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Slutty Embellishments: Elizabethan Fashion and Projections of Decadence in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*

Brian Holmes

On June 15, 1574, in Greenwich, Queen Elizabeth I delivered an address enforcing statutes of apparel, lamenting that "the excess of apparel and the superfluity of unnecessary foreign wares thereto belonging now of late years is grown by sufferance to such an extremity that the manifest decay of the whole realm generally is likely to follow."¹ In response to such apparent decay, Elizabeth's sumptuary laws tailored clothing to meet rigid restrictions within her court. These laws thus created a visual rhetoric in which embellishments functioned as the materialization of both a spoken limitation on class-related self-presentation and an unspoken lexicon of ambitious hierarchical extravagance. As Elizabeth meticulously named within each and every statute the pedigree of those who would qualify for exceptions to the rules of specific dress-codes, the purpose of her sumptuary laws became clear: to define a social hierarchy in order to maintain control. Elizabeth's obvious goals were to assert her power as a feminine, authoritarian monarch and to exercise control of her subjects. As she grappled with the anxieties of emergent modernity and the controversy of being a female monarch, Elizabeth's reign focused primarily on maintaining appearance—a means of governance ruled by an obsession with self-display—to enforce political stability.

On the surface, the sumptuary statutes attempted to restrict expenditure on foreign fashions and extravagance out of fear of the rhetorical power ornamentation carries—a language of sartorial economics that should only be spoken and understood by those who need to look the part.² The confusion of

stations implied in the possibility of a commoner indulging in the fashion of an Elizabethan courtier requires someone to tell people what to wear: superficial differentiation is required for maintaining a social hierarchy. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass point to Phillip Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) as bridging the idea of clothing as superficial indulgence and the depth of hegemonic disruption that such superficiality produces. Stubbes agrees with Elizabeth that the act of overindulging is a base sin of sumptuousness and an unaffordable strain on economy, but he considers the very non-necessity of clothing more dangerous because clothing prints its meaning onto a wearer. That is, clothes "transnature" their wearer: they "give a nature to what previously had [none], [turning] the virtuous into the vicious, the strong into the weak, the male into the female, the godly into the satanic," and the nun into the whore.³ They create a depth that exceeds a personalized gown fitting: clothes become a second skin, which molds itself to a skull,⁴ warranting Stubbes's reservations of "sumptuous dress as the proper dignity of high office."⁵ Clothing must be considered as an investiture, livery that provides the literal form a person was allotted—their "shape, a social function, a 'depth'."

Although livery is not an obvious concern of Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, the Elizabethan poem's refusal to adhere to sumptuary law exposes anxieties about the relation between dress and social identity. I wish to trace the connections between clothing and ideas about social control that the poem explores: to navigate the dialogic threads that initiate a kind of proto-modernism in the poem, like Hero dressing in whorish purple when she should not. In the midst of the vesterian crisis over clerical dress, Hero's fashion pairs her with the likes of Archbishop Parker, whose desire for the clergy's dressing in vestments and square caps was "attacked [by anti-vesterians] as the materialization of the Whore of Babylon."⁶ This quality of clothing should only be expected from a royal sponsor, which implicates Hero in her obstinacy toward subscribing to the apparel statutes of Elizabeth's England. If clothes both name and carry socio-economic value, then Hero's garments properly fashioned her into a "Venus nunne."⁷ That is, her clothing in the poem exposes a tension between conformity and its subversion. The economic currency of Hero's clothing is weightier than her morality, directly correlating with the ultimately failed attempt to falsely accessorize her as a lady of the court: the lavish attire does not cover the "sinner" that wears them.

In response to such impositions, it seems that Hero assumes a satiric role in Marlowe's poem, wearing the kind of over-embellished costumes that Elizabeth was known for in her later years, and thus representing a facet of cultural decadence—a dramatized decline of order. This assumption of cultural decadence seems to be the very point on which Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* pivots, deriving its beginning tension from Hero's sumptuous attire and ending in her

deadly nudity. Reading the poem from this perspective, I argue, the estranged pastoral description of Hero's garments sets up the decadent complexities that subsequently unfold: Hero's already sumptuous clothing is shed from her virgin body in tandem with her increasing lust as Leander attempts to expose her to carnal knowledge. The progression of her promiscuity terminates with a failed aubade that implies, instead of an expected regeneration, her moral degeneration: the eternal damnation of losing the will to live. Rather than attempting to categorize Marlowe as a modernist, then, I am examining the concept of embellishment in *Hero and Leander*—both literally on Hero's clothing and descriptively through Marlowe's writing—as a symptom of breaking from the tradition of categorization altogether, to refuse to limit the potential of a text as a living, breathing document.

A postmodern historicism unsews the early modern period from the conceptual renaissance of antiquity and rehangs it with what David Lee Miller describes as the "agonized emergence of intertwining social, political, economic, and cultural forms of European modernity."⁸ A similar historicism would uproot scholarly appropriation of literary periodic terms, which go through their own historicization, developing specific systems of analysis through their respective, distinctive features, resulting in authors' styles becoming projected structures outside of historical, linear time and offering a potential understanding of these resonances. What should be made, then, of unidentified resonances in the past that scholars note in recent literary history? I would argue for a reverse renaissance that celebrates and mourns the pre-existing modernities of supposed contemporaneity: to locate trends of more recent aesthetics that were previously uncharted in the past and reconsider the multiple lenses through which literature demands to be seen.⁹

