



Shakespearean Authorship Trust

Christopher Marlowe

Dates:

1564 - 1593 (?)

Background:

- Born in Canterbury, son of a cobbler
- Scholarship to the King's School, Canterbury, where boys were encouraged to write poetry in Latin and perform plays
- Scholarship to Corpus Christi college, Cambridge. Six years of study & MA raised him to the status of gentleman.
- Musical: likely a Kings' chorister, his Cambridge scholarship required he could sing plain song.
- Connected to the Sidney-Pembroke circle through a dedication to the Countess of Pembroke
- Connected to the nobility – 'very well known' to both the Earl of Northumberland (Percy) and future Earl of Derby (Stanley)
- Connected to Sir Walter Raleigh and astronomer Thomas Harriot.
- Member of London literary scene: friend of Thomas Nashe, Thomas Watson, and Matthew Roydon, wrote with Thomas Kyd.

Famous For:

- Popularising Elizabethan blank verse drama with *Doctor Faustus*, *Edward II* & five other plays.
- The long poem *Hero & Leander* and several other translations/versions of poetic narratives by Lucan, Virgil and Ovid.
- The lyric poem *The Passionate Shepherd* ('Come live with me and be my love...')
- Working in the Queen's service as an intelligence agent
- Reading 'the atheist lecture' to Sir Walter Raleigh and his circle of free thinkers
- Saying 'That all they that love not Tobacco & Boies were Fooles'
- Apparently dying after being stabbed through the eye in a 'tavern brawl' in Deptford, aged 29.

The Case

- Marlowe's inquest document is widely regarded by scholars as untrue; a cover-up.
- The three named witnesses to his death were all professional liars. Two worked, like Marlowe, as intelligence agents. Two worked as conmen. (One was both spy and conman.) All three were connected to Marlowe's friend and patron, Thomas Walsingham.
- Marlowe's apparent death on 30 May 1593 occurred when he was effectively on bail. Marlowe was facing accusations of atheism, heresy and blasphemy – charges considered treasonous and likely to lead to his execution.
- The man said to have stabbed Marlowe, a lifelong servant of Marlowe's friend and patron Thomas Walsingham, was pardoned with unusual swiftness and before he could be brought to trial.

