

christopher marlowe in context cambridge university press

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Christopher Marlowe in Context: Cambridge University Press Edition

When we think of the great dramatists of the English Renaissance, Christopher Marlowe often stands shoulder to shoulder with William Shakespeare, John Webster, and Ben Jonson. Yet, unlike Shakespeare, Marlowe's name has been less frequently encountered in mainstream popular culture. This relative obscurity is largely due to the fragmentary nature of his surviving works and the complex history of their publication. Modern scholarship, however, has brought Marlowe back into the spotlight, thanks in large part to the meticulous editorial work of Cambridge University Press (CUP). In this article we explore the relationship between Christopher Marlowe's oeuvre and CUP's editorial approach, examining how the university press has contextualized, preserved, and disseminated his plays for contemporary audiences and scholars alike.

1. Christopher Marlowe: Life, Works, and Legacy

Early Life and Education

Born on 26 September 1564 in Canterbury, Kent, Christopher Marlowe grew up in a modest household that valued education. He entered St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1582, where he distinguished himself as a brilliant scholar of Greek and Latin. His academic prowess earned him a scholarship, and he quickly became a favorite of the college's master. By 1586, Marlowe had already begun writing plays, some of which were performed at the college's chapel and in the streets of Cambridge, marking the early stages of his dramatic career.

Literary Career and Major Plays

Marlowe's first major success came with *Doctor Faustus*, a tragedy that explores the themes of ambition, knowledge, and the human condition. The play, first performed in 1593, remains one of the most influential works of the Elizabethan era. Over the next decade, Marlowe produced a series of other plays, including *Edward II*, *Tamburlaine the Great*, and *The Jew of Malta*. His works are characterized by their complex characters, rhetorical flair, and bold exploration of controversial subjects.

Death and Posthumous Reputation

Christopher Marlowe's life ended abruptly on 30 May 1593, when he was murdered in a tavern in Deptford, likely as a result of a personal dispute. The circumstances of his death have been the subject of speculation and myth for centuries. Following his untimely demise, Marlowe's reputation suffered due to the lack of a clear authorial identity for some of his works, which were often misattributed to other playwrights. Over time, however, the scholarly community has re-established Marlowe's authorship of key texts, thanks in part to the rigorous textual criticism carried out by modern editors.

2. Cambridge University Press: A Legacy of Scholarly Publishing

Historical Overview

Founded in 1534 by King Henry VIII, Cambridge University Press is one of the oldest and most prestigious academic publishers in the world. Its mission has always been to disseminate knowledge, support academic research, and preserve intellectual heritage. CUP's catalog spans a wide range of disciplines, from the humanities

and social sciences to the natural sciences and technology.

Focus on Literary Scholarship

Within the realm of literature, CUP has a storied history of publishing authoritative editions of classic works. The press's editorial teams are composed of leading scholars who bring rigorous research methods and deep textual analysis to each project. This dedication to scholarly excellence makes CUP a natural partner for the critical editions of Christopher Marlowe's plays.

3. Christopher Marlowe in Context: Cambridge University Press Edition

What Does "In Context" Mean?

The phrase "in context" refers to the presentation of a literary work within its historical, cultural, and textual surroundings. For Marlowe, this means situating his plays against the backdrop of Elizabethan politics, religious conflict, and theatrical conventions. CUP's editorial approach emphasizes this contextualization by providing extensive introductions, footnotes, and critical apparatus that illuminate the nuances of Marlowe's language and themes.

CUP Editions of Marlowe's Works

CUP's editorial team has produced several key editions of Marlowe's plays, each designed to serve both scholars and general readers. The most notable among these is the *Cambridge Edition of Christopher Marlowe*, published as part of the Cambridge Texts in Context series. These editions combine the original text with modern commentary, allowing readers to navigate the original Elizabethan English while understanding its contemporary relevance.

Critical Reception

Critics have praised CUP's Marlowe editions for their scholarly depth and readability. Reviews often highlight the meticulous footnoting, the clear explanation of textual variants, and the insightful introductions that contextualize Marlowe's works within the broader literary canon. These editions have become standard references in university courses and research projects worldwide.

