

My Shakespeare: Christopher Marlowe

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All the evidence that supports the case for Marlowe – as with all other candidates – is circumstantial. I make the case for Marlowe not because I am certain he wrote the works, but because I consider him the best candidate for the vacancy, given the curious absence of evidence for the man from Stratford. The case for Christopher Marlowe as the chief author of the works known as Shakespeare's is strong in one very vital regard. Marlowe is the *only* authorship candidate whose skills in dramatic composition, blank verse, and lyric poetry evidence the genius-level writer required to create the Shakespeare canon. And the greatest obstacle for Marlowe's authorship of the Shakespeare canon — his apparent death in 1593 before most of the plays were written — is, paradoxically, a strength.

The best reason to hide his identity

Marlowe had the best reason of any authorship candidate to hide his identity. What was at stake for Marlowe was not a loss of dignity, but his life. By the early 1590s, Marlowe was not just the most accomplished author of his generation; he was an 'intelligencer', working to undermine plots against the Queen's life. He began this work while he was still a student at Cambridge University. In 1587, the Queen's Privy Council, represented by five of the most powerful men in the country, wrote to Cambridge to urge that university to grant his MA, despite a report 'that Christopher Morley was determined to have gone beyond the seas to [the Jesuit college at] Rheims', where plots against the queen's life were hatched. Their Lordships — including John Whitgift the Archbishop of Canterbury, Christopher Hatton the Lord Chancellor, Henry Carey the Lord Chamberlain and the Lord Treasurer William Cecil — reported 'that in all his actions he had behaved himself orderly and discreetly whereby he had done her Majesty good service, & deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealing.' They stressed that 'it was not her Majesty's pleasure that any one employed as he had been in matters touching the benefit of his Country should be defamed by those that are ignorant in the affairs he went about.'¹

Nevertheless, six years later, Marlowe's work as an intelligence agent began to catch up with him; he was again being defamed, and more dangerously. An informer said that 'one Marlowe is able to show more sound reasons for Atheism than any divine in England is able to give to prove divinitie & that Marloe told him that he hath read the Atheist lecture to Sir Walter Ralieghe & others.'² A Catholic double agent, Richard Baines, wrote out a comprehensive list 'Containing the opinion of one Christopher Marly Concerning his

¹ 1587, 'Letter from the Privy Council to the Cambridge University Authorities', PRO Privy Council Registers PC2/14/381. This and other items relating to Marlowe in government documents are transcribed in Constance B. Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe : A Renaissance Life* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 202-3. I have modernised the spelling of this and certain other documents for clarity.

² 1593a, 'Remembrances of Wordes & Matter Againste Ric Cholmeley', BL Harley MS 6848 f.190r.v.

Damnably Judgment of Religion, and scorn of gods word';³ the list mirrors Baines's own published confession when he was tortured by the Catholic priests he had been spying on (Kendall 2003, 40).

The accusations of heresy and atheism levelled against Marlowe at this time were more than enough to have him imprisoned, tortured, and executed. And there were further moves to have Marlowe removed from the game. On May 5th, a document known as the Dutch Church Libel was posted on the wall of a Huguenot church, stirring up hatred against protestant refugees. This poem in iambic pentameter looks like a deliberate attempt to implicate Marlowe in the recent unrest against foreigners, referencing his plays *The Massacre at Paris* and *The Jew of Malta*, and being signed 'Tamberlaine'. Marlowe's former roommate, Thomas Kyd was arrested, and papers seized — 'vile heretical conceits' — which Kyd, under torture, 'affirmeth that he had from Marlowe'. On May 18th 1593, The Privy Council issued a warrant for Marlowe to be apprehended; on 20th May Marlowe presented himself 'for his indemnity therein' and was released on his own recognisance, 'commanded to give his daily attendance on their Lordships until he shall be licensed to the contrary.'

The official record of Marlowe's apparent death ten days later is widely considered a cover-up, independent of any authorship claim.⁴ If the 'convenient' timing of it were not suspect enough, the only recorded witnesses to his death were three professional liars. Two were current or former intelligence agents and one of these (plus the supposed murderer) had links with Marlowe's friend and patron (and first cousin once removed of the head of the Secret Service), Thomas Walsingham. Marlowe is said to have been stabbed through the eye in an argument over the 'reckoning' - the bill - after an all day meeting at Eleanor Bull's house in Deptford. Marlowe's biographer Charles Nicholl determined that Mrs Bull's house was not a 'tavern'. Eleanor Bull had strong court connections: she was 'cousin' to Blanche Parry, Chief Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber, Elizabeth's most trusted attendant. She was related to the Lord Treasurer, William Cecil (Nicholl 2002, 42).

This has led to some scholars believing that Marlowe was assassinated. Yet it has been repeatedly demonstrated that those put forward as the instigators of Marlowe's murder have no reason to murder him (Hammer 1996). In any case, were an assassination required, why not simply stab him in a dark alley? It is a fact that Lord Burghley, at loggerheads with Whitgift and losing ground to him in terms of Privy Council influence (Sheils 2004), failed to prevent the execution of puritan John Penry at the Archbishop's behest, the day before Marlowe met with Robert Poley, Ingram Frizer and Nicholas Skeres at Deptford (Cross 2004). As Kuriyama points out, the men present with Marlowe at widow Bull's house, though known to be expert liars, were not assassins (Kuriyama 2002, 139). The supposed murderer, Ingram Frizer, was a loyal servant of Marlowe's friend and patron Thomas Walsingham. Swiftly pardoned for the killing, Frizer was doing business for Walsingham the very next day, and continued in the service of Thomas Walsingham to the end of his life, being rewarded by James I with a series of leases in reversion of crown lands (Bakeless 1942, I, 170). Nevertheless, we are left with questions concerning government involvement at the highest level. Why was a copy of the Baines note sent to the Queen? Why was the heading and content of the note altered in the copy she was given?

The reader should consider what they might do in similar circumstances. Faced with his probable torture and execution but in a privileged position due to his Privy Council and secret service connections, Marlowe had the means, motive and opportunity to escape. As Roy Kendall points out 'deaths in the murky world of espionage can often be "blinds" for disappearances, and vice versa' (Kendall 2003, 149). We know it was common for

³ 1593b, 'Bayns Marlow of His Blasphemyes', BL Harley MS 6848 ff 185-86.

⁴ A fuller exploration of the evidence around Marlowe's death can be read in Peter Farey, 'Marlowe's Sudden and Fearful End', <<http://rey.myzen.co.uk/sudden.htm>>, accessed 10th October 2017

government agents to operate on the continent under assumed names (Kendall 2003, 106).⁵ In an era before photographs and modern methods of travel, faking a death to execute an exile was a manageable proposition. Deptford, near the mouth of the Thames, was a perfect place to disappear from. Why might Marlowe, facing probable torture and execution, have an eight hour meeting with these particular men in this particular place? If you needed to stage a disappearance, this would be the perfect combination of location and personnel. Faking one's death to avoid actual death is not an unreasonable action: most of us would choose a fake death (and exile) over real death if it seemed the only viable means of survival. That one is supposed to be dead, and risks real death if discovered, is a far stronger motivation for concealing oneself behind a 'front' than the shame of writing for the public stage.

