MARLOWE'S HERO AND LEANDER:
THEME AND FORM

by

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CRITICISM OF HERO AND LEANDER:
THE STATE OF THE ART

The nineteenth century "discovery" of Christopher Marlowe, which transformed his status from a relatively unknown and unread poet to an exalted position as a precursor or near equal of Shakespeare, has led to a critical "discovery" in the twentieth century. Commentary on Marlowe's dramatic, as well as non-dramatic, work has been extensive. This chapter presents a survey of critical writings on Marlowe's most famous non-dramatic work, the Ovidian love narrative, Hero and Leander. The purpose of this survey is to point out the direction that past and recent criticism of Hero and Leander has taken and to suggest one particular area which needs more critical analysis.

In regard to literary history, the first problem faced by the critics of Hero and Leander, both past and present, is that of accurately dating Marlowe's writing of the poem. The poem was first entered in the Stationer's Register in 1593 (the year of Marlowe's death), but the earliest known surviving edition is that of 1598. Literary historians and critics tend to see it as a work of Marlowe's later years. However, there is no conclusive evidence one way or another; one can

1For a complete review of Marlowe's literary reputation, see F. S. Boas, "Marlowe Through the Centuries," Christopher Marlowe, A Biographical and Critical Study (Oxford, Eng., 1940) esp. (p.) 300 ff.
choose on the basis of the facts as one sees them.

The view that *Hero and Leander* was written before Marlowe became a playwright is based on the reasoning that it was natural for Marlowe to pass from his translation of the *Amores* to the conception of a work that is fully in keeping with the voluptuous tendencies displayed in Ovid. (This view depends on the assumption that Marlowe translated Ovid at an early stage in his writing career—an assumption that has not yet been convincingly disputed, according to L. C. Martin.)

An early date for *Hero and Leander* is supported by such considerations as these: (1) some of the details of thought and phrasing in the translation are parallel to *Hero and Leander*; (2) of Marlowe's plays, *Dido* (credibly an early work) seems to be recalled in *Hero and Leander* more than any other of his plays—one line is exactly repeated; (3) the general discrepancy between versification of *Hero and Leander* and of Ovid's *Elegies* may exist because Marlowe was artistically free in writing the poem, while in translating Ovid he was held to the rigidity of a line-by-line rendering.

Those who argue for a later date of composition state that *Hero and Leander* suggests a more balanced philosophy and a more controlled artistic sensibility than is represented in the plays—again, according to L. C. Martin, this is not

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beyond controversy since one meets "not only with 'high astounding' proofs of his genius but with crudeness, at least uncertainty of touch." Martin does not attempt to decide on any chronology but associates *Hero and Leander* with other poems supposed to have been written in the 1590's and probably a good deal indebted to Marlowe's example. He names Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and Drayton's *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595). Martin finds Shakespeare and Marlowe associable because of (1) the noticeably intellectual faculty; (2) the realistic reflections, (3) the compressed and pregnant phrasing; and (4) the ingenuities of comparison, all of which they both bring to their highly sensuous themes. Martin states:

> In the fabric of their poems the enbroideries of fantasy are prominent; but it may often be felt that the basis is not so much the slender classic theme as the stuff of personal experience, and the narrative work of these poets has the near connexion with real life and thought which made for the greater achievements of the Elizabethan dramatists and for the infusion of new vitality into the amorous lyric.

Frederick S. Boas's analysis of "internal evidence" in *Hero and Leander* supports the acceptance of the work as one late in Marlowe's career. The evidence is as follows:

(1) there is a large proportion of run-on lines and double endings in *Hero and Leander* as contrasted with the end-stopped couplets of the *Elegies*, although one has to allow for a

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3 Martin, p. 4.
4 Martin, p. 4.
difference of technique in a translation of Ovid's elegaics
and in an original work; (2) there is an absence of colloquial
phrases which produced a jarring effect in the Elegies, the
absence of which shows a more mature verbal artistry on
Marlowe's part, according to Boas. Since there is no con­
clusiv e evidence as to the date the poem was written, at
this point it seems practical to suspend judgment on this
issue and leave it to the literary historians to unearth
more substantial proof.

Although critics cannot be sure of the date Marlowe
wrote Hero and Leander, they have not been reticent to com­
ment, in more absolute terms than those used as they equivo­
cate about the date, on the poet's intention in the work or
the unifying principle it possesses (or lacks). Here is
where the worthwhile critical battles begin. The date of
composition of Hero and Leander will probably always remain
a moot point, so we will leave it so in order to investigate
the poem itself.

Much more is known about the poems subsequent publication
than about the still elusive date of Marlowe's writing of
Hero and Leander. As mentioned earlier, the poem was entered
in the Stationer's Register, September 28, 1593.5 The entry
read: 'a booke intituled HERO AND LEANDER beinge an amourous
poem devised by CHRISTOPHER MARLOW.' John Wolf, who was the

5 All dates are from the Introduction in Martin's Poems.
licensee, had by 1598 given the rights to the poem to Edward Blunt, or Blount, who also did not retain full publishing rights. He transferred it to a Paul Linley on March 2, 1597/8. Linley published his own edition along with George Chapman's continuation. This edition (in facsimile) was used in this study to note deviations in the modern text used. The title page of Linley's 1598 edition is: HERO AND LEANDER; Begun by Christopher Marloe; and finished by George Chapman; Ut Nectar, Ingenium; (Ornament); At London; Printed by Felix Kingston, for Paule Linley, and are to be Solde in Paules Church-yard, at the Signe of the Blacke-beare; 1598. (Quarto).

Only three copies are known to exist of this first complete printing of Hero and Leander, which includes Marlowe's first two sestiads and Chapman's sestiads III – VI – STC 17414. According to L. C. Martin, only one copy of Edward Blount's edition, which appeared separately in 1598 with only Marlowe's two sestiads, is known to exist - STC 17413. For the convenience of line references and modern spelling, Martin's edition of Hero and Leander in Marlowe's Poems (1931 and 1966) will be the text used for this study. Martin's text is based on Blount's 1598 edition of Marlowe's part alone (STC 17413) collated with the two copies of Linley's 1598 edition (STC 17414). The principles of editing behind

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6 Christopher Marlowe and George Chapman, Hero and Leander (1598), Menston, Eng., 1968.
the text Martin states as follows:

Old forms differing sufficiently from the corresponding modern forms to affect perceptibly the sound or rhythm of the lines are retained; and the early editions have nearly always been followed where they give past tenses or participles in '-ed,' implying, very often that the final syllable is to be sounded separately. The punctuation, though modernized, has been slightly influenced by that of the early editions where that seemed to indicate greater speed or a freer rhythmical flow than strictly logical devices or printing would convey.\(^7\)

L. C. Martin, in his edition of Marlowe's Poems (1931 and 1966), which includes the poet's non-dramatic works, states one of the typical critical judgments of Hero and Leander. According to Martin, in his rendering of the Ovidian narrative love poem, Marlowe derived from Ovid the following characteristics: (1) his untrammeled appreciation and direct sensuous description of amourous adventure; (2) his command of decorative phrase; and (3) his capacity for crisp sententious reflection. Although he finds Hero and Leander an admirable poem, Martin is critical of a "certain incoherency of concept, a lack of organic development,"\(^8\) and he notes that the poem is not classical ("nothing less Greek") because it suffers from:

\[\text{. . .violent transitions from the spirit of a sensuous but idyllic love-story to that of a wordly-wise and cynical comment. Milton was to show later that even satire and invective could be drawn satisfactorily into the web of a poem ostensibly devoted to the 'sad occasion' of a funeral elegy. But that achievement of controlled complexity was the outcome}\]

\(^7\) Martin, p. v.

\(^8\) Martin, p. 6.
of a mental discipline to which, so far as can be seen from his work, Marlowe had not yet submitted himself. . . Sobriety and a clearly defined singleness of effect were alien to Marlowe's purpose. . . However, Marlowe's baroque-romantic intention could not absolve him from the need to inform his work with some kind of coherency. 9

He also finds certain of Marlowe's details and digressions out of place and states that "the trivial incident" of Neptune's courtship of Leander needs excision or recasting, terming the digression "aesthetically inept." The unity of conception and management of Venus and Adonis, the Rape of Lucrece, and Endimion and Phoebe far exceed that of Hero and Leander, in Martin's estimation. However, Martin holds that the poem's merits outweigh its shortcomings, since there are "...many moments of marvelously wrought description and imagery, many lines of appropriate and telling comment, and a pervasive and thrilling magic of cadence and rhythmical modulation." 10 Martin says the "...virtue of melody and cadence...is the quality par excellence that has led to the praising of Hero and Leander for other qualities which it scarcely possesses." 11

The "violent transitions" from a sensuous love story to "wordly-wise and cynical comment" does not necessarily indicate an "incoherency of concept" if the poem can be seen as a satire

9 Martin, p. 7.
10 Martin, p. 8.
11 Martin, p. 11.
of "idyllic love" stories. Perhaps Martin has failed to perceive the "achievement of controlled complexity" that Marlowe shows which is similar to Milton's in Lycidas. He seems also to miss the point of what he terms the "trivial incident" of Neptune's courtship.

Writing a year later, Douglas Bush, in his Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition, more or less agrees with Martin's assessment of Hero and Leander with its lack of any formal unity. Bush finds in Hero and Leander all the best qualities of the Italianate Ovidian tradition. They are embodied and transcended in the poem, but Bush also states that the poem "...exhibits in high relief all the vices of the tradition." He also notes how Marlowe expanded the story drawn from the Greek poet, Musaeus; "...especially the enamorment and the ensuing dialogue, and the union of the lovers." Of the poem's narrative nature, Bush states: "Hero and Leander ... is like the Eve of St. Agnes, narrative poetry of a kind that makes its own laws, but Marlowe lacks Keats's sustained perfection of detail, his perfect harmony of tone. He does surprise by a fine excess, yet he was an Elizabethan, and his excess is frequently cloying." He remarks that Marlowe seemed resolved to gather up all the pictorial convention that

13 Bush, p. 127.
14 Bush, p. 130.
the Ovidian tradition supplied and outdo all his predecessors in the luxuriant handling of these conventions. Bush, as did Martin with the Neptune scene, finds the Mercury episode of the poem irrelevant, simply serving to allow for more sensuousness.