No literature, regardless of time or place, can avoid the wave of modernity, the assumption of the superiority of the present as a step in a mutating series of superior "presents." In *Five Faces of Modernity*, Matei Calinescu considers modernity, due to its universal implication, as a critical abstraction of literatures across the globe. He defines this abstraction through the comparison of the contradictory French and Hispanic tendencies in *fin de siècle* Europe. The combatting aesthetics within the contemporary French literary "schools" of the Parnassians, decadents, and symbolists demonstrate the French failure to acknowledge their own similarities and converge into a singular school of modernity, the equivalent Hispanic *modernismo* as the "complete and utter end of all schools."¹⁰ In his discussion of the various modernisms, Calinescu comments on this interest of modernity, "which is certainly changing—to the point that change constitutes its essence."¹¹ The attitude toward history and modernity—anti-traditionalism—is the very manifestation of the modern: an "urge for change."¹² Calinescu makes the case that a false conception of modernism

relies solely on history rather than aesthetics and their history. A truer understanding of modernity as a linear trajectory requires a convergence of history and aesthetics, a necessity to realize that our present Anglophone modernity starts with the end of the Elizabethan era and ends with the discontinuity of the twentieth century's conceptualized "modern": again, modernity always implies a tradition of anti-traditionalism.¹³

Modernity must thus be understood by the beginning and end of a moment, a destiny to die. In what Calinescu considers a poetic manifesto, "The Future of Poetry," the modernist poet and critic John Crowe Ransom recognizes modernism's possession of two principles: 1) "to disembarass poetry of its terrible incubus of piety," and 2) that poetry contains freer verse where "meter is more elastic to accommodate novelties."¹⁴ Although Marlowe does not fully comport to the latter definition of free verse, he does invent his own style, transfiguring preceding verse forms and modes. Marlowe's mock blazon of Hero, for example, turns the metaphysically embodied attributes of courtly love into mere embellishments of their original intentions, rejecting Petrarchan love poetry and sonnet tradition altogether. He furthers this mode of anti-traditionalism in Ransom's primary sense of modernism by subverting piety. Rather than a unary, Christian God, a selection from the Greek pantheon—Aphrodite, Cupid, and Poseidon—governs the narrative of *Hero and Leander*. Marlowe's avoidance and rejection of Judeo-Christianity culminates with Hero's denied prayer, albeit pagan, criticizing the performance of praying and its inherent, earthly failures. Ransom's conception of modernism further highlights the impatience and destructiveness of aspiring moderns, examining poetic predecessors with a magnifying critical lens, which, for Calinescu, results in a fatal aesthetic paralysis.

In Hero's case, conflating holy terms like "chastity, bless[ing], and prayer" with Greek gods in a Christian world is "bound to lead to a situation of crisis." For Hero, this conflation manifests itself through the "resentment" of giving herself over to desire and the ultimate decay of her beauty.¹⁵ Thus, the social decay Elizabeth fears, anticipated in her statutes, is the very result of this willed urge for change that characterizes modernity, which Friedrich Nietzsche points to as not merely a literary movement but rather a global phenomenon. From this point of view, modernity and decadence are redundant. The "new" becomes the symptom of decay. This conflation requires the recognition of decadence as "a phenomenon of the order of the will" that can be at once negative, the acknowledgement of an ontological decline in order, and psychically positive, a manifestation of the desire for progress.

With the reality of Elizabeth's sumptuary statutes as its cultural backdrop, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* operates like a decadent text through its depiction of Hero's cultural degradation. But before going further into the implications

of sumptuary clothing in the poem, I should first construct the imaginary that is Hero's dress as it is described early in the poem. The pastoral enargia of her ensemble in the following excerpt seems to assemble the necessary elements of her decadent destiny.¹⁶ In accordance with the fashion of the times, Marlowe associates Hero's body with "modernizing" social change. With Elizabeth's sumptuary statutes already imposed, Hero knowingly wears unsuitable clothing that is reserved for the royalty of the Tudor court, rejecting institutionalized hegemony. Yet, the idea of a false blazon, with Marlowe's diction, deceptively dresses Hero's transgressive body with embellished language, painted in the frame of a pastoral, idealized beauty:

The outside of her garments were of lawne,
the lining, purple silke, with guilt starres drawne,
her wide sleeves greene, and bordered with a grove,
Where *Venus* in her naked glory strove.¹⁷

Aside from the more obvious textile definition, "lawne" can be interpreted to mean "an open space between woods; a glade."¹⁸ This pun imagines Hero's body as a landscape under "guilt stares ... bordered with a grove," where *Venus* is free to frolic in her glorious nudity. In the context of Tudor fashion, Hero's sleeves are notably "wide," correlating to Eleri Lynn's description of the "Spanish sleeves, which were wide decorative outer sleeves"—an example of the "unnecessary foreign wares" Elizabeth forbade from lowly subjects.¹⁹ Describing this piece of Hero's costume as "greene" demonstrates both the rich color of Hero's body as pasture and her clothing as an accessory of a stylish, wanton wardrobe.²⁰ Moreover, the "purple silke" with "guilt starres drawne" are a readily discernible fabric and design reserved for someone of a higher class, as Elizabeth I decreed: "No persons under the degrees above specified"—the lowliest of whom were knight's wives—"shall wear any guard or welt of silk upon any petticoat, cloak, or safeguard."²¹ The extravagance of her dress overtly exceeds even the smallest amount of silk reserved for the lowliest ranks, signifying the over-idealization of Hero's imagined beauty.

