Writing Marlowe As Writing Shakespeare: Exploring Biographical Fictions

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September 2010

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signed _____

Table of Contents

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SUMMARY

This thesis consists of two components: a 70,000-word verse novel and a 50,000-word critical component that has arisen out of the research process for that novel.

Creative Component: The Marlowe Papers

The Marlowe Papers is a full-length verse novel written entirely in iambic pentameter. As with verse novels such as *The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth, or *The Emperor's Babe* by Bernadine Evaristo, its inspiration, derivation, conventions and scope owe more to the prose novel than to the epic poem. Though there is as yet no widely-accepted definition, a verse novel may be distinguished from an epic poem where it consists, as in this case, of numerous discrete poems, each constituting a 'chapter' of the novel. This conception allows for considerable variations in form and tone that would not be possible in the more cohesive tradition of the epic poem. *The Marlowe Papers* is a fictional autobiography of Christopher Marlowe based on the idea that he used the pseudonym 'William Shakespeare' (employing the Stratford merchant as a 'front'), having faked his own death and fled abroad to escape capital charges for atheism and heresy. The verse novel, written in dramatic scenes, traces his life from his flight on 30 May 1593, through the back-story (starting in 1586) that led to his prosecution, as we similarly track his progress on the Continent and in England until just after James I

accedes to the English throne. The poems are a mixture of longer blank verse narratives and smaller, more lyrical poems (including sonnets). Explanatory notes to the poems, and a Dramatis Personae, are included on the advice of my creative supervisor.

Critical Component: Writing Marlowe As Writing Shakespeare

This part of the thesis explores the relationship between early modern biographies and fiction, questioning certain 'facts' of Marlovian and Shakespearean biography in the light of the 'thought experiment' of the verse novel. Marlowe's reputation for violence is reassessed in the light of scholarly doubt about the veracity of the inquest document, and Shakespeare's sonnets are reinterpreted through the lens of the Marlovian theory of Shakespeare authorship. The argument is that orthodox and non-Stratfordian theories might be considered competing paradigms; simply different frameworks through which interpretation of the same data leads to different conclusions. Interdisciplinary influences include Kuhn's philosophy of scientific discovery, post-modern narrativist history, neuroscience, psychology, and quantum physics (in the form of the 'observer effect'). Data that is either anomalous or inexplicable under the orthodox paradigm is demonstrated to support a Marlovian reading, and the current state of the Shakespeare authorship question is assessed. Certain primary source documents were examined at the Bodleian Library, at the British Library, and at Lambeth Palace Library. Versions of Chapters 2, 3 and 4, written under supervision during this doctorate, have all been published, either as a book chapter or as a journal article, within the last year (Barber, 2009, 2010a, b).

Acknowledgements

I could not have completed this thesis without the advice and assistance of my main supervisor, Professor Andrew Hadfield, and my creative supervisor, Stephen Knight. Thanks are also due to the many people who have supported me throughout my research, and through the editing process, including Dr. William Leahy, Professors Michael Stapleton and Sarah Scott, and founder members of the International Marlowe Shakespeare Society, chiefly Peter Farey, who provided both opportunity for rational argument and the generous loan of research materials, but also Daryl Pinksen, Anthony Kellet, Isabel Gortazar and Carlo Dinota. Clare Coombe of Reading University must be thanked for her generous help with Latin translations. Lastly, my deep gratitude to the selectors of the Arts and Humanities Research Council whose doctoral research funding made this possible.

A note on spellings

Many rebuttals to non-Stratfordian arguments are advanced along the lines that, with regards to the man usually attributed as the author, 'his name is on the plays'. This is *argumentum in circulo,* starting as it does with the assumption that the Stratford-born man is the author, and demonstrates that to consider the Shakespeare authorship question at all requires that we distinguish the author of the plays and poems from the Stratford-born man to whom they are usually attributed. In order to avoid wordiness or repetitive qualifiers, where a distinction is necessary I have used the convention adopted by Diana Price and others, using the spelling Shakespeare when the reference is to the author and Shakspere when the information pertains to the man born in Stratford-on-Avon. They may be one and the same man, but in order to explore the theory at all, confusion must be avoided. The vagaries of Elizabethan spelling are acknowledged and do not constitute any significant part of my argument.

1. Introduction

The major part of this thesis is a work of invention. The research necessary to bring it into being soon revealed that the same might be said of many biographies of Marlowe and Shakespeare. In order to create a scenario in which Marlowe wrote the works of Shakespeare, it was first necessary to separate myth and assumption from what could firmly be established about three separate entities: Marlowe (as he might be understood had he not died a violent death), Shakspere the Stratford-born share-holder, and Shakespeare the author (who in the fictional scenario is Marlowe post-May 1593). This process led to a number of revelations.

What began with a desire to dissolve myths metamorphosed into a thought experiment. If Marlowe didn't die at Deptford, was he necessarily violent? If Marlowe wrote *Shake-speare's Sonnets*, do they read differently, and submit more easily to interpretation? The results of the thought experiment were provocative. It became apparent that the orthodox story contained numerous anomalies which are explained away by orthodox scholars. It is these anomalies which are the foundation of Shakespeare scepticism, and viewed through the Marlovian narrative that my fictive pursuits required me to adopt, they transmuted into data which was both easily explicable and could be read as correct.

An early reading of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) made me conscious that the conflicting theories – orthodox, Marlovian,

Oxfordian, Baconian – could be seen as different paradigms.[1] Marlovian authorship theory is not new, having been first proposed by Wilbur Zeigler 115 years ago (Zeigler, 1895) and developed by Calvin Hoffman half a century later (Hoffman, 1955). What *is* new is to approach each theory of Shakespeare authorship (including the orthodox one) as a competing paradigm; a theoretical framework through which observable data can be explained. A paradigm approach made sense of the way the same data could be perceived so differently within each framework, and also explained the quality of debate (if it can be dignified with such a name) in the Shakespeare authorship question, rightly characterised as a 'dialogue of the deaf'. Could the humanities be subject to significant paradigm shifts similar to those noted in the sciences? It transpired there were at least two historical precedents. Firstly, in 1795 the work of Friedrich August Wolf had caused the conventional biography of Homer to be 'suddenly and permanently overthrown'. Forty years later, the work of David Friedrich Strauss caused a similar revolution in understanding the relationship between the Gospels and the life of Jesus. In both cases, the paradigm shift involved the commonly understood biography of a vitally important figure and his relationship to the literary texts associated with him.[2]

Following a conference at the British Academy on *Enquiry, Evidence and Facts*, where I was exposed to the evidential reasoning of David Schum, the thought experiment mutated into an evidence-marshalling exercise. The next task was devising a coherent narrative that joined as many of the dots of evidence as possible: the framework for the novel in verse. Eventually I found myself arguing for Marlovian theory - not to say it is correct, or can be proven, but only that it is not as ludicrous as first appears: that evidence can be interpreted to support it, and that adopting it as a

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[1] I am using 'paradigm' throughout in the sense of OED 4: A conceptual or methodological model underlying the theories and practices of a science or discipline at a particular time.
[2] SHAPIRO, J. S. (2010) *Contested Will,* London, Faber and Faber, 78-84.

working theory not only furnishes us with explanations for numerous apparent 'anomalies' in the historical record, but also tallies surprisingly well with much of the scholarship that has been conducted over the last two centuries. In addition, it has some merits in terms of the deeper readings of texts that it can elucidate. More than this cannot be claimed.

This work has required much trawling through the internet haunts of non-Stratfordians. Occasionally, those frustrated by the Shakespeare authorship question (on both sides of the debate) have expressed longing for a single document that would seal the issue once and for all. Innovative interdisciplinary historian Marc Bloch, who wrote extensively on the nature of historical evidence, shatters this hope:

> *'It would be a great illusion to imagine that to each historical problem there corresponds a unique type of document, specialized for its use. On the contrary, the more research attempts to deal with fundamental events, the less it can hope to receive illumination from any source other than the convergent rays of light coming from very different types of evidence.'*
>
> (Wilkinson, 1996: 84)

There is no clinching proof, only numerous small fragments of data; an unusual word here, an 'error' there. Together they appear, from a non-Stratfordian perspective, to build into a body of compelling evidence, but it is a body of evidence that seems to crumble to trivial irrelevancies the moment one assumes Shakspere wrote Shakespeare.

To suspend or change one's paradigm is not easy. For some, it may not be possible; human neurology is rightly resistant to our tampering with the frameworks through which we sift the vast amount of data available to us. The most persuasive argument contained within might be the work of fiction, rather than the theorising on fact. Since fiction entails the suspension of disbelief, it may yet prove the most effective mechanism through which those in one paradigm may glimpse the world as perceived through another. *The Marlowe Papers* is by no means the only fictive treatment of non-

Stratfordian theory which will see the light of day in 2011. Roland Emmerich, director of *Independence Day* and *2012*, is currently shooting a film entitled *Anonymous*, a fictional representation of one of the more extreme branches of Oxfordian theory.

Interest in the Shakespeare authorship question shows no sign of abating. After many decades in which the attitude of most English Literature academics has been to give it no oxygen in the hope it goes away, a major Shakespeare scholar has recently spent considerable time and energy on the subject. The resultant book, *Contested Will* (2010), has been received with a certain amount of glee by mainstream commentators, several reviewers assuming the book's argument is sufficiently strong that the authorship question can now be considered settled, the traditional attribution confirmed. Their desire to brush the question away suggests a certain anxiety, and they are right to be anxious. From a non-Stratfordian perspective Shapiro's book does nothing to answer the chief reasons for their scepticism.

Orthodox Shakespearean scholars are mystified by requests for them to engage with an issue that – due to the constraints of their paradigm - appears to them to have no basis in reality. They are likely to remain mystified unless they are able to fully embrace the consequences of what has long been understood by certain postmodern historians; namely that, as Bloch put it, 'meanings remain elusive, conferred by the interpreter rather than imposed by the evidence' (Wilkinson, 1996: 81).

2. *Deconstructing Marlowe's Violence*

Ever since the linguistic turn of the 1970s, the fictive nature of historical reconstructions has been strongly argued. From Hayden White onwards, sceptical thinkers have argued that history has no more legitimate purchase on the past than any other narrative form (White, 1973: 334, Oakeshott, 1983, Jenkins, 1991, Ankersmit, 1989, Munslow, 1997). No historiographical account can claim to be objective: historians 'cannot strip themselves of their inherited prejudices and preconceptions … because the historians' preconceptions and prejudices are what make understanding possible in the first place'(Harlan, 1989: 587).[3] Appreciating that our predecessors' preconceptions and prejudices have shaped historical accounts demands that we should be open to revisions of received histories, and might also lead us to conclude that we have a responsibility to investigate possible alternatives. This is especially so in the field of early modern literary biography, where the personal history we accept for the author has a significant bearing on our interpretation of the texts they have left behind.

Hayden White argued that 'the techniques or strategies that [historians and imaginative writers] use in the composition of their discourses can be shown to be substantially the same'(White, 1978: 121) and though the statement might strike some

Notes

[3] Harlan is summarising GADAMER, H. G. (1989) *Truth and Method,* London, Sheed and Ward.

as controversial, a number of historians have come to recognise creative fiction as a valid way of interrogating the past.[4] The methods of creative fiction allow us to escape temporarily from our received histories and bring to light the assumptions that underpin their construction. Through fiction, we have license to construct alternative narratives, rethinking histories so widely assumed to be 'true' that they have not been properly examined in the light of contemporary scholarship. As though trapped in bubbles of earlier, empiricist air, many apparent historical 'facts' turn out to be ungrounded assumptions.

Literary biography and historical fiction depend upon the same source material as the basic information from which to construct a narrative: legal records, mentions in printed sources, and any extant personal documentation - literary or theatrical manuscripts, diaries, letters etc. The literary biographers of nineteenth and twentieth century subjects generally find themselves furnished with sufficient evidence to compose a life story free of speculation. The difficulty, when it comes to early modern subjects, is that the surviving evidence is scant, leading to large gaps in the historical record. Thus Marlowe and Shakespeare biographers are frequently found resorting to what Alan Downie calls the 'Must Have' theory of biography (Downie, 2007).

According to W.V.O. Quine, who proposed the idea of the indeterminacy of theories, 'one evidence source can underwrite many different theories.'[5] An experiment by Jerzy Topolski illustrated that the same source material 'may be used to construct various historical accounts of any fragment of the past'(Topolski, 1999: 199).[6] This

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[4] This view has been expressed repeatedly in the journal *Rethinking History,* and a number of fictional explorations have been published there. A recent themed issue was even entitled "History as Creative Writing". GOODMAN, J. Editorial: History as Creative Writing. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice,* 14**,** 1 - 3.

[5] Quine cited in TOPOLSKI, J. (1999) The Role of Logic and Aesthetics in Constructing Narrative Wholes in Historiography. *History and Theory,* 38**,** 198-210.

[6] Topolski gave his students 'all the available source information concerning a certain town in the region of Wielkopolska to be found in the *Historico-geographical Dictionary of the Province of Poznan in the*

might lead one to conclude, as Beverley Southgate does, that 'the past is anyway promiscuous, and the fact that it will go with anyone in general calls into question its usefulness for anyone in particular' (Southgate, 2005: 92). Yet Southgate goes on to argue for history, which he thinks of as 'a game that we play with the past', as invaluable in understanding ourselves and the present, with historians 'now revealed as themselves the architects and builders of a past that would otherwise remain as inconsequential as any other heap of rubble' (Southgate, 2006: 55).

Sixteenth century literary biography, as a subset of historiography, is not immune to the subjective interpretation of historical evidence. Like historians (and, I would contend, all human beings), literary biographers of centuries-dead subjects are 'mere humans engaged in their own subjective reactions to some few surviving evidential traces'(Southgate, 2006: 55). It may be argued that they, differentiated from the biographers of non-literary historical figures, have more than 'traces' from which to create a factual narrative when their subject has left a considerable body of creative work. But the interpretation of an author's literary output for biographical purposes is not only prone to a similar or greater degree of subjectivity than other evidence sources; the interpretation of the subject's writings will depend upon the life narrative already imagined for the author of those works.

In the process of writing a verse novel based on the idea that Christopher Marlowe faked his own death, fled to Northern Italy, and wrote the works attributed to Shakespeare - a work of imagination - research into the lives of the protagonists has revealed the extent to which the traditional biographies of both Marlowe and Shakespeare unusually share more ground with fictional accounts than has previously been assumed.

Middle Ages' and asked them to write a short history of the town. The resultant histories were all logical, yet 'more or less different from one another'.

Literary biographers, novelists, and filmmakers have routinely described Marlowe as a rash and hot-headed young man, an assessment that many scholars appear to accept without question. Roy Kendall, for example, in his biography of Richard Baines, confidently refers to 'violent characters such as Christopher Marlowe' (Kendall, 2003: 133), yet the playwright was considerably less violent than other young men of the era, including Ben Jonson. Marlowe's reputation for violence arose only posthumously, as a result of his alleged cause of death, which is still frequently mischaracterized as a 'tavern brawl'(Nicholl, 1992: 40-41).[7] If the official record is likely untrue, as this chapter argues, it invites us to challenge the accepted view of his nature and personality.

The tendency to construct Marlowe as violent seems to have begun with a single paragraph in Thomas Beard's *Theatre of God's Judgements* (1597), and has not lessened in the course of four centuries. Park Honan's *Christopher Marlowe: Poet & Spy* extends this tendency over four hundred pages, whose flavour may be gleaned from the index:

> *'fighting, of M's father, 12, 359; M's sister accused of, 27-8; in M's reading, 45, 53; in Erasmus's outlook, 51; at school, 59; and Guildhall's laws, 223; on stage, 223; and M's insecurity, 223-4, 287; and fencing schools, 224; M's duel at Hog Lane, 224-6; M's scuffle with constables, 288; M attacks Corkine, 289; at Mrs Bull's in Deptford, 351-2, 364, 365; and see violence'*
>
> *'violence, in Kent, 10-11; as tendency in M's family, 12, 22, 26, 27; and Naarden massacre, 32; in Foxe's 'Martyrs', 33; in Burghmote's decree, 34; in games, 34-5, 55; at school, 59; used against Jews, 41; M attracted to, 45-6; as Dionysiac in Malta, 261, 263; M's interest in causes of, 272-4; in M's Hero, 317; authorized by Star Chamber, 334-5; see also fighting'*
>
> (Honan, 2005: 409,420)

This barrage of entries suggests that the biographer wishes to emphasize violence as essential to understanding his subject. His biography of Shakespeare contains no such

[7] There is no evidence that Eleanor Bull's residence in Deptford was a tavern. Bull was of good family with discreet royal connections, being a 'cousin' of Chief Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber Blanche Parry, who was in turn a 'cousin' of Lord Burghley. The phrase 'drunken brawl' appears to have originated with Sir Sidney Lee's 1893 biographical entry for Marlowe in the DNB, thirty years before the inquest document was discovered, and is no more than an assumption.

material in the index, although this playwright similarly lived in the time of fighting on stage and in fencing schools, and for all we know, also enjoyed reading battle scenes.

Honan concentrates on what he calls Marlowe's 'endemic, provocative faults.' These he largely depicts as character traits inherited from his father, John, who 'in rough moods … used oaths or became violent, or insulted his helpers.' On the evidence of two episodes that made it to the local courts, Honan is confident enough to say that 'his irascible moods became more frequent, as when he struck his apprentice Lactantius Preston, and then got bloodied by William Hewes (a disgruntled employee) out near the buttermarket.' [8] However, that two incidents appear in close succession after a period of relative peace does not necessarily lead to the conclusion Honan draws. It is also possible that the two employees may have been friends, or that Marlowe's father was under financial stress at this time. In a wider context, acts of minor violence against apprentices were an extension of socially sanctioned forms of discipline, considered necessary for maintaining good order. As the head of the household, a man was expected to keep his inferiors in line (including his wife, children and servants). As Alexandra Shepard notes, 'Violence was one of the main props of patriarchy in early modern England, and as such was central to the regulation of social relations between men as well as between men and women' (Shepard, 2003: 128). Corporal punishment was an acceptable means of chastising a social inferior for transgressions against good behaviour. Such common actions only led to court when one of the parties felt his status compromised and needed formal redress.

Honan is so keen to back up his theory that a violent family background formed a fatally intemperate nature that he ignores contradictory evidence. In the case of Marlowe's sisters, for example, who 'after the poet's time . . . were cited as harridans,'

[8] Ibid., 6, 14, and 22, respectively.

the biographer suggests that it was the parents being 'unusually close or exclusive, and contented with themselves' that led to their daughters' errant behaviour in later life. John Marlowe's 'irascible moods' are nowhere apparent in Honan's depiction of marital closeness, and Honan concedes that 'as violent as he might have been, there is no sign that John physically abused his wife; in due course, he became an almost respectable churchwarden.' The grounds for the qualifier 'almost' remain unclear. For evidence of the Marlowes' harmony, Honan cites one occasion where they are seen drinking in a pub together with friends, that John allowed his wife a maid-servant even though he had little money, and that having made Katherine his sole legal executor, she chose to be buried by his side. This allegedly so estranged the daughters that they became 'unstable' (Honan, 2005: 37).

Honan sees Marlowe's violent nature everywhere. Early on, 'he was attracted to confrontation and the violent, provocative remark' (30). Certainly, he appears to have been confrontational in his verbal utterances; his words as reported by Kyd and Baines were extremely provocative. But the gratuitous use of 'violent' here implies, misleadingly, that these verbal quips were symptomatic of an urge towards a more physical form of confrontation. A few pages later, Honan asserts that 'looking for a motif to catch his fancy, Marlowe began to admire vignettes about armies.' *Tamburlaine* and *The Massacre At Paris* indeed demonstrate an interest in the human propensity to violence, but we need not assume that an author who writes about this subject shares the same proclivity with his characters. Many of Shakespeare's plays are extremely violent, yet few assume that this is characteristic of the author's nature. Yet Honan makes exactly this presumption about Marlowe. Even *Hero and Leander* is read biographically such that it somehow 'offers through its snippety narrator a sense of violence barely under control'(317). This gratuitous remark seems exaggerated, the

evidence distorted to prove that the author begged his own death even in the relatively innocuous form of the epyllion. Where not exhibited, his violence is simply assumed. 'If he submitted outwardly' to his parents, 'how much of his aggression, before leaving home, had he needed to disguise or repress?' (287)

Of the three well-known incidents that brought Marlowe to the notice of the English courts, only one was indisputably violent. The fight on 18 September 1589 appears to have been a duel, a ritualistic form of violence that was not only socially acceptable amongst gentlemen but sometimes considered essential for defending one's reputation.[9] Marlowe did not kill William Bradley during this incident, and may well have entered the fray on behalf of his friend, Thomas Watson, who had an existing feud with Bradley, originating with Watson's brother-in-law, Hugh Swift (Eccles, 1934: 57, 61). The dead man may, in fact, have been the aggressor. At twenty-six, he had already been badly wounded in a previous incident, whereas there is no record of Marlowe having fought before. When Watson arrived on the scene, Bradley apparently cried, 'Art thou now come? Then I will have a bout with thee,' which may be further evidence that he, rather than Marlowe, was the aggressor. The coroner's jury exonerated Watson of Bradley's murder for reason of self-defence. Though Marlowe spent thirteen days in Newgate before providing two sureties for his release, and Watson eleven weeks, this was standard procedure whilst awaiting the Queen's pardon. The poets had been acquitted of both murder and manslaughter from the outset (12). Most importantly, Eccles determined that the Hog Lane incident occurred at the lane's western end in Finsbury fields, a popular duelling location.

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[9] For more detail on this point, see AMUSSEN, S. D. (1995) Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England. *The Journal of British Studies,* 34**,** 1-34. For insight into the significance and popularity of fencing in the period see HOLMER, J. O. (1994) "Draw, If You Be Men": Saviolo's Significance for Romeo and Juliet. *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 45**,** 163-189.

Duelling was a formal and ritualized way of settling a disagreement between gentlemen challengers, and quite unlike the 'drunken brawl' with which Marlowe, as a result of the apparent circumstances of his death, has become inextricably associated. As Shepard notes, not all physical confrontation was alike, and violence was 'a vital tool in men's maintenance of hierarchy and reputation, routinely used to articulate subtle status distinctions between men.' Through his two Cambridge degrees, Marlowe had risen from a lowly beginning as a shoemaker's son to become the gentleman and scholar that he fashioned himself to be. As such, he was expected to adhere to appropriately decorous codes of conduct, which included protecting his honour and that of his friends, such as Watson. On occasion amongst men, and particularly gentlemen, 'male interpersonal violence was not just implicitly condoned or grudgingly suffered … but, like disciplinary violence, broadly prescribed'(Shepard, 2003: 140). Given these conventions, it is not difficult to imagine Bradley issuing a challenge that constituted just such a situation for Marlowe, who would wish to defend his honour, rather than to indulge in irrational violence for its own sake.

The other incidents that biographers have used to characterize Marlowe as violent can be explained otherwise. On 9 May 1592, Middlesex session rolls recorded a recognizance binding 'Christopherus Marle' of London, in the sum of £20, to keep the peace towards Allen Nicholls and Nicholas Helliot, the constable and subconstable of Holywell Street in Shoreditch (Eccles, 1934: 104).[10] It was not unusual for justices to compel individuals to be bound over to keep the peace, and such an order does not necessarily imply violence on Marlowe's part; the offence might have been no more than an exchange of words. The common legal phrase associated with this judicial action, *ob metum mortis*, 'for fear of death', is absent from Marlowe's recognizance.

[10] An English transcript can be found in KURIYAMA (2002: 210-11).

However, this very expression was included in a surety of the peace requested by William Wayte against 'William Shakspere' (and four others) in 1596, (Schoenbaum, 1987: 198) yet biographers do not use it to portray him as a violent man.

Indeed, it is worth noting how differently scholars have treated Marlowe and Shakespeare in this respect. In applying for his coat of arms, for example, Shakspere associated closely with Sir William Dethick, a possibly psychopathic man whom Katherine Duncan-Jones calls 'violent and quarrelsome to a degree remarkable even in the Elizabethan period.' She writes that he appears to have been friendly with George Wilkins, who on one occasion 'kicked a pregnant woman in the belly' and on another 'stamped on a woman he had already beaten up so severely that she had to be carried home in a chair'(Duncan-Jones, 2001: 99). Shakspere's younger brother Gilbert, whom he had sign on his behalf in a number of business dealings, is also known to have associated closely with unsavoury acquaintances, being named in a court case 'among violent associates who . . . worked for a vicious manorial Lord'(Honan, 1998: 230).[11] Shakspere thus seems to have been able to turn a blind eye to violence far worse than anything in which Marlowe was involved. However, with the exception of Duncan-Jones, most biographers have carefully underplayed these connections. Honan insists, 'Shakespeare is not to be blamed for the company he kept'(329). Marlowe, by contrast, is frequently found wanting for the company he was keeping on that single day in Deptford, despite the fact that we have no idea of the purpose of the meeting.

The third incident may not be as violent as it might seem at first glance. On 15 September 1592, Marlowe was involved in a skirmish with William Corkine, a tailor from his old home town, which led to the tailor suing him in Canterbury Civil Court for

[11] Unlike his treatment of Marlowe, Honan does not use the evidence that a member of Shakespeare's family had violent connections to suggest that Shakespeare was violent, though this association could be considered more significant than John Marlowe's assault on his apprentice.

£5.[12] Though the case contains an accusation that he 'assaulted [the] plaintiff and then and there struck, wounded and maltreated' him, the purpose of the suit is explicitly to claim that 'he has suffered loss and incurred damages to the value of five pounds and hence brings this suit.' Though the wording describes physical violence, a familiarity with the way that language is used to strengthen claims in the legal process, and the fact that the suit has been brought to recover damages, implies that it was property, rather than the person, that bore the brunt of the attack. Shepherd describes how attacks on a person's clothing were a particularly common feature of status disputes between men in this period, and how such incidents were precisely the sort likely to end up in the courts, litigation being initiated 'not simply because a violent exchange had taken place, but more specifically because of its nature and context … the central concern of many litigants (when it can be detected) seems to have been the restoration of debased status'(Shepard, 2003: 146). Corkine, as a tailor, was of the same social class as Marlowe before the latter's transformation through education into Dominus ('Sir' or 'Master') Marley, making a status dispute between the two, on Marlowe's return to his old home town, a significant possibility. Marlowe lodged a counter suit alleging that Corkine assaulted *him*, but named no weapon; it was dismissed. After being adjourned, the case was dropped by mutual consent.

The poet's weapons were, allegedly, a staff and a dagger. That Marlowe had a dagger on his person is not unexpected; like all men, he carried his own knife for eating. But if violence was attractive to Marlowe, it is surprising that he used a *baculo*, or stick, rather than a rapier. He had made the ranks of *generosus* at Cambridge, where 'the possession of weapons was as routine, and uncontested, for students as their ownership of books' (Shepard, 2003: 107). Honan speculates that Marlowe, traumatized by his

[12] An English transcript can be found in KURIYAMA (2002: 212-14).

part in the killing of Bradley, eschewed the rapier that he was entitled to carry. We cannot know the circumstances of the conflict, but there may have been less animosity in the attack than the necessarily strong legal wording would suggest. Not only was the case settled out of court, but the historical record contains evidence that might be interpreted to suggest that Marlowe's antagonist held no grudge against him. In 1612, a William Corkine's *Second Book of Airs* includes a musical arrangement for 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (Sternfeld and Chan, 1970: 180).[13]

This is a period of English history in which a man could suffer the many phases of the 'traitor's death': dragged on a hurdle behind horses, hung, cut down alive, 'his privy parts cut off and burnt before his face,' disembowelled, and quartered, his parts distributed throughout the kingdom, merely for publishing a Catholic pamphlet.[14] Where state-sanctioned brutality of this magnitude exists, it is not difficult to appreciate that society, as a whole, was more violent than today. Honan admits

> *'It was, of course, a violent age – a playgoer was run through for disputing a theatre's gate-fee. Tempers quickly flared, and a scholar such as Sir William Sidney, aged 15, knifed his own schoolmaster. Ben Jonson killed Gabriel Spencer, and is said to have put out a boy's right eye.'*
>
> (Honan, 2005: 223)[15]

Lawrence Stone, working from homicide rates, has estimated that early modern England was five times more violent than now, although not all social historians agree (Stone, 1983). For example, J.A. Sharpe argues, 'there is little evidence that contemporaries were particularly aware of violence as a problem' (Sharpe, 1985: 214). Stone contends that this silence on the subject could, in fact, be taken as an indicator of the extent to

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[13] We do not yet know whether these two William Corkines are one and the same man, but it is certainly possible. The song following this one is entitled *Walsingham*, the name of Marlowe's patron, and also the title of a lyric written by Sir Walter Raleigh, to whom Marlowe is alleged to have "read the atheist lecture", and with whose "man", Thomas Harriot, he associated.

[14] Sir Edward Coke's defence of 'normal' executions for treason are quoted in AMUSSEN, S. D. (1995) Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England. *The Journal of British Studies,* 34**,** 1-34.

[15] Again, though Honan appears to recognise the violent nature of the age, he does not allow this context to inform his view of Marlowe's behaviour, and ignores the evidence that he was less violent than some of his well-known contemporaries.

which violence was widely accepted as a fact of life by the commentators of the time (Stone, 1985: 221).[16] In spite of his conviction for murder, Ben Jonson enjoyed a successful career as a dramatist, enjoying royal patronage, which suggests that violent behaviour did not always cause social stigma.

As Keith Wrightson points out, the higher homicide rate may be due to the absence of modern medical techniques, which might have saved many of those individuals who died of their wounds. He concludes that 'the circumstances of violent death do, however, suggest that this was a society in which violence might be resorted to comparatively readily.' English culture had 'a comparatively high tolerance level for minor violence and its members, at all social levels, were relatively ready to resort to threats and blows'(Wrightson, 1982: 162). Sharpe admits, 'this was a society where tensions and frustrations were turned outwards more easily'(Sharpe, 1985: 214). Again, violence was an accepted tool for discipline, from state-devised punishments to the domestic violence that patriarchs used to keep wives, children and servants in line.

Set against such a background, then, can Marlowe's involvement in a duel in which he injured no one, a skirmish in which the main consideration was damage to property, and a single incident of being bound over to keep the peace, be considered particularly violent? Even Honan admits, 'Still he did not riot night after night, or patrol the lanes with weapon in hand'(Honan, 2005: 287). However, any number of young men from Cambridge University did exactly that. Shepard describes an incident in 1593 when a number of students, pretending to be university proctors, 'asserted manhood by subverting official rites of violence.' The perpetrators, most of whom were to take holy orders, included two future bishops (Shepard, 2003: 94). Duncan-Jones

[16] In his rejoinder, Stone suggests Sharpe is simply looking in the wrong places, citing the Privy Council's 1575 attempt to ban handguns in the commission of crimes. He also quotes Cockburn in observing that Shakespeare's "degree" speech in *Troilus and Cressida* "stands in eloquent testimony to an entire generation of *bons bourgeois* haunted by the spectre of crime and violent disorder."

points out that 'going to Turnmill Street to beat up whores was a traditional pastime for high-spirited young men throughout the Tudor period'(Duncan-Jones, 2001: 206). Against such a backdrop, Marlowe's behaviour begins to look tame.

David Mateer has recently discovered, in the National Archives at Kew, two further legal documents relating to Christopher Marlowe which 'offer us something that no other set of documents does, namely a glimpse into the state of his finances at the time, and even perhaps a window on his character' (Mateer, 2008: 16).[17] Though the documents have no direct relevance to violence, Mateer's conclusions neatly illustrate how elements of Marlowe's biography are interpreted to support his 'bad boy' reputation. On 11 April 1588, fellow Corpus Christi alumnus Edward Elvyn lent 'Christopher Marley' the sum of £10. Six months later he sued for the return of the original loan plus £5 in damages. Marlowe denied the allegations and both parties agreed to stand trial, but the case did not proceed and appears to have been settled out of court (16). On 10 August 1587, 'Christopher Marlo' apparently hired a grey gelding and tackle from hackney-man James Wheatley. When asked to give it up the following year he failed to do so and Wheatley began proceedings against him in October or November of 1588. Marlowe did not employ a legal representative, and by failing to turn up for the hearing on 23 January 1589, automatically forfeited the case. Costs and damages of £9 6s 8d were awarded against him (Mateer, 2008: 20).

Mateer explores the idea that Marlowe's hiring of a gelding was in line with a need to adopt the outward appearance of a gentleman. Though the poet clearly could not afford to keep a horse, acquiring one 'would very publicly have demonstrated to Londoners his exalted social station, attained through six and a half years of study at Cambridge.' If we acknowledge that Marlowe's contemporaries were as apt to

[17] MATEER, D. (2008) New Sightings of Christopher Marlowe in London. *Early Theatre,* 11**,** 13-38.

associate him with his protagonists as modern scholars, and apply A.L.Rowse's assertion that 'Marlowe is Faustus', then one of the epigrams by 'J.D.' (usually taken to be Sir John Davies) that was bound with Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores* as *Epigrammes and Elegies by I.D. and C.M.* may support Mateer's suggestion. Epigram number 7, *In Faustum,* reads:

> *'Faustus not lord, nor knight, nor wise, nor old,*
> *To euery place about the towne doth ride,*
> *He rides into the fieldes Playes to behold,*
> *He rides to take boate at the water side,*
> *He rides to Poules, he rides to th'ordinarie,*
> *He rides vnto the house of bawderie too,*
> *Thither his horse so often doth him carry,*
> *That shortly he will quite forget to go.'*
> *(Davies and Marlowe, 1599)*

If we take this Faustus to be Marlowe, then his riding a horse, despite the fact he is young and without title, is conspicuous; even a defining characteristic. As with the Bradley duel and the Corkine incident, the Wheatley case might be considered in the light of Marlowe's concern with status, and a need to maintain at least the outward appearances of gentlemanly standards and codes of conduct. Mateer, however, ends his valuable contribution to Marlovian biography by considering both cases in the light of 'Marlowe's reputation as a hell-raiser and the *enfant terrible* of Elizabethan theatre.'

Yet the only deduction we can make from these court cases with any certainty is that Marlowe, like most other poets and playwrights of his time and since, was short of money, at least in the first eighteen months after arriving in London. It was not an unusual state of affairs, even for gentlemen born to that class. Marlowe's future patron Thomas Walsingham, the son of a knight and later to be knighted himself, was sued in 1590 for outlawry over a debt of two hundred marks, and imprisoned in the Fleet.[18] Eccles, whose archival work contributed so much to Marlovian biography, documented

[18] The transcript for Thomas Walsingham's pardon for outlawry is in KURIYAMA (2002: 208-9).

dozens of poets and writers whose court cases are not dissimilar to Marlowe's, involving either minor altercations or being sued for unpaid debts.

Sir John Davies (of the *Faustus* epigram) was expelled from The Middle Temple for attacking one Richard Martin with a 'Bastinado'(Eccles, 1982: 37). Like William Shakspere, Thomas Dekker, who later dedicated two works to the Middlesex justices, was bound over to keep the peace, as was the playwright William Rowley, and also Francis Davison, author of *The Mask of Proteus* and translator of psalms (42, 116, 39). John Donne was sued in Common Pleas (with Christopher Brooke, another writer) for a debt of £40; Thomas Heywood, with Richard Perkins and John Cumber were bailed for £20 each 'to answere the hurtinge and woundinge of Robert Knowles Thomas Dickenson and Robert Holmes' (44, 66). Hugh Holland, who contributed a sonnet to Shakespeare's first folio 'gave a bond of two hundred pounds to answer at the next goal delivery for Middlesex', the unusually large bond indicating 'something more serious than recusancy' (69). John Lyly was sued for a debt of three pounds, and George Puttenham, author of *The Arte of English Poesie,* 'continually sued or was sued in the Star Chamber and other courts' (87,109). The poet Barnaby Rich was indicted for forcible entry, and a decade later was 'bound in his own recognizance of twenty pounds at general sessions and meanwhile to keep the peace towards John Glasse of Stepney'. In 1604/5 he was sued for refusing to re-convey to one Richard Lee a house and orchard that Lee had conveyed on secret trust to John Lyons, who had fallen ill and conveyed it to Rich on a similar trust for Lee. Rich refused to return it, and Lee died a debtor in the Fleet prison; Lee's sons then sued Rich and his brother-in-law (113). Ben Jonson, who unlike Marlowe is not generally characterised as violent, nevertheless 'killed two men for no apparent reason, went to prison on three separate occasions, was "almost at the Gallowes" and wore the brand of a convicted murderer on his thumb' (Riggs, 1989: 3).

Marlowe's appearances in court records then, though significant, should not be regarded as particularly unusual, and his transgressions were certainly exceeded by some of his contemporaries.

Until May 1593, Marlowe did not, as far as we can ascertain, have a reputation for violence. Robert Greene and Gabriel Harvey, not averse to publishing the character flaws of those they envied, associate Marlowe with atheism in print (potentially endangering him) but make no mention of a bad temper. The document known as *Remembrances against Richard Cholmeley* again associates Marlowe with giving the 'atheist lecture' but it is Cholmeley and his 'damnable crew' that are considered physically dangerous.[19]

Perhaps most compelling is the absence of any accusation of hot-headedness in the Baines Note, which certainly would have appeared there. The comprehensive list of accusations against Marlowe includes atheism, spectacular blasphemy, counterfeiting, and the notorious observation that all who 'loue not Tobacco & Boies were fooles.' Violence is not mentioned. Baines describes Marlowe as 'dangerous' only with respect to his 'damnable opinions', thus the appeal to 'all men in Christianity' to endeavour that his mouth be 'stopped'.[20]

Marlowe's posthumous reputation as a violent man by personal testimony begins and ends with Thomas Kyd, who calls him 'intemperate & of a cruel hart' in the first letter to Puckering and in the second accuses him of 'rashness in attempting sudden privy injuries to men'.[21] But one must consider the context. Kyd was attempting to

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[19] (1593b) Remembrannces of Wordes & Matter Againste Ric Cholmeley. BL Harley MS.6848 f.190r,v, (1593c) A Second Report on Cholmeley. BL Harley MS.6848 f.191. Transcripts in KURIYAMA (2002: 214-5).
[20] (1593a) Bayns Marlow of His Blasphemyes. *BL Harley MS.6848 f.185-86.* Transcript in KURIYAMA (2002: 220-22).
[21] (1593e) Thomas Kyd's Letter to Sir John Puckering BL Harley MSS 6848 f154, (1593d) Thomas Kyd's Note to Sir John Puckering. BL Harley MS.6849 f.218r,v. Transcripts in KURIYAMA (2002: 229-31).

absolve himself of atheism by association: 'it is not to be numbered amongst the best conditions of men, to tax or to upbraid the dead *because the dead do not bite,* but thus much have I . . . dared in the greatest cause, which is to clear myself of being thought an Atheist, which some will swear he was.' Kyd sounds remarkably like Baines, and it is in the context of one of his statements on Marlowe's atheism that the accusation of 'sudden privy injuries' occurs:

> *'That things esteemed to be donn by divine power might have aswell been don by observation of men, all of which he wold so sodenlie take slight occasion to slyp out as I & many others in regard of his other rashnes in attempting soden pryvie injuries to men did overslypp though often reprehend him for it'*

The context suggests that these 'sudden privy injuries' were verbal. Kyd had been arrested, imprisoned, tortured, had lost his patron, and was facing ruin, all as a result of his association with Marlowe. He calls him a 'reprobate' with 'monstrous' opinions, and admits, 'in hatred of his life & thoughts I left & did refrain his company.' Kyd's letters, then, are hardly unbiased about Marlowe's character.[22]

Kyd's account should be weighed against the posthumous opinions of Marlowe's friends and fellow writers. To Nashe, he is 'poor deceased Kit Marlowe' and numbers among 'my friends who used me like a friend'. According to Thomas Thorpe, he is 'that pure, Elementall wit Chr. Marlow'. Edward Blount knew him as 'the man, that hath beene deare unto us', and 'J.M' (usually considered to be John Marston) as 'kynde Kit Marlowe'. Thomas Heywood writes that he was 'renown'd for his rare art and wit' and Gabriel Harvey refers to him as 'the Highest Minde / That euer haunted' St. Paul's.[23] One may argue that encomia are unlikely to contain references to

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[22] Similar points are made by RIGGS (2004: 345-6).

[23] NASH, T. (1613) *Christs Teares Ouer Ierusalem Whereunto Is Annexed a Comparatiue Admonition to London. By Tho. Nash*, London : Printed [by George Eld] for Thomas Thorp, 1613. NASH, T. (1596) *Have with You to Saffron-Walden.,* London, John Danter, LUCAN & THORPE, T. (1600) *Lucans First Booke Translated Line for Line, by Chr. Marlovv,* London, P. Short/Walter Burre. MARLOWE, C. (1598) *Hero and Leander by Christopher Marloe*, London : Printed by Adam Islip, for Edward Blunt. John Marston, *The Newe Metamorphosis*, BL Add MS 14824 vol I part I fol 39. See LYON, J. H. H. &

the deceased's character flaws, but if he were as hot-headed and prone to outbursts as many modern biographers suggest, one might expect a hint of this intemperance to be reflected, perhaps reframed as passion. The closest we come to this is Drayton's reference to 'his raptures' of 'ayre and fire' and 'that fine madness' which 'rightly should possesse a poet's braine', but his poem concentrates on the quality of Marlowe's verse, and there is no evidence that he knew Marlowe except through his writing.[24] In any case these observations only attest to a passionate nature, not a violent one.

The coroner's inquest, which determined that Marlowe had been stabbed in self-defence in an argument over a bill, represents the first unambiguous testimony of him as aggressor. Though these details were not in the public domain until the document was discovered by Leslie Hotson in 1925, and most accounts of his death before then have proved to be inaccurate, what they and the inquest document share is a portrait of Marlowe as the aggressive party.[25] His role as aggressor seems to have become common knowledge by 1597 with the publication of Beard's *The Theatre of Gods Judgements*. He described the playwright's death 'by his own dagger into his own head' as a decisive punishment for his atheism: 'see what a hook the Lord put in the nostrils of this barking dog'.[26] Similarly, the accounts of Frances Meres, William Vaughan and Edward Rudierde are based on hearsay, and demonstrate the writers' antipathy toward the 'blasphemer'. None of them knew Marlowe.

Since Hotson's discovery, scholars have read the inquest document differently and many have been suspicious of the official record. Early objections to the

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GENT, J. M. (1919) *A Study of the Newe Metamorphosis,* New York, Columbia University Press.
HEYWOOD, T. (1635) *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells* London, Printed by Adam Islip.
HARVEY, G. (1593) *A Nevv Letter of Notable Contents with a Straunge Sonet, Intituled Gorgon, or the Wonderfull Yeare,* London, Printed by Iohn Wolfe.
[24] DRAYTON, M. (1627) *The Battaile of Agincourt* London, Printed [by Augustine Mathewes] for William Lee.
[25] HOTSON, J. L. (1925) *The Death of Christopher Marlowe,* London, Nonesuch Press.
[26] BEARD, T. (1597) *The Theatre of God's Judgements,* London, Adam Islip.

plausibility of the version of events found there were first voiced by Eugenie de Kalb, and Samuel Tannenbaum (de Kalb, 1925, Tannenbaum, 1926). John Bakeless considered the document suspect, and Ethel Seaton provided sound argument for her conclusion that 'conspiracy… was the cause of Marlowe's death' (Bakeless, 1942: 182-4, Seaton, 1929). U.M. Ellis-Fermor noted among the playwright's biographers 'the prevailing impression that he was deliberately murdered'; a view echoed sixty years later by William Empson (Ellis-Fermor, 1927: 8, Empson and Jones, 1987: 63). More recently Charles Nicholl and David Riggs have joined those who believe the account is a cover-up for Marlowe's assassination (Nicholl, 1992, Riggs, 2004). Those inclined to trust the official account, and who are suspicious of the motives of those who wish to (in the words of Frederick S. Boas) 'reverse the verdict in posterity's court of appeal' include A.L.Rowse, Constance Brown Kuriyama and J. A. Downie (Boas, 1931: 140, Downie, 2007, Kuriyama, 2002, Rowse, 1964). Nevertheless, a significant number of scholars have concluded that the verdict into Marlowe's death was false, and that he was murdered rather than killed in self-defence.

Since the accounts of Beard and his fellows are suspect, and since the 'violent' incidents in Marlowe's biography have been similarly misrepresented, we must consider that the only piece of evidence that unambiguously depicts him as aggressive, the inquest document, rests on the testimonies of three men frequently described as professional liars. Robert Poley was an agent of the Elizabethan intelligence services, the 'chief actor' in the Babington Plot, and Nicholas Skeres had assisted him in this regard. Skeres, like Ingram Frizer, supplemented his income by working as a 'conny-catcher', or con-man (Riggs, 2004: 154,133). Poley, whom William Camden describes as 'very expert in dissembling', is on record as saying he has no objection to lying; here, to the Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham: 'I will swear and forswear myself,

rather than I will accuse myself to do me any harm' (Camden and Darcie, 1625: 134, Nicholl, 1992: 33). He was so adept a liar that Anthony Babington could not believe after his own arrest that it was Poley who had deceived him.[27]

There is no record of any other witnesses. Kuriyama suggests that others must have confirmed or provided elements of the coroner's report, such as how the men spent their time, and their demeanour during the day. That malicious words were 'publicly exchanged' also implies that other witnesses besides Poley, Frizer and Skeres overheard the fatal argument – but the argument may have been staged. Though Kuriyama surmises it is probable that 'someone else was in the room when the attack occurred' (Kuriyama, 2002: 138-140), there is no evidence for this. Though we may wish to imagine Eleanor Bull or a member of serving staff nearby, the only confirmed witnesses are three men who specialised in deception, and it is on their evidence that Marlowe's posthumous reputation for violence was founded.

When deliberating on whether or not to believe the official version of events, another piece of evidence should be considered. Thomas Nashe, known as a close friend of Marlowe's, speaking of his friend as 'Aretine', observed, 'His life he contemned in comparison of the liberty of speech' (McKerrow, 1958b: 265).[28] We may interpret this as an expression of Nashe's belief that his fellow writer was deliberately silenced for freely expressing his opinions. There is no mention of a dispute over a bar bill.

However, the standard account persists, based on false assumptions. The argument here is circular:

> *'A.L.Rowse, himself a biographer of Marlowe, in a stern review of Nicholl's book, admonishes historians of Elizabethan England to state categorically that Christopher Marlowe was not murdered, that he died as violently as he had lived, and that no conspiracy to kill him is verifiable. . . . Given his proclivity to violence, Marlowe's death in such circumstances was inevitable.'*
>
> (Furdell, 1996: 482)

[27] BL Lansdowne MS 49, f.25. For transcript see NICHOLL (2002: 187).
[28] Nashe's use of the name Aretine for Marlowe is discussed at length by FEASEY, L. & FEASEY, E. (1949) The Validity of the Baines Document. *Notes and Queries*.

If Marlowe was murdered rather than killed in self-defence, then the only unambiguous evidence for his 'proclivity to violence' is dissolved. He has been considered prone to such behavior because he was assumed to have died as the aggressor in the disputed 'tavern brawl' based on the account of Beard and other clergymen who wished to condemn a notorious atheist, upon whose questionable evidence later biographers have relied overmuch. If Marlowe was not the aggressor, as many scholars conclude, the episodes previously used as evidence of a violent nature to make the biography structurally coherent can instead be read in a neutral context.

Lukas Erne explores the 'vicious hermeneutic circle within which the plays' protagonists are read into Marlowe's biography and the mythographic creature thus constructed informs the criticism of his plays' (Erne, 2005: 28).[29] A belief that Marlowe was violent may persuade us that the author would ally himself with Spencer Junior, who advises Baldock 'You must be proud, bold, pleasant, resolute,/And now and then stab as occasion serves' (*Edward II* 2.1.42-43).[30] However, Marlowe may be holding up this cynical attitude for scorn rather than admiration. What Erne describes as 'mythography' creates a skewed sense of the author, which distorts our interpretations of the texts. A broader survey of the most reliable evidence suggests that Marlowe, like other creative intellectuals drawn to express themselves forcefully, favoured words rather than blows.

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[29] ERNE, L. (2005) Biography, Mythography, and Criticism: The Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe. *Modern Philology,* 103**,** 28-50.
[30] For an example of this tendency, see LEECH, C. (1986) *Christopher Marlowe : Poet for the Stage,* New York, AMS Press.

3. *Reconstructing Marlowe through the Sonnets*

Characterisation is an essential ingredient of both novel and biography. If literary biographers are to flesh out their subjects to any satisfactory degree (certainly to the degree that would lead to a plausible and coherent narrative), they can look to only two sources: the works attributed to those authors, and the historical record. Though arguments can be made for the relative merits of both literary output and the more usual historical evidence of document and artefact, no sceptical historian would claim either as a source of 'truth'.[31] Both are equally open to interpretation, and even carefully worded legal documents will support numerous readings, as is apparent in the various scholarly interpretations of Shakspere's gifting his wife the second best bed. In a historical record strewn with gaps – as is the case for Marlowe and Shakespeare – extant artefacts and documents give us so little of the subject that invention is necessary to create a coherent narrative.

When considering certain biographies of Marlowe and Shakespeare, the necessity for invention creates a sub-genre of biography that appears to crossover considerably with fiction. Honan is particularly adept at novelistic flourishes. A representative example occurs when, strongly implicating Sir Thomas Walsingham in Marlowe's death, he writes:

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[31] As Beverley Southgate puts it, 'With any route to a final truth barred, and with all foundations undermined, our histories are revealed as fragile superstructures, suspended over an abyss.' SOUTHGATE (2006: 55)

> *'Neither vicious nor evil, Thomas might express a worry to a faithful subordinate, in an offhand, implicit way, and then, later, notice that affairs resolved themselves. No doubt, life brings poignant loss. On tragic days, one grieved, one stood in wise, reflective sorrow at a graveside, and then rode back to one's fishponds and profitable pigs, or shot at vile, squealing water rats in black water.'*
>
> (Honan, 2005: 349)

There is no evidence that Thomas Walsingham had Marlowe murdered. Honan extrapolates both motive and character from the fact that Walsingham's servant, Ingram Frizer, killed Marlowe and was accepted back into Walsingham's service immediately on his pardon. But he does not take into account the evidence, from Marlowe's publisher Edward Blount, that testifies to Walsingham's friendship to Marlowe a full five years after the playwright's death. To create a plausible narrative, Honan has created causal connections between various elements of the story, and as such, has created a fiction. This tendency, prevalent in both Marlowe and Shakespeare life-writing, is what Downie scathingly refers to as the 'Must Have' theory of biography (Downie, 2007).

As we have seen, Marlowe's posthumous reputation for violence appears to have been constructed by reading the extant evidence through the lens of an apparently violent death, in the process giving more credence to the statements of his enemies than to those of his friends. A more neutral reading of events removes the necessity for Marlowe to be characterised as violent. This neutral stance becomes essential when one recognises that the circumstances of Marlowe's death - the key source of his violent characterisation - are not open to simple and unequivocal interpretation. Though commentators concur that he was stabbed, the accounts of his death circulating in the first hundred years after the event vary considerably, with apparent uncertainty as to whether the stabbing is to the head or to the eye, whether there are one or two knives involved, whether the knife that killed Marlowe was his own or his assailant's. The

death is said to have occurred 'in London streets' (Beard, 1597: 148) or 'at Detford, a little village about three miles distant from London' (Vaughan, 1608: C5). The assailant is described variously as 'one whom he met in a streete in London' (Rudierde, 1618: XXII, 29), 'one whome hee ought a grudge unto' and 'purposed to stab' (Beard, 1597: 148); 'a bawdy Serving man, a rival of his in his lewde love' (Meres, 1598: 286) and more accurately, 'one named Ingram' (Vaughan, 1608: C5). So readily did myths and fictions spring up around Marlowe's death that his killer was even identified by John Aubrey as Ben Jonson (Aubrey and Clark, 1898: II, 13).[33]

Some documentary evidence from Marlowe's life is less ambiguous – we can at least determine his presence at Cambridge, and long unexplained periods of absence, from the college buttery accounts, for example. We also have the unusual intervention of the Privy Council on 29 June 1587, insisting the University award his MA despite these absences and a rumour that he 'was determined to have gone beyond the seas to Reames' (the Roman Catholic seminary). A letter signed by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Treasurer, Lord Chamberlain, Sir William Knollys and the Archbishop of Canterbury, reveals that Marlowe 'had done her Majestie good service, and deserved to be rewarded for his faithfull dealinge', and that 'it was not her Majesties pleasure that anie one emploied as he had been in matters touching the benefitt of his countrie should be defamed by those that are ignorant in th'affaires he went about'.[34] By the age of twenty-three, Marlowe was already attracting rumour; his character, even then, being mistaken, and his actions misinterpreted. Yet here is a character reference of the highest order: five of the most powerful men in the land witness Marlowe's 'faithfull dealinge' and vouch that he had been working for 'the benefit of his country'.