Government involvement in Marlowe's apparent death includes the location being owned by a cousin of the Queen's most trusted attendant, the Queen's unusually rapid pardon of the supposed murderer, the presence of Robert Poley, and the Queen's coroner William Danby conducting the inquest. The most likely substitute body, that of John Penry — transported to a spot two miles away to be executed without warning the day before, and never located — would have likely been in the control of Danby (Farey 2005).⁶

How would the jury be duped by a substitute body? They are very unlikely to know what Marlowe looked like, as he was not local to the area. The jury of yeoman would have had no reason not to believe the three witnesses who identified the body as Marlowe's, since the witnesses were all gentlemen, and thus their social superiors. In any case, the supposedly fatal wound, a stabbing through the eye, would be sufficient not to make anyone look too closely at the face. As Shakespeare's Duke Vincentio says when carrying out just such a body substitution trick in *Measure for Measure*, 'Death's a great disguiser, and you may add to it'.

There is evidence to support the idea that Marlowe's faked death was a Privy Council compromise. The Baines Note, containing the fatal accusations against Marlowe, was edited. It makes sense that the final version marked as 'sent to her H[ighness]' has been stripped of the more salacious accusations, leaving only the statements pertaining to Marlowe's statements about religion.⁷ But what might be the reason to change the title, with its reference to Marlowe's "sudden and violent death", to the more equivocal "sudden and fearful end of his life"? For someone wary of lying on an official document, this phrase is the perfect get-out: the 'death' has gone, and the violence too (for there is no violence in a faked death); yet truthfully Marlowe's life as he knew had indeed come to an 'end', and no question he would have found this end both 'sudden and fearful'. The hand that made these changes has been identified as Lord Keeper Puckering's (Nicholl 2002, 323). This supports the idea of Marlowe's arranged demise as a Privy Council compromise between those who wanted him kept alive as a valuable asset (William Cecil and his allies) and those who wanted him dead as an example to atheists (Archbishop Whitgift, Puckering and their allies).

Perfect timing

It is sometimes argued that Marlowe cannot be Shakespeare because they existed (and wrote) at the same time: in the orthodox narrative, Shakespeare is in London by the late 1580s or early 1590s, when the first plays now known as Shakespeare's — the early *Henry VI* plays for example — were being staged. But the *Henry VI* plays have a long history of being attributed in whole or in part to Marlowe, and none of those early plays were attributed to

⁵ Anthony Standen, for example, used the names Monsieur La Faye, Andree Sandal, Saintman, and Pompeo Pelegrini.

⁶ John Penry's body as a substitute for Marlowe's was first suggested in David A. More, 'Drunken Sailor or Imprisoned Writer?' *Marlovian Newsletter*, (1997).

⁷ 1593c, 'Copy of Marloes Blasphemyes as Sent to Her H', BL Harley MS 6853 ff.307-8.

Shakespeare in the Stratford man's lifetime. If we go by unequivocal documentary evidence alone, William Shakespeare the author was 'born' shortly after Marlowe's death.⁸ The first recorded appearance of the name 'William Shakespeare' in connection with any creative work is on the dedication of the long narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*. Marlowe's apparent death occurred on 30th May, and less than two weeks later *Venus and Adonis* was on the bookstalls. In other words, the extant documentary evidence points to perfect timing: exit Marlowe, enter William Shakespeare.

Breadth of social experience and education

Marlowe's birthplace, Canterbury, was a city of considerable importance: the seat of the Church of England, and a place connected to the wider world through its position on the Southern extension of Watling Street, connecting London to the main port at Dover. It had a population of 5000, around 2000 of whom were Huguenot refugees. As a key stopping place between London and Dover, Canterbury saw 'a steady stream of diplomats, soldiers, merchants and messengers going to and from France' (Riggs 2004, 30).

Christopher Marlowe was born in 1564, the same year as the man we know as William Shakespeare. Like his Stratford counterpart, Marlowe's father was a leather-worker: where John Shakespeare clad hands, John Marlowe shod feet. Shakespeare's lower class characters are not stock characters. They are well-observed in a way that suggests considerable direct experience: Launcelot Gobbo in the *Merchant of Venice*, for example, or the witty cobbler in the opening scene of *Julius Caesar*. Marlowe, too, used such characters for comic relief: the magic-abusing servants of *Doctor Faustus*; the soldiers in *A Massacre At Paris* trying to work out the best way to dispose of a corpse.

Marlowe was elevated from these humble beginnings through a first-class education. A scholarship to the prestigious Kings' School gave him the required skills to win another scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. At the King's School, students were required, even at play, to 'never use any language but Latin and Greek'; they were required to compose speeches and verses in Classical Latin. The Parker scholarship which took him to Cambridge required that 'the best and aptest scholars' should be able to sight read music, and sing ('at first sight to self and sing plainsong'), and ideally 'make a verse'.

Marlowe studied for six years at Cambridge, the University whose slang and other specific references were first identified in the plays by Boas (1923). His MA gave him the status of 'generosus' (gentleman), and entering the Queen's service as an intelligence agent, Marlowe mixed with the full gamut of society. He told Sir Robert Sidney (the Countess of Pembroke's brother) he was 'very well known' to Lord Strange (the future 5th Earl of Derby) and the 9th Earl of Northumberland, known as the 'Wizard Earl' for his interest in chemistry. He was also connected to Sir Walter Raleigh, to whom he was said to have 'read the atheist lecture', and to Thomas Hariot, the astronomer who worked for both Raleigh and the Earl of Northumberland; he moved in circles dedicated to the advancement of human knowledge. Yet despite mixing with scientists, courtiers, and noblemen, and undertaking duties that may well have taken him to foreign courts, he remained familiar with the yeoman class sensibilities strongly depicted in the Shakespeare canon. Whoever wrote the canon had similar social breadth to Marlowe: he not only knew the ways of courtiers and nobleman, but of tavern keepers and cobblers.

Genius-level writing

⁸ Robert Greene's 'upstart Crow' of 1592, despite the epithet 'Shake-scene', and though widely believed to be Shakespeare, is much more likely to be the actor Edward Alleyn. See Daryl Pinksen, 'Was Robert Greene's "Upstart Crow" The Actor Edward Alleyn?' *The Marlowe Society Research Journal*, 06 (2009).

Since we are considering which flesh and blood human was actually capable of becoming the most revered English dramatist and poet of all time, the importance of demonstrable literary genius should not be underestimated. If other candidates are capable of writing genius-level plays and poems, we have limited or no supporting evidence.⁹ There are no extant plays for main candidates besides Marlowe. Where poems attributed to these other candidates have survived, they do not exhibit the qualities of Shakespeare's, begging the question of why anyone would set their name to inferior works while publishing or distributing superior ones under a pseudonym.

Marlowe, on the other hand, has the profile and track record appropriate to a writer of genius. His first hit for the public stage, *Tamburlaine*, was first performed in 1587 when he was twenty-three. Its success spawned so many inferior imitators that some forty years later Ben Jonson would complain in his commonplace book, *Discoveries*, of 'the Tamerlanes and Tamerchams of the late Age, which had nothing in them but scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers.' Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* was popular from the 1590s to the closing of the theatres in 1642. His Ovidian epyllion *Hero and Leander* was widely admired; he translated Ovid's *Elegies*. The writer known as Shakespeare was similarly inspired by Ovid (Bate 1993).

