It is not just in their initial meeting that the narrator chooses to use such negative adjectives to describe the lovers; he is consistent with his use of these words to describe them throughout the entire poem. Earlier, the narrator describes how men would react to the sight of Hero; he says, "And all that viewed her were enamored on her" (118). Here, the narrator uses this word in the same way as when he describes Leander's reaction to Hero after being struck by the arrow— with a negative connotation. The same holds true for "amorous." When the narrator first describes Leander, he refers to him as "Amorous Leander, beautiful and young" and explains how everyone who Leander met was strongly moved by sexual desire for him (51). The narrator reports that men would say, "Leander, thou art made for amorous play" (88). The narrator clearly uses the word "amorous" in these instances to denote the sexual disposition of Leander, just like when he describes Hero's reaction to Leander after the arrow strikes her. The narrator's word choice is consistent, and as the reader progresses through the poem, it becomes clear why these adjectives accurately describe the lustful behavior of Leander's character.

Later in the poem, the same sort of negative language and imagery is used to describe the more intimate encounters between the two lovers. In their first intimate exchange, the narrator describes Hero and Leander as "greedy lovers," implying that they might have a selfish interest in each other (508). In addition, the narrator's description of

their first sexual encounter is full of negative images; this makes the scene ironic because it does not resemble the intimacy that one would expect to see experienced by two people who share an intense and sincere love. The narrator says of Leander: “His hands he cast upon her like a snare,/ She, overcome with shame and sallow fear/ Like chaste Diana when Actaeon spied her,/ Being suddenly betrayed, dived down to hide her.” (743-746). When read in isolation as above, the negative imagery is difficult to dismiss, and most would agree that this encounter does not seem like an interaction between two who are deeply in love. Leander does not gently embrace Hero in his arms, but he is instead rough in his handling of her, such that she is actually afraid of him and tries to escape.

Later, the same sort of fear is shown when Leander again tries to seduce Hero: “She trembling strove, this strife of hers (like that/ Which made the world) another world beget,/ Of unknown joy. Treason was in her thought,/ And cunningly to yield herself she sought” (763-766). Hero is not trembling in anticipation, but out of fear for what is about to take place. She is not completely giving herself over to love because she sees the sexual encounter between them as “treason.” The narrator even comments on the fact that Hero seems to have been forced or tricked into giving in to Leander when he says “So that the truce was broke, and she also,/ (Poor silly maiden) at his mercy was” (779-780). He sympathizes with Hero (the “poor silly maiden”) for losing something to Leander that she will never be able to get back. The narrator’s negative imagery continues after the sexual act is completed: “For much it grieved her that the bright daylight/ Should know the pleasure of this blessed night./ And then like Mars and Ericine displayed,/ Both in each others’ arms, chained as they laid” (787-790). The narrator doesn’t describe them as embraced, tangled together, or intertwined as authors often

describe lovers in bed; instead, he describes them as being “chained” in each other’s arms. His word choice thus suggests an unpleasant or forced experience, not the passionate sexual encounter experienced by most lovers. This use of judgmental and negative language to describe the lovers seems to achieve the same purpose as the narrator’s aphorisms about love– they expose the false nature of the love between Hero and Leander.

In addition to the narrator’s judgmental language and choice of negative imagery throughout the poem, his storytelling technique is also marked by frequent interjections that showcase the shortcomings of Hero and Leander’s relationship. While many of these interjects take the form of the aphorisms that were discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the most significant interjections made by the narrator is a digression of over 100 lines in which the narrator tells the tale of Mercury and the country maid. Although many scholars point to this digression as further evidence of the narrator’s lack of storytelling skills, I see this digression as the most direct and obvious clue used by Marlowe’s narrator to expose Leander’s purely lustful intentions. Ironically, the relationship between Mercury and the country maid very closely resembles the relationship that we see unfolding between Hero and Leander. Before beginning the story, the narrator explicitly states that he will explain to the reader why the nymphs of the palace of Destinies hated Cupid so much, and although the digression accomplishes this purpose, the parallels that exist between the story of Mercury’s pursuit of the beautiful country maid and Leander’s seduction of Hero suggest an ulterior motive and an ironic intention. To begin with, the description of the country maid is extremely similar to the opening description of Hero. While Hero was “courted for her hair” and praised for “the sweet

smell as she passed/ When t'was the odor which her breath forth cast," the country maid was similarly admired for her hair which "glistered with dew" and for her "breath as fragrant as the morning rose" (6; 21-22; 389-391). In addition, just as Hero has sworn an oath to Venus to maintain her virginity, the country maid's "only dower was her chastity" (412). More striking than the similarities between the two women is the similar way in which they are pursued by their seducers.