[33] Jonson killed Gabriel Spencer, but did not, so far as we know, stab Marlowe.
[34] Transcribed in KURIYAMA (2002: 202-3)

That Marlowe was arrested five years later for counterfeiting in Flushing need not undermine the idea that he remained a loyal servant of the Queen and Her Majesty's Government. Marlowe's arrest resulted from the accusations of Richard Baines, an 'intelligencer' who had been ordained as a priest in the Rheims seminary, but whose communications to Lord Burghley, discovered in 1582, had led to his torture and a public confession. Roy Kendall's detailed biography of Baines suggests that after his release (if not before), he was a double agent. Baines's 'malice' towards Marlowe, mentioned in Sir Robert Sidney's letter to Burghley, is evidenced in the damaging accusations he submitted in his 'Note' the following year, and may be explained by the fact that Marlowe had parodied him as 'Barabas' in *The Jew of Malta*.[35] There is no record of Marlowe's imprisonment for this potentially capital crime (coining was petty treason), and he is freely roaming the streets of Shoreditch three months later. David Riggs thus suggests the possibility that Marlowe was coining on Government orders, as part of an attempt to infiltrate the Stanley Plot.[36] Certainly, we can assume that had Lord Burghley considered him guilty of a committing a crime, he would have taken appropriate action. Thus we might read the Flushing incident as evidence that Marlowe was considered discreet and trustworthy enough to continue to work in matters 'touching the benefit of his country', and that the Lord Treasurer of England was convinced of his loyalty.

The number of extant documents that can be used to build the basic structure of a biographical narrative are considerably more in Shakspere's case than in Marlowe's, not so much because the latter had his professional career curtailed, but because Shakspere involved himself in numerous business dealings. However, this means that

[35] This idea is expanded in Chapter 4.
[36] Sir William Stanley had converted to the Catholic cause and sworn to kill the Queen. At the time he was maintaining his regiment (who had also defected) just outside Flushing.

the vast majority of documents relating to Shakspere are of a legal nature and consequently, barring what we might surmise from the various clauses of the infamous will, are unhelpful in the construction of character. Whereas Marlowe's personality is illuminated by accounts from his contemporaries, both friend and foe, in Shakespeare's case 'the personality behind the factual record remains shadowy and indistinct' (Dutton, 1993: 6). Whereas Marlowe is seen indulging in 'table talk' that would later be used to construct what is 'effectively … [his] death warrant' (Kendall, 2003: 216), Shakespeare, in nearly two decades on the London literary scene, is not once reported as holding forth in public. Shakespeare was never a member of the Mermaid Club (Donaldson, 2004), and the fondly imagined 'wit combats' between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson are exactly that – imagined constructions of early biographer Thomas Fuller, writing fifty years posthumously.[37]

There are no direct contemporary reports of Shakespeare's conversations in any context whatsoever. Indeed, an anecdote dated 1681 (from the notoriously unreliable John Aubrey, he who stated that Ben Jonson 'killed Mr.... Marlow, the poet, on Bunhill, comeing from the Green-Curtain play-house') insists that Shakespeare 'was not a company keeper lived in Shoreditch, would not be debauched, & if invited to, writ: he was in pain.' But this detail was not included in the edited version of Aubrey's manuscripts, *Brief Lives*, where in complete contrast, Shakespeare was said to be 'very good company.' The scrap of paper on which 'not a company keeper' is written has been crossed over and as Schoenbaum admits, '[o]ne cannot say with absolute certainty that these notes apply to Shakespeare - so disordered is the manuscript at this point – rather than to the biographer's informant, William Beeston' (Schoenbaum, 1987: 256). Whether Shakespeare was 'very good company' or 'not a company keeper', the fact

[37] FULLER, T. (1662) *The History of the Worthies of England,* London, Thomas Williams. So little factual information about Shakespeare does Fuller possess that he leaves the year of his death blank.

remains that there is no reliable evidence of him keeping any kind of company at all that dates from his lifetime.

The anecdotes about Shakespeare wittily completing Jonson's epitaph, or standing as godfather to one of Jonson's children and making a joke about translating 'latten spoones' also arose only in the mid-seventeenth century, and their dubious reliability is indicated by the fact that of the two versions of the spoons story that exist, one writer gives the pun to Shakespeare and the other one to Jonson (Schoenbaum, 1987: 257). Jonson describes no such social occasions himself, and there is no primary source evidence for any of these tales. Indeed, there is only one personal story about Shakespeare that dates from his lifetime, which is the entry about 'William the Conqueror' in John Manningham's diary from 1602, again an anecdote in the form of a joke (this time between Shakespeare and Burbage).[38] The story is clearly marked as hearsay, having been received from 'Mr Curle', and has not been established by any more authoritative source.

In *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* (Price, 2001), Diana Price demonstrates that Shakespeare is unique among the most successful twenty-five writers of his period in leaving no literary paper trail, and that he has also left little or nothing in the way of personal testimony.[39] Following Honigmann, who demonstrated that the myth of 'sweet Shakespeare' arose out of references to his writing style, as in Meres's 'sugred sonnets' (Honigmann, 1982), Price shows that literary allusions to Shakespeare

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[38] Jonson's references to Shakespeare, all made after April 1616, will be examined more closely in a later chapter.

[39] In her Appendix Chart of Literary Paper Trails, ten categories of evidence (that the subject of investigation was a writer) are logged by Price. Ranked from most to least surviving evidence: Ben Jonson (10), Thomas Nashe, Phillip Massinger, Gabriel Harvey, Edmund Spenser, Samuel Daniel, George Peele, Michael Drayton, George Chapman, William Drummond, Anthony Mundy, John Marston, Thomas Middleton, John Lyly, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Watson, Christopher Marlowe, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Thomas Kyd, and John Webster (3). There is no evidence of a literary paper trail for Shakespeare in any of the ten categories. In the case of personal testimony, Price makes a clear and careful distinction between personal, impersonal and ambiguous testimony.

used by biographers to characterise him are references to the works rather than the man (Price, 2001: 137).

Characterisation is an essential step towards constructing a plausible narrative, and in the absence of sufficient documentary evidence to support characterisation, it is necessary for Marlowe and Shakespeare's biographers, and novelists, to turn to the works. Determining an author's character from their plays, however, is problematic. Drama is necessarily dialectical, and it is not easy to discern the author's views as distinct from the views expressed by the characters. Shakespeare's plays owe some of their continued popularity to the fact that the views of opposing characters are espoused with equally fluent and persuasive rhetoric, so that it is uncertain which characters' views might have been shared by the author.[40] Where an author's biography and their works can be clearly interlinked, it is the biographical detail that informs a reading of the work, and not the other way round. *The Crucible* is enriched when we appreciate how it relates to Arthur Miller's experiences under McCarthyism, but if we had no biographical information on the author, we could not assume the play was a reflection of his personal situation. The tradition of lyric poetry, however, allows us to read the author's poems as a vehicle of personal expression. Thus where an attempt is to be made to (re-)construct the author's character, poetry, with its closer (though still ambiguous) relationship to autobiography, appears a more promising avenue to explore.

Though some scholars argue that Shakespeare's sonnets should not be read biographically, but seen rather as a response to, and product of, the Elizabethan vogue for sonneteering, there is a long history of scholarly attempts to interrogate the sonnets for biographical detail. Paul Edmondson & Stanley Wells, having reviewed both sides

[40] Consequently, many of the plays can be adapted to suit even wildly opposing ideologies. Jonathan Bate notes how, in 1934, a French production of *Coriolanus* was perceived as proto-fascist, and that the following year, the same play was staged in Moscow as a morality play for socialists, with Coriolanus as 'enemy of the people' BATE, J. (2007) A Man for All Ages. *The Guardian* Manchester & London.

of the argument, conclude: 'though 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). Thus the 'fair youth' to whom it is widely believed the majority of the sonnets are addressed is identified by a consensus of scholars as a young nobleman, possibly either Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, or William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. There have also been persistent attempts to identify the 'dark lady' and the 'rival poet'.[41]

Some editors have found the apparent narrative of the sonnets confusing or bothersome, and so have attempted to alter both its focus and course by changing the order in which the sonnets are presented (Duncan-Jones, 1997a: 41-44). A biographical reading of the sonnets has led to some readers, from the nineteenth century onwards, having difficulty reconciling the poems to what is known, or at least what is believed, of the life of William Shakspere. Nineteenth century scholars, and Shakespeare-lovers in the wider community, have sometimes been dismayed by the apparently homoerotic content.

But if we are to follow the demands of the Marlovian authorship scenario – adopting the verse novel's conceit that Marlowe wrote all of the plays and poems published under the name 'William Shakespeare' - any elements of character surmised through interpretation of the Works are not aspects of Shakspere's character, but rather, aspects of Marlowe's. Richard Slotkin, proposing the writing of historical fiction as a useful tool for testing historical hypotheses, lays down the ground rules: 'For the thought-experiment to work, the fiction writer must treat a theory which may be true as if it was certainly true, without quibble or qualification; and credibly represent a

[41] These attempts hit scholarly impasse more than half a century ago. When Roland Barthes declared the Author dead, further attempts to identify this author's friends were abandoned with a sense of relief. If the author was dead, then his friends certainly didn't matter.

material world in which that theory appears to work' (Slotkin, 2005: 221). Without at this stage committing to the proposition that Marlowe as the author of Shakespeare's sonnets is something that 'may be true', the results of applying Marlowe's authorship to the sonnets - a useful 'thought-experiment' in the process of creating the work of fiction - are interesting.

The first noticeable effect is that the homoerotic content of the sonnets is no longer surprising. Marlowe's sexuality has been the subject of considerable debate, and though it is not useful to apply modern concepts of homosexuality to an era where unmarried men customarily shared beds with each other for practical reasons, there is undoubtedly homoerotic content, or the depiction of homosexual relationships, in three of Marlowe's attributed works: *Dido Queen of Carthage*, *Edward II* and the long narrative poem *Hero & Leander*.

While acknowledging that the sonnets need not be autobiographical, read from the perspective of the Marlovian narrative the group of poems sometimes referred to as the sonnets of separation become sonnets of exile.[42] Their allusions to travel[43] (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[44] 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

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[42] The parallels between the narrative of the Sonnets and the presumed biography of Marlowe-in-hiding was first noted by WEBSTER, A. (1923) Was Marlowe the Man? *The National Review,* LXXXII**,** 81-86. The idea has been further developed by others, notably WRAIGHT, A. D. (1994) *The Story That the Sonnets Tell,* London, UK, Adam Hart.

[43] Q: travaille: travel, labour. No distinction was made in Elizabethan spelling between the two, and as the sonnets reference both journeying and 'toil', it can be taken to mean either, or more likely both.

[44] See Sonnet 51.

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: 'thyself 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)*

Katherine Duncan-Jones admits the possibility of physical letters, but favours a more metaphorical reading, with the messengers being 'reciprocal sentiments' – presumably because we know of no journey of any distance being undertaken by William Shakspere that would lead to an exchange of letters of this sort (the distance between Stratford and London, 100 miles, could be walked in four days) (Duncan-Jones, 1997a: 200). The decision of whether to interpret an image literally or metaphorically depends on the narrative chosen to decode it.

The 'suborned informer' (false witness, or hired spy) in Sonnet 125, has divided orthodox scholars; some have taken it to be a cryptic reference to a real individual, while others have regarded it as metaphorical. Online sonnets editor Gerard Ledger summarises the numerous orthodox positions on this phrase:

> *'it is not known for certain to whom this refers, if indeed it is to a real person or to a mere abstraction. Some editors think it refers to the youth himself, others to an onlooker who has been misinforming the youth, while others think it harks back to Sonnet 123 and is a final challenge against Time, who attempts to distort and destroy the reality of love. Of the most recent editors, John Kerrigan thinks it is a malicious onlooker; Katherine Duncan-Jones thinks that most probably it is Time itself; G. Blakemore Evans either some specific individual or tale bearers generally; Stephen Booth lists 'a self-serving toady' or the youth himself as possibilities. Seymour Smith is confident that it is the Friend himself, who is finally being reminded that the poet is not, and never has been, under his*

> *control. It could refer in a general sense to the devil's advocate who is always at hand to defeat idealism, and to all those who disbelieve in the power of love.'* [45]

Duncan-Jones justifies her belief that the 'suborned informer' is 'Time' by calling Time 'the explicit addressee of sonnets 123-5', despite the fact that only the first of those sonnets explicitly addresses Time. Adopting a 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).

In the Marlovian scenario, given that a person suspected of '*Heresie, Atheisme* or *Apostacie'* in 1593 could be executed without evidence (Shagan, 2004: 559) and he was unlikely to escape the charges in the Baines note, Marlowe's death has been faked and – assisted by his secret service colleagues - he has escaped to the continent while on

[45] Gerard Ledger's comments can be found at http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/125comm.htm

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

> '*When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes*
> *I all alone beweep my outcast state,*
> *And trouble deaf heav'n with my bootless cries,*
> *And look upon myself, and curse my fate…' (29:1-4)*

Christopher Marlowe, the 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).

Richard Baines, whose note to the Privy Council suggested 'all men in christianitei ought to endevor 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)*

George Steevens called this last line and the one that follows it 'purblind and obscure' (Rollins, 1944: I:284) but Duncan-Jones says line 7 'presumably means "(because it is your opinion only that I care about) it is as if no one but you is alive as far as I am concerned, and I live in the opinion of no one else"' (Duncan-Jones, 1997a: 334).[46] Again, 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,*

[46] DUNCAN-JONES, K. (Ed.) (1997a) *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Arden Shakespeare, Thomson Learning.

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' (206). 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' 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.[47] 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, 1997a), 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 […]

[47] Duncan-Jones discerns a possible allusion to Passionate Pilgrim in Sonnet 112: 'Your love and pity doth th'impression fill/Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow.' But Marlowe's biography provides a far more powerful 'vulgar scandal' of his own making.

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)

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 ruminate' (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)[48]

Yet time to 'ruminate' 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:

[48] See also sonnet 81 and the numerous sonnets addressing the theme of poetry as immortalisation, of which Erne counts 'no fewer than twenty-eight'. ERNE, L. (2003) *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist,* Cambridge, UK ; New York, Cambridge University Press.

'consumed with that which it was nourished by' (73:12);

and

'the worst was this: my love was my decay' (80:14).[49]

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:[50]

'…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)

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).[51] Fortune's spite appears again in sonnet 90:

'Then hate me when thou wilt, if even now,

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[49] The latin inscription on the 1585 Corpus Christi portrait, which gives the sitter's age as 21, is QUOD ME NUTRIT ME DESTRUIT; what nourishes me destroys me.
[50] Duncan-Jones glosses this sonnet 'Weary of the corruption and hypocrisy of the age he lives in, the speaker longs for death, restrained only by the thought of abandoning his love.' (242)
[51] Weis, reading the image literally, has concluded that Shakespeare was physically lame.

Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross.
Join with spite of fortune, make me bow.' (90:1-3)[52]

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, 1997a: 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.[53] 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 (Minto, 1874: 222, Acheson, 1903, Robertson, 1926), but since no direct link could be found between Chapman and Shakspere, 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

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[52] 'Spite' makes another appearance in sonnet 36: 'in our lives a separable spite'.
[53] The name Marlowe, associated as it was with a 'vulgar scandal', was doomed to be forgotten by literary history for 300 years. In 1820, one critic even unwittingly reversed Marlovian authorship theory by describing Marlowe as 'a borrowed designation of the great Shakespeare'. See MACLURE, M. (1979) *Christopher Marlowe : The Critical Heritage,* London, Routledge.

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 Walsingham'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)*

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.

Editorial emendations are similarly dependent on the acceptance of a particular narrative. For example, where some editors have emended Quarto's 'loss' in 34:12 to 'cross', Duncan-Jones rejects this on the basis that it 'transforms the speaker into a Christ-figure', but for the Marlovian narrative this would be preferable, since it chimes with Marlowe's Christian name, which means 'bearing Christ'.[54] Editors have revised the punctuation of 81:6 such that it reads 'Though I, once gone, to all the world must

[54] See also 42:12: 'And both for my sake lay on me this cross.'

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'. Similarly, in sonnet 113, the Quarto text argues that the poet's eye is effectively blind 'For it no form delivers to the heart/Of bird, or flower, or shape which it doth lack.' Duncan-Jones has accepted Capell's[55] emendation of 'lack' to 'latch' (grasp, seize with the mind), but if it were understood that the poet had moved to another country, with differing flora and fauna, Quarto's 'lack' might stand.

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'. 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.'

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[55] Edward Capell's marked up copy of the Sonnets published by Bernard Lintott (1711), in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, is one of the editions of Shakespeare collated by Katherine Duncan-Jones.

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' (Edmondson and Wells, 2004: 57) 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.'(Duncan-Jones, 1997a: 180)

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 brav'ry 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 merchant who agreed to play his front man – we can conclude that the poet's friend heeded those instructions.

It is apparent that an analysis of Shakespeare's sonnets against two opposing narratives shows what Helen Moore called 'the inherent deceptiveness of a form that seems to be one thing and turns out to be another' (Moore, 1999: 229). The use of imagery in the poetry enables us to take an image either literally or metaphorically according to the narrative to which we are adhering, changing the way an idea is received or interpreted based on the reading we are either expecting, or imposing. The safest position from which to read the sonnets may therefore appear to be the anti-biographical one. The logic might be seen thus: the sonnets seem to be autobiographical, but bear no relation to the life of the man we believe to be the author. Two straight-forward solutions present themselves: either the sonnets are *not* autobiographical or the man we credit with their making is *not* the author. Thus many orthodox scholars have concluded that, despite the deeply personal tone of many of them, the sonnets are not autobiographical.

The precedent that is sometimes quoted is that of Giles Fletcher's *Licia* (1593), written, the author claims, not from his own experience, but 'in imitation of the best Latin poets and others'. Edmondson and Wells ask:

> *'Is this deliberate obfuscation… a playful attempt to deflect enquiry into a living object of love? The depth of Giles Fletcher's indebtedness to Continental and other models suggests not: suggests in fact that his sonnets are, as Shakespeare's have often been described, literary exercises largely divorced from personal experience.'*
>
> (Edmondson and Wells, 2004: 19-20)

Divorcing himself from the content, Fletcher prefaces his poems 'A man may write of love and not be in love, as well as of husbandry and not go to the plough, or of witches and be none, or of holiness and be flat profane', and he is quite right. The point is, does such writing make good poetry? Fletcher's sonnets are neither technically interesting, nor moving, nor original. As a result they do not have any kind of contemporary readership. The differences between these poems and Shakespeare's are striking, and Edmondson and Wells are happy to declare 'with certainty that Shakespeare's sonnets are quite exceptional in their relationship to other sequences, in their overall lack of indebtedness to direct models, as well as in their frequent defiance of conventions of the genre' (20). In other words, they do not bear any of the signs of being 'literary exercises largely divorced from personal experience.' Indeed, Edmondson and Wells believe the sonnets 'may be thought of as an emotional autobiography' (27); an approach that invites attention to be drawn to the very mismatch between life and work that spawned the Shakespeare authorship question in the first place.

It is clear, then, why many orthodox scholars insist that Shakespeare's sonnets are best understood as a response to Elizabethan sonnet sequences of the 1590s. But to believe that the author would write a sequence of 154 sonnets simply because they were fashionable also entails taking a certain position on the character of the man who wrote

them. Even the least biographical reading implies a particular characterisation of, and therefore a particular narrative for, the author.

There is no evidence that Marlowe survived after 1593. There is no evidence Shakspere attended grammar school, either, yet biographers and scholars routinely assume it, because it is necessary to create a plausible narrative for the putative author of the works. There's quite a difference between these two assumptions, and I am not for a moment suggesting we should assume that Marlowe survived, only noting that there are interesting consequences when we allow ourselves to not entirely rule out that possibility. If we change our frame of reference: if we simply ask the question posed by all fiction, *what if?* then the extant evidence, from both literary and other primary sources, can be interpreted such that it supports the Marlovian narrative more easily than it supports the orthodox one. In the case of *Shake-speare's Sonnets*, apparent mysteries and inconsistencies are resolved and clarified by reading the text through the lens of this alternative history: suspected ambiguities of tone vanish; paradoxes dissolve; the biographical events behind strong emotions are easily identified; even the poet's friends (and enemies) hove into view.

The sonnets are representative of wider issues present in Shakespeare biography. Beyond the usual incompleteness of the historical record with which any early modern scholar is familiar, there exists Shakespeare-related evidence that is not adequately explained by the orthodox version of events, and other evidence which has been either explained away or overlooked entirely because it does not comfortably fit into the traditional narrative.[56] As with the emendation of *Shake-speare's Sonnets*, certain comments alluding to Marlowe and Shakespeare have been assumed to be in error where a Marlovian narrative would allow them to be both correct and intentional. One

[56] Key anomalies in the data will be addressed in Chapter 5.

might argue, then, that they only seem to be in error because they do not conform to the interpretive paradigm applied in an attempt to understand them.

My aim here is not to offer proof that Marlowe's death was faked, or that he wrote the works attributed to the Globe shareholder William Shakspere, but rather to demonstrate that there is actually a significant body of primary evidence which can be interpreted to support this theory, and none that essentially refutes it. Since one of the arguments against all non-Stratfordian theories is that no-one doubted the orthodox candidate's authorship in his lifetime, I will now explore a contemporary text that can be read to suggest otherwise when we adopt a Marlovian authorship paradigm.

4. Shakespeare Authorship Doubt in 1593

Around the time of Marlowe's apparent death, the name William Shakespeare appeared in print for the first time, attached to a new work, *Venus and Adonis*, described by its author as 'the first heir of my invention'. The poem was registered anonymously on 18 April 1593, and though we do not know exactly when it was published, and it may have been available earlier, the first recorded sale was 12 June. Scholars have long noted significant similarities between this poem and Marlowe's *Hero and Leander;* Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen describe 'compelling links between the two poems' (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, 2007: 21), though they admit it is difficult to know how Shakespeare would have seen Marlowe's poem in manuscript, if it was, as is widely believed, being written at Thomas Walsingham's Scadbury estate in Kent in the same month that *Venus* was registered in London.

The poem is preceded by two lines from Ovid's *Amores*, which at the time of publication was available only in Latin. The earliest surviving English translation was Marlowe's, and it was not published much before 1599. Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen admit, 'We don't know how Shakespeare encountered *Amores'* and again speculate that he could have seen Marlowe's translations in manuscript.

Ovid's poem is addressed Ad Invidos: 'to those who hate him'. If the title of the epigram poem is relevant, it is more relevant to Marlowe than to Shakespeare: personal attacks on Marlowe in 1593 are legion, and include the allegations in Richard Baines' 'Note' and Thomas Drury's 'Remembrances', Kyd's letters to Sir John Puckering, and allusions to Marlowe's works in the Dutch Church Libel.

The poem from which the epigram is taken closes (in Marlowe's translation):

> *Then thogh death rackes my bones in funerall fire,*
> *Ile liue, and as he puls me downe, mount higher.*

Celebrating the immortality of a poet through his verse, they may also be read – within the Marlovian authorship paradigm - as a more literal reference to the poet's triumph over death.

From the wording of the dedication to Southampton, it appears that the author expects the young earl to know who he is (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, 2007: 27). Beyond the dedication, no link between William Shakespeare and Southampton, or his guardian Lord Burghley, has ever been established. Christopher Marlowe, however, was known to Lord Burghley as early as 1587 when the Privy Council intervened to ensure he was awarded his MA from Cambridge, and as late as 1592, when Sir Robert Sidney, Governor of Flushing in the Low Countries, sent Marlowe to Burghley under suspicion of coining (Wernham, 1976: 344-5). As Marlowe was not prosecuted for this potentially capital offence, it is not unreasonable to conclude, as Riggs and other scholars have done, that he was working for Burghley at the time. If Burghley conducted business from Cecil House, where Southampton lived as his ward, a possible means by which Marlowe might have met Southampton can be established. This is not to say that William Shakspere and the Earl of Southampton cannot have met, only that

the Marlovian paradigm offers corroborating external evidence when the orthodox paradigm offers none.

The first recorded purchaser of *Venus and Adonis,* Richard Stonley, was, perhaps not coincidentally, an employee of Lord Burghley. His usual taste was for sermons and histories, and his uncharacteristic purchase of poetry might feasibly be explained by his employer's potential interest in a book dedicated to his ward (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, 2007: 30). Another early reader, the soldier William Reynolds, also had an interest in Burghley and wrote to give his personal interpretation of the poem to the Lord Treasurer in a letter dated 21 September. That another letter, dated five days earlier but intended to escape the eye of authority, may contain a more significant reaction to *Venus and Adonis* has not generally been considered.

In Autumn 1593, Gabriel Harvey's *A nevv letter of notable contents With a straunge sonet, intituled Gorgon, or the wonderfull yeare* was published. It comprises a twenty-six page letter dated 16 September 1593, addressed to the printer, John Wolfe, followed by three pages of poetry that scholars of Elizabethan literature find notoriously obscure. McKerrow writes: 'it was doubtless intended to have some meaning, but … I have in vain attempted to discover what this may be' (McKerrow, 1958a: V5, 102). A majority of scholars have agreed that this poetry contains allusions to Marlowe,[57] but there is no consensus as to what Harvey is trying to communicate.

More recently, the tendency of scholars to interpret literally the line 'He and the Plague contended for the game', and the unlikelihood that Harvey would be

[57] Hale Moore summarises the scholarly reactions to *Gorgon* up to 1926, and offers a deeper exploration of the Marlowe allusions, in MOORE, H. (1926) Gabriel Harvey's References to Marlowe. *Studies in Philology,* 23**,** 337-357. Gorgon's references to Marlowe are noted by BAKELESS, J. E. (1942) *The Tragicall History of Christopher Marlowe.,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press. The Feaseys note *Gorgon*'s allusions to Marlowe and their similarities to a section of Harvey's *Pierces Supererogation* (April 1593) which is also taken to be about Marlowe: FEASEY, L. & FEASEY, E. (1949) The Validity of the Baines Document. *Notes and Queries*.

misinformed as to the circumstances of the poet's demise, as well as the fact that four months on, Marlowe's death was surely no longer topical, prompted Charles Nicholl to suggest that *Gorgon* is not about Marlowe at all, but about the no-account braggart Peter Shakerley, with the poem using Marlowe 'as a reference point' (Nicholl, 2002: 149). J.A. Downie and Constance Brown Kuriyama have accepted this conclusion (Downie, 2007: 257, Kuriyama, 2002: 151), perhaps with an eye to mounting a defence against the non-Stratfordian theory shortly to be elucidated. But the Shakerley interpretation does not explain the remarkable similarities, noted by the Feaseys, between Harvey's attacks on the subject of this poem and his previous attacks on Marlowe; plus it raises a number of new problems that Nicholl, Downie and Kuriyama have not addressed.

One of these concerns timing. Harvey's letter is dated two days before Shakerley was buried on 18 September. Nicholl suggests 'he would have died a few days earlier: the grave-diggers were busy this plague summer'; yet plague victims were buried very quickly precisely to prevent a backlog building up, and if Shakerley died of the plague in London (as Nicholl concludes) he would have been buried very rapidly indeed. Vanessa Harding, in her paper *Burial of the plague dead in Early Modern London*, writes 'It is true that plague victims were buried quickly, but the interval between death and burial was rarely longer than two or three days anyway' (Harding, 1993). In other words, if Shakerley died of the plague and was buried on 18 September it is unlikely he was dead before the 16th when Harvey's letter is dated. Even allowing a normal, non-plague burial interval of two to three days, the earliest date we might consider for Shakerley's death is 15 September and the news of his death would then need to travel the fifty-five miles from London to Saffron Walden. From figures produced by Alan Brayshay, a royal letter to a person of importance might be expected to cover such a

journey in around 14 hours (Brayshay et al., 1998).[58] A letter between private citizens was not allowed to travel in the royal mail bag until the 1630s and could be expected to take considerably longer. As Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe state in their study *Letter Writing in Renaissance England*, '"mailing" a letter in England was no simple matter… the likelihood of a letter arriving in a timely fashion was iffy at best' (Stewart and Wolfe, 2004: 121). The timing is not impossible, but tight enough that Shakerley's candidacy as the poem's subject should be considered unlikely.

Other problems with the Shakerley theory will be elucidated below, but it is not in any case necessary to formulate an alternative to Marlowe, since it is possible to interpret and contextualise the poem such that the two chief objections to Marlowe as the subject of *Gorgon* are eliminated. Firstly, as I will show below, there are indications in the poem itself that 'the Plague' was intended metaphorically rather than literally. Secondly, if we allow ourselves to contemplate the possibility that *Gorgon* encapsulates Harvey's belief that Marlowe is the author of *Venus and Adonis*, and may still be alive – in other words, that Harvey is writing from within a Marlovian authorship paradigm - the poem is perfectly topical.

Harvey refers to the *Gorgon* poem as 'Newest Trifle':

> *'I terme it a Trifle for the manner: though the matter be in my conceit, superexcellent; in the opinion of the world, most admirable; for priuate consideration, very notable; for publique vse, passing memorable; for a point, or two, excee[d]ing monstrous. And that is the very disgrace of the Sonnet, that the Stile nothing counteruaileth the Subiect, but debaseth a straunge body with vulgar attire, and disguiseth a superlatiue Text with a positiue Glosse. As it is, it is your owne to dispose, or cancell at pleasure.'*
>
> (Harvey, 1593: B2v)

This feigned nonchalance suggests that the poem is not important; yet it is easy to argue that the poem is the primary material in the publication. Though most scholars, like

[58] The mean time for a royal letter to travel from London to Royston was 8.5 hours. Royston is 13 miles from Saffron Waldon, and royal letters travelled from post-towns to nearby destinations on foot at an average speed of two miles an hour (Brayshay et al., 1998: 276,281).

Stern, consider the 'curious sonnet *Gorgon*' as 'appended' to the letter (Stern, 1979: 111), one might also consider the poem as the body of the work to which the letter is a preface. As Harvey says (in relation to Wolfe's other recent publications) on the opening page, 'It is not the externall, but the internall forme, (call it the Pith, or the marrow, or the life-bloud, or what you list) that edifieth' (Harvey, 1593: A2). The overwhelming and distracting nature of the prefatory material can be viewed not only as a deliberate exercise in misdirection, but also a strong indication that what is contained in the poem is highly sensitive, a conclusion supported by its being cryptic to a degree unusual even for Harvey.

Gabriel Harvey had motivation to be careful, since he had on a previous occasion been 'clapt in the Fleet for a Rimer' (Nash, 1596: T3-3). In what *Gorgon* refers to as this 'fatall yeare of years', 1593, the dangers of being a writer had become very palpable. The imprisonment and torture of Thomas Kyd, author of *The Spanish Tragedy,* had been followed swiftly by the arrest, and apparent death while on bail, of Marlowe.

But what exactly is 'The mightiest miracle of Ninety Three', which Harvey follows immediately with the Latin phrase *Vis consilii expers, mole ruit sua*, roughly translated as 'force without wisdom falls by its own weight'? Nicholl says the answer is Peter Shakerley's death, but why this should be counted, in plague-ridden London, as not only miraculous but the 'mightiest miracle' of the year, or how it might be related to the Latin motto that follows, he doesn't explain. Marlowe's death has been a common suggestion; but 'miracle' is perhaps too strong a term for something that might, at least in Harvey's terms (and according to this Latin motto), have been predictable.

It was A.D.Wraight who first developed the hypothesis that *Gorgon* is Harvey's reaction to seeing a copy of *Venus and Adonis* for sale on the bookstalls at St. Paul's

(Wraight, 1994: 133),[59] and for the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the implications of interpreting the available historical data from this Marlovian perspective. St. Paul's (as 'Powles') is referenced six times in Harvey's poem; Gabriel Harvey lodged there, with John Wolfe, from September 1592 to July 1593. It is clear from Stonley's purchase on 12 June that Harvey would have had ample time to buy a copy from John Harrison's stall 'at the signe of the white Greyhound in Paules Church-yard' before returning to Saffron Walden.[60] It is also possible that Gabriel Harvey, a don at Cambridge when Marlowe was a student, would have been familiar with the latter's writing style.

The poem's title, *Gorgon*, echoes Harvey's comment that the poem is 'for a point, or two, excee[d]ing monstrous'. Stern suggests two connotations: one relating to a line from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* Part I (IV.i.18) where Zenocrate's father insists he will not retreat 'were that Tamburlaine as monstrous as Gorgon, prince of Hell' and the other to the Gorgon Medusa, who petrified those who looked directly on her (Stern, 1979: 117). A third is made possible by adopting Wraight's hypothesis. Those steeped in the orthodox biography of Shakespeare may strain to believe that in the summer of 1593, the name William Shakespeare was entirely new and had no history attached to it; scholarly tradition has long assumed that William Shakespeare was a familiar name in literary and theatrical circles before the appearance of *Venus and Adonis*. Yet there is no evidence for this assumption.[61] For the purpose of testing the alternative hypothesis, we will assume that no evidence of William Shakespeare's involvement in literary endeavours was available to Harvey either, and that he was reacting to the

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[59] Wraight was following a suggestion in William Honey's *The Life, Loves and Achievements of Christopher Marlowe, alias William Shakespeare* (London: private printing, 1982)

[60] (1973) [Illustration]: Diary of Richard Stonley. *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 24. The publisher's address, but not his name, was published on the title page of *Venus and Adonis*.

[61] That the single literary allusion taken to refer to Shakespeare prior to this point, Robert Greene's famous 'upstart crow' passage of September 1592, is more likely than not a reference to Edward Alleyn, the 'Player' of whom Greene writes in the body of *Groatsworth,* is explored in Chapter 5.

sudden appearance of a new poetic genius at exactly the point a previous one (with very similar writing style) was eclipsed.[62]

> 'S[t] Fame *dispos'd to cunnycatch the world,*
> *Vprear'd a wonderment of* Eighty Eight:
> *The* Earth *addreading to be ouerwhurld,*
> *What now auailes, quoth She, my ballance weight?*
> *The Circle smyl'd to see the Center feare:*
> *The wonder was, no wonder fell that yeare.'*
>
> (Harvey, 1884: V1, 295)

Fame and deceit are the opening notes: the world is easily conned where fame is concerned. Though Stern believes this opening sestet relates to the failing of dire astrological predictions made by Gabriel Harvey's brothers Richard and John (Stern, 1979: 116), it seems unlikely that Harvey would wish to draw attention to something that had been widely mocked (not least by Nashe). 'A wonderment of Eighty Eight' has also been suggested as Marlowe, whose 'atheist Tamburlan' was first mentioned this year by Robert Greene (Hubbard, 1918), but Hale Moore argued that the phrase refers to the failure of the Armada (Moore, 1926: 346).[63] Harvey then moves on to the present tense and the present year and lists a series of 'amazing events (for the most part welcome rather than dire ones)' (Stern, 1979: 116) from the current year, ending the first sonnet: '*Weepe Powles, thy* Tamberlaine *voutsafes to dye.'*

Vouchsafe is notably odd in this context. The OED definitions include: 'To give, grant, or bestow in a gracious or condescending manner; to deign or condescend to

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[62] Shakespeare's early works, both dramatic and poetic, are widely acknowledged to owe significant debts to Marlowe. This is explored further in a later chapter. It is notable that Harvey, who lists numerous contemporary writers in his published work, never mentioned Shakespeare in print. His only reference to Shakespeare is in piece of unpublished marginalia which states 'The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeares Venus, & Adonis: but his Lucrece, & his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, haue it in them, to please the wiser sort. Or such Poets: or better: or none. Vilia miretur Vulgus: mihi flavus Apollo.'

[63] Some scholars date both parts of Tamburlaine to 1587 or earlier on the basis of a letter from Phillip Gawdy to his father describing an accident in an unnamed play performed by the Admiral's Men. See MARLOWE, C. & JUMP, J. D. (1967) *Tamburlaine the Great : Parts 1 and 2,* Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press. *Tamburlaine* is first mentioned by Greene in the address *To The Gentlemen Readers* prefacing *Perimides The Blacke-smith* (1988).

give; to deign to accept; to be prepared to bear or sustain.'[64] If we take 'Tamberlaine' to indicate Marlowe (as it has been taken, for example, in the Dutch Church libel), the word 'vouchsafe' would seem to suggest an element of collusion, on Marlowe's part, in his own death. Nicholl does not elaborate on what the 'wonderment of Eighty Eight' might be if applied to Shakerley. Whether we adopt Hale Moore's Armada theory, Stern's astrological prediction theory, or Hubbard's solution of Marlowe himself, it remains to be seen how Shakerley's death could in anyway be related, or provide the 'ballance weight' to the 'wonder' that failed to fall in 1588. Nor could his death, especially in a plague year, be described as an unexpected or wondrous event. All the other events listed in the first sonnet can rightly be described by Harvey as wondrous. Marlowe's apparent resurrection, no matter how little we might be prepared to believe it, would certainly qualify as such.

Harvey supplements the *Gorgon* sonnet with a two line *L'envoy*:

> '*The hugest miracle remaines behinde,*
> The second Shakerley Rash-Swash to binde.'
> (Harvey, 1884: 295)

The majority of scholars take the subject of both lines to be Thomas Nashe; Harvey refers to Nashe as 'the booted Shakerley' in *Pierces Supererogation*, which was published bound together with *New Letter* (Stern, 1979: 117,108 n.96). Shakerley was a notorious braggart; one of Harvey's many names for Nashe was 'Braggadocio'. But the sentence structure does not allow Nashe to be both 'the second Shakerley' and 'the 'hugest miracle' that remains behind 'to binde' Nashe, or for Nashe to bind. Interestingly, the overlooked verb 'bind' supports the argument that the 'miracle' to which Harvey is referring is a recently published pamphlet. For Harvey to believe that *Venus and Adonis* is a work of Marlowe's that Nashe has brought to press is not

[64] Oxford English Dictionary, online edition.

unreasonable. Nashe appears to have played this role in the publication of Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* in 1594. Marlowe was at Scadbury on May 20 1593 and he may have been there for some time; Kyd's testimony suggests he was known to the stationers of St.Paul's and thus would not have been able to register this work in person. Within a Marlovian authorship paradigm, 'the hugest miracle' that 'remains behind' might be interpreted as the copies of *Venus and Adonis* in St.Paul's, rashly (and with swash-buckling bravado) bound under the name Shakespeare.

A Marlovian paradigm also makes sense of a puzzling line in the section of the poem entitled 'The Writers Postscript: or a friendly *Caveat* to the *Second Shakerley* of Powles' (i.e. a warning to Nashe). The second sonnet refers to 'Magnifique Mindes, bred of Gargantuas race … Whose Corps on Powles, whose mind triumph'd on Kent'.[65] Hale Moore says 'by these words any contemporary not in Harvey's confidence might have been baffled…The significance of Kent is indeed puzzling' (Moore, 1926: 352). There are at least four separate connections that would support the idea of the 'mind triumph'd on Kent' being Marlowe's: he was born and educated in Canterbury; the prosecution he escaped (through apparent death) was led by John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury; it was Whitgift who had licensed the anonymous *Venus & Adonis* to be published (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, 2007: 476); and Deptford, where Harvey might suspect Marlowe triumphed over death, was also at that time in the county of Kent. Under the orthodox (Stratfordian) paradigm, only the first of these connections would exist to link Marlowe to the line, but there is no explanation for how we might feasibly apply the 'Kent' reference to Peter Shakerley. The poem continues:

> *'I mus'd awhile: and having mus'd awhile,*
> *Jesu, (quoth I) is that* Gargantua minde

[65] Though the compression has tortured the sense – Harvey was no great poet – the expanded version would read 'Whose corpse (body.. i.e. Marlowe in person) triumphed on St.Paul's, whose mind triumphed on Kent.'

> *Conquerd, and left no* Scanderbeg behinde?
> *Vowed he not to Powles* A Second bile?'
> (296)

Again, the Shakerley interpretation is not easily applied. 'Gargantua minde' could only be ironic in this context; applied to Marlowe it is sarcastic, but at least accurate. Wraight took 'Scanderbeg' to relate to a now lost play *The True History of George Scanderbeg* which she assumed to be an early play of Marlowe's. The phrase 'left no Scanderbeg behinde', and the immediate reference to a promise to (the booksellers of) 'Powles' does indeed suggest that the Scanderbeg Harvey has in mind is a publication, and that the subject of his poem a writer. We have no evidence that Peter Shakerley wrote or published anything, and again the focus must be thrown back onto Marlowe.

But at what point did Marlowe vow to St.Paul's a second 'bile'? Under the Marlovian paradigm the answer appears straightforward. In the dedication of *Venus and Adonis* 'William Shakespeare' makes precisely such a vow, promising the Earl of Southampton '[I] vowe to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour'. If Harvey has – mistakenly or not – decided that 'William Shakespeare' is Christopher Marlowe's pseudonym, this couplet (the apparent death of an author referred to twice as Tamburlaine, the absence of a 'Scanderbeg' on the bookstalls, the vow to St.Paul's bookstalls of a second publication) fits the conflated author exactly.

The most likely subject is still, under any paradigm, Marlowe: Nashe is certainly alive, and given both this and Harvey's contempt for his scurrility, cannot be the subject of the lines:

> *'Is it a Dreame? or is the* Highest minde,
> *That ever haunted Powles, or hunted winde,*
> *Bereaft of that same sky-surmounting breath,*
> *That breath, that taught the Timpany to swell?'*
> (296)

Nor can the subject be Shakerley, for though Nicholl suggests we read 'the Highest minde/That ever haunted Powles' as comic hyperbole, there is no reason to think that Shakerley 'taught the Timpany to swell'. The description, however, aptly fits the blank verse dramatist known for his 'high astounding terms' and 'mighty line'.

Early interpreters of this poem were confused by Harvey's reference to the plague, imagining that Harvey had mistaken Marlowe's cause of death, but since Harvey's brother Richard was Rector at St.Nicholas Church in Chislehurst, the parish church attended both by Marlowe's patron, Thomas Walsingham, and Marlowe's supposed murderer, Ingram Frizer, this is unlikely. When it came to gossip surrounding Marlowe's death, in comparison with his contemporaries, Harvey would have been exceptionally well-informed. The literal reading of this line is the key reason why Nicholl felt it necessary to propose Shakerley as the subject. However, there is no need to read the line literally; poetry is a genre well-disposed to the use of metaphor, and Harvey had used disease as a metaphor elsewhere in *New Letter*.[66]

> '*He, and the* Plague *contended for the game:*
> *The hawty man extolles his hideous thoughtes,*
> *And gloriously insultes upon poore soules,*
> *That plague themselves*: for faint harts plague themselves.'
> (297)

That the final clause, and the word Plague, are set in Roman type can be taken as Harvey's nudge to read 'the Plague' metaphorically. Since people 'plague themselves' with fears; fear itself is the Plague, 'the tyrant Sicknesse of base-minded slaves' living under the regime that has finally 'felled' proud 'Tamberlaine', the 'wonderment of Eighty Eight'. Harvey tells us 'The hawty man extolles his hideous thoughtes'. If Peter Shakerley expressed controversial opinions, we are left with no record of them. Marlowe's 'hideous thoughts', however, were famously noted, being described by Kyd

[66] STERN (1979: 119) supports the view that Harvey's use of the plague is metaphorical.

as ‘monstrous opinions’, and this line is a reasonable description (at least from Harvey’s perspective) of the way Marlowe was depicted in the Baines Note. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, Harvey appears to show a familiarity with this key Marlovian document in another letter, part of *Pierces Supererogation*, which was published at the same time as *New Letter*.

Continuing his description of the man whose death is linked to some kind of miracle, Harvey writes:

> *The tyrant Sicknesse of base-minded slaues*
> *Oh how it dominer's in* Coward Lane?
> *So Surquidry rang-out his larum bell,*
> *When he had girn'd at many a dolefull knell.*

Running short of new words to express haughty pride, Harvey settles for 'surquidry’. That the subject had ‘girned’ [‘to show the teeth in laughing; to grin; OED 2] at previous dangers would fit with Marlowe’s having escaped capital punishment for coining in 1592; and indeed, the accusations in 1587 that he intended to go to the Catholic seminary in Rheims. Again, Peter Shakerley is an anonymous enough individual to provide no interpretative purchase for these lines. But in those immediately following, there seems little reason why Shakerley, rather than the author of that famous play, would be described as possessing ‘tamberlaine contempt’.

In a passage long recognised to refer to Marlowe, Harvey writes

> *He that nor feared God, nor dreaded Diu'll,*
> *Nor ought admired, but his wondrous selfe:*
> *Like Iunos gawdy Bird, that prowdly stares*
> *On glittring san of his triumphant taile:*
> (297)

The first of these lines echoes Harvey’s criticisms of ‘Aretin and the Divels Orator’ – believed to be his nicknames for Marlowe and Nashe – in *Pierces Supererogation*

(1593): 'They neither fear Goodman Satan, nor Master Belzebub, nor Sir Reverence, not my Lord Government himself'. Returning again to the subject's vanity and pride (the reason, in Harvey's poem, for his fall), Harvey brings his second sonnet to a close:

> *Or like the vgly Bugg, that scorn'd to dy,*
> *And mountes of Glory rear'd in towring witt:*
> *Alas:* but Babell Pride must kisse the pitt.
> (297)

If we take his subject to be Marlowe, Harvey is saying that Marlowe scorned to die. Rather than dying, he has reared 'mounts of Glory' in 'towering wit'; a phrase which – under the Marlovian authorship paradigm - strongly evokes the content of *Venus and Adonis.* But 'Babel Pride', the sin of the word-spewing author, must 'kiss the pit'.

His closing couplet references a 'huger thing' than St. Paul's cathedral, recently destroyed by lightning: a fitting reference to Marlowe, who was rightly famed, but hardly fitting for Peter Shakerley.

> *Powles steeple,* and a *hugyer thing* is downe:
> Beware the *next Bull-beggar* of the towne.
> (297)

Just as the central section, the 'frendly Caveat' was addressed to Nashe, so is this closing warning: it is the 'second Shakerley', Nashe, who is the 'next Bull-beggar'. Harvey had referred to Nashe as a Bull-beggar a year previously, but when he did so it was as part of a double-act. It was 'Aretine and the Divels Oratour' – i.e. Nashe and Marlowe – whom he accounted 'terrible Bull-beggars' in *Four Letters* (1592) (Harvey, 1884: Vol 1, 203). Again, this points towards Marlowe being the fallen subject, the precedent whose fate the 'next Bull-beggar' should heed. Harvey ends the poem with another warning, in Latin: *Fata immature vagantur*; the Fates roam prematurely.

The identification of the subject of *Gorgon* as Marlowe rather than Shakerley, then, is very well-supported by the evidence. But as to what Harvey is actually saying about Marlowe, there are no certainties. Harvey doesn't say that Marlowe is alive.

Nevertheless, 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?' Marlowe's death is framed only as a question, and this question is never answered. The couplet of the closing *L'envoy* describes him only as 'down', or fallen, the fall predicted in the opening stanza of the poem; a 'ballance weight' to the 'wonder' that Fame 'uprear'd' in 'Eighty Eight.' The simplest interpretation is that Harvey can't believe Marlowe is dead. However, this leave unanswered an important question: what is the 'hugest miracle' which remains behind (to bind Nashe, or for Nashe to bind)? If Harvey's suspicions centre on *Venus and Adonis*, we have not only a viable interpretation for this line, but also the line about the 'second bile' that was vowed to St.Paul's. Simply put, the Marlovian authorship paradigm explains more of the poem than any other hypothesis that has been forwarded.

Under this paradigm, Harvey's uncertainty is what has provoked the poem, whose intensely cryptic nature can reasonably be explained by the importance of Harvey imparting his doubts only to those who could confirm his suspicions. The most likely person to understand his message was Thomas Nashe; not only because their protracted print-battle entailed a deep involvement in each other's writings but because Marlowe was Nashe's friend. The majority of *New Letter,* though addressed to John Wolfe, is also a public communication with Nashe, and that significant sections of that communication are about Marlowe was argued cogently some sixty years ago by Lynette and Eveline Feasey (Feasey and Feasey, 1949).[67] In that context the following aside echoes certain accusations directed at Marlowe that were circulating just before his arrest:

[67] The Feaseys refer to one section of Harvey's *New Letter* as 'a long and violent attack on Marlowe' (515).

> *'Did I neuer tell you of a grauer man, that wore a priuy coate of interchaungeable colours; and for the Art of Reuolting, or recanting, might read a Lecture to any retrograde Planet in Heauen, or Earth? Is it not possible for a wilde Asse of a fugitiue and renegate disposition, in such a point to resemble the tamest Foxe?'*
>
> (Harvey, 1593: B3v)

This man who 'for the Art of Revolting… might read a Lecture to any retrograde Planet in Heaven, or Earth' is a perfect fit for Marlowe, who was accused of reading the 'atheist lecture' to 'Sir Walter Raleigh & others' in a report by an anonymous agent preparing evidence against Richard Cholmeley.[68]

The 'privy coat of interchangeable colours' works as a reference to Marlowe's intelligence work; when the Privy Council interceded on his behalf at Cambridge in 1587, the letter explicitly stated that he had been 'emploied … in matters touching the benefitt of his Countrie'. In three different documents between 1587 and 1593, Marlowe is accused of intention to go to the 'other side': in the Privy Council letter of 1587 there are said to be rumours that he 'was determined to have gone beyond the seas to Reames and there to remaine'; Governer Sidney's letter to Burghley in 1592 contains Baines's and Marlowe's mutual accusations that the other intends to 'goe to the Ennemy or to Rome'; Kyd's 1593 letter to Puckering states that Marlowe 'wold perswade with men of quallitie to goe unto the King of Scotts whether I heare Royden is gon and where if he had livd he told me when I sawe him last he meant to be.'[69] These three pieces of independent evidence strongly suggest that Marlowe was working for the Privy Council as a projector, a professional religious and political turncoat; a suggestion that Harvey's 'privy coat of interchangeable colours' would appear to corroborate.

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[68] (1593b) Remembrannces of Wordes & Matter Againste Ric Cholmeley. BL Harley MS.6848 f.190r,v. There are good reasons to think the agent in question was Thomas Drury.

[69] (1587) Letter from the Privy Council to the Cambridge University Authorities. *PRO Acts of the Privy Council*, (1592) Letter from Sir Robert Sidney, Governor of Flushing to Lord Treasurer Burghley. PRO SP 84/44, (1593d) Thomas Kyd's Note to Sir John Puckering. BL Harley MS.6849 f.218r,v. Transcripts in KURIYAMA (2002: 202,210, 231)

The words 'graver man' might be taken as Harvey's pun on Marlowe's apparent death.[70] If he is not dead, then he is a fugitive from justice, and Harvey's description of a 'wilde Asse of fugitive and renegade disposition' who now 'resembles' (interchangeable as he is) 'the tamest fox' might be read, if Harvey has suspicions about *Venus and Adonis*, as a metaphor for Marlowe's Ovidian metamorphosis into Shakespeare. That Harvey is thinking of a book is confirmed by the next sentence. 'Books with unstayed readers, and running heads', Harvey says, have readers flock to them (the word 'flock' evoked by both birds and sheep); thus turning the water (here standing metaphorically for those books, and synecdochically for their authors) from 'white to black, and from black to white' - another example of this man's coats of interchangeable colour. The outer garment may be changed, Harvey says, but appearances can be the very opposite of what they seem. Like the central section of the accompanying poem on Marlowe, this section of *New Letter* is framed entirely in questions.

Nashe's response, though apparently at least partially written the same year, would not come until 1596.[71] Both works that were published in 1594 were written and entered into the Stationers Register by the 27th September 1593, and new writing by Nashe in the two years following the publication of *Gorgon* was limited to two prefaces.

The Unfortunate Traveller, dated 27th June 1593 and registered by Harvey's publisher John Wolfe within days of receiving *New Letter*, was published by Cuthbert Burby the following year. Given how strongly Wolfe was allied with Harvey, it might

[70] A similar pun is used in Romeo & Juliet, III.i. Under this hypothesis, one might also read the *Venus* dedication's 'graver labour' in the same light.
[71] That all or part of *Have With You to Saffron Walden* was written in the last quarter of 1593 is apparent from the accusation that Harvey wrote his own 'wellwiller's Epistle … before his *Four Letters* a year ago' NASH (1958: V3, 127). *Four Letters* was registered in September 1592.

be regarded as peculiar that he would secure the initial right in Nashe's work.[72] It is fronted, like Venus and Adonis, by a dedication to the Earl of Southampton: 'A dere louer and cherisher you are, as well of the louers of Poets, as of Poets themselues' (Nash, 1958: V2, 201). Under the Marlovian paradigm, the likelihood that Marlowe met Southampton through Lord Burghley is increased by the confidently 'knowing' tone of this sentence by one of Marlowe's closest friends, published in the same year as *The Rape of Lucrece*, whose dedication to Southampton included 'the highly unusual word "love"' (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, 2007: 28). Nashe's irreverent dedication was omitted from the second edition.