In finding fault with the characterization of Hero and Leander, Bush comments:

The human values of the story suffer from the cumulative effect of artifice in description and narrative. They suffer also from the excess of rhetorical speech-making. . . . Thus for all the picture-making we seldom really see the lovers—indeed, despite the prevailing sensuousness we are not sure that they have bodies and faces—and for all the expression of feeling we seldom really feel with them. We have to turn to Musaeus for the dignity, humanity, and pathos of the story.15

He also sees a discordant effect in the introduction into a Greek story of sixteenth century dress and manners. In addition, he finds fault with what he terms the inconsistent behavior of both the hero and the heroine. Of what he conceives as the chief unifying theme of the poem, Bush states:

. . . the conception of fate as foredooming lovers, which is so essential to the story, Marlowe does more than scarcely play with. . . . There are hints in the first sestiad. . . . But in general, instead of the ever present consciousness of tragic destiny that Shakespeare gives us [in Romeo and Juliet], or Chaucer in Troilus, we have the mingled conceits and satire of the tale of Cupid, and briefer but not less trivial allusions to the part played by the gods.16

15 Bush, p. 131.
What Bush seems to be looking for is a poem more closely related to the simplicity of Musaeus, and he finds fault with the narrative, decorative, and rhetorical embellishments Marlowe gives to the story. Typical of Bush's commentary is the mention that Leander's speeches are "... not the speech of a simple Greek youth to a simple maiden, but the rhetoric of an emancipated young poet of the Italian Renaissance who tramples underfoot the puritan, bourgeois standards professed by his countrymen." Bush ends his commentary on *Hero and Leander* still wishing Marlowe had stuck closer to Musaeus: "... one wonders what miracle Marlowe might have achieved if he had been able to approach Musaeus directly, to create and sustain the note of simple and genuine passion." 

In what can be termed a succinct refutation of the comments of Martin and Bush, Frederick S. Boas states: "Marlowe had, at any rate, subconsciously, a double object in *Hero and Leander*, to tell the story of the lovers and to load every rift with mythological lore. It is, therefore, in a sense, beside the point to criticize the poem for its lack of unity." 

In the 1940's criticism of *Hero and Leander* began to concentrate on the humorous aspects of the poem, in direct contradiction to Edward Dowden's dictum that "Marlowe possessed

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17 Bush, p. 136.
19 Boas, p. 228.
no gift of humor."\textsuperscript{20} Among the first to comment was Rufus Putney who noted that \textit{Hero and Leander} is digressive because Marlowe turned aside from his story \textquotedblleft...to pick up the plums of humor along the way.\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{21} Marlowe's contribution to Ovidian narrative love poetry was the comic myth and aphorism, according to Putney. He states: 

By means of aphorisms Leander attempts to seduce Hero, Venus to win Adonis, and almost every other lover to attain his or her desires. Critics have taken them seriously and protested. But it is the normal fate of aphorisms to grow up into proverbs and inculcate honesty, chastity, thrift, and all the other virtues recognized in \textit{Poor Richard's Almanac}. Their use to promote vice is a comic touch worthy of Marlowe's intelligence.\textsuperscript{22}

Putney also makes note of the use of rhetoric humorously in the poem.

The general nature of Marlowe's humor is treated by Paul H. Kocher who is not afraid to state (something which previous critics failed to do) what seems obvious to an astute reader of \textit{Hero and Leander}. Kocher comments:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Hero and Leander}...is a paean to sex, and to all the pleasures of sense, unabashed and uncondemned. Other Elizabethan poems were erotic enough, but Marlowe's work has also a homosexuality which sets it apart. Kocher refers to the Neptune scene in the poem, and also to parts of the plays \textit{Edward II} and \textit{Dido}.\textit{At the very

\begin{flushright}
22 Putney, p. 546.
\end{flushright}
least, its treatment in three of Marlowe's works showed his willingness to tamper with a dangerous topic, and more probably it betokens some degree of personal passion. 23

Kocher contrasts the tone and subject matter of *Hero and Leander* with "the harsh, conquerable world" of the dramas. In dealing with fantasy and myth, Marlowe is far from hated institutions and enemies, according to Kocher. In *Hero and Leander* he finds "...a form of humor which is largely whimsy, indulging in escapades of playful exaggeration." 24 At the core of Marlovian humor is irony, such as Hero being a priestess of Venus, a nun who vows chastity to the goddess of love. The irony takes an added impact when one notes (as Marlowe did) the slang meaning of "nun" in Elizabethan times. Kocher states:

Another important element in the humor is laughter at the maneuverings of the lovers, which leads Marlowe to some wryly sententious comments on human nature, particularly feminine human nature: "Women are won when they begin to jar: (I, 332). In other words, the imaginative, recognizably unreal element in the story is not the only one. At many points the unreality passes over into reality through temporary and partial perceptions of Hero and Leander as actual persons. ... The smudges of satirical realism in the poem, however, are neither very dark nor very numerous. 25

Kocher comments that Marlowe's favorite subjects of


24 Kocher, p. 295.

25 Kocher, p. 296.
ridicule throughout all his works are Christian religion and gross excess of any sort; and except for relatively infrequent cases where a spirit of play is uppermost, his humor is predominantly critical, a weapon of attack against men and ideas, according to Kocher. He then speculates on Marlowe's probable success as a satirist:

Had Marlowe been interested enough in satire to treat it as a separate form and to discipline himself in its construction, his genius might have shown as brilliantly in this field as in tragedy. He had many qualities of a great satirist—the brains, the sense of humor, the anger, and the power of devastating expression. These were attaining a growing realization in his work up to the time of his death, and there is no reason to doubt that the process would have continued. The prophecy may be ventured that at his full stature Marlowe would have equalled or exceeded any satirist of his age in the deftness of his multilateral scorn, seasoned with flights of whimsy and, above all, a saving power of self-ridicule.26

In contrast to Kocher's remarks on Hero and Leander, Tucker Brooke's comments on the poem in the Renaissance section of a Literary History of England serve to point out the varying degrees of possible interpretations and readings that any one work can be given. The Pollyanna-like quality of Brooke's reading makes one wonder if the two critics are commenting on the same work. He states:

The subject of this fragment (Hero and Leander), the last thing Marlowe did, is one of the most beautifully sensuous stories in all the pagan literature of Greece, and the treatment Marlowe gives it is one

26 Kocher, p. 299.
of the purest things in Elizabethan poetry. In what he wrote there is not an obscene word or degenerate suggestion; everywhere he sees the marriage of true minds, the cleanliness of ocean-dewy limbs and childlike souls. Even in the verse there seems to be a kind of reticence. The narrative is masculine and straightforward beyond any other of its genre and age, but in Marlowe's couplets there is no fluent and suggestive ease; there is, on the contrary, a sweet hesitancy not otherwise characteristic of the poet, which cools instead of inflaming the mind. And everywhere there is moral poise; everywhere there are grave and tender observations, as of a soul firm in its roots.27

Brooke's comment on Hero and Leander seems to prove that if you don't look for something "obscene" or "degenerate" in a poem, you will not find it.

More recently, Harry Levin, in The Overreacher, states that the simple Epicureanism of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd" is developed to its fullest realization in Hero and Leander. According to Levin, Hero and Leander "...differs so much from his other writings, both as experiment and as parable, ...we are bound to note that it elaborates and rationalizes an attitude struck in the apprentice work of his university days: the invitation to love."28 Levin takes his educated guess at the date of Hero and Leander and concludes that one can draw no conclusions and that Marlowe might just as well have been working on it intermittently over several


years rather than early or late in his career.

Of "the invitation to love" Levin mentions, he states:

The warmth of his subject is mitigated by the continual interplay of his paradoxes and epigrams; the sensuousness of the lovers is cooled by the sententiousness of the poet, who speaks for once in his own voice rather than through dramatic mouthpieces. . . . . . The tone is mock-heroic; as a narrator, Marlowe is more like Chaucer than Spencer; and his comingled ironies and sympathies resemble those of Troilus and Criseyde.29

Levin's analysis of Hero and Leander does not really involve a "close" reading of the poem but several of his general appraisals of the poem open trails for later critics to follow.

Hallet Smith, in Elizabethan Poetry, comments on the Ovidian tradition and the decorative-narrative aspects of Hero and Leander. He remarks that sexuality was an important element in the Ovidian tradition. In the historical evaluation of the tradition, Ovid's poetry was read in the Middle Ages as heavy allegorical didacticism, which evolved in the sixteenth century as an emancipated glorification of the senses and the imagination, and finally returned in the seventeenth century to philosophical interpretation, according to Smith. He finds that Ovid's narratives are "...a mixture of sensuous delight, humor, preciousness, and airy sophistication. The details and imagery are pictorial, not dramatic."30 He also notes that from "a grave and sober" point of view Ovid

29 Levin, p. 140.

is a "wanton" poet, but from the start his work had the saving grace of being able to be read as allegory; hence, readers could overlook the literal meaning.

Essentially agreeing with Boas, Smith says of Hero and Leander: "The plot of the tale is very simple, and the narrative can accordingly be rapid and yet highly decorated. Hero and Leander are neither human beings nor gods; they live in a world remote enough so that individuality, 'psychology,' and consistency of character are unimportant." 31 He states the descriptive embellishment of the poem is largely pictorial and has little to do with nature. However, not all the decoration is descriptive. Some of it is narrative such as the myth at the end of the first sestiad. Smith states that it is:

... a story introduced to explain, at some length, why the Fates are not favorable to love. But in true myth fashion, one thing leads to another; and we learn also why scholars are always poor... The narrative is consistent... with the whole method of myth: it involves the gods in the same love difficulties experienced by men, and in its representation of the Fates as hostile to love it provides a premonition of the tragic conclusion of the tale. Marlowe offers it to a taste very much more interested in narrative for its own sake, for its decorative effect, than the modern mind readily comprehends. 32

As other critics before him have done, Smith notes also the use of rhetorical decoration, as well as pictorial and narrative. He sums up his view of Marlowe's intention as

31 Smith, p. 79
32 Smith, p. 80.
follows:

In a sense... Hero and Leander are not "characters" at all. They are merely focal points for mythological inventions. Marlowe's intention is to produce a world of directly apprehensible beauty, the mysteries of which are not referred to the reader's memories of his own vague emotions, or to an imagined but intangible experience, but to the standard and recognized pattern of mythological lore... The speed of the poem is its essential characteristic. There is... no time for lingering images. The problem, therefore, is one of variety and contrast.33

Michel Poirier in Christopher Marlowe notes the Ovidian nature of the poem and makes some helpful distinctions concerning Marlowe's treatment of humor and certain medieval concepts. He states:

Ovid's influence is not only apparent in some lines which recall the Heroides or the Elegies which Marlowe had translated, but in the general conception of love exemplified by the poem. It is essentially a hymn to sensuality, wherein physical passion is decked out in the most attractive attire. Its eroticism, far more conspicuous than in the Greek model, is neither humorous as in medieval fabliaux nor naturalistic and crude as in ancient poetry. Typical of an age when the beauty of the human body, so highly glorified by Greek statuary, was discovered anew, the poem quite naturally contains medieval reminiscences. Hero is the "saint" whom Leander worships, the "nun" of Venus in whose "church" she offers sacrifices to the goddess. Leander's long indictment of chastity, with the idea of the forbidden fruit it implicitly contains, is a perfect illustration of Renaissance hedonism grappling with the scruples of Christian morality.34

Poirier warns, however, of not making too much of the possible medieval references. He also points out that Marlowe,

33 Smith, p. 82.

"Although he clearly reveals his preference for boys throughout the two cantos, he has chosen as his theme ordinary sexual love, almost completely absent from his dramas... Love, says Marlowe, always starts at first sight and although it implies some beauty in its object, it baffles every explanation. It at once grows so intense that neither will nor reason can quench it." 35

In his rather brief discussion of Hero and Leander, Poirier speaks in general terms of the opulence of description in the poem, its leisurely pace, and its abundant lavish images. However, his most important statements are those already quoted.