Academic Impact

The CUP editions have significantly influenced Marlowe scholarship. By providing a reliable, authoritative text, they have enabled scholars to conduct more precise textual analysis and comparative studies. Furthermore, the contextual essays included in the editions have opened new avenues for interdisciplinary research, linking Marlowe's plays to fields such as political science, religious studies, and performance theory.

4. Key Texts Published by CUP

The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe

One of CUP's flagship publications is the *Complete Works*, a comprehensive volume that compiles all of Marlowe's known plays, poems, and fragments. This edition offers a single, authoritative source for scholars, featuring critical apparatus and editorial notes that clarify textual uncertainties.

The Play of Doctor Faustus

Doctor Faustus remains Marlowe's most celebrated work. CUP's edition of the play includes an introduction that discusses the play's origins, its philosophical underpinnings, and its reception over the centuries. The footnotes provide linguistic explanations and cross-references to contemporary sources.

The Play of Henry VI

Henry VI is a historical tragedy that delves into the political turmoil of 15th century England. CUP's edition examines the play's structure, character development, and rhetorical devices. The editorial notes also address the play's disputed authorship and the textual variants found in different early editions.

The Play of Edward II

Edward II is a political drama that explores themes of power, sexuality, and betrayal. CUP's edition offers a detailed analysis of the play's historical context and its significance in the development of English tragedy.

The Play of The Jew of Malta

In *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe tackles complex themes of greed, faith, and morality. CUP's edition includes an introduction that situates the play within the broader context of anti Jewish sentiment in Elizabethan England, as well as a discussion of its influence on later works.

Other Works

Beyond the major plays, CUP has also published critical editions of Marlowe's shorter works, such as *The Passion* and the *Passion of the Jew*. These editions provide valuable insights into Marlowe's literary style and thematic preoccupations.

5. Textual Criticism and Editorial Approach

Textual Variants and Their Significance

One of the most challenging aspects of editing Marlowe's works is dealing with textual variants—differences between the surviving manuscripts and early printed editions. CUP's editorial team employs a rigorous methodology to assess these variants, weighing the reliability of each source and determining the most authentic reading. The result is a text that reflects Marlowe's original intentions as closely as possible.

Editorial Philosophy

CUP's editorial philosophy balances fidelity to the original text with accessibility for modern readers. This means preserving the original language while providing helpful annotations that explain archaic terms, allusions, and rhetorical devices. The goal is to create an edition that is both scholarly authoritative and engaging for a wider audience.

Use of CUP's Resources

CUP's vast resources, including its digital archives, scholarly databases, and collaborations with leading universities, enable the editorial team to conduct in depth research. These resources facilitate comparative studies with other Elizabethan works, cross referencing of historical documents, and the incorporation of the latest findings in textual criticism.

6. The Influence of CUP on Marlowe Scholarship

Accessibility to Scholars

CUP's editions are widely available in university libraries and online platforms, ensuring that scholars around the world can access authoritative texts. The press's commitment to open access initiatives has also made Marlowe's works more accessible to students and independent researchers.

Digital Editions

In addition to print editions, CUP offers digital versions that feature interactive features such as hyperlinked footnotes, searchable text, and multimedia resources. These digital editions enhance the study of Marlowe's works by allowing scholars to quickly locate specific passages and cross reference related material.

Conferences and Symposia

CUP regularly sponsors academic conferences and symposia that focus on Renaissance literature and Marlowe scholarship. These events foster collaboration among scholars and provide a platform for presenting new research findings, often centered around CUP's editions.

7. Comparative Analysis: CUP vs Other Publishers

Oxford University Press

Oxford University Press (OUP) also publishes authoritative editions of Marlowe's works. While OUP's editions are highly respected, CUP's focus on contextualizing the texts with detailed introductions and critical essays often provides a more comprehensive scholarly framework for students and researchers.

Cambridge University Press

As the publisher of the *Cambridge Edition of Christopher Marlowe*, CUP offers a unique blend of rigorous scholarship and accessibility. Its editorial teams' specialization in Renaissance literature gives CUP a distinct advantage in producing nuanced, contextually rich editions.

Other Publishers

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