Christs Tears Over Jerusalem, whose first edition in 1593 had landed Nashe in prison, was printed in 1594 with a radically revised preface, the original apology to Harvey being replaced by a renewed attack following Harvey's publication of *Pierces Supererogation* and *New Letter*. On the question of Marlowe's death, Nashe is explicit: 'poore deceased Kit Marlow' is one of the 'quiet senseless carkasses' that Harvey has 'vilely dealt with'. Calling him 'Gabriel Graue-digger', Nashe rails, with a reference to *Tamburlaine*, 'Ile hamper him like a iade as he is for this geare, & ride him with a snaffle vp & down the whole realme' (Nash, 1958: V2, 180). Nashe, then, maintains that his friend is dead.

A full answer to the questions in Harvey's *Gorgon* isn't published until 1596 in *Haue vvith you to Saffron-vvalden. Or, Gabriell Harueys hunt is vp Containing a full answere to the eldest sonne of the halter-maker. Or, Nashe his confutation of the sinfull doctor.* Nashe is dismissive of the poem, listing its contents as

[72] Nashe makes much of Harvey's relationship with Wolfe in *Have With You To Saffron Walden*. Yet within two weeks of receiving *New Letter*, Wolfe had registered *The Unfortunate Traveller* by Nashe, as well as two works by Marlowe; *The First Book of Lucan* and the unfinished *Hero and Leander*. Both rights in Marlowe's works were apparently sold on to Edward Blount (Marlowe's friend and publisher of the *First Folio* Shakespeare).

> *'his goggle-eyde* Sonnet of Gorgon, *and* the wonderfull yeare, *and another* Lenuoy *for the chape of it, his* Stanza declaratiue, VVriters post-script in meeter, *his* knitting vp Cloase, *and* a third Lenuoy, *like a fart after a good stoole…'*
>
> (Nash, 1958: V3, 133)

Of *New Letter* he says

> *'[O]ne Epistle thereof, to* Iohn Wolfe, *the Printer, I tooke and weighed in an Ironmongers scales, and it counterpoyseth a Cade of Herring and three Holland Cheeses. You may beleeue me if you will, I was faine to lift my chamber doore off the hindges, onely to let it in, it was so fulsome a fat* Bonarobe *and terrible* Rounceuall.'

Comparing the structure of *New Letter/Gorgon* to 'tying a flea in a chain', he writes: 'O, tis 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' (Nash, 1958: V3, 36, 37).

Under the Marlovian paradigm, that Nashe understands *Gorgon* as a reaction to *Venus and Adonis* may be suggested by the words 'first invention', a contracted echo of the phrase in the *Venus* dedication. This is immediately followed by a variation on the giant's cry 'Fe Fi Fo Fum' which appears to corroborate this interpretation of *Gorgon*. According to Nashe, Harvey's poem amounts to nothing more than 'I smell the blood of an Englishman' dilated until it takes a day to read. The line that would immediately follow this, *Be he alive or be he dead?* is omitted, but the familiarity of the nursery rhyme makes it present even in its elision. The structure and pace of the sentence would enable the 'wise' reader to pick up this submerged allusion whilst allowing the unfriendly eye of authority, or the general reader, to miss it completely.

As Nashe hints a few pages later, both *New Letter* and *Have With You To Saffron Walden* require deciphering. Showing a consciousness of the authorities perusing both their works, and the cryptic-to-the-point-of-encrypted nature of *Gorgon,* Nashe writes:

> *'O, we should haue the Proctors and Registers as busie with their Table-books as might bee, to gather phrases, and all the boyes in the Towne would be his clients to follow him. Marry, it were necessarie the Queenes Decypherer should bee one of the High Comissioners; for else other-while he would blurt out such Brachmannicall fuldde-fubs as no bodie should be able to vnderstand him.'*
>
> (Nash, 1958: V3, 46)

The nature of any code is that it becomes intelligible when one has the key. Only readers alert to *Gorgon*'s subject matter would pause at the colon to appreciate that the nursery rhyme is completed by the lines 'be he alive, or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread.' Under the Marlovian paradigm, Nashe uses this device to communicate to Harvey that he has understood his question and makes a veiled accusation that Harvey is undertaking a potentially life-threatening 'hunt' – perhaps the hunt alluded to on the title page – for personal gain. Harvey's mission, says Nashe is

> *'to discouer and search foorth certaine rare Mathematicall Experiementes… which if by anie industrie hee could atchieve, his owne name being so generally odious through* Kent *and Christendome, hee would presently transforme & metamorphize it from Doctour* Harvey *to Doctour* Ty*…'*
>
> (Nash, 1958: V3, 37)

McKerrow comments 'The expression "Kent and Christendom" i.e. everywhere, was fairly common, but has not been satisfactorily explained'(McKerrow, 1958c: 320).[73] Kent being the Archbishop of Canterbury's seat as well as Marlowe's birthplace, the phrase would be of particular relevance when Marlowe is the unspoken name. Nashe suggests that if Harvey were successful in his mission, he too might wish to 'transform & metamorphize' his name on the basis that it had become odious.[74]

Some pages on, Harvey's conflation of Marlowe with Tamburlaine is thrown back on him; Nashe refers to the 'sinful Doctor' as 'Scythian Gabriell', an epithet which works doubly under this hypothesis to identify Harvey with the grim reaper (Nash,

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[73] e.g Lyly, Mother Bombie (1594) III.iv.5."I can live in christendom as well as in Kent."

[74] The name Nashe suggests Harvey might like to adopt, Dr Ty, has some interest for Marlovian theorists. Dr Tye was, according to the Dictionary of National Biography, a composer and poet. Like Marlowe, he was an alumnus of Cambridge, initially a chorister, and had the first name Christopher.

1958: V3, 49). It is Harvey, Nashe says, who is 'playing the swash-buckler'(Nash, 1958: V3, 55). He goes on to explore at length Harvey's identity as the son of a rope-maker, implicating rope-makers in the hanging of men, and arguing that a son continues in the profession of their father; thus Harvey is making ropes, and is not innocent of the outcomes that result from his actions (Nash, 1958: V3, 59). The implication is that the business Harvey is conducting has the potential to put an end to the lives of others. There is no suggestion from Nashe that Marlowe is alive, and no hint that he has knowledge of *Venus and Adonis* as being written by Marlowe. But *New Letter* is not the only text of Harvey's that Nashe is answering; he also clearly answering passages in Harvey's *Pierces Supererogation*.

There are several passages in *Pierces Supererogation* that offer new interpretations under a Marlovian paradigm.

> *'Pap-hatchet [Lyly] talketh of publishing* a hundred merry Tales *of certaine poore Martinists: but I could here dismaske such a rich mummer, & record such* a hundredwise Tales *of memorable note, with such a smart Morall, as would vndoubtedly make this Pamflet the vendiblest booke in London, and the Register one of the famousest Autors in England.'*
>
> (Harvey, 1884: V2, 312)

The phrase 'this Pamflet' could be taken to refer to *Pierces Supererogation* itself, but it would then be difficult to explain how it's becoming 'the vendiblest book in London' would make 'the Register one of the famousest Aut[h]ors in England'; Gabriel Harvey never published anonymously. What is the pamphlet, then, to which Harvey is referring? An earlier section of *Pierces Superogation* entitled 'An Advertisement for Pap-Hatchet and Martin Marprelate' and written in November 1589, addresses the Martin Marprelate pamphlets, and identifies the anti-Martinist author of *Pappe with an Hatchet* (1589) as John Lyly. Pap-hatchet (i.e. Lyly) is ostensibly the subject of this sentence, but Harvey has already 'dismasked' him as the author of the anonymous Hatchet pamphlet several pages (and four years) earlier. The section of *Pierces*

Superogation in which Harvey boasted he could 'dismaske such a rich mummer' was written at the end of April 1593, when Harvey was lodging with Wolfe in St.Paul's, then the heart of the London publishing industry. An alternative interpretation for this passage is that Harvey is referring to a new work by someone else that has recently been entered anonymously in the Stationers Register. The author then would become the 'rich mummer' that he is threatening to 'dismaske'. Let's explore this and other parts of the same section further from within a Marlovian authorship paradigm, and consider the results.

Harvey is keeping his information to himself, 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.

Significant portions of this part of *Pierces Supererogation* are devoted to a posthumous attack on Dr Andrew Perne, Cambridge University's vice-chancellor, whose name became 'a byword for a religious turncoat' (Collinson, 1994: 179). But Harvey is also using the 'Thrise-learned Deane' as a point of comparison. Launching into a description of a 'braggard with motts', Harvey says that Machievelli, or Perne 'would go very-nigh to call him a goose, that gave for his mott: *Simul astu, et dentibus vtor*', a phrase translated as 'together I use my cunning and my teeth' (Harvey, 1884: V2, 307). One might assume that Harvey is attacking Nashe, who placed Latin mottos on the title pages of *Pierce Penilesse* and *Strange Newes,* but neither match Harvey's

mocking paraphrase in form or content, and nor do they constitute the poetry Harvey has in mind:

> *'Did the flying Pegasus of the redoubted Bellerophon, before his aduenturous expedition … against the fierce sauages …prouide to arme himselfe with a braue Posie; or boast of his horrible mother Medusa, or of his owne Gorgonean winges? Did the fiery horses of the Sunne… threaten Prince Phaeton, or the world, with a dreadfull Verse?'*

Given the repeated references to the Martin Marprelate pamphlets throughout *Pierces Supererogation*, we must consider whether Harvey is referring to any of the anti-Martinist tracts attributed to Lyly or Nashe: *Pappe With An Hatchet*, *An Almond for a Parratt, A Countercuffe Given to Martin Junior*, *The Return of Pasquill* or *Pasquils Apologie.* The last three, all claiming to be written one Pasquill Cavaliero, do not bear mottos. *An Almond for a Parratt* is fronted with the latin motto *rimarum sum plenus* (roughtly translated as 'rifts [or flaws] I am full of'); *Pappe With An Hatchet*'s title page sports the sentence (in English): Martin hangs fit for my mowing. The first of these is not boastful, and neither constitutes a 'dreadful Verse'. In any case, how topical are any of these 1589-90 publications when Harvey is writing in April 1593?

We recall that *Venus and Adonis* – registered anonymously nine days before the date of this text - was prefaced with two lines of Latin poetry from Ovid,

> *'Let base conceited wits admire vile things;*
> *fair Phoebus lead me to the Muses springs'*

and that in its original context the passage leads 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.'*

The preponderance of horses in the classical illustrations used by Harvey to criticize the bragging author may be read as an allusion to these lines, through the key word 'mount'. The word also appears in the closing lines of *Gorgon*, where Harvey says the

vain author 'scorned to die' and instead reared 'mounts of glory' in 'towering wit'. The horses Harvey names - Pegasus, and the fiery horses of the sun - are certainly 'mounts of glory'. With the additional reference to 'Gorgonean wings', we might read a tentative link here to the *Gorgon* poem.

Speaking (as he does throughout *Pierces Supererogation*) of imposture and dissimulation, Harvey says 'the Troian Horse… was not such an Asse, to aduaunce himselfe with any such prowde Imprese, as, *Scandit fatalis machine muros.'* This phrase, 'the fated machine climbs the walls' comes from Virgil's description in Book 2 of the *Aeneid* of the horse's being lifted into Troy. Harvey, we may infer, believes the author is giving himself away to a ludicrous degree. Dissimulation is in anyway pointless, says Harvey, since 'The Tree is knowen by the fruite; and needeth no other Posie' (Harvey, 1884: 308). Nashe's reference, in the extended title of *Have With You*, to his own 'mott or posie' can be read as a direct response to this passage, underlining its importance in their argument.

Harvey warns the author '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' (Harvey, 1884: 309). Marlowe and Shakespeare, who drew heavily on Ovid, could both reasonably be described as 'Ovid's lover'. It is an apt description for the author of a narrative which was both taken from Ovid, and prefaced by a quote from Ovid, as *Venus* was. Indicating that he has not changed the subject, he continues

> *'Meane-while it is nothing out-of my way, to prayse the close, or suspicious Asse, that will not trouble any other with his priuy Counsell, but can be content to be his owne Secretary. There be more queint experiments in an Vniuersitie, then many a politique head would imagine.'*
>
> (Harvey, 1884: 310)

From this it is possible to infer that Harvey's suspicions, which he will not take to Secretary of State Robert Cecil and the Privy Council, are linked to his knowledge of some 'queint experiments' at Cambridge. He continues 'I could nominate the man, that could teach the Delphicall Oracle, and the Aegiptian Crocodile to play their parts,' and the following page is devoted to a further character sketch of 'Hypocrisy incarnate' in the shape of Doctor Perne. We might assume those Perne 'could teach' have nothing more than a symbolic value, but if we are reading this as a passage rich with coded information, we may infer they correspond with two significant Cambridge alumni. The 'Delphicall Oracle' may be read as a reference to the bragging author warned to 'Foretel not'; the parallel human counterpart for the Egyptian Crocodile will become apparent.

That a memory of 'queint experiments' at Cambridge has reminded Harvey of Perne is notable, for earlier in the text, he says of the former Dean '[i]t was in him, to giue instructions vnto Ouid, for the repenning of his Metamorphoses anew' (Harvey, 1884: 300). *Venus and Adonis* is widely accepted as a 'repenning' of Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* Adopting the Marlovian authorship paradigm, we might consider the possibility that Harvey recognises *Venus and Adonis* as one of those 'quaint' Cambridge experiments encouraged by Doctor Perne.

Harvey will not reveal everything he knows, he says, not only in consideration of the author's 'calling' and 'secret friends' but also because suspicions do not constitute proof: 'what methodicall Artist, would allow the Encomium of the Fox, in the prayse of the Asse, vnlesse I would prooue by irrefragable demonstration, that the false Fox was a true Asse' (Harvey, 1884: 312). Though he recognises the author's cunning, there is more than one reason, in Harvey's mind, for suspecting the author to be more of

an 'Asse' than a 'Fox': not only for revealing his intentions so obviously in his verse motto, but

> *'especially for defeating one without cause, and troubling the same without effect, that for ought he knew, might possibly haue it in him, to requite him aliue, and dead.'*
>
> (Harvey, 1884: 313)

Whom Marlowe might have troubled and 'defeated… without cause' has been available to Marlowe biographers since it was first noted by Boas that there is a possible parody of Richard Baines as Barabas in the *Jew of Malta* (Boas, 1949: 608). While Baines was posing as a priest at the Jesuit seminary at Rheims, he hatched a plan to kill every Catholic resident there by poisoning the well. A friend (whom he wished to protect) betrayed him, he was tortured by the strappado, and his confession was subsequently published in England. Marlowe's friends Thomas Watson and Thomas Walsingham were both resident at Francis Walsingham's Paris Embassy during Baines's time at the seminary; indeed 'their arrival exactly corresponds to the time that their fellow secret service agent Richard Baines was preparing for ordination in nearby Rheims, and their departure similarly corresponds with the end of his period of imprisonment'(Kendall, 2003: 127). Marlowe is likely to have been privy to inside information about Baines, and the friends (who are known to have enjoyed 'jests' together) may have joked privately at Baines's expense. Barabas, who is comically evil, plots, like Baines, to poison an entire religious house – not through the well, but through the porridge. Roy Kendall speculates that anger over his depiction in the *Jew of Malta* is the reason for Baines's betrayal of Marlowe, first in Flushing, and subsequently in the form of the infamous 'Note'.

Kendall was also the first to appreciate the strong likelihood that Harvey and Baines knew each other, for 'they were at Cambridge together for five years and for at least four of those years (1568-72) were at the *very same college* (Christ's)' (Kendall,

2003: 384 n.44). Taking this possible identification forward, Harvey says Baines 'thinketh not now on the booted foole, that alwaies ietteth in his startups'. This is an echo of the preface to Greene's *Perimedes the Blacksmith*: 'startups' and 'buskins' were both calf-length boots, and the phrase might allow Harvey to identify Marlowe to the well-informed literary reader.[75] Rather than thinking of Marlowe, Baines thinks of another 'good auncient Gentleman, that mought haue bene his father for age; his tutour for learning; his counsellour for wisedome; his creditour for siluer; his Catechist for Religion, and his Ghostly father for deuotion'. Harvey has returned to the infamous turncoat, Doctor Perne (Collinson, 1994: 210-11). After describing his exchange with Perne at the funeral of Sir Thomas Smith in 1577, Harvey switches his subject from teacher to student: from 'my old backfrend of Peter-house' (Perne), to one of the other 'Doctors of Hypocrisie' of his acquaintance; the switch signalled by the name Iodocus (Jew), which cannot be applied to Perne[76] but is an apt moniker for the man on whom *The Jew of Malta* may have been modelled (Harvey, 1884: V2, 314). He was a master of cunning, says Harvey, and those who underestimated him did so at their peril. If we had any doubt that it is Baines' trouncing of Marlowe to which Harvey is referring, the next sentence would seem to offer powerful confirmation:

> *'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.'*
> (Harvey, 1884: 315)

At first sight, it seems impossible that Harvey can be referring to the Baines Note, which scholars have long assumed was delivered on either 26 or 27 May. But the date added to this edited version of the note was always misleading, for Whitsun eve fell on

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[75] '...latelye two Gentlemen Poets, made two mad men of Rome beate it out of their paper bucklers: & had it in derision, for that I could not make my verses iet vpon the stage in tragicall buskins, euerie worde filling the mouth like the faburden of Bo-Bell, daring God out of heauen with that Atheist *Tamburlan…' GREENE, R. (1588) Perimedes the Blacke-Smith, London, Printed by Iohn VVolfe, for Edward White.*

[76] Though 'triplicitous' according to Harvey - Protestant, Papist, and neutral - Perne was no Jew.

2 June (old style) in 1593, the day after Marlowe's inquest. As Riggs points out, the note must have been delivered to the Queen before his death in order for her to 'prosecute it to the full', as Thomas Drury insists she did in a letter to Anthony Bacon.[77] Drury says he was commanded to 'stay one mr bayns' and this may be related to the fact that he released from prison to do some 'servis' for Lords Puckering and Buckhurst the previous November. There is no date on the original version of the Baines Note; thus it is perfectly plausible that the note was in existence (and even in Government hands) long before 26 May, and that the insertion 'delivered on whitsun eve' is either an error, deliberate obfuscation, or the date that the final version – perhaps rewritten on the Queen's orders - was 'sent to her H[ighness]'. The 'new' chronology of events suggested by *Pierces Supererogation* under this interpretation is in fact supported by Webb, Miller and Beckwith's *History of Chislehurst* (1899), and the possibility that the Baines Note preceded the summons was also arrived at independently by Tucker Brooke (Kendall, 2003: 308, 281). One phrase in particular suggests that Harvey knew about the Note, and its contents, on 27 April. He continues

> *'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; that had often bene the death of his Life in his worthiest Frendes, and was eftsoones the death of his Death in his wyliest enemy. Whose Spite was intricate, but detected: and whose Subtility maruelous, but disuailed: and he that disclosed thesame, is perhaps to leaue an immortall Testimoniall of his Indian Discoouery.'*

If Harvey wishes to leave the knowledgeable contemporary reader – and perhaps posterity - in no doubt as to the information he has in his possession, then 'his Indian Discovery' is an important reference: the first item on the list of 'damnable opinions' known as the Baines Note is 'That the Indians and many Authors of Antiquitei have

[77] A transcript of the letter can be found in KENDALL (2003: 336-38).

assuredly written of aboue 16 thowsande years agone, wher Adam is proued to haue leyved within 6 thowsande years'.

Since (under this interpretation) the Note has just been mentioned and is about to be paraphrased, we may reasonably assume it is Marlowe who was 'shrewdly encountered', 'prestigiously besieged' and 'invisibly undermined with that weapon of weapons' (the written word).[78] If so, he is also the subject of the next sentence, beginning 'What other supply could have seconded, or rescued him, but Death'. That Death 'had often bene the death of his Life in his worthiest Frendes' can be applied to Marlowe in respect of Thomas Watson, of whom Harvey was known to approve, and who had died seven months previously. But how might we read Harvey's cryptic comment that Death was 'the death of his Death in his wyliest enemy'?

To begin with, we might infer that Harvey understands the accusations in the Baines Note to be potentially fatal. He makes it clear in *Pierces Supererogation* that he has read *Apology of sundry proceedings by Iurisdiction Ecclesiasticall*, the 700-page defence of ex officio oaths published that year by Richard Cosin, a lawyer member of the High Commission and leading adviser to Archbishop Whitgift, calling it one of 'the most-materiall, and most-formall Treatises, that any English Print hath lately yeelded' (Harvey, 1884: V2, 291). As Ethan Shagan demonstrates in his analysis of Cosin's tract, '[i]n cases of "heresy, atheism, and apostasy"…penalty of life and limb was very much at issue', for '[h]eresy in particular was defined as a danger to the church, and thus in English context a danger to the state, even if someone's heterodox beliefs were never shared or uttered' (Shagan, 2004: 558, 562).[79] Cosin explains that against 'a grievous crime' such as heresy, a judge has the power to proceed even without evidence

[78] Marlowe has also undermined Baines with that 'weapon of weapons', but less invisibly, since the parody of Barabas has been performed on the public stage.
[79] COSIN, R. (1593) *An Apologie for Sundrie Proceedings by Jurisdiction Ecclesiasticall*.

(Shagan, 2004: 559). Some commentators have denied that Marlowe represented any danger to the State, on the basis that he was released on bail (Downie, 2007: 266). Certainly, his release suggests he was not regarded as a danger to the State by the majority of the members of the Privy Council. This does not, however, lessen the probability that the Baines note represented a severe danger to *him*. Allowing that Harvey's references to the man of 'privy coat' with 'secret friends' are both Marlowe, and that Marlowe had been working for Lord Burghley attempting to infiltrate Catholic plots against the crown, and bearing in mind his claimed association with the Earl of Northumberland and future Earl of Derby, his release on bail is not unexpected. He had, after all, been released without charge for a capital and treasonous offence the previous year. Yet, as Harvey is likely to have been aware, the Baines Note was 'effectively the playwright's death warrant' (Kendall, 2003: 216).

How might Marlowe, then, achieve the 'death of his Death'? According to Harvey, by Death: 'what other supply could have seconded or rescued him'? Yet the mention of Marlowe's rescue by Death is surely premature. The letter is dated three weeks before Marlowe's arrest, and a full month before the incident in Deptford. Assuming Harvey did not add to the letter after 27 April, this passage might be interpreted, in the context of Marlovian authorship theory, as Harvey's detecting the possible ruse before it has even been enacted. Is this likely? Harvey is conscious that potentially fatal accusations of atheism contained in the Baines Note have coincided with the anonymous registration of a narrative poem in Marlovian style, which it seems he believes might be Marlowe's, claiming in the dedication to be the work of another man.[81] He might reasonably conclude that the purpose in issuing such a work at this time – especially since it promises a sequel – is to set up the new identity before the old

[81] There is evidence that the dedication was already present when the work was registered; see below.

is abandoned, and represents the poet's first move in escaping an almost inevitably fatal prosecution. 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, thus his care not to 'ransack' this particular 'satchel'.

Modern witness protection programmes are evidence that even today governments occasionally enable individuals to disappear under new identities. In the early modern era, before the advent of photographic passports and efficient border controls, such a disappearance would have been considerably easier. As noted by Roy Kendall while discussing the apparent death of the spy Gilbert Gifford a few months before the appearance – in the company of two intelligence agents - of one Gifford Gilbert, 'deaths in the murky world of espionage can often be "blinds" for disappearances, and vice versa' (Kendall, 2003: 149). Harvey had already commented on the apparent foolishness of the Ovid quote fronting the publication, which appears to give away, or 'foretel', the author's intentions to triumph over death. He indicates he is aware of the contents of the Baines Note, and has read the Cosin tract, the two documents which combine to make Marlowe's execution a near-certainty. If, in these circumstances, he read the registration of the intensely Marlovian poem *Venus and Adonis* as a sign that Marlowe was imminently to be 'rescued' by a faked death in order to achieve 'the death of his Death', it was not a completely unreasonable surmise. The human survival instinct is strong, and most people, faced with the certainty of their own death in a similar situation, would attempt to escape. Richard Cholmeley, connected to Marlowe and faced with similar charges, had already gone on the run and would be captured months later. To fully escape pursuit and prosecution, one would need to be thought dead.

Though registered anonymously, it is possible that the publication already included the dedication signed 'William Shakespeare'; 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).

To summarise this interpretation, in the letter in *Pierces Supererogation* dated 27 April 1593, Gabriel Harvey makes a number of references which can be taken to point to *Venus and Adonis*. *Venus* was an anonymously registered publication (the Register is the 'aut[h]or'), a 'repenning' of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, preceded by a motto in verse (also from Ovid) – hence the reference to the author as 'Ovid's lover'. Harvey says the author is a 'mummer' whom he can 'dismaske', which action would, he claims, make the publication a best-seller. He will not do it, he says, because 'the close man' (which can be read to mean 'the concealed author') has some secret friends who would not appreciate it, and in any case he does not have 'irrefragable' proof. But the author, he says, might be thought an 'asse' for 'defeating one without cause'; a description fitting Marlowe's parody of the murderously-minded Richard Baines in *The Jew of Malta*. 'Let the wronged party not be iniuried', he says, going on to identify Marlowe through a paraphrase of Robert Greene. He transitions from one infamous religious turncoat to another - from Doctor Perne to Richard Baines (identified, possibly in reference to Marlowe's play, as Iodocus, the Jew) - thanking the latter for his 'invaluable Note', whose first line he also paraphrases. As promised, he does not explicitly name the author, but in the poem published with *New Letter* he makes repeated references to Marlowe, whom he says 'scorned to die'; and who left behind something that could be considered the 'mightiest miracle' of 1593.

Though some may feel certain, both that Marlowe died in 1593, and that *Venus and Adonis* and other works attributed to William Shakespeare were written by the now

well-known glover's son born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Gabriel Harvey, Marlowe's highly intelligent contemporary, whose brother Richard had regular contact with both Marlowe's patron and his purported killer, appears to have had his doubts. What Nashe calls Harvey's 'goggle-eyde sonnet of *Gorgon*' gives its fullest and most coherent reading when interpreted as a reaction to the publication of *Venus and Adonis* as though it is Marlowe's work published under a pseudonym. Nashe's 'full answer' to the 'sinful doctor' can be interpreted to corroborate this reading of *Gorgon*, and working within a Marlovian paradigm, certain interpretations of the letter in *Pierces Supererogation*, dated by Harvey nine days after the registration of *Venus*, can be used to strengthen the evidence further.

Is it really possible that Harvey believed Christopher Marlowe to be the author of *Venus and Adonis*? Did doubts over Shakespeare's authorship – and indeed, over Marlowe's death - begin with Shakespeare's very first publication, raised by a man very much in touch with the contemporary literary scene? Harvey's challenging and obscure prose can certainly be decoded under this hypothesis, and its interpretation within a Marlovian authorship paradigm appears to create access to valuable new information from an existing primary source. Those scholars able to allow that Harvey (whether or not his surmise about *Venus* is correct) is describing Christopher Marlowe and Richard Baines, are furnished with rich material that has previously gone unnoticed from one who appears to have known Marlowe's nemesis to a significant degree, down to details like Marlowe's wearing a 'stilliard hat'. Under this reading, we also find ourselves delivered of information suggesting an earlier provenance for the Baines Note than that previously suspected, which will require deepening our understanding of the moves against Marlowe in the weeks preceding his arrest.

There is an obvious objection to the apparent discovery of a wealth of new material in sources available to scholars for over a hundred years: surely, if such information could be gleaned from these texts, several generations of gifted academics would not have missed it?[82] The answer to this objection is simple: the 'new' information is only apparent and available within an interpretive paradigm in which we allow ourselves to consider the possible validity of the Shakespeare authorship question: in other words, a non-Stratfordian paradigm. Nearly all Shakespearean scholars (both current and previous generations) work from within the orthodox paradigm, 'Shakespeare (i.e. William Shakspere of Stratford) wrote Shakespeare', which does not allow the possibility that there was contemporary doubt about the identity of the author. The reasonable assumption is that a talented writer would be personally known to many of his writing contemporaries, and this assumption overrides the absence of corroborating evidence when it is viewed from a perspective where Shakspere's authorship is an established 'fact'. The possibility that Gabriel Harvey queried the identity of the author of *Venus and Adonis* is thus an interpretation of the text that is simply unavailable to scholars working within the orthodox paradigm.

However, just as there are numerous interpretations of a text available to orthodox Shakespearean scholars, there are diverse perspectives possible within the Marlovian paradigm. Marlovian scholars Peter Farey and Daryl Pinksen disagree with the interpretation of *Pierces Supererogation* outlined above, and while I contend that the Marlovian interpretation of *Gorgon* and *New Letter* are better supported by the textual evidence than any other interpretation so far advanced, it seems to me that the Marlovian 'decoding'of *Pierces Supererogation* is on more slippery ground. It might be best, for the time being, to view the latter as an interesting illustration of what tends

[82] Though not widely available until the advent of EEBO and digitisation: just 50 copies of Grosart 's edition of Harvey's collected works were 'printed for private circulation only' in 1884.

to happen when a person's perspective is subsumed under any of the authorship paradigms, including the orthodox 'Stratfordian' one. Simply, and in line with physics experiments which demonstrate the 'observer effect', there is a tendency to find the corroborating evidence one is looking for.

This is a danger of working within *any* paradigm. It does not, in and of itself, invalidate the adoption of unorthodox paradigms as a way of opening texts (and historical evidence generally) to the possibility of new interpretations. Our brains are wired to accept data that tallies with our beliefs and reject data that conflicts with them. The implications of this are explored in the following chapter.

5. *Anomalies in the Data*

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn describes a 'psychological experiment that deserves to be far better known outside the trade' by Bruner and Postman in which subjects were asked to identify a series of playing cards on short controlled exposures (Kuhn, 1996: 62-4, Bruner & Postman, 1949). Many of the cards were normal but some were anomalous: a red six of spades and a black four of hearts, for example. The anomalous cards 'were almost always identified, without apparent hesitation or puzzlement, as normal', being 'fitted to one of the conceptual categories prepared by prior experience.' On further exposure, subjects began to hesitate and show confusion, and a further increase would lead to most subjects identifying the anomalous cards correctly. A few subjects, however,

> *'were never able to make the requisite adjustment of their categories. Even at forty times the average exposure required to recognize normal cards for what they were, more than 10 per cent of the anomalous cards were not correctly identified. And the subjects who then failed often experienced acute personal distress. One of them exclaimed: "I can't make the suit out, whatever it is. It didn't even look like a card that time. I don't know what color it is now or whether it's a spade or a heart. I'm not even sure what a spade looks like now. My God!" '*
>
> (Kuhn, 1996: 62-4)

In Kuhn's understanding, a paradigm which adequately explains observable data becomes widely adopted, and the vast majority of academic activity (what he calls 'normal science') will then be entirely within that framework. Anomalous data,

according to Kuhn, is often not noticed or collected by those working within the paradigm, simply because experiments are designed within its boundaries.

Fugelsang, Stein, Green and Dunbar, studying scientists at work in their laboratories, discovered that in over half of the scientific experiments they studied, the results were inconsistent with the scientists' predictions; and that scientists were reluctance to consider that data as 'real' (Fugelsang et al., 2004: 86). The surprising finding was classified as a mistake: 'perhaps a machine malfunctioned or an enzyme had gone stale' (Lehrer, 2009). 'The scientists were trying to explain away what they didn't understand,' said Kevin Dunbar, one of the neuroscientists involved. 'It's as if they didn't want to believe it.' Even after scientists had produced the anomaly consistently, they would often choose not to follow it up. The research of Fugelsang, Dunbar and others demonstrates that despite their discipline's reputation for impartiality, scientists are not immune from confirmation bias: the human tendency to seek out and give attention to data consistent with one's initial theory. Researchers from a variety of disciplines including cognitive psychology, scientific thinking, judicial reasoning, medical reasoning and politics have 'noticed the preponderance of confirmatory-based strategies in human reasoning' (Fugelsang et al., 2004: 86).

There is no reason to assume that scholars in the humanities are immune from confirmation bias; it appears to be a function of human neurology, possibly seated in the reticular activation system (RAS). At any given moment, some two million bits of information are available to us, but the human brain can process only 130 bits per second. The RAS acts as a filter, and allows through only what seems relevant. To an orthodox scholar, any information that lies outside the fundamental belief framework Shakespeare-wrote-Shakespeare will not be relevant, and is thus liable to pass unnoticed. If sufficient exposure occurs for it to be noticed, as in the early parts of

Bruner and Postman's anomalous playing card experiment, the tendency is to interpret it to fit. Analogous to 'That's the six of spades but there's something wrong with it', or 'the enzyme must have gone stale', anomalous data relevant to the Shakespeare authorship question (data which reads as 'correct' in an alternative paradigm) is often read by orthodox scholars as some kind of error. This is a useful evolutionary adaptation: our belief frameworks must of necessity be extremely stable if we are to function effectively, so we will be far more inclined to perceive there is something wrong with the data than doubt our paradigm. Examples of orthodox scholars reading data which supports an alternative paradigm as being in error have already been noted in the chapter on *Shake-speare's Sonnets*: some further examples are give in this chapter. But let's begin with the ways in which orthodox scholars have shored up Shakespeare's biography – a biography peculiarly absent of personal testimony that the subject was a writer – by erroneous interpretation of evidence.

5.1 Chettle's Apology to Peele

In 1998, Lukas Erne was the sixth scholar since 1874 to point out that Henry Chettle's apology in *Kind Hart's Dreame* (1592) to one of the playwrights who took offence at the contents of *Greene's Groats-worth of Witte* (1592) cannot have been aimed at Shakespeare (Erne, 1998: 435). The letter prefacing *Groatsworth* was addressed to 'those gentlemen, his quondam acquaintance that spend their wits in making plays' and warned them of the perils of writing for 'those puppets…that speak from our mouths,-- those antics garnished in our colours', and famously among these actors, of an 'upstart crow' generally taken to be Shakespeare. Chettle describes how this 'letter written to diuers play-makers, is offensiuely by one or two of them taken', and then apologises to one but not the other. Shakespeare cannot be the subject of his

apology, since he is not among the group of playmakers, but supposedly one of the actors they are being warned about.

Scholars have argued that the two subjects of Chettle's apology must be Marlowe and Shakespeare because neither George Peele nor Thomas Nashe would have reason to take offence at *Groatsworth*. Erne demonstrates this is not so: George Peele was a director of courtly pageants and an established poet with a reputation to defend, and it is unlikely he would have appreciated being called upon to 'despise drunkenness', 'flie lust', and 'abhorre those Epicures, whose loose life hath made religion lothsome to your eares' (Erne, 1998: 437).[83]

The second defence of *Kind Harts Dreame* as an apology to Shakespeare relies upon the false premise that the word 'qualitie' in the phrase 'the qualitie he professes' refers specifically to acting. Of the four instances the OED cites in the period 1590-1630 for 'quality' meaning 'profession, occupation or business', only one of them refers to acting; and where Shakespeare uses 'quality' to refer to a profession in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* the 'profession' in question is outlawry (IV.i.56).

The commonly held belief (so strong that it is perceived as a 'fact') that Chettle's apology is to William Shakespeare is based on an implausible and illogical reading of the text, yet it continues to persist, despite the best efforts of Erne and others before him, for a reason Erne well understands: Shakespearean biography is so bereft of evidence of Shakespeare's existence on the London literary scene that it cannot afford to abandon *any* apparent allusion to Shakespeare, even one that doesn't bear scrutiny. 'If we authenticate it,' says Erne, 'we have found a crucial milestone on Shakespeare's artistic and social trajectory. If we don't, a biographer writing his chapter on

[83] ERNE, L. (1998) Biography and Mythography: Rereading Chettle's Alleged Apology to Shakespeare. *English Studies,* 79**,** 430-440.

Shakespeare's first years as an actor and dramatist is deprived of one of his most important narrative supports' (435-6).

5.2 Allusion or Illusion? Unmasking the Upstart Crow

The picture for the orthodox position is worse than Erne can imagine, for Chettle's apology is not the only important narrative support that careful analysis and logical argument threatens to remove. I refer to famous 'upstart crow' passage from *Greene's Groats-worthe of Witte*, which since first being noticed by Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1778, and its subsequent adoption by Malone in 1787, is routinely taken as the 'first certain allusion' to Shakespeare in London.

Before demonstrating why this is wishful thinking, it is first necessary to re-establish that the text is by Greene. Since D. Allen Carroll's edition of the text, scholarly consensus has adopted Warren B.Austin's conclusion that Henry Chettle is the author of *Groatsworth* (Carroll et al., 1994).[84] But Austin's methods were deeply flawed, as Richard Westley makes clear in his recent reassessment (Westley, 2006: 363), which notes ten categories of error. Key amongst these is missing controls: Austin compares *Groatsworth* with just five of Greene's thirty-two known prose-works, and omits several works that were close to *Groatsworth* in time of composition. Austin also deliberately excludes, on the basis of context, a number of key words that strongly argue for Greene as the author, and fails to take into account Chettle's role as compositor. What Austin refers to as the 'strongest piece of evidence' that Chettle wrote *Groatsworth* is its preference for '-ever' over '-soever': Greene always uses the latter, Chettle the former (Austin, 1969: 23). As Donna Murphy points out, pursuing an

[84] The British Library record for *Groatsworth* came through with Chettle as author: I have adjusted the reference in this text so that Carroll's name is now listed first.

entirely different thesis, Chettle admits to copying out the text, and could very easily have introduced the change subconsciously (Murphy, 2007: 251). In this light, the adoption of Chettle's authorship by Vickers, Duncan-Jones and others looks mistaken. Westley concludes that 'Austin's findings should… be set aside'.

A better understanding of the context of the letter '*to those Gentlemen his Quondam acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plaies'* argues for Greene's authorship in any case. The passage that is taken to relate to Shakespeare is a warning from Greene, in his 'miserie', not to trust actors, who he refers to as 'Apes', 'rude grooms', 'those Puppets… that spake from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours', and 'painted monsters':

> *'Yes trust them not: for there is an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his* Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, *supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute Iohannes fac totum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.'*

Viewed through the orthodox paradigm, the idea of the upstart actor, jack of all trades, who now believes he can write blank verse as well as any of the university-educated wits, combined with a paraphrase from *Henry VI Part 3*, appears to point to William Shakespeare. The prefix Shake-, for most scholars, seems to seal the identification.

That the subject of Greene's rant might not be Shakespeare was first advanced by A.D.Wraight (1993) and recently developed by Daryl Pinksen (2009). Although it is clear why orthodox scholars would be resistant to such arguments, the alternative theory nevertheless deserves to be given serious consideration. Greene had written against actors before, in his *Francesco's Fortunes* (1590), and in terms very similar to those used in *Groatsworth*: 'Why Roscius, art thou proud with Aesop's crow, being pranked with the glory of others' feathers?' Samuel Schoenbaum and Peter Alexander both

agree that Roscius here stands for the actor Edward Alleyn (Alexander, 1964: 68, Schoenbaum, 1987: 152).

We know that Greene wrote plays for Alleyn; it is accepted, for example, that Alleyn played the lead role in Greene's *Orlando Furioso*. A large portion of the part of *Orlando* is amongst the papers at Dulwich College with additions in Alleyn's hand. In the main text of *Groatsworth*, Greene describes the life of Roberto, whose experience, says Greene, has 'most parts agreeing with mine', inviting it to be read as a thinly-veiled autobiography. Greene describes how Roberto met a wealthy and successful player, who offered him employment writing plays, with the promise he would be 'well-paid'. The Player is a wealthy man; Roberto is surprised to discover his profession: 'I took you rather for a Gentleman of great living, for if by outward habit men should be censured, I tell you, you would be taken for a substantial man.' The Player confirms his wealth, saying he is rich enough 'to build a Windmill' and that his share in playing apparel 'will not be sold for two hundred pounds.' It is clear that the Player is not only a major shareholder but also the leading actor of his troupe, and he claims to be well-known ('I am as famous for Delphrigus, & the King of Fairies, as ever was any of my time').

Greene's Player is a good fit for Edward Alleyn, who seems to have been a sharer in Worcester's Men from the age of sixteen, and by 1592, at the age of twenty-five, after great successes as the lead actor in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*, had already become manager of Lord Strange's Men. The Player is a poor fit for William Shakespeare, who does not appear in the records as a shareholder in any theatre

company until after Greene's death, and was never, as far as we can tell, cast in a leading role.[85]

'Men of my profession get by scholars their whole living', Greene has the Player say: a sentiment precisely echoed by Greene in the attached letter just ahead of the 'upstart crow' passage. 'Is it not strange, that I, to whom they all haue beene beholding: is it not like that you, to whome they all haue beene beholding, shall (were yee in that case as I am now) bee both at once of them forsaken? Yes trust them not…'. Greene feels 'forsaken' by the actors who have benefited from his writing skills and in particular by the 'upstart Crow'.

The traditional reading of this passage is that Greene is envious of the up-and-coming Shakespeare, who despite having no university education, is turning his hand to writing plays. Some have taken the phrase 'beautified with our feathers' to suggest plagiarism, but the parallel between this and the phrase used in Francesco's fortunes suggests only that the actors, like Aesop's Crow, are using words supplied for them by the university wits to gain glory, fame – and importantly, wealth. The feathers refer not as Duncan-Jones claims to elaborate head-dresses, but to the writers' quills. In contrasting the playwrights with the upstart Crow, Greene implies that the Crow is an usurer who has failed to provide for him in his sickness: 'I knowe the best husband of you all will neuer proue an Vsurer, and the kindest of them all will neuer proue a kind nurse.' Actors are 'as changeable in minde, as in many attyres' and as a result '*Robert Greene,* whome they haue often so flattered, perishes now for want of comfort.'

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[85] The first documented connection between William Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men relates to a payment to shareholders for a performance in December 1594, recorded March 1595 (N.S.): "To William Kempe, William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, servaunts to the Lord Chamberleyne, upon the Councille's warrant dated at Whitehall XVth Marcij 1594 [O.S.], for two severall comedies or enterludes shewed by them before her majestie in Christmas tyme laste part viz St. Stephen's daye and Innocents daye..." (Public Record Office, Pipe Office, Declared Accounts No. 542, f. 207b). As to his being an actor, there is no primary evidence to support the idea he played leading roles, and most scholars concur he is likely to have played only minor characters. Ben Jonson's cast lists, which appeared only after Shakespeare's death in April 1616, I shall deal with separately.

That Greene might have expected Alleyn, his wealthy former employer, to come to his aid when he was ill and without other means of income, is supported by a letter from actor Richard Jones to Edward Alleyn in February of the same year. Alleyn was loaning Jones £3 for new clothes to perform with the Admiral's Men but the letter also reveals that Alleyn had provided financial assistance to him during a recent illness, opening with 'thanks for your great bounty, bestowed upon me in my sickness, when I was in great want' (Greg, 1907: 33). Another way of reading the letter attached to *Groatsworth*, then, and explaining both Greene's bile against the upstart Crow, and his sense of being 'forsaken', is that Greene, following Richard Jones's example, had asked Edward Alleyn for money, but unlike Jones, had been turned down.[86]

The famous paraphrase of a line from *Henry VI Part 3*, long accepted to point towards the writer, Shakespeare, would in fact be much more likely in the reader's mind to be associated with the actor who played the part for the following reasons. Plays during this era were generally associated with the acting companies who brought them to the public, rather than their writers. Greene was a populist writer and would expect his audience to grasp his allusions. Shakespeare was not publicly known as the author of this play in 1592, and from the evidence we have, not for another 27 years: in another three years it would be published (anonymously) as *The True Tragedy,* but only in 1619, as one of the Pavier quartos, was it to be attributed to 'William Shake-speare'. The name 'William Shakespeare' had not yet appeared in print and would not appear on any play until 1598 (when it appeared in hyphenated form).

In any case, then, as now, actors were far more famous than the writers who supplied their lines; this complaint, indeed, is at the heart of Greene's letter, epitomised

[86] This is not surprising given that, as Pinksen points out, Greene (as 'Roberto') had bragged in *Groatsworth* that 'when I am paid anything aforehand, I break my promise.'

in the observation that the actors are 'beautified with our feathers'. Just as the line 'I'll be back' from the film *The Terminator* (1984) reminds of us Arnold Schwartzenegger rather than James Cameron and Gale Ann Hurd, the phrase 'Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde' would be considerably more likely to invoke for Greene's audience the actor who had memorably played the part of York, rather than the (unacknowledged and at this point unknown) author. Alleyn is the most likely candidate. 'Shake-scene' can simply be read as an insulting synonym for 'actor'; and since contextual evidence points towards Alleyn as Greene's target, and there is no evidence to support the idea that William Shakespeare was known in theatrical circles at this time, Alleyn is substantially more likely to be the actor whom Greene accuses of being 'in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey'.

There is one more point of identification which needs to be addressed. The 'Johannes fac totum' in question 'supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you'. For the Upstart Crow to be Edward Alleyn, we would need evidence that he was writing for the stage. The evidence exists in the form of an entry in Henslowe's diary, where, in 1602, he notes paying Alleyn forty shillings for 'his boocke of Tambercam'. The play is not extant, but the title suggests it was an attempt to emulate Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, the protagonist of which Alleyn had played with great success. Pinksen notes it was *Tambercam* Parts I and II, rather than the original *Tamburlaine*, that was playing in the repertoire of Lord Strange's Men in 1592, as Greene was falling ill (Pinksen, 2009: 5, Henslowe and Greg, 1904: 13-15). That Alleyn was not only playing the lead role, but had penned the play, is indicated by Henslowe's use of the possessive pronoun. Elsewhere he pays Alleyn for 'a book' or 'the book'. Only in the case of *Tamberca*m is the book referred to as 'his'. That *Tamberca*m was Edward Alleyn's imitation of *Tamburlaine* would explain why Greene

would address Marlowe, 'thou famous Gracer of Tragedians' primarily (not only addressing him first, but writing more to him than to the other two playwrights, thought to be Nashe and Peele); under these circumstances, Marlowe might be likely to share his grievance against Alleyn. This hypothesis also provides a context for Greene's plea: 'let those Apes imitate your past excellence, and neuer more acquaint them with your admired inuentions.'

The case for Alleyn as the upstart Crow, as Pinksen notes, is 'backed by converging lines of compelling evidence'. Greene knew, as he wrote *Groatsworth*, that he was facing death, without the funds to afford medical care. 'Yet accepted scholarship,' says Pinksen, 'holds that Greene's final obsession was with being upstaged by another playwright. Considering his circumstances, could anything seem more trivial?' (Pinksen, 2009: 11). Marlowe, Nashe, and Peele, along with Greene, had all written plays for Edward Alleyn. There is no documented connection between any of these four writers and William Shakespeare. Edmund Malone ratified this 'possible allusion' to Shakespeare nearly two and a quarter centuries ago, long before the majority of significant finds of early modern theatrical and literary history. With the accretion of time and authoritative repetition, it has hardened into an accepted 'fact' and an essential prop of Shakespearean mythography that cannot safely be removed lest the roof cave in.

Yet the continued reliance on this prop by orthodox scholars, and their unwillingness to question or re-evaluate it, essentially only emphasises the inherent weakness of the orthodox position. The alternative, as described by Erne, sounds very much like the Shakespeare authorship question:

> *'Stripping bare our image of Shakespeare of four centuries of (mis-) interpretation is hermeneutically impossible. If it were possible, the results of a biographer might be less than rewarding, both aesthetically and economically. Some of the evidence which generations of Shakespeareans*

> *have hardened into fact would become ambiguous, riddled with difficulties. The figure we seem to know might take on shady contours and the character hidden behind it would become difficult to relate to.'*
>
> (Erne, 1998: 439)

I disagree with Erne that stripping away four centuries of (mis-)interpretation is impossible; it is only impossible within the orthodox paradigm because, I contend, that paradigm would begin to collapse. With both the upstart Crow and Chettle's apology excised from William Shakespeare's timeline, the troublesome 'Lost Years' would lengthen by another two. The first mention of Shakespeare in a literary context then becomes the publication of *Venus and Adonis* in June 1593; in a theatrical context, payment as a shareholder in December 1594 (recorded in 1595).

I have demonstrated that there is questionable evidence being taken as fact to support the orthodox paradigm in the consensus readings of both Chettle's apology and Greene's 'upstart Crow' passage. Other evidence, which cannot be explained under this paradigm, is ignored, made little of, explained away, or simply not noticed, because, just like the anomalous playing cards, it doesn't fit the conceptual framework.

5.3 A Suspected Metamorphosis

Gabriel Harvey is not the only contemporary writer who may have attempted to express his doubts about the attribution of *Venus and Adonis*. Nor are his works the only primary sources that it can be argued support the early stirrings of the Shakespeare authorship question. It is worth asking, then, why doubt over Shakespeare's authorship did not take hold in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. It is possible that the answer to this question lies in the Bishops' Ban of 1599.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, prime mover of Marlowe's 1593 prosecution through the High Commission, was also the chief censor of Elizabethan

publications. On 1 June 1599, along with Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, he issued an edict now known as the Bishops' Ban, which detailed works to 'bee presentlye broughte to the Bishop of London to be burnte.' Harvey and Nashe were marked out for special attention, the entire corpus of each to be destroyed[87] though Harvey had not published a book since *New Letter* in the year of Marlowe's disappearance.[88] It is also notable that the general category of 'English histories' is included in this list of works considered dangerous to the authorities – not only because this is a category of drama in which Marlowe and Shakespeare specialised, but because the inclusion of that category acknowledges the power of those who write historical narratives (history as story, rather than empirical 'fact').

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' edict as *Davyes Epigrams, with marlowes Elegyes*. (These epigrams include No.7, *In Faustum*, about a young man who can't afford a horse nevertheless riding to the theatre, to the river, and to the bawdy house). Seven months after this book was banned by the bishops, an entry in the Stationers Register shows Eleazar Edgar registering '*A book called Amours by J.D. with certen oyr [other] sonnettes by WS'*. Whether this is an attempt to license the same book under a new guise is an open question: either this volume was not printed or it did not survive. But 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'. Though there are other candidates

[87] Fortunately for scholars, this edict was not subsequently enforced.
[88] Though some scholars believe he was the author of, or had a hand in, *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe*, which purports to be the work of the Cambridge barber Richard Lichfield.

for the initials 'WS', 1599 had seen the publication of *Passionate Pilgrim*, an anthology of verse whose success was dependent upon readers believing all the poems to be written by William Shakespeare (whereas some were by other authors, one of them Christopher Marlowe) and we can therefore infer that the name had some fame attached to it. Given his clear popularity, 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 described as the first documented example of some confusion – deliberate or otherwise – between Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare.

The first two items on the bishops' list of books to be burnt – Joseph Hall's *Satires* and John Marston's *Pygmalion* – are also, interestingly, books that have subsequently been cited as containing evidence of contemporary doubt about Shakespeare's authorship. Developing an argument first raised by Walter Bagley, Baconian B.G. Theobald demonstrated that Marston and Hall appear to believe that *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* were written under a pseudonym. Nicknaming this author Labeo, Hall writes

> *'Long as the craftie Cuttle lieth sure*
> *In the black Cloud of his thick vomiture;*
> *Who list complaine of wronged faith or fame*
> *When he may shift it on to anothers name.'* (Hall et al., 1824: 73)

Though *Venus* and *Lucrece* are not identified by name, references to the stylistic elements of both Shakespeare poems in other passages addressed to 'Labeo' make them strong candidates as Hall's target,[89] and Marston's passage on 'Labeo' paraphrases lines from *Venus and Adonis*. H.N. Gibson, who argued against a range of authorship

[89] In Satire 1 of *Satires Book VI*, Hall satirises Labeo for repeatedly beginning his stanzas 'But' and 'O' ('While big *but oh's!* each stanza can begin') and his use of hyphenated words as epithets ('In epithets to join two words in one /Forsooth, for adjectives can't stand alone') (Hall, 1824: 159-60). In *Lucrece* it is noticeable how many stanzas begin with 'But' or 'Oh', and in both *Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis* hyphenated words are employed as epithets.

candidates in his book *The Shakespeare Claimants*, says 'Theobald is ... probably correct in his identification of the poems concerned'(Gibson, 1962: 63) and called the argument 'the one piece of evidence in the whole Baconian case that demands serious consideration.' When Bagley first put forward the evidence later expanded by Theobald, 'some Stratfordians accepted it at its face value, but said that Hall and Marston were mistaken'.