Yet, Marlowe's language, interrupting himself, prevents a reader from following the blazon without returning to the beginning. Miller rightfully critiques the narrative for recycling language, which forces a rereading of the first few lines as the text begins with a circular prophecy of the ending:

On Hellespont, guiltie of true love's blood,
In view and opposit two citties stood,
Seaborderers, disjoin'd by Neptun's might:
The one Abydos, the other Sestos hight. (1-5)

“Hellespont” implies a forgone conclusion, a scene determined by the narrator’s disclosure of details. Marlowe’s destruction of the suspense that accompanies linearity suggests the narrator’s potential lack of reliability, which holds true with the later upending of the expected conclusion. The narrator’s slippery tongue is evident in (as Miller observes) the “seaborders,” which form the borders of Hero’s sleeves, and Judith Haber notes that the narrativized “guilt of the Hellespont becomes the aestheticized ... artificial stars of Hero’s garment.”²² Hero’s clothing blends with the rhetoric that describes her environment, framing her body as a pastoral landscape. For Haber, Marlowe’s language causes these stops and turns that form the “Spectacular” in the poem, namely, the possibility of viewing the “naked truth,” which is constantly denied as Hero redresses herself or lets the text veil her nudity, as when the narrator says, “eie those parts, which no eie should behold.”²³ Although the text explicitly taunts the reader with seeing what cannot be seen, the obvious place from which to watch is Leander’s gaze, his urgency in viewing an erotic spectacle, doomed in her purple silk parade.

Upon describing the exterior of Hero’s gown, the speaker exemplifies a key interruption of the pastoral moment in his account of her “kirtle.” The metaphor situates itself daringly close to Hero’s body, a licentious battle “of wretched louers slaine” leaving bloody stains all over her petticoat (16). Although not using the metonymical term “petticoat” as a means of attributing a sense of womanish features to the clothing, the kirtle nonetheless carries with it a sense of female agency that elicits Hero’s guilt in the spilled blood. As Jones and Stallybrass note, in Genesis 37:34, Joseph “is stripped of his clothes, and both times his clothes will tell stories that are false. The first time his bloody coat of many colors proclaims that he is dead. The second time ... it is [his] own garment that testifies against him.”²⁴ Of course, blood is a sign of something gone awry, and, like Joseph, Hero’s dress testifies against her. Both wearing the sumptuous attire and also later detaching it from her body to experience “unknown joye,” Hero plays an obvious role in her own demise (765). The blood on her kirtle paints her death and her ecstasy in discovering sexual pleasure.

In attempting to refocus the treatment of Hero in true pastoral fashion, the speaker drips her body with organic diction of “flowers and leaves” that cascade down “to the ground beneath.” Still, the deviation from pastoral continues:

Upon her head she ware a myrtle wreath,
From whence her vaile reacht to the ground beneath.
Her vaile was artificiall flowers and leaves,
Whose workmanship both man and beast deceaves. (17–20)

These lines describe Hero’s flowers and leaves as “artificiall,” revealing the *ostranenie* of describing the embellishments of Hero’s pastoral ensemble in organic terms (18–19).²⁵ Contextually, “a type of decoration associated with Elizabeth I’s later court was naturalistic embroidery,” like “scrolling foliage and flowers, insects and birds,” already tarnished here by the blood on her kilt.²⁶ The speaker further negates the pastoral quality of Hero’s body with concerns of craftsmanship: “[the vaile’s] workmanship both man and beast deceaves.” The veil resembles a fashionable pillbox hat or a false crown, both of which are well out of her station. The non-genuine accessories more closely associate Hero with false newness, removing her from the “greene” characteristic of pastoral. In comparison, Elizabeth I did not have literal flowers adorning her person; the flowers embroidered on her dress “had their own language of symbolism,” such as “the white lily,” which “stood for purity.”²⁷ Although these embroidered details of Elizabeth’s dresses are technically artificial, they were legitimately crafted by professionals with the intention of physically presenting Elizabeth’s magnificence through her image.²⁸ Unlike the symbolic imagery of the flowers on Elizabeth’s dresses, beyond constructing a physical image, Hero’s flowers lack true meaning and are therefore descriptively unremarkable beyond the fact that they are not real. The very lack of further detail and purpose expresses the strangeness of this pastoral moment.

If the ideal is organic, then praising Hero’s over-embellished ensemble distances Marlowe’s *enargia* from the metaphor of Hero’s body as pastoral proper and instead raises concerns regarding copiousness in the description of Hero’s wardrobe. Imagination, for Calinescu, can escape “the control of reason,” and subsequently can lose “sight of the whole of reality and of the actual hierarchy.”²⁹ Here is the decadent foundation of this “pastoral-like” moment in *Hero and Leander*, as Marlowe imagines Hero’s garments as subversively sumptuous and less and less resembling a pastoral as the description plows onward:

Many would praise the sweet smell as she past,
When t’was the odour which her breath foorth cast,
And there for honie, bees have fought in vaine. (21–23)

The “sweet smell” that “her breath foorth cast” incited the praise of many with what almost sounds like magic—a spell of seduction “cast.” The many praises eliminate the idiosyncratic experience customary in pastoral poetry: her body seems to be pursued by numerous suitors—the bees sought honey and “fought in vaine.” In the figurative sense, the men buzzed around her with unrequited love—she would not please them due to her vowed chastity to Venus. However, in the literal sense of the pastoral, the bees fighting and struggling to access honey ruins the aspect of leisure in nature. Still, the fact that nature itself lusts after the sumptuous Hero, in a sense, defends her artificiality: there is an

attraction toward rebellion for both the rebel and those around her. Leander defends this idea with his desire to have sex with Hero, creating the metaphor of Hero's beauty through the speaker's description of Elizabeth's pearls, wrapped "about [Hero's] necke ... chaines of peblestone" (25). They are not the genuine gem, though they "like Diamonds shone," but pearls were nevertheless an embellishment reserved for the pious and pure, a luxury of the court (26). Like a Petrarchan lover, Leander uses this falsehood as a means to an end in his garrulous argument in favor of Hero's indulgence in desire. He claims a "diamond set in lead his worth retaines," meaning these stones, although not outwardly at the same standard of beauty as the diamonds, should be considered the same if not better because they will last longer (215). As an allegory of their own situation, beauty is not lost due to its association with something considered beneath them—that is, having sex with Leander would not tarnish Hero's value. It could only improve her beauty as it is enjoyed.