Marlowe's dramatic style is in every way the forerunner of the style which would become Shakespeare's. Marlowe was the first person to write really successful plays in blank verse (the style which the author known as Shakespeare perfected). He was the progenitor of three other important dramatic features which 'Shakespeare' developed: the English history play (*Edward II*),¹⁰ the internal-state soliloquy, as opposed to the expositional or character-introducing soliloquy (in *Doctor Faustus*), and the sequel (*Tamburlaine Part 2*). Throughout the Shakespeare canon, the author paraphrases or references Marlowe repeatedly, which might be identified as what Bakeless calls 'Marlowe's habitual self-repetition' (Bakeless 1942, II, 227). In the traditional telling, the shared stylistic features of Marlowe and Shakespeare, and the repeated references, amount to a very strong 'influence'.

Robert Logan speaks of 'the firmness with which Marlowe's influence rooted itself in Shakespeare and developed, for it continued to thrive for 18 years after Marlowe's death, roughly from 1593-1611, the remainder of Shakespeare's career' (Logan 2007, 8). Peter Ackroyd says 'Marlowe was the contemporary writer that most exercised him. . . . He haunts Shakespeare's expression, like a figure standing by his shoulder' (Ackroyd 2005, 140). Stephen Greenblatt says of the influence of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* on Shakespeare that 'from its effect upon his early work, it appears to have had upon him an intense, visceral, indeed life-transforming impact' (Greenblatt 2004, 189). Russ McDonald calls Marlowe 'one of Shakespeare's most influential teachers,' claiming 'that Shakespeare's plays would have been very different from what they are – and may not have been at all – were it not for the Marlovian example' (McDonald 2004, 67). Harold Bloom declares Marlowe 'London's dominant dramatist from 1587 to 1593' and states that 'Marlowe, himself a wild original, was 'Shakespeare's starting point, curiously difficult for the young Shakespeare to exorcise completely' (Bloom 2002, 10).

There may have been a good reason why it was 'curiously difficult' for Shakespeare to exorcise Marlowe completely: one can hardly 'exorcise' oneself. It's interesting how many orthodox scholars recognise the unusual persistence of this 'influence' by expressing

⁹ Allowing that one rules out, as one must, the circular argument that their skill is evident in the works of Shakespeare.

¹⁰ It may be argued that the Henry VI plays came before Edward II (dates are uncertain), but we now have growing stylistic evidence that Marlowe wrote the originals of these plays too.

Marlowe's 'presence' in the canon through metaphors where Marlowe's spiritual form possesses or inhabits Shakespeare. Jonathan Bate expresses it particularly strongly:

'Shakespeare, I suggest, only became Shakespeare because of the death of Marlowe. And he remained peculiarly haunted by that death.' (Bate 1997, 105)

If the two writers are in fact one person, this ghostly mystery is solved. The soul of a writer may mature and gain experience, but it cannot be dislodged. Thinking of Marlowe as ur-Shakespeare explains a great deal about the relationship of the two canons. As Patrick Cheney notes, what 'Marlowe had begun... Shakespeare would complete' (Cheney 2008, 25). Reading Sonnet 76 in this light allows us the interpretation that Shakespeare knew very well that his Marlovian roots were showing:

'Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed?'

Working in the nitty gritty of textual analysis, scholars have long found it difficult to distinguish Marlowe from Shakespeare. Until the 1920s it was common for scholars to give all or part of the early Shakespeare plays (*Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Shrew*) to Marlowe. Recently, computational stylistics has led to Marlowe being given an official co-authorship credit for all three of the *Henry VI* plays. But those who imagine this rules out Marlowe as a candidate because the tests 'prove' that Marlowe and Shakespeare have discernibly different styles have not understood how 'Marlowe' and 'Shakespeare' marker words (and patterns of words) are derived in these tests, nor how the tests ignore the possibility of the evolution of a writer's individual style over time.¹¹ Nor how, even when measures are chosen specifically as a means of separating the two canons, there are often occasions (as with Act 4 of *2 Henry VI*) where they cannot be distinguished (Segarra et al. 2016). When evolving stylistic markers are measured in individual plays — whether it is feminine endings and enjambment, or the relative use of certain words — the results consistently show a smooth and evolving continuum between the Marlowe and Shakespeare canons as the 'Marlowe signal' of the early works diminishes and the 'Shakespeare signal' of later works increases (Merriam and Matthews 1994).¹² Where a stylistic marker doesn't change much over time - as seems to be the case with word length frequency, measured by Mendenhall in 1901 - Marlowe's style is an exact match for Shakespeare's (Farey 2000, Appendix IV).

Those who say that Marlowe can't have written the Shakespeare canon because he couldn't write comedy are ignoring the comic scenes the printer Richard Jones admits to cutting from *Tamburlaine*, those that survive in *Doctor Faustus* and *A Massacre At Paris*, the bawdy humour of *Hero and Leander*, and the fact that *The Jew of Malta* is most effectively played as a farce. Those who say that Marlowe can't have written the Shakespeare canon because he didn't write strong women are ignoring his Dido, Hero, and Isabella. Obviously there are significant differences between the skills displayed in *Tamburlaine* (c.1587) and

¹¹ They also overlook the persistent issue of inadequate sample sizes; Burrows and Craig (2016) used 2000-word segments when Maciej Eder, independently testing their methods, described the results for segments under 3000 words as 'simply disastrous' - Maciej Eder, 'Does Size Matter? Authorship Attribution, Small Samples, Big Problem', *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 30/2 (2015). The Word Adjacency Networks methodology favoured by Segarra et al. (2016) not only significant conflicts with the results of other methodologies on the same plays, but uses scene-size samples; as low as 105 words.

¹² See also Appendix V and VI of Peter Farey, 'A Deception in Deptford', <<http://rey.myzen.co.uk/chap8.htm>>, accessed 10th October 2017

Othello (c.1604). But these can be explained by maturity and practice: the output of a fledging writer aged 23 will clearly be different from the output of the same writer at 40. Marlovian theory would explain why, as Logan notes, Marlowe's influence was so 'firmly rooted'. The self may mature and gain experience, but cannot actually be dislodged. Unlike any other authorship candidate (including the man from Stratford), Marlowe is demonstrably and generously equipped to write the Shakespeare canon.

Direct evidence for Marlowe

Did anyone at the time notice the strong similarity between Shakespeare's writing and Marlowe's? There are strong reasons to believe that Gabriel Harvey did.¹³ Harvey was living with a bookseller in St. Paul's in the first seven months 1593. Harvey was in a position to be very knowledgeable about Marlowe. He had been a don at Cambridge when Marlowe was a student there. He had attended Christ's College in Cambridge at exactly the same time as Richard Baines, the man whose 'Note' that year led to Marlowe's arrest. Harvey's brother Richard was the rector of the church at Chislehurst, where Marlowe's patron Thomas Walsingham lived, and where Marlowe was arrested. Harvey was also engaged in a war of words with Marlowe's close friend, Thomas Nashe.