What has been missed, however, is that the very existence of sixteenth century doubt about the authorship of works published under the name William Shakespeare is significant, if William Shakespeare is as active and present on the London theatre scene at this time as is generally believed. When *Pygmalion* and the *Satires* were published in 1598, Marston was establishing himself as a playwright (Knowles, 2004) and both Marston and Hall could presumably have confirmed the author's identity for themselves were Shakespeare – as orthodox scholars assume - physically present and well-known on the London literary scene. What is more, Marston was from Warwickshire, Shakspere's home county. Indeed, his father was appointed counsel to the city of Coventry, and was lawyer to Thomas Green, solicitor to the corporation of Stratford-on-Avon (Knowles, 2004), who has been described by orthodox Shakespearean scholar Dave Kathman as 'one of Shakespeare's closest friends in Stratford'.[90] Green, whose 1614 diary refers to 'cousin Shakespeare', and who was living at New Place in 1609, was sponsored to enter the Middle Temple by John Marston and his father in 1595.[91]

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[90] http://shakespeareauthorship.com/friends.html

[91] Another orthodox anomaly can be noted with respect to Thomas Greene, a published poet himself, who lived in the house of William Shakspere in the year *Shake-speare's Sonnets* were published. His diary shows no awareness whatsoever that his 'cousin' was a writer, and nor does he mention Shakspere's death in 1616. Stopes commented 'It has always been a matter of surprise to me that Thomas Greene, who mentioned the death of Mr.Barber, did not mention the death of Shakespeare.' She offers the explanation 'Perhaps there was no need for him to make a memorandum of an event so important to the town and himself.' JIMINEZ, R. L. (2008) Shakespeare in Stratford and London: Ten Eye-Witnesses Who Saw Nothing. *"Report My Cause Aright": The Shakespeare Oxford Society 50th Anniversary Anthology 1957-2007*. New York, The Shakespeare Oxford Society.

John Marston, then, had solid Warwickshire and Stratford-on-Avon connections, and stood surety for 'one of William Shakespeare's closest friends' three years before he published his satirical comment about Labeo. If the talented author of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* was the Stratford man, John Marston would have been well-placed to know. Why then does Marston refer to him by Hall's nickname of 'Labeo', a celebrated lawyer of ancient Rome who lost favour with the Emperor Augustine for opposing the emperor's views?

> *'So* Labeo *did complaine his loue was stone,*
> *Obdurate, flinty, so relentlesse none:*
> *Yet* Lynceus *knowes, that in the end of this,*
> *He wrought as strange a metamorphosis.'*
> (Marston, 1598: 25)

The first two lines reference lines 200-1 of *Venus and Adonis*:

> *'Art thou obdurate, flintie, hard as steele?*
> *Nay more then flint, for stone at raine relenteth'*

Commentators on Marston's poem note that Marston is comparing the metamorphosis of Pygmalion to that of Adonis, but the grammar of the sentence suggests that Labeo is the subject who 'wrought as strange a metamorphosis'.[92]

By 1598, when Marston's *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* was published, orthodox scholars assert that William Shakespeare was the leading playwright for the Lord Chamberlain's men, as well as being a shareholder and (at least occasionally) an actor. Most scholars believe that by this time the three parts of *Henry VI*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Comedy of*

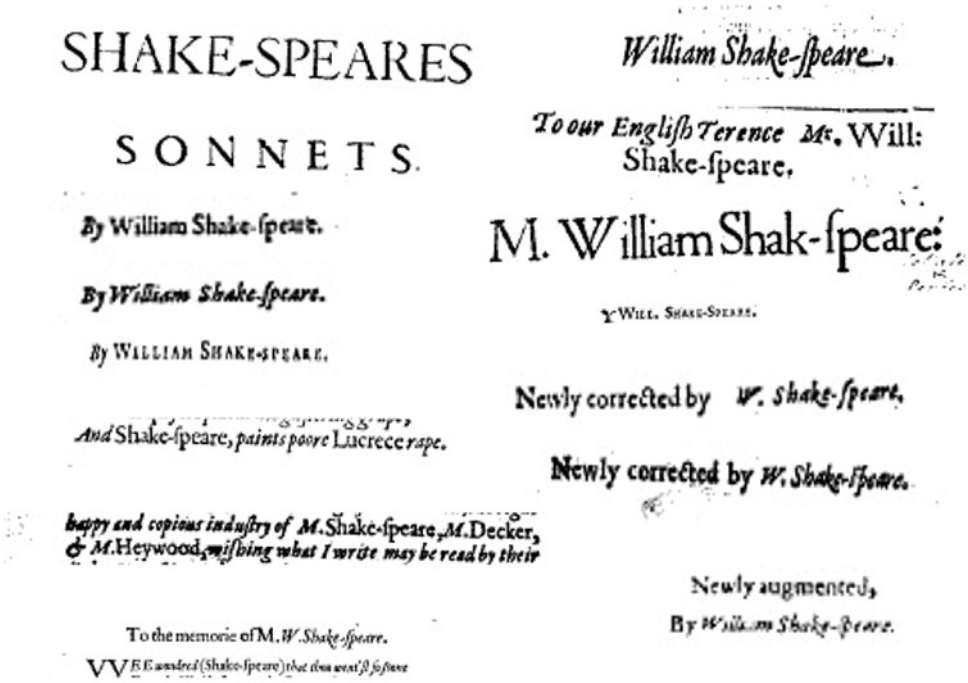
---

[92] Lynceus, an argonaut, was the jealous murderer of Castor who participated in the hunt for the Calydonian boar. He was said to have excellent sight and see through trees, walls and underground. It was a boar, of course, that gored Adonis to death after he repeatedly refused the advances of the older and physically repellent Venus. It seems likely in the circumstances that Lynceus is Marston's nickname for Hall, who has seen through the 'strange metamorphosis' of Labeo. If the nickname Labeo suggests that Marston and Hall believe the author is Francis Bacon (which seems likely, as Labeo was a lawyer who fell out of favour) the reason would be Bacon's falling out of favour with the Queen in 1593. The author of the work is seen as being identified with Adonis and Venus is clearly seen then as standing for the Queen.

Errors, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* had all been written and staged. The primary source evidence for Shakspere's involvement on the London theatre scene to this point is, however, somewhat scanty, consisting of a single payment to him and other share-holders in 1595. The listing of 'William Shakespeare' as 'principle comedian' in the 1598 cast list of Ben Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour* should strictly be considered secondary evidence, since Jonson's *Works*, the only place it appears, was published in 1616 some months after William Shakspere's death. But even if this is accepted as primary evidence, we might consider that the authorship doubts of Marston and Hall rather count against Shakespeare's visibility (at least in a physical sense) on the London literary scene in this year.

If Marston was not certain about the identity of William Shakespeare in 1598, this would certainly change by 1601, when it appears he has entered the 'inner circle' of those associated with Shakespeare, as one of the contributors to Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr*. The other contributors besides Shakespeare and Marston are Ben Jonson (future editor of the *First Folio*), and George Chapman. George Chapman, who as we have seen completed Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* in 1598, was a friend of Matthew Roydon, associate of the Derby and Northumberland literary circle, and was patronised by Marlowe's former patron Thomas Walsingham. Shakespeare's contribution to the collection of 'new compositions of seuerall moderne Writers whose names are subscribed to their seuerall workes' was signed William Shake-speare.

5.4 Hyphenated Shake-speare


SHAKE-SPEARES
SONNETS.
By William Shake-speare.
By William Shake-speare.
By WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE.
And Shake-speare, paints poore Lucrece rape.
happy and copious industry of M. Shake-speare, M. Decker, & M. Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their
To the memorie of M. W. Shake-speare.
WVE E wonder (Shake-speare) that thou went'st so soone

William Shake-speare.
To our English Terence Mr. Will: Shake-speare.
M. William Shak-speare:
Y WILL. SHAKE-SPEARE.
Newly corrected by W. Shake-speare.
Newly corrected by W. Shake-speare.
Newly augmented,
By William Shake-speare.

The frequent hyphenation of Shakespeare's name in early texts has not been satisfactorily explained. An analysis of texts available on EEBO (Early English Books Online) reveals that of the 58 quartos and octavos of plays published between 1593 and 1630, half of those not published anonymously (a third of the total number of texts) showed the author's name as hyphenated:

Shakespeare	- 19
Shakespere	- 1
Shake-speare	- 18
Shak-speare	- 1
Anonymous	- 19

Inclusion of poetry texts brings down the percentage of hyphenated occurrences, largely because *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* (reprinted numerous times, with 14 and 6 extant editions respectively from this period) have the non-hyphenated form of the name

appended to the dedication. Even so, the hyphenated form Shake-speare appears on 36% of all the poetry and drama texts attributed at the time of their publication to Shakespeare between 1593 and 1630. It appears most notably in the 1609 *Sonnets*, both on the title page ('Shake-speares Sonnets neuer before imprinted') and as a running header on every verso page. There are also four instances of the hyphenated form in the 1623 *First Folio*.

Randall McLeod's suggestion that hyphenation is due to the need to separate the descenders of the long-k and long-s in kerning fonts (McLeod, 1981) does not to stand up to scrutiny. In the case of the 1609 *Sonnets*, Shake-speare is printed in capitals throughout, suggesting hyphenation is a choice rather than a necessity. Analysis of the fonts used on the title pages of the plays reveals that twelve of the nineteen quartos authored by 'Shake-speare' do not use kerning forms of s and k, indicating that hyphenation is not for the reason McLeod suggests. In two quarto title-pages, the name is broken over two lines, but in the remaining ten neither font nor layout demand hyphenation. In addition, five quartos by 'Shakespeare' display the non-hyphenated form in a kerning font, without the apparent need to hyphenate. In three of the five, an ascending long form of 's' is used, but on the title pages of the 1603 quarto of *Richard III*, and the 1619 quarto of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, the descenders of both a long-k and long-s are printed without the separation device of a hyphen. In the majority of cases, then, hyphenation cannot be explained by necessity.

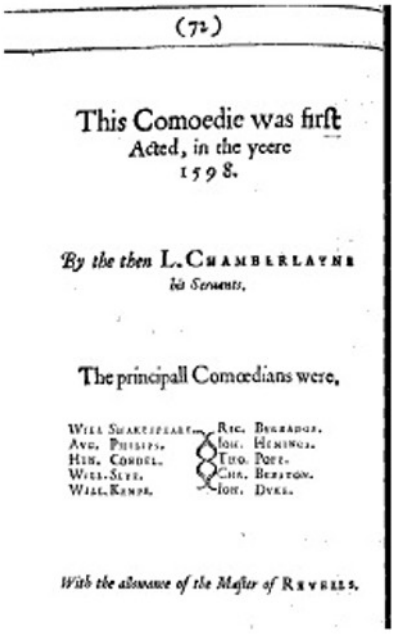
Amongst those of Shakespeare's play quartos advertised on their title pages as 'newly corrected' by the author, the non-hyphenated form of the name appears only once; the author's involvement in the publication of these 'corrected' quartos is speculative, but it nevertheless seems more likely that he would have been involved in

'corrected' versions than in the so-called 'bad quartos'. If so, the hyphenated form of his name appears to have been his preference.

Shakespeare's poetic contribution to Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr* (1601), as one of 'the best and chiefest of our moderne writers, with their names subscribed to their particular workes' also suggests a relationship between hyphenation and authorisation. Contribution of poems on the curious theme of 'the Turtle and the Phoenix', seems to have required, at least in the sense of answering to a brief, the author's direct involvement. There is no explanation as to why Shakespeare's name appear here in the hyphenated form, Shake-speare, when the names of Ben Johnson (as he then styled himself), George Chapman, and John Marston are not. The name is in a kerning font, but, as demonstrated by the title pages of *Richard III* (1603) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1619), kerning does not necessitate hyphenation. *Love's Martyr* was printed by Richard Field (authorised printer of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593) and published by Edward Blount (publisher of Shakespeare's *First Folio* of 1623), giving the volume an authoritative Shakespearean pedigree. In the absence of McLeod's 'kerning' argument, *Love's Martyr* raises the possibility that the author himself specified his name be printed as 'William Shake-speare'.

Other texts that hyphenate Shakespeare include the first reference to the author in another text. The anonymous *Willobie his Avisa* (1594) informs us that it is 'Shake-speare, paints poore Lucrece rape.' At the other end of Shakespeare's writing career, John Webster, in his *The White Divel, or, The Tragedy of Paulo Giordano Vrsini, Duke of Brachiano* (1612) refers to 'the copious industry of M.Shake-speare', hyphenating only this name among the several playwrights he credits as his models. In both *Willobie his Avisa* and *The White Divel* the name is in a Roman non-kerning font. Ben Jonson's *Works* (1616) lists a 'WILL SHAKESPEARE as 'Principall Comoedian' in *Every Man*

In His Humour (1598), but a hyphenated 'WILL. SHAKE-SPEARE' as 'Principle Tragoedian' in *Sejanus* (1603).



(72)

This Comoedie was first
Acted, in the yeere
1598.

By the then L. CHAMBERLAYNE
his Seruants.

The principall Comœdians were,

WILL SHAKESPEARE. RIC. BURBADGE.
AVG. PHILIPS. IOH. HEMINGS.
HEN. CONDEL. THO. POPE.
WILL. SLYE. CHR. BEXTON.
WILL. KEMPE. IOH. DVKE.

With the allowance of the Master of REVELLS.

(315)

The Persons of the Play:

TIBERIVS.

DRVSVS *sr.* | SEJANVS.
NERO. | LATIARIS.
DRVSVS *jr.* | VARRO.
CALIGVLA. | MACRO.
ARRVNTIVS. | COTTA.
SELEVC. | APER.
SABINVS. | HATERIVS.
LEPIDVS. | SANQVINIVS.
CORDVS. | PONTONIVS.
GALLVS. | POSTHVMIVS.
REGVLVS. | TREO.
TERENTIVS. | MINVTIVS.
LACO. | SATRIVS.
EUDEMVS. | NATTA.
RVFVS. | OPSIVS.

TRIBVNI.

AGRIPPINA. { LIVIA. SOSIA.

PRAECONES. | LICTORES.
FLAMEN. | MINISTRI.
TVBICINES. | TIBICINES.
NVNTIVS. | SERVI.

THE SCENE

ROME.

The principall Tragedians were,

RIC. BURBADGE. WILL. SHAKE-SPEARE.
AVG. PHILIPS. IOH. HEMINGS.
WIL. SLY. HEN. CONDEL.
IOH. LOWIN. ALEX. COOKE.

Given Jonson's reputation for taking meticulous care in the presentation of his texts, and given that hyphenation is not explained by the requirements of font or layout, the two forms of the name might reasonably be regarded as distinct. Shake-speare is hyphenated four times in the prefatory material to the *First Folio* (1623), three times in Leonard Digges's poem and again in the poem by I.M. (usually taken to be James Mabbe, though the initials also work for John Marston). The name's appearance on the following page in unhyphenated form but in kerning font, again disproves McLeod.

John Davies of Hereford uses the hyphenated form when he refers to 'our English Terence, Mr. Will: Shake-speare' (*The Scourge of Folly*, 1611). Though he writes epigrams addressed to dozens of people, including Francis Bacon, Sir John Davies, Fulke Greville, Thomas Campion, Samuel Daniel, Ben Jonson, John Fletcher, John Marston, Francis Beaumont, Michael Drayton, George Chapman and Inego Jones,

Shake-speare is the only one whose surname is hyphenated. The Shake-speare epigram (159) is followed by two others containing hyphenated addressees, but both are pseudonyms: epigram 160 is addressed to 'No-body' and epigram 161 to 'Some-body'. John Davies's use of hyphens only in made-up names might reasonably suggest that John Davies believes 'Shake-speare' to be a pseudonym.

The hyphenated form was not exclusively used to indicate a pseudonym. Irwin Matus notes a small number of examples where real names were hyphenated, the most significant being that of the printer of seditious materials Robert Waldegrave, who after 1582 consistently printed his name as Walde-grave (Matus, 1994: 28-30). However, the man usually taken to be the author of Shakespeare's works did not, in any of the six signatures that have come down to us, hyphenate his name. Indeed, he did not even spell it the same way across the six signatures, which is highly unusual for a literate Elizabethan, and Jane Cox has postulated that up to four of the six signatures were made by scribes (Thomas and Cox, 1985: 33). Matus's argument that some of the hyphenation in Shakespeare's quartos is due to printers repeating title page information from one edition does not withstand scrutiny (Price, 2001: 60). The extensive hyphenation of Shakespeare's name continues to be both inexplicable under the orthodox narrative, and highly unusual. For non-Stratfordians, use of the hyphenated form might be read as indicating some deliberate division between the author (Shakes-speare) and the shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (who can be safely identified, from primary sources, as the glover's son from Stratford) – a division that appears to have been maintained by the author himself.

5.5 'Errors' and Inexplicable Data

The orthodox paradigm is littered with many more 'errors' and items of inexplicable data than there is space to list here; and dozens of them are catalogued in Price's *Unorthodox Biography*, Cockburn's *The Bacon Shakespeare Question*, John Michell's *Who Wrote Shakespeare?*, Pinksen's *Marlowe's Ghost* and other non-Stratfordian sources and websites. I have thus confined myself to exploring four items that have not previously been re-interpreted under a Marlovian paradigm.

5.5.1 Marston's Tense

We return to the apparent authorship doubt of John Marston, whose Warwickshire pedigree and friendship with Shakespeare's 'cousin' Thomas Greene should allow us to give some credence to his concerns. It does seem that he believed in 1598 that the author of *Venus and Adonis* might be Francis Bacon, and that three years subsequently he was one of only four writers commissioned to write poems for *Love's Martyr*, another of whom signed his contribution William Shake-speare. Is there any evidence that he changed his mind about the author's identity subsequent to 1598? There may be.

It is generally accepted that John Marston is the author of the manuscript work, *The Newe Metamorphosis*, which refers to 'kynde Kit Marlowe'. This tribute is rarely quoted in its full form, because the full form contains a puzzle; or to orthodox scholars, an error. Marston, writing in 1600 or later, refers, in the present tense, to Marlowe completing Hero's narrative:

> *'kynde Kit Marlowe, if death not prevent-him,*
> *shall write her story, love such art hath lent-him'*
> (Marston, 1600)

It seems inconceivable that an experienced writer such as Marston should use the present tense erroneously. Even straining to meet the rhyme (lent/prevent) within the metrical requirements does not explain his use of the future tense 'shall' at a time when Marlowe is supposed to be at least seven years dead. As we have seen, the anger of the author of Shake-speare's sonnets towards the Rival Poet would be more than adequately explained if Marlowe's plan was to complete the unfinished *Hero and Leande*r at some future time, when he hoped to be resurrected, and then discovered the task had been handed over to George Chapman. Marston's use of present tense, which within the orthodox narrative is so inexplicable that the rest of the quote besides 'kynde Kit Marlowe' has been routinely ignored, is unproblematic under Marlovian authorship theory.

5.5.2 Covell's Gaveston

There is an additional Shakespeare allusion which contains what has widely been considered an 'error' but which lends weight to the idea that certain writers of the period understood 'William Shakespeare' to be Marlowe's pseudonym. The second earliest allusion to Shakespeare in a printed text is a marginal note in William Covell's *Polimanteia.* The note reads:

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

Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R.Woudhuysen explain his apparent error thus:

> 'Carried away with enthusiasm, Covell appears to have added *Piers Gaveston* (1594?) – strongly influenced by Shakespeare but written by Michael Drayton – to Shakespeare's authentic poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594).'
>
> (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, 2007: 5)

It seems odd that Covell would make such a mistake given the prominence of Michael Drayton's name on the dedicatory epistle accompanying the poem, but an error must necessarily be assumed under the orthodox paradigm. However, it is perfectly possible that Covell was not making a mistake, but rather recognised that *Venus* and *Lucrece* were written by the same author who had eloquently depicted Piers Gaveston in *Edward II*, at least a year before the publication of Drayton's poem. That Covell believes Shakespeare to be a pseudonym for Marlowe would also be strengthened by his observation that the author is 'Watson's heyre'. It is well-documented that Marlowe was a friend of Thomas Watson's, both from the legal accounts of the Bradley slaying, and from the published dialogue between Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey. There is no evidence whatsoever that Thomas Watson was connected with Shakspere of Stratford. If we allow ourselves to read Covell's comment from a Marlovian perspective, no error exists – Covell is saying that Marlowe, the man who put eloquence in the mouth of Piers Gaveston and was the natural heir to Thomas Watson, was the author (as 'Shak-speare') of Venus and Adonis and the Rape of Lucrece.[93] It is worth noting that Covell was a student at Christ's College, Cambridge, gaining his BA in 1585 (the same year as Marlowe) and his MA in 1588 (the year after Marlowe). Like Gabriel Harvey, therefore, he has a connection to Marlowe's Cambridge years.

Though Covell is unusual in conflating Marlowe and Shakespeare, he is not unique, and nor has he remained alone, in noting Shakespeare's debt to Watson. According to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Watson's sonnets 'appear to have been studied by Shakespeare' (Harvey, 1969: 874). It is clear from the dialogue of

[93] The hyphen here *is* accounted for by the requirements of the text's layout.

Gabriel Harvey and Thomas Nashe that Nashe and Watson are of the same social circle, and that both are friends of Marlowe. Other friends are mentioned by Harvey, all of them contemporary writers or musicians; Shakespeare is conspicuous by his absence.

In addition to Watson, the influence of Nashe, of whom Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost* is recognised to be a caricature (Nicholl, 2004), has been repeatedly detected by J.J.M.Tobin (2003, 2001, 1999, 1992, 1985, 1984, 1982, 1981, 1980, 1978a, 1978b) and the strongest influence of all is widely acknowledged to be Marlowe.[94] If the writer behind the works of Shakespeare is in fact Marlowe, the detection of his own style, and the influence of those in whose company he clearly spent his time, is understandable. Under the orthodox paradigm we must put it down to coincidence that Shakespeare's greatest influences were Marlowe and his social circle (primarily Watson and Nashe), despite the lack of corroborating evidence that the orthodox candidate was in any way connected to them. '[T]he greatest of Nashe's literary contemporaries is the one never mentioned by name in his pamphlets' says Nicholl, describing yet another piece in the catalogue of missing evidence for Shakespeare as 'a curious oversight' (Nicholl, 1984: 203). Shakespeare is everywhere absent.

5.5.3 Anne Cornwaleys Her Book

In 1852, esteemed Shakespeare biographer J. O. Halliwell-Phillips published a commentary on an item that was described in an 1844 Sotheby's Auction catalogue as

> *"SHAKESPEARE. A POETICAL MISCELLANY OF THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH, containing verses by Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford, Sir Edward Dyer, Vavasor, G. M., Sir P. Sidney, and Shakespeare; russia, 4 to."*

The item, known as the Cornwallis–Lysons manuscript and now in the Folger Library (Folger MS V.A.89), is identified on its second page, in a large, immature italic hand, 'Anne Cornwaleys her booke'. The poems copied within it are in a different hand, and

[94] A collection of scholarly quotes to back up this statement can be found in Appendix A.

include two unpublished sonnets that would later be attributed to Shakespeare, and another which would appear under Shakespeare's name in William Jaggard's 1599 anthology *The Passionate Pilgrim*.

The manuscript was exceptional, said Halliwell-Phillips in 'containing the earliest copy of any of Shakespeare's writings known to exist. The writing of the MS. is very early; and I very much doubt if any portion of the volume was written as late as 1590. If I am correct in this supposition, we have here a strong confirmation … that Shakespeare began to write at an earlier period than has been usually supposed.' An attempted revision of this sort leads to difficulties for the orthodox paradigm: as we have seen, the earliest possible allusion to Shakespeare in London is in 1592 (and is in any case doubtful), and the first published poem was *Venus and Adonis* in 1593. It may be in order to overcome such difficulties that Halliwell-Phillips later revised his estimate of latest date from 1590 to 1595. Subsequent commentators have seen fit to revise the date even later, despite the mismatch between a later date and Miss Cornwallis's adolescence.

Nevertheless this interesting piece of evidence is seemingly never mentioned in biographies, presumably because the absence of any documented or even speculative connection between the orthodox candidate and the Cornwallis family does not allow this piece of evidence to be woven into the biographical narrative. How did Anne Cornwallis, a young girl residing in a mansion just east of Bishopsgate Street Without, come to acquire unpublished poems by Shakespeare?

Oxfordians point out that Anne Cornwallis was the daughter of William Cornwallis, formerly of Brome, in Suffolk, who in the autumn of 1588 had purchased Fisher's Folly from the Earl of Oxford. It is believed that Oxford entertained a coterie of writers at the house, and that the poems (which include poems by Oxford) came from

manuscripts the earl left behind. Scholars initially assumed that Anne had copied the poems herself, but since they were transcribed in 'an accomplished secretary hand' it is now thought they were 'simply chosen to please a romantic adolescent and presented to Anne by a friend or relative'(Marshall, 2005).

The evidence, inexplicable under the orthodox paradigm, and dangerous because of a documented connection between Anne Cornwallis and a non-Stratfordian authorship candidate, is one of many free-floating dots of evidence that the Marlovian paradigm, also, allows to be joined as part of a larger narrative. Between 1588 and 1592, and falling precisely within the 1588-95 timeframe that Halliwell-Phillips identified, Marlowe's friend and fellow poet Thomas Watson was a tutor to the Cornwallis children (ostensibly to Anne's older brother John, but it is clear the daughters were also educated). It is thought likely that he was simultaneously working as a political agent, since the family were Catholic and the father was under surveillance for recusancy from 1587 (Chatterley, 2004).

The first part of the manuscript contains seven poems autographed by John Bentley. Bentley's association with Marlowe is documented by Thomas Dekker in *A Knight's Conjuring* (Dekker, 1607: Kf4v). That the Cornwallis copybook contains love poems by poets known to Watson might be considered with interest alongside the fact that the poet was involved in an attempt by his wife's younger brother, the musician Thomas Swift, to woo another Cornwallis daughter. Legal documents recount that Watson was involved in a scheme whereby Swift (who was a resident in the Cornwallis household), attempted to blackmail Anne Cornwallis's fourteen-year-old sister, Frances, into marrying him. The document (drawn up by another of Watson's brothers-in-law, the attorney Hugh Swift) was 'hurriedly effected before morning lessons in front of witnesses' and Watson was later accused of being 'the plot-layer of this matter'.

Thomas Watson died of unknown causes in September 1592 before the case was heard in Star Chamber, and his death was registered at St Bartholomew-the-Less (in the grounds of the hospital) ten days before Hugh Swift's in the same place.

There is no need to ignore the Cornwallis copybook, or to posit abandoned manuscripts, when a person well-versed in the work of contemporary English poets, and personally acquainted with several of them, was working as a tutor to the Cornwallis children. Under the Marlovian paradigm, Thomas Watson provides the means by which a collection of poetry, including unpublished sonnets later identified as Shakespeare's, is gifted to Anne Cornwallis.

5.5.4. Vaughan On Valladollid

In July 1602, a letter (transcribed by Leslie Hotson in *The Death of Christopher Marlowe*) was sent by William Vaughan to 'the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sir Thomas Egerton, Sir Robert Cecil, and the Rest of the Council' reporting the activities of Jesuit priests abroad. A section of the letter concerns a man who had entered the seminary at Valladollid, according to the Colleges's *Liber Alumnorum,* as John Matthew alias Christopher Marler.[95] Vaughan writes

> *'In the said seminary there is . . . one Christopher Marlor (as he will be called), but yet for certainty his name is Christopher, sometime master in arts of Trinity College in Cambridge, of very low stature, well set, of a black round beard, not yet priest, but to come over in the mission of the next year ensuing. . . '*
>
> (Hotson, 1925: 60)

Hotson uses this letter to argue that the Christopher Morley for whom the Privy Council intervened just before his commencement to M.A. in 1587 was the poet, not Christopher Morley of Trinity, on the basis they would surely not intervene on behalf of a man who was subversive enough to become a Jesuit priest. What Hotson did not

[95] "*Joannes Matheus* (*alias Christopher Marlerus*) *Cantabrigiensis admissus est in hoc Collegium die 30 Maii an° 1599* ". [John Matthew alias Christopher Marler of Cambridge is admitted into this college on 30 May 1599.]

know was that Christopher Morley of Trinity had died in 1596, his will being proved there by the Vice Chancellor's Court after his having been a fellow at Trinity for a decade. In the light of this information some Marlovians have become convinced that the man at Valladollid from 1599 to 1602 is Marlowe himself, although how a man could expect to remain hidden using his own name is difficult to explain.[96] Peter Farey has argued convincingly against this, and it seems more likely that the Valladollid man is Trinity graduate John Matthew, using as an alias the name of a former tutor he knew to be dead (Farey, 2010).[97]

What remains interesting, and what Hotson describes as an 'odd coincidence', is that the author of the letter is the same William Vaughan who two years earlier in *The Golden Grove* (1600*)* wrote the only reasonably accurate account of Marlowe's death to be published until Hotson's own book three hundred and twenty-five years later. Vaughan, compared with most of his contemporaries, seems to have been well-informed in the matter of Marlowe's death, probably due to his court connections: his step-mother, Lettice Vaughan, was sister-in-law to Dorothy Vaughan nee Devereux, the sister of the Earl of Essex (Nicholl, 2002: 93). If there were any rumours that Marlowe's death was too convenient, and was suspected of being faked, Vaughan is likely to have heard them. This might explain not only his interest in this man of so similar a name, but also the physical description. There is no reason why Vaughan would know what Marlowe looked like, but he wants to inform the Privy Council (who would have met Marlowe when he responded in person to their warrant on 20 May 1593) that this particular Christopher Marl-, is 'of very low stature, well set, of a black

[96] Nevertheless, this was successfully achieved over a much smaller geographical distance even in our recent and relatively well-connected times. Johnny Sterling Martin faked his own death in 1979 and lived under his own name for 20 years in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina just 150 miles from his original home, before being spotted by one of his ex-wives http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10924038/from/ET/ Valladollid is 1000 miles from London; a significant distance in 1602.
[97] FAREY, http://marlowe-shakespeare.blogspot.com/2010/07/john-matthew-alias-christopher-marlowe.html. Mathew left Trinity the year Morley died.

round beard.' We cannot take this as certain proof that Vaughan suspected the Valladollid priest to be the poet, but the 'odd coincidence' that the writer of this letter was well-versed in the official version of the Deptford incident, and the otherwise unnecessary physical description, would be neatly explained by that reading of the evidence. The physical description is not detailed enough to apprehend this Jesuit should he find his way to England (especially if he shaved), and is not sufficient to identify any particular man unless that man was already known to the letter's recipients.

5.6 Jonson's Ambiguities

Ben Jonson is central to any discussion of the Shakespeare authorship question. Jonson is given in myth to have had a particularly close relationship with Shakespeare, as indicated by the imagined wit battles at the Mermaid Club, and the unverifiable anecdotes about 'latten spoons'. It is Jonson who in his commendatory poem in the *First Folio (*1623) provides the first documented link between the works of Shakespeare and the man from Stratford-upon-Avon with his reference to 'sweet swan of Avon' (the second linking reference being from Leonard Digges in the same volume: 'thy Stratford moniment'). Jonson also confirms a separation between Marlowe and Shakespeare when he effectively maps the lineage of Shakespeare's plays:

> *'how far thou dist our Lily out-shine,*
> *or sporting Kid or Marlowes mighty line.'*

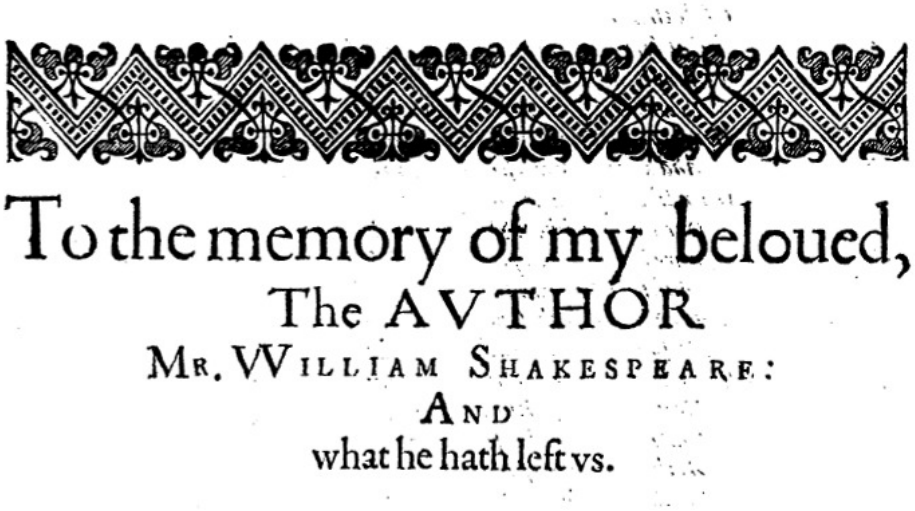
Jonson's testimony on Shakespeare, however, is anything but unambiguous. Jonson's cast lists, headed by 'Will. Shakespeare' as 'Principal Comedian' in 1598 and 'Will. Shake-Speare' as 'Principal Tragedian' in 1603, have already been mentioned. These cast lists were published in 1616, just after Shakspere died; they do not appear on earlier

quarto versions of the plays. As Price notes, this means that 'during Shakspere's lifetime, Jonson wrote nothing about Shakespeare – or Shakspere – by name, a surprising omission for an author who wrote explicitly about most of his literary colleagues'(Price, 2001: 68).

Having listed Will Shakespeare as a comedian in *Every Man In His Humour* (1598), Jonson may have mercilessly mocked the Stratford shareholder as unintentional clown Sogliardo in *Every Man Out Of His Humour* (1599) the following year. The words 'Non, sanz droit' (no, without right) are written on John Shakespeare's first application for arms (1596), indicating that the application was rejected. The phrase appears again without a comma 'Non sanz droit' (not without right) on the second application, which some have taken to be Shakspere's motto, although it was never used. Jonson's Sogliardo, who has bribed officials in order to acquire the status of a gentleman through a coat of arms, has the motto 'Not without mustard'; a joke perhaps at a man who mistook the herald's refusal as a motto. Sogliardo has been accepted as a satirical hit at Shakspere by scholars including E.K. Chambers and H. Gibson. That Schoenbaum rejected the allusion is not surprising given its context: Sogliardo's coat of arms, the crest of which most unusually depicts a 'Boar without a head, rampant' is described as very fitting: 'I commend the Herald's wit, he has deciphered him well: A swine without a head, without brain, wit, anything indeed, ramping to gentility' (III.iv).

It is hard to reconcile the character of Sogliardo with a man of whom Jonson made the declaration 'I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry'; but reading Jonson's references through a non-Stratfordian paradigm removes the problem. The insulting portrait would be aimed at the theatre company shareholder who had recently succeeded in deceiving and bribing the herald into obtaining a coat of

arms, William Shakspere.[98] The love would be reserved for *the author* William Shakespeare, the man to whom Jonson's poem is pointedly addressed:


To the memory of my beloued,
The AVTHOR
Mr. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE:
AND
what he hath left vs.

Though Jonson declined to say anything about the author in Shakepeare's lifetime, and published no personal recollection of him during his own, the posthumous publication of Jonson's commonplace book, *Timber, or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter* (1641) contains a small passage that suggests he had personal knowledge of the man behind the works.

> 'De Shakspeare nostrat. - *I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakspeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, "Would he had blotted a thousand," which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour, for I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature, had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped.* "Sufflaminandus erat*," as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so, too. Many times he fell into those things, could not escape laughter, as when he said in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him, "Cæsar, thou dost me wrong." He replied, "Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause;" and such like, which were*

[98] That Shakespeare's coat of arms was wrongly awarded is confirmed by it being one of several objected to by the York Herald in 1602. The 'errors, exaggerated claims and misrepresentations' are explored by PRICE (2001: 72-3). A bribe is implied in Sogliardo's exchange with Carlo; the application's many deficiencies, and the subsequent complaint 'lend weight to the suggestion that a bribe compensated for any deficiencies.'

> *ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned.'*
> (Jonson and Schelling, 1892: 23)

'In the remarks *de Shakespeare Nostrati* we have, doubtless, Ben's closet-opinion of his friend, opposed as it seems to be to that in his address to Britain [the Folio poem]' says Clement Ingleby (1874: 172). Reading this passage through the Marlovian paradigm, there are several points of particular interest. One is the description of his exchange with the players, who appear to have been proud that Shakespeare 'never blotted out a line' and thought Jonson's retort 'Would he had blotted a thousand' to be malicious. We are reminded of Heminges and Condell in their *Epistle to the Great Variety of Readers* in the *First Folio*, who said 'His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarse received from him a blot in his papers'.[99]

Jonson's comment that they thought his retort 'a malevolent speech' implies that it was not, so it is worth considering how 'Would he had blotted a thousand' might be interpreted as supportive of the author. The players' comment suggests that it was unusual to receive plays without authorial corrections; Jonson, being a writer himself, would know that corrections are an essential part of the writing process. If the plays being passed to the company by William Shakspere were not his own, but fair copies of the original author's foul papers, it would explain the lack of corrections. Ben Jonson's comment under this reading of the passage would therefore be that he wished the author had been in a position to present the plays as his own: not a malevolent suggestion. If there is another interpretation under which the line 'Would he had blotted a thousand' is not malevolent, it is not immediately apparent; no alternative has yet been offered by

[99] Heminges and Condell give their own interpretation of what the blotless papers mean; Jonson alludes to a different cause. If the cause were in line with Heminges and Condell's assumption, Jonson's retort could only correctly be interpreted as malevolence.

orthodox scholarship, who seem to accept Jonson's apparently contradictory attitudes to Shakespeare, and indeed this statement's malevolence, on the basis that Jonson's relationship with him was somewhat two-faced.[100]

Another non-Stratfordian point, originally raised by Greenwood, is that unblotted manuscripts do not sit well with the less-than-fluent signatures we have for Shakspere. 'But let the reader glance at Shakspere's signatures, and ask himself if it is possible to conceive that the Shakespearean dramas were not only written by the man who so wrote, but written without a blot! No; if the anti-Stratfordian case seems improbable here, surely the "orthodox" case is more improbable still, so improbable indeed, as to be incredible. And of two improbabilities, if such there be, it is wise to choose the less' (Greenwood, 1921: 31).

Jonson compares the author to Haterius, the Roman orator who spoke so freely that he offended his emperor. *Sufflaminandus erat* is translated in the 1892 edition of *Discoveries* as 'He had to be repressed.' That Shakespeare had to be repressed is not a traditional view of the author. 'Sufflaminandus erat' immediately follows Jonson's observation that the writer 'was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature, had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped.' Orthodox scholars must necessarily interpret the passage as referring to verbal fluency which Jonson sometimes halted, but the reference to the repression of Haterius[101] suggests a more political and public 'stopping' of the kind alluded to by the author of the sonnets, who complained of being 'tongue-tied by authority'. Under a Marlovian interpretation, it would be no coincidence that Jonson's wording echoes the Baines Note, where it was urged that 'all

[100] A necessary assumption if we are not to begin considering that Jonson is referring to two different people.
[101] Quintus Haterius, who was alive at the same time as the subject of one of Jonson's plays, Sejanus, was a fluent and popular orator whose 'eloquence while he lived was in the highest celebrity.'

men in christianitei ought to endevor that the mouth of so dangerous a member may be stopped.'

Jonson's description of the writer as 'honest' might seem difficult to tally with the court records discovered by Mateer, but as discussed, Marlowe was not unusual among writers of the period in being taken to court for unpaid loans. These incidents do not appear to have been public knowledge, and in any case they happened in the late 1580s, before Jonson was involved on the literary scene. Documentary evidence – the evasion of taxes and the hoarding of grain - would not support Shakspere's honesty either. Given the context, it seems more likely that the 'honesty' to which Jonson refers is more to do with speaking of things as he saw them; the very quality that would necessitate his mouth being stopped.

The 'open and free nature' of which Jonson speaks tallies well with what we know of Marlowe, both through his friends' posthumous report, and through the descriptions of his table talk from Richard Baines and Thomas Kyd. It was speaking too freely, Nashe said, that cost him his life, which 'he con[d]emned in comparison of the liberty of speech.' Despite the enthusiasm with which orthodox scholars apply Jonson's comments to their candidate, there is no other evidence which corroborates the idea that Shakspere was of an 'open and free nature' and plenty to contradict it: the complete absence of reported conversation suggests he was taciturn to a fault, rather than 'open', and that he had a 'free nature' is contradicted by the many documents relating to his business activities, which include pursuing debtors and their sureties through the courts, and his very conventional behaviour with respect to his daughters' education.[102]

[102] Shakspere certainly had the money to educate his daughters, but chose not to; the usual course for families of yeoman stock.

If the author William Shakespeare is really Marlowe, and we read the passage in *Timber* as indicating that Jonson knows this, what could he have meant by the reference to 'Sweet swan of Avon' in the poem addressed to the author in the First Folio?

> Sweet swan of *Avon!* what a sight it were
> To see thee in our waters yet appeare,
> And make those flights upon the bankes of *Thames,*
> That so did take *Eliza,* and our *James!* [103]

Swans are famously mute. Sogliardo – that possible parody of Shakspere – has a nephew who is described as 'kinsman to justice Silence'; a clear reference to Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 2*, but one that opens the possibility that Silence and Sogliardo are two names for the same man. There are several non-Stratfordian interpretations of 'Sweet swan of Avon!' but one possibility is that this is not a reference to the author but rather a mock oath, a dramatic cry of thanks, to the discreet man who allowed him to continue producing work by 'fronting' it for him.[104]

Jonson then continues in his address to 'The AUTHOR William Shakespeare', 'what a sight it were / To see thee in our waters yet appeare.' The orthodox paradigm cannot account for that small word 'yet', and the oddness of this phrase does not appear to have been noticed. This is not surprising, given that it makes no sense under the orthodox paradigm.[105] One might suggest that Jonson had no other way of making the line metrical, but the choice of 'yet' as padding (over other possibilities) would still be curious. Jonson was an accomplished poet, and would have had no problem meeting the metrical demands of the poem without torturing his sense. Substituting for 'waters' a

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[103] Under this interpretation, one might conclude Jonson intended 'take' to bear, in addition to 'enthral or capture' the secondary meaning of OED 11: **11.** *intr.* Of a plan, operation, etc.: To have the intended result; to succeed, be effective, take effect, 'come off'; the first documented usage in this context is 1622, the year before the Folio's publication.

[104] The best exploration of the idea that Shakespeare was a 'front', and useful comparison with the Hollywood writers blacklisted under McCarthyism in the 1950s, can be found in PINKSEN, D. (2008) *Marlowe's Ghost: The Blacklisting of the Man Who Was Shakespeare,* Bloomington, IN, iUniverse.

[105] It doesn't make sense under a Baconian or Oxfordian one either, and the same can be said with their application to 'Sufflaminandus erat'. Marlovian Theory is the only authorship paradigm in which the author was suppressed.

three-syllable word or phrase of the correct stress-pattern would entirely remove the need for the extra syllable:

> ‘*What a sight it were*
> *To see thee in our rivers’ flow appear.’*

Or Jonson could have achieved a full rhyme by substituting ‘appear’ and using the word ‘tributaries’:

> ‘*What a sight it were*
> *To see thee in our tributaries stir.’*

Indeed, one could argue the gentle pun of ‘tributaries’ would be even more satisfying than the neutral ‘waters’, in a poetic tribute to an author who had achieved wide acclaim. There are numerous poetic possibilities besides metrical padding.

But Jonson has written ‘yet’, and ‘yet’, combined with ‘what a sight it were’, suggests a surprising continuance; something that makes sense only under the Marlovian paradigm. Under the orthodox one, Shakespeare was never repressed, his art was not tongue-tied by authority (the sonnets being merely a literary exercise), and Jonson’s delight at the sight of the author’s continued appearance in literary waters is so inexplicable that it is simply missed.

6. *Plausibility*

It has been demonstrated that the particular biographical narrative through which we choose to view the subject of our study will powerfully influence our reading and interpretation of the evidence. Extending this idea further with respect to the Shakespeare authorship question, I have shown that the historical evidence yields significantly different interpretations when viewed through different authorship paradigms. How, then, are we to choose between two or more paradigms that are mutually exclusive? The obvious answer – that there is usually far more evidence for one than the other – is complicated when we take into account the existence of confirmation bias, the unconscious filtering out of evidence which conflicts with our pre-existing beliefs. The second most obvious answer, plausibility, is also more complex than it might at first appear.

It is important to understand that the evidence for all authorship candidates – including Shakspere of Stratford – is circumstantial.The fact remains that there is no primary source evidence linking William Shakspere of Stratford to the poems and plays attributed to him. There is strong primary evidence that he was a business man and theatre share-holder, scant and dubious primary evidence for his acting, but no documents at all from his lifetime that support his being a writer. The argument that 'his' name on the pre-1616 quartos constitutes primary evidence is circular, relying as it

does upon the assumption that the name William Shakespeare (or Shake-speare) refers to Shakspere of Stratford, and is not a pseudonym. Similarly, pre-1616 references in other texts to the writer William Shakespeare (or Shake-speare) cannot be assumed to refer to Shakspere; every single one is demonstrably an impersonal reference, requiring an awareness only of the author's works and writing style, not personal knowledge of the man. As Price concludes,

> *'the authorship attribution in the* Folio *constitutes the first historical evidence identifying Shakspere in personal terms as the dramatist. The evidence is posthumous, and for no other writer of Shakespeare's time period are we asked to trust such ambiguous and belated information, uncorroborated by any solid documentation left during the author's life, as evidence of authorship.'*
>
> (Price, 2001: 194)

I have confined this thesis largely to addressing the mythography created by Marlowe and Shakespeare biographers, and exploring what happens when primary texts are read through the Marlovian authorship paradigm. The main weaknesses of the orthodox paradigm are not part of my brief, and have in any case been thoroughly explored in Price's *Unorthodox Biography* (2001). However, there is a substantial body of evidence that argues against Shakspere's being the author of the works attributed to him that continues to go unacknowledged by orthodox academics.[106] Each piece of evidence on its own is not particularly significant, but taken together, the evidence creates reasonable doubt of Shakspere's authorship – at least for those whose reticular activating system allows them to consider an alternative paradigm. That most of the evidence consists in anomalies and missing data should not be discounted. David Schum, an academic and lawyer who has worked for the CIA and specialises in the analysis of evidence, began a presentation to the British Academy conference 'Enquiry, Evidence, and Facts' with an extract from Conan Doyle's *Silver Blaze* to demonstrate

[106] Owing to the impossibility of cross-paradigm communication, I am aware that orthodox scholars will disagree with this statement.

that the absence of something we would expect to be there qualifies in itself as an important piece of evidence that any explanatory narrative must account for (Schum, 2007).

> *' "Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"*
> *"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."*
> *"The dog did nothing in the night time!"*
> *"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.'*
> (Doyle, 2001: 413)

Is it plausible that a man as passionately involved in the English Language as this author, whose works garnered the praise of literary men throughout twenty years of output, would leave behind absolutely no letters to anyone?[107] That an author who filled his plays with educated woman, would leave his daughters functionally illiterate? That his genius would pass unnoticed at a grammar school which awarded university scholarships to talented pupils? Is it plausible that a writer whose vocabulary exceeded 29,000 words, and whose source books, as identified by scholars, number nearly 300, would leave no evidence of a single book owned, borrowed, or written in? That unlike every literate person of the period he would not have developed a consistent signature? That despite being one of the most famous authors of his generation whilst alive as well as afterwards, he would leave no trace of a life amongst other writers in London or elsewhere, not a scrap of unambiguous personal testimony? Is it plausible that a man who had no university education would use, in a metaphor, terms that are specific to Cambridge undergraduates, or show detailed knowledge of people who worked there or plays performed there (Cockburn, 1998: 223-34)?[108] That he would exhibit first-hand knowledge of Italian towns and cities that most scholars agree he never visited (Prior,

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[107] Given that letters to or from his contemporaries Ben Jonson, Thomas Nashe, Gabriel Harvey, Edmund Spenser, Samuel Daniel, George Peele, Michael Drayton, George Chapman, William Drummon, John Marston, John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Kyd and Philip Massinger are extant.
[108] See 'Shake-Speare a Cambridge University Man' in COCKBURN, N. B. (1998) *The Bacon Shakespeare Question : The Baconian Theory Made Sane,* Limpsfield Chart, N.B. Cockburn. Also BOAS, F. S. & SHAKESPEARE, W. A. M. (1923) *Shakespeare & the Universities, and Other Studies in Elizabethan Drama*, pp. vii. 272. Basil Blackwell: Oxford.

2008, Cockburn, 1998: 705-12)?[109] That despite being extremely litigious in all documented areas of his life he would attempt no legal redress when his work was plagiarised and pirated? Is it plausible that a follower of Ovid, who celebrated and pursued immortality through verse, and whose sonnets express a repeated yearning for literary immortality, could be the same man that scholars agree showed absolutely no interest in the publication of his work?[110] That after more than two hundred years of extensive research, with more than seventy documents relating to his life retrieved, the biography of Shakespeare alone (amongst two dozen writers of the period) would be bereft of those items we would expect to find if the biographical subject were a writer?

These are only a fraction of the inconsistencies that have led to the birth and continued rise of Shakespeare scepticism. Each one on its own may be (and in many cases has been) explained away by orthodox scholars; but taken together, non-Stratfordians believe they constitute a substantive case against the incumbent candidate's authorship. Stephen Greenblatt, aware of the sharp contrast between the biographical and literary Shakespeare, refers to him as 'a master of double consciousness'. Since human beings (with the possible exception of those suffering from multiple personality disorder) generally possess only a single consciousness, a far simpler explanation for this phenomenon is that we are actually looking at two different men, but this is the rationale that falls beyond the academic pale. For Shakespeare

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[109] Italian places of which Shakespeare demonstrates first-hand knowledge include Mantua, Padua, Milan, Verona, Venice, Bergamo and Bassano. Roger Prior's fascinating evidence for Shakespeare's first-hand knowledge of Bassano is defeated by his effort to shoe-horn this evidence into the orthodox narrative. A necessarily short sojourn abroad for the traditional author/actor/share-holder, and the freshness of the Italian references, leads to his suggestion that *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Othello* were all written in the first half of 1594.

[110] Erne's 2003 book made a powerful case for the author's yearning for literary immortality, but the evidence of this (from Shakespeare's own texts) is so at odds with the documentary evidence relating to the orthodox incumbent, Shakspere, that the idea is still widely rejected. ERNE, L. (2003) *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist,* Cambridge, UK ; New York, Cambridge University Press.

sceptics, the sheer quantity of 'special pleading' required to swallow the orthodox narrative makes it deeply implausible.

At first sight the Marlovian case, with its necessity for a faked death, looks no more plausible than the orthodox one. Certainly there is nothing but circumstantial evidence to support it. However, although the idea of a faked death seems initially to be absurd, it is not impossible, and there are a number of conditions that favour it. One is the lack of agreement between scholars as to whether Marlowe's inquest document covers a planned assassination, or is a truthful account of an accidental stabbing.

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 Poley, Frizer and 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 the Walsinghams 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).

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? Thus Downie and Kuriyama conclude Marlowe was stabbed as a result of a fight, as the inquest document states. The option that the inquest document covers up not a murder but a faked death is dismissed as ridiculous. Yet it is worth imagining oneself in Marlowe's position. Consider that you have been arrested under suspicion of heresy and atheism, a charge

for which you can be executed without evidence, as a government lawyer had recently confirmed. Thanks to your colleagues in the intelligence services, you have both the means and opportunity to escape prosecution; you certainly have the motive. The only conditions under which you can hope to escape without being pursued is if your prosecutors believe you are dead. Under these conditions, it is difficult to imagine a person who would *not* make a bid for their own survival.

Even these times of photographic passports and DNA analysis, people fake their own deaths in circumstances considerably less life-threatening than those Marlowe found himself in.[111] Naturally we only hear about a faked death where it has been exposed to be fraudulent, but that does not mean that a proportion of faked deaths are not successful, and indeed it would be somewhat extraordinary if the faked deaths that are discovered represent one hundred per cent of those carried out. The faked death theory offers the potential to answer the objections both of those who argue against assassination and those who argue against accident – explaining those elements of the documentation that hint at cover-up, while allowing that the people implicated in his death were friends and colleagues, rather than enemies, of Marlowe.