In more recent criticism, the comic elements in the poem have been stressed. Eugene B. Cantelupe's article, "Hero and Leander, Marlowe's Tragicomedy of Love," 36 points out how the English poets of the Ovidian school show a divided loyalty to paganism and Christian morality. He states that Hero and Leander is the best example of the amatory poem in the Italian Ovidian Tradition: "Its mythological narrative is sophisticated, sensuous, and pictorial, and its wit, ranging from the funny to the mocking, the outrageous to the grave, is subtle and superb. [But at its core]...is as serious an intention and as moral a didacticism as a mythological morality by

35 Poirier, p. 196.
Lydgate. "37 Cantelupe proposes that Marlowe tells the story of Leander's passion for Hero to stress the moral that when desire has for its goal neither marriage nor procreation but the gratification of the senses, then it reduces man to the level of animals and consumes him to dust. Hence, he finds Marlowe's theme essentially a tragic one, but the manner of presentation is comic. Again, rhetorical persuasion is seen as the most effective comic device.

Perhaps the most cogent and complete reading of *Hero and Leander* in recent modern criticism is that of J. B. Steane in his *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, Eng., 1964). His initial comment is that, given the various readings of the poem, critics are in agreement that it should not be taken too seriously. According to Steane, most of them come up with the conclusion that "... the poem is a charmer and Marlowe has taken a turn for the better. This impression is the outcome of many readings by many people, yet, I think, it is at best a half-truth and at worst (whatever the intention) a belittling misrepresentation."38 He finds in *Hero and Leander* that its tone and intention are quite often very "delicately intimated." He states "Its tones are constantly shifting. They can move from the heroic and romantic to mock-heroic and burlesque; from an oddly savage irony to warmth and sympathy; from

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37 Cantelupe, p. 296.
38 Steane, p. 302.
flippancy to seriousness and back again."39 Relating to these "delicately intimated" shifts is an excellent analysis of Marlowe's technique for indicating such shifts:

On Hellespont guiltie of True-loues blood,
In view and opposit two citties stood.
Seaborderers, disioin'd by Neptune's might;
The one Abydos, the other Sestos hight.

The tone of the first line is heroic and portentous while the second is cool and factual. The third line reinforces the first, as the fourth reinforces the second. Neat, trim, cool fact, clipped and antithetical, is paired in the unit of the couplet with tragical pomp, decked out in the solemnities of personification and myth. The curious pair is typical of the curious poem. The heroic is summoned, paraded and pricked—here quite lightly, without savagery, and in the normal, impudent, manner of mock-heroic; but it is not always so.40

Steane then goes on to note other such shifts as the ultimate deflation of romantic hyperbole in the description of Hero followed by the description of Leander which he sees as "...statuesque, sculpted closely on classical models and removed only occasionally from the heroic-conventional,"41 despite the rather intimate bodily detail.

Tone, technique, and attitude and their closely related aspects are the main concern of Steane's study of Hero and Leander. He finds that the poem does not have "a tone" but a great range of tones that are simultaneously being presented

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39 Steane, p. 304.
40 Steane, p. 304.
41 Steane, p. 308.
to the reader. Steane states: "The tone of Hero and Leander encompasses many extremes: tenderness, ruthlessness, romantic luxuriance, and a clipped, ironic detachment."\(^{42}\)

An indication of the poem's several tones can be seen in light of Hero's predicament involving her vow of chastity and love for Leander. According to Steane:

The poem is to focus constantly on this partly comic tension between Hero's official and private selves, between natural 'will' and the conscientious sense of propriety inculcated by society and religion. Marlowe's tone here is amused and knowing, partly detached but also compassionate. We feel the strength of Hero's emotion, the strain of her conflict and the embarrassment of it. It is this embarrassment that, throughout the poem, he reveals more closely, I think, than any other poet has done.\(^{43}\)

Steane does not find the intrusion of the digressions concerning Mercury and Neptune irrelevant as several other critics have. He states: "Obviously it is a digression from the main story, but it is like a musical interlude, an entr'acte in which one recognises adaptations and developments of themes heard in the second. There is immediately apparent a likeness of manner. Knowing, sophisticated comedy is again curiously mixed with farce."\(^{44}\)

Responding to L. C. Martin's remark that Neptune's...

\(^{42}\) Steane, p. 311.
\(^{43}\) Steane, p. 316
\(^{44}\) Steane, p. 322.
aesthetically inept," Steane rejoins, "But 'ludicrous discomfiture,' so far from being 'aesthetically inept,' is an element at the heart of the whole poem. From the very beginning we hear the motif of lovers frustrated, played scherzando; and it links with the other dominant motif, again partly comic of love's indignity and cruelty."

Steane makes note of many of the comic rifts in Hero and Leander, but he also takes pains to show the more serious or darker Marlovian aspects he finds in the poem. M. C. Bradbrook's analysis of Hero and Leander (Scrutiny, II, i, 1933) pointed out how Marlowe's approach to humor could be compared to Chaucer's. However, Steane thinks that it is now important to see the contrast between the two.

There is a fierceness and destructiveness about Hero and Leander which is utterly unChaucerian. Charm and decorum are everywhere in Chaucer's love scene. In Marlowe there is embarrassment, fear, conflict and farce. Hero is divided, betrayed by herself, put to absurd shifts, subject to a sort of sexual brutality. And Marlowe's Hero is a woman being, amongst other things, exposed, with a ruthlessness unknown to Chaucer and probably, in spite of the coexisting sympathy, quite antipathetic to him.

Steane has shown in his essay how the poem is a "charmer"—a sophisticated comedy, with young, beautiful actors. "The

45 Martin, p. 7.
46 Steane, p. 328.
47 Steane, p. 331.
nervous tenderness, the absurdities of the pursuit, the embarrassments and affronts to dignity, the hard, predatory will, the infinite resources of passion, the wonder of its fulfillment and the new beauty it creates: all these are in the poem, and again an extraordinary breadth is there to be recognized."48 He also shows the poem's serious, darker side:

We are often aware of a cynical knowingness, and a laughter of belittlement in the sometimes farcical comedy. Dignity is undercut again and again, and there is something even self-destructive in this... . . . . As heroic hyperbole is pricked in the Jew of Malta so is romantic hyperbole in Hero. The deflation touches Marlowe's own poetic practice, though with the quick shifts of tone such deflation is intermittent... . . . But destructiveness and cruelty are never far absent in Marlowe.49

Steane's study of Hero and Leander is by far the best definition of what the poem is as a work of art. His analysis serves as a main shaft from which future critics may tunnel off into different directions looking for the rich ore yet to be found in the poem.

Paul M. Cubeta in "Marlowe's Poet in Hero and Leander,"50 concentrates on the idea that if one sees that Marlowe created a narrator, for satiric purposes, who works at cross purposes to the poet himself, it is possible to reassess both the craft and meaning of Hero and Leander: "Marlowe's narrator, far

48 Steane, p. 358.
49 Steane, p. 360.
50 GE, XXVI (Oct. - May'1964-65), 500-505.
from being his spokesman. ...is mocked at every turn. He is a clearly discernible character with an over-active awareness of his literary heritage and almost no ability to master it poetically."51 Cubeta suggests that the several digressions in the poem have little bearing on the dramatic action since they do not illuminate the romantic or tragic issues of the poem. He concludes from this that Marlowe's narrator is not in control of his material. Marlowe allowed, "...at the narrator's expense, an opportunity to turn melodrama into hilarious burlesque and thus to retain his own urbane detachment."52 He sees the narrator as priding himself on his capabilities as an Ovidian mythographer, but the narrator proves his inability in the digression on Mercury's slighting of the Destinies. Cubeta states:

But the elaborate tale explains little. Hero and Leander are all but forgotten as the narrator, with no control of dramatic structure or narrative relevance, leaves Ovid and Musaeus far behind. Classical myth is blended with pastoral convention and romantic melodrama and larded with smug observations on feminine psychology--...only to end as an allegory on the economic status of the teaching profession.53

Cubeta remarks that Marlowe is laughing in a detached and mocking manner at his narrator who affects absurdly the postures of the Italianate-Ovidian tradition. He finds the

51 Cubeta, p. 500.
52 Cubeta, p. 501.
53 Cubeta, p. 501.
signposts of parody everywhere—in the bawdy ambiguity, the outrageous feminine rhymes, the bizarre hyperbole, and "... the gnomic sentiment which is often only conventional platitude or fatuous intrusion uttered solemnly as a profound insight into the psychology of young love." 54

He finds the central purpose of Hero and Leander to be "the celebration of erotic rapture." In conclusion he states:

Marlowe can explore beneath the romantic surfaces of his subject and affirm a pagan ethic of love and life free from literary conventions and all social and moral restraints. For Marlowe there is... the eroticism of his lovers; there is pleasure also in playing the literary games of the Italianate-Ovid tradition, especially when one never entirely commits himself to following the rules. 55

To follow Cubeta's thought, perhaps Marlowe did not commit himself to following the rules because he wished to satirize the style of the Italianate-Ovidian tradition. The several comic elements in the poem suggest that at least part of Marlowe's intention was satirical. Of satire in the Elizabethan period, Hallett Smith states:

It is commonly said that satire is not an important form in Elizabethan literature. Yet any reader of the great body of the literature of the age is aware of the fact that there is a satiric element inherent in almost all of it. The literary histories have generally looked for formal satire and, finding none of importance until the 1590's, have focused their attention upon Hall and Marston and Donne as the three examples of satire.