On April 27th, Harvey wrote of his suspicions regarding a certain pamphlet which had been registered anonymously. *Venus and Adonis* was registered anonymously on April 18th. In the letter published in *Pierces Supererogation*, Harvey says 'I could here dismaske such a rich mummer. . . as would vndoubtedly make this Pamflet the vendiblest booke in London, and the Register one of the famousest Autors in England' (Harvey 1884, II, 312). But Harvey will not 'dismask' this 'mummer',¹⁴ being 'none of those, that utter all their learning at once' and being also concerned that 'the close man' might have 'some secret frendes, or respectiue acquaintance; that in regarde of his calling, or some priuate consideration, would be loth to haue his coate blased, or his satchell ransacked.' Harvey's awareness of the man's 'calling' and associated 'secret friends' – friends who would not appreciate Harvey blowing his cover – resonates with our understanding of Marlowe as a government intelligence agent. That the work was to be published by Richard Field, Lord Burghley's printer, may have suggested to Harvey that the move was officially sanctioned by Marlowe's government employer.

Launching into a description of a 'braggard with motts', Harvey mocks the author for trying to 'arm himself with a brave Posie' - a motto. *Venus and Adonis* was prefaced with two lines of Latin poetry from Ovid, that in its original context lead on to a couplet predicting a triumph over death: 'Then thogh death rackes my bones in funerall fire,/ Ile liue, and as he puls me downe, mount higher.' Harvey says 'the Troian Horse ... was not such an Asse, to aduance himselfe with any such prowde Imprese'. Dissimulation is in anyway pointless, says Harvey, since 'The Tree is knowen by the fruite; and needeth no other Posie' (308). In other words, he recognises the style of this (at this point) anonymous pamphlet. Hinting at the Ovidian nature of this anonymous pamphlet, he calls the author as 'Ovid's lover', saying 'Ouids loouer must not attempt, but where he will conquer', adding 'Foretel not, what thou intendest to atcheiue, lesse peraduenture being frustrate, thou be laughed to scorne, and made a notable flowtingstocke' (309). Immediately after allusions to 'priuy Counsell' and

¹³ A fuller exploration of the Harvey-Nashe quarrel in reference to *Venus and Adonis* can be found in R Barber, 'Shakespeare Authorship Doubt in 1593', *Critical Survey*, 21/2 (2009).

¹⁴ Since a 'braggard with motts' is unlikely to be a 'mumbler' (*OED* 1), 'Mummer' must mean the only other definition of the word at this time (*OED* 2a): 'a person who acts in a mummer's play'. (The definition 'actor' did not arise until the 18th century). Mummers traditionally wore masks; Merriam-Webster gives the definition 'one who goes merrymaking in disguise'.

‘Secretary’ he states ‘There be more queint experiments in an Vniuersitie, then many a politique head would imagine (310), and this reminds him of the former Dean, one Doctor Perne, of whom he said earlier in the text ‘[i]t was in him, to giue instructions vnto Ouid, for the repenning of his Metamorphoses anew’ (300). *Venus and Adonis* is widely accepted as a ‘repennig’ of Book X of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

His knowledge appears to go deeper than his suspicion that *Venus and Adonis* is one of those ‘quaint’ Cambridge experiments encouraged by Doctor Perne. He considers the author an ‘Asse’... ‘especially for defeating one without cause’ that ‘might possibly haue it in him, to requite him aliuie, and dead’ (313). ‘Alive, and dead’ is pertinent to our theory, but who is this person who that the author defeated ‘without cause’ who might ‘requite’ him so? If the author is Marlowe, there are good reasons to suspect this is Harvey’s college friend Richard Baines (Barber 2009, 99). And two pages later, after a typically Harveyian detour about Doctor Perne - a religious ‘turncoat’ whom he says might have been Baines’s ‘catechist for religion’, Harvey confirms this identification by saying ‘Braue Mindes, and Ventrous Harts, thanke him for this inualuable Note, that could teach you to atcheiue more with the little finger of Pollicy, then you can possibly compasse with the mighty arme of Prowesse (315).’ And then refers to the contents of the Baines Note, saying ‘he that disclosed the same [i.e. Baines], is perhaps to leaue an immortall Testimoniall of his [i.e. Marlowe’s] Indian Discoouery’. The first item on the list of Marlowe’s ‘damnable opinions’ known as the Baines Note is ‘That the Indians and many Authors of Antiquitei have assuredly written of aboue 16 thowsande years agone, wher Adam is proued to haue leyved within 6 thowsande years’.

Harvey appears to know about the Baines Note, and its contents, on the 27th April. Of the Note’s consequences, he says ‘Was not he shrewdly encountred, that was prestigiously besieged, and inuisibly vndermined with that weapon of weapons? What other supply could haue seconded, or rescued him, but Death.’ The mention of Marlowe’s rescue by Death is a month premature. But Harvey is conscious that the fatal accusations of atheism contained in the Baines Note have coincided with the anonymous registration of a narrative poem in Marlovian style. He is has roundly mocked the Ovidian motto fronting the work, undoubtedly aware of the couplet that follows it, which predicts a triumph over death. ‘Foretel not’ he says in that passage, ‘what thou intendest to atcheiue, lesse peradventure being frustrate, thou be laughed to scorne, and made a notable flowtingstocke’ (309). He has seen the Trojan Horse arrive outside the gates. He understands what comes next.

Though registered anonymously, it seems likely that *Venus and Adonis* already includes the dedication; Harvey signs off with a conspicuous (and italicized) echo of the ‘idle hours’ in the *Venus* dedication: ‘I writ onely at idle howers, that I dedicate onely to *Idle Howers*’ (Harvey, 1884: V2, 330).

After *Venus and Adonis* was published, Gabriel Harvey published a poem called ‘Gorgon, or the wonderfull yeare’. Scholars of Elizabethan literature find it notoriously obscure. But most agree it contains allusions to Marlowe.¹⁵ What Nashe calls Harvey’s ‘goggle-eyde sonnet of *Gorgon*’ gives its fullest and most coherent reading when interpreted as a reaction to the Marlowe’s *Venus and Adonis* appearing under the Shakespeare name on the book stalls of St. Paul’s. St. Paul’s (as ‘Powles’) is referenced six times in Harvey’s poem. Harvey is ‘goggle-eyed’ at something he calls ‘The mightiest miracle of Ninety

¹⁵ Hale Moore summarises the scholarly reactions to *Gorgon* up to 1926, and offers an exploration of the Marlowe allusions, in Hale Moore, ‘Gabriel Harvey’s References to Marlowe’, *Studies in Philology*, 23/3 (1926). *Gorgon*’s reference to Marlowe are noted by Bakeless (1942, I, 126, 43). The Feaseys note *Gorgon*’s allusions to Marlowe and their similarities to a section of Harvey’s *Pierces Superorogation* in Lynette & Feasey and Eveline Feasey, ‘The Validity of the Baines Document’, *Notes and Queries*, /26th November 1949 (1949).

Three'. This is not as is sometimes suggested Marlowe's death, a predictable and inevitable event. But the word 'miracle' would certainly be fitting for Marlowe's apparent resurrection.