Though the purpose of the meeting cannot be known, it is relevant and should be considered. Marlowe at the time of the Deptford incident was on bail and reporting daily to their Lordships, obliged to stay 'within the verge', that is, twelve miles of the Queen's person. Although some scholars insist he was not in danger, it is clear from Richard Cosin's 1593 defence of ex officio oaths that Marlowe would be likely to face the death penalty for the accusations of atheism contained in the Baines Note. The all-day meeting (they talked in 'quiet sort') needs to be understood in this context. There

[111] A list of some of the most interesting faked deaths of recent times, including famous people (MP John Stonehouse, author Ken Kesey) and a man who 'posthumously' wrote a book under an assumed name, can be found at http://www.marloweshakespeare.org/FakedDeaths.html

appears to have been no intention on Marlowe's part to make the journey to Nonsuch for his daily attendance under his bail conditions.

As previously noted, the most striking quality that all three men present with Marlowe have in common is that they are accomplished liars. All three are also connected to Marlowe's patron Thomas Walsingham – a man whom Edward Blount, Marlowe's publisher, and publisher of Shakespeare's *First Folio*, acknowledges as Marlowe's friend five years later, in 1598. Peter Farey has discovered that the foreman of the jury – who did not hail from the geographical area from which the jury would usually be drawn – is also connected to Thomas Walsingham (Farey, 2009).

Poley's cover as a spy had been blown during the Babington plot, but he continued to work for the government as 'an operational chief or section head, running a small intelligence network in the Low Countries, and reporting to Vice-Chamberlain Heneage and the Cecils' (Nicholl, 2002: 299). A payment to Poley covering 8 May to 8 June 1593 states explicitly that he was in the Queen's service 'all the aforesaid tyme':

> *'To Robert Poolye upon a warrant signed by Mr vicechamberlayne dated at the Courte xii^{mo} die Junii 1593 for carryinge of lettres in poste for her Majesties speciall and secrete afaires of great ymportaunce from the Courte at Croyden the viiith of Maye 1593 into the Lowe Countryes to the towne of the Hage in Hollande, and for retourninge backe againe with lettres of aunswere to the Courte at Nonesuche the viiith of June 1593, being in her Majesties service all the aforesaid tyme - xxx^{s}.'*
>
> (Boas, 1940: 267)

As Peter Farey points out, this last statement is 'unique amongst the warrants listed, and clearly tells us that Poley was on duty that day at Deptford.' It is worth asking, if he had returned from the Hague to Deptford at that point, why it took another eight days for him to deliver the letters to the Court at Nonsuch. One point worth considering for relevance is Kyd's testimony that Marlowe 'would persuade with men of quality to go unto the K[ing] of Scots, wh[i]ther I hear Roydon is gone, and where if he had lived, he told me when I saw him last, he meant to be.' As Nicholl points out, Roydon

(connected to one of the Deptford trio, Nicholas Skeres, as far back as 1582) can only have gone to Scotland within the last month, since Skeres testified on 23 April 1593 that he was at that time living at a shoemaker's house in Blackfriars (Nicholl, 2002: 30,312). Thus though Kyd claims that he 'did refrain from his company', we can discern that it was within the month that Marlowe told Kyd he intended to follow Roydon to Scotland. Poley's chief recommendation to the Babington circle had been that he 'knew the best ways to pass into Scotland' (Seaton, 1929: 284). Thus it has been postulated that Poley's otherwise unaccountable eight-day delay (given these were 'secret affairs of great importance') could be accounted for in his accompanying Marlowe to a place of safety.

In his article 'Marlowe's Sudden and Fearful End', Farey considers at length the various possible reasons for the meeting a Deptford. The idea of a 'feast' hosted by Frizer, as suggested by Vaughan, does not tally with the dire situation we know Marlowe to be in. Nor is it likely that Poley, on duty and carrying letters 'in poste' (i.e. in a hurry) would stop off for a relaxing day with friends (and there is no evidence he knew Frizer). Paul Hammer's suggestion that the meeting was for Frizer and Skeres to recoup a debt from Marlowe, a meeting which subsequently went wrong, does not explain the presence of Poley, nor why such a meeting would take all day. If the purpose of the meeting were to murder Marlowe, then it remains to be answered why such an elaborate means of dispatching him were necessary, and what motivation Thomas Walsingham and the Cecils could possibly have for wanting Marlowe dead. Due process was likely to lead to his death in any case, making a complicated scenario for his murder unnecessary.

If this were assassination, there is no explanation why a meeting planned to end with his murder would take eight hours. If the meeting were to plan Marlowe's escape

or assist with it, there is no reason why Skeres and Frizer would need to be present: Poley alone had sufficient knowledge for such a purpose. To fake a death, however, requires three people: one 'killer' and two witnesses. Since they would have to appear before a jury, they would need to be consummate liars, as these men were. A faked death would save Marlowe from torture and execution, 'the most likely objective of those men for whom the three people there with Marlowe would have had most loyalty.' Thus, Farey argues, a faked death is the only logical reason why these particular people would meet at this particular time.

The location is also important. Of the four men who met, three are known or suspected to have worked for Sir Francis Walsingham's (and later the Cecils') network of intelligence agents, and two were involved in dubious money-lending schemes that involved deception. The underworld dealings of Frizer and Skeres in particular have been stressed. The venue for the meeting, however, was in the house of a highly respectable woman with court connections. Eleanor Bull was a 'cousin' of Chief Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber Blanche Parry, a trusted royal servant who had been close to the Queen since Elizabeth's infancy and who was in turn a 'cousin' and good friend of Lord Burghley.

Deptford, a stopping off point for travel to and from the continent, can only be considered 'within the verge' allowing some leeway for the accuracy of Elizabethan miles. Nevertheless the inquest was conducted as if within the verge by the Queen's Coroner, William Danby. It would be normal procedure to involve the Kent County Coroner, but Danby presided over the case alone. Danby had been a contemporary of William Cecil at the Inns of Court some fifty years earlier, and had been his close colleague at court for the past four.

It has been claimed in the past that the Queen's special interest in the case is indicated by the wording of the writ of certiorari sent to William Danby on 15 June, or by the wording of Frizer's pardon, which states

> *'We therefore moved by piety have pardoned the same Ingram ffrisar the breach of our peace which pertains to us against the said Ingram for the death above mentioned & grant to him our firm peace. Provided nevertheless that the right remain in our Court if anyone should wish to complain of him concerning the death above mentioned In testimony &c Witness the Queen at Kewe on the 28th day of June.'*

However, the wording of both documents is standard. Nevertheless, the Queen's interest in the case *is* evident in so far as a copy of the Baines Note was made, altered, and 'sent to her H', a fact confirmed by Drury, who describes how he was responsible for setting down the 'vyldist artyckeles of Athemisme that I suppose the lyke was never known or red of in eny age' which 'were delyvered to her hynes and command geven by her selfe to prosecut it to the fule.' From this we might ascertain that the Queen followed Baines's urging to put an end to Marlowe's spouting of 'damnable opinions'. Riggs followed this logic to theorise that the Queen sanctioned Marlowe's murder, but there is more than one way of stopping a mouth. One of the many interesting changes made to the Note delivered to her Highness was the alteration of the title, from

> *'A note conteyning the opinion of one Christofer Marlye concernynge his damnable opinion and Judgment of Relygion and scorne of Gods worde, who since Whitsundy dyed a suden and violent deathe'*

to

> *'A note delived on whitsun eve last of the most horrible blasphemes and damnable opinions uttered by XpoferMarly who within iij dayes after came to a suden & fearfull ende of his life.'*

The necessity for changing 'a sudden and violent deathe' to the more equivocal phrase 'a sudden & fearfull ende of his life' is not clear, except in the case of a faked death, where the latter might be deemed to have avoided the open lie.

None of this evidence proves that Marlowe's death was faked, but all of the evidence is consistent with that theory, whereas the 'accident' and 'assassination' theories fail to address or adequately explain certain items of the evidence. This does not mean that Marlowe's death *was* faked, only that this hypothesis appears to offer the best explanation for the evidence that has survived. That is, in respect to the necessary process of 'joining the dots' (Schum, 2007), the faked death theory joins all of the dots of evidence and leaves none unaccounted for.

As previously discussed, a faked death is not, in and of itself, implausible. On closer analysis what is implausible is not the original deception, but the idea that it was so successful that some of the greatest literary and critical minds might have been under a false impression for four centuries. And yet I contend this is by no means beyond the realms of possibility.

Those who entertain the Shakespeare authorship question are frequently dismissed as 'conspiracy theorists', a derogatory term which allows the orthodoxy to avoid any serious consideration of doubt. Yet though 'conspiracy theory' is a relatively recent term, the word 'conspiracy' has roots beyond Chaucer for the simple reasons that there have been conspiracies throughout history – indeed, Shakespeare himself dramatized some of the more famous ones. The age in which Shakespeare lived and wrote might be reasonably characterised as the age of conspiracy: the Babington Plot, Main Plot, Bye Plot, Stanley Plot and Gunpowder Plot being just a handful of those plots unearthed by the Privy Council. Thomas Walsingham, Robert Poley and Nicholas Skeres were involved in the Babington Plot. The government of the day ensured that these Catholic plots became public knowledge; but how likely is it that Lord Burghley and Sir Robert Cecil did not indulge in conspiracies of their own? Indeed, David Riggs believes that what Marlowe and Baines were up to at Flushing was part of a government

scheme to infiltrate Sir William Stanley's regiment, after Stanley had made clear his intent to assassinate the Queen. We do not have any details; to have the highest chance of success, a secret operation is best not documented.

By necessity, a successfully faked death will look like death itself, and will not have been generally doubted. A cursory examination of human society will reveal that on the whole, people believe what they are told, particularly by authority figures. They also believe what they want to believe. The accounts of Beard and Meres, though wildly inaccurate, were readily believed, so much so that their view of Marlowe as a blasphemous atheist who got what he deserved still dominates the cultural consciousness. One can conclude it suited Elizabethans to envisage such a death for Marlowe, and there would be no reason to question so 'fitting' an end, especially as it was clearly utilised by the Church (both Beard and Meres were clergymen). Reasonably in the circumstances, any doubts about the veracity of Marlowe's death among Marlowe's friends and fellow writers appear to have been expressed in the most guarded of terms.

This raises another issue of plausibility. Reading the enigmatic references of Marlowe's fellow writers as evidence that those authors understood the name 'William Shakespeare' to be a front for a suppressed colleague invites the question, how much of an open secret might it have been, and still remain secret? Those who 'knew', under this reading of the evidence, include Ben Jonson, John Marston, John Davies of Hereford, William Covell and Gabriel Harvey. Poley, Frizer and Skeres must be numbered amongst the 'knowing' – plus Thomas Walsingham. If we read the revision of the Baines Note as part of the scheme, then certain members of the Privy Council

would also be party to it.[112] Under these circumstances, with so many people apparently in possession of confidential information, is it plausible that such a secret could be sustained?

There is at least one historical precedent that would allow us to answer this question in the affirmative. In the Second World War, hundreds of people were privy to the secret workings of Ultra (thus named because it was 'Ultra-secret'), but the project was not known about until the government allowed it to be revealed to the public nearly thirty years later (Winterbotham, 1974). In Marlowe's case, to reveal that his death had been faked would be to risk being the cause of not only his death but very likely the imprisonment, death and ruin of those who had assisted him. Indeed, it might even be perceived as an action that would be dangerous to the self: Richard Baines, who might be regarded as chiefly responsible for the demise of Marlowe (at least as an identity) in 1593, appears to have been framed for a capital crime the following year by an unnamed man with whom he unwisely went drinking, and the story of his downfall and execution was famous enough to provoke a ballad (Kendall, 2003: 308-31).[113] Any revelation of this kind regarding Marlowe would also likely have dire consequences for the body of work associated with the name 'William Shakespeare'. Those who wished these plays and poems to be given the respect they deserved, and did not want to be responsible for the death of a talented man whose prosecution seems to have been the result of a personal vendetta provoked in the line of loyal service to his country, would have had no motivation for divulging his secret in an open way.

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[112] Peter Farey has recently argued that Marlowe's silencing and exile was a compromise agreed between the two key factions of the Privy Council: the Cecil faction, who wanted to keep him alive and potentially of use to them, and the Whitgift/Puckering faction, who wanted him prosecuted and executed for his religious opinions. The faked death would allow his survival whilst simultaneously making him an example of what God does to atheists and blasphemers. Interestingly, the hand that altered the Baines note has been identified as Puckering's.

[113] The case for Baines being this man, rather than the Waltham rector proposed by Nicholl and Kuriyama, is persuasive (308-31). The cup-stealing scene in *Doctor Faustus* between 'Dick' and 'Robin' bears such intriguing parallels to the Baines case that it looks strongly like a post-1594 addition.

A further possibility has recently been postulated by Peter Farey: with such a public, well-documented and government-sanctioned 'death', anyone expressing a belief that Marlowe might have survived could have been threatened with incarceration in Bedlam. That some nevertheless felt the urge to hint at what they knew, or thought they knew, is indicated by the striking number of enigmatic references to Shakespeare, and absence of direct ones.

Plausibility, then, is in the eye of the beholder. What a person will consider plausible will depend upon the paradigm through which they interpret the data. The 'alternative' paradigm is bound to look implausible because it doesn't accord with one's perceptions (those perceptions, in turn, being shaped by one's beliefs). Since confirmation bias will not allow us to fairly weigh the evidence, or even decide what is relevant enough to *count* as evidence,[114] and plausibility is demonstrably subjective, how then are we to ascertain which theory is the most likely explanation for the data that exists? David Schum, whose background in probability gives him unique insight into the theory and methods of evidence, advocates the 'imaginative act' of 'telling a story, or constructing a scenario' as 'a most valuable heuristic device' (Schum, 1999: 446). According to Schum, the most likely explanation for the information we have received will be the narrative that joins the greatest number of dots into a coherent scenario, with the least amount of fudging, dots left out, and inexplicable data.

[114] Schum, speaking of the unfortunate tendency to discard information too early in an investigation, illustrates another example of confirmation bias when he states that 'Some of the information or data being gathered will be perceived as *relevant* to the case at hand and will then be called *evidence*. In many situations, the relevance of an item of information is not initially appreciated when it is first received.' SCHUM, D. A. (1999) Marshaling Thoughts and Evidence During Fact Investigation. *South Texas Law Review,* 40**,** 401-54.

7. Conclusion

James Shapiro has recently acknowledged what non-Stratfordians have long recognised: that the Shakespeare authorship question is taboo in academia (Howard, 2010). In his interesting account of the historical origins of the controversy, he has chosen to explore the psychology of the early Shakespeare sceptics (from the 1850s to the 1920s) rather than address contemporary non-Stratfordian scholarship by the likes of Diana Price, Harry Cockburn, Daryl Pinksen, Peter Farey, and Roger Strittmatter. Shapiro contends that a point-by-point rebuttal is unnecessary because all forms of Shakespeare scepticism are rooted in the rise of Romanticism, and the mistaken belief that fiction is always self-revealing, always a veiled autobiography. He mentions Marlovian theory only in passing, and dismissively; in Shapiro's view 'an exhaustive account of all the candidates ... would be both tedious and futile, and for reasons that will soon become clear, Bacon and Oxford can be taken as representative' (Shapiro, 2010: 3). His erroneous assertion that Calvin Hoffman opened the grave of Sir Francis Walsingham (Shapiro, 2010: 229) suggests he is not even mildly acquainted with the facts of Marlowe's claim.

He makes other errors too, assigning the Westminster Abbey memorial window question mark to the date of Marlowe's birth, rather than his death (241). This is a proof-reading error, but other mistakes are more serious. His claim that the dedications of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* contain the first instances of the hyphenated 'Shake-

speare' (256) – a claim easily proved false by checking the images available on EEBO – suggests a level of sloppiness unbecoming to an academic of his standing. Without crediting his source, he utilises McLeod's 'kerning' argument to explain the hyphenation, when an hour or two inspecting title pages on EEBO would show that this is easily refuted (see Section 5.4). He gives the impression that he is responsible for the discovery that the Cowell manuscript (concerning the observations of Dr. James Wilmot) were a Baconian fraud (13) when the discovery had in fact been made by two non-Stratfordian researchers Daniel Wright and John Rollett, who reported it to Stratfordian Alan Nelson and presented their findings at a conference, and in *Shakespeare Matters*, in 2003. As former New York Times editor William S. Niederkorn explains:

> *'Based on his knowledge of the subject, Wright noticed that a number of the Baconian arguments made in the manuscript were not put forward until long after 1805. Agreeing with Rollett about the paper, Nelson supposed the manuscript was a forgery and said he would have it examined by a paleographer. In Contested Will, however, Shapiro gives the impression that he has just unmasked the forgery himself.'*
>
> *(Niederkorn, 2010)*

Only in the bibliographical essay at the end of the book does he reveal that he knows about the work of Wright and Rollet (319). Shapiro also makes the erroneous claim that 'anyone investigating the development of Delia Bacon's ideas confronts much the same problems as Shakespeare's biographers' (98) when it is clear from his chapter on her that the primary source evidence and personal testimony confirming she is the author of the works attributed to her are plentiful.

Approaching the question with his faith firmly established: 'I …believe that William Shakespeare wrote the plays and poems attributed to him'(8), Shapiro has not examined the case for authorship doubt at all; he has only examined the doubters. Aware that the absence of life-work links for Shakespeare were the spawning ground of the authorship question, his thesis is that to expect a writer's life to be reflected in their

work is a Romantic fallacy. To support his thesis, he mines the biographies of key sceptics in great detail, searching for aspects of their lives that explain their works, as if unaware of the irony present in his doing so when his central claim is that a writer's life has little bearing on the subject of their writing.

Despite his errors, Shapiro is largely correct in saying that arguments for Oxford have rested largely on the parallels to be found between the life of that candidate and material found in the works. Marlovian theory, however, rests on distinctly different foundations. Firstly, that there are good reasons to question whether or not Marlowe died at Deptford independent of any authorship issue: the veracity of the inquest document has been questioned by orthodox scholars ever since it was discovered eighty-five years ago, and neither the 'assassination' nor 'accident' theories square with the available evidence, hence the ongoing disagreement between these two orthodox camps. Shapiro seems unaware that there are valid reasons to doubt Marlowe's death quite separate to any idea that he might be the author behind the works of Shakespeare (Shapiro, 2010: 240-1). Secondly, and perhaps most critically, is the considerable body of scholarly opinion that notes the pervasive, persistent presence of Marlowe's writing style, and his very words, in the works of Shakespeare.

Numerous scholars and biographers have noted that the plays of Marlowe bear very close resemblance, both in theme and in style, to the early works of Shakespeare. As Riggs notes, 'for two centuries the pervasive debt to Marlowe's style and sensibility persuaded scholars that Marlowe actually did write most of Henry VI' (Riggs, 2004: 283). Until the late 1920s, it was not unusual for respected scholars including Boas, Fleay, and Sir Sidney Lee to credit Marlowe with a significant hand in, and occasionally sole authorship of, plays now considered firmly part of the Shakespeare canon, including *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III* (Brooke, 1922). Scholars have noted

striking parallels between *Hero and Leander* and *Venus and Adonis,* between *Edward II* and *Richard II*, between *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice*, between *Tamburlaine* and *Coriolanus,* between *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest,* and many other paired combinations across the Marlowe-Shakespeare canon (Honan, 2005: 166). Motifs are picked up and repeated, sometimes close together in time, as in the embroidered Venus and Adonis on the border of Hero's sleeve (*Hero and Leander* 11-14), and sometimes more in the manner of bookends, as when Prospero, a wiser and older necromancer in the mould of Doctor Faustus, mirrors the earlier character's 'I'll burn my books' by vowing to drown his (Bate, 2008: 129). Across the entirety of Shakespeare's output, Marlowe's significant and abiding influence is universally recognised (Logan, 2007).[115] John Bakeless noted that 'the abundance of Shakespeare's quotations, echoes, and allusions [of Marlowe] is especially important because he lets his other literary contemporaries severely alone' (Bakeless, 1942: 213). The close relationship between the works of Marlowe and Shakespeare, as noted in quotations from 150 years of orthodox scholarship, is attached as an Appendix.

This is not by any means offered as 'proof' that Marlowe's authored the works, only that he is the only authorship candidate who demonstrably had the ability to do so. Contrary to Shapiro's assumptions, Marlovian theory is not grounded in the false belief that the plays are autobiographical, but rather in an awareness that, in the light of an inquest document widely suspected of being untrue, it is possible to see the Marlowe-Shakespeare canon as the career trajectory of a single man. Once this perceptual framework is adopted, it appears to offer explanations for many if not all of the numerous 'anomalies' with which Shakespearean biography is strewn. It offers a simple explanation for textual data that either cannot be explained by the orthodox

[115] See also Appendix A

narrative or has been perceived as erroneous; not only those examples discussed above but many others that have been utilised in the arguments of other non-Stratfordians, such as Francis Bacon's letter to John Davies,[116] as the latter was riding to meet King James on his accession, with its inexplicable reference to 'concealed poets'.[117] It explains how, despite the hugely different education and life experiences of Marlowe and Shakspere from their late teens on, commentators have in several cases found the late works of Marlowe and the early works of Shakespeare too similar to tell apart.[118]

Perhaps most telling of all, a Marlovian framework provides a rational explanation for the recurrent themes of exile and loss of identity that can be detected throughout the sonnets, and across the plays. For though a fiction 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 (part of the Oxford argument) – the *themes* to which a writer regularly returns will tend to be those of personal significance.

'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

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[116] This is apparently the John Davies (later knighted) whose epigrams had been published alongside Marlowe's translation of a section of *Amores*, and who wrote about 'Faustus' and his horse-riding.

[117] Bacon's biographer, Spedding, admits 'The allusion to "concealed poets" I cannot explain.' SPEDDING, J. (1874) *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon Vol 3,* [S.l.], Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer.(65). Cockburn documents the inadequate orthodox response to this phrase. (Cockburn: 15) Though Baconians and others have assumed Bacon is referring to himself, the phrase 'So desiring you to be good to all concealed poets' need not in any way be self-referential. One branch of Marlovian theory suggests Marlowe might have been Louis Le Doux, the English agent posing as a Frenchman, who was working for the Earl of Essex under the direction of Anthony Bacon in 1594/5. The Bacon brothers worked closely together, and are likely to have shared confidential information. Both Essex and Anthony Bacon, with whom Le Doux corresponded, were dead by 1603; continued contact could have been through Francis. For more on Le Doux see Peter Farey's research, which A.D. Wraight represented as her own, in WRAIGHT, A. D. (1996) *Shakespeare : New Evidence,* London, Adam Hart.

[118] This point was first raised by Daryl Pinksen. For numerous scholarly observations of the similarities between the two canons, see Appendix A.

Kingsley-Smith in her ground-breaking study *Shakespeare's Drama of Exile.* '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.' (Kingsley-Smith, 2003: 1,8) Kingsley-Smith analyses Shakespeare's exploration of exile in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV* 1 and 2, *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus* and *The Tempest*. She is deeply conscious of the centrality of language (and language loss) to Shakespeare's understanding of exile:

> *'Perhaps the most obsessive concern of these plays is language, wherein lies the originality of Shakespeare's representation of exile. For no other dramatist asked so insistently what happens when the language by which the individual is known turns against him or her - through the word or 'sentence' of banishment - or explored the dilemma of transforming or adapting one's own alienated speech. In every play, the exile's language changes: in the tragedies, it is choked by densely metaphorical lamentation; in the comedies, by the smugly self-conscious Stoic or Epicurean consolation. Yet, in each case, the exile's survival depends upon the possibility of sustaining any language in isolation from the linguistic community. The most basic equation of Shakespearean exile is that language equals creativity and thus power. Language-loss equates to silence, impotence and death..... Through this dialogue about exile, Shakespeare's plays examine not only the precondition of art (and thus of their own existence) but the linguistic foundations of identity.'*
>
> (Kingsley-Smith, 2003: 30)

There is no need, says Kingsley-Smith, for the author to have experienced banishment himself. As one would expect from any scholar embedded in the orthodox paradigm, she dismisses Marlovian theory without serious examination, despite the fact it would reasonably explain the author's apparent obsession with 'that one word *banished*', including loss of identity and the destruction of reputation. She finds it 'strange that Shakespeare's drama of exile has received so little attention'(8), perhaps not appreciating that despite every effort by scholars influenced by Roland Barthes to discount the author, a powerful theme so at odds with the orthodox biography of the presumed author will necessarily be ignored. Offering to address 'the question of why and how Shakespeare dramatized exile'(25) she ably explores the 'how' without casting any substantial light on the 'why'. The why, after all, would require some understanding

of personal motive. She locates no plausible or substantive reason as to what might propel the traditionally conceived author to write plays in which 'the audience is consistently asked to imagine itself banished'(29). Interpretation of these plays through the Marlovian paradigm would present no difficulty in explaining why 'Shakespeare's banishment plays lament an identity that seemed *complete*, based as it was on familial and romantic love, civic and national vocation, honour and reputation' (28).

A similar understanding of Shakespeare's canon 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. Stephen 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?' (Greenblatt, 2004: 376-7). From a Marlovian perspective, it is as though Greenblatt and Kingsley-Smith, despite being immersed in the orthodox paradigm, have seen through the works to the real author, but are unable to understand what they have seen.

Tim Buthe, arguing that narratives have 'distinctive strengths that make them especially suited for historical scholarship', claims that assessing alternative narratives need not be especially problematic once they are 'subjected to the collective assessment

of the scholarly community at large' (Buthe, 2002: 489). Buthe's qualifier, 'at large', is important. Those considered authorities on Shakespeare necessarily comprise those whose perceptions are anchored in the orthodox narrative, and whose discourse does not, and at present cannot (Ankersmit, 1988: 205) entertain any questioning of the authorship of *Shake-speares Sonnets* or the plays in the *First Folio*. Detailed rebuttals by Harry Gibson, Irwin Matus and Jim McCrea (Gibson, 1962, Matus, 1994, McCrea, 2005) have failed to bring an end to the Shakespeare authorship question as they had hoped, and James Shapiro's attempt to do the same through analysing the psychology of Shakespeare sceptics is similarly doomed to failure, for the simple reason that these writers are arguing from within a paradigm that is unsupported by primary source evidence, and riddled with anomalies – issues their paradigm prevents them from acknowledging as significant. Writers on both sides of the authorship question are engaging in a dialogue of the deaf for the simple reason that no common understanding is possible between those dwelling in mutually exclusive paradigms. Orthodox scholars and non-Stratfordians occupy different perceptual realities.

Resistance to any paradigm shift is inevitable, and necessary, Kuhn has argued: 'By ensuring that the paradigm will not be too easily surrendered, resistance guarantees that [scholars] will not be lightly distracted and that the anomalies that lead to paradigm change will penetrate existing knowledge to the core' (Kuhn, 1996: 65). Despite the famous proclamation by Roland Barthes over forty years ago, recent debates in Shakespearean attribution studies illustrate that authorship remains vitally important (Foster, 1988, 1997, Monsarrat, 2002, Vickers, 2002), and that even when biographical interpretation of early modern texts is overtly avoided, biographical arguments play a significant role in determining the acceptability of an attribution (Duncan-Jones, 1997b,

Abrams, 2002),[119] if for no other reason than that scholarly protocols demand that internal evidence be corroborated by external evidence and tally with the documented – or at least perceived - facts of an author's life.

As the importance of authorship is slowly resurrected, and despite continued resistance from the scholarly community, non-Stratfordian research in an academic context has begun (Price, 2001, Stritmatter and Kositsky, 2007). The Shakespeare Authorship Research Centre at Concordia University in Oregon has just completed its 14th Annual Conference, and a new Shakespeare Authorship Centre is being proposed by Professor Olexander Pronkevych and Kateryna Sinkevych of The Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University in Ukraine. The first MA in Shakespeare Authorship Studies, set up by William Leahy at Brunel University in 2007, is producing a new pool of doctoral candidates prepared to investigate what is, in academia, more or less unbroken ground. The Declaration of Reasonable Doubt, which Shapiro calls 'a skillfully drafted document, the collaborative effort of some of the best minds committed to casting doubt on Shakespeare's authorship' (Shapiro, 2010: 248) has been signed by a total of 1,747 people. Of these, 1,376 are college graduates, 620 with advanced degrees – 261 doctoral degrees and 359 master's degrees. A total of 312 are current or former college or university faculty members, the largest percentage (21%) being in English Literature.[121] The rise in Shakespeare scepticism shows no sign of abating.

There are two historical precedents for paradigm shifts in the humanities, both of which are catalogued by Shapiro, and which he acknowledges inspired early non-

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[119] The attribution of 'A Funeral Elegy' by 'W.S.' was argued largely on the basis of computer-aided stylometric analysis, in an attempt to minimise subjectivity, but biographical arguments were also advanced both for and against the attribution to Shakespeare.

[121] Figures from the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition, personal communication.

Stratfordian thinking. The first was provoked by Friedrich August Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* in 1795, which demonstrated, through an analysis of how texts were transmitted over time, that Homer, 'an even greater literary divinity' than Shakespeare, was not one but several authors. Scepticism about Homer at that point had a hundred year history, with 'rumblings …going back to antiquity', but it was Wolf that caused the conventional biography to be 'suddenly and permanently overthrown' (Shapiro, 2010: 78-9).

The second paradigm shift in the humanities occurred after the publication of David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* (1835). Struass 'relentlessly exposed "the discrepancies contradictions and mistakes in the Gospel narratives and made the supernatural explanations appear weak and untenable."' He undermined the truth-value of the Gospels by pointing out that they were based on 'second-hand and anecdotal testimony' (Shapiro, 2010: 83-84). The parallels with non-Stratfordian arguments are clear.

However, until a greater number of mainstream academics have 'grasped the significance of the silence of the dog' (Doyle, 2001: 415) the majority of advances in non-Stratfordian research will continue to be made outside of the confines of universities. To my knowledge, this is the first doctoral thesis on Marlovian theory anywhere in the world. At the time it was proposed, it was only possible as a Creative Writing doctorate, on the basis that the research was required for a novel in verse exploring the idea that Marlowe wrote Shakespeare; a work that comprises the remainder of my thesis. Though built around a framework of the extant evidence and reasonable interpretations of the same, the novel makes no claim to truth. Like numerous accounts of Shakespeare's life, and indeed Marlowe's, *The Marlowe Papers* is nothing more than a biographical fiction.

8. Creative Component: The Marlowe Papers

'When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room. Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.'

- Touchstone, *As You Like It, 3.3*

'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.'

- **Ted Hughes,** *Letters* (2007: 120)

The Marlowe Papers: Contents

To the Wise or Unwise Reader

What can a dead man say that you will hear?
Suppose you swear him underneath the earth,
stabbed to the brain with some almighty curse,
would you recognise his voice if it appeared?

The tapping on the coffin lid is heard
as death watch beetle. He becomes a name;
a cipher whose identity is plain
to anyone who understands a word.

So what divine device should he employ
to settle with the world beyond his grave,
unmask the life that learnt its human folly
from death's warm distance; how else can he save

himself from oblivion, but with poetry?
Stop. Pay attention. Hear a dead man speak.

Dramatis Personae

Writers and Actors
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE……..…… poet, playwright, intelligencer
TOM WATSON…….…….. poet, playwright, intelligencer
THOMAS WALSINGHAM…….…… gentleman, literary patron
ROBERT GREENE……...….. writer of prose romances, playwright
EDWARD (NED) ALLEYN……... lead actor, acting company manager/sharer
THOMAS NASHE…….…… prose satirist
THOMAS KYD……..……. playwright

Government
SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM……..… Secretary of State, head of intelligence
LORD BURGHLEY……William Cecil, Lord Treasurer
SIR ROBERT SIDNEY……. Governor of Flushing in the Low Countries

Nobility
NORTHUMBERLAND…… Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland
SOUTHAMPTON…….Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton
ESSEX……..…. Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, soldier
SIR JOHN HARINGTON…….. 1st Baron Harington, first cousin to the Sidneys
LUCY, COUNTESS OF BEDFORD…….. his married teenaged daughter
ARBELLA STUART……. first cousin to James VI of Scotland
BESS OF HARDWICK…….Countess of Shrewsbury, Arbella's grandmother

Intelligence
ROBYN POLEY…….…… intelligencer
THOMAS THORPE……..... gentleman publisher, intelligencer
RICHARD BAINES……...…… intelligencer
GILBERT GIFFORD……..…… intelligencer
ANTHONY BACON……. head of the Earl of Essex's intelligence network

Sundry
JOHN ALLEN…… Ned Alleyn's brother, innkeeper
WILLIAM BRADLEY……..……. publican's son
HUGH SWIFT…… lawyer, Watson's brother-in-law
JOHN POOLE……. Catholic counterfeiter
SIR WALTER RALEIGH……..…. courtier, adventurer
MRS ELEANOR BULL…….. Deptford gentlewoman with court connections
VENETIA……...……. a maiden of Venice
JAQUES PETIT……..Anthony Bacon's servant
WILLIAM PETER…….…… gentleman

THE MARLOWE PAPERS

Death's a Great Disguiser

Church-dead. And not a headstone in my name.
No brassy plaque, no monument, no tomb,
no whittled initials on a makeshift cross,
no pile of stones upon a mountaintop.
The plague is the excuse; the age's curse
that swells to life as spring gives way to summer,
to sun, unconscious kisser of a warmth
that wakens canker as it wakens bloom.

Now fear infects the wind, and every breath
that neighbour breathes on neighbour in the street
brings death so close you smell it on the stairs.
Rats multiply, as God would have them do.
And fear infects like mould; like fungus, spreads -
folk catch it from the chopped-off ears and thumbs,
the burning heretics and eyeless heads
that slow-revolve the poles on London Bridge.

The child of casual violence grows inured,
an audience too used to real blood;
they've watched a preacher butchered, still awake,
and handed his beating heart like it was love.
And now the sanctioned butchery of State
breeds sadists who delight to man the rack,
reduce men from divine belief and brain
to begging, and the rubble of their spines.

From all this, I am dead. Reduced to ink
that magicks up my spirit from the page:
a voice who knows what mortals cannot think of;
a ghost, whose words ring deeper from the grave.

Corpse-dead. A gory stab-hole for an eye;
and that's what they must think. No, must believe,
those thug-head pursers bent on gagging speech,
if I'm to slip their noose and stay alive.
Now I'm as dead as any to the world,
the foulest rain of blackened corpses on
the body that is entered in my name:
the plague pit where Kit Marlowe now belongs.
For who could afford for that infected earth
to be dug up to check identities?
And so, I leave my former name behind.
Gone on the Deptford tide, the whole world blind.

Friend, I'm no-one. If I write to you,
in fading light that distances the threat,

it's as a breeze that strokes the Channel's waves,
the spray that blesses some small vessel's deck.

Decipherers

I'll write in code. Though my name melts away,
I'll write in urine, onion juice and milk,
in words that can be summoned by a flame,
in ink as light and tough as spider silk.
I'll send a ream of tamed rebellious thought
to seed a revolution in its sleep;
each letter glass-invisible to light,
each sheet as blank as signposts are to sheep.

The spy's conventions, slipping edge to edge
among the shadows, under dirty night
mislead the search. To fool intelligence,
we hide our greatest treasures in plain sight.
This poetry you have before your eyes:
the greatest code that man has yet devised.

Captain Silence

We dock in darkness. The skipper's boy dispatched
to find our lodgings. Not a town for ghosts,
and with no wish to be remembered here
I'm wrapped in scholar's garb, the bright man's drab.
A quarter-moon is rationing its light
to smuggle us ashore without a fuss;
the fishermen are far away from port,
their wives inside and unaware of us.

You know I've come this way before; not here,
but in this manner, come as contraband
under the loose concealing cloak of night,
disguised as something of no interest,
as simple traveller. A man of books:
which words will make him interesting as dust
to folk who cannot read and do not care
they sign their papers only with a cross.
My name means more, and yet I shrug it off
like reptile skin, adopt some alias
that huffs forgettable, to snuff the flame
that now would be the death of me. Anon,
now Christopher is too much cross to bear.

The skipper calls me only with a cough.
Lugs, with his lanky son, my trunk of books.
No prop. For books will be my nourishment
in the sightless days without you. And if I
feel strange, or wordless, they will anchor thought,
ensure my brain is drowned in histories
that help me to remember who I am.

The skipper leads as shadows bolt from us
and streets fall back. And in his torch's flame
a flicker of the tongue that can't be bought,
which pirates sliced to secrecy. The rest,
that part he'd curl to make his consonants,
is long since fish-food on the Spanish main.
The boy speaks for him when we reach the door.
We're hurried in, 'Entrez,' as though a storm
is savaging the calm still tail of May
and has the oak trees shaken by their roots.

The woman might be forty-five, or ten.
A calculated innocence, a face
so open blank, it seems revealing as
it hides itself. This woman's learnt to blanch
as bones will bleach when left to drink the sun,

as death will creep a pallor into skin
at just its mention. Clothed in widow's weeds,
soft fingers straighten for gold. 'Un angelot.'
Two months of food for sticking out her neck
for an Englishman. The payment's hidden where
she's still half-warm. 'So you will sleep above,'
she states as if she questions us, 'the room
that slopes for Captain Silence and his boy.'
They heft my trunk upstairs between them, just.

'The less we say, the better,' she begins.
'You want some ale? You're thirsty? Or there's sack
if you need something stronger.' Then she pales,
as if she is reflecting me. Some look
betrays my loss to her, and in a blink
her loneliness has fastened on to mine.
'You learnt the tongue from Huguenots?' She nods
and answers her own question. 'That is right.
And you. You are a religious man? But, no.
forget I ask you anything.' In truth,
I am a scholar of divinity
and study the divine with open eyes.
Beyond all question, I would give her truth;
and yet, I cannot save her if I speak.

'My husband was an Englishman, like you.
Or not like you. He had no love of books.
Ballads he liked. He used to sing this one…'
Her brain defends itself by giving way.
'I don't remember it.' But here, her eyes
brim with the silence, break their trembling banks
as though she heard his funeral song. Then he,
her husband, a growl, is whispering in her ear
the rudest ballad he knows, clutching her waist
to spin her for a kiss. And then he's gone,
and we are momentarily with ghosts.
'Forgive me,' she says. 'The silence is poisonous.'

Upstairs, I'm with her still. She's through the wall,
the spectre of a woman I might touch
on any other night but this. I don't
undress so much as loosen up a notch,
for comfort now would later be exposed,
a gift to spot and clear as light to slay;
and bad enough, I'm running for my life
without my skin a beacon for the moon,
a human sheath that swallows blades. I sit
laced in my boots, my stomach tight, my ears
so strongly tuned they model sight from sound.

Nextdoor, the widow braves into her gown
and lies awake. She listens to the house
and reads the whispers that pronounce her safe
though I would have her sacrificed for love.
I know her stares are pulling at the wall
I'm on the other side of, and her bed
feels colder for the want of me. And yet,
as time goes on, she's bidding me adieu.

A woman's skin might send a man to sleep,
but I must twitch and listen to the night
say Nothing's here. The moon is out of sight
and something gnaws now, in the walls. I write,
the extra tallow that I paid her for
illuminating every sorry word.

How we are trapped in silence; how this night
has brought a silent shipwreck to her shore,
how silence unites us as it chokes us off,
how thick the silence hangs around the door
that dogs might almost sniff it, and the causes:
cutlass, lies or longing. Gathered here,
awake, or sleeping aware, are three full-grown
examples of the muted. And the boy
fathered by silence, slight and safely bred
to keep his trap shut. How the silence grows,
how it wraps around the house like sealing snow
though we are in the final day of spring.

Silence surrounds the men of deepest faith
and, listened to, may call a man to prayer.

I pray that no one follows us tonight;
that in England, rural keepers of the peace
are kept bewitched by corpse and candlelight;
I pray those men are instantly believed
who, having played my dark and murderous friends,
have stayed to stay the executioner's hand;
I pray my soul's absolved in all the lies
that tumble slick as herring from their tongues.
I pray, my friend, you're warm and safe at home,
that doors remain unkicked and truths untold
and we have silence when the daylight comes.

The Shape of Silence

I dream of Kent. I'm still at school, at King's,
in Canterbury, where my starveling brain
unloaded intrigue from a feast of tongues
that massacre and war made refugees.
Canterbury, from whose huddled roofs
bursts the substantial faith of a cathedral
whose spire aspires to heaven, but whose stones
have been a butcher's block where holy men
were finished off for their beliefs. Vespers.

A whisper: You're wanted. Shrinking low, I duck
official eyes and follow the message boy.
He guides me to a room whose door shuts fast.
And clear as sherry there is Robert Greene
stroking his beard until it points to hell.
He's master now; the Duke of Chaos reigns.
Envy has whipped the light that shows it bare,
and jealousy has fashioned wisdom's chains.

'Pretending to be dead?' A crow, he caws.
'You'll find death is uncomfortable at best.
You shouldn't mock us with your parlour trick.'
He points me to the iron branks. 'It's yours.
Unless you'll try a smoother punishment.'
I say I will. My legs are rendered stone
and cannot port me out of there. I'm led,
like calf to slaughterhouse, to inner rooms
where boys are gagged with bandages, and on
until we reach the library. 'See this?'
He opens up a box whose gilded clasp
features initials not my own. 'Your tongue
goes here,' he says, and strokes the tongue-shaped mould
designed for it. The velvet's bright as blood.
He turns to the shadows, shouting, 'Cut it off!'
and in the glint of threatened knives, I wake,
a grey light creeping through a widow's drapes.
Only my breathing saturates the dawn.

The Trunk

A hand on my shoulder startles me. 'Excuse.
It's best you leave before the dawn. This place.
Its people love the smell of something fishy.
They get up early too.' She's loosely dressed.
I'm at the desk, as though I never slept.
The blown out candle's stink is barely cold
and she is nursing a flame to light its wick.
'I don't need trouble. Whoever you are. It's time.
You have to … vite.' Her eyes avoiding mine.
She's woken the Captain and his boy. In vests
they're readying to shift my trunk downstairs.

Her parlour seems colder now, the fire out.
The candlelight insists it's night outside,
only her rush suggesting otherwise.
'Yesterday's bread. Some cheese.' She packs my bag
as if we are related. 'Best I can do.
Go up the road six miles. My cousin's house
is at the crossroads. He's the farrier.
He'll find a horse for you. Tell him Monique
will cook him a pie if he brings meat across.
Exactly those words, you understand?'

I'm stuck.
Her brittleness unnerves me, like the shock
of a morning wash. She shivers anxiously
as if the changed wind slipping beneath the door
hints at the distant stench of consequence.
Her eyes evasive, fearing mine might lock
hers to some dangerous bond of loyalty.

'The trunk?' I ask. The boy is sat upon it.
The captain yawns. And there I glimpse again
the stub that recommends him to the State.
'I'll send it on,' she says, 'as you instruct.'

Two footsteps on, I'll be reduced to robes,
to paper, quill and ink, a change of clothes.
'The trunk,' I tell her, 'anyone can look.
'It's just some books, some poems. If someone
- authorities - should need to open it,
they will find nothing. It is literature.
Send it to Mr Le Doux. At the sign of the bear
in Middelburg. There'll be an angelot
if the inventory's present still.' She nods.
'May God be with you.'

Then I'm alone outside,
feeling a pinch no dawn will warm away.
The captain and boy will shuffle off and slip
mooring ahead of the mackerel coming in.
I set off inland, towards the brightening sky,
conscious of night behind me. All England's dark
that threatens to engulf me is a panther
crouched at my back. And then I remember you.

Forge

The farrier is shoeing with a force
you'd only use on hooves. He hammers in
a quarter-dose of good luck for the road
then puts the fetlock down. 'You wanting me?'
His mouth is battened straight, as if the lips
are still turned in to hold a row of nails.
My mind sets cold; it's hard enough to trust,
and Monique's 'cousin' might mean anything;
they hardly seem related. He's a 'friend',
but not a friend of mine. He runs his eyes
across my scholar's cloak, my library skin.

'I've a message from Monique,' I say. 'She asked
if you would take some meat across for her,
and she'll bake you a pie.'
'That's what she said?
Monique is full of promises. Last time
I did her a favour, she reneged on me.'
He snorts, and turns to wash his spade-like hands
in a nearby bucket. 'So you need a horse.
I hope you're good for payment. Monique's pies
are legendary. Like the Phoenix, son.
They don't exist.' His apron is his towel.

Assuming me green, he guides me to the barn
and tries to palm me off with something slow.
'A sturdy beast. You have some miles ahead?'
'A few,' I say. 'But I don't have a whip.'
'Just so,' he laughs. 'For sturdy beasts and mules
have much in common. Some reluctance, no?'
My French needs greasing, but is adequate
to make him laugh. 'Perhaps you're after speed?
In case you're set upon,' he says, and shrugs.
'It happens. The roads attracts its travellers
and some are desperate.' His eyes on me.
'Some signs of life would do,' I say. 'This mare?'
'Ten sovereigns.'
'That's too much!'
'That's what she costs.'
His arms across his chest, a barrier.
'The price is made of many parts. She's fast
as the man who sells her's quiet. You understand.'
I understand that Monique's words have cost
the doubled price of silence. So it goes;
life will be cheaper once I've disappeared.
I bargain for her tack to be thrown in.
The smell of leather as I saddle up

returns me briefly to my father's shop:
the chatter of my sisters up the stairs
and hammered sunlight leaning across the door.

'You know the road to take? Towards Douai?
You have a scholar's pallor,' he explains.
'The English scholars tend to go that way.
But you were never here,' he adds. 'Of course.'

She has no name. I call her Esperance,
blessing myself with hope.

Just after noon
we turn off the Douai road and plod a stream
that cuts us easterly through woods; a route
less clock-predictable, should I be tracked.
Dear Nowhere-to-go, press on.

For at my back,
beyond La Manche, one destiny is crouched
still ready to spring: the cell, the lash, the rack,
the gibbet and noose. The slicing from the throat
to the belly; my intestines gentled out
by the dutiful executioner, my prick
hacked off and crammed into my mouth. Good miles
that keep me in my skin, my breath, my mind.
But every mile another mile from you.

Conjurors

Watching my father at the last, I learnt
that love is a necessity of craft.
Who writes must love their pen and every mark
it makes upon the paper, and the words
that set their neighbours burning, and the line
that sounds against the skull when read again.

Elbows against a schoolboy's desk, I learnt
the dead can be conjured from their words through ink,
that ancient writers rise and sing through time
as if immortal, the poet's voice preserved
like the ambered insect some see as a scratch
but I'd imagine flying, brought to life.

And so to precious paper I commit
the only story I can never tell.

Tom Watson

'He's come to Cambridge. Thomas Watson.'
'Swear!'
'I swear. Staying with some old friend of his.
He's come to see the play.'
It's Christmas week.
The play starts in an hour, the snow is thick
across the quad, and crunches underfoot
as Knowles and I make for the buttery.
'You can't be sure.'
'The rumour's sound. He'll come.
He'll love it, Kit.'
'He'll recognise those lines
where Dido dies. I robbed the pith from him.'
'You're fine. He'll take it as a compliment.'

Our names marked down, I take some soup and bread
but cannot eat. Across the darkened lawns,
the hall is tricked out as a theatre.
Boys are in make-up; two in Roman gowns
are testing their breasts won't slip. It's too late now
to change a word of it. They've memorised
their entrances and exits, have the lines
under their breath. The night is with the gods.

*

The final speech. As Dido's sister bolts
headlong into imaginary flames
a silence settles. Then the hall erupts.

For a thief's anxiety, worming its nest of holes
in the poet's stomach, nothing like the salve
of warm appreciation from a throng
of drunken students.
One man stands apart.
As others press through to greet me, he leans in
to his friend's ear, eye on me and whispering
something that makes his neighbour splutter. Not
at me, but at the sea of gowns he parts
entirely by the focus of his gaze.

Anticipation makes me blurt his name
in time with him as we are introduced.
He laughs, 'Another Watson? A common name,
I grant you, but Tom too? It's ludicrous.
I've met a dozen Toms this last half-day,
but not another Watson.' He smiles. 'Relax,

my friend. You're Christopher Marley, and I'm glad
to meet you. Quite an ambitious play for one
so young. You'll come to town and sup with us?
Gobbo's paying.' He motions to his friend.

Some tankards later, his voice conducts a crowd
jesting at one particular Oxford don
who 'finding a student tying his laces together,
would correct the miscreant's bows, and demonstrate
the best knot for the job, before he'd rise,
and be felled to the floorboards like a tree.'
The table laughs. His eyes are bright with it.

More beer is hailed as one of his friends chips in:
'And Richard Harvey is another ass.
He wrote a book some years ago, predicting
the destruction of the world in '88.
The calamity will be fire and water mixed.
And what might that describe?'
'His bowels perhaps,'
Watson suggests, 'when none of it comes true.'
The table erupts, and as the beer arrives,
Tom Watson leans in closer to my ear.
'Dim-witted Dick is rector to my friend.
His brother, Gabriel, is tutor here.
You know him?'
'I have had the dubious pleasure.'
He smiles. 'You'd circle the globe to see two men
more cursed and blessed with brains. Intelligence
is only for the gifted. Don't you think?'
This question pierces me. His eyes, like hearths
to come in from the cold to. Do I think?
I haven't said much, since the second beer
which tugs at me now to head out for the jakes.
'I'm not sure what you mean.'

His friends are lost
in jokes about the Harveys; all the air
around the two of us drawn in, enclosed,
as if his voice has conjured us a room.
His face is serious. 'A lively wit
can only be ridden if it's broken in.
You've heard that phrase? One Privy Councillor
I know is very fond of it.'
'Lord Burghley?'
'Sir Francis Walsingham. He has some work
for men with languages. If you like travel.
Delivering letters to the embassies.
Paris, and so on. Should I mention you?'

I hope I didn't seem too puppy-keen;
my only other option was the Church.
A life outside the walls of academe,
adventuring in the service of the Queen,
a chance to move among the powerful
and commandeer material for my pen
was more like life than all my lives till then.
The gods forgive me if I wolfed the bait.

'Discretion, though. Should you speak to anyone
about the possibility, it's gone.'

Odd to recruit me there, a public place.
And yet, surrounded by the drunk and loud
and cloaked in a fog of less important talk,
he carved us privacy. A gale of noise
proves safer to talk in than a privy queue
or quiet street. Words travel far on air,
and piggyback on silence, riding miles
beyond our sight. But lean in, sup a beer,
exchange a tale. And then, rejoin the jokes.
Allude to nothing further: be, and wait.

Thus Watson's first free lesson in the art
of espionage on Dido's opening night:
the safest jewels are hidden in plain sight.

Tamburlaine The Great

This banished man is writing you a poem,
the only code I know that tells the truth,
though truth was both my glory, and my ruin,
the laurel, and the handcuff, of my youth.

*

'They've never seen the like before.' Applause,
a clapping swell like starlings after grain
and Ned Alleyn is striding off the stage,
dressed as the thunderous Tamburlaine. 'Some beer!'
He claps me on the back. 'Look what you've made.
It seems they love a monster. As do I.'

Six years ago is now a life away.
Yet I close my eyes and put my feet up there
as solid as a tavern tabletop,
comfortable as a chair that I rock back
to balancing point, and just sustain in air
because I am young, full of success and praise,
and not yet too much ale.
'My love! Some more!'
Ned upbraids the tapster's wife for beer,
orders a double supper, beef and bread,
then closes his eyes as if he hears the crowd
and shakes his head.
'Oh, that was something, Kit.
I had them in my pocket from the first.
Your words. I tell you. If I had your words
three hours a night, I'd set the world on fire'

I say, 'You gave him life, they're clapping you.
My words, but someone had to speak them, Ned.
An author cannot speak his words himself,
the world would lynch him. And his mother, too,
were she to hear.'
'The world will hear of this!'

'As far as the world might go. Perhaps not Kent.'
He laughs. 'As far as Beckenham at least!
Come, man, your mother would love the show tonight,
if she had dreams for her son of better things.
A simple shepherd can become a king -
you show us how. And with a crown of words
make kings of both of us. This hollow town
will ring to the name of Tamburlaine for years!'

The man who sidles up behind his back
is red and pointy-bearded, olive cloaked:
'May it not be so. London's tortured ears
are sick of it already. Is it news?
Congratulations.' Proffers up his hand
as if it were a prodding stick. 'Your name?'

Ned stands to introduce us: mizzen tall.
'Christopher Marley,' Ned says, 'scholar poet -
Robert Greene, author of ladies' romances.'

Greene slides his palm away, 'And scholar too
at both the universities. I write
because I need to eat. There's quite a crowd
of educated masters wielding pens
in London now. You've come to join the throng?'

'He's come to be head of it!' says Ned, quite drunk
on the crowd's applause, and sitting down as hard
as a man will sit to squash a mouse. 'Come, Robert.
Did you not see the play? A masterpiece.'

