



Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify (Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama)

Andrew Duxfield

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In this sustained full length study of Marlowe's plays, Andrew Duxfield argues that Marlovian drama exhibits a marked interest in unity and unification, and that in doing so it engages with a discourse of anxiety over social discord that was prominent in the 1580s and 1590s. In combination with the ambiguity of the plays, he suggests, this focus produces a tension that both heightens dramatic effect and facilitates a cynical response to contemporary evocations of and pleas for unity. This book has three main aims. Firstly, it establishes that Marlowe's tragedies exhibit a profound interest in the process of reduction and the ideal of unity. Duxfield shows this interest to manifest itself in different ways in each of the plays. Secondly, it identifies this interest in unity and unification as an engagement in a cultural discourse that was particularly prevalent in England during Marlowe's writing career; during the late 1580s and early 1590s heightened inter-confessional tension, the threat and reality of foreign invasion and public puritan dissent in the form of the Marprelate controversy provoked considerable public anxiety about social discord. Thirdly, the book considers the plays' focus on unity in relation to their marked ambiguity; throughout all of the plays, unifying ideals and reductive processes are consistently subject to renegotiation with, or undercut entirely by, the complexity and ambiguity of the dramas in which they feature. Duxfield's focus on unity as a theme throughout the plays provides a new lens through which to examine the place of Marlowe's work in its cultural moment.

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