With an odorous honey tongue and deceitful pearls, the artificial construction of Hero's beauty undertakes anti-traditional subversion to reject the expected simplicities of conventional pastoral form. All of the embellishments are falsely "greene," and Hero's body becomes the decaying landscape of progress.³⁰ In the context of *Hero and Leander*, Hero's pastoral-like body is understood at the crudest level by Leander as progress—the ideal—and by Hero as decadent modernity—the real—but the reader is bombarded with the full complexity of the descriptions. We receive the divine praise of Hero's magnificence through the speaker's *enargia* and Leander's infatuation with her, while simultaneously viewing glimpses of a decadent transformation in her body: from the natural to its true artificiality. Therefore, the pastoral moment cannot be entirely written off as merely an idealized landscape; rather, it is also the realization and destruction of it. This conflation assumes these two modes of pastoral as mutually inclusive: the ideal is a distortion of the real as a result of the internal conflict between instinctive tendencies and societal norms. In other words, Hero represents a prototype of human desire that enrolls the self in the role of artifice, insofar as our own social fabrications produce psychological distortions as a response to primal instincts.³¹ This schema of contradiction is evident in the ebb and flow of Leander's argumentation in tandem with Hero's internal anxiety and external presumptuousness. If her clothing marked her body to associate with a particular institution, the very fact that her clothes do not align her religiously or socially strains against Phillip Stubbes's reservation of "sumptuous dress as the proper dignity of high office" to form an identity "for onlooker and wearer alike."³² The materials on her body reject her social identity, being the base self-destruction of othering oneself, and later culminating in her death—the chronic symptom of opposing a modernity whose aesthetic was not ready to die.

In imagining her own aesthetic, Hero's appearance from the onset of the poem in opposition to Elizabeth's sumptuary statutes forcibly creates an unconscious contradiction of pursuing her own decadent style while prescribing herself to expectation. Calinescu observes that "a style of decadence is simply a style favorable to the unrestricted manifestation of aesthetic individualism," and there is no greater freedom of will than a "Venus nunne" tramping around in queenly clothing.³³ Thus, decadence and modernity coincide in Hero's rejection of traditional expression, a physical signal that fuels Leander's harassment targeting her unnecessary virginity: "For thou in vowing chastity has sworne / To rob her name and honour" (304–305). Leander argues that as the priestess nun of Venus, Hero should lose her virginity to him:

This idol which you terme *Virginitie*,
Is neither essence subject to the eie

...

Nor is't of earth or mold celestially,
Or capable of any forme at all. (269–274)

Hero is but a lowly virgin priestess of Venus—the irony of being a virgin and priestess to the goddess of sex, Venus, is the basis of Leander's sophisticated argument encouraging Hero's acquisition of carnal knowledge. Leander's speech is copious and exudes a feverish urgency; understandably so, since "the consciousness of decadence brings about restlessness."³⁴ Leander's perspective of the ideal in progress forces him into this mindset of impending change and, therefore, since time is fleeting, the desire to alter Hero in the immediate moment. The material memory of her clothing serves as a signifier, and a "Venus nunne" has no business dressing like a lady of the court since "fashion fashions, because what can be worn can be worn deeply," expressing the interiority of a person's being—and Hero tried to go to deep.³⁵ Her clothing advertised her promiscuity, which she tended to act upon in response to Leander's constant comparison of her to Venus. In a natural state of nudity, Venus exudes a prominent physicality that the very institution of virginity lacks, since it is not "capable of any forme at all." As visual rhetoric, virginity has no ideographic prowess; Leander is correct to expose the virtue's lack of "essence subject to the eie," and to question whether Hero should term it an idol.

This influence of idolatry helps to degenerate Hero's clothing, leading to the first attempted sexual engagement between Leander and Hero, an encountered framed like a pastoral: "As sheap-heads do, [with] her on the ground hee layd" (405). Yet the scene is anything but leisurely, and Hero runs off due to Leander's "brutish force and might" (419). The reoccurrence of the estranged pastoral reaffirms the notion of modernity through its continual infringement upon the accustomed shaping form in response to Hero's inability to behave.

This off-kilter pastoral experiences an unprecedented transformation that resists expectation, where shepherds no longer ask and “eie those parts, which no eie should behold,” where the seductive becomes the brutish, and where the day sinks menacingly into the night (408).

And when the day sinks, Hero very nearly slides into bed with Leander. In one of Leander’s nearly successful sexual endeavors with Hero, Marlowe presents the moment as an aubade. Yet the term cannot be quite right, since Hero refuses carnal knowledge and remains a virgin—she is not a lover leaving at dawn. The motif of the sun perseveres through the decaying of Hero’s morality, as the “sunne through th’orizon peepes”³⁶ (583). The syntax characterizes the sun’s curiosity, “peep[ing]” over the horizon to see if Hero actually went through with losing her virginity. Since she did not follow through, Hero is neither equated with the rising sun nor compared to the organic features of the world. Nature itself continues unaffected.