Although we are not given a physical description of Mercury to compare to Leander, Mercury's actions toward the country maid mirror Leander's attempts to seduce Hero. Leander's first failed attempt is also fresh in the reader's mind as the narrator recalls it immediately preceding the story of Mercury and the country maid. Using the same verb choice, the narrator explains that both men are "enamored" by the women and try to woo them with words. The narrator writes of Leander: "And now begins Leander to display/ Love's holy fire with words, with sighs and tears... These arguments he used, and many more,/ Wherewith she yielded, that was won before" (192-193; 328-329). In a similar fashion, we learn that Mercury "with his smooth speech, her fancy to assay/ Till in his twining arms he locked her fast,/ And then he wooed her with kisses and at last,/ As shepards do, her on the ground he laid,/ And tumbling in the grass, he often strayed/ Beyond the bounds of shame" (402-407). Both men, however, fail in their first attempt because of Hero's and the country maid's will to protect her respective chastity. As an attempt to thwart her lover's pursuit, the country maid "imposed upon her lover such a task,/ as he ought not perform, nor yet she ask" (429-430). Hero imposes on Leander a similar task— that is, he must swim across the dangerous Hellespont and climb her tower in order to see her again. Both men achieve the seemingly impossible task, so in this way

Leander and Mercury are very much alike. The main difference is that while Mercury is punished, the poem ends with Leander achieving his desire— to sleep with Hero.

Although the narrator's digression provides the reader with information about Cupid, it also serves to alert the reader to the carnal purpose behind Leander's pursuit of Hero.

Not only do Leander's actions mimic those of the lustful Mercury, but this reading of Leander also gives a reason for Leander's eventual fate— a fate that, even though it is not explicitly stated at the end of the poem, is hinted at from the very beginning of Marlowe's piece and was well-known to his readers.

By reviewing the concept of irony and examining Marlowe's poem in light of the work that has been done by Booth and Hutcheon, the possibility of an ironic narrator in *Hero and Leander* seems likely. Booth's "clues" for recognizing irony are abundant throughout the text, and the "scene" which Hutcheon describes as being the ideal environment for irony to thrive is perfectly characterized by the context in which Marlowe was writing. Attention to this irony reveals that all of the seemingly contradictory statements for which the narrator is so often criticized can actually be read as ironic. This revelation changes not only the way that we view the narrator, but also the way we read the poem itself. An ironic reading transforms Marlowe's questionable narrator into a sophisticated and authoritative voice in the poem, and we can then assess the characters in the poem based on the statements and judgments made by this voice. Thus, it suddenly becomes clear that the narrator is not simply telling the traditional tragedy of Hero and Leander; instead, he seems to be pointing out a flaw in their relationship. Not only does he use irony to expose the lustful nature of the interactions between Hero and Leander, but he chooses language and imagery in his descriptions that

highlight this negative attribute. Besides the subtle language and ironic comments, the narrator attempts to alert his reader to his purpose early in the poem by relaying the story of Mercury and the country maid. Masked as an explanation for Cupid's trouble with the nymphs, the parallels that exist between the story of Mercury's pursuit of the country maid and the story of Leander's seduction of Hero are too striking to be coincidence. The insistent Leander is so much like the lustful Mercury that readers cannot help but begin to question Leander's motives in pursuing Hero. By viewing the development of Hero and Leander's relationship through the eyes of this ironic narrator, Marlowe's readers would have seen the popular myth from a new perspective. Gone is the romantic and sentimental story as it was portrayed by Ovid and Museaus, and in its place is the cunning and manipulative seduction of Hero by the lustful Leander. In Marlowe's version, the relationship between Hero and Leander is no longer held up as one of the most tragic love stories of all time; *Hero and Leander* is instead merely the tale of Leander's sexual conquest of the chaste Hero.

CONCLUSION

Written during a time when it was said that “Leander and Heroes loue is in euery mans mouth” and *Musaeus* was hailed by George Chapman as “the incomparable Love-Poem of the world,” Marlowe’s rendition of Musaeus’s tale is anything but ordinary (Bush 126; Donno 16). The type of translation that Marlowe achieves in writing *Hero and Leander* is not merely a translation of Musaeus’s words; rather, it is a demonstration of his ability to take the original and do something new. As Gill asserts, while “Musaeus sang the *tragedy* of the two lovers,” Marlowe “sang their *comedy*” (337). Although many scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries attribute the comedy of the poem to the narrator’s inability to – in their eyes – accurately narrate the tale, it is unclear whether Marlowe’s audience would have necessarily interpreted the narrator in the same way. Marlowe was one of many writers who were producing translations of minor epic poems in a short period of time. Many of these writers incorporated a narrative voice similar to Marlowe’s own, so the narrator himself may not have been as amusing to these writers as the way in which Marlowe used him. Indeed, Marlowe’s ability to develop the popular myth through the eyes of a unique and peculiar narrator not only allowed him to set himself apart from his contemporaries, but it also enabled him to use that narrator to challenge the traditional reading of the classical myth. Whereas the most popular versions of the tale– those written by Ovid and Musaeus– highlight the love between Hero and Leander using sentimental and emotional language, Marlowe’s version paint

their relationship in a much more negative light. Marlowe achieves this purpose not by making an inept narrator, but by making a sophisticated narrator who uses ironic statements to alert his readers to a possible shortcoming of Hero and Leander's love.