54 Cubeta, p. 502.
55 Cubeta, p. 505.
The Elizabethans saw the satirical in the shadow of the pastoral, in the obverse of the heroic, in the extravagance of love poetry. What motive was there to make them find a separate form for it? Furthermore, the models, sources from which a convention and a tradition could be made, were mixed.56

In this review of criticism of Hero and Leander, the continuum of critical opinion has been explored. One relatively safe conclusion we can make is that there is no real consensus of opinion, nor is there one reading of the poem which adequately accounts for all (or most) of the elements found there. Hence, we may also conclude that Hero and Leander needs to be examined and read again, perhaps to find a reading which can account for all (or most) of the elements present in the poem. The following is a summary of some of the key points raised in past criticism of Hero and Leander.

We have noted how L. C. Martin's view of the "violent transitions" from an idyllic love-story to "worldly-wise and cynical comment" may be seen as a technique used for satiric purposes. These transitions afford Marlowe with an overt means to comment on the highly embellished, and hence, unreal quality of romance. He brings love and romance sharply into a more realistic focus, thus deflating what he sees as idealized distortion of life.

Douglas Bush's comment on how the human values suffer because of the artifice in description and narrative—that we never "really see the lovers," seldom "really feel with them"—can

56 Smith, p. 207.
be seen as inaccurate. Perhaps Marlowe doesn't want the reader "to see or feel with them" in any "real" sense. If one thinks about it, romantic convention is what is artificial. Marlowe makes this point by being overly "romantic" for purposes of mockery or satire. Bush also notes that Marlowe "scarcely plays with" the idea of fate foredooming lovers. This may indicate that Marlowe does not see the idea of fate as important in a basically humorous poem. That Marlowe intended Leander's rhetoric to "trample underfoot" the puritan, bourgeois standards of his contemporaries, Bush also notes. This trampling underfoot is certainly part of a satiric intention in the poem. Bush also finds fault with Hero and Leander because Marlowe did not approach Musaeus simply and directly. This may have been because Marlowe foresaw that a simple and direct treatment is not conducive to mockery.

Hallet Smith states that Hero and Leander are not "characters" but focal points for mythological invention; and, it is Marlowe's intention to create a "world of directly apprehensible beauty." However, if one takes into account the amount of humor in Hero and Leander, it may be seen that Marlowe's intention is to satirize a literary world of overdone, romantic distortions of life.

Michel Poirier's statement that Marlowe chose "ordinary sexual love" (a theme almost completely absent from his drama) indicates that Marlowe may have been saving the theme of heterosexual love for a special purpose--the purpose being to
Eugene B. Cantelupe sees at the core of *Hero and Leander* a serious intention in that when love has for its goal "neither marriage nor procreation," then men are reduced to animals and consumed. He says the theme is tragic and the method comic. However, it seems from Marlowe's manipulation of the characters that he could not care less about the sanctity of marriage or procreation of the species. If fate is not important, it does not seem that marriage would be. Cantelupe's view makes Marlowe appear as a Christian moralist, which seems a bit out of character for Marlowe.

J. B. Steane points out the "darker" side of *Hero and Leander* which underlies the comical. The "cynical knowingness," the "laughter of belittlement in farcical comedy," "the undercutting of dignity," and the inherent deflation which causes the shifting tone are seen as part of the "destructiveness and cruelty" which is never far absent in Marlowe. Perhaps Steane shows the ultimate meaning of the satire of romantic love. At any rate, one is made aware of something "dark" or perverse in Marlowe's personality.

Paul M. Cubeta affirms that Marlowe's narrator in the poem is being "mocked at every turn," has an "over-active awareness" of his literary heritage, and no ability to master that heritage. Again, for satiric purposes, Marlowe's narrator is pointing out the faults of the romantic "literary heritage." Marlowe is not mocking the narrator but the conventions of the
Italianate-Ovidian tradition. Cubeta seems also to have an inconsistency in his reading, since he finds Marlowe to be "celebrating erotic rapture" while at the same time mocking the conventions of the Italianate-Ovidian tradition. Mocking and celebration seem to be incompatible elements.

In the final citation in this chapter, Hallet Smith explains that satire is present in almost all Elizabethan literature. This study will attempt to determine in what degree humor and satire are found in Hero and Leander and investigate the possibility that Marlowe's intention in writing the poem was primarily to satirize romantic love.

The following two chapters will include (1) the literary background from which Hero and Leander came, and (2) the reading of the poem itself. The basic critical approach I will take in my reading is formalist--conclusions about the work will be drawn essentially from that which is expressed in the text. However, I will be eclectic where I believe extra-literary data is especially germane and helpful to a "close" reading of the poem.
HERO AND LEANDER: THE LITERARY BACKGROUND

The one thing about Hero and Leander that all critics agree on is that it is an Ovidian imitation definitely related to the literary fad of the 1590's. Such a near absolute in literary criticism is rare indeed; and, at least for a while, it seems a sound base from which to move toward a reading of the poem.

We have surveyed the state of criticism in regard to Hero and Leander. The myriad of different readings given to it tend more to make the poem an enigma than they do to serve as helpful clarification. I suspect that this enigmatic quality is a fault of the critics rather than that of the artist who created the work. There are those who see in the poem a lack of unity, and those who say that imposing a criterion of unity on a poem such as Hero and Leander denies its very nature. No critic, in my estimation, has successfully shown why the poem should or should not have some kind of unifying principle that ultimately lies behind its creation. In other words, critics agree that Marlowe set out to write an Ovidian imitation, but they are not sure what Marlowe did (or attempted to do) with the genre. Hence, all the parts, so far as can be determined, do not necessarily fit into one set framework from which a critic may attempt to judge the poet's degree of success in achieving his intended purpose with Hero and Leander. Again, either the artist did not succeed in putting together an
artistic whole into which all the parts fit, thus making the whole more than the sum total of its parts, or the critics have failed to properly conceive of the artistic motivation behind the work of art. Perhaps, the best in art, or that which makes it art, is not ultimately definable, as may be with Hero and Leander. But, if critics are doing their job, they should be able to discern with a large margin of certitude, based on evidence from the text (and elsewhere, if germane), just what the artist's intention was in writing his work as that intention is expressed in the text. We can agree that Hero and Leander is an Ovidian imitation and from this point we can go on to see what is Ovidian about it and what Marlowe may have been doing with the Ovidian tradition as it appeared in the late Renaissance.

The first element which is obviously Ovidian is the retelling of a Greek myth. Where the story of Hero and Leander first came from is unknown. But as an archetypal myth it is found in an Egyptian love-lyric:

The love of my darling lies on the farther side,  
And between us the river rolls,  
And on a sandbank waits a crocodile.  
I go down to the water, I face the stream,  
My heart fails not amid its current,  
And under my feet the waves are like firm land.  
Her love it is that makes me strong,  
For me she is magic against the waters.57

Leander's first appearance is in Latin literature; he is cited by Virgil in the Georgics (III, 258-63). Later in Greek

poetry, the first allusion to Hero and Leander is by Antipater of Thessalonica. F. L. Lucas believes it unlikely that the story could have been known before, at the earliest, the Alexandrian period:

Its romantic tone is typically Hellenistic; and, were the tradition older, we should expect to find some reference to it before Virgil, seeing we find so many after him—in Ovid, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Lucan, Statius, Silius Italicus, Martial, under the early Empire; in Fronto in the second century, Ausonius in the fourth, Musaeus in the fifth, Agathias and Paulus Silentiarius in the sixth. The wide popularity of the story is also proved by frescoes at Pompeii; by a mosaic and a relief found at Zaghouan in North Africa; and by coins of Sestos and Abydos under the Roman Empire, which show the lover swimming and the maiden high on her tower.\(^{58}\)

That the Hero and Leander legend had been around a while before Marlowe reworked it is an understatement. Critics\(^{59}\) are in general agreement that Marlowe's Greek source or outline for his story was the fifth century Alexandrian poet, Musaeus. Marlowe's Hero and Leander is what would be termed in the film industry "freely adapted" from Musaeus's model. The two "bestiads" which Marlowe had completed include 818 lines, which correspond approximately with the first 265 lines of Musaeus's Hero and Leander. (The original contains about 340 lines.) The 563 "extra" lines that Marlowe added to Musaeus's "outline" of the story are taken up with sundry adornments and embellishments which include the Mercury and Neptune


\(^{59}\) Martin, Bush, among others.
mythological episodes and copious descriptive additions. Much more could be said about Marlowe's "source" for Hero and Leander, but this brief summary seems sufficient for purposes of this study.

It is reasonably certain that Marlowe did indeed use Musaeus as the model or outline of his poem. His "fleshing out" of the story directs us to the conventions of the late Renaissance imitations of Ovid.

In Marlowe's era, Ovid was becoming more widely known through Arthur Golding's translation of the complete Metamorphoses (1565-67), and, as mentioned earlier, Hero and Leander were treated by Ovid in Heroides, XVIII and XIX, and in the Amores, II, XVI, 31-2. First to be considered is how Marlowe's version of Hero and Leander can be seen as an imitation of Ovid.

The most apparent similarity between the two is their appreciation for direct sensuous description of their subject matter--amorous adventure. The erotic nature of Ovid and his imitators had much to do with the popularity of love narratives among the sophisticated, literary audience of the late Renaissance. The fact that Marlowe's poem was well known among the literati before publication in 1598, five years after his death,60 proves the popularity of erotic love narratives and

that they were intended for only a sophisticated audience. This logically follows with another element found in Ovid, an airy sophistication, which Marlowe also exhibits in Hero and Leander. Ovid's command of decorative phrase and his ability to make pictures is identifiable in Marlowe's technique in which details and imagery serve pictorially rather than dramatically.\(^6\) Included with this Italianate lusciousness and preciousness of language is a somewhat opposite element—the interjection of crisp sententious reflection. This technique is especially forceful with Marlowe's use of the couplet. Ovid himself makes particular use of this as he scatters moral aphorisms throughout his somewhat "immoral" poems. This, of course, is a device of rhetorical artifice at which Ovid was a master and which we note in Leander's arguments against virginity and chastity in Marlowe. Mythological decoration, which abounds in Hero and Leander, is also an element of Ovid. For the purposes of this study, the most important element, related to the use of the other elements stated above, is the presence of humor in Ovid's poetry and its use in Marlowe's imitation, Hero and Leander. The humor in Ovid is maintained at the expense of those depicted in his amorous adventures, and it is the same with Marlowe. The extent and implication of the use of humor in Hero and Leander will be dealt with in the reading of the poem which will follow. However, it is

\(^6\) See Smith, p. 79.
important to first note some differences between the poetic technique of Ovid and Marlowe; more precisely, what elements in Ovid Marlowe did not imitate and also how Marlowe's Ovidian imitation differed in general from those of his contemporaries in the 1590's.