Although the assumption of the aubade is that the night will conceal all wrongdoings and the sun will represent the beginning of a renewed present, Hero has implied the impossibility of this outcome. She struggles to decide which she would rather have: a sinful night that can never be forgiven by any form of light or continuing as the virgin priestess of a sexual goddess wearing clothes that would doom her regardless. Her unsatisfied desire is the very tension that the narrative depends upon, as she must give into and avoid her primal interiority. Obvious in what Miller calls her “unmasking,” but what would more appropriately be termed her undressing, Hero forbids Leander from “touch[ing] the sacred garments which [she] wear[s]” while also inviting him to visit her “in the silence of the night” (344, 349).³⁷ Marlowe does not depict the actual unraveling of Hero’s clothing, but the action of undressing can be intuited because Hero must redress in the morning: “Whereat she starts, puts on her purple weeds” (573). Her redressing can be read as a feature of “the true opposite of decadence”: “regeneration.”³⁸ She does not require a complete regeneration from her non-sexual encounter, however, since she essentially retains her virginity. Especially important in this false act of restoration is acknowledging “the reassumption of livery”—that is, Hero is able to reinvest in herself because she has not soiled her sexual economic value.³⁹ As a transaction, virginity is a losing game for the virgin, a currency to be lost, carrying with it the decadent connotation of decay through its use in death, morality, and culture. Therefore, Hero’s retention of her virginity seems to be a vestigial remnant of the dedication to and initial investment in a constructed social order that halts the progress of self-realization, an ineptitude for choice expression.

In discussing Hero’s tendency to seek refuge or flee in shameful situations, John Leonard refers to and questions W. L. Godshalk’s disparagement of the narrator’s trustworthiness. While Godshalk finds Hero’s resistance to be

self-deceptive, Leonard “prefer[s] to see Hero as a puppet going through the motion of desire.”⁴⁰ He claims that “the narrator delights to pay lip-service to Hero’s virtue while manipulating her into compromising physical positions.”⁴¹ However true that may be, both Leonard and Godshalk stop short of realizing the greater implications of the “cunning incompetence” that Marlowe bestows upon his untrustworthy narrator and the complicit Hero: this narrative incompetence is performed by Hero alone. Judith Haber describes the interruptions in the narrative progression as “the aesthetic of pointlessness,”⁴² following the assertion of Leander’s phallic point, which, due to Hero’s rejections, he fails to insert. These interruptions of Hero’s desire and subsequent reluctance to follow through are the rejections of expected continuity, the same false starts that M. L. Stapleton connects from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to *Hero and Leander* in order to qualify it as Marlowe’s Ovid.⁴³ The very same script that decadence follows in performing failure in the style of Marlowe’s classicism, and in the awareness of Elizabethan classism, displays the anti-theatrical nature of his writing. Thus, Hero is accompanied by Leander in rejecting expectations; Hero, through her lust and fashion, and Leander, with his inability to tame her, satirize the inherent difficulties of living in Elizabethan England with its hierarchical social requirements and rhetorical opportunities for self-performance.

Hero’s intense desire to have sex with Leander eventually overtakes her in the final movement of the poem, returning to the earlier, unfulfilled aubade and presenting Hero’s actual engagement in sex. Even before the natural world has a chance to perform, Hero breaks from circadian rhythm and preemptively assumes the aubade’s occurrence; the act of the sun always rising becomes a meta-anxiety for Hero. She imagines “th’approaching sunne” in a menacing way when she actually needs the sun’s restorative powers. Unfortunately, she cannot decipher the contradiction of the “bright day light,” preemptively dreading its exposure of her sin rather than lavishing in the erasure of the previous night’s proceedings.

And now she wisht this night were never done,
And sigh’d to thinke upon th’approaching sunne,
For much it greev’d her that the bright day light,
Should know the pleasure of this blessed night. (785-788)

Hero expects the sun’s light will shine upon her. But, rather than a picturesque moment in the aubade serving as a regeneration as she redresses, Hero remains nude within the bed chamber. “Greev’d,” she anticipates an estrangement of the aubade, much like her own decadent body, and imagines the sun will highlight her misdeeds: “the pleasure of this blessed night.” Fulfilling Hero’s anxiety, the aubade refuses to let the natural sun rise. Gordon Braden attributes this to Hero’s “ruddie cheeks,” as if she is the sun and to combat her shame, her cheeks are already being burned—a solution that would reveal her previously intuited childish innocence that the non-rising sun inexorably extinguishes.⁴⁴ This embarrassment and guilt

would imply Hero's ability to forgive herself and, ultimately, to save herself through penance, which she would naively undertake in the vein of societal indoctrination.

Yet Marlowe's contrarian aubade "is imperious and loud," not redeeming; the humiliation unremorsefully quickly drains her cheeks of the embarrassed blush that filled during her womanish pageantry before Leander.⁴⁵ In the final lines of the poem, the confusing syntax potentially conflates the reference to "she" with Hero and night, both sharing "anguish, shame, and rage." Hero becomes "the night that she wished were never done."⁴⁶ The loss of her virginity results in the formation of her "consciousness of decadence," resulting in self-examination and subsequently a "hysteria" in reaction to the strain of living according to the oppressive societal norms.⁴⁷ Purity has been the center of dialogue between Hero and Leander throughout the poem. For Hero, it was a mandatory virtue—as an unwed maiden, her virginity is an expectation should she ever marry.