If the poem is Harvey's reaction to the sudden appearance of a new poetic genius at exactly the point a previous one (with very similar writing style) was eclipsed — for contrary to the orthodox narrative, there's no evidence that the name William Shakespeare was known in any literary or theatrical circles before the appearance of *Venus and Adonis* — then the title 'Gorgon' works on two levels. Firstly, Marlowe compared Tamburlaine to 'Gorgon, prince of Hell' in *Tamburlaine Part I* (IV.i.18) and 'Tamburlaine' is Harvey's name for Marlowe in this poem. Secondly, if Harvey believes that 'Shakespeare' is a pseudonym for Marlowe, then 'Gorgon' alludes to Pallas Athena, the spear-shaking goddess of wisdom whose aegis (protective shield), bore the Gorgon's head.

Harvey doesn't say that Marlowe is alive, but he doesn't seem sure that he's dead. 'Is that Gargantua minde / Conquerd ...?' he asks in the first of a flurry of questions about the 'mind triumph'd on Kent', and later 'Is it a dreame? Or is the Highest minde, / That ever haunted Powles ... Bereaft of ... breath...?' Marlowe's death is framed only as a question. 'Weepe Powles,' says Harvey early on in the poem, 'thy Tamberlaine voutsafes to dye.' 'Vouchsafe' suggests an element of collusion, on Marlowe's part, in his own death: that he consents, or chooses, to die. At the end of the poem, Harvey compares Marlowe to 'the ugly bugg who scorned to die' [my emphasis]. Thus he has both chosen to die, and refused to die. The couplet of the closing *L'envoy* describes him only as 'down', or fallen.

Harvey describes Marlowe as one whose 'mind triumph'd on Kent'. Kent was Marlowe's birthplace, but this is not enough to make sense of 'triumphed'. If Marlowe escaped prosecution (through apparent death), then he had triumphed over John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, who would not only have been the Privy Council member pressing for his death, but had licensed the anonymous *Venus & Adonis* to be published; Deptford, the location of that triumph, was also at that time in the county of Kent.

That Harvey is writing about *Venus and Adonis* is strengthened by:

*I mus'd awhile: and having mus'd awhile,
Jesu, (quoth I) is that Gargantua minde
Conquerd [...]?
Vowed he not to Powles A Second bile?'*

For 'Shakespeare' did indeed vow to produce a 'second bile' in the dedication of *Venus and Adonis* where he promised Southampton to 'take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour.'¹⁶

Thomas Nashe, in response, calls Harvey 'Gabriel Graue-digger' and referencing Tamburlaine says, 'Ile hamper him like a iade as he is for this geare, & ride him with a snaffle vp & down the whole realme' (Nashe 1958, II, 180). '[P]oore deceased Kit Marlow' is one of the 'quiet senseless carkasses' that Harvey has 'vilely dealt with'. As you would expect, Nashe maintains that his friend is dead.

But his 'full answer' to 'sinful doctor' corroborates our reading of 'Gorgon' as a reaction to *Venus and Adonis*. In *Haue vvith you to Saffron-vvalden. Or, Gabriell Harueys hunt is vp* (1596) Nashe insults the poem (III, 133) and calls him 'a precious apothegmatical Pedant, who will finde matter inough to dilate a whole daye of the first inuention of Fy, fa, fum, I smell the bloud of an Englishman' (III, 36-37). 'First invention' echoes the dedication of *Venus* and the unwritten next lines of the nursery rhyme are: 'Be he alive or be he dead? I'll grind his bones to make my bread'. Thus Nashe communicates to Harvey that he has

¹⁶ It is worth considering that 'graver' here may also be a pun, along the lines of Mercutio's 'Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man' in *Romeo and Juliet* (3.1.65).

understood ‘Gorgon’ as a potentially life-threatening ‘hunt’ – perhaps the hunt alluded to on the title page. Nashe mentions the transformation and metamorphosis of names in relation to Kent, and throws the conflation of Marlowe and Tamburlaine back on Harvey by calling him ‘Scythian Gabriell.’ In another relevant section, Nashe writes that putting ‘*that fairest body of Venus in Print ... with a witness*’ obviates the need for a virginity test (i.e. a test to show that the book really was the ‘first heir’ of the author’s ‘invention’).

Harvey published nothing further on the matter. The following year, Nashe went on the run from the authorities for his hand in writing the play *The Isle of Dogs*. Two years later, the Bishops’ Ban decreed ‘That all NASSHes bookes and Doctor HARVYEs bookes be taken wheresouer they maye be found and that none of their bookes bee euer printed hereafter’; this was a public conversation the authorities wanted banned and burned.

Other contemporary documents demonstrate apparent confusions between the Marlowe and Shakespeare canons.

William Covell, who attended Cambridge at the same time as Marlowe, appears to have confused Shakespeare and Marlowe in his *Polimanteia* (1595). In a section celebrating the graduates of England’s two universities, a printed marginal note reads:

‘All praise
worthy. Lucrecia
Sweet **Shak-**
speare.
Eloquent
Gaveston.
Wanton
Adonis.
Watsons
heyre.’

Why include a reference to ‘Eloquent Gaveston’ between Shakespeare’s two poems *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*? Orthodox scholars Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen think this an erroneous reference to Michael Drayton’s *Piers Gaveston*. (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen 2007, 5). But another explanation is that Covell was thinking of the ‘eloquent Gaveston’ that opens and dominates Marlowe’s *Edward II*. It is, after all, Marlowe (not Drayton) who is best described as ‘Watson’s heir’; Marlowe was nine years younger than his friend Thomas Watson, and something of his protégé. Perhaps Covell, who was a year behind Marlowe at Cambridge, also thought he noticed the verse style of his fellow alumnus and made the leap.

In the Stationers’ Register in January 1600, another conflation of Marlowe and Shakespeare is evident. Marlowe’s translations of Ovid’s *Amores*, the source of the *Venus & Adonis* epigram, had been published bound together with John Davies’s *Epigrammes*, and was listed on the Bishops’ Ban of 1599 as *Davyes Epigrams, with marlowes Elegyes*. Seven months later, Eleazar Edgar registered ‘A book called *Amours* by J.D. with certen oyr [other] sonnettes by WS’. J.D. was how Sir John Davies identified himself when his epigrams were bound with Marlowe’s translations of *Amores*, and *Amours* strongly suggests this is the *Amores* of the original unlicensed publication. The only element that differs is the substitution of the initials ‘WS’ for those previously given as ‘CM’. Given the fame of the name by this time, it is likely that in 1599 ‘William Shakespeare’ would be the first name that a reader would identify as the author when faced with the initials ‘WS’. This entry in the Stationers’ Register, then, may be read as the only documented attempt to exchange ‘Christopher Marlowe’ for ‘William Shakespeare’ on a publication.

At a similar time, the author of the manuscript work, *The Newe Metamorphosis*, wrote about Marlowe in the present and future tense. As Lyon proved conclusively through the author's mention of salient autobiographical details, the author of this text is Gervase Markham (Lyon 1919). Evidence for Markham's personal connection to Marlowe has recently been established (Barber 2016). In *The Newe Metamorphosis*, Markham refers to 'kynde Kit Marlowe'. This tribute is rarely quoted in its full form, because the full form is problematic to orthodox scholars. Markham, writing in 1600 or later, refers, in the present and then future tense, to Marlowe completing the narrative of Hero (from his half-finished *Hero and Leander*):

*'kynde Kit Marlowe, if death not prevent-him,
shall write her story, love such art hath lent-him'*

One might explain away all these texts as errors, but it seems a profound coincidence that they are all making 'errors' about exactly the same author. Under the Marlovian narrative, Harvey's inscrutable poem is no longer perplexing, Nashe's references are no longer mysterious, and confusions of identity or tense connected to Marlowe's works are no longer errors: all of this data stops being anomalous.