Marlowe differs from Ovid most apparently in that descriptive elements overtake and submerge the narrative or storytelling aspects of the poem. The descriptions of Hero and Leander, the temple of Venus, the digressions on Mercury and Neptune; these all slow down the narrative movement of the poem (Not necessarily detracting from the poem, given one's estimation of what he thinks Marlowe was trying to accomplish). However, with Ovid the case is quite different, as Bush notes: "Ovid was a brilliant maker of pictures, as Marlowe and his fellows well knew; it was not always remembered that he was also in the main a swift and straightforward story-teller."62 As proof, in his Elegies, a poem of 120 lines is a rarity; the average length being 40 to 50 lines.

Another difference between the two is the presence of a personal framework. In Ovid, the first person narrative voice is ubiquitous. In Hero and Leander establishing the function of the persona of the narrator may be a problem, but it is not within the personal framework which Ovid and many of Marlowe's contemporaries set their poems. More will be said

62 Bush, p. 130.
on the problem of the persona of the narrator in the reading of the poem itself.

Marlowe also differs from his contemporaries who wrote Ovidian imitations in that he did not use this personal framework. He did not make use of the "complaint" motif or the feminine wooer which were both popular elements in the imitations and also have analogues in Ovid. Marlowe does fit into the fad of Ovidian imitations in regard to the tendency to localize myth, and, as Elizabeth Donno remarks, "...to transport the whole gorgeous panoply of pagan deities, nymphs, and sylvan creatures to the Elizabethan world."63 This tendency can be noted in Hero and Leander through the presence of anachronisms. Another element that Marlowe uses which was a technique of the genre is adorning the narrative with literary and mythological allusions, and not only that, but incorporating a complete secondary tale which was either borrowed or invented (as is the Mercury and Neptune episodes in Hero and Leander). The opulent imagery already noted in Marlowe was also present, but not necessarily to the same degree, in the writings of the other Ovidian imitators.

We have noted in this section Marlowe's probable "source" for Hero and Leander in Musaeus, the Ovidian nature of the poem (as well as Marlowe's departures from Ovid), some of the similarities and differences between Hero and Leander and

works in the genre contemporary with Marlowe. It now remains to approach the poem directly, to determine the validity of previous interpretations, and to set forth a new hypothesis concerning the use of humor in *Hero and Leander*. 
On Hellespont, guilty of true love's blood,
In view and opposite two cities stood,
Sea-borderers, disjoined by Neptune's might:
The one Abydos, the other Sestos hight. (I, 1-4)

As J. B. Steane has perceptively noted, these opening
lines point out a general pattern of tone and expression
which the poem maintains throughout. Lines one and three
have the ornate, luscious, preciousness of Italianate-
Ovidian convention, while the second half of each couplet is
a rather mundane expression of the simple facts of the situa­
tion. It is a movement from inflated, ornate style to deflated,
factual reporting. This is an indication that Marlowe could
be playing literary games with the genre which he is writing
in. As will be noted later, this movement of inflation-
deflation is readily apparent throughout Hero and Leander.

What can be termed the second structural division of the
poem are lines 4-50, which are devoted to a description and
cataloguing of Hero's beauties. This cataloguing of female
pulchritude has its origins in medieval poetry; but, of course,
Renaissance poets were sure to make it more intimate and com­
plete--embellishing the description to its fullest. Even
given the Renaissance taste for embellishment, Marlowe's
description of Hero is too excessive to be charged simply to
his being carried away by his own powers of extravagant ex­
pression; there is evidence in the description that Marlowe's
excessiveness is intentional. Lines 4-8 can be seen as part
of the mythological adornment—Hero is so fair that Apollo courted her simply for the sight of her hair and offered to her as a dowry his throne where she could sit just to have men gaze upon her. These lines are conventional, both in regard to the mythological adornment and to the poet’s own invented mythology. However, lines 9-50 contain an undeniable element of humor provoked by the description of Hero’s “beautiful” attire.

The outside of her garments were of lawn,
The lining purple silk, with gilt stars drawn;  
Her wide sleeves green, and bordered with a grove,  
Where Venus in her naked glory strove  
To please the careless and disdainful eyes  
Of proud Adonis that before her lies.  
Her kirtle blue, whereon was many a stain,  
Made with the blood of wretched lovers slain.  
Upon her head she wore a myrtle wreath,  
From whence her veil reach’d to the ground beneath.  
Her veil was artificial flowers and leaves,  
Whose workmanship both man and beast deceives. (I, 9-20)  

Her dress is of fine linen with a purple lining and golden stars embroidered with “gilt” thread on the outside. Her wide sleeves are green, and embroidered on the borders of them is a representation of a naked Venus wooing a reticent Adonis who is lying before her. The dress or skirt (“kirtle”) is blue and somehow “stained” with “the blood of wretched lovers slain.” If one has been keeping in mind just the colors being presented to the reader, even with an elemental knowledge of the color spectrum, one has the notion that

64 Martin notes that Apollo’s hair was sometimes associated with the sun’s rays, (Poems, p. 28, n. 6).
something is awry. As Poirier mentions: "The excess of
opulence [in Hero and Leander] sometimes offends good
taste. What a strange sense of colour Hero--and the poet--
show!"65

Her myrtle wreath, like everything attached to her gar-
ments, has symbolic significance, in that it was a plant held
sacred to Venus. This would seem to be plenty even for a
Renaissance description, but Marlowe loads on more.

Many would praise the sweet smell as she past,
When 'twas the odour which her breath forth cast;
And there for honey, bees have sought in vain,
And beat from thence, have lighted there again.
About her neck hung chains of pebble stone,
Which lighten'd by her neck, like diamonds shone.
She wore no gloves, for neither sun nor wind
Would burn or parch her hands, but to her mind
Or warm or cool them, for they took delight
To play upon those hands, they were so white. (I, 21-30)

Steane, again, is perceptive about this passage.

We draw close to Hero, however; in fact, quite
suddenly and oddly close. We see her as a
figure, somewhat remote and beautifully clothed;
then we are at her mouth. With the honey-
sucking bees we are suddenly intimate with the
odour of her breath: the bees who 'beat from
thence, have lighted there again.' The
description works to a large extent within a
convention. It is the convention of romantic
hyperbole, as found in the madrigal lyrics,
and all the details, down to the bees have their
place in it. . . . . Has not Marlowe, in fact,
sent the conventional hyperbole one stage further
than it is usually made to go?. . . .it is surely
a satirist, rather than rhapsodist, who thus
adorns his heroine with bloodstains, symbolic
or not. . . .Similarly, in the lines about the

65 Poirier, p. 198.
breath and the bees, the whole passage is on the verge of absurdity, and with the...line--'And beat from thence (the mouth) have lighted there againe'--the convention is extended just far enough to see it topple over into farce.66

Steane admits that much of the description "...is straightforwardly beautiful, idyllic and conventional that one must wonder."67 He says that with Hero's swatting of the bees Marlowe "...has, whether knowingly or not, with the first touch of realism deflated the romantic hyperbole."68

Steane notes in this section that Marlowe's treatment of romantic hyperbole is satiric, but perhaps this is just one section where the satirical element is most readily apparent.

If one continues to "wonder" about the conventional treatment of romantic hyperbole in this description of Hero, her "buskins" and Cupid's case of mistaken identity make it clear that Marlowe is being more than conventional.

Buskins of shells all silvered used she,  
And branch'd with blushing coral to the knee;  
Where sparrows perch'd, of hollow pearl and gold,  
Such as the world would wonder to behold;  
Those with sweet water oft her handmaid fills,  
Which as she went would cherup through the bills.  
Some say, for her the fairest Cupid pin'd,  
And looking in her face, was strooken blind.  
But this is true, so like was one the other,  
As he imagined Hero was his mother;  
And oftentimes into her bosom flew,  
About her naked neck, his bare arms threw,  
And laid his childish head upon her breast,  
And with still panting rock'd, there took his rest.  

(I, 31-44)

66 Steane, p. 306.  
67 Steane, p. 307.  
68 Steane, p. 307.
A pair of slippers with hollow birds of pearl and gold, filled with water, so that when the water sloshes, the birds make a "cheruping" sound should be enough to convince the most skeptical reader that Marlowe is mocking the literary convention. But there are hints later on that Marlowe is doing even more than mocking a literary convention; and, as one reads on, these hints increasingly appear.

The treatment of Cupid is another example of Marlowe's mythmaking, at once giving a possible reason why Cupid is blind and an explanation of how Hero is so beautiful that he flies into her bosom, mistaking her for his mother, Venus. The mention that Hero is "Venus' nun" (l. 45) has two ironic and, hence, humorous elements. First, Hero is a nun to the goddess of love, who would be out of business if all women were her "nuns." Second, however, Venus would be in business if all women were "nuns" in the Elizabethan slang sense where "nun" denoted a prostitute. Undoubtedly, Marlowe intended both meanings, since he was a tavern habitue who was on intimate terms with the tavern argot of his times.

As the description ends, we are told that Hero's beauty outdoes nature itself, which pines because Hero took more from it than she left.

Therefore, in sign her treasure suffer'd wrack,
Since Hero's time hath half the world been black. (I, 49-50)

The hyperbole and mythmaking does not stop even at the end of the description. Hero outdoes nature itself and leaves it
in partial ruination. The meaning of half the world being black may be that Marlowe's mythologizing as to why a portion of the world's people are black. Hero took away that much fairness from it. Or it may also be Marlowe's romantic mythologizing about the cause of day and night. Hero the fair took half of nature's light; hence, half the world is always in darkness, or black. At any rate, our fair Hero has had an enormous impact on the world, according to Marlowe's mythography—even though she seems to be attired like a contest winner at a mummer's parade.

We have met one of the lovers, and in the next structural unit of the poem Marlowe turns to a description of the other (I, 51-90).

Amourous Leander, beautiful and young,
(Whose tragedy divine Musaeus sung)
Dwelt at Abydos; since him dwelt there none
For whom succeeding times make greater moan. (I, 51-54)

Marlowe's description of Leander begins with "His dangling tresses that were never shorn" (I, l. 55). This is parallel to the beginning of the description of Hero. However, we notice that Marlowe does not bother with an elaborate description of Leander's garments but bypasses them to describe his beautiful flesh. It is the tactile sense that is important here.