By examining the narrator's statements in light of the work done by Booth and Hutcheon, it becomes clear that his seemingly contradictory statements can actually be read as ironic. Booth suggests that irony "often produces a much higher degree of confidence than literal statement" and in the case of *Hero and Leander* this seems to be the case (51). When read as ironic, we no longer wonder about the "bumbling," "inept" narrator; instead, we are alerted to the fact that he is trying to let us in on the true purpose of Leander's interest in Hero. Moreover, the community of minor epic writers that Marlowe was a part of during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries created the perfect target or audience for Marlowe's irony. Using Hutcheon's terminology, this "discursive community" constitutes the ideal context or "scene" for Marlowe's irony to take place because the ironic tone of Marlowe's narrator would have surely been picked up on by his readers. Marlowe is thus able to use his narrator as a vehicle for highlighting a fundamental flaw in the relationship between the two lovers. It is through the narrator's judgmental language and ironic statements that the reader begins to question the sincerity of the love between Hero and Leander. By the end of the poem, Marlowe succeeds in exposing the relationship between two of the most well known lovers of his time as merely a lustful exchange. Marlowe's translation proves that not only can he write like the great Ovid or Musaeus, but it showcases his ability to take a poem written by the greats and do something unexpected.

Marlowe's version of *Hero and Leander* is indeed unexpected. His version demonstrates a feat of literary importance because of its original narrative voice and unconventional depiction of the tragic lovers, but it is possible that Marlowe had an even greater purpose in characterizing the relationship between Hero and Leander as a lustful exchange. According to Fredric Jameson, "Genre criticism...involves the use of three variable terms: the individual work itself, the intertextual sequence into which it is inserted through the ideal construction of a progression of forms...and finally that series of concrete historical situations within which the individual works were realized" (qtd in Marotti 397). In other words, Marlowe's minor epic poem could be responding to a particular historical situation in which he was writing, and just a brief examination into Marlowe's historical period reveals a possible political objective to Marlowe's poem.

By exposing the false nature of the relationship between Hero and Leander, Marlowe comments on the standard conventions of Elizabethan love poetry, and in turn, he criticizes one of the central forms of discourse that was used by the court. This argument is further supported by the fact that Marlowe would not have been the first to take such a stance against this type of poetry. In 1573, George Gascoigne published his prose narrative, *The Adventures of Master F.J.*, to accomplish a similar purpose. The language of the court permeates Gascoigne's narrative, and he purposely recreates the conventions of courtly love only to expose them as false. As Penelope Scambly Schott explains in her discussion of this text and its introductory materials: "All of these convey Gascoigne's attitudes and judgments about poetry and, more specifically, about the amorous poetry of young men" (371). With so many courtiers using amorous love poetry to address the Queen during the end of her reign, it makes sense for someone to come

along and expose the insincerity of this politically driven language of the court. In fact, Arthur Marotti has already discussed this “sociopolitical encoding of love poetry” in his study on the popular genre of sonnet sequences in Elizabethan England (397). Marotti asserts that the use of amorous love poetry was especially encouraged in the court of Elizabeth I as a “means of expressing personal ambition” and that “this particular encoding of love language had wide influence” (398; 399). Although Marotti focuses his work on sonnets, he himself admits that these were “only one kind of love poetry written in Elizabethan England” (398). So, the prevalence of all this love poetry, along with Gascoigne’s blatant censure of it in his prose narrative makes a compelling case for Marlowe’s own criticism of poetic conventions. If this be the case, then Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* becomes even more progressive in nature than my original discussion affirms.

Without further investigation into the specific political influence and relationship between love poetry and the Elizabethan court, it is impossible to say for sure whether or not Marlowe had a greater political purpose in exposing Hero and Leander’s lustful relationship in the poem. It is clear, however, that this revelation is made possible by Marlowe’s ability to craft a unique narrator whose sophisticated use of irony showcases a distinctive twist on an otherwise traditional mythological story. Ultimately, what my project reveals is that Marlowe does indeed “sing the comedy” of Hero and Leander; however, the comedy comes not at the expense of the narrator, or even the mythological characters, but at the absurdity of a relationship established for selfish (or perhaps political) gains.

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