- Since the killing was deemed to have occurred within 'the Verge' (12 miles of the monarch's person), the inquest was conducted by the Queen's Coroner, William Danby. The county coroner should also have been present, but Danby conducted the inquest alone, making the inquest legally void. Danby was a long-time friend of Lord Treasurer Burghley (William Cecil), Marlowe's employer.
- Burghley had a history of protecting Marlowe from accusations of treason – including a potentially capital charge sixteen months earlier. Scholars have argued this is because the accusations in 1587 and 1592 arose from Marlowe's working in the Queen's service.
- The Baines Note – a list of Marlowe's crimes produced by a suspected Catholic double agent– was edited by a hand identified as that of Privy Councillor Lord Keeper Puckering. In the copy sent to the Queen, he altered 'died a sudden and violent death' to the more equivocal 'came to a sudden and fearful end of his life'.
- This 'end' occurred at the home of Mrs Eleanor Bull, cousin to the Queen's favourite nanny, Blanche Parry, who was in turn a cousin of Lord Burghley. Charles Nicholl identified it as a government safe house, a stopping-off point for agents travelling to and from the continent.
- Robert Poley, the key witness and one of the government's best agents, was carrying letters for the Queen, only 16 miles away, but took a week to deliver them. The brawl and assassination theories cannot explain this delay. The escape theory can. The record for his payment for the period 8 May – 8 June 1593 states he was 'in her Majesty's service all the aforesaid time'.
- An available substitute body was that of John Penry, executed suddenly the previous day, only three miles away. The body, unaccounted for, would have been the legal property of Danby.
- The faked death scenario has been proposed as a compromise meeting the needs of the two main factions of the Privy Council: the Cecil faction arguing to keep a valuable agent alive, and the faction headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, who would want to make an example of a notorious atheist. Marlowe's death was publicised as divine retribution.
- William Shakespeare was 'born' as an author shortly after Marlowe's death. *Venus and Adonis* was registered anonymously on 18 April 1593, and the first recorded purchase on 12 June 1593, less than a fortnight after Marlowe's apparent death, marked the first appearance of the name 'William Shakespeare' in any literary or theatrical context.
- Marlowe is the only candidate with a proven record of writing 'like Shakespeare'. Marlowe's later works are indistinguishable from early Shakespeare. First Folio works such as *Henry VI*, *Shrew*, and *Titus Andronicus* were attributed to Marlowe until the 1920s. Key Shakespeare plays are re-workings of earlier Marlowe plays. Shakespeare quotes (and refers to) Marlowe throughout the canon. Marlowe has consistently matched Shakespeare in stylometric tests.
- Marlowe had the social breadth required to be the author: from cobbler to Queen's agent. Despite mixing with noblemen, and duties that took him to foreign courts, he remained familiar with the yeoman class sensibilities strongly depicted in the Shakespeare canon.
- The Marlowe story fits Shakespeare's obsessive themes. Shakespeare is obsessed with resurrection: 33 characters in 18 Shakespeare plays are wrongly thought to be dead. The author repeatedly returns to slander, false accusation, and loss of name and reputation. 19 plays explore exile.
- Slander followed by exile offers a firm basis for the 'outcast state' for the 'shame' and 'disgrace' mentioned throughout the sonnets (e.g. Sonnet 29).
- The author reports in the sonnets that his name has received 'a brand', and that it should 'be buried where my body is'.
- Sonnet 66 – 'Tired of all these, for restful death I cry' - tallies with the Marlowe theory in its description of 'right perfection wrongfully disgraced', 'art made tongue-tied by authority' and 'folly, doctor-like, controlling skill'.
- The Rival Poet can easily be identified under this theory. In 'rival poet' sonnets 85-87, Shakespeare refers bitterly to 'both your poets'. Marlowe's patron Thomas Walsingham became George Chapman's patron after Marlowe's apparent demise. Chapman, who claimed the ghost of Homer helped him write his translation of the Iliad, was first suggested as the rival poet who was 'by spirits taught to write' in 1874. In 1598, Chapman published his continuation of Marlowe's *Hero and*

Leander, tripling the length and changing the structure: more than enough provocation to account for the tone and content of these sonnets.

- Faked death fits with several references in the sonnets that orthodox scholars have struggled to interpret and frequently emend to make (orthodox) sense including 'Though I (once gone) to all the world must die' (91), 'I to none alive' (112), and 'You are so strongly in my purpose bred/That all the world besides me thinkes y'are dead.'
- Sonnet 74 can be interpreted as referring explicitly to the events of May 1593, referring to the author's 'body being dead,/The coward conquest of a wretch's knife' and death as 'that fell arrest without all bail'.
- William Covell (who was at Cambridge with Marlowe) apparently confuses Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare in *Polimanteia* (1595): he suggests 'eloquent Gaveston' (a character in Marlowe's *Edward II*) is one of Shakespeare's creations. He also calls Shakespeare 'Watson's heir' (Thomas Watson was a document friend of Marlowe's).
- Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare are apparently confused in the Stationers' Register on 3 Jan 1600, when 'WS' is given as the poet who translated Ovid's *Amores* alongside the epigrams of 'JD' (John Davies).
- The author of *The Newe Metamorphosis* (JM, gent), writes about Marlowe in the present tense some time between 1600 and 1615: 'Kynde Kit Marlowe, if death not prevent him, shall write [Hero's] story'.
- In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare has Sir Hugh Evans confuse Marlowe's 'Come live with me and be my love' with Psalm 137, arguably the most famous song of exile in existence.
- In a widely recognised reference to Marlowe's death in *As You Like It*, a line from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* is altered to include a phrase from the inquest document – 'the reckoning' – a phrase not in the public domain until 1925.