His body was as straight as Circe's wand;
Jove might have sipt out nectar from his hand.
Even as delicious meat is to the taste,
So was his neck in touching, and surpast
The white of Pelops' shoulder; I could tell ye,
How smooth his breast was, and how white his belly,
And whose immortal fingers did imprint
That heavenly path with many a curious dint,
That runs along his back, but my rude pen
Can hardly blazon forth the loves of men,
Much less of powerful gods... (I, 61-71)

In comparing the two descriptions, Leander appears to be the more physically and sensuously desirable of the two lovers. It is interesting to note that in other Ovidian imitations (Lodge's Scylla's Metamorphosis, Drayton's Endimion and Phoebe, and Chapman's Ovid's Banquet of Sense), it is the woman who is presented as sensuously appealing. Some critics (Kocher, Lucas, among others) have seen in this an indication of Marlowe's own sexual proclivities. F. L. Lucas says that in Hero and Leander "...Marlowe could not resist exhibiting his own homosexuality." It is excusable that some critics could have missed this element, mixed as it is with mythological allusions. But when the poet begins to state how he could tell how "smooth his breast was, and how white his belly," one begins to "wonder" again. The proof of this homosexuality is in the description of Leander's back--"That heavenly path with many a curious dint" (I, l. 68). A male physique so sensually described is "unique" enough, but to concentrate particularly on the beauties of a back bone must be a first instance in English literature. This is followed by one of the most ironic and humorous statements in the poem--"but my rude pen/Can hardly blazon forth the loves of men" (I, 69-70). This the poet says

69 Lucas, p. 206.
after he has done what he says he can't do while he continues. in the next twenty lines to do it. "Some swore he was a maid in man's attire,/For in his looks were all that men desire" (I, 83-84). This description is in keeping with the poet's presentation of Leander, if not as a woman, as an exceedingly effeminate male.

We have noted that deflation of the romantic hyperbole in the description of Hero amounts to farce, while the description of Leander is realistically sensual enough to indicate that Marlowe intended to make Leander look the more desirable, and Hero the more ridiculous, of the two lovers. The description of Hero mocks a literary convention (romantic hyperbole), while the poet's description of Leander makes the male appear more (or equally as) desirable as the female. That Marlowe is burlesquing or satirizing the literary convention is quite evident and the evidence begins to point out that in a certain respect Marlowe is satirizing the idea of heterosexual love behind romanticism. Of the total effect of the description of Hero as he sees it, Steane states:

There seems to be no question that a subtle, independent mind is involved, and even at this stage, for all the freshness and beauty as well as the sunny charm of these innocent seeming couplets, one senses that there is somewhere at work a spirit that denies or undermines or 'gets at'. Yet this is not at all the normal manner of a satirist, with his programme of demolition and formalised attitudes, but rather a part of a complex sensibility whose feelings, over a wide range and with varied emphasis and direction, are engaged in his work.  

70 Steane, p. 308.
Hence, Steane notes the satiric element but says that Marlowe is doing many other complex things also. I think he de-emphasizes the satirical elements, however, and misses some of the subtlety himself. He reads the description of Leander as being closely on classical models even despite the intimate bodily detail. The subtlety of the satirical elements needs to be stressed, for it seems that the ornateness of style and the descriptions themselves sweep readers along. They don't really concentrate on what is being described but are overcome with the lavish expression, and therefore the humor present in the poem is missed. I think the opulence of language is the main cause of so many varying interpretations of Hero and Leander. The subtlety of Marlowe's satire needs to be recognized.

The descriptive gives way to the narrative as the poem shifts to the story itself. Lines 91-102 tell of the festival for Adonis held on Sestos every year. The guests go "To meet their loves: such as had none at all,/Came lovers home, from this great festival" (I, 95-95). "Everybody falls in love during the festivities. This section is followed by more romantic hyperbole, describing Hero's effect on those at the festival. "But far above the loveliest Hero shin'd,/And stole away th' enchanted gazer's mind" (I, 103-4). Again we note the excessive romantic hyperbole:

He whom she favours lives; the other dies. 
There might you see one sigh, another rage,
And some (their violent passions to assuage)
Compile sharp satires, but alas, too late,
For faithful love will never turn to hate.
And many seeing great princes were denied,
Pin'd as they went, and thinking on her died.
On this feast day, O cursed day and hour,
Went Hero through Sestos, from her tower
To Venus' temple, where unhappily,
As after chanc'd, they did each other spy. (I, 124-34)

The first of the aphorisms ("faithful love will never turn to hate") appears in this section. Next follows a tour-de-force of mythological lore as the poet describes Venus's temple (I, 135-57). The enamourment follows as Leander sees Hero open her eyes as she rises from a kneeling position:

Thence flew Love's arrow with the golden head,
And thus Leander was enamoured.
Stone still he stood, and evermore he gazed,
Till with the fire that from his count'rance blazed,
Relenting Hero's gentle heart was strook:
Such force and virtue hath an amourous look. (I, 161-66)

Up to this point the poem has been entirely narrative-descriptive, except for the brief one-line comment by the narrator about faithful love turning to hate. Following the enamourment, however, we have the first long digression by the narrator as he intrudes into the story:

It lies not in our power to love, or hate,
For will in us is over-rul'd by fate.
When two are stript, long ere the course begin,
We wish that one should lose, the other win;
And one especially do we affect
Of two gold ingots, like in each respect.
The reason no man knows; let it suffice,
What we behold is censur'd by our eyes.
Where both deliberate, the love is slight;
Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight? (I, 167-76)

The first couplet of this section concerning "will" and "fate" has been much discussed by the critics. L. C. Martin,
speaking of how Hero and Leander may endorse or correct views expressed by Marlowe in his plays, states:

The writer now speaks in *proppria persona* and allows himself to comment freely upon the course of events in his story; and these asides or elucidations should be at least as reliably Marlovian as the reflections of his dramatic characters. But since they may express merely the poet's transient moods, they can only be used with extreme caution as an index to the main trends of his mentality.\(^1\)

Martin's advice of caution seems well taken, since he notes that some have taken this as an indication that Marlowe has shifted or substantially modified his attitude concerning human power and will implicit in passages from his plays. Martin continues: "But they may represent no more than a passing fancy, or more probably still they convey a sentiment congenial to the poet chiefly because of its artistic propriety at the point where it occurs. And from the reflective passages as a whole it would be difficult to exact convincing evidence of such philosophical composure as has been attributed to their author at this stage."\(^2\) F. S. Boas also cautions about reading too much into "will," which he interprets "... in its narrower Elizabethan sense of amourous desire, or its opposite ... [for] if it is to be taken in its naked simplicity, and in its natural interpretation today, it is the negation of the dominant spirit of Marlovian drama."\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Martin, p. 9.
\(^2\) Martin, p. 9.
\(^3\) Boas, p. 230
As earlier noted, J. B. Steane reads *Hero and Leander* as a poem of complexities shifting in places from the comic to the serious. He recognizes the points made by Martin and Boas, but then turns to the possible "serious" meaning behind the 'will and fate' couplet:

The other reading, taking the lines seriously is more personal and intuitive. It depends in the first place on a feeling that the tone deepens at this point where a crisis in the narrative provokes that kind of a commentary, especially in a writer whose manner at other times is so un-sententious and non-abstract. This feeling takes support from the fact that the first couplet is on any reading a remarkable one to have found Marlowe writing.

... In a Marlowe whose dramas originate to a great extent in the passionate wills of people, this notion of a power overruling will in such important departments must be one that sets resonating a great deal that is fundamental in his thought and feeling.  

It seems to me that reading one couplet in a eight-hundred line poem that is basically comical, and seeing in the couplet a fundamental change in the philosophical attitude of a poet is over-reading the couplet, especially when the section in which it appears is appropriate, given the structural patterning Marlowe is following, not to mention the matter of the Elizabethan definition of "will." It is more likely that the narrator wishes to show us that "alas, that's the way life is in matters of love and hate." Douglas Bush comments on this couplet and seems more to the point:

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74 Steane, p. 315.
But though fate is thus invoked as the cause of love, the conception of fate as foredooming lovers, which is so essential to the story, Marlowe does scarcely more than play with. There are slight hints in the first sestiad . . ., but in general, instead of the ever present, consciousness of tragic destiny that Shakespeare gives us, or Chaucer in Troilus, we have the mingled conceits and satire of the tale of Cupid, and briefer but not less trivial allusions to the part played by the gods.75

Thus, one can see this intrusion by the narrator into the poem not as dramatically serious comment on forces moving the characters, but as a kind of conventional aside ("dear reader") which explains the way love and hate work "at first sight."

The poem returns to the narrative where we find Leander bent in prayer to Hero. She says to herself that "were I the saint he worships, I would hear him" (I, l. 179). She moves closer to him, and,

He started up; she blush'd as one ashamed;
Where with Leander much more was inflam'd.
He touch'd her hand; in touching it she trembled;
Love deeply grounded, hardly is dissembled.
These lovers parled by touch of hands;
True love is mute, and oft amazed stands.
Thus while dumb sighs their yielding hearts entangled,
The air with sparks of living fire was spangled; (I, 181-188)

Again, we note the use of a couple of one-line aphorisms by the narrator: "Love deeply grounded, hardly is dissembled" (l. 184) and "True love is mute, and oft amazed stands." One begins to wonder whether the lovers inspire the use of these "sententious" comments or whether the sententious comments

75 Bush, p. 134.
inspire the description of the lovers. Since Marlowe is "setting up" the situations, it would appear that he is "proving" the wisdom of "conventional wisdom." At any rate, the scene is conventionally romantic with its dumbfounded and blushing lovers. Four lines later, Leander begins

Love's holy fire, with words, with sighs and tears,
Which like sweet music enter'd Hero's ears;
And yet at every word she turn'd aside,
And always cut him off as he replied. (I, 192-196)

Somehow Hero does not seem to be struck with love at first sight, but she comes around later as Leander begins to speak like a "bold sophister" (I. 187) after an eight line "introduction" in which he wishes his "rude words had the influence/
To lead thy thoughts as thy fair looks do mine" (I, 200-201). He states:

My words shall be as spotless as my youth,
Full of simplicity and naked truth. (I, 207-208)

Leander's speech in its "simplicity and naked truth" is approximately 120 lines of sophistic rhetoric which has as its only goal the seduction of Hero. Its "simplicity and truth" are lost along the way. Leander's technique is somewhat parallel to that of the poet, recalling the description of Leander in which the poet said his rude pen could not describe the loves of men, while at the same time he was doing just that. The same kind of comic use of rhetoric is in force here. In summarizing Leander's simple and truthful speech we find these elements: First, he says "why worship Venus
whose beauty you exceed?", just as "A stately builted ship, well-rigg'd and tall" (I, l. 225) makes the ocean more majestic, why stay in Sestos when Hero "On Love's seas more glorius would appear?" (I, l. 228). Then he goes on to show how things not "used" (i.e., untuned golden strings, brass vessels, treasure, rich robes, a palace, a house) have no value--false analogies abound. He then turns to more abstract arguments equally sophistical. The final argument in this first section of persuasive rhetoric returns to more concrete, but no less sophistical, argumentation when Leander states that whether a beautiful woman is false or not some "vile tongues" will blot her name anyway; and if she lives alone, people will think she is being kept as a mistress, not to be shared with anyone. The use of such rhetoric, introduced as "simplicity and naked truth," has been noted as one of the most humorous of Marlowe's comic techniques in the poem. The first part of this sophistical harangue ends when Leander asks Hero to whom she made a vow of chastity.

