



# Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood

*Patrick Cheney*

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*Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession* presents the first comprehensive reading of the Marlowe canon in over a generation. The occasion for Patrick Cheney's rereading is a primary discovery: Marlowe organized his canon around an "Ovidian" career model, or *cursus*, which turns from amatory poetry to tragedy to epic. Ovid had advertised this *cursus* only in his inaugural poem, the *Amores*, where its purpose was to counter the Virgilian *cursus* of pastoral, georgic, and epic. Marlowe was the first writer to translate the *Amores*, and thus the first to make the Ovidian *cursus* literally his own.

Marlowe inscribes this *cursus* not simply to participate in the Renaissance recovery of classical authors, but in particular to contest the national authority of the 'Virgil of England,' Edmund Spenser. Using an Ovidian *cursus* to contest Spenser's Virgilian *cursus*, Marlowe enters the generational project of writing English nationhood. Unlike Spenser, however, Marlowe writes a 'counter-nationhood' - a nonpatriotic form of nationhood that subverts royal power with what Ovid calls *libertas*.

By discovering the original project organizing an otherwise fragmentary canon, Cheney aims to change the most basic lens through which critics have viewed Marlowe: 'Shakespearean drama'. This lens cannot account for two of the most striking features of Marlowe's canon: his scholarly use of translation and his writing of epic. Cheney proposes that a theatrical, Shakespearean model has prevented critics from discovering the original context within which Marlowe produced his art: a multimedia, multi-genre Spenserian model of Ovidian counter-nationhood.

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