Marlowe in the Sonnets

Marlowe's narrative maps powerfully onto Shakespeare's sonnets. Paul Edmondson & Stanley Wells, considering the argument that the sonnets were simply a writing exercise, conclude: '[T]hough Shakespeare's sonnets, like all his work, unquestionably reflect his reading, and though not all of them are intimate in tone, it is not unreasonable to look in them for reflections of his personal experience' (Edmondson and Wells 2004, 21).

Read from the perspective of the Marlovian narrative, the group of poems sometimes referred to as the sonnets of separation become sonnets of exile. Their allusions to travel (27:2, 34:2), a journey undertaken with heavy heart (50:1), a physical separation, sundry losses (34:10) and things lacked (31:2) down to the shape of familiar birds and flowers (113:6) - 'th'expense of many of a vanished sight'(30:8) - can now be read as allusions to Marlowe's long journey on horseback across Europe to a final destination in foreign climes (in the case of the Marlovian narrative, Northern Italy). Sonnet 50, 'How heavy do I journey on my way', can be taken as expressing an exile's reluctance to continue on a journey in which 'my grief lies onwards and my joy behind.' The 'large lengths of miles' (44:10) are referred to as an 'injurious distance'(44:2), the poet as being in 'limits far remote' (44:4). But the friend is constantly in his thoughts: 'thysself away, art present still with me' (47:10). Sonnet 45 can be read as describing an exchange of letters: the joy of receiving one, swiftly followed by despair when the reply is sent and the wait for a new missive begins:

'oppressed with melancholy,
Until life's composition be recurred
By those swift messengers returned from thee
Who even but now come back again assured
Of thy fair health, recounting it to me.
This told, I joy; but then no longer glad,
I send them back again and straight grow sad.'(45:8-14)

The 'suborned informer' (bribed false witness, or hired spy) in Sonnet 125, which some commentators have read as a cryptic reference to a real individual, is hard to explain

under the orthodox narrative. Katherine Duncan-Jones believes it refers to 'Time' whom she calls 'the explicit addressee of sonnets 123-5', despite the fact that only the first of those sonnets explicitly addresses Time (Duncan-Jones 1997, 363). Adopting Marlovian narrative gives us the biographical basis for a literal reading, and we may assume it is Richard Baines that Marlowe is addressing when he writes

'Hence, thou suborned informer, a true soul
When most impeached, stands least in thy control.' (125:13-14)

A similar difference in approach can be taken to the line in sonnet 62 where the poet describes himself as being 'Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity'. Duncan-Jones' gloss on this line suggests that 'since Shakespeare's father was a whittawer, who prepared leather for gloves, Shakespeare may well have believed his own skin to have undergone this process', but in the light of the Marlovian narrative, the line can be read as the poet becoming literally weather-beaten as he travels towards Italy. Under this reading, 'whatsoever star that guides my moving' (26:9) could be taken as Fate not simply determining the course of a particular life, but a physical journey as well.

'[T]his separation' (39:7) leads to 'absence' (39:9), to the two friends being 'twain' (36:1, 39:13), a situation the poet appears in various sonnets to rationalise (e.g. 'For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings' 29:13), or try to come to terms with (e.g. 'let us divided live' 39:5).

Sonnet 29, immediately following two 'journey' sonnets, can be read as explicitly referring to Marlowe's state of exile:

'When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate...' (29:1-4)

This poet and playwright of acknowledged genius, is

'The prey of worms, my body being dead,
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife' (74:10-11).

Why any other possible author would refer to themselves as being stabbed isn't clear. Under this narrative, Richard Baines, whose note to the Privy Council suggested 'all men in christianitei ought to endeavor that the mouth of so dangerous a member may be stopped' has effectively prevailed. Marlowe will not write as Marlowe again. And yet he fears even his writing style might give away his anonymity, since he continues to write 'still all one, ever the same... That every word almost doth tell my name' (76:5,7).

With the name of Marlowe effectively dead, the exiled poet lives only through his writing, and – vicariously – through his friend:

'You are my all-the-world, and I must strive
To know my shames and praises from your tongue;
None else to me, nor I to none, alive.' (112:5-7)

The orthodox reading takes this as metaphorical; the Marlovian reading makes it literal. But where a reading may be either metaphorical or literal, the Marlovian reading is not always the literal one. An example is Sonnet 48.

‘How careful was I, when I took my way,
Each trifle under truest bars to thrust,
That to my use it might unused stay
From hands of falsehood, in sure wards of trust;
But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are,
Most worthy comfort, now my greatest grief,
Though best of dearest, and mine only care,
Art left the prey of every vulgar thief.’ (48:1-8)

Duncan-Jones’s gloss for line 5 says ‘To a wealthy young nobleman, the valuables of a professional playwright would no doubt seem trifling.’ But reading the sonnets as letters home from exile, sent to a loved one, the ‘trifles’ entrusted to the friend – the poet’s jewels – are the sonnets themselves, and the friend has been inadvisably sharing them. This would chime both with Francis Meres’s 1598 mention of Shakespeare’s ‘sugred sonnets’ being shared amongst his friends, and the publication of two of the sonnets in Jaggard’s *Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599. The poet is concerned that it is the friend who will be put in danger:

‘And even thence thou wilt be stol’n, I fear;
For truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.’ (48:13-14)

Far from being a sonnet referring to ‘the security of his earthly possessions’ (Duncan-Jones 1997, 206), sonnet 48 can now be read as a warning to a friend who is literally giving too much away.

When reading the sonnets as a narrative of exile, it is possible to detect a note of despair verging at times on the suicidal (32:1; 66:1). Mining recent personal experience for his metaphor, the poet in the Marlovian narrative begins Sonnet 74:

‘But be contented when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away’ (74:1-2)

His lost name plagues him in these moribund contemplations, and is linked with a concern to protect his friend, who cannot be discovered to be associated with him:

‘When I, perhaps, compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse [...]
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.’ (71:10-14)

The name that should not be rehearsed comes up again in the following sonnet:

‘My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me, nor you.’ (72:11-12)

The nature of the shame is elusive in the orthodox narrative, but in the Marlovian one we have a clear cause. Sonnet 111, which ‘has been frequently read as an allusion to Shakespeare’s public profession as an actor-dramatist’ by orthodox scholars, bears a stronger reading when it relates to Marlowe, whose posthumous reputation was destroyed by those such as Beard:

‘Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand;
Pity me, then, and wish I were renewed’(111:5-8)

The ‘brand’ on the Marlowe name has lasted over 400 years; Marlowe’s reputation is still so sullied that many couldn’t countenance him as the author of the Shakespeare works even if there were proof he survived. As a result of his ‘harmful deeds’ as government agent, his nature is ‘subdued/To what it works in’ – to words. Writing is his only way of communicating with the world from which he is exiled.