'To Venus,' answered she, and as she spake,
Forth from those two tralucent cisterns brake
A stream of liquid pearl, which down her face
Made milk-white paths, whereon the gods might trace
To Jove's high court. (I, 295-299)

The romantic hyperbole has not been left out of this section either. Hero is still not convinced, but she is wavering, so Leander continues:

The rites
In which love's beauteous empress most delights,
Are banquets, Doric music, midnight-revel,
Plays, masques, and all that stern age counteth evil.
(I, 299-302)
Hero smiles at Leander's request for a kiss, and he continues to bombard her with sophistic rhetoric.

'Though neither gods nor men may thee deserve,
Yet for her sake whom you have vow'd to serve,
Abandon fruitless cold Virginity,
The gentle queen of love's sole enemy.
Then shall you most resemble Venus' nun,
When Venus' sweet rites are performed and done. (I, 315-320)

He asks her to give up her vow for the sake of the goddess to whom she made it. Then follows the double-entendre about Hero being truly "Venus' nun" once she has sacrificed her virginity. At this point,

Hero's looks yielded, but her words made war;
Women are won when they begin to jar.
Thus having swallow'd Cupid's golden hook,
The more she striv'd, the deeper was she strook:
Yet evilly feigning anger, strove she still,
And would be thought to grant against her will. (I, 331-335)

For all of Leander's love at first sight, Hero seems to need more convincing. She replies, asking Leander, "'Who taught thee rhetoric to deceive a maid'" (I, 1. 338). But she adds that though she should abhor the words, she likes them because of who is saying them. Leander then tries to embrace her, but she slips away from him. She abruptly changes the subject and tells where her turret can be found and a "come thither" (I, 1. 375) to Leander slips out:

And suddenly her former colour chang'd,
And here and there her eyes, through anger, rang'd,
And, like a planet moving several ways
At one self instant, she poor soul assays,
Loving, not to love at all, and every part
Strove to resist the motions of her heart. (I, 359-364)

She prays to Venus and vows to uphold her chastity, but
meanwhile "Cupid beats down her prayers with his wings, / Her vows above the empty air he flings" (I, 369-370). He then shoots Hero with one of his arrows "Wherewith she strooken, look'd so dolefully, / As made love sigh, to see his tyranny " (I, 373-374). Cupid flies to the Destinies to request that Hero and Leander "Both might enjoy each other, and be blest" (I, l. 380). The Destinies refuse because of their hatred of Cupid. All this is by way of introduction (and transition) to the first major digression from the narrative itself, although it is thematically related to the story of Hero and Leander. For the reason of the Destinies' hatred of Cupid, the narrator says, "Harken a while, and I will tell you why" (I, l. 385). It seems that one day Mercury, Jove's son, spotted a desirable country maid' "Yet proud she was (for lofty Pride that dwells/ In tow'red courts, is oft in shepherd's cells)" (I, 393-394). She also knew she was beautiful. Mercury "charmed" her feet so that she could not run away from his wooing and kissing. Then,

As shepherds do, her on the ground he laid, 
And tumbling in the grass, he often stray'd 
Beyond the bounds of shame, in being bold 
To eye those parts which no eye should behold. (I, 405-408)

Mercury makes the mistake of telling of his parentage and the maid "Whose only dowry was her chastity" (I, l. 412) threatens to cry out to the shepherds in the area. He then releases her, and she runs a little way with him following her.

After went Mercury, who us'd such cunning, 
As she, to hear his tale, left off her running,
Maids are not won by brutish force and might,
But speeches full of pleasure and delight. (I, 417-420)

The maid would neither deny, or grant his suit.
Still vow'd he love; she, wanting no excuse
To feed him with delays, as women use,
Or thirsting after immortality,
All women are ambitious naturally,
Impos'd upon her love such a task,
As he ought not perform, nor yet she ask. (I, 424-430)

These passages point out a basic anti-feminist attitude
which has been heretofore more subtle. We can also note the
parallels between Mercury's wooing of the maid and Leander's
attempted seduction of Hero. Somehow the romantic ideal of
"love at first sight" does not aid the wooer as much as the
art of rhetoric does. This too can be seen as part of the
satire of romantic heterosexual love and the dim view the poet
has of womankind. The rest of the digression tells how
Mercury stole from Jove "A draught of flowing Nector" (I, l. 431)
for the maid to drink. Jove is furiously angry and descending
to earth he asks Cupid's help. Cupid, "To be reveng'd on
Jove" (I, l. 442), wounds the Destinies with love which forc'd
them to aid "deceitful Mercury" (I, l. 446). They agree to
return Mercury's father, Saturn, to Olympus. Once Mercury
gets his wish, he disdains the Destinies. In retaliation, they
return Jove to his throne, and as punishment, they decree
that Mercury (who represented learning) should always be poor:

That he and Poverty should always kiss.
And to this day is every scholar poor,
Gross gold from them runs headlong to the boor. (I, 470-472)

Marlowe also gets in a few slams at "servile clowns" who
profess learning. The "angry Sisters" also see to it:

That Midas' brood shall sit in Honour's chair,
To which the Muses' sons are only heir;
And fruitful wits, that in aspiring are,
Shall discontent run into regions far;
And few great lords in virtuous deeds shall joy,
But be surpris'd with every garish toy;
And still enrich the lofty servile clown,
Who with encroaching guile keeps learning down. (I, 475-480)

The mild invective shown in this passage indicates a type of satire that later Elizabethans developed into harsh invective and in more direct attacks on ideas and people. The couplets especially appear as forerunners of the type masterfully developed by Dryden and Pope a century later.

This digression of some one-hundred lines serves to let the reader know why Cupid couldn't convince the Destinies to bless the union of Hero and Leander. The sestiad ends:

Then muse not Cupid's suit no better sped,
Seeing in their loves the Fates were injured. (I, 483-484)

The section about Mercury is, of course, only tangentially related to the story of Hero and Leander. However, it has to do with feminine psychology (the country maid), the use of rhetoric in seduction (Mercury's wooing), and the vagaries of fate--all of which are related thematically to the story of Hero and Leander. It is also within the convention of Ovidian imitation, which would make this digression justifiable on the grounds that it was simply mythological ornamentation. It fits Marlowe's purposes since it has elements of humor, chides women, and mildly attacks abuses in learning apparent to him as a scholar himself. These elements reinforce the
hypothesis that Hero and Leander was conceived as satire.

In the second sestiad, Marlowe brings us directly back to the narrative with the rather comically abrupt:

By this, sad Hero, with love unacquainted,
    Viewing Leander's face, fell down and fainted. (II, 1-2)

Whereas in the first sestiad, Hero's mental consternation is apparent, in the second, in many places her physical reactions to the seduction are stated so factually that an air of slapstick becomes readily noticeable. Both lovers appear awkward and naive, even Leander, the suave sophister of the first sestiad. Leander breathes life into the prostrate Hero with a kiss, and she immediately trips away but not without several looks behind her and excuses for lingering along the way. At one time, she even stops "but was afraid,/ In offering parley, to be counted light" (II, 8-9). However, she drops her fan ("Thinking to train Leander therewithal" (II, 12)), but he is such a novice that he does not realize what is happening. He doesn't follow her but sends a letter to which she replies encouraging Leander to visit her. The pace of events in this sestiad is much greater than in the first; and before we know it, we are with Leander at Hero's tower.

The second meeting seems more appropriately to bring out the idea of love at first sight--perhaps a neat Marlovian twist on a romantic convention. Hero has her room strewn with roses. She waits anxiously and finally Leander arrives.

...0 who can tell the greeting
These greedy lovers had at their first meeting?
He ask'd, she gave, and nothing was denied.  
Both to each other quickly were affied.  (II, 23-26)

Then follows an inserted comment by the narrator:

"Sweet are the kisses, the embracements sweet,  
When like desires and affections meet;  
For from the earth to heaven is Cupid rais'd,  
Where fancy is in equal balance pais'd.)  (II, 29-32)

However, Hero still is not sure and her "rashness  
suddenly repented,/ and turn'd aside, and to herself lamented"  
(II, 33-34).  She continues to waver concerning her honor and  
wishes, "albeit not from her heart" (II, l. 37), that Leander  
would leave her tower.  But then she changes her mind, "lest  
his love abated" (II, l. 43), and jumps on Leander to continue  
their affectionate embraces.  I think that Marlowe's point  
here again is to comment on the romantic "Love at first sight"  
idea.  Hero is humorously pictured as someone who is not sure  
of what she is doing, which is quite a bit removed from the  
all-consuming passion we would expect from love at first  
sight.  Leander, of course, is seen as delighted with the  
"free hand" he is given ("O what god would not therewith be  
appeas'd?").  He toys with her "as a brother with his sister"  
(II, l. 52), (Perhaps a rather sinister idea lurks behinds this  
statement), and

Supposing nothing else was to be done,  
Now he her favour and good will had won.  (II, 53-54)

Leander, "rude in Love" (II, l. 61), after dallying with  
Hero, "Nothing saw/ That might delight him more, Yet he sus-  
pected/ Some amourous rites or other were neglected" (II, 63-64).
The understatement at this point enhances the comic effect. With this suspicion, Leander presses the battle for this unknown *piece-de-resistance*. Hero, "fearing on the rushes to be flung/ Striv'd with redoubled strength" (II, 66-67) to get away, but this just makes Leander more intense. (It also heightens the description of this comic scene.)