Greene's sigh could strip his beard. 'Not see, exactly,
but rather heard in roars along the street
when I was on my way here. And the chat'
(he motions round the tavern) 'tells the plot.
Tell me, young Master Marlowe, scholar poet.
Is violence poetic? Should you write
so beautifully about atrocities?
I hear your hero has a monstrous rage
and murders his own children. What of love?
Do modern poets not have time for love?
Is it passé?'

How wrong a man can judge.
And he heard my second syllable as 'low'.
I let it pass. 'Love is a mystery,'
I say, as a wench's hips sway past my eyes.
'Each person craves it, yet it doesn't sell.
Or so I'm told. We cannot dine on love.
Perhaps too few believe in it.'
'It's true,'
Ned elbows in, 'the modern public like
their entertainments savage. Buckets of blood,
and heartlessness. Or how could we compete
with public executions? Hanging's free.'

Greene stays with me. 'A Cambridge boy, I'm right?
We may have shared a tutor. William Gage?
I was at Benet first.' He rubs his chin,

as though his beard's a bet he's bringing in
against the fluff of my young moustache. 'You were
a sizar? Not a pensioner?' He trawls,
fishing for scraps that he might hang on me.
What is my father's trade? For he smells trade.
He guessed it straight away, as if my name
has come to him before.
'A cobbler's son?'

'But then Our Lord's son was a carpenter.
The trades are honest. Everyone needs shoes.'
My father's words, my mouth. 'Whose son are you?'

'A petty miser. Hard as gold is soft
and can be clipped. He has disowned me, though.
I'm disinherited. A writer's lot,
as you will learn, is not all sweet applause,
and there's no wealth in it. There's ladies, though,'
- exchanging winks with one – 'if you're not bent
or too high-minded.'
'Robert, Will you join us?
Ned doesn't catch the slurs, his beery speech
too full of them to find a fault elsewhere.
I motion at the chair. Greene hesitates.
'You don't prefer to celebrate alone?
I wouldn't want to steal the limelight.'
'I'd
be happy to hear how you survive by the pen.
There must be quite an art in it,' I say.
Greene eyes me carefully. 'I don't give tips
to the competition. Nose out. But I'll stay.
So long as there's wine and Ned is paying for it.
The good stuff. French. None of that sherry stuff.'
He pulls a chair in. Ned is scandalised.
'One too many free dinners has spoiled your palate!'
'Too many? Who can have too many?' Greene
twiddles his beard to dislodge evidence.

An hour he drank with us before a whore
was his excuse to leave us. All that hour
he talked about his books and of the plays
he promised to Ned. Occasionally he smiled,
but only sidewise, flinching every time
a punter came to give Alleyn a slap
for his performance. 'How to follow that?
Great Tamburlaine has clearly conquered all.'
He eyed me shrewdly. 'After such a play,
the next must surely disappoint us, no?'

'More of the same!' cries Ned, still going strong.

‘Tell us what happens next. How does he die?
Who overthrows him?’

None but God himself,
as I have learned, but didn’t answer then.
I let the bluffers fill the empty space.
Ned offered up a plot. I had my own:
to guard my tongue, but give rein to my pen.

The Low Countries

A room above an inn. The foreign words
on floors beneath me, drifting up like smoke
from kitchen staff, say I'm the stranger here.
The fields are almost marsh. Two days of rain
and still the skies are pouring. Clothing, soaked,
sweating before the open fire. My skin
is wrinkled as the elderly, my feet
as white and sodden as the Dover cliffs
stood out in water. All my papers soaked,
the ink cried out of them: a blot, a streak,
then blank again. Last night, I dreamt of rape.

From the space under my cot, from all the quiet
beneath my sleeping body, came the shift
of someone who had waited for my breath
to slow and mark that I was vulnerable.
A shadow consolidated into flesh,
some man who needed more than meat or drink
my soul's destruction. Not a face, no voice,
but the cold desire for what he couldn't have
I recognised. Intrusion was his name.
And the cry of fear he stuffed back in my throat
with fists of bedclothes echoed in the room:

a room with no-one in it. Yet, afraid,
I kept my eyes on the door until the grey
of dawn began to detail me, alone.
I drifted back to sleep just after dawn,
exhausted by my vigilance and fear,

and found myself at the nightmare's end, distressed
as I ran from room to room in some great palace,
with no-one recognising me as friend,
and, bursting finally into a hall,
my nightshirt torn, my privacy exposed,
I found myself half-dressed before a court
of witnesses. The room was thick with them,
the walled up souls who manage history.
They silently consented while the shadows
skewered me with their wills, stuffed up my mouth
with exiled cotton, each a muffled gun
unloaded into me. Made me their hole,
as if I am but nothing. Had they hearts?
No. Fear of the truth provoked disgust in them.
'Hold her down fast,' they said. 'Cut out her tongue.'

The rain falls still. It's two hours after noon.

The silent shame that follows being raped
is reeking from the dampness of the clothes
I took a walk in, trying to be clean,
though all the dirt is on the inside now.
And bursting to be told, to be let out,
but, with the stain of it, who can I tell
who wouldn't blame me for inflaming it?

I take my driest paper, mix the ink,
and open the scene where the daughter stumbles in
with bleeding stumps for hands, a bloody chin,
and blood ballooning as she tries to speak;
each word a victim of her absent tongue
translated to a meaningless sphere of air;
anguished to tell some caring heart who wreaked
this violent silence over their guilty deed.
But speechlessness has rendered her a worm:
no hands to write, no tongue to speak until
she spies the book that spells another's tale –
the silenced woman become a nightingale
who sings, and in her singing, is avenged.

Armada Year

London. How fondly, thinking of you now,
I conjure up your smells: your market stalls,
the horse manure, the river's fishy taint.
Can hear you in my ears like old advice:
the racket of the carts, the coster woman
who'd shout out, 'Flowers are lovely,' to the rich
as I wandered back from breakfast to my desk.
I'd make the world in words, I'd show it things
you'd only see in mirrored glass, and then
scratch off the silver, let the truth go through.
The loveliness of youth. The innocence.

Government duty helped me pay the rent.
From time to time, called up as messenger:
the small thrill when my strict instructions were
to give the message personally to men
as close to princes as pond lilies are
to the water's edge. Each courtier, each swain,
was study for my second Tamburlaine.

Watson was newly married: he and Anne
took up a lease above a draper's shop
in Norton Folgate. I lodged in the roof.

'So Kit, how goes it?' Watson, entering
the room I wrote in through those early months;
the smell of starch and long opinions.
'Tom,
can I greet you first?' I feel that warm embrace
as if his arms are round me now, and not
this blanket. Missing him wells up like blood
from a fresh wound, and I let the memory pass
to that early evening as we pull apart.

'How's writing going?'
'How was France?
He laughs,
'You first! You know I'm paid for my discretion.
No gossip for you before the third beer. So.
How is it going? How's your second part?'

'Obscene. I had to pump the horror up;
dear Ned insisted.'
'Have you eaten yet?
Can I tempt you to the tavern? All the light's
gone out of the day. What say you? Save your wax
and dine with me. The Queen is paying for it.'

'I'm halfway through a scene.'
'And stuck?'
He read
my mind most clearly when he was relaxed.
'Come back to it tomorrow when you're fresh.
Your brain can solve it overnight, if greased
and given sustenance. Come on.'

He was
persuasive, warm. The most insistent arm
to ever link with mine and march me down
three flights of stairs and out into the night
to marvel at mud and stars. He was the shape
I moulded myself to, because he made
such wondrous things as him seem possible.

We stride into the tavern, get a wink
from Kate the barmaid as she sashays by,
two trays of food well-balanced. 'Christopher,
you may slip in there; I'm a married man.'
Greets neighbours, 'Well met Harry! How's the boil?
My wife can brew an unction. Hunt her down!'
We take the private corner he prefers.

'How are you doing for money?'
'Not so well.'
'Still hiring the horse, though.'
'I must have the horse.
Tom, without the horse, I'm five foot five
and half the world looks down on me.'
'I know.
Create the show and folk believe its true.
Dress rich, ride rich, be rich. When will it work
do you think?'
'Don't doubt me Tom. I'm come this far
with nothing but belief. A cobbler's son
who now is qualified a gentleman.'

The corners of his mouth twitch like a fly
in a spiders web that movement now reveals.

'Don't toy with me Tom.'
'Oh we are serious.
I'm glad you have the horse, still. As for money,
the horse might get you more of it.
'How's that?'
He leans in closer, makes our wall-less room.
'A Spanish invasion fleet is being prepared.'
My pulse leaps like a stag. 'Twelve dozen ships

bearing three thousand guns. There will be peace
negotiations. But. We believe they'll fail.'

'The execution of the Queen of Scots –'

'- has angered the Catholics greatly, yes, my friend.'

He drops his voice two registers, as Kate
yaws to the side to fill our cups with ale.

'A horse eats up the distances,' he smiles
until she is past, 'between the enemy
and us. We need a network on the ground.'
Watson takes two short sips beneath the froth
and smacks his lips.
'Pack and be ready to go.
You'll not be called until the chain's in place
through which to pass your information. But
be ready to serve your country.'

'Tamburlaine!
The room fills with his roar as Ned Alleyn
creates a stage around him. 'Is it done?
I thought I'd find you here. Where is my play?
Have you got time for drinking?'
'It's my first!'

'He's lying, this is number three,' Tom says,
and shakes his hand.
'You poets. Always thirsty.
Can a humble actor join you?'
'Be our guest.
Though our kitty's empty, if you might chip in.'

Tom had been writing plays for Ned for months,
though secretly, without his name to them.
'If it's not Latin, it's not scholarly;
I cannot own the thing,' he told me once.

Ned's quick riposte, 'Both spent my money, then?
was subtle as a knife in an oyster shell.

'I may have information,' Watson said.
'Advance information. What will be on the minds
of the summer's audience. You could plan ahead.'

Alleyn is interested. 'Go on, then, speak.'
'Better not speak,' says Tom. 'I'll write it down.
Read it and cast it on the fire. And should
anyone ask how you're so prescient,

say you consulted an astrologer.'

'I'm with you,' said Ned. 'Come on then.' Watson tears
the corner off a playbill on the wall,
borrows the quill the tapster keeps for tabs
and scratches some words for Ned.
His brows rise up
like punters for an ovation.
'This is news.'
'Valuable news?'
'I'll double the summer gates
with the right plays in place.' He hands a purse
over to Tom unconsciously, his eyes
still taking the words in.
'On the fire,' Tom says,
and Ned obeys. It curls up, black as nightmares.

'We will defeat them,' Watson says, quite firm.
'We will defeat them, Ned. You mark my word.'

Middelburgh

At Middelburgh, the printer's twitchy eye,
its odd, incessant winking, puts me off.
My accent deteriorates. 'Monsieur Le Doux.
You have a trunk for me?' The facial tic
suggests he has it hidden. 'Not at all.'
'It didn't come?' His wink says nothing more.
'If I give you this angel?' 'There you are.'
He snaps the money up. 'It's stored out back.'
I follow him through. An apprentice at the press
brings down black letter onto pristine sheet.
I check the contents. 'Everything is there,'
he says, politely. 'Books are valuable
but far too heavy to stand in for gold.
I have some English titles you might like.
Things you can't get a licence for. You know?'
The one time winking might have seemed to fit,
his face is motionless as masonry.
'Religious tracts of various persuasions.
Wider debate than the English Queen allows.'
'You publish poetry?'
'If it will sell.
None at the moment. You have written verse.'
He knows. It's not a question. 'I have seen
your manuscripts,' he shrugs apologetically.
'When I was checking things against your list.
There might be a market for the saucy ones.'
'We may do business later,' I reply,
tucking a ream of paper beneath my arm.
'For now, I'm at these lodgings. Send the trunk
as soon as you can manage.' He folds the slip
into his pocket, winks me to the street.

I write all night. The lady of the house,
who provided extra candles for a mark,
is snoring on her purse. The moon is low;
a cat is prowling shadows on the stairs
and when I stop, my losses crowding in,
I think of your lips, one kiss. As though I live.
But I am the ruined queen of ancient Rome
who killed herself, and left her words to sing.

At noon, the trunk arrives between two boys
who frown at my tip. The tall one kicks the short
to dig out a piece of parchment, firmly sealed.
'This came for you this morning.' Another coin
and both skulk off. It's addressed 'M. Le Doux';
the seal's unknown to me; the hand inside

is unfamiliar. But beside the words
is sketched the outline of a marigold.
‘Meet me at one. The Eagle’s Head. T.T.’

Tamburlaine the Second

‘Oh, that was something. This’ll run for weeks.’
Over my shoulder, ‘Robert, sir, you’re late!
Where were you at this young man’s play?’ Ned barks.
Greene almost flinches. ‘Though there’s nothing I
would rather do than laud another’s art,
I was unwell.’ There is a hint of truth
around his lips; the lightest tint of green
reflected from his cloak, or in his blood
from the rumoured diet of fish and Rhenish wine.
Tonight, exaggerating for effect,
Greene is his name, his nature and attire.

‘On rewarding myself with a pint or two of wine
for finishing that script I promised you,
I find my head inoperative, too full
to take this young man’s pounding poetry.
But, Marlowe, you’re well, I trust. Another hit?’

‘Marley,’ I say.
‘That doesn’t have the ring
an author needs, my boy. Whereas Mar-low
seems altogether fitting, since the sound,
paints you with either syllable. Mar-low.
The play went well?’
Ned chips in, ‘It’s a hit’;
the insult doesn’t land with him at all.

‘That’s just as well for me. These fashions change,
sometimes before a man can capture them.’
He pushes a manuscript in front of Ned.
‘Alphonsus, King of Aragon. The part
is made for you, Alleyn. Bombastic verse
in quite the style you’re used to. Guaranteed
to pack the house as full as Tamburlaine.
Six pounds is not too much to ask.’
‘Six pounds?
I paid half that for Tamburlaine Part Two!’
‘But this is twice as good again, at least.
(Excuse me, no offence intended.) And
the Spanish title makes it topical.
You’ll more than make your money back again.’

‘Can I distract you?’ Watson, at my side.
‘A friend from Paris would like to meet the man
who has a shepherd bridle pampered jades.
Sir Francis’ cousin, Thomas Walsingham.’

Thus, you have joined me in the tale I tell:
your gentle face beside him, framed in curls.
'Perhaps you'd call me Tom. Another Tom.'
You grasped my hand. 'I've read your poetry.
You're Watson's heir. In English. And your play –
it's very brave.' Your eyes were so intense
you threw me for a moment.

'How so, brave?'

'To scold religions, have an atheist
depose both Christian and Muslim kings.'

Is it natural for a memory to scorch,
word upon blistered word, that first exchange?
Do you recall as clearly, my new gaze
falling upon you? Yours was torching me.

'It isn't bravery, but metaphor.
Impassioned right slays cold hypocrisy.
Those who swear oaths on sacred books and break
their promises should surely feel God's wrath.'
'In the form of a shepherd?'
'Why not in a shepherd?
A shepherd's a man like any king. But rarer:
he keeps his word.'
'You don't see danger in it?'

Instinctively, I draw back from the cliff
of my own confirmed opinions, wondering if
you fish for your cousin also.
'May I speak
not as intelligencer, but as poet?'
'Can you separate yourself so?'
'Certainly.'
As though you'd entered, verbal sword half drawn
and we were locked now, hilt to hilt.
'Then do.'

'Truth's dangerous to liars. But in art
it's softened by beauty. If we put both sides,
as dialectic training teaches.'
'Where
were you educated?'
'Cambridge.'
'Tom, I swear,
he works for you already. Interviewed
by Sir Francis himself.' The jest from Watson there
only voicing my own discomfort. You stayed fast
on the subject as a ship's own barnacle.

‘One of the sceptic colleges, no doubt.
Not Christ’s. Say, Corpus Christi?’
‘You are sharp.’
And serious. ‘My father kept blades like you
for skinning rabbits.’
Trying to prick a laugh,
to distract you from your purpose. To no avail.

‘They train good heretics,’ you say as plain
as if I’d just assented.

‘I would say
they train young men to question and debate
both sides of all positions.’
‘And is there
a bar on what may be counter-argued?’
‘No.’
‘The existence of God?’
‘Ah, come now,’ Watson leaps
ahead of my answer. ‘Let us get to know
each other first. Thank goodness it’s a play.
As quite opposed to something serious.’
He clasps your shoulders, ‘Come now, gentle friend!
A play is only playful. There’s no threat
if we are entertaining make-believe.’
Your eyes assess the set of my mouth and jaw
precisely as a housewife squeezes fruit;
remain there lest I slip away. ‘I don’t
believe he’s made it up.’
‘What are you saying?’
‘The atheism. Are you an atheist?’
Watson laughs loudly, ‘Faith, he isn’t Tom!
He’s toying with you.’
‘No, I’m not’ I say.
‘Not an atheist?’
‘Not toying with you.’
‘Oh,’
you say, and I watch your face fall like a bird
hit by a slingshot. So surprised by ‘Oh’
that the fight quite leaves me.
‘Nothing more than “oh”?’

There is a folding sadness in your face.
‘If you don’t know God’s not an argument,
I cannot help,’ you say.
‘You want to help?’
‘A talented writer like yourself? I do.’
The strangest sense, then, of your tenderness
washed over me. I’d read you very wrong.

‘I’m open to help,’ I say, ‘all kinds’.
And Tom
chips in, ‘He hasn’t any money, Kit.
He’s a second son. His brother has the manor.
Handsome place, too. At Scadbury, in Kent.
But Tom’s as penniless as the rest of us.’

We spent some borrowed pennies anyway
on further beers. You softened visibly.
and as we parted, grasped my hand and said,
‘You know God’s name is Jove?’
‘Of course.’
You dipped
my finger in the frothy head that lay
at the bottom of my exhausted cup and spelt
across the tabletop: ‘I-O-V-E’.
‘As it is written,’ you said, quietly.

I close that memory, and sleep alone.

Hotspur's Descendant

Two days later, I was called away
to the continent. The Spanish invasion fleet
was building off the Netherlands. Inland
the Duke of Parma's army gathered strength.
I crossed the Channel as a pious man
and quoted verse at those who challenged me,
defrauding death by blasphemous degree.
Yet in the honest service of a faith
and that faith's defender; loyal to my queen
by counterfeiting service to a God
I couldn't quite believe in. If that God
despised my actions, he left me unharmed
to estimate men and horse, artillery.

Flushing, the English garrison where I
reported news that they might use at home
was base to every spy and volunteer.
The bars were choked with soldiers on alert
exchanging rumours over watered beer;
with tables squeezed, it wasn't possible
to eat alone, unless one was diseased.
But I was halfway through a history play,
preferred to eat alone than make small talk,
and the inn, at least, had candles. I was glad
scribbling in public frightens people off.
It kept me out of trouble.
'Can I sit?'
The gentleman who joined me had a voice
as curious as Fortune.
'Be my guest.'
I hoped he couldn't read things upside down.
'Do you mind my asking what you're working on?'
'Do you mind my saying yes?'
He didn't blink.
'It can't be secret if you're writing here.'
'It isn't secret, but it's personal.'
'Looks like a play.'
'Excuse me, have we met?'
'Henry,' he said, his hand entreating mine.
I took it. 'Christopher Marley.' Back to the page.
'Marley the poet?'
'So they say.'
'What luck!
I finished reading, only recently,
your translation of Ovid's Elegies.'
'That manuscript has travelled well.' I wondered
how this stranger came by it.

'Indeed. Like fire
through August hayricks. You have quite a skill.
I write a little myself. Not fresh as you.
I'm more of a reader.'
'Very interesting.'
I admit my patience wore a little thin.

'I'm sorry. I'm interrupting. Don't mind me.'
He sat and tapped his fingers on the edge
of the beery table. Like he dabbed the keys
of an invisible virginal to scales.

'It's funny how, on the very edge of war,
our thoughts are drawn to the wars of history.
I couldn't help noticing it's a battle scene.
Apologies.' He'd been quiet a good two minutes.
Time to give up. 'You're fond of history?'

'I'm fond of learning. Fond of the arts, and science,
debate. Though I avoid theology.
As wise men should. But knowledge interests me.'

Clearly he was no soldier. Though in clothes
as practical as mine, there was an air
of velvet and silk about him, suddenly.
I wondered I hadn't noticed it before.

'When all this is over, if they don't invade,
perhaps you'd like to use my library.
Come stay with me. I have two thousand books;
you might find one or two of use.' He grinned.
'Do you know Thomas Watson?'
'He's a friend.'
'A mutual friend. Delightful. Well, I'll go
and leave you to your play. We'll meet again.'

I asked the tapster to supply his name.
'That's Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland.'

First Rendezvous

A half-hour early, I search out a seat:
a shadowed place, a good view of the door.
As lunchtime nears, The Eagle's Head fills up
with Flemish conversation; working folk
taking their lunch. At noon, a slender man
tall as a cobbler's story, enters the bar,
a drooping marigold in his lapel.
I've never met the man, he can't know me,
and yet he logs my face, and, ducking the beams,
traverses to my corner. 'Thomas Thorpe,'
he says; a proffered hand. I let it hang
limp in the air, an unadopted flag
I can't declare myself to. 'Marigold!'
The hand I spurned leaps to the sad gold flower
and dumps it on the table. 'Am I right?
It was murder to get it. Sorry. Figure of speech.'
His eyebrows flash an inkling of the fate
I'm rumoured to have suffered. 'You'd be surprised
how detestably obtuse the local soil:
it's not the soil for marigolds, I'm told.'
I don't know whether to take this literally
or as a metaphor, since 'marigold'
has long been the service code for Catholic.
I haven't said a word to help him out,
provoking the eager man to ask me straight,
'Monsieur Le Doux, have I made a mistake?'

'What makes you think that I'm Monsieur Le Doux?'

He pauses thoughtfully, and tucks the flower
back where its drooping head offsets his air
of confidence. 'Three men here are alone.
One is as old as Christmas. One possesses
a wooden leg. The other one is you.
Your caution's admirable; but you've the air
of someone set upon and robbed, my dear.
Thus I concluded you have lost something
that's as yet unrestored. Your name perhaps.
I have on my person, however, something of yours.
A publication fresh-picked from St. Paul's.'
He places the volume gently in my hands.
'An author of some promise, I understand.'

It's Venus and Adonis. The long poem
I wrote the previous winter when the plague
had closed down all the theatres. The works
I never published underneath my name

when I was living (preferring to stay alive
than yoke myself to Faustus, Tamburlaine)
are still not mine. What's new belongs to him:
my fabricated self, my pseudonym.

He insisted that I meet him personally
in an empty room at Richard Field's shop,
above the bang and clatter of the press
on the floor below. The deal already sealed,
the price agreed. 'But I must know his face.'

He had a hard, unmoving quality:
rough country-hewn, that quietly withstands
the shoulders of bulls. I've never met a man
so much like a dry-stone wall.
I watched his eyes
travel my clothes and calculate their cost –
cambric sixpence a yard, slashed satin sleeves –
I'm totalled, underlined.
'So you are he?
The writer?' I nod. 'We all should learn to write
and live so sumptuously.'
And I could say
I've other work, or, I have noble friends,
but choose this line: 'I'm kept well by my Muse.'
A tightness in me, constricting like a wire
across my Adam's apple.
'But not safe.'
He closes his ledger, states my truth as bare
as Lenten tables. 'So. We have a deal.'

How sharp to see his name beneath my words.
Print makes it real. Erased. I'm written out.

'It's causing quite a stir,' Thorpe offers, pouring
himself a beer from the jug he whistled up.
'Lusty young men are learning lines by heart.
It's selling. The second reprint's due next week.
I have an interest in the trade,' he says,
as he notices a question in my face.

'And there's no inkling?'
'Not a doubt, my dear.
He's fresh discovered. Conjured out of air.'
He throws his hands up like a small bouquet
which falls again, and crumples in his lap.
'The public love a new thing.'

'So they do.'
And there! A spike in my blood, an inward punch
against myself, and all that nourished me.
So long as the public swallow up this lie,
believe me written out, then I am saved.
And yet I'm starved. But good he's believed not me.
Yet dreadful, my work condemned to bastardy,
conceived as if my Muse had slept with him.
Now see, my beautiful daughter on the street,
admired by white limbed, languid youths, and she
crediting him, while I am buried warm.

'And has he kept his head down?'
'That he has.
He's happily in the country where the folk
don't read a lot of poetry.' Thorpe smiles
like a reopening wound. This agent's young;
younger than me, I'd guess – yet old as wine
kept in its dust.
'You'll want to spend some time
alone with this,' he says. 'But we must meet
again. I have a letter. No, not here –'
He must have read my mind, which jumped like a fish
in hope of a mayfly. 'Not here. Somewhere private.
Where do you lodge?' I give him my address.
And so he weaves his height back through the chairs
and leaves me with my poem, half his beer.

As I walk out, a pair of Englishmen
fall into step beside me.
'Pardon us.
We were wondering, sir, what you were reading there.
It seemed to provoke such interest. Is it new?'
They are both in continental clothes, disguised
in local jackets. The second man chips in.
'My friend and I are lovers of literature
of all persuasions.'

'And so inquisitive,'
I remark politely. 'But I have no objection.'
I hand it over like a piece of bread
I don't mind sharing.

England's spies are quiet,
thumbing the pages, finding only poem.
No code, no masked sedition, only poem.
One shrugs, gives up. The sharper of the two
returns to the title page. 'What phrase is this?
Can you translate?' He jabs the epigram
which, naturally, is Latin.

'It's a quote.
"Let base conceited wits admire vile things.
Fair Phoebus lead me to the muses springs."
From Ovid,' I add gently. 'The Roman poet.'

'I've not much taste for ancient history,'
the sharp man says. 'And though I like a verse
or two, a poem this long is tedious.
Perhaps another time.' The pamphlet's pressed
into my chest, and they give me Good days
and doff their hats. I'm free to walk away.

The First Heir of My Invention

I cannot bear to check it for mistakes.
Can hardly bear to look at it at all,
and tuck it in the trunk. So it is mine.
So young men parrot it. And there is praise
inherent in its selling out so soon.
But the accident of needing some disguise
to write beneath means all the praise belongs
to my invention, Shakespeare. Who is me,
and yet, divorced from all my infamy.
The poem designed to rescue me from shame
now wreaths its laurels round another's name.

I smuggle a quart of whisky to my room
and drink the afternoon into a blur:
filling the hell-hole of the thoughtless mouth
that occasioned this disaster to occur;
drumming the dumb skull of this idiot
who pushed the gods of fame to such degree
that no-one, now, can know that he's alive.
And no-one abroad has been as fooled as he –
or me – for I forget now who I am,
drowned both in whisky and unyielding grief
for all that's shipwrecked with identity.

The Jew of Malta

At the launch of my fourth play, I'm holding court.
London is drunker with me every month,
and tables pulled together, flagons poured -
and how my mouth is like those beery jugs,
pouring a liquor that could ruin us all,
clear and intoxicating all at once.

'Religion is made by men, not made by gods.
Its purpose is to keep the world in awe
while we are robbed to gild the candlesticks.'

Tom Watson, sucking the meal out of his teeth,
allows his mouth to crawl towards a smile.
'Not all religion, Kit. Those candlesticks
are Papist props. So be a puritan.
Eschew the pomp.'
'But that's his favourite bit!'
This gibe from Nashe, then recently arrived
in London: a gag-toothed youth I rather liked
for his insolence.
'The scarecrow isn't wrong,'
I say, not quite declaring he is right.
'At least the Catholic Church puts on a show:
paintings and music, incense. What we get
for our pennies on the plate is threats of Hell,
and pious hypocrisy, with rituals
dead-dull enough to send a spark to sleep
if the pews weren't hard as sitting on your bones.
Nothing to look at, sermons sour as lime
and fines for not attending.'
Watson smiles,
intent on baiting me. 'So be a Jew!'
He fills my tankard to the top, then his.

'Tom, could I change my blood, I'd rather die
than go through the bris – of all ungodly things –
to join a people scorned even beyond
players and poets. No, for all their skill
at making money.'
'Be a Muslim then.'
His smile says give up, friend, you'll never win.
He pitches it against my seriousness
hoping I'll cave and switch to lighter things.

Might I have saved myself by heeding him?
Not without gutting me of all my passion;
the past can't be rewritten. In any case,

for all Tom's lightness, he too found his prison.
My bars were forged inside my drunken mouth.

'My point is, all religion is the same.
I cannot see why a man can't simply be –
defined by no allegiance. Hold his spirit
outside religion.'
Quietly, you were there.
Folding your jacket, speaking with that calm
that lifts your opinion over louder mouths,
entreating 'Kit – be careful what you say,'
your eyes intense.

'Can I not speak my mind?
Is England ancient Rome? Are we all slaves?'

How patient you were with me. A doting parent
whose love prevents all discipline.

You say,
'In principle we're free, but bear in mind
the times. You could pick a safer subject. Be
a safer subject.'
Like a father.
'Kit!'
Tom Watson interjects, 'The Bible says,
Be still and know that I am God. What say
we let it rest at that?' There's nothing stirred
until Watson gets his oar in. I respond,
'The Bible is a storybook for babes.
And the New Testament is filthily written.
It's hard to credit that the word of God
would have no poetry.'
'But it speaks of love,'
says Ned, objecting. 'Loving one's fellow man.
You surely can't object to that.'
Nashe snorts,
attempting to contain within his nose
a laugh that Edward Alleyn would not enjoy.
Not to blame friends for my misfortunes, but
he cues me in to further mischief.
'True.
Christ loved St. John extremely, don't you think?
Actors have ingles, Jesus had his John.
I can't help but approve, but worship him?
How has this man, professing love, puffed up
a cult that suckles bishops? Feeds them larks
on golden platters in their palaces?'

'Abuse of power,' you remind, 'is not

specifically religious. It's a trait
that occurs throughout humanity. But love'
(oh, you were always speaking love to me),
'the concept of God as love, is that not worth
the flaws in either Testament? Is love
not central to religion?'

There, Nashe twitched
with such involuntary violence that his beer
flew into his lap and soaked him. Christ, your laugh
was such blessed relief, but when the roar
of hilarity died down you asked again,
'Do not the gospels testify of love?
Are we not urged to love?'
'But has it worked?'
You know I hate to lose. I do not lose.
'As one and a half millennia attest,
religion kills more people than the plague.
Love neighbours, yes. But not if their beliefs
rest in some other holy book.'

These words
provoke a burst of laughter. Ned is cut.
'But, Kit,' he says, 'you do believe in God?'

'I believe in truth and beauty. The divine.
But literal miracles? Water into wine?'
('If only!' shouts Nashe, shaking his empty cup.)
'The raising of the dead? A virgin birth?'

'So Christ was a bastard and his mother dishonest?'
Watson desires to see how far I'll go.

'He was a carpenter. A mortal man.
What are we meant to worship? Didn't the Jews,
among whom he was raised, know who he was
and whence he came? And they had him crucified.'

Ned's brother, John, is listening from his post
behind the bar. 'Now, now, that's dirty talk.'
His moustache and hairy lower lip are paired
to make a second mouth, which I enjoy
watching as he negotiates the burr
of the faint West Country accent Ned has kicked.
'My customers are all God-fearing men.
Or ought to be, for all the ale they swallow.'
He crosses and sits among us, next to Ned.
'Brother! You've brought in reprobates again!'
(A hammy whisper.) 'And Master Marlowe too.
Always a pleasure to learn what's in those books

and have the company of gentlemen.'

Nashe grimaces. 'We're happy to oblige.
Now back to the fun. So who is next?'

'Moses,'
Ned offers. 'Now he was a holy man. A prophet,
most surely.'
I snap the offer from his mouth
as a hawk takes bacon.
'Ned, he led the Jews
to wander the wilderness for forty years,
a journey that should take no more than one.
Appalling poor direction? Or a jape
so all those privy to his subtleties
would perish before they found the Promised Land?
Raised Egyptian, he wouldn't find it hard
to fool some unsophisticated Jews.
The man was a conjuror.'
'A conjuror?'
'Most certainly, for when –'
'Who has my chair?'
A kingly roar comes from a stubbled man
whose friends have him by his elbows, rein him back.
'My chair!' he says. 'Has my initials on.
See? William Bradley. Give me back my chair!'

It's the chair I'm sitting in that bears his mark,
carved on the armrest like a schoolboy's desk,
and I rise, as light as thought, until a hand
presses my shoulder. 'No, Master Marlowe, you
should stay right there. The chair belongs to me.'

The chair man stumbles back a step. 'How so?'

John Allen: 'Because you owe me fourteen pounds.
Deny it all you like, I have your chit.'
The men lock eyes as if those eyes were horns;
John, as the landlord, snorting from his turf
at nextdoor's bull. He growls,
'Now pay your debt.
Or you will lose more than your furniture.'

'You broke into my house.'
'You broke your word.'
John Allen's accent thickens under stress.
'And I will break your neck without a thought
if you make any trouble.'
'That a threat?
I'll have the law on you.'

'We have the law
with us,' says, Watson, fingering Hugh Swift,
his brother-in-law, a Middle Temple man.
'Now pay your debt to John or bugger off.'

Bradley is pissed, but with this taunt he stiffens,
shakes off his helpers, and engages me
directly. 'That chair's mine. If you know what
is good for you, you'll stand and pass it here.'

I feel my throat go dry, and every face
around the tavern tense for my reply.
I take a sip of beer and settle back.
It hasn't passed my notice that his hand
is on his dagger's hilt. 'Dear man, I would,
if I thought you needed it. But you can stand
up by yourself, despite - how many pints?
This chair's so comfy I'm afraid you'd slump
and lose all benefit of being tall.
Once sat, a man must rely upon his wit
for his defence. Take no risks. If you stand
you can rely upon your knife. Although –'
I nod to his twitching fingers, dancing round
the hilt. '- I wouldn't. There are more of us.'

His anger narrows. 'So superior,
with your clever words, your friends with velvet capes.'
It was you he was referring to, our lord
without the manor. 'All is levelled though
by your being flesh. No wit is quick enough
to escape my knife. Who are you anyway?'

'He wrote The Jew of Malta.'

'Good for you!'
the bastard leers across the tabletop.
'At least you'd sense to boil the big-nosed crook.'
The farce's subtleties were lost on him.
'The kikes and money lenders should be hanged'
(grinning at John Allenn). 'And all the landlords
who let the poofters in.'

Now Watson stands,
now Ned Alleyn, now every one of us,
comes to the battlements with daggers drawn.

'You pus-filled bollock.' Watson's voice is steel.
'You privy stool I wouldn't shit upon.
If you're a gentleman, procure a sword
and find me any weekday at my house.

If not, admit that you're a parasite
who borrows from friends and doesn't keep his word.
Let's settle it like men, and not like scum
who murder with their eating implements.'

Bradley is reeling back and grinning wide.
Pleasure has dropped his voice to baritone.
'If you're a man, then I'm a Persian whore.
We'll settle it as you say, though. Call it a duel.
Then, when I kill you, I'll have my defence.'
He and his cronies shamble to the door
half checking us, half fearless. As he leaves,

'You challenged me. My brothers are witnesses.'

Everyone sits, and no-one says a word.
Four heartbeats pass before I break the air.
'Tom, that was madness.'
'Well, he made me mad.'
'The man's a brawler.'
'He'll not get a sword.'
'Who says he won't come at you anyway?'
'He'll sober up.'
Our eyes meet, sharing doubt.
'I liked your speech, though', Nashe says, 'very neat.
Your mental side-step, Kit, completely threw him.
You had him flummoxed, tied up in a bow
and sent to his mother.' And so the table warms
and I am toasted: 'To Kit! To the play!
To the Jew of Malta!' And Nashe contributes:
'To pus-filled bollocks, may they rue the day!'
'To pus-filled bollocks,' we agree, and roar.
I notice Greene come in, turn round, and leave.

Lurch

'I'm getting out of London, Kit,' you said,
catching me as I left the inn that night.
'My brother's fallen ill.'
                Perhaps the drink
had magnified my feelings, but your news
felt like a blow. And that surprised me so
that I staggered back.
                'Woah, Kit!'
                You pulled me up
from the path of a carthorse and its fatal load.
'All well?' you asked.
                'No, Tom! All isn't well.
Why are you going?' You helped to brush me down
unaware your touch was setting light in me
a thousand fuses. And confusion too,
tipped up, the drink not helping. 'For my brother,'
you said. 'And Scadbury needs managing.'
'Is he very ill?' I asked. 'Will you inherit?'
The drink, the drink. You smiled all your forgiving.
'I do not know the outcome, Kit, only
that I am called away.'
                'Don't go, dear friend!'
My sudden passion shocking even me
as I went to kiss you.
                'Kit,' you reeled, 'behave!'
The boy holding our light looked sharp away.
'I need you here,' I said.
                'You don't need me.
You've got Tom and the others,' you replied.

But now you know how much I needed you,
my voice of caution, and my gentler side.
For I remember, parting, how you gripped
my hand in both of yours with urgency.
'Work less for my cousin. All the lies required
are dangerous for honest men like you.'

'When money comes more readily, I'll stop.'

You went to Kent. And what was I to do?

That Men Should Put an Enemy in Their Mouths

Whisky kicks doorframes while the landlord sleeps.
It shoulders blame, then pisses it in the sink.
Blurs what it hurts to look at, pillows sense.
Grog fogs a future which is only dark
until tomorrow narrows to a pin
on the nose's tip. Then drink soaks into thoughts,
weighting them into bruising hammer blows

which wake me, not as senseless as I wish
I was. Each leaden limb thuds with the poison:
self-administered. As I lift my cheek
from its crumpled resting place, and shift my head
the world shifts with it, wobbles, settles down.

'And Christ is Risen.' Thomas Thorpe is sat
four feet away, his hands placed on his knees
like souvenirs. 'You're lucky I'm a friend.
I could have had eggs and bacon off your back,
you'd not have noticed.'

'How did you get in?'
I squint my eyes at the daylight's acid burn.
'Old fashioned charm,' he says, smoothing his hair.
'A drop of rose-oil too. The ladies like it.'

My brain is coming back from somewhere cold,
finding its way by following the steps
it stomped out yesterday. 'You have the letter?'

'The letter, yes. All in good time, my dear.
There's something else more pressing. A request.
We need a play.'
'The theatres are closed.
Unless you're saying they're open?'
'No such luck.
The plague's still rampant. Gathering en masse
is quite forbidden. All the same a play
has been requested. You'll be paid for it.
A comedy.'
'A comedy!'
'Indeed.'
He keeps his mouth straight, though it longs to smile.
'The Queen, apparently, likes something light
at Christmas time.'

I launch towards my desk,
pick up the papers I was writing there

and wave them like a fist. 'I have a play.
A tragedy of violence and revenge.
Titus Andronicus. The crowd will love it.
Henslowe will make a mint. Though he'll complain
about the cost of bull's blood, and the slopping
and mopping for each performance. Here. It's done.
Or close to done. I've had enough of it.'
A wave of nausea forces me to sit,
my heart capsized.

'And then the comedy?'

'What? Are you mad? Pray, find me comedy
in the nonsense that my life's become. Go home.'
I press my aching head between my fists
as if I could squeeze him out of it. 'Go home.
Go back to – where you came from.' Thinking Hell
might be the place. 'But give me the letter first.'

'Touchy,' he says, and offers it from afar
like meat on a stick that's pushed towards a bear.
The seal, and the hand, Southampton's, and not yours.
I break it open. Not a word of you.

'There's nothing else?'
'There's gold if you'll write the play.
I assume you're running low by now.'
He's right,
and knows he is, but quiet in victory,
stares out the window at a distant cloud
feeding his hat brim through his hands, to mime
that velvet wheel of Fate, necessity.

'I'll try,' I say, my hand out for a purse,
aware of my own petulance. 'Perhaps
the joke will come to me in Italy.'

'Commedia dell'Arte! I saw it once
in Padua. What larks!' He stops the flow
immediately, though a boy had bubbled up
beneath the beard. 'You've travelled much?' he asks,
dropping the gold into my open palm.
'A little,' I say, with unmasked bitterness.
'In service of the Queen. What I've not seen
I'm sure to make up for in the coming months.'

'Do you know Padua?' 'Just by report.'
'A scholar ought to go there at least once.
You're travelling as a scholar, I believe.
You might want to visit the university.'

‘If I have time,’ I say, aware of time
stretched out before me in an endless rope
that I must climb towards the heartless gods,
its end fraying behind me. And the drop.

I tuck the purse inside my shirt. ‘I’ll try,’
I say to his eyebrows, arching up like cats
at an enemy. ‘No promises.’

He picks
up the Chronicles, that volume from the trunk
that groans with England’s misery, and flicks
to a page that wants to open. Reads for a blink,
then puts it down as gently as a babe.

‘There’s humour in every tragedy,’ he says.

‘Not this,’ I answer, stabbing the title page
of the bloody play that hacks out my revenge.

‘The troubled mind is a creative one.
But have you watched the crowd’s reaction when
the blood starts gushing? Faces turned away.
Barbaric as human kind might seem to be,
most cannot look. The point you mean to pierce
is deflected. No-one sees. But make us laugh
and we’re toys for you to play with.

Just a thought,’
he says when a silence follows.

Though that thought
is tugging a mental sleeve, points at the door
of my own imprisonment. Which is unlocked.
Whisky, however, clouds the hall beyond.

I turn to Thorpe ‘What was amusing once
seems less amusing now I am obliged
to forgo my native tongue. Go by a name
I cannot tune my ear to when it’s called.
Good conversation, which would feed my heart,
is fields and seas away, and barred from me.
Banished from friends and loved ones, putting miles
between us daily. That’s my life. Perhaps
you’d like to suggest the humour in it.

‘Well -’
He thinks for a moment, scratching at his chin
to make a cloud of fairies. ‘You’re alive.

Whereas Marlowe, so they say, is horribly dead.
Stabbed through the eye. Some drunken tavern brawl.'
I startle. 'Sorry, what?'
'That's what I heard.'

'He was a gentleman! A Cambridge scholar.
He never would have died in such a manner.'
He knows. I know. Third person is a sham.

Thorpe shrugs. 'Does it matter now? Kit Marlowe's dead.
And no-one looks for a dead man. So. Be glad.
Get out in the air and breathe it. Friends of yours
have taken risks that you might do so.' And
with that, he turns, gathers the play, and leaves.

The University Men

No one dared breathe succession, but the stage
was clearing for the coming deathbed scene
of the Virgin Queen. Vibrating in the wings,
the noble houses and the royal courts,
a dozen hopefuls. She would not discuss
such certainties as might endanger them.

For power's an intoxicating brew,
and plots begin to cook in seething heads
that ache to overthrow the old regime
with cold assassination. So we were placed:
the university men. The tutor spies.
The secretary agents of the state.

For a change of head may bring a change of faith,
and the careful man will shift from foot to foot
and listen to the words that will determine
who will be judges, who will be hanged and burned.
The university men, known for their wit,
would use intelligence, and gather it.

The God of Shepherds, Poley named himself.
In charge of the poets: as if poets can
be ruled by anything except their dreams.
But still, we drank with him, and called him Pan,
alive with the danger he might put us in
to serve our country, and to serve the Queen.

Tom was assigned Cornwallis, while my charge
was the King of Scotland's cousin, Arbella Stuart.
We were to guide our charges down the road
of strict obedience and loyalty.
We were to note who called, who crept to Church.
The loyal man at work. Yet still, I played,

dandled that toy, religion. Spun ideas
to jet above Ned's buskins on the stage.
For it was God – at least, it seemed like God,
who kept me up at night, and scribbling
those thoughts humanity might understand.
Only, I wrote – and signed them – in my hand.

The Pact of Faustus

‘So should I sign in blood?’ My joking words
fell silently on the official’s face.
I put my name to paper anyway.
And so I set the wheel of my disgrace
trundling toward me on some distant road.

Knowledge. It sounds as gentle as a bell
at three a.m. from the neighbouring parish clock.
It sounds as sound as wood does to a tree.
It sounds, at first, as safe as any book.
But certain volumes, authorised in Hell,

are dangerous to know. Some knowledge lifts
and some intoxicates. Jesters and clowns
pretending they know nothing, are the wise.
Some knowledge airs the mind; some knowledge drowns -
and yet, I couldn’t drink enough of it.

I had such faith in me, I didn’t doubt
the licensed bloodhounds couldn’t do me harm;
dull thinkers not equipped to sniff me out,
who missed the jokes, too slow to see me palm
the words from hand to hand, or hand to mouth.

But the universe has lessons, tailored tight
to fit the sin, and I was set to fall.
Proud of the name I signed away that day,
as former cobbler’s son who had it all
but shared with Lucifer the sin of pride.

Bright Lucifer, once so beloved of God
but tumbled out of heaven, and his wits;
the universe correcting for its gifts.
True knowledge of humanity confirms
that this is Hell. Nor are we out of it.

The Tutor

'You have been recommended. And your name
is Morley, I understand.'
                'It is.'
                She's still
as a spider who has felt a fly alight.
The Countess of Shrewsbury knows the Queen as Bess,
a name they share. A double-barrelled look:
three husbands haven't lasted her. The fourth
is not at home in London.
'Hear me then.
My granddaughter deserves the best of minds
to guide her education. Rhetoric'
- she enunciates carefully, lest I mishear -
'will not be on the menu. No woman should
be trained for disagreement. Literature
is fine. The classical sort. Not Ovid, mind.
She's just thirteen.' She scours me like a step.

'Come closer, Master Morley.' Lifts a sleeve.
'Now. Velvet? Surely a scholarly gentleman
cannot afford it.'
                'I have generous friends.'
'Do you indeed? Tom Walsingham, no doubt.'
She casts for the reaction on my face;
I give her nothing. Still, a narrowed gaze.
'Oh, I know all about it. Why you're here.
The eyes and ears of the Queen range far and wide
across our troubled country. There are those
who fancy Arbella on a Catholic throne –
please don't insult me with your feigned surprise –
and she must be protected. You'll report
to Walsingham or Burghley. So be it.
Then the government shall pay you. I'll provide
paper and books, and ten hot meals a week.
A room when we're not in London.'

                Like a thief
cutting the purse strings – certainly as quick –
but with entitlement.
'Your ladyship,
What if I can't afford those terms?'
                Her brow
rises as gently as the sea. 'Then I
will find someone more flexible,' she says.
'Someone who understands the value of
tutoring she who might one day be queen.'

‘My lady, we cannot discuss succession.’
‘No.
But be aware succession will occur.
Dear Bess is not immortal.’ Flashing teeth
as black as widow’s weeds. ‘If not Arbell,
then her cousin the King of Scots. This royal charge
is valuable. Be aware that I could ask
for any prospective tutor to pay me
and have a hundred applicants.’
It’s true.
And stood on her blood red rug, I sniff the bait
of royal stories. Close to history’s forge
as a cobbler’s son could ever dream to be,
think not of danger, or grey poverty
gnashing its teeth. Just opportunity.

Small Beer

‘Not pay you?’ Nashe is shrill, incensed. ‘Not pay?
The richest English woman beside the Queen?’
‘But how did she become so?’ Watson nods,
filling a pipe. ‘Think on. The woman’s shrewd.’
‘Not pay you, though,’ Nashe murmurs.
‘I’ll be fine,’
I reassure him. ‘You should see the meals.
Quality fare, a ransom on their own.
The books and paper are invaluable,
and time to write in. And the rest of it –
the beer and ink and horse food, I can cover.
Intelligence will serve if the playhouse shuts.’

The landlord’s girl, collecting empty jugs
at this point trips, almost into my lap
before I help her onwards. Watson blinks
at the accident. ‘You mean your wits, of course,’
‘Of course. These were expensive wits to train.’

Soliloquy

Listen. The hoot owl sweeping from the woods
marks, like a breath expelled, the starlit air.
The moon scores loneliness across the fields,
slow as the rolling ocean, and a breeze
slides to my cheek and whispers He's not here.

The road might carry love upon its back
like a dusty serpent winding from the hills;
you might be sleeping one night's dream away;
and yet your absence crawls inside my bones
and makes its home there, like a broken vow.

Two things remain: the thudding of my heart,
that drumming clown whose audience dispersed
to leave only litter, tickets… and the sound
that thought makes when it's a battered on a wall
that won't admit it. Oh love, let me in.

I grieve myself. This shadow I've become
that berates itself for being out of doors,
the rusty nail on which my name is hung
now on the edge of falling; I'd be yours
were I not crushed and bootless. Who is this?

I grieve that boy who practised walking tall
around the quiet squares of academe;
who, like his father, aimed to fashion souls,
envisaging the awl as poetry.

I grieve that young man, choking on the jests
that he and friends had conjured from their dreams;
of how it will be when all the world is theirs
and they will fall to bed in satin sleeves…
oh clod, oh stupid man, where was your head?

This age abhors the truth. It beats it down
like a smart unruly servant, like a dog
whose eye reflects his master, club in hand
and poised to destroy him. Meanwhile, churches cram
with poisoned congregations, social ticks
who nod to each other, followers of Faith
who don't believe the words, but sing the song.

Oh irreligious world, so scant of good
that good, when it comes, cannot be recognised -
a tolerated foreigner, who's blamed
the moment we're engulfed by our own sin.

Oh sacrilegious world, to kill a man
for the form his prayer takes, when we need all prayers
to pull us from this darkness into light.
But snuff us out, who cares?

Oh shameless world.
I'll hold a mirror to your ugliness
until you see you contribute each squint,
each pustulence, to the grotesquerie.

Oh former loved but never-loving world.
We poets have a duty to believe
in goodness, beauty and the human heart.
Forgive me, then. How deeply I must grieve
that I'm struck down for having better faith.

A rabbit screams its murder. Bullies read
the bloodied claw of nature as a cue
to justify themselves as predators.

The landscape sits as passive as a priest
receiving our confessions, and the globe
revolves beneath the heavens: night, then day,
then night again. A lifetime falls away
as water poured on sand until we ask,

What is a human being? Are we clay?
Excrescences of light? Bright animals
adopting gross stupidity? Or gods
pelted in human skin, come down to play,
create, destroy, find joy in misery?
The moon squats on the mountains like a pearl.
It only has to rise, and will be free.

The Hog Lane Affray

Hog Lane, just after two, three years ago.
After a lunch of mutton and cold beer
with Thomas Nashe, I'm strolling back to work
on Doctor Faustus when the devil himself
calls out behind me: 'There's the beardless man
who slandered me!' It's Bradley and a friend,
George Orrell, full of ale and parsnip stew
and outrage. 'I believe I complimented you
on your uprightness,' I said.
'Untrammelled shit.
Give me your sword,' he says to Orrell, 'quick.
I'll slice his head off. Then we'll see whose brains
are bigger.' Clumsily, he wrests the sword
from his large friend's scabbard. Orrell shoves him off,
annoyed to be handled. Yet eager to assist,
he hands his yeoman friend a soldier's blade.
The rapier at my waist weighs half as much,
but neither of us has experience.

'That's not a duelling weapon.'
'I don't care.
A fighting weapon's all I'm looking for.'

'Don't start this thing.'

'You started it yourself.
The night you wouldn't get out of my chair.
I'm here to finish it.'

He hawks and spits
a fat green slug of phlegm on to the dirt.

Nashe whispers, 'I'll get Watson,' and flits off
through the gathering crowd, who, with their stink and breath,
are drawn by the hope of blood and spectacle
to make our arena. I watch my flame-haired friend
like an urgent signal flashing up the street,
dodging the foul discharge of a chamber pot
before he's swallowed up in passageways.

'I've got no fight with you, my friend,' I say.

'I'm not your friend.' He slides a greasy hand
across his mouth, as if he's tasted me.
'Draw if you call yourself a man.'
'I do.
But a gentleman.' I slide the rapier tip

into the air with a flourish, though my heart
is knocking to be let out. 'Though I would rather
settle with words. But if you're disposed to fight
I'll prove that wit's superior to sword
by dodging you.'

He narrows blazing eyes.
'I'll have your wits on a skewer. Come here, boy.'
He beckons with his free hand. 'Let's have some blood.'

'Show him what for!' a shout comes from the back.
It's Eric, the local butcher's lad. 'Now, Eric' –
my sword tip drops to the ground – 'should you not be
about an errand, running joints of pork?'
A grin splits through his pimples, cracking sore.
'I wouldn't miss a murder for the world.'

'Murder? There'll be no murder here.'
'That's what
you think,' says Bradley, charging like a bull
that has broken tether. Instantly, the cuff
of our weapons clashing, and his heavier blade
has snapped mine seven inches in.
'Oh dear,'
says Orrell, 'Now look what you've done. You've snapped
the boy's toy sword.' A laugh bristles the crowd.
I'm hard against the brute, our wrists are locked
until I push, release and slip aside
like a sudden opened door, so that his force
wrong-foots him, and he falls.
'You little shit,'
he growls, brushing the dust off as he stands.
My breath, from the exertion of his weight
is rasping a little, and my rapier
is blunt as a whore's remark. Bradley, now sore,
is more determined. Slow, perhaps, but slow
in the manner of a seasoned torturer
delighting in his work, delaying pain
until the expectation's made it worse.
He calls for a swig of ale, as if to savour
his victory before dispatching me.
It appears from the audience. 'I'll have you now,'
he says with a cellared voice, 'you worthless tick.'