When thinking of her misdeeds, Marlowe describes "her countenance" as a "kind of twilight breake" (802-803). Aligning with what Calinescu describes as the "usual associations of decadence with such notions as decline, twilight," Hero's predisposition to losing her virginity makes her incompatible with temporal progress, and the mental turmoil she inflicts upon herself forces her to succumb to the realized crisis of decadence.⁴⁸ The inability to accept herself as no longer being the nun priestess of *Venus* results in her cultural suicide. Furthermore, society has seen her clothing, and Hero all but confirms the assumption of her being a "Venus Nun," the only remaining confirmation is self-acceptance, an acceptance that in Elizabethan England is impossible: she cannot live or perform the vagrant role Marlowe costumed for her as much as she can accept the burning throne Apollo "offred as a dower" (7). Whether in her sumptuous garb or stripped within the privacy of her bedroom, Hero receives no sympathy:

Poore soldiers stad with fear of death deadstrooken,
So at her presence all, surpris'd and tooken,
Await the sentence of her scornfull eies. (121-123)

This scene describes a third party's set of eyes on following the initial blazon that Miller describes as "transform[ing] the rapture of gazing on feminine beauty into the horror of beholding death."⁴⁹ Although Miller is not interested in the physical spectacle of clothing, the same judgment the "poore soldiers" receive develops into the final display of Hero's inherent wrongness. Her nudity becomes an awful sight that, for Leander, deserves admiration but transforms into a tragedy. Even without sumptuous clothing, her quandary fashions her body into an object of scorn, projecting the soldier's fear of death onto her

own through a masculinist gaze. Knowing that she stands in the presence of an audience, even if only constituted by her, forms the awaited self-realization of her impending demise as nature itself can no longer fathom her existence. The story (and Hero with it) had run rampant, and so Marlowe has no further detail to provide. The final silence is decadent in its very negation of detail. This, perhaps, is the reason Marlowe forcibly ended Hero's existence, why Marlowe had to put down the pen.

Although Marlowe does not seem initially to condemn Hero, the satiric nature of the sporadic blazon begins by insulting Venus's nudity and her inability to swoon Adonis.⁵⁰ In light of this allusion, it is impossible to read *Hero and Leander* without considering Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*—and especially impossible to discuss moral degeneration without giving attention to the mythos of Venus's promiscuity. Through dress, Hero has the commensurate sexual power of Venus, who failed "to please the carelesse and disdainfull eies / Of proud Adonis" in the Shakespearean adaptation of the myth (13-14). She succeeds in her unintentional, yet yearning, seduction of Leander, and this success seems to stem from a different form of beauty than that of Venus. Whereas Hero's beauty is artificial, Venus's beauty is natural and divine. Whereas Hero is pursued by her object of desire, Venus must perform the pursuit herself. Both texts conclude with deaths: Marlowe's with Hero's death and Shakespeare's with that of the non-pursuing object of desire, Adonis. Hero's death arises as a result of a moral crisis, while Adonis is killed by the jealous god Ares. Both victims of their respective narratives, Hero and Adonis demonstrated aversions to desire, and, as beauty demands attention, their resistance is not compatible with the reality of the progressively more public human conscience.

Hero begins the narrative with an unknowingly sumptuous body but is unable to commit to the persona required of her. Her constant degeneration, in response to the expectations of giving herself over to desire, is overwhelming and itself is a causation for death; desire is a means of fragmentation—there exists an endless number of possibilities to mull over, leading to an unsatisfying flow of constant desire that can never be accommodated within the restriction of a constructed society. Therefore, temporal progress requires a person's comportment to and survival through degeneration: the will to accept what is contemporarily considered decadent.

As Hero demonstrates, however, the continuity of narrative and temporality depend upon the very thing that destroys them: existence depends upon "the destructiveness of time and the fatality of decline."⁵¹ "In a Judeo-Christian tradition," Calinescu offers, this fatality appears as the "approach of the Day of Doom ... announced by the unmistakable sign of profound decay—untold corruption." For Hero, the inexcusable decision wear purple silk and gold fringe, as well as the inability to accept carnal knowledge as progress, consequentially

result in her suffering a crisis of “alienation from contemporary society”—“the despair of [a] modern [wo]man.”⁵² And this is confirmed when religion fails Hero, as Cupid denounces “her prayers with his wings” (369). This does not, however, deny the fact of progress: rather, it is the experience of it through the anguish of the aforementioned crisis. Unfortunately, Hero is “o’rcome with anguish, shame, and rage” of losing her virginity—alienating herself from the expectations of retaining her chastity in the exchange of vows—and “dang[s] downe to hell,” fulfilling the decadent prophecy of human catastrophe (818).⁵³

Ruin, as the pinnacle of decadence, describes the modernity of catastrophe as “a vast implosion of a cultural tradition” and “the becoming of what we no longer are,” and Miller refers to such moments as spectacular.⁵⁴ Hero’s undoing stands as the allegorical anticipation of an emergent, spectacular modernity. Humanity at its core is a trial-by-error experiment that Marlowe so carefully toys with. This “posthumous relation to a dying order” finds remarkable precedence in Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*. Put simply, Elizabeth’s statutes were shrinking the freedoms of the will to live; Hero’s attempt to retaliate costs her life. She could not separate her actions from her beliefs, and rather than strutting in her purple dress, she reduces herself to a nude, fetal position, suffering the machinations of opposing conformity to the point that she can neither continue her rejection of identifying with a rigid society nor accept herself—the ultimate death of the self.