But writing is also his strength, and from a position of exile he not only gains perspective but a greater depth of thought: ‘Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare’ (64:11). The celebration of writing as both powerful and redemptive is a theme to which the sonnets repeatedly return:

‘... unless this miracle have might:
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.’ (65:13-14)

Yet time to ‘ruminare’ brings the poet to negative thought as much as to positive, and twice the poet echoes the Latin inscription on the putative Corpus Christi portrait of Marlowe:

‘consumed with that which it was nourished by’ (73:12);
and
‘the worst was this: my love was my decay’ (80:14).¹⁷

He also continues to be bothered by the slurs on his reputation, at times so bitterly that he begins sonnet 121

‘’Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed’
and ends it

‘All men are bad, and in their badness reign.’

The badness of the world is associated explicitly with slander in Sonnet 150:

‘Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,
Mad slanderers by mad ears believed be.’ (150: 11-12)

Sonnet 66 now becomes a much more personal diatribe than the orthodox narrative allows, with several of the lines appearing to apply directly to the exiled poet’s situation:

‘...And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly, doctor-like, controlling skill...’ (66:7-10)

¹⁷ The Latin inscription on the 1585 Corpus Christi portrait, is QUOD ME NUTRIT ME DESTRUIT; what nourishes me destroys me.

In the Marlovian narrative, William Shakespeare is the frontman for the poet's work, and under this reading, 'gilded honour shamefully misplaced' could be taken as an allusion to Shakespeare's being mistaken as the author.

The limping mentioned here is a repeated metaphor that has, with the exception of René Weis (Weis 2007), been largely overlooked by orthodox Shakespearean scholars; elsewhere, the poet refers to himself as being 'made lame by fortune's dearest spite' (37:3).¹⁸ Fortune's spite appears again in sonnet 90:

'Then hate me when thou wilt, if even now,
Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross.
Join with spite of fortune, make me bow.' (90:1-3)

The speaker considers himself deeply unlucky, and feels the world has turned against him, misinterpreting his deeds. This, an aspect of the sonnets that has often perplexed those reading from the orthodox perspective, fits perfectly with the Marlovian one.

Other long-standing interpretive problems dissolve on adopting Marlovian authorship theory. The 'paradoxical claim that [*Shake-speare's Sonnets*] will be remembered for its subject-matter (the fair youth), not for its author' which is 'taken to its furthest extremes' in Sonnet 81 (Duncan-Jones 1997, 272) ceases to be any kind of paradox when we adopt the Marlovian narrative. Though the name 'Shakespeare' became very well known, the author behind the name recognised he would not be credited. The two sonnets that pun on the word, and the name, 'Will', can be read as the poet's attempt to fully inhabit his pseudonym so that he feels less disempowered and over-looked:

'Think all but one, and me in that one Will.' (135:14)

'Make but my name thy love, and love that still;
And then thou lov'st me, for my name is Will.' (136:13-14)

The rival poet referred to in sonnet 86, who cannot be unequivocally identified in the orthodox narrative, can be confidently identified as George Chapman in the Marlovian one. Previous scholars, starting with William Minto in 1874, have suggested Chapman as the Rival Poet (Acheson 1903; Minto 1874, 222; Robertson 1926), but since no direct link could be found between Chapman and Shakespeare, the presumed author of the sonnets, no consensus could be reached. Chapman, however, had a clear relationship not only to Marlowe but to Marlowe's patron and friend Thomas Walsingham. In 1598 Chapman revised, extended and had published Marlowe's unfinished *Hero & Leander*, contributing more lines than Marlowe had written, altering the poem's structure, and dedicating it to Thomas Walsingham's wife, Audrey. Having one's poetic creation taken over would be cause for jealousy enough without the added complication that Chapman appears to have become Marlowe's friend and patron's new favourite. Chapman claimed to have been visited by the spirit of Homer whilst translating his *Seauen bookes of the Iliades of Homere*, published, like *Hero and Leander*, in 1598 (Chapman 1941, 174.II.76-77). His identity seems certain when we imagine it is the 'dead' Marlowe who asks

'Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?' (86:5-6)

¹⁸ Weis, reading the image literally, has concluded that Shakespeare was physically lame.

Under this narrative the identification of the rival poet as George Chapman is unproblematic because we have a proven biographical parallel with the situation described in the sonnets. Walsingham patronised and formed close relationships with both Marlowe and Chapman. Viewed through this biographical frame, at least fifteen sonnets (78 to 92), and possibly more, are addressed directly to Walsingham ('both your poets', Sonnet 83). When reading the sonnets, there are numerous important interpretative decisions that are wholly dependent on the assumed biography of the author behind the works.

Editors have revised the punctuation of 81:6 such that it reads 'Though I, once gone, to all the world must die', but the Quarto version 'I (once gone)' would work better for the Marlovian narrative, adding to the more obvious meaning (which the revised punctuation makes emphatic) a pun on Marlowe, thought dead, being already 'once gone'. Another editorial amendment illustrates even more strongly how one possible narrative might be concealed by the adoption of another. The final couplet of Sonnet 112 reads, in the Quarto:

'You are so strongly in my purpose bred
That all the world besides me thinkes y'are dead.' (112: 13-14)

This is frequently emended to 'That all the world, besides, methinks, are dead' but as Duncan-Jones comments, 'none of the proposed emendations ... yields easier sense' than to read 'y'are' as 'you are' (Duncan-Jones 1997, 334). Since the traditional narrative does not allow easy understanding of this couplet, her paraphrase is nevertheless torturous: '(because I have excluded the rest of the world from my consciousness) I believe that to everyone except me you are dead – you have existence only for me.' The Marlovian narrative, however, allows the couplet to be understood very plainly, if we read it as addressed to Thomas Walsingham, whose regular attendance at court ceased after Marlowe's apparent death. Under this narrative, the couplet's meaning is: 'All the world besides you thinks *I'm* dead. And you're so protective of my secret that you have also dropped from view.'

The Marlovian narrative can account for many of the apparent inconsistencies in the sonnets. For example, it gives a rationale for the poet claiming to have been silenced ('As victors of my silence cannot boast' 86:11) when he is clearly still writing. It can also elucidate the precise nature of the addressee's offence in sonnets 33-36. In the orthodox narrative, there appears to be some confusion about the 'stain'(33:14) 'shame'(34:9) and 'disgrace'(33:8, 34:8) which, via the poet's apparent forgiveness in sonnet 35, become 'those blots that do with me remain', so that by sonnet 36, the 'shame' is now associated with the poet (36:10). Edmondson & Wells note the direct diction employed 'in what seems like a lover's quarrel' and Duncan-Jones, trying to find clarity of meaning in the orthodox narrative, suggests '[t]he young man has wronged his friend; in making excuses for him the poet colludes with him and shares his fault.'

Read from the perspective of Marlowe in exile, a richer story emerges. Here is Sonnet 34 in full.

'Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day
And make me travail forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,
Hiding thy bravery in their rotten smoke?
Tis not enough that through the cloud thou break,
To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,
For no man well of such a salve can speak
That heals the wound and cures not the disgrace;
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief;

Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss;
 Th'offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
 To him that bears the strong offence's cross.
 Ah, but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,
 And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.'