'Go on, Bill, finish him off!' a woman squeals.
I turn round, shocked to notice 'Mrs Peat?'
'I meant him dear,' she reverses. 'Finish him off.'
And no hard feelings, offers me her gums.
Bradley's delight reveals two broken teeth
inflicted in another brawl; he comes

like Judgement Day towards me. As he swings
the unwieldy blade, I snatch from a crooked man
his walking stick, rush 'sorry' as he falls
and his crutch, braced in my hands, prevents an act
of unfair decapitation, then is dropped
as I duck beneath those ape arms. Bradley turns
but trips on the crippled man whose stick I stole.
'You whore's son with your la-di-dah brocade.'
Several assistants help them to their feet,
the old man winded, Bradley in a stew
now boiling over. 'Fight, you poncy turd!'

'I believe you're a little drunk. There's children present.'

It's Watson, breathing sharply at my side,
and Nashe not far behind. He claps his arm
around my shoulder, saying, 'Honestly.
Gentlemen duel at dawn. It's almost three.
You're keeping good people from their work. I'd guess
that your opponent's not a gentleman.'

'So you've come now?' says Bradley. 'Very good.
I'll have a bout with you, then finish off
your wheezy friend.'

There goes his fish-stock rage,
bubbling over his lip as if a fire
were stoked beneath him. Watson keeps his calm,
and his hand on the hilt of an unfamiliar weapon.
'That's not your sword.' 'No, it's Cornwallis's
I borrowed it just in case,' he whispers back.

Having emptied his verbal armoury,
the brute has another swig of someone's ale,
a pat on the back. A breeze whips up the air
like a hand up a lady's petticoat. A thrill.

My mind cooks up the shiver; brings it here
with a flavour of its aftertaste, the bite
of unalterable history. But then, what felt
like theatre was real: not choreographed,
the lines to come unwritten and unknown.

'Kit, hold my jacket,' says Watson, stripping quick
to his undershirt. 'It cost me two months' pay.'
And he's in the fray, and fencing.

I've seen cocks
go for each other's eyes more cautiously;
Watson, perhaps pumped up from running there,

is bright, ferocious; Bradley swinging wild
like a blinded man who doesn't know which way
the blows will come. The gathered crowd step back
to accommodate raw spleen. A boy left stood
in the way of danger, awed by spectacle,
is collared to greater safety.
'Ha! Take that!'
crows Watson, scratching blood from Bradley's chest.
'I've taken worse,' his gruff opponent says,
and turns as ugly as a thunderstorm
thwacking his heavy sword again, again,
across the spaces Watson occupied
split seconds earlier. Tom leaps back and back
to accommodate the depth of Bradley's rage
as the bull man presses forward. The heavy sword,
now lightened by fury, flashes there, then there,
slices at arm and thigh.
I watch the blood
that feeds that friendly heart spread like a plague
across the cambric of Tom Watson's shirt.
Bradley is grinning. Now the crowd grows quiet,
and the steel on steel that follows cuts a hush
as still as the full-stop of a funeral hymn.
As tremors in my legs, those staggered steps
of Watson, backwards – backed now to a ditch
where his breath comes shallow-sharp as that bare inch
between him and his end – a sudden end,
rearing up black from the afternoon's bad joke.
And who would leap into that deep unknown
we're told leads to the gods, but comes up void -
is always walked alone – without a stab
at another's heart?

I hear the blade go in
with a crack of bone, a squeak along the rib;
Watson's eyes widen, close. The heavy groan
is Bradley's. He slides – as easily as snow
thick-laid on a sloping roof, but thawed beneath -
clean from the blade, and crumples to the ground.

No-one moves, though the wind tugs at their cuffs,
their hats, their hems. And then a wail begins
on a note like a rising flood in someone's gullet:
a dust-blonde woman pushing through the throng,
knocking aside the goggling passer-by,
the death-dumb neighbour, 'Bill,' she's sobbing, 'Bill,'
and it's Bill that's drowning. Blood bursts from his mouth
in eager blossoms as his love winds through
to cradle him in her lap, 'Oh Bill, oh Bill,
oh William' – so intently locked with him

that she's blind to us, his murderers, until
she finds on her blood-soaked dress a heavy corpse;
and no-one in that flesh.
'What have you done?'
Her hate disintegrates to disbelief,
then melts to loss as she returns to Bill,
what used to be her Bill, what kissed her neck
to wake her up, and twirled her in a dress
when he promised her a future, always good
for the rent no matter what. And now, no Bill.
And she's sobbing no, and no, and no, and no,
her hair stuck to her tears, her hopeless cheek
stamped with her lover's blood. The bud of her lips
murmuring prayers.
'I'll get the constable,'
says Nashe, 'Don't worry. The both of you stay put.'
He's sprinting down the street. I steer Tom's arm
to sit him gently down, remove what's left
of his shirt and tear it into strips. There's not
one protest, joke. With frightened care, I wrap
his wounds until the cloth stops soaking red,
then drape his jacket gently on his shoulders
as though he were a general. He shudders,
grips round his knees, and dimly stares away.
Someone offers a flask: 'Good whisky, sir.'
I put it in his hand. He swigs it, gulps
and winces, gives it back, still gazing straight.
I don't partake myself; return it to
the glove of a quiet man I recognise,
a friend of Richard Field.
Tom's skin is cold,
so I put my arm around him, stop his coat
from flapping on his chest. I want to say
'Are you alright?' but the question's ludicrous.

What good are words? There's a woman sobbing on
her slain provider, comforter and mate,
and her sobs are your creation. How should words
presume themselves as bandages or slings
when the world limps onward, and you've darkened it?
And words be damned, for if we're gentle men
then what hope does the world have? Words are lost.
They've plucked their eyes out rather than see this,
have jumped from clifftops.

Finally, Tom thaws.
Stone quiet, he murmurs, 'What will I tell Ann?'

'Tell her the truth,' I say, after a pause.
'I killed someone? She'll like that.' There's no smile.

‘I thought I was a better man,’ he says,
‘but there’s no such thing. Just look.’ He nods his head
at the sobbing woman, mingling tears with blood,
Orrell and Bradley’s brother lifting what
used to contain her love, and staggering,
wrong-footed by its weight. ‘It’s all insane.
We’re all just people, Kit. We’re all the same.’

Envoi

But he was not the same. If prison broke
some part of him, it was a secret piece
below the cough he carried eighteen months
beyond the blessedness of his release.

Within his former swagger now, a limp
was hinted at: some slight imbalance stayed.

Behind each joke the deadly serious
would tug a gulp, provoke the listener's stare.

And he was out of time; his laugh would ring
two beats beyond the point where some of us
would find things funny.

Yet the strangest jest
Tom ever played on us was losing faith
that the world would let him off on self-defence
another time. And so he wrote his end.
Three years would pass before we buried him.

Limbo

Thrown into Limbo, Newgate's deepest cell,
to await our pardons, and to join those souls
who spend their hours watching rodents fight
for a crumb of something rotten.
'Fuck, the smell,'
says Watson, as we're frogmarched down the hall.
Clink costs, and those who can't afford to pay
to shit in a pot have smeared it on the walls.
Here, we'll await the pardon of the Crown.
The stink of resignation follows us down.

The third night in, the gaoler lets me out
for a visitor who's paid him handsomely.
And there, in a private room with a solid door
is Robyn Poley.
'So. You're bearing up?'

'The God of Shepherds come to find his strays?'

He like the metaphor. 'Some decent beer?'
He passes a jug across. He has a face,
as Watson said, uncoupled from his thoughts.
A windless lake that mirrors the serene
even when lightning cracks the sky above.
I wanted more than drink.
'Some paper and ink?
A working quill? A pen-knife?'
'Not in here.'
'But you can get me out?' I said. Again,
that lake of a face showed only silver calm
over its fatal depths.
'Come sit,' he says.
the proof that the man can smile and slip the noose
over your head before you feel a thing.

'I cannot bear to be here,' I begin.
'The shit, the fleas –'
He stops me. 'Who are you?'
'I'm sorry?'
'The Queen's own servant, are you not?
No livery, grant you; you're of a higher grade.
A trusted agent, and a royal tutor.'

I gaze at his throat. 'No doubt that's over now.'

'Not so, my friend. Your Poley had a word.
Her guardians were most distressed to know

about your mother's sudden death.'
'Her death?'
'Indeed. You must remember that she's dead
next time you need excuses.'
'But she's not –.'
His smile is broad. Untrustworthy as paint.
'I've no idea. Shall I send someone to check?'
I take a seat. I let him pour me beer.

'An event is like a coin,' Rob Poley says,
palming an angel deftly out of sight
and back again. 'It has two faces. You
might see them both, or choose to muse upon
the one side only. Most folk here see tails:
the arse-end of the problem... like, the stench.
But on the reverse: our queen, all majesty.
and the cool suggestion one might use one's head.
There are advantages to prison life.'

'The exceptional cuisine?'
He meets my eye.
'The food gets better for a little cash.'
'Which I can't earn in here.'
'And yet, you can.'
The angel is gone; then reappears again
as if by its own free will. 'A shortish stay
at Her Majesty's pleasure brings its own rewards.
And you might learn something.'

'To earn that coin?'
I wish I could say I didn't want that coin.
I tried to affect disdain. It didn't fit,
my poet's poverty too overgrown
to wear the fencer's shirt of nonchalance.

'It's yours.' It's flipped to the air, and, like a beak
my hand has snapped it cold. 'Look closely now.
And judge the weight of it. Test that it gives
like a woman's flesh between your teeth.'

I test.
'Seems good enough,' I say, and slip the coin
beneath my belt. I scrutinise his face
for the fading pleasure of a punctured ball
but Poley is unmoved. 'It might prove hard
to break so large a sum; you'd rather change?'

'I'll keep the gold.'

He hefts a heavy pouch

of lesser coins. 'I'll give you twice the value
in pence and ha'pennies.'

I weigh the offer.
'Alright,' I say. 'Lets see them.'
He makes stacks
and I inspect them, tally them, and then
surrender my angel.
Poley's smile's unchanged,
and yet I sense a satisfaction there
as though he's swallowed something.
'Yes indeed.'
he says. 'The highest quality I've seen.
You're smart, yet they got by you. Piece of piss.
How much more easily fooled the common man:
the grocer, the soldier and the publican.'

It dawns on me. I've swapped my gold for dirt.

'But coins this small are never counterfeit!'
'Sadly untrue,' he says. 'Still you can spend
that shit in here. The light is very low.'

I pick out a penny, turn it, looking close
as I've ever looked upon the Queen's gnarled head.

'Perhaps there's something off,' I say.
He nods.
'And yet you'd hardly notice, you'll agree.
It's expert stuff. And there are chests of these
buying rebellion on the continent.
You know of Sir William Stanley?'
I adopt
that look I practised in the glass when young:
unwashed contempt. 'The man who quelled the Irish,
but gave Deventer to the Spanish. Yes.
England's most famous turncoat. What of him?'

Poley is like a draught beneath the door,
that slides around one's ankles barely felt
then whispers up the spine.
'He has command
of a regiment of soldiers near Zutphen.
He keeps his troops in beef with coins like these,
having spent all legal funds. This is much more
than a treasonable insult to the Queen
and Lord Treasurer Burghley. It feeds mutiny.
It pays men who are only building strength
to slit the throats of fellow Englishmen.
We cut those strings, the men will melt away.'

‘What can I do in here?’
Rob Poley’s face
is an unturned hour-glass. ‘Why, you make friends.’

His foot, snapped like a belt against the floor,
flattens a cockroach. Now tapped from his sole.

‘There is one Poole, a prisoner you might know
thrown here on a misdemeanour. He made these.’
He touches one as if its weevilled biscuit.
‘At least, we think he did. We have no proof.
We found him shaven-headed, like a priest,
loaded with coins and not far from the coast.
Sir William Stanley’s sister is his wife.
That’s all I’ll tell you. You’ll tell me the rest.’

‘And when I do?’
‘If you get in with Poole
there may be more employment in the world
outside these walls.’ He rises from his chair
and calls for the guard to come. ‘Poole’s brother-in-law
is cousin to Ferdinando Stanley, future Earl
of Derby. He keeps a troupe, Lord Strange’s Men,
who masquerade as players, though they act
abominably, in my view.’
There’s the latch
undoing our meeting. ‘You, I hear, write plays.’

‘When I’ve the time.’

‘I’ll leave you with this thought.
A servant of Lord Strange would have the time.’

Poole the Prisoner

John Poole, a big man, like a side of beef
hung till the blood pools out of it, just chews.

‘Limbo. The biggest joke is in the name:
we’re in a place the State denies exists.’

He doesn’t fence a smile. ‘If you’re amused
in eighteen months, explain the humour then.’

‘You’ve been here eighteen months?’
‘And seven days.
I don’t need friends.’

That told me. But a week
of watching me cross myself before I eat
and he has softened up.
‘You keep the faith?’

‘This? It’s a mime to scare the flies away.’
His grimace is a gift of blackened teeth.
‘That’s good. I’ll try that one.’
He eyes the bread
that I’ve paid extra for. Watson’s asleep;
shedding the time.
‘They say he killed a man,
your friend.’ Poole nods at him. ‘He don’t look tough.’

‘How looks deceive. If I were to go by looks
I’d say you were a shaven-headed priest
whose locks grew out.’ He cackles. ‘So you heard.
Arrested for a haircut.’ Runs his hand
across the lank lengths of his grown-out sides,
the crop on a once-bald pate.

‘You’re not a priest?’

He laughs. ‘No Latin. I dressed as a priest.
For a private joke on my sister’s wedding day.
A crime of clothing, though no law exists
until they make one up.’ Those teeth again,
like headstones, lean and list above his gums
as though the land has slipped. He slides his back
down the wall and sits beside me. ‘Sir. You seem
like a gentleman,’ he said. ‘whose charity
I’d not want to abuse. But I am short
of the grease that moves the goalers. Would you have
a groat or two for a brother?’

Now, my purse
is fat with coppers which the very hand
that asks for them has minted. What to do?

I thought of Ned. How he can wear a thought
or state of being, shrug on innocence
and make it fit. I put the broth aside,
with its balanced bread, and hand him several bits
which he slides, no questions, underneath his belt.

Fear has my stomach clenched, I don't pick up
my bowl again. 'Are you not having that?'
he asks. 'I'm full.' He grabs it like a thief
would grasp a chicken by its neck, and eats.

After wiping his mouth, he's glad to talk.
'You know Lord Strange?' he asks, thus saving me
two days of round-the-houses. 'He's the cousin
of my brother-in-law. My father dines with him.
I have connections, see. Your kindness here
will add to your account when you get out.
You're getting out, I take it.'

'Yes, due course.
Both of us filed a plea of self-defence.
You?'
'When the wind slides round. Which I think it will.'
'You do?'
'Connections.' Taps his nose.

Some men
fear they might fade away unless they talk,
and will at the smallest chance unleash their thoughts
to anyone who'll listen. And John Poole –
whose best advice is keep things to yourself –
is one of those. I'm blessed.
'My brother-in-law.
Sir William Stanley. You'll have heard of him.'

'Christ!' I shush him. 'Not in here. The guards –'
'They're deaf as posts, I tell you.' My attempt
at quieting him provokes a greater urge
to spill himself. 'He keeps a company
of disgruntled soldiers, growing by the day.
He speaks of religious freedom on these shores.
A Catholic Head of State.'
'But this is –' Here,
I stop myself to barely mouth the words.
'But this is treason!'

'She is getting old.'
His whisper would reach back to the cheapest seats.
His cupped hand doesn't shield, but magnifies.
'I don't say kill her; though I know some do.
Simply, when death vacates the English throne
some Catholic will replace her. And the gaols
will be for Protestants.' His fingers spread
to offer our grim surroundings to the foes
that occupy his head. He fiercely smiles.
Watson drifts over, 'Kit. You coming back?'
'Up!' is the word that sends us to our cells.

*

It was a fearsome and unbalanced smile
that I adjusted to in several weeks
over the conversations as he poured
his life into my hands. Until one night,
returned from ablutions, with his hands still wet,
he had me by the throat, pinned to the wall,
lavender sickly over the smell of shit.

'You tricked me,' he says.
'I'm sorry?'
'Don't pretend
you don't know anything. Your money's bent.'
Believe your innocence. (Thanks Ned.) My eyes
must speak for my closed-down windpipe, and they do:
he drops me like a wool-sack. Rubbing my throat,
'You mean it's worthless?'
'Yes.'
'How do you know?'
'Because it's mine. I made it.' If the guard
ten yards away has heard, he doesn't care.
'I hadn't seen it closely, in the light,'
he spits as if I'd called him stupid. No,
neither had I. Light was in short supply.
He comes at me, 'Which suits you, weasel man!'
Getting me by the collar leaves my throat
a corridor of air to answer him.
'Where did you get it?'
'From my cousin, sir.'
'Where did he get it?'
'I don't know,' I said,
squeezed like a pimple in his pinching hands.
'He gave it to me' (coughing) 'so that I
would not die here for want of sustenance.
I didn't question where it came from. Why
would I suspect him?'
'Why would I trust you?'

Poole growls. 'Has your cousin ever been abroad?'
and he twists my collar. 'Often,' I reply,
though the word's half lost for choking. 'Often, sir.
He is a soldier. Half his life's abroad.
Recently Flushing. And he plays at cards,
perhaps he won it.
Like a house at night
where a fiercely burning candle's pulled away
from a window, and seen flickering elsewhere,
at the back of other rooms, or up the stairs,
Poole's thinking pulls away from murdering me.
He lets me slide onto the earth, sits down.

'I couldn't know it wasn't real', I said.
I dug some coins from the purse beneath my belt
'It still looks real to me. Extraordinary.
Are you serious? You made this?'
'Yes,' he nods.

And on some grains of truth, I build a plinth
to set us on again. Within an hour
he's marvelling at coincidence and Fate:
and how two brothers, for we almost were,
might use some slivers of cathedral plate
that he had minted for a higher cause
to buy some privy time, and newer beef.
And I was complimenting him on work
so finely wrought that very few would know
except perhaps himself.
'It is an art,'
he glowed.
'Astonishing. How do you make
the points so fine?'
He grinned.
'There is a method.'
He mimes an action, but does not enlarge.
'Obtaining silver is the harder part.
The higher coins are better worth my skill.'

'I have a friend,' I said, 'a noble friend
whose greatest interest is in alchemy.
He has a well-equipped laboratory.'

'A wizard?' Poole is wary.
'No, an earl.
Northumberland.'
Thus are our goods exchanged:
his counterfeiting knowledge swapped for hope
that basest metals might transmute to gold.

The information that I gleaned from him
will only lead me further up the chain.
His parting gift the day I am released:
a letter of introduction to Lord Strange.

A Twin

‘The trouble a writer has,’ says Thomas Thorpe,
breaking the local flatbread, ‘it seems to me,
is his writing calls to be attended to,
yet he fears too close attention.’ Knocking snow
off his boot, he snares me with a look that hints
more information may be read therein,
then fondly eyes the fire. Some travellers
have gathered there to thaw themselves and drink,
soaking the welcome heat. It is the eve
of St. Stephen’s night, and I feel more relieved
to see Thorpe’s face than I’d care to admit.

‘Something of interest to you. I’ve a tale
of a man who was mistaken for another.
London is talking now of William Shakespeare.
A man who shares that name, had come to town
attempting to broker the sale of Stratford grain.
The landlord of the inn where he is staying
puts out the rumour that the famous author
William Shakespeare is a guest of his.’

‘Oh God.’
‘Just listen. So the word goes out
and a young man comes one evening to the pub
and asks this merchant, Shakespeare, if he’ll sign
a copy of the book he wrote last year.
A certain erotic poem you might recall.’
‘But the man can barely write.’
‘Don’t second guess
the tale before it’s told. You’ll spoil my fun.’

He takes the carafe between us by its neck,
as though he holds a goose, and tops our cups
with warm spiced wine. ‘So.’ Takes a sip of his,
devoid of urgency. ‘This Shakespeare says
‘I’m afraid you have the wrong man.’
‘Honestly?’
‘He waves the youth away.’
‘But -’
‘Let me finish.

‘The young man asks the landlord, is it true,
that the man in the snug seat, polishing off some tripe
is the author William Shakespeare. “That he is,”
says the landlord, “and as modest as could be.
You’ll never hear him boast it, but it’s true.”
“But he says he isn’t.” “Ah”, says the publican,

who folds his arms, and chews tobacco leaf,
"and there's your clue. Imagine you're mistaken
for an author of genius, would you not be tempted
to soak up the praise and let the error pass?"
The youth agreed he would. "There's half your proof.
And might the actual author, shunning the gaze
of an over-zealous public, shy away
from acknowledging his progeny?" He might,
the youth agreed. "You peg him closely now,"
the barman says, "look at his balding brow.
The heat of the ideas inside that skull
have burnt away his hairline." It was true,
his hair was fast receding. "See his hand,
poised on the table ready for a quill,
the thumb and finger ready." The student stares
then notices something awkward. "Where's the ink?"
"I'm sorry?" says the barman. "Where's the ink?
The pad of his middle finger should be black
from pressing on a pen." The barman stares
to the middle-distance, like he's watching wheat
as it's harvested and stacked. "Ah yes, the ink.
The absence of ink. You've found the final proof.
The man is such an expert at the craft,
so practised in the art of wielding pen,
he never blots a word." The youth's convinced
and the tavern picks up custom from his friends
as he spreads the word. Our gentle merchant packs,
ready to head back to the countryside
where he can do his business unperturbed.'

'And there the story ends?'
'Ah. Were it so.
Thorpe motions my attention to the cup
I drained while he was talking. 'Please,' I nod.

'He took his business straight to Richard Field.
He is a private man, he says. This fame
that you have courted, settles ill with him
as a curdled syllabub.'

'But he was paid!'
My throat is sticky. I rinse the lump of fear
back to my stomach with a swig of beer.
He took the money.'
Thorpe taps on his lip
with a slender index finger. 'If you wish
to use his name again, he wants a share.'

'In what?'

‘In the player’s company. Stay, stay –’
he stops me rising to my feet in rage
‘- your Privy Council friends have seen to it.’

He lets the information sit with me.
The fire munches on damp conifer,
popping and whining when it hits the sap.

‘Well I don’t like it.’
‘No. But it is safer.
A false name is a wall made out of paper.
A finger can be pushed through it. Human flesh
will not give way so easily.’
‘As long
as he is paid.’
‘Indeed, but then your plays
will see to that. And as a shareholder
in the player’s company, he seems more like
the think he’s meant to be. A purveyor of plays.
You might see this as help from God on high.’

‘Divine assistance. Really.’ And I drain
to the bottom of the cup. Waft back the smoke
that, failing to find the chimney, stings my eyes.

Thorpe rubs his hands together. ‘Well, it’s cold,
but never so cold as six feet underground.
Don’t you agree?’
He likes to use my death
as a cheery tool to demonstrate my blessings.

‘Can we get away with this?’
‘Who knows. Who knows.
It’s strange how the truth is seeded. Take a lie
and give it plausibility; voilà!
You have a truth.’
He mimes a magic trick.

‘I prefer the true truths.’
‘Spoken as a poet.
Be glad that truth’s like that. Though half the time
it works against a man, the other half
it puts the devil off his scent.’ He fills
my glass half full. ‘I have another letter.
I’ll pop it under your door when things are quiet.
You have a play? You have the comedy.’

‘Oh yes,’ I say. ‘I have the comedy.
And you have put in mind another one.

Two gentlemen, identical in name,
and how each is mistaken for the other.
I have them fucking one another's wives.
The room for comedy is infinite.'

He surveys me like a plot of land for sale.
'Be careful how you spend your humour, though.
Store in the light. You may be needing it.'

'How needing it?'
He stretches his legs towards
the longed-for grate before he answers me.

'Nashe is in prison.'
'What for?'
'For the book
he wrote in repentance, mourning at the death
of dear Kit Marlowe.' He gives me the look
that tells me he knows everything. 'He laid
some juicy insults on our much-loved town
and all who dwell in her. So he's in clink.
It isn't safe to write so openly.
As he should know, having had such a friend.'

I see the puckish one light up a pipe
only a year ago, when we were free.

'Poor Nashe.'
'Indeed, poor Nashe.' The silence falls
over our conversation like a hood
to protect the guilty. I have run away,
though all my friends might go to Hell for me.
'How is he?'
'I hear he's railing even now
that the city's corrupt.'

The news was heartening.
We all might come through this. 'And how is Ned?'

Thorpe's wall goes up. 'I'm sorry. It seems we've drunk
a little too much. I blame the Christmas cheer.
It isn't good to name a person's friends.
He fakes a yawn. 'I'm done. We'll meet again.
More soberly the next time.'
And he's gone.

Necessity

Necessity, the mother of all art
and half the population, brought me square
to a shared room on the knee of Bedlam gate.
My rent was non-existent, but my sleep
was patterned by the cries of the insane.
If madness sucks in madness, then perhaps
that room made sense.
I shared with Thomas Kyd,
the both of us employed to furnish plays
for the good Lord Strange's men. A bed thrown in
and a desk at either corner. Thomas Kyd
was a white-skinned creature who avoided sun
and drooled in his sleep. He had a lodger's cough,
winced when I cursed; he'd beg me to be quiet
lest I bring the devil on us. So I teased.
He was a toy, an instrument for me,
a winter amusement, and I played his tremor
as perfect as a lutist plucks a string;
it fed my humour through those long dark months
without Tom Watson's wit.
We wrote in stints.
He had the daylight, squinting at his scenes;
I chose the dark, the quietude, the sense
of the world asleep wrapped round like a cocoon
where I plotted to shake them rudely, candlelight
making a pool so all I could see was play.

We sat there under blankets. Kyd was blocked.
He ground out word by word, a line an hour,
stumped by The Spanish Tragedy's success,
his sighs enough to cure meat, but his words
uncooked or overdone.

'Hamlet, revenge?
What kind of cry is that? A fishwife's cry.'
Kyd scrunches his neck and covers up the script
I'm reading over his shoulder. 'It's a draft.'
'Should the man broadcast his plots for all to hear?
He's mad indeed.'
'It is a draft, I said.'

'Apologies.' I sit down on the bed
and tug my boots off. 'Surely what we need
when we've put good plays behind us, is hard truths.
Better you hear it now than when it dies
and they laugh the tragedian off the stage.
Can you feel how he might feel?'

'The tragedian?'

'Your Prince of Denmark. He that needs revenge.'
Kyd screws his forehead up, as if he'd strain
to wring the feeling out.
'Not in your head,
I say, 'but in your heart. You feel it here?'
Thumping my solar plexus. Kyd looks blank,
and then, as if he's stumbled on a road
that shaves his knees of skin, his eyes grow dark
and wary. 'It's not yours. It's my idea.
You think you'd write it better. Well, you're wrong.'

I clasp my hands behind my head. 'I think
no such thing,' I say. (Though his complaint
plants the suggestion.) 'I still have the devil.
He's enough to be getting on with, honestly.'
Still scratching at religion, light or dark,
contained or uncontrolled. Kyd shivers sharply.
'I wish to God you'd finish that.'

'I will.'
I lie back leisurely, my elbows spread.
'When his time runs out. And you must finish yours.
I mean to be helpful, truly. Perhaps the Fates
put us together for that very purpose?
A second opinion can be valuable.'

Kyd bites his lip. He picks off scabs of wax
that cling to the table. Rubs an eyebrow tired.
Picks his nose. Then gathers some scenes and plonks
them on my chest. 'Okay. What's wrong with it.
In your opinion.'

I read with his eyes on me.
Awareness of his breeding, restless thoughts
intrudes on my concentration. At one point
he jumps from the chair like someone badly stung
by an unseen wasp, and orders on his shelf
some books and papers. Then he's up again
to stand at the window, flinching at the sound
of each read page. The last sinks to my lap
and he turns to me, tight as drum-skin. 'So, go on.'

'It could be good. It's a fantastic yarn.'
I must admit, I was half writing it
in my own words even then. Pressed back the thought.
'But in order to fill the stage with űber-gore,
you've sucked the blood from every character

that ought to hold our interest. Chiefly, him.
The lost great Dane.'

Kyd makes a slow retreat
back to his chair. 'I don't know what you mean.
Revenge is the interest, isn't it?'
'Revenge
could work like a canker on the man beneath.
Dissolve his metal, even as it shines
through his despair. I can't find his despair.'
I hand the papers back.
As if they weigh
much heavier than they are, his outstretched arm
weakens as it receives them. Kyd's response
is wheedling, pleading for his words to be
interpreted more kindly. We indulge
in a kind of mental arm-wrestling until
his irritation bores me. I must work.

'Hamlet is all of us, put in his place.
You need his hesitation, or the deaths
are done with by the end of the first act.
But where's his anguish? His humanity?
Is he murderer without a thought? Your Dane
is a writer's puppet. Wooden. Yanked on strings.'

He sinks to the floor. I've holed him, like a ship.

'Go out,' I say, 'get supper. Make a pass
at a juicy barmaid. Put yourself in the way
of some other humans. Life's experience
may feed you when imagination fails.'

After he leaves, and takes his seething with him,
I sit at the window seat and watch the shade
of a winter afternoon becoming night.
Across the street, De Vere's house, Fisher's Folly
- newly acquired by the Cornwallises -
is lighting up within. Ann Watson's there,
over the red-brick, castellated wall,
taking down laundry in the kitchen yard -
mistress's nightshirts, napkins, tablecloths,
her charges' clothes.

Ann couldn't keep their house:
a prisoner can't earn, and former rent
prevented her husband's gaolers making more
of his punishment. Her brother, a musician,
employed to teach the eldest daughter songs
had wrangled her some duties, and a room.

Now, as the sky shuts down, I strike a match
and light a candle, breathing out the name
of dear Tom Watson as a form of prayer.
But I'm alone. And I must write from there.

The School of Night

'You stir them up,' Sir Walter Raleigh says,
spanking his pipe until the ash gives up.
His West Country burr like John Alleyn, but soft
as the lace on the lace of a courtier's handkerchief.
'It's more than entertainment on the stage.
You show us ourselves. Uncomfortable to see.'

My own discomfort is the feathered brooch
he has perched in his hair. He mustn't see
I'm fighting to keep my eyes fast on his face.

'I write what comes to me.'
He motions I
should sit down in a heavy, cushioned chair
less throne-like than his own. Behind his head
the river's sultry darkness softly winks
with a barge's lamp.
'This was the lantern tower,'
he waves at book-shelved walls 'when this dear palace
belonged to the Bishop of Durham. Now I've made
a study of it.' Enjoying his own pun.
Self-educated, he displays his books
as peacocks do their fans. 'Knowledge entails
the shedding of new light on old conundrums.'
Perhaps he believes his riches make him wise,
or that his knighthood, and the Queen's good favour
entitle a sailor to school a Cambridge scholar.
'This room's a metaphor.'
A laboured one,
I think, but say, 'A perfect place to write.'
'Yes, isn't it?' He pours us both a rum
- 'The sailor's delicacy. You don't mind?' -
and offers me tobacco. 'Do you smoke?'
'I haven't tried it.' 'Well you should, my boy.
The native Indian tribesman of Virginia
will claim it brings you closer to your soul.
Relaxes one. Here. Borrow my spare pipe.'
It's carved with naked women. Raleigh laughs
as I study it. 'I'm told they run around
like the nymphs and dryads of antiquity.'

'The New World is an old one, then?'
'Perhaps.
I have a mathematician on my staff
who calculated they have been around
six thousand years. That's longer than the Church
gives all Creation. How d'you account for that?'

He lights my pipe, and his. I watch him close,
and suck, as he does. Bitter on my tongue
and puffing my words to clouds. 'I'd trust a scholar
before I'd trust a bishop with the truth,'
I say.
'Too harsh!' He laughs. 'What can you mean?'

'We're prone to take the Bible literally
forgetting it was written for the flocks
of a simpler age.'
'You're not an atheist?'
he asks, half casually.

'The word of God
must be interpreted,' I say, 'by man.
And man is full of ignorance and sin.
The bible tells us so.'
Raleigh guffaws
and throws his head back, so his pointed beard
pokes like a brickie's trowel into the air.
'You priceless man. It's true then, what I've heard?'
'What have you heard?'
'I count religion but
a childish toy. That line is yours?'
'It is
a character's.'
'You hold it true yourself?'

To buy a pause, I suck and blow out smoke.
'You should inhale,' he says, concerned. 'Like this.
To feel it in your lungs. Not much at first.
You'll find it powerful.'

So I inhale…
and cannot speak for coughing. Raleigh smiles,
and passes a lacy napkin.
'Apologies.
Perhaps a little less than that. More rum?'

To mend my throat, I gulp rather than sip,
then wipe my mouth and say 'My view is this.
Religion is irrelevant. What counts
is faith in God, and love of humankind.
A Catholic's as human as a Jew,
a Muslim, Moor or Puritan; though he,
the puritan, will aim to enjoy it less.
But only the pure intentions of the heart
connect us to our source. Not ritual,
not superstitious oath, not form of prayer,

nor literal translation.'
Raleigh nods
his sage approval. 'Truly. To preconceive
is to imprison thought, which should be free.
We will discover nothing if we bind
ourselves to accepted wisdoms. Questioning
is necessary for discovery.
The best minds in the country think like yours.'

I find I'm liking him a little more.
Though he is fishing, I'm a fisher too.
I suck at my pipe more cautiously; this time
a sudden airiness, a head as light
as a sudden gust of wind.

'Oh yes,' he said.
'I wanted to show you this. This lyric's yours?'
He brings out from a drawer the song I wrote
for lute, 'Come live with me and be my love,'
expertly copied in a stranger's hand.
'It is.'
'Delightful! I have made reply
from the love-shy maiden. Would you like to see?'
Without a pause for my assent, he thrusts
the answer in my hands. 'See how the form
has followed you precisely.' He is pleased,
and breathes like a panther, softly, in a tree,
digesting. In my flesh, tobacco buzzes
like a woman stroking all of me. His praise
could almost bed me if he shaved the beard.
I read, but cannot take it in.
'So to
the reason why I sent for you,' he says.
'We have a meeting, once a month, held here.
We would be very grateful if you'd speak
on a subject of your choosing.'
'Who'll attend?'
'Lord Strange. Northumberland. George Carey too.'
These names as powerful as laudanum
dropped in my glass. He has my 'Yes' right here.
'George Chapman, Matthew Roydon, fellow poets.
Thomas Harriot. Others I shall not name.
But men of some education, with a bent
towards the improvement of humanity.
Many of these you know.'
'Matt Roydon, yes,
The Earl of Northumberland made me his guest
this summer last. I used his library.'

'And of course Lord Strange has furnished you a room

to write for his players.'
'You are well informed.'

Sir Walter rises. 'London's alive with gossip.
If people are bones then gossip is the flesh.
The power goes to he who controls the flow.'
He turns the globe that sits upon his desk
until I'm faced with the Americas:
his prize, his conquest, feeder of his pipe.

'As a lung for gossip, this house does not exhale.
Thus we speak freely here,' he lifts his eyes
to catch mine on a hook of seriousness,
'but nothing of these meetings must be breathed.
Not who attends, or what is said. Agreed?
Swear on your word.'
'Upon my life I swear!'
I spoke with a rush of passion. Raleigh smiled.
'The word of a gentleman is good enough.'

And in that word, the wide world opened up.
As Sir Walter Raleigh completed the reeling in,
I felt so close to Court that I could taste
the powdery kiss of my good Sovereign's hand.

'The Queen delights' (he sucks) 'in clever men';
he blows a loop that wobbles in the air.
'Our full potential as creative beings
requires that we adventure to our souls.
Though we explore the globe, map out the stars,
the greatest mystery remains in here -'
He thumps his chest. 'Which is where poetry goes.
Tobacco too. Why don't you stay tonight?
The servants can lay a chamber. Stay, let's talk
over some venison. I'll tell the Queen
I've fed the master of Mephistopheles.'

The Banishment of Kent

Gallows festoon the road with rotting men
left as a warning to the vagabond;
their eyes pecked out, the flesh dried into strips,
their bodies gently twisting in the wind.

I am struck dumb. Expelled into the air
like the nation's cough, because there is no cure
for the liberty of thought it won't endure,
for certain uncertainties it cannot bear.

The truth is silent and the lie believed;
all through man's history, this gaping gulf.
The lamb is slaughtered to preserve the wolf.
The son of God is drying on a tree.

Tobacco and Booze

It's small beers and a trencher at The Lamb.
Three fools: Tom Watson, Thomas Nashe, and me.
'Two Toms and a Kit,' Greene called us once, half-cut.
A very feline crew. But quite without
a cat-like wariness, gold-blinking eyes
that take the day in, opting not to speak.

The day seemed quite exceptional to me,
the highest height. For it was on that day,
full of lamb cobbler and my latest play,
friend of Sir Walter, satisfied to be
the tutor of the maybe future queen,
that I tipped my chair back, lighting up my pipe
to savour its sweetness balancing sour hops,
and seeing a man's face crumple, loud declared,
'All those who love not tobacco and booze are fools.'

'Tobacco and boys?' Nashe laughed. He was half deaf,
the close ear dull. 'Dear post, tobacco and booze!
But boys go just as well with sweet Virginia
pressed into a pipe.'
                Misheard, off-stage,
the quote that would define me for an age.

Copy of My Letter to Poley

To Pan, the God of Shepherds, Fontainebleau.

Mercury sends his greetings. Please excuse,
if this should meet unfriendly eyes, the stop
of rhyme to force them skywards. I have news
of a Spanish metaphor. This, I will swap

for whatever letters you can bring this ghost
that might not find him safely otherwise.
Risk no-one, yet deliver the enclosed
to the man whose servant stabbed a poet's eye,

that perjured eye whose sharp continued sight
sees nothing, lately, but the worst of men
and longs to feel the beam of friendship's light
break from the clouds and fall on him again.

A man condemned to silence may still hear.
Speak to me softly. Lest the ghouls appear.

How do I start this? Let me try again.

The night is very silent. Though the days
are marked by the dull percussion of the miles
away from you, the night brings me up close
to its empty collar and breathes your absence there.
A blow in the chest. A heaviness of air
that I must carry with me, to my bed,
rather than mistress, lover, drunken friend.
Forgive me. At times, I almost sense your face
in front of mine, and bring it to my lips,
only to see myself the foolish man
in the window's mirror. Love. You know my heart:
so quietly murdered, yet it beats as loud
as a funeral drum that sounds the death of kings
when I feign sleep, and when I dare your name,
leaps lively as a trout caught on its fate -
so quiet for some, but far beyond dead things.

I spill out words, more words. Where do they go?
I see them landing in a distant pond
and sunk to the bottom, covered up with silt,
then seen no more.
It's seems I have no breath
if I'm kept from all reaction: if a puff
on my palm does not bounce back to stroke my face
then I am truly dead. And so I wait
to hear that I am missed.

This damnable silence
that I agreed to, bargaining for my life.
To do what? I forget. Then I remember.
To write. To write. To write. To write. To write.

Burying the Moor

An April night. A distant bell tolled ten.
The cobbles glittered recent rain; the elms
fringing the church shook drips from newborn leaves.
Chilled moonlight traced a figure at the gate
that turned out to be you.
'Tom. Kit. You came.'

Watson's whisper was louder than my boots.
'How could we not? A secret funeral?'
He was a little drunker than we'd planned.

'Go in,' you said. 'The coffin's on its way.'

Throughout, Tom Watson ran a commentary
into my ear like a gnat's unsettling whirr.
'He seems upset with us.'
'With us?'
'With me.'
Sir Francis Walsingham, or what remained,
came past in a simple coffin made of pine.
'The man was like a father to him, Tom.
And his brother's only six months in the ground.
Has drink made you stupid?'
'Maybe. Maybe so.'

The bishop cleared his throat.
'So few are here!'
Tom whispered. 'All that effort for the Queen
only to die a pauper's death. How rich.
Or not.'
The candles flung their shadows high
into the vaulted roof.
'Lucky there's room
in the tomb of his son-in-law,' Tom hissed, 'or he'd
be dumped in a common hole with the rest of us.'

Widowed, now fatherless, his daughter stood
in the pew beside you, holding on to tears
and her three-year-old until the toddler squirmed;
a servant arrived to take the babe away.
Watson remarked, 'As well she looks good in black.'

The bishop called you up. You read some words,
the emotion in your throat like broken glass
for the man who filled your father's shoes.

'Is that
the Earl of Essex?' The once deft whisperer,

his volume faulty, caused two mourners' heads
to turn and glare at us. 'By God, it is!
A sterling comfort for an orphaned girl.'

She wept a river on that noble chest.
A stand-in for her father, so I thought;
but nine months later, she would bear his child.
A night so marked with endings and beginnings.

'So who will pay intelligencers now,
seeing the debt it drove Sir Francis to?'
Tom Watson muttered.
When I heard your news,
my thoughts too had been half upon your pain
and half on my pocket. But I was all with you
as you closed your reading, crumpled like a rag
that has polished until it should be thrown away.
I wanted to hold you.
Watson said, 'I must
be sick,' and stumbled outside as we rose
to sing one economic psalm.
Which left
just me alone to greet you afterwards.
We clasped like brothers, though your cheek on mine
felt like the moment Phaeton took the reins
of his father's horses.
'Can you stay awhile?'
You shook your head. 'Too many creditors.'
'I miss your company.'
'And I miss yours.'
A silence between us like a pact of kings
exchanging truces.
'You could come to Kent.'
The orchards of my boyhood; sallow fields
and not a theatre. Only mumming plays.
'I cannot leave London. All my work is here.
At least till Arbella returns to Derbyshire.'

And silence again, a wall we couldn't breach
which needed no words, but some intense collapse
into the truth of what we had become.
Too hard to be the first.
And then came Tom,
grinning like Christmas, so recovered from
his beer-fuelled sickness that he startled me.

'That's better,' he said. 'Sometimes one needs a purge.
A vomit and leak. And as I tucked me in
who should pass by but our Lord Treasurer,
leaving the church, but not without a plan.

He stopped, and most conveniently conversed
about our working for him. Come outside.'
He tugged at my sleeve. 'Shall we meet you anon?'
Addressing you. 'The Golden Bear's still lively.'

'I'm staying tonight with Frances.' And your eyes
engaged with mine. 'So we should say goodbye.'
Embracing Tom an unknown final time,
a punch on his arm to seal it off.
Then me.
Goodbye, good friend,' you said. The weight on friend.
'Goodbye.' Another clasp. Another taste
of fiery horses hammering through my veins.

'Be well!' Tom said to you, and tugged me out
into the churchyard, cluttered with its stones,
towards the road where two grey horses stamped
and steamed. And waiting by his carriage steps,
'Lord Burghley,' Tom whispered, nodding at the man
in robes and chains. 'He wants to speak to you.'

'Morley? Or Marlowe?'
'Either will do, my Lord.'
He rearranged his gown, fussing his thumbs
around the chain of office. 'Very good.
I hear you write poems in English. Latin's fine'
(addressing Watson), 'but the young prefer
poetry in their native tongue. I have
in my charge the young Southampton. Quite a fine –
no, quite is ungenerous, inaccurate –
an exceptionally fine young man, with all the arts
a responsible guardian should train him to:
a taste for poetry, debate, good wine,
but not, alas, for women. That is to say …'

I noticed how bright the stars, how velvet black
the sky this conversation fell beneath.

'… not so much that he looks the other way
but dreams of sport and of a soldier's life
and says a wife would hamper him, where I
would have him settled down. He is sixteen,
and listens far more to poetry than me.
I wondered whether, for a generous sum,
you might persuade him of … the benefits…
that is to say, desirability,
of marriage.'

Watson's smirk, behind his hand,
he had to cough out, and excused himself,

leaving us momentarily.
'My Lord,
if you're imagining I could write a poem
which would turn his thoughts to women, I'm afraid
my friends have made too much of me. Though women
boast charm, some men are naturally averse.
I could no more turn a fox into a frog
than persuade your ward to marriage.'

'No, no, no,'
the Treasurer demurred. 'He's not averse.'

Watson dipped in, then out. His suppressed mirth
was proving hard to wrestle with. 'My Lord –'

'He's simply disinclined. Disinterested.'
Lord Burghley was very used to being right.
A splat of late-stopped rain, held on a leaf
was shaken upon him, yet he wiped it off
without distraction. 'Certainly not averse.

No verse would touch averse. And yet a verse'
(nodding the pun to congratulate himself)
'– or several – might turn him in his course,
if executed with sufficient …grace.'

Watson rejoined us, his rebellious mouth
repaired on his sleeve.
Lord Burghley skimmed him over
but remained intent. 'For a substantial purse?'
'Very well,' I said. 'But I must meet him first.'

Southampton

The first of his words to me were angry ones.
'Why should I marry who that man decrees?'
He was a boy, four months from seventeen.
The sky was in his eyes, intensely blue.

His second sentence was in praise of love.
'Love is what brings us close to the divine.
To wed for less is shabby compromise.'
The simplest shiver rippled through the trees.

He softened to me then. 'I liked your play.'
He patted me beside him on the wall.
'So tell me, you're a poet, am I wrong?
Should I forget my heart?' There was a song
sung from an open window, light as lace
upon the moment. 'Never that,' I said.

'My mother loved,' he said. 'Another man.
It killed my father. Truly. Broke his heart.
Women are fickle. Love makes lovers damned,
a marriage bed a death bed.' Yet his face
had all his mother's tenderness; his rage
was all his father's. He, the argument
for marriage, procreation, and disgrace.

'What is a woman for? The servants cook
and clean, friends entertain, and whores are cheap.
Why do I need a wife? For what plain good?'
The lavender was thick with scent, and bees
hung round the beds like baleful courtiers.
Above, his eyes, a sky's idea of blue.
The thought occurred: 'To make another you.'

In his perfection, here was Love's excuse
for all her misdemeanours, every heart
that split to feel her bastard offspring's dart.
And here was Love herself, conducting songs
from neighbours' windows, rustling up the trees
to shed the spring's confetti for his hair
and bring this moment, begging, to its knees.

Love is oblivious. All the love was mine.
And all the wisdom of a dozen plays
of wit and genius will not assist
the motley fool whom sudden love enslaves.
Three years have gone, and still the purest love
- the jewel of Southampton, sitting on that wall -

accompanies me to my oblivion.

Arbella

Arbella was wild as a clipped goose smelling fox.
She lurched from wall to wall 'Why not go out?
There's education in the wind and rain.
We could get wet and you could teach me why
it bounces off the sparrows.'
'Read this book,'
I offered, patiently, the only poultice
that's ever worked for me.
'Pah! Read a book!
Another dusty book? Another wedge
of dead man's brain? No thank you. What is it?'
'It's poetry.'
A snort. 'What good is that?
What good are words? Words are not real life.'

'But they create in here,' I tapped my head,
'whatever's locked out there.'
Another snort.
She stamped her boot, and spun towards the view.
'But not the Earl of Essex,' she replied.
'You can't create him, can you?'
She was hooked
two years before, at court, when she was twelve.
Imagined they might marry, though I knew
by then your cousin Frances had his child
tucked in her belly.
'You might be the Queen
one day,' I said. 'How to prepare for that
except to read and imagine how it feels?'

Knowing she'd marry whom the Queen decreed.
Be pawned to the Duke of Parma's son, Farnese,
to end the war. Be dangled like a threat
to keep her cousin James obedient.
And me, determined to get close to both.
How powerful I felt myself to be.

'Very well,' she said. 'Prepare me.' Still outside.

I turned the pages silently and found
the lines where the sultan's riches glow like fire,
the pulsing light of each delicious gem
its own confection, savoured on my tongue.
And drawn across, as though the jewels were real,
Arbella knelt in front of me, her hands
open as though she thought this spell of words
would conjure and drop into her lap these stones.

I closed it, and we listened to the weather
beating itself against the window pane.
‘Now love,’ she said. ‘Now tell me how love feels.’

Alpine Letter

Love? If you'd asked me yesterday, I'd say
love is a saw that amputates the heart.
I'd call it my disease, I'd call it plague.
But yesterday, I hadn't heard from you.

So call it the weight of light that holds one soul
connected to another. Or a tear
that falls in all gratitude, becoming sea.
Call it the only word that comforts me.

The sight of your writing has me on the floor,
the curve of each letter looped about my heart.
And in this ink, the tenor of your voice.
And in this ink the movement of your hand.

The Alps, now, cut their teeth upon the sky,
and pressing on to set these granite jaws
between us, not a mile will do me harm.
Your letter, in my coat, will keep me warm.

Watson's Verse-Comment on My Flushing Assignment
(translated from the Latin)

A horse has summer flies; a sheepdog fleas.
A swift will harbour lice, a brook its rocks.
Bright days breed duller endings, and a girl
of perfect beauty's not immune from pox.
An apple has its worm, a rose its thorn,
the noblest seat of earls, its ghost in chains.
Good books will suffer misprints, will they not?
The gods have sin. And you have Richard Baines.

Poisoning the Well

One of his favourite tales was Richard Baines.
The priest of spies; the spy who was ordained
while under cover with the Jesuits,
his ear out for their plotting as his mouth
swallowed the wafered lie: 'The body of Christ.'

How you and he, that Paris summer (there
to receive each message at the embassy:
who went to England, under which false names)
watched as he crumbled like a papal biscuit.
The Old Religion drove the man insane.

His identity submerged beneath a fib
that even he believed: so who was he?
A hundred per cent pretend; and Richard Baines,
who sucked in incense and incensed himself.
Who counted boredom on his rosary.

And once he was ordained, bad faith took hold:
rotted his humour, and disturbed his sleep -
the laughable sinful mismatch of his roles
as Father Baines and agent of their foes,
betrayer of the faithful, took him deep.

The stink of fish on Fridays up his nose,
he salivated at the thought of meat.

He took to sneaking pork pies to his cell:
'God cannot be concerned with what I eat!'
Began to gibe at prayers and snort his truth
beneath his breath, not knowing that he spoke.

Love was his downfall, though. There was a youth
- for who can bear so much deceit alone? –
he shared a bed with. Stroked his novice head,
while plotting ways that he could take him home.

The boy was a thorough Catholic: convinced
that the seminary served a holy cause.
Baines moulded him like warm wax, dropping hints
that darker secrets lay behind locked doors.
'And will you plot against your natural queen?'
The boy's uncertainty filled up the pause.

This, how Tom told it, dramatising scenes
over the tavern table, playing Baines
as he existed afterwards, post Rheims:

shocked into greyness, with a limping sway
not yet inflicted on the loving priest
who stroked the boy's anxieties away.

The lie would drive him crazy: he must leave.
But not without the boy. And not without
shutting the college down; no, no reprieve
for the priests whose mumblings broke his sanity.

Think: Tom's cruel mimicry of Richard Baines
watching the morning gruel, the evening soup,
with sudden insight - every bowl the same!
How easy to wipe them out, this nest of rats,
with poison in the food. He would be loved,
he told himself, by government and Queen.
And now to persuade his lover.

Could he blame
the boy for running to the powers that be?
Baines had been breaking slowly ever since
he donned that itchy robe, humility,
and now had shed the cloak of decent man,
exposing the loveless murderer beneath.

Enter the later version, Richard Baines,
crippled by vengeance that he cannot take
and joints that give him grief each time it rains,
betrayed by the youth who still comes to his dreams.

How easy it is to get a laugh from freaks.
'Incense and blarney!' Tom's adopted twitch
that Baines himself developed after weeks
of the strappado - hung like butcher's meat
with weights on his feet, and dislocated arms,
in a new mode of confessional for priests -

forgetting it was a man they'd broken there.
Forgetting that we weren't immune from sin.
Forgetting how whispers travel on the air
and get back to the subject.

If I wrote
a play whose central character was him,
I never dreamed his hands around my throat
or thought that he might recognise himself.

He didn't matter. He was just a tale,
material I foisted on the shelf
of a London stage or two. He was the Jew,
the counterfeit believer, counting gold

above all human life, tainting the stew,
out-plotted to a most theatrical end,
and played for laughs. And that it tickled you
was all I used to think about, my friend.

Danger is in Words

Thom Nashe's lip curls down to curb his teeth.
'You're not concerned he's seen it?'
It is cold.
We're standing in the doorway of a shop
festooned with carcasses; and half a pig,
eviscerated, sawn from snout to tail,
spins gently round to eye me.
'Richard Baines
at a public entertainment? Heaven forfend.
Watson says Baines was made more serious
than sentence of execution. Anyway,
I go as Morley. Marlowe wrote the play.'