On the contested topic of the poem’s non-ending, then, I agree with W. L. Godshalk’s rejection of Marlowe’s poem as an unfinished product. But Godshalk assumes that the poet’s ultimate goal is Hero’s humiliation, that “the poem ends where most poems end: when the poet has said what he has to say.”⁵⁵ Yet such a reading does not satisfy the larger discourse that Marlowe has left in the poem. In Haber’s words, Marlowe “leaves us not with the end, but with an image of the horror.”⁵⁶ She rightfully phrases the text’s self-deprecation as “it acknowledges its own pointlessness ... as an incomplete artifact.” Yet, Haber does not condemn or tie Hero’s implication to the narrative even though her body was woven into the very rhetoric that constitutes the text since the premonition of her demise. Instead, Haber leaves her analysis of Hero incomplete the same way Marlowe supposedly does his story. But, with Miller’s historicism, Hero cannot be simply forgotten; she is complicit in Marlowe’s unobvious completion of the incomplete. Her ignorance of expectations manifests in the world’s collapsing, and her rejection of personal autonomy evinces itself in the alienated death of the poem. The text estranges itself from the early modern period, from the anticipation of death expected along the continuity of modernity. As a new modernity arises, one either accepts the shifting rejections of the previous moment or loses touch with reality by surrendering to the former like it’s going out of fashion.

This hunger for “historical otherness” is birthed from an acknowledgment of the unspeakable, from intentions of showing the radical without the ability to argue in its defense. The peculiarity of Marlowe’s ending, along with the rest of his narrative, thus resonates with Stephen Spender’s hermeneutics, outlined in *The Struggle of the Modern*.⁵⁷ Marlowe is unapologetically aware of his contemporary moment in Elizabeth’s England. Contemporary fashion is therefore only sumptuous because of limitations society places on its constituents, who knowingly follow institutionalized classism. Marlowe’s focus on sumptuous fashion, Ovidian reinterpretation, and outright satire of Petrarchan love poetry qualify the poet’s modernity by linking him to the decades prior to his poem. Nonetheless, and ironically, the contested fragmentation of this hypothesized unfinished poem is Marlowe’s right to remain silent, to disrupt the literary expectations of his contemporaries. Had Marlowe continued Hero’s tale, his pen would have forced a commitment to bipartisanship. Would he have punished Hero for transgressing the structured hierarchy or would he have romanticized her rebellion? With a touch of decadence, Marlowe instead collapses the fraying fabrics with which Hero desperately tries to cover herself, ending inconclusively. Although, in a sense, there is a conclusion; Marlowe dresses Hero only to break her.⁵⁸ The sumptuous clothing is “the ‘obscure link’ between early and late modernity [as] the birth of a cultural ego already imbued with death,” and her undressing spins a manifestation of decadence through self-resentment.⁵⁹ As articles of memory, her clothing on the floor signifies her giving herself over to sexual desire—an imitation of an impossible reclamation of free will. Insurmountably forbidden and prophesied from the beginning in “Hellespont,” there was never an inkling of intention in letting a modern creation like Hero live beyond the final lines Marlowe wrote.

Yet George Chapman clearly buys into the cliché of disavowing modernity, mutating Marlowe’s manuscript into a more acceptable literature of early modernity. Of course, he depicts an exercise of holy matrimony between two lovers, Alcmane and Mya, and satisfies the desired deaths of Hero and Leander, which courtly readers would have delightfully anticipated. He disciplines the free-spirit of the poem, disciplines the wild Marlowe, and, unsurprisingly, disciplines Hero for her transgressive body and mind. The obvious problem with Chapman’s unnecessary addition to Marlowe’s adaptation is the backward logic of asserting himself into the literary canon, freeloading on Marlowe’s status as the poet looks to his own ingenuity and refashions himself with the iconic non-ending of *Hero and Leander*. Although Chapman does successfully make a name for himself through this addition, his need to preserve the norms of the immediate past and fading present are the very pronouncement of failed ingenuity. His fidelity to the tired mode of prolonging a presumed renaissance, as if it would dwindle into decadence, recalls the counter-intuitive idea of defining

a specific moment as modern, when modernity transcends the idea of contemporaneity. The reality of modernity allows for the constant death and rebirth of modernisms, little renaissances that were invented to die.

The exposure to the unexpected that overturns continued expectation, condemning perceptions of new modernities, is requisite—the sources of anxiety in the context of *Hero and Leander* are specific to its temporality. Different ages profess different demands and norms. But, as Nietzsche proposes, decadence exists beyond the literary realm, tracing the continual increase of hysteria that runs parallel to time. With Elizabeth's death and the coronation of James I, 1604 marks the end of sumptuary law. Giving rise to a new aristocracy, James appoints a new order of knighthood, another means of inculcating power that will eventually be usurped. Within any given time, as well as those that precede and succeed it, anxiety remains. Although it does not stem from the sumptuary statutes of 1574 as it does for Hero, anxiety is the result of decadence that elusively roots itself deep within humanity. Thus, reality is an imaginary ideal specific to individual perception of one's temporality, with crafty decadence chipping away at morality along every temporal step until death. Indeed, *desunt nonnulla* ("some things are lacking").