She, with a kind of granting, put him by it,  
And ever, as he thought himself most nigh it,  
Like to the tree of Tantalus she fled,  
And seeming lavish, sav'd her maidenhead.  
Ne'er king more sought to keep his diadem,  
Than Hero this inestimable gem. (I, 73-78)

Hence, Hero wins the first of the comic-slapstick battles for her virginity. The narrator closes out the battle scene with the intrusion of a comment which can be read as somewhat bawdy, typical of Ovid. We must keep in mind what the poet has been referring to when he spoke of a "gem" in the previous passage:

_Above our life we love a steadfast friend,  
Yet when a token of great worth we send,  
We often kiss it, often look thereon,  
And stay the messenger that would be gone:  
No marvel then, though Hero would not yield  
So soon to part from that she dearly held:  
Jewels being lost are found again, this never,  'Tis lost but once, and once lost, lost for ever._  
(II, 79-86)

The proximity of Hero's "gem" and "a token of great worth" and "often kiss it, often look thereon" is too close to be accidental, especially in a poem of this type when it is written by Christopher Marlowe.

Hero has been saved by the dawn (and her own strength), and Leander departs at first light. The description of his
leave-taking is conventionally romantic. We also find that Hero has given him her myrtle wreath and even though it is early in the morning, with few people around, the wreath "made his love through Sestos to be known" (II, 1. 111). Somehow the word gets to Abydos faster than Leander can sail there. We're told:

...for incorporeal Fame,
Whose weight consists in nothing but her name,
Is swifter than the wind, whose tardy plumes
Are reeking water and dull earthly fumes. (II, 113-116)

Leander arrives home, but he sees it as exile. In the intervening lines the poet explains Leander's state and how he is unable to conceal his love. Leander's father spots the problem immediately and rebukes him, trying "to quench the sparkles new begun" (II, 1. 138). His father's attempts are in vain for "nothing more than counsel lovers hate" (II, 1. 140). Leander then climbs a rock and stares at Hero's tower across the Hellespont. He prays for the waters to part, but they don't comply. In a rather ungracious (and hence comical) way,

With that he stripp'd him to the ivory skin,
And crying, 'Love, I come," leapt lively in. (II, 153-154)

Leander is off to do battle again; this time after swimming the Hellespont, having had no sleep, and without any clothes--(only one of which seems to be appropriate for the occasion).

With Leander's jump into the water, the second major digression of the poem begins. Neptune, mistaking Leander for Ganymede, has the waves pull him to the bottom where the
mermaids are sporting with their loves. "The lusty god embraced him, call'd him 'love',/ And swore he never should return to Jove" (II, 167-168). Neptune realizes it isn't Ganymede because "Under water he [Leander] was almost dead" (II, l. 170). Leander is returned to the surface, and the infatuated Neptune calms the waves for him. Then follows a passage (II, 181-191) in which Neptune plays wantonly with Leander, caressing every part of his body. Rosemond Tuve cautions that Elizabethans would have read this passage as purely metaphorical—Neptune being a personification of the waters surrounding Leander. However, again, given Marlowe's much reported sexual proclivities, one would also have to give the literal description here weight, especially in light of the description of Leander at the beginning of the first sestiad. The homosexual overtones cannot be denied, even given the possible metaphorical meaning. Leander, in reply to Neptune's talk of love, cries "'You are deceiv'd, I am no woman,'" (II, l. 192). At this Neptune smiles and begins a digression within the digression. It is about a shepherd who "Played with a boy so lovely fair and kind,/ As for his love both earth and heaven pin'd" (II, 195-196). He goes on for five more lines, but Leander interrupts, telling Neptune he is in a hurry (in a conventionally romantic way, of course):

76 Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery (Chicago, 1947), p. 159.
'Aye me,' Leander cried, 'th' enamoured sun, That now should shine on Thetis' glossy bower, Descends upon my radiant Hero's tower: O that these tardy arms of mine were wings!' (II, 202-205)

The impatient lover being held up by an amourous god is a fine comic touch. But what follows is perhaps the most serious of the interruptions of the narrative by the poet. Leander begins to swim away from Neptune, but the god is angered because Leander does not want to hear his tale. The god throws his mace at Leander, but out of love for him recalls it, and it hits his own hand, wounding him. This comic touch is soon tempered as Leander, seeing the wound, gives a look of sympathy which is felt by Neptune. The poet comments:

... In gentle breasts
Relenting thoughts, remorse and pity rests.
And who have hard hearts, and obdurate minds,
But vicious, hare-brain'd, and illit'rate hinds?
(II, 215-218)

This could be the poet's personal comment to those who condemn, persecute, and misunderstand homosexuals. It is in the same spirit as his attack on the "servile clowns" at the end of the first sestiad. Leander here represents the "gentle" minds who do not prejudge out of ignorance or misunderstanding. Homosexuals of that period were persecuted even more severely than in modern times.77

Breathless, Leander finally makes it to shore, and doesn't stop to rest but goes straight to Hero's tower. Hearing his knock, she hurries to the door, forgetting to put on her robes.

77 See Kocher, p. 209.
The comedy of this third meeting of the lovers is overt.

And drunk with gladness, to the door she goes;
Where seeing a naked man, she screech'd for fear,
Such sights as this to tender maids are rare. (II, 236-238)

She runs to her bed, he follows but not necessarily for the reason we may think:

Through numbing cold all feeble faint and wan;
'If not for love, yet, love, for pity sake,
Me in thy bed and maiden bosom take;
At least vouchsafe these arms some little room,
Who hoping to embrace them, cheerly swum,
This head was beat with many a churlish billow.
And therefore let it rest upon thy pillow.' (II, 246-252)

Leander needs to be revived before he can do anything, a rather un-romantic idea. However, the heat from where Hero's body had lain rejuvenates Leander, and he attempts to grab her.

She slides under the sheets to hide:

And as her silver body downward went,
With both her hands she made the bed a tent. (II, 263-264)

Leander tries to seduce her with words,

Yet ever as he greedily assay'd
To touch those dainties, she the harpy play'd,
And every limb did as a soldier stout
Defend the fort and keep the foeman out. (II, 269-272)

There follows a few lines of description of the erotic foreplay which leads to Leander's victory and finally the "Poor silly maiden, at his mercy was" (II, l. 286). The narrator sums up Leander's attitude:

Love is not full of pity, as men say,
But deaf and cruel where he means to prey. (II, 287-288)

And Hero:

Even as a bird, which in our hands we wring,
Forth plungeth, and often flutters with her wing,
She trembling strove; this strife of hers (like that
Which made the world) another world begat
Of unknown joy. Treason was in her thought,
And cunningly to yield herself she sought.
Seeming not won, yet won she was at length,
In such wars women use but half their strength.

(II 289-296)

After the consummation of the act, we are aware of a tone
and attitude of repose—it lasts about sixteen lines. Then
Hero, who does not know what to say or do next, tries to
sneak away, leaving Leander alone in bed.

But as her naked feet were whipping out,
He on the sudden cling'd her so about,
That mermaid-like onto the floor she slid,
One half appear'd, the other half was hid. (II, 313-316)

Thus, after the completion of the ultimate romantic act,
the whole thing is deflated by another touch of slapstick. To
the very end the inflation-deflation cycle has been maintained.
In describing first what is romantically conventional and
following it with what might really happen to lovers, Marlowe
is chiefly satirizing the romanticizing of heterosexual love
as it was idealized in the late Renaissance. The eroticism in
the poem is mainly in what can be construed as homosexual
taste. Marlowe's purpose in presenting this in an Ovidian-love
narrative may center around either his desire to flaunt his
own homosexuality or to satirize not only romantic conventions
but conventional love itself. Whatever the case, he has done
it artfully in composing one of the literary highlights of the
late Renaissance.
CONCLUSION

The general tone of Hero and Leander, as noted by Hallet Smith, "...is the result of a highly romantic or baroque decoration combined with gravely mocking asides." This is the matter of the deflation of romantic hyperbole and "romantic" love itself, which we have noted Marlowe doing at various points in the poem. The "gravely mocking asides" Smith refers to are the elements of satire, which he finds inherent in most Elizabethan literature. We also noted earlier that Paul H. Kocher found "The smudges of satirical realism (in the poem) ...neither very dark nor very numerous." We can agree, at least, that there are elements of satire in Hero and Leander; however that tells us nothing new about the poem. Taking into consideration the points made in this study, and reviewing the faults other critics have found in the poem, given their particular readings, it seems judicious to assert that Marlowe had much more of the satirical in mind when writing Hero and Leander than previous critics have given him credit for. In the reading we have noted these elements of humor and satire:

1. In lines 1-4, the juxtaposition of ornate style with simple, factual reporting.

78 Smith, p. 79.
80 See above p. 12.
2. The description of Hero which is overdone to the point of ridiculousness, or rather, to the point of deflating romantic hyperbole.

3. The irony in the description of Leander (who is presented as more desirable than Hero) which amounts to mockery of heterosexual love; plus, the narrator's "denial" of his ability to "blazon forth the loves of men," while at the same time he does it.

4. "Love at first sight," which needs the aid of second and third encounters.

5. The narrator's "sententious" comments.

6. The humor in Leander's sophistic rhetoric, which also aids "love at first sight."

7. The punning on "Venus' nun."

8. Hero's slips of the tongue.

9. The Mercury episode explaining his problems with a young maid; the poet's anti-feminist tone; and a mild attack on the abuses of learning.

10. The slapstick quality of Hero's predicament.

11. Leander's inexperience.

12. Hero's inability to make up her mind.

13. The bawdy reference concerning Hero's "gem."

14. Leander's entrance into the Hellespont.

15. The Neptune episode with the case of mistaken identity, the near drowning of Leander, the homosexual overtones, and Leander's boredom with Neptune's story.

16. Hero coming to the door and seeing Leander naked.

17. Leander at first being too tired from his swimming to renew his attempts at conquest.

18. Hero's escape into the covers where she "makes the bed a tent."
19. Hero's not knowing what to do next after the consummation and her attempted exit which is foiled by Leander.

20. Finally, Hero's sliding half-way out of the bed--a realistic deflation of the ultimate romantic act.

All the structural units and thematic elements can be accounted for in reading the poem as a satire of the literary and thematic conventions of romantic love narratives. Even the flaunting of homosexual love can be seen as mocking romantic, heterosexual love. Therefore, satire can be seen as a fundamental intention in Marlowe's Hero and Leander. His purpose was to satirize rather than employ the romantic conventions of the Italianate-Ovidian tradition.
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