In the Marlovian scenario, the friend was instrumental in Marlowe's planned escape, but did not foresee the consequences: the damage to Marlowe's reputation after his apparent death in a knife-fight. The 'rotten smoke' could be an allusion to the unflattering rumours and slanders that are now circulating. The friend is sorry, but Marlowe – and his name – must bear 'the strong offence's cross.' The Marlovian narrative clearly identifies the 'separable spite' which leads the poet to conclude, two sonnets later.

'I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
 Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame,
 Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
 Unless thou take that honour from thy name:
 But do not do so...' (36:9-13)

If we allow ourselves to imagine that these are private sonnets by Christopher Marlowe, written in exile under a pseudonym that allowed him to communicate with his friend whilst remaining hidden from those who would have him killed – poems successfully attributed for four hundred years to the businessman who agreed to play his front man – we can conclude that the poet's friend and patron heeded those instructions.

Marlowe in the Plays

A writer's work should never be read as thinly veiled autobiography. We should not be looking for an author with three daughters because Lear has three daughters. But there are arguments for connecting the life and the work when, for example, a significant and inexplicable change has been made to the source material. Such is the case for Juliet: sixteen years old in the source, Arthur Brooke's poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, but in *Romeo and Juliet*, she is thirteen when she dies. Marlowe's prematurely married sister Jane died in childbirth at that age. But even more pertinent even than biographical parallels, the *themes* to which a writer regularly returns will tend to be those of personal significance.

The Marlowe story fits Shakespeare's obsessive themes. Shakespeare is obsessed, for example, with resurrecting characters believed to be dead. Thirty-three characters across eight Shakespeare plays are wrongly thought to be dead. Seven of these deaths are deliberately faked: Juliet (*Romeo & Juliet*), Hero (*Much Ado About Nothing*), Helena (*All's Well That Ends Well*) and Hermione (*The Winter's Tale*); plus Falstaff (*1 Henry IV*), Claudio (*Measure for Measure*), and Innogen (*Cymbeline*), who all fake their deaths to avoid being actually killed. While pretending to be dead, Innogen becomes 'Fidele' who is also mistakenly thought to be dead for a time. Some of these false deaths are in the sources Shakespeare has chosen to develop but many of them are additions. The 'problem' plays and the late plays, in particular, are riddled with them. Under the Marlovian narrative, this obsession with resurrection can be seen as a sort of wish fulfilment, or indeed a plea.

Deaths are often faked because of slander, false accusation, and loss of reputation: precisely the problems that beset Marlowe. Marlowe's reputation was so sullied by his enemies that even now, four hundred years later, some people consider him too degenerate a

character to have written Shakespeare's works. Little wonder, then, that he would obsess over slander and 'the bubble reputation'.

From the main plot of *Othello*, through the subplot of *King Lear* involving Edgar and Edmond to the main plots of *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, an honorable character is falsely slandered and consequently killed, or forced into some form of exile. In the tragedies they remain dead or exiled; in the comedies they are restored to their lives.

'The note of banishment, banishment from the heart, banishment from the home sounds uninterruptedly from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* onward till Prospero breaks his staff, buries it certain fathoms in the earth and drowns his book' says Stephen Daedalus in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Joyce 1980, 180). 'Banishment is both the action which defines the canon and the reason for its existence' writes orthodox scholar Jane Kingsley-Smith in her ground-breaking study *Shakespeare's Drama of Exile* (Kingsley-Smith 2003, 1). 'Again and again, he writes a scene of banishment, reworking the details of earlier plays, redirecting the emphasis from loss of language to loss of nation, from loss of the beloved to loss of self' (8). Embedded in the orthodox paradigm, she locates no plausible or substantive reason as to what might propel the author to write plays in which 'the audience is consistently asked to imagine itself banished' (29).

A similar understanding of Shakespeare's works as a canon of exile has been reached by Stephen Greenblatt, whom Shapiro has called 'the best reader of Shakespeare in America today' (Howard 2010). James Shapiro is deeply critical of Greenblatt's New Historicist approach, which he perceives as dangerously opening the door to a similar approach by non-Stratfordians, and one can see why. Greenblatt could be mistaken for advancing a Marlovian argument when he writes:

'Again and again in his plays, an unforeseen catastrophe ... suddenly turns what had seemed like happy progress, prosperity, smooth sailing into disaster, terror, and loss. The loss is obviously and immediately material, but it is also, and more crushingly, a loss of identity. To wind up on an unknown shore, without one's friends, habitual associates, familiar network — this catastrophe is often epitomized by the deliberate alteration or disappearance of the name and, with it, the alteration or disappearance of social status.' (Greenblatt 2004, 85)

Regarding Prospero, he writes 'Why, if [Shakespeare] is implicated in the figure of his magician hero, might he feel compelled to plead for indulgence, as if he were asking to be pardoned for a crime he had committed?' (376-7). From a Marlovian perspective, it is as though Greenblatt and Kingsley-Smith have seen through the works to the real author, but are unable to understand what they have seen.

And let's consider Prospero: a wiser and older - and exiled - version of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. The comparison is explicitly made by the author himself: both 'Prospero' and 'Faustus' come from Latin words meaning 'fortunate'. One character signalled the end of Marlowe's career, as Marlowe's conflation with his protagonist led to accusations of atheism against him; the other signalled the end of Shakespeare's. Faustus declares he will burn his books; Prospero that he will drown his. It is as though with water, and compassion, Prospero douses the fire and passion of his youthful counterpart.

'As you from crimes would pardoned be,

Let your indulgence set me free.’¹⁹

Summary

Marlowe was a gifted blank verse dramatist, penner of history plays, and Ovid-influenced poet whose works are stylistically on a continuum with Shakespeare’s; the only candidate of whom this is true. As someone facing execution as a result of his work to protect the queen’s life, whose life would have depended on his concealment, he had the best reason of all the candidates to hide his identity. His circumstances from lowly birth through exceptional education to gentleman, and through royal service to the friendship of noblemen and courtiers, offer the right mix of experience required for a writer of Shakespeare’s social breadth. Timing supports Marlowe as author: the name William Shakespeare appears in the literary record for the first time just two weeks after Marlowe’s apparent demise in an incident so mysterious that the majority of scholars who have examined the evidence believe the inquest was some kind of cover up. To read the sonnets as Marlowe’s is to resolve numerous problems of tone and interpretation that exist under the orthodox narrative, including the identity of the Rival Poet. Recurrent themes throughout the plays – particularly those of slander, loss of name and reputation, exile, resurrection, and mistaken and doubled identities — fit well with what would have been Marlowe’s post-exile obsessions. Contemporaneous evidence supports the idea that some writers of the time – including one very much in touch with the Elizabethan literary scene – recognised Shakespeare’s style as Marlowe’s.

If true, it explains both why the canons are so similar and inter-related, and why they deviate in subject matter and preferred imagery. The effect of losing one life and identity would be profound. Suffering can prove a unique source of wisdom: of broader perspective, and a deeper understanding of the human condition. As former poet laureate, Ted Hughes, expressed it:

‘The way to really develop as a writer is to make yourself a political outcast, so that you have to live in secret. This is how Marlowe developed into Shakespeare.’
(Hughes and Reid 2007, 120)

Perhaps it is time we listened to Prospero’s valedictory words, pardoned this exiled conjuror, and set him free.

¹⁹ *The Tempest* was performed before King James on 1st November 1611. Might this speech have been primarily addressed to him?

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