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NOTES

- 1 *The English Renaissance: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Kate Aughterson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 164.
- 2 In their foundational work on Renaissance fashion, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2, explain, "Embedded in classical theories of rhetoric in which the logic of the argument was its 'body' and the figures of speech its 'ornament' or 'clothing,'" fashion shapes the wearer.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 4 David Lee Miller, "The Death of the Modern: Gender and Desire in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (1989): 758.
- 5 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 2.
- 6 For a discussion of the vesterian crisis, see Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 4.
- 7 An ordinary "whore" in early modern slang; see William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives: Irony and Pathos in the Ovidian Poetry of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Their Contemporaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977), 90.
- 8 Miller, "The Death of the Modern," 756

- 9 For a review of the desynonymization of conceptual modernity and contemporaneity, see Matei Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 86.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 76-77.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 84-85.
- 13 There is an undeniable urgency in needing to reclassify the contemporary use of "the modern" as a period and aesthetic—similar to the detachment of "the Renaissance" from the early modern period. In literary historicism, this would be the very act of modernity, rejecting what has been proposed and accepted, acknowledging "the expression of the spiritual needs of a whole epoch" (Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 72).
- 14 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 82.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 180.
- 16 Enargia becomes a concept of degeneration. As Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 161, explains, "the profuse use of description, the prominence of detail, and, on a general plane the elevation of the imaginative power, to the detriment of reason," is a style of literary decadence.
- 17 All citations of *Hero and Leander* are from Louis Martz, *Hero and Leander: A Facsimile of the First Edition, London, 1598* (London: Johnson Reprint, 1972), here ll. 9-12.
- 18 According to the *OED*, "lawne" is a fine linen or cotton fabric used for making clothes. *OED* s.v. "lawne" n.1 1; for the other definitions, see *OED* s.v. "lawne" n.2 1.
- 19 At the time of *Hero and Leander's* publication, this style of sleeve was especially popular in the Elizabethan court; see Eleri Lynn, *Tudor Fashion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 51.
- 20 According to one entry of the *OED*, "greene" signifies newness. *OED* s.v. "green" adj. and n.1
- 21 On June 15, 1574, Elizabeth I declared that "[n]one shall wear in his apparel: Any silk of the color of purple, cloth of gold tissued, nor fur of sables, but only the King, Queen, King's mother, children, brethren, and sisters, uncles and aunts; and except dukes, marquises, and earls, who may wear the same in doublets, jerkins, linings of cloaks, gowns, and hose; and those of the Garter, purple in mantles only." Although the purple silk is only in Hero's gown lining, she is not of any of these ranks. The "guilt starres" on Hero's sleeves, again, are reserved for women of higher prestige: "None shall wear ... cloth of gold, silver, tinsel, satin, silk, or cloth mixed or embroidered with gold or silver or pearl, saving silk mixed with gold or silver in linings of cowls, partlets, and sleeves: except all degrees above viscountesses, and viscountesses, baronesses, and other personages of like degrees." *Elizabethan Sumptuary Statutes*, edited by Maggie Secara, www.elizabethan.org/sumptuary (accessed February 17, 2019).
- 22 Haber, "'True-Loves Blood,'" 374.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 385.
- 24 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 272.
- 25 "Ostranenie" is the transliterated Russian word for the theoretical concept of "estrangement."
- 26 Lynn, *Tudor Fashion*, 96.
- 27 As Lynn, *Tudor Fashion*, 90, explains, the "use of symbolism had developed throughout

- Elizabeth's reign, both as a means of showing loyalty but also as a conscious device to mythologize her and was to be seen everywhere" The idea of signs is important to note here, because Hero's "getup" is a failed imitation of creating importance and a failed assertion of her own modern importance: her dress exceeds the extent of her own constitution.
- 28 According to Lynn, *Tudor Fashion*, 96, this type of embroidery was often done by high-born ladies.
- 29 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 156.
- 30 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 155, asserts that the idea "of modernity and progress" and the "idea of decadence ... are mutually exclusive only at the crudest level of understanding," instead, "progress and decadence imply each other so intimately ... we would reach the paradoxical conclusion that progress is decadence."
- 31 Hero believes that she must carry herself according to normative society and cannot act of her own free will.
- 32 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 5.
- 33 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 171.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 35 Social categories must be understood as not "subjects ... prior to objects," not "wearers to what is worn" (Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 3).
- 36 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 156: "Along with their automatic antonyms: rise, dawn, spring, youth, germination, etc.—make it inevitable to think of it in terms of natural cycles and biological metaphors."
- 37 Miller, "Death of the Modern," 770.
- 38 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 156.
- 39 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 273.
- 40 W. L. Godshalk. "Hero and Leander: The Sense of an Ending," in "A Poet and a Filthy Playmaker": *New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Kenneth Friedenreich et al. (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 61.
- 41 Godshalk, "Hero and Leander," 59.
- 42 Judith Haber, "'True-Loves Blood': Narrative and Desire in *Hero and Leander*," *English Literary Renaissance* 28.3 (1998): 373.
- 43 For this discussion, see M. L. Stapleton, *Marlowe's Ovid: The Elegies in the Marlowe Canon* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 153-184. For further details of Marlowe's parody of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see John Leonard, "Marlowe's Doric Music: Lust and Aggression in Hero and Leander," *English Literary Renaissance* 30.1 (2000): 59-61.
- 44 Gordon Braden, "Hero and Leander in Bed (and the Morning After)," *English Literary Renaissance* 45.2 (2015): 227.
- 45 Braden, "Hero and Leander in Bed," 227.
- 46 Miller, "Death of the Modern," 773.
- 47 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 154.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 156.
- 49 Miller, "Death of the Modern," 765.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 767.
- 51 Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 151-152.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 221.
- 53 Early decadents "relished in the feeling that the modern world was headed toward catastrophe," radically opposed to the alternative idea of "regenerationists": the possibility of indefinite progress that is merely a diversion from the reality of increasing spiritual alienation" (Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity*, 162).
- 54 Miller, "Death of the Modern," 758.
- 55 Godshalk, "Hero and Leander," 312.
- 56 Haber, "True-Loves Blood," 386.
- 57 Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).
- 58 "The spirit of decadence is *deceptive*," Calinescu explains, in that it underpins lowly living as its opposite; its disruption of normalcy is reassured to be a livelier version of reality (*Faces of Modernity*, 180).
- 59 Miller, "Death of the Modern," 761.