Flushing

When the winds decreed, I sailed to Vlissingen:
Flushing to English ears; and English ears
were everywhere: in street, in crooked bar,
on frozen river, at the chestnut stall,
stamping in garrisons and coaxing whores
from frosty doorways. I reported there,
leaving my passport with the Governor,
then through snow, up a creaky flight of stairs
to the cold room I would share with Richard Baines.

He wasn't there. I poked amongst his things.
Some jottings in a crabby, slanted hand
and half in cipher. Flints and candle stubs.
Some undergarments draped over a chair
like unwrapped bandages. A locked-up trunk.
A Douai Bible with a broken spine
and scribbled in. And when the stairs complained,
I closed and set it down.

Baines, coming in,
froze in the door. Eyes flicked around his things,
then back to my face, and narrowed.
'Who are you?'
'Morley,' I said.
And something on his face
like pan-burnt porridge, betrayed an aftertaste,
as if he knew that name. But only now
do I understand that look.

'Why are you here?'
he asked, not watching me, but limping in
to gather his papers up like promise notes
snatched from a fire.
'I believe we have a friend
in common. Richard Cholmeley?
'Drury's "mate"?'
He spat the word like bones. 'What kind of friend
will put a friend in prison? You should leave.'
My information fatally out of date; or else
set up to label me. Quick thinking due.
'I'm glad to hear you've stronger loyalties,'
I doubled-back. 'These are unsettled times.'

He knelt now to undo the trunk, his hair
all in a circle, monkish round his pate
and prematurely grey from torture's jolt,
as he fed the papers in, replaced the lock

and turned the corded key around his neck.

‘Why are you here?’ he said again, like ice
at the heart of sleet.

‘In truth, I have a message
of some delicacy. And understood you might
know a way to send it onwards.’

‘Oh? To whom?’
‘To Sir William Stanley.’
‘Ha!’ Baines gave contempt
both vent and volume. ‘You are very young
if you fantasize I would commit myself
to knowing the Queen of England’s enemy.’
On this point, he and I would now agree.
‘I’m nearly twenty-eight.’
‘You are a babe,’
he grimaced, approaching close until his breath
assaulted me. ‘Do you know who I am?’

‘You’re Richard Baines.’
‘I’m Richard Baines,’ he echoed,
glaring the broken vessels of his eyes,
‘who spent three years at Rheims to serve the Queen
and took a punishment you’d not survive.’
His lip curled back, trembling as if his teeth,
filed by their rottenness to tiny points,
had terrified it into revealing them.
‘I don’t take kindly to the implication
I’m the Duke of Parma’s whore,’ he said, and spit
fell softly, unintentionally like rain
upon my cheek.
‘Sir, I apologise,’
I said sincerely. ‘I meant no such thing.
Only, I understood you knew of ways
to pass a message. If I was mistaken,
forgive me.’
‘I don’t forgive,’ he breathed. ‘That job
I leave to God.’
But stepped away at last,
if only to appraise the whole of me:
if I were a joint, how long I’d take to cook.

‘If that is so, then I’ll be on my way’ -
re-shouldering my knapsack with relief
at the prospect of escaping his foul air,
fair swap for failure. ‘Please, forget I called.
So many rumours fly about my charge
I would not wish to stir them.’

'What? Your charge?'
He pecked the words, half-starving. 'Who is that?'
I confess, I used Arbella like a worm
to jerk before that grasping mind. 'Her name
has caused great trouble to the bearers of it.
If you don't know, I'm glad not to expose her.
I come on another matter.'
Though her marriage
to the Duke of Parma's son was brokered there
in Flushing – in that month.
And when he knew,
boiled down the stock of his deductive stew
to the royal bones, he said 'Forgive my haste.
It was un-Christian of me to suspect
your motives. These are awkward times. And yet' -
drawing his hesitation on the air
like an unsheathed sword across my exit door -
'I might know ways to help you. You have money?'

Fishers

Which of us had the net, I couldn't tell.
Both of us fishers, sounding out the depths
of the other's beliefs. I'd not declared a side
and nor had he. He offered to make enquiries
on condition – to keep the closest eye on me –
that I shared his room and rent.
No, not his bed,
though I felt those pink grey eyes upon my back,
like cold on my buttocks and my shoulder-blades
undressing at night, conscious he never snuffed
the candle till I was covered.
No, not his bed,
dear absent friend whose ear these words address
in the silent theatre of my empty head
some two years since they brought the curtain down,
and the cheering crowds dispersed to pick their teeth
and the plague played kill-kick-jenny on the streets.

A sea away, two countries' width away,
a war away, a mountain range away,
each sentence that I form, I form for you.
You are the love I tell my story to –
who knew so much of it, and yet the truth
eluded both of us. Yet, I've begun
to understand.

All histories are fictions,
so if I skip the worst, forgive my fault.
Though you would not condemn me: like the sun,
my imagined perfect audience of one,
your light seeps through this darkened, shuttered room
somewhere in northern Italy. But grieve,
and remain with me, as I return to Baines,
confess my part as I reap the bleak remains
of the game I played with him.

No, not in bed.
For even then my body's touch was yours.

A Resurrection

The game was simple. It was not to lose.
The game was complicated. It was this:

If he was Catholic, I was Catholic too.
If loyal Protestant, I mirrored him.

Neither of us committed to a thing.
I let slip nothing that was not my view.

And yet I bathed in contradiction, sharp
to each nuance of his behaviour. Faith, we were
chameleons trying to camouflage ourselves
in the ever-changing colours of the other,
so standing out against the barren hues
of that bitter coastal town.
And spotting us,
across a tavern, munching gristled beef,
was a dead man. Gilbert Gifford.

'4', I breathe,
and his jaw falls open as he reads my lips,
then fiercely resumes its chewing, eyesight dropped
to read the grain of the table.
'For? For what?'
Baines is intrigued to read the shock on me.

Six years ago. My first assignment. 4
was the spy we most admired. As slick as wax,
and warming the kirtle of the Queen of Scots
as he passed her coded letters. Ordained at Rheims
the year of my MA. Then caught in bed
with a whore. Jailed by his Catholic friends. And dead.

'For pity's sake,' I say, 'that meat is tough.
Look at him chewing. Do you know that man?'
(My God! What was he doing in a port
so full of spies, when Poley had fixed his death
in a Paris prison not three months before?)
But Baines is in the dark. 'I've seen his face
these last few days but don't possess his name.
I'll ask.'
'No-'
As he leaps up, deathly keen
to inflict a meeting, I forget myself.
'He may be offended,' I explain, 'by me.

That I was staring.'
'Tush. Don't be a mouse.'
Baines stride-hops over like a half-chewed goose
and stops at the other's table. Though I strain
to catch their conversation, it is lost
in the songs of a dozen soldiers at the bar
comparing wives to whisky. Gifford laughs;
they both glance over.
Then the dead man nods,
abandons his bowl of stew, picks up his beer,
and follows Baines towards me.
Baines is pleased.
What odds, two former bogus Catholic priests -
one rumoured to be dead, one broken-kneed -
have come this way to sift me?

'Since his beef
was inhumanely tough, I said he might
share some of our rabbit pie.' Baines stands aside
for the weathered man who once looked like a child
to introduce himself. 4 has a skill
more powerful than Ned's. The lie is steel.

'It's Gilbert. Gifford Gilbert.' He gives his hand
as though I'd never taken from its clutch
the notes to Walsingham that laid the trail
one Queen of Scotland followed to the block.
An oddly bloodless hand, and glacial look.
'Gilbert' I echo, as if the name reversed
has turned him inside out. 'I'm Morley, sir.
Called Christopher.' So begins another game.

'What brings you to Flushing?'
Not a hint of sly,
deception's signature not in his voice,
no hint of recognition in his eye.
'I come as a messenger.'
'Ah, Mercury.
My favourite of all the Roman gods.'
Had I imagined that some Paris brick
had knocked all memory clean from his skull,
his use of my codename clarified the rules.
'Are you staying long?'
'Not long.'
Just long enough
to ascertain Dick's contact. And to play
another round of Who's In Catholic Pay?
'And on what business do you pass this way?'
I ask the handsome corpse.
'Oh, for my trade.'

‘What is your trade?’
‘A goldsmith,’ Gilbert lies,
audaciously demanding my belief.
‘I give shape to the precious. What of you?’

‘For my sins, I’m a scholar,’ I reply. ‘I give
shape to the precious also, but the gold
flees to the hands of others.’
‘And your trade?’
he asks of Baines.
‘I trade in human souls,’
Baines mutters without blinking. ‘I’m employed
to find good men wherever they may be.’

‘Is that a trade?’
‘Recruitment? Possibly
it’s more of a vocation.’
Baines has sliced
a section of pie and hands it to our guest
on my empty trencher.
‘Who do you work for?’
Gilbert’s pretence at innocence demands
he asks such forward questions. Baines, exposed
by a twitch on his cheek, replies, ‘Whoever pays.’

We laugh at the sour joke, and make a toast
to the paymasters, whoever they may be,
that feed this poet, crippled spy, and ghost.

A Counterfeit Profession

So we became a threesome, thick with spells
we might cast on each other. Gilbert made
some sad excuse of homelessness: some bill
for a phantom signet ring due any day -
was grateful to lodge his body in that room
where we might frisk each other's souls, unheard.

A week went by, during which time we stuck
so closely to each other's sides, we stank;
needing the privy all at once, like girls,
so as not to miss a whisper. What we lacked
we held in common: the coppers to pay our chits
and the knowledge that might furnish us with gold.

Grief! The pretence we made, of being friends,
began to wear in like a favourite cloak,
and I relaxed into that dangerous state
as though too deaf to understand the joke
that every one of us was counterfeit,
and more in need of truth than we'd admit.

The Fatal Labyrinth of Misbelief

Money was almost all we spoke about.

Baines wanted more. 'A crown is just enough
to pass your message. A reply costs two.'

I weigh him up. 'I'll pay you when it comes.
I'm clipped at the minute.'
'I will need it first,'
he shakes his head at the floorboards. It is cold,
and I back against the warmth of a chimney breast
fed by the heat from someone's fire below.
Baines fidgets at the window. 'Here he comes.
Back from the docks I see. Not looking well.
He's ill-clad for a goldsmith, don't you think?'

'His cuffs are a little worn.'
'Yes. And his shoes,
two seasons old at least.'
'Your point is what?'
'Our friend may not be all he seems to be.
Or more. You know this town is full of spies.'
His eyes on me.
'If you suspect him so,
then why invite him to come in with us?'
I ask. He limps to the bed to relieve his bones
from the stress of standing. 'What you do not know,
young scholar, could be stretched between the stars
and hang the world's washing. There's great benefit
in keeping close those folk you do not trust.
Though half a wheel keeps stiller than a whole,
only the wheel that turns is immune to rust.
Gilbert!' he greets him. 'What a nice surprise.'
(Leaving me to decode his homilies.)
'I thought you would be gone two hours at least.
Do you have your money?'
'No.' The boyish face
that legend has it, charmed a dozen nuns
into breaking their vows to Christ, is sour with age.
He throws his jacket off. 'The boat has sailed.'

*

Had coinage passed between us quite as freely
as talk of it, we would all three be rich.

Over some broth: 'Stanley's in want of funds'
Baines offers common knowledge like a gift

I should be grateful for. 'That is well known,'
I answer.
Did the slight lead me astray?
Why would I add, 'And more in want of funds
since the man who pressed his coins was put away.'

'What man?'
'John Poole,' I say. 'I met him once.
In Newgate.' This news ignites our Richard Baines
as a spark strikes out of flint. Here is the key,
I think to myself, engaging with the lock
of Baines and turning him. 'And did he speak?'
The veins of his eyes are like faint trails of blood
across some week-old snow. I make him wait.
Gilbert is leaning inwards, though he feigns
to pick dirt from his nails.
'So? Did he speak?'
'Yes, a most prodigious speaker.'
'That is he,'
Baines nods and sits back, coldly satisfied.
'If words were food, he'd vomit himself skeletal.
You spent long with him, did you? Dear John Poole.
How was he?'
A sudden rush of chilly air.
'Alive,' I say. 'Grateful to be alive.
Look smart. The drink is coming.'

We put coins
in the barmaid's hand; Baines takes no pleasure in it;
remarks, 'How quickly money runs away.'

'Yet, how many ways to make it,' Gilbert muses,
sipping a drowsy beer. 'If we but knew.'
'You are a goldsmith,' Baines says, 'surely you
could press a coin or two.' Gilbert's awake
immediately to the danger. 'Do you ask
could I commit a treason? No, I couldn't.'

Baines' smile is serpentine. 'You've never tried?
Even for fun? To see if you've the skill
to make a coin that's passable.'
'I've not,'
Gilbert says firmly, his conviction melded
with the fact he's never handled molten metal.

An opportunity to whip away
my former contact's cover; bond with Baines
in his unmasking. And in doing so,
remove his complication. Sorry, 4.

‘Why, Gifford,’ I say, ‘what treason could there be
in testing a goldsmith’s talents?’
Baines concurs.
‘Should anyone find out – and how would they?
we’d vouch for you. That it was just a game,
and not in earnest. Why, we’d not strike coins
in any quantity. And not in gold.’

‘But pressing coins? That is a specialist skill.
My talents lie in crafting jewellery.’
Yet mutinous pearls of sweat had broken out
across his temples. Me: ‘It isn’t hard
from what I understand. John Poole described
the process in some detail.’
Richard Baines
picks up the thread. ‘I’d truly like to see
how easy – or hard – it is to press a coin
that is persuasive. If Marlowe would talk us through.’

‘Morley,’ I say.
‘Of course. What did I say?’
‘Another name.’

Gilbert objecting then,
‘I have no metals. Until my bill is paid.’

‘We do have metals. Why, this pewter spoon
would make five shillings.’
‘Poor ones.’
‘All the same.’

How did I miss that Baines knew both my names?

*

We needed wax, and clay, and crucible.
Inn candles were purloined for wax; the clay
brought from the shoreline by an eager Baines.

‘I don’t believe I have a crucible,’
says Gifford, and moments afterwards,
‘What’s this?’
Baines lifts the unused prop from Gifford’s things.
‘Is this not a crucible?’
Defeated, ‘Yes.’

The fire in the room was lit and fed.
Enthusiastic, Baines laid out the tools
while Gifford stood and contemplated flames.

‘Now what shall we copy. Who has got a coin?’

We’d nothing between us higher than a shilling,
and Dutch at that.

‘You don’t have something English?’
Baines asked. His eyes most pointedly on me.

I part supposed – misreading his intent –
he meant whatever coinage we produced
might go to Stanley’s English regiment.

And sewed inside the lining of my coat:
a dozen English coins. But something said,
Just shake your head. They’re for emergencies.

‘No matter,’ said Baines, ‘press on.’

The mould was made.
My mouth gave out instructions, word for word
almost as Poole had given them, my mind
well-used to memorising sentences.
Gifford was rattling in his skin. His hand
shook like a beggar’s cup. More ale, more ale
to still it. I drank too. Baines stayed as dry
as a lawn in summer, cracking tiny smiles
whenever I looked to him.

‘Please, can you help?’
Gifford addresses me. Steadier of hand,
I pour the liquid metal into moulds.
We wait and drink some more.

Then it is done.
One coin is uttered; an imperfect fake,
and yet the birth of it, miraculous.

‘Bravo!’ I say. Gifford hides his surprise
in a slow, professional nod. He’s passed the test.

‘The method seems sound,’ says Baines. ‘Though I’ve seen Poole’s
and they were sharper.’
‘With a little practice,’
says Gifford, ‘I would do better.’
‘Would you, now?’
Baines rubs his chin. He contemplates the shilling
by the hungry fire.
‘Except I would not coin,’
Gifford says, hastily. ‘Not as a rule.’
‘Because?’ says Baines.

'It is a capital crime!'
He starts to pack away the crucible,
the evidence.
'Well, let us celebrate
your show of skill in any case.' Baines pulls
from his trunk a bottle of brandy.
'From the monks
at a certain bolthole in the heart of France.'

Two logs on the fire. By the time they have collapsed
into their embers, breathing dragon bones,
Gifford is snoring heavily in a chair.
The brandy's warming. Baines is tight and quiet,
turning the shilling over in his palm.

'More of this would be useful.'
I agree.

'And do you figure this act is treasonous?'

I couch my answer in philosophy.
'All men are equal under God,' I say.
Beneath God's gaze, I've as much right to coin
as the Queen of England.'
Something slips apart
in the fire; provokes a brief, unruly flame.

'Sir William Stanley, whom you'd like to meet,
would like to have this knowledge you possess.
Poole's knowledge. And he'd pay the goldsmith, too,
past his objections. I could take you there.'

I said that I'd be happy to be taken.
His hand slid to my knee.
I took a breath
and told him it was time I went to bed.

*

The brandy knocked me out, but how long for
I couldn't tell. What woke me was the cold
of Baines's bony body in my bed,
rubbing against me. I pretended sleep
and lay as unresponsive as the Fates
as he wheezed as grunted. Praying silent prayers
that all my duties for the Queen would not
include forced penetration. By the dawn
he'd satisfied himself, or given up.

And more than once I've wondered, had I let

the bugger in, if I would be here now.

*

Baines, in the morning, like a change of sheets,
betrayed no inkling of the night before.
As if his memory were wiped by drink,
he gave out nothing, even in his eyes.

'Stanley is outside Flushing. You will need
your passports.'
'Mine is on me,' Gifford said.
'You're sure he will pay me just to see this coin?'
Baines is packing clothes for travelling.
'For your trouble yes. And confirming how it's done.'
'My passport's with Governor Sidney,' I replied.
Baines ties his bag up smartly. 'Yes, of course.
You came in by the port. To the governor's, then.
We'll call in on the way.'

And so we slipped
through snowy streets to Robert Sidney's house,
Baines' speedy limping due, I thought, to cold,
to the icy leaks of less-than-perfect boots,
so blind was I to the fate he planned for me.

Betrayed

'You must arrest this man!' Baines flings at me
a shaky arm. 'Go on! Arrest this man!'
'No! On what charge?' I startle as the guards
take both my arms behind my back. 'What charge?'
'This man's a traitor. Counterfeiting coin
of the realm. Sufficient charge, I think you'll find
to hang you,' he says, switching his words to me.

Gifford begins to leave. 'And this man too!'
Baines says decisively through crumbling teeth.
'He is a goldsmith, and he struck this coin.'
As guards take Gifford, too, Baines struts across
and slaps upon the desk our one Dutch shilling.
I glance at Gifford, but his eyes are fixed.
The embassy clerk in charge considers it.

'A sorry thing,' he says, soothing his beard,
'It wouldn't pass. It's pewter.'
'It's a test.
With practised skill they meant to strike in silver,'
Baines insists. 'And more of the Queen's own coin.
They're traitors, both.'
'This man is lying,' I say.
'We struck this coin, agreed, but for a wager.
To see the goldsmith's cunning. Let me see
Sir Robert Sidney on my own. I can
explain.'

But we would not be seen alone.
Sir Robert was very busy. A two hour wait,
messengers running in and out like bees
depositing honey; visitors summoned forth
and clacking their leaving heels across the tiles:
all more important than three feuding frauds.
Even though two of us might meet our deaths
the crime was 'petty' treason. Common. Small.

Gifford was steeped in silence, staring down
at a spot that looked like blood just by his feet.
I focused on my story; on the words
that would keep me from the gibbet. Richard Baines
was impatient, jiggling his legs like rattling sticks,
and yet each time he caught my eye he grinned
like a cook who holds a lobster by its claw.
Finally we were summoned.

'Very well.'

Sir Robert surveyed us with the saddest eyes
I've ever seen in government. He seemed
as under water as a drowning man
whose white face sinks away from you.
'I have –'
the effort was painful 'understood the claim
and counter-claim. Now speak one at a time.
First, Master Baines.'

Baines rises to his feet.
'I'd prefer you sitting,' Sidney says.
Baines sits
reluctantly. His voice scratches the air
like a thing that claws the door to be let in.
'These two men struck that coin upon your desk.'
The sorry thing that looks more like a stain.
'This man' – his bony finger points at me –
is an enemy of Her Majesty, who means
to go to Rome.'
'I do not!'
'Sir, sit down,'
warns Sidney, for indeed I'm on my feet.
'You mean to go to Rome!' I finger Baines.
'Sir, he is the Romish agent.'
'Sir! Sit down!'
The governor's anger silences the room.
I melt to sitting.
Sidney takes a breath
of perfect patience. 'Master Gilbert next,'

Gifford says only 'They both pressed me to it.
They wanted to know my skill.' Eyes earthwards still.

Behind the governor's head, the worthy spines
of perhaps three hundred books are calling me
to confess myself a poet. 'Like your brother,'
I imagine myself saying, 'in whose tomb
I saw Sir Francis buried.' But my tongue
is stuck in my cover.

'A scholar by profession?'
He reads the notes taken on my arrest.
'Marley,' he says. (I gave the family name;
poised as it is between the poet's and spy's.)
'You pressed the goldsmith to demonstrate his skill?'

'We both did. For a wager.'

Sidney clacks
the roof of his mouth. 'A very risky bet

to take with a man who's clearly not your friend.'

'I did not think –' I stop and realise
the truth of that. Sidney seems sadder still.
'You're aware that coining is a capital crime?'
I nod.
'Why should this agent want you dead?'
Baines's objection, he stops with stony eyes.

I splutter, 'Sir, my purpose …'
Falter there.
For the noose is sooner put around the neck
of government traitors. 'Sir, I cannot speak
openly of my purpose. But wish to say
I'm very well known to the Earl of Northumberland.
And also my Lord Strange.'
I watch his face
register the significance of these names:
two earls of Catholic family whose claims
to the English throne are watched by those like me.

'Excuse me, sir,' Baines says, 'but who he knows
is not of relevance. The man should hang
for counterfeiting coinage of the realm.'

Sidney considers once again the coin,
a thing inconsequential in itself,
handed across a bar, or flicked into
a beggar's hat. But here, potential doom,
the tiny price a man's life hangs upon.
He raises his eyes, surveys all three of us.

'Of this realm,' Sidney says, 'but not his own.
The case is not so clear.'
'Sir, it is clear!'
Baines senses he has tugged a little hard,
and the hook not quite inside the lip; and here's
a chance I might swim free. 'Excuse me, sir,
but to counterfeit's a crime in any land.
Simply imprison him, let a judge decide.'

Sir Robert Sidney rises like a spark
sent up the chimney. 'I will not be told
my course of action by – what are you, sir? –
a snivelling groveller whose loyalties
are not detectable.' Those words were like
the lifting of a boot that pressed my chest.
I thanked him with my eyes, and angered him,
it seems, a little more. 'It is not clear,
and I will not unravel it from here.

Lord Burghley will decide what will be done.'

He ties the papers. 'Masters Marley and Gifford,
you remain under arrest. As prisoners
you'll sail tonight for England. Master Baines,
you will go with them.'
'Am I prisoner?'
Baines asks, most aggravated. 'Sir, I have
important business here.'
Sir Robert asks,
'And what is more important than the law?
Than justice being done?' Baines cannot say.
He's fleshed in secrets. 'You will go with them.'

The river's frozen, sullen as it's wide.
The town sits on the river like a toad
swallowing flies. We are its meal today,
and half digested, we're pushed out to home.

Returned to the Lord Treasurer

Before we reached London, Baines had slipped away.
Along the Strand, the air was a mist of rain
which flecked and relieved our faces with its cold.

Burghley was livid. 'Now, what have I left?
Two unmasked agents and a scheme undone
which took four years to put in place.'
'My Lord –'
'Don't my Lord me.' He vibrates like a bee
that can't decide to sting us. 'You are dead,'
he says to Gifford. 'I cannot have you hanged
without unravelling a dozen lies
that serve to protect Her Majesty. Though God
knows I am in the mood to have you hanged
for your destructive interference.
'Sir –'
His attempt to speak is severed by a hand.
'Expressly, Gifford, you had been retired
and put out to pasture. It was not your place
to be in Flushing, let alone intrude
on matters of delicacy.'
'I saw a chance
to be of some service.'
'Only to yourself!'

Burghley dismisses him to wait outside.
'And you.' He turns to me. 'Can you explain
what violent arrogance possessed your brain
to demonstrate how counterfeiting's done?'

'I thought – I felt – if he was Catholic,
and keeping Stanley's gate, then it would prove
that I was close to Poole, might be of use.'

'You set the hook by which he reeled you in.'
He turns to the desk and thumps it. Rubs his fist
and returns to stalking, up and down like thread
from my mother's darning needle. 'Can't be fixed,'
he says, as though he too perceives the hole
I just imagined. 'You are too well known.
But not as an agent. No.' He meets himself
on coming back. It seems they have agreed.

'You were on Her Majesty's business. An arrest
on petty treason necessitates your death –'
He pauses for breath. Perhaps to make me sweat.
' – which plain incompetence does not deserve.

Yet your release –' Again he ventures short
and this time, won't complete. 'You're on your own.
I recommend a daily dose of prayer
that no news of your liberated state
gets out to Baines.'

'Then I am free to go?'
'For now, you're free. Return to tutoring.'

Crossing the marble entrance hall, I hear
a gentle voice behind me: 'Marlowe, sir'.
The Earl of Southampton, hair down to his waist,
and dressed as if Tuesday lunchtime might be host
to some fine occasion.
'I enjoyed your poems.
Remiss of me to let so many months
pass without saying so. Forgive me, please.'

I nod. 'I understand they didn't work.'
'Not as my Lord intended,' he replies,
with a momentary flash of summer's warmth.
'But something of love is kindled by your lines.'

A servant appears, as if a fairy's curse
has summoned him from smoke to break the spell.
'My Lord Southampton, you're required within.'

*

Gilbert was just outside. We left as one,
all hope of further service work undone.

Light-fingered rain had thickened in the hour
and now fell hard enough to clear the streets.
Though the door closed at our backs, we hovered there
to shelter in the doorway. 'Disappear,'
said Gifford. 'Baines won't keep this to himself.'

Collaboration

The consolation prize I called my friends
was out of sorts when I returned that night
to the lanes of Shoreditch, freshened by the rain,
rinsed of the stench of urine. I could kiss
their crooked timber houses and the dogs
half bald with mange, prepared to brave the wet
to nose the butcher's leavings. Much the same
as when I left to tangle with Richard Baines,
excepting those friends of mine. Some argument
had splintered them into separate bars.

First Ned,
nursing a pint of stout between his paws
in the Cock and Bull. 'The man's impossible.'
he booms like an ancient king. 'What? Robert Greene.
I only added six lines to his scene
and he took offence. Called me a pea-brained clod,
a country parsnip, if you please. My God.'
'And you stayed calm?'
'I may have said some things.'

Nashe in the Horse and Groome, his mischief sealed
behind a troubled stare. 'It's not my fault!'
he says straight off. 'Though Ned is blaming me
for laughing, the pompous oaf. Greene lost his temper.
Now Ned won't even pay him what he's owed.'
'And what of the play?'
'The play? The play's a mess.'

My play. That Ned persuaded me to leave
half finished when I went abroad. Had said
'Good hands will finish it! You'll have your share.
The lion's share, indeed. Go on, be gone!'
My play was at the core of what went wrong.

Greene had moved in with the prostitute, Em Ball,
who cradled his head between a squelch of breasts,
eyeing me sharply. 'Don't be upsetting him.
He isn't well.' Greene peered up through the pain
of a hangover. 'You can sod your blasted play
unless you've come with money from the Crow.'
'Ned isn't happy.'
'Good.'
'About the play -
you have some scenes?'
'I fed them to the fire,'
he growled. 'Delightful words, but we had need

of kindling.'
'Greene, for God's sake!'
'What of God?
What's God to do with this, you atheist?
I know what you've been up to, gone abroad
to pretend at being Catholic, setting traps
for Jesuits. How taxing it must be
to believe in nothing.'
'Robert, that's not true –
and protecting Her Majesty is honest work.'

'If lying through your teeth is honest work
no wonder I'm facing death through poverty.
You're no more honest than your friend the Crow,
for both of you live by acting. And beneath
are puffed-up nothings, like the fungus balls
we find in the woods, and stamp to clouds of spores.'

His mind diseased, I left him with his whore
and went in search of my own sanity:
an evening with Thomas Watson, to offload
the horror that was Flushing, knowing he
would find the joke in it. And we'd share Baines,
and the resurrection of dead spies, with glee.
He'd shore me up.

But no lights in his rooms.
And no Tom in the local hostelry.
And no wife to explain where he might be.

The night was turning filthy, with the rain
harried in all directions by a gale.
In case his tutor's duty kept him late
I knocked at Fisher's Folly, spoke his name,
and the door was shut on me.

So I trudged back
to Nashe. 'Have you seen Watson anywhere?'
'Oh, Kit. My word, I'm sorry. I was so –
preoccupied. I forgot you didn't know –
it happened weeks ago.'
'What happened?'
'Kit,
he's in the Fleet.'
It's true that I had then
a vision of his body, bloated dark
with the sewer water, floating to the Thames.
Rather that than think our friend in chains.

'Explain,' I said, winded enough to sit

and help myself to cider.
'He – oh, Kit,
it isn't good.'
'Explain.'
'The girl, the girl –'
And so he blurted it. Tom's brother-in-law
falling for Cornwallis's young daughter,
and how Tom – as a jest, he said – suggests
he lend ten angels to the miser's daughter,
and has his brother Hugh draw up a deed
saying she'll repay it on her wedding day,
but worded in such tortured legalese
that he, Tom's brother-in-law, must be the groom.

'And all is blamed on him? He's in the Fleet?'

'He's in the Fleet, accused of every crime
the family could throw at him. But chiefly,
for instigating blackmail.'

'Have you tried
to bail him out?'

'They wouldn't set a price.
His employer's livid. And in any case
I'm hardly equipped to lend a surety.'

The wind was at my back and in my face,
the links boys scattered by the howling rain,
and only a lighted window here or there
allowed me to thread that mile across the city.
In time, the sullen shadow of the Fleet
reared up its walls and smell.
Though it was late,
I offered what I had in silver coin
to a hook-nosed gaoler.
'Watson. Tom. It's me.'
I shook him, and his soul fell into place
behind his eyes: still him, but somehow changed.
'I'm done for, Kit.'
'Don't say that.'
'Smell the place.'
The torchlight lit him wildly, but the draught
that ripped through the building couldn't budge the stench.
'That's death,' he said. 'Three corpses leave a day.'
'Not yours,' I said. 'You're coming out alive.'
He smiled like a crumbling loaf. 'Let's pray.'
And closed his eyes. I waited for the joke
to end. Instead, his eyes steadfastly closed,
his lips were murmuring. And then, 'Amen.'

‘Are you all right?’ I asked.
He looked at me
as though I spoke in Flemish, and the pause
was for his own translation. ‘Am I? No,’
his words as brittle as an ancient book.
‘Tom, you’ll escape the charges.’
‘You don’t know,’
he said. ‘Cornwallis doesn’t go to church.
You understand? He has me for a spy.’
‘I’ll get you out.’
‘With what? An I.O.U?’
‘I’ll think of something.’
‘Yes. The genius,’
he said, unusually sour. ‘Well, think it quick.’

‘Where’s Ann?’ I asked. He threw his head back hard
against the stone. ‘With relatives. My wife
must resort to charity. It was a joke!’
‘What was?’
‘What do you think? The bastard note.
I never thought they’d write the idiot thing.’
He smacked his head against the wall again.

Two hours I stayed, entrenched in his despair,
and each week after, dragged myself to him,
with pies and paper that he had no heart
to fill with words. The spark in him was out,
and his estate too damp and treacherous
for it to be relit. What was my friend
departed months before the final pinch.
And though I strove to paint his freedom there,
a future for him, he only saw his end
creeping towards him, inch by stinking inch.

The School of Atheism

My own fate crept towards me too. How frail
is the bubble reputation. On a pin.

What starts with only rumour, just the fluff
of some poor servant's ignorance and fear
becomes corporeal, trails a snaky tail,
until the tale's found devilish enough,
and scurries to the dark, as lode to pole.

An anonymous agent writes of how we meet
to spread the unholy creed, and from my lines,
twists joke to accusation: how we teach
scholars 'to spell God backward.' We who thrilled
at Raleigh's phrase 'adventures of the soul'
begin to understand we may be damned.

'Faustus!' A stranger hails me in the street.
'Send my regards to Hell!'
I grab his throat
and thrust him against the baker's door
'Who said
that I am Faustus?' The sweetest smell of loaves
warms in the air between us.
'Why, it's known,'
he stammers. 'Is generally known.'
I see his hand
making a surreptitious cross and growl
into his face, 'What's known? What's this that's known?'
'That the author of Faustus is an atheist.
That you are he.'
'Who said this?'
'Robert Greene.'

Holywell Street

'Greene! Open Up!' I hammer on the door
of his digs in Holywell Street. A passer-by
skirts round me like a pothole. 'Mistress Ball!
I need to speak to Robert.'
It is May.
Enfeebled sunshine warming up the roofs
and the foul load of the gutters. 'Open up!'

Movement. An upstairs window creaks its joints
and the woman's face appear. ''E isn't well,'
she says in a voice as sharp as splintered wood,
'and not receiving visitors.' She's gone.

I could have left. Perhaps, had I turned my heel
and left them well alone, his spiteful pen
would not have felt it had to set in ink
the vitriol he'd drafted with his tongue
and freely spewed in taverns, bars and inns.
But I was righteous. Full of consequence.

I hammer again. 'Greene! Open up this door!'
It flies from my fist. 'Whaddya want 'im for?'
Miss Ball was Greene's protector, those last days,
her shrew-like features screwed up like a page
whose scenes he had rejected, 'He is ill,
I said, and if you do not know the word,
then please acquaint yourself and catch the plague.'
Her diction was deliberately strained.

'He has the plague?'
'Whaddya take me for?
Would I be 'ere without an 'andkerchief?
No. No, you fool. Although a plague of "friends"'
– her tone has marked the word for quarantine –
'seems to descend here daily. What's yer beef?'

'I want to speak to Greene,' I say, and take
advantage of the open door to bolt
like lightning up the stairs. She follows. 'Hey!
Don't push me! Don't go up there! Bloody men.'

Greene is indeed in bed, but fully dressed,
as though he's just retreated there.
'Ah, Marlowe.
I thought I recognised your dulcet tones
drifting up from the street. And such a rhythm
you played on my door, as if it were a drum

and I should break out singing. But alas,
I am unwell. They say the very air
can spread contagion. You may note the smell.'
There was, indeed, a stench.
'One cannot catch
the slow death wrought by alcohol,' I say,
stalking across the room to pull the sheets
away from his booted body. Emma swears,
arriving in the doorway out of breath,
and hands him the olive cloak draped on a chair.
'And you have been well enough to venture out
and smear my name amongst the taverners.'

'So? I must eat. My Em's a dreadful cook.'
She scowls at him; he smiles and grasps her hand
to pull himself up to sitting. Clears his throat.
'A dying man should have his fill of fare
while time allows. If I should stagger out
for lunch or an evening meal –'

'You miss my point,'
I say. 'Eat what you will. And where you will.
But keep your mouthparts busy mangling food
and not unravelling slanders. Several men
in this last week alone, have savaged me
for views I do not hold, and claimed that you –'
(I jab my finger in his chest. He coughs.)
'- were their source of information.'
'Oh? What views?'
All innocence he is, all empty eyed,
though his lips are curled like paper by a fire.
'A man's religious opinions –' I begin,
'that is, beliefs – should not be simplified.
Not in these times.'
'What times? I'm out of touch,'
he sneers. 'Dear Em, will you fetch me a mug of wine?'

'The Queen herself once promised, we are told,
not to make windows into her subjects' souls.
But if others, spreading lies –'
'What have I said?'
No more than you've said yourself a dozen times.
"Christ was a bastard and his mother dishonest."
The atheist highlights, if you please.'
'For God's –
for pity's sake, you cannot spread this stuff!'

Nashe said I should have run him through, right there;
but to witness one man die was enough for me.
And I am not a natural fighting man.

I prefer the bright and bloodless cut of words.

‘What fiendish foul excuse for a human being
would put my life and liberty on the line
for his private entertainment? The powers that be
have cooked up fear until it bubbles thick
in the brains of the ignorant, and you would stir
it further, give them names? And give them mine,
as if this mind is fodder for the ropes
at a public hanging? Damn you, Greene, you may
have bitterness against me, but this life
of graft by pen and ink, and several friends
we have in common. Say what you like of me,
but do not say I am an atheist.’

Emma returns with wine. He curls a hand
around the mug, and pats her on the bum.

‘Say it? I’ll write it. Publish it indeed,
under my name. Greene’s Devils. That would sell.
Greene’s Former Friends, the atheist and the clown,
who feed their best lines to an upstart crow.’

‘You can’t be serious. For mercy’s sake,
if you call me an atheist in print –’

‘- you’ll soon be back in gaol, where you belong.’
He takes a gulp of wine. ‘And I’ll be dead.
Emma will publish it when I am gone.’
A smile spreads on his face as though a stain
has crept across a tablecloth. He coughs
and pats his mistress’s hand. The spill of glee
has spread to her lips, which curl up like a cat.

‘Well damn you both!’ I pace across the room
and in a surge of fury, draw my sword.
‘What maggot in a cloak, what pickled turd,
would find this shit amusing? And what sow,’
I skewer her with a glance; she looks away,
‘would suckle this poison? In the name of God –
for now you swear allegiance, like a cur
licking the foot that kicks him – damn you, Greene!’

He eyes me like a sore. ‘How very choice.
In the name of God, you damn me. Does that work,
I wonder, when your blood’s so thick with sin?
I will not fight. So murder a dying man,
be witnessed by my Em. I am unarmed.’
He coughs again. She pats him, eyes all spite
in my direction.

'Sin? You hypocrite.'
I sheathe the sword with difficulty. 'Sin?
You're the high priest of sin. You've said as much
yourself. Full house. Let's lay them out to see:
pride, envy, greed, and lust.'
This last word licked
against Miss Ball, who steels each dwarfish inch
of herself towards me 'Get out of my house!
I'll call the constables. Flo! Get the law!'
she shouts at her neighbour's wall. 'A man in 'ere
is causin' trouble! 'Andsome. Now yer cooked,'
she said, self-satisfied. 'Go on, clear orf,
before yer clapped in irons.'
'Don't do it Greene.'

'I'll do whatever I please.' The mug set down.
'Perhaps if you had come on bended knee –'
he smoothes his beard into a sharper point,
'and not on a horse that you can ill afford,
full of your self and your self-righteous wrongs,
full of your friendships with the Sirs and Earls,
trussed up in velvet like a bloody lord.
You're all pretence. A jumped up cobbler's son
who dresses up as pounds what is worth pence.'

'You filthy weasel!' I am at his throat
with my eating knife before his breath is out,
and Mistress Ball at the window, 'Murder! Help!'

'You piece of shit.'
He's not the least alarmed,
knowing I've not the heart for it. 'How quaint.'
His Adam's apple bobs against the blade.
'You've reverted to your class. I've heard distress
will do that to a man.'
'This way! This way!'
the shrew shrieks at the window. ''Ere they come,'
she grins at me. 'Yer really for it now.'

*

It could have been worse. I was bound to keep the peace
and warned to stay away from Holywell Street.
But had I hoped to stem the bleed like this,
I was mistaken. 'Marlowe the atheist' -
the rumours thickened, reproduced and spread
from house to inn, from corner shop to bed,
from maid to fishwife, serving man to priest.

A Groatsworth of Wit

Death came that summer, dressed up in a heat
as unforgiving as the smelter's fire,
stalking the alleyways and London streets
as hot and unrelenting as desire
will track a woman down and smear her sheets.

So many deaths, they couldn't count them all:
the cry, bring out your dead, emptied complete
houses. It heaped whole families with its call
and tipped them into everlasting sleep.
Summer burned on relentless. At St.Paul's

the thinning buyers milled more thickly where
the stationer stacked Greene upon his stalls.
A freshly dead contagion in the air
as accusation gossiped round the walls
the plague of rumour. I would not be spared.

And the fear that gripped me as it spread its wrong
ensured I would be perfectly ensnared
by throwing me into a dark despond.
For the flavour and appearance of despair
looks much like guilty truth when stamped upon.

Such heat. September came without relief,
the summer furiously clinging on,
killing exhausted mule, pernicious weed
and sucking the river dry. Thom Nashe was gone
to spy on the Church; our friend was in the Fleet

sucking the humid air, while like a fly
my brain buzzed madly round the corpse of Greene
pressing to find a window to the sky
but only knocking into stink. A priest
confused me with Doctor Faustus as if I

had damned the world to gulp his curses down.
So merged the playwright and the Queen's own spy,
by the power of language flushed from underground;
my fictional creations now not mine,
but me. And in their mythic flesh I drowned.

Dismissed

Fear sends the mad man running off a cliff.
I asked Arbella Stuart for forty pounds;
an annual sum, to save me from the list
of poverty-murdered poets. I could hear
Fate drumming at the window. But the doubt
surrounding my religion reached the ears
of the countess. Like a flea, I was dismissed.

The Cobbler's Son

The backward movement of returning home
thickened my blood as I approached the walls
of Canterbury. Passing through its gates
like a child squeezing back into the womb
of a mother he has out-suckled.

There, the fence
I used to daub with chalk when I was small,
was clipped around the ear for. There, the school
whose books propelled me into fantasies.

Autumn was shedding summer in the gardens
and the leaves blew giddy down familiar streets
as though afraid of something.

At his awl
just as I'd left him some three years ago,
my father bends and straightens like a willow,
predictably nattering a customer
into a better pair of shoes. At first
his eye mistakes me for a gentleman
he needs to cozen, misled by my clothes.

'Young sir, how are you booted?' Then, 'Good grief!
It's Christopher!' Out back, 'It's Christopher!'
My mother comes with sodden hands, 'My son!'
and wets my shoulders with them. 'Why, you've come
so unexpectedly! What brings you here?'
Between the two of them, a glance, a nod:
I wondered then how fast, from man to man,
the word might travel.
With her in the yard:
'You have leave from your tutoring?' she asks,
wringing a tunic dry. As if she knows.
'I'm finished with that,' I answer, tapping grit
out of my shoe. 'I am on government work.
I need to rest here for a week or so -'
The truth stuck in my throat.
'You'd let me know
if you were in trouble?'
'Mum, you know you'd know.'
She eyes me like a button that won't fit
through the hole she's made.
'I know you less these days.'

I was foolish to go drinking; but what else

is a man to do to stop becoming boy
when he's moved back with his parents? Darkly lost
in wondering how to rescue me, 'Corkine!'
feels like an assault; a cheery parrot's cry
from a man I fail to recognise 'Topher!'
He spits through his teeth the name they used at school.
'Come on, it's me, Corkine! The tailor's son.
Indeed, a tailor now. With a son of my own.
How's cobbling?'

I confess, it grated me,
his sense that we were equals. I had lost
a job instructing England's possible queen,
been slandered by a drunken, envious pimp,
but still I was raised to gentleman, M.A.

'Excuse me, sir, I do not cobble now.'

His cheeriness was irrefutable.

'They call you the cobbler still. You cobble up
some trifles for the public stage, I hear.'

'I am a scholar. And a gentleman.'

'Get you!' he laughs, and jabs a bony digit
into my ribs. 'Our Toph's a gentleman.
If you're a gentleman, where's your rapier?'

I hadn't taken it to Derbyshire.
It was in London, stored amongst my things,
and just as well, the mood that I was in.

'Are you suggesting, sir, that I am lying?'

His eye twitched nervously, as if the smile
was breaking off in pieces. 'Not me, Toph.
Just asking where your sword was, that was all.'

He sits beside me, pulling up a stool.
'So do you have a family? A wife?'
For forty minutes, I put up with it,
answering trivial questions through my teeth
in one or two words only, but Corkine -
either convinced his cheer would gladden me,
or unaware of how I seethed and boiled –
remained there like a birthmark.

'Well, Corkine,
it's been a pleasure,' (said so sourly

my mother could pickle herrings in the tone)
'but it's time for me to go.'
He stands up too.
'I'll walk down with you to your father's house.
My own is just beyond.'
'I'd rather walk
alone,' I said. Yet ten steps down the road
I find him at my side. 'It isn't safe,'
he said, 'to walk alone at night. Not here.'

The wind spoke malcontentedly through signs,
creaking the baker's loaf, the glover's glove.
It wasn't safe for him to walk with me
against my wishes. Though I bit my tongue,
I was so close to punching him, I swear
my fist was itching.

'Look, I need to think.
I have some troubles and must be alone.
Please let me be.' So firmly to his face
he couldn't mistake my meaning. Still, he said,
'I hope we might be friends. Now that you're back.'

You understand that I must say all this
in mitigation for what happened next.
The facts alone – if you had seen the facts,
laid out, as they were, in court – tell only that
I assaulted the man. But I did so much more.

'I am not back. And we will not be friends.
I don't make friends with tailors, any more
than I would marry the shit upon my shoe.'

I watched his face turn crimson in the light
of the tavern window.

'Furthermore –' But I
had said enough. And felt it, even through
that bellyful of ale. I turned to go

and Corkine shouted out, 'You stupid sprat!
You jumped up sprat of man! You know you're nothing!
You're nothing at all.'

And did I batter him?
You bet I did. Did I hold my dagger close
against his throat as I had done to Greene?
Did I growl in his face, and cut his buttons off,
saying they'd be his fingers if he crossed
my path again? With certainty, I did.

My father bailed me from the local cells
and talked me home. The shame in my mother's eyes –

I knew then that I couldn't stay there long.
To go back to the groundnest of your birth
when you have fledged, have learnt to use your wings,
flown across oceans, sung with friends at dawn,
is to shrink and rot as surely as a worm
will hole an apple. London, though, was death
tricked out in temptress clothes.
                And then you spoke.
Your voice came clearly: 'You could come to Kent.'
Yes, there was more to Kent than Canterbury.
I rode, next afternoon, to Scadbury.

Re:spite

The birds sang my arrival through the woods,
along the path, and through the entrance gates.
Had I believed that all would turn to good
the moment you embraced me, I would wait
only two weeks to learn that pain was still
coming for me, and as relentlessly
as a bloodhound closing in upon it's kill.
Tom Watson turned to death to set him free.

A Fellow Of Infinite Jest

Had I forgotten him? No. Nor can I
erase from my mind the pained, unruly grin
that took possession of his face the night
I told him I was leaving town.
'You too?
Of course. Yes, bugger off. I'll keep the rats,
my loyal companions. I shall press my face
against the bars and gurn at passers-by
for entertainment. Though if this keeps on
there'll be no passers-by. All London town
will be a prison, which we prisoners
will govern by witchcraft while we slowly rot.'

'Tom –'
'Don't apologise. You have your troubles.
I don't wish to be one of them.' Like lard
slides off a cooked goose breast, he changes tack.
'This heat is insufferable. When will it end?'

I left him there, it's true. No coin of mine,
no words that I might write, would set him free.
And yet, if I could go back to that night,
I'd boot the guards, and wrestle for the key
rather than standing in that dripping yard
wondering which unholy mound was he.

Scadbury

We wintered quietly. We fed the fires.
You let me write for hours, and touched my sleeve
when meat was served. December's ice slaked thick
across the moat; fish torpid in the depths
of the fishponds' cloudy cataracts. I wrote
as deep as I could inside the ancient tales,
as if afraid, should I come up for air,
I'd find a bank of prosecutors there.

When geese cranked spring's return across the sky,
you rode to town and back, to bend your ear
to the Privy Council's whisperings, while I
sank deeper still, but all my blood aware
that half those men still pressed to have it spilled
as a fine example of the rebel's heart:
He who abandons God cannot be saved.
Those men could not imagine how I prayed.

A Slave Whose Gall Coins Slanders Like a Mint

You'd spent two days in London. You had news.
Your wolf-hound greeted you with a slow wag;
you stroked him distractedly, and gave your cloak
to Frizer.
'Bring some wine,' you said. His brow
showed silent concern. How strange to write him now
bearing only the weight of your cloak along the hall,
knowing how he would bear a greater burden,
and all for love and loyalty to you.

Anxious, I followed you into the room
where so many conversations, games of cards
and quoted poetry had sealed us tight
in friendship: every night held in those walls
as though the wood, still tree, were living witness,
rather than simple panelling.
'Frizer.'
'Sir?'
'Dismiss the staff. We're not to be disturbed.
And you may go to bed.'
It wasn't late,
and he raised a single eyebrow, but complied.
The crackling fire, which he'd lately fed,
filled up the silence as we listened then
to the quieting of the house.

'There is a note,'
you said, with blunt despair. You turned your glass
around in your fingers, staring at the wine
as though you wished to drown there. 'Kit, it's bad.
Lord Burghley gave me sight of it. It says –'
You shook your head to free you of the thought.
'Kit, they've enough to hang you.'

So it fell,
the sword of Damocles. I barely flinched.
'What does it say?'

'Your words. It's all your words.'

You left a gap, allowing me to summon
which words it might have been: and strangely, then,
I could only remember triumphs. Faustus, mad,
as he fails to save his soul. Or Tamburlaine,
whose bereavement serenades the loved, lost wife
in emerald, ruby words. Leander's song
for the woman he will throw his life upon.

‘It’s every quip you ever made on drink.
Your arguments against the Trinity:
Mary a whore, the Holy Ghost a bawd,
and Jesus a bastard.’
‘Jesus.’
‘All set down
in a comprehensive list of blasphemies.’

How much I would prefer I had been damned
by the words I crafted carefully in ink.
Instead my pen was cancelled by my mouth,
and scholarship drowned in an hour or two of drink.

If I had drifted into my own pain
on the damp, unstable wreckage that was Kit
you barely noticed, locked in paraphrase:
‘That the Bible’s filthily written. Every gibe
you aimed at religion, recalled perfectly.
That Christ deserved to die more than Barabbas
though Barabbas was a thief and murderer.’

The reference woke me up. With that, I knew.

‘Barabbas - Baines. He wrote this.’
‘Signed his name
with a flourish. Says he can bring witnesses
to affirm his accusations. Ends the note
to plead that every Christian should ensure
your mouth be stopped.’

‘I’m done for.’

Silence sank
into the room as stone sinks in a pond;
the shadows thrown up by a welcome fire
dancing like hordes of demons on the wall.

‘What if you disappeared?’ you said.
‘To where?’

‘To Scotland, where you friend went. To the King,
Arbella’s cousin.’

‘How could he take me in?
A wanted atheist? No, I’d be sent
home with an escort.’
‘You could go abroad.
We have the contacts.’
‘What, and have to hide

forever after, fearing for my life,
or end my days in some unsavoury hole,
stuck on the end of some assassin's knife?
I'd rather die right here.'

I watched your face,
as tender as though I'd kicked it. In a breath,
I'm on my feet, and stalking up and down.
'Damn it! What do I do?'

'You die right here,'
you said as quietly as fear allowed.
Still walking nowhere, everywhere at once,
I barely heard you. 'What?'
'You die right here.
Not here, not in this house, but somewhere safe.
Under another name, you slip these shores
with passport to travel. While Kit Marlowe meets
a proper death, observed by witnesses,
with documents to prove it.'
'How?'
'Sit down!'
you said, more forcefully. 'I have to think.'

The Plot

The plot you devise for me is scrupulous.
In every detail - entrances, exits, marks,
contingencies and props – no blank is left.
No improvisation. Nothing left to chance.

If I'm arrested, Burghley will have me bailed.
He wouldn't want me in a torturer's chair,
blubbering awkward secrets, crying his name.
We will have days to set the plan in train.

> My perfectly accidental death. A fight,
> a scuffling over something trivial.
> The reckoning – I saw you enjoy the pun.
> Most folk would say that I had gotten mine.

To be controlled it will occur inside.
At the safe-house. Widow Bull's, close to the Thames:
easy to sail from, and inside the Verge,
jurisdiction of the Queen's own coroner,

ensuring that this too-convenient death
is stamped by the royal seal: no doubt allowed.
The Queen will sign it off, conditional
on an obedient silence spent in exile.

> Exile. In all the haste to save my neck,
> I hadn't sounded out that word at all.
> It sings its empty promise in my ear
> like the coffin of a wife that I must join.

But now your job is: make me disappear.
A minimal cast whose loyalties are sound.
Chief witness: Robyn Poley, king of lies.
Abroad, but he can be sent for. Offering

his life in your service, as he had once sworn,
Ingram Frizer will play my murderer,
armed with his stone-faced plausibility,
and a plea of self-defence, to dodge the rope.

> Was there no other way it could be done?
> My reputation snagged upon that nail:
> a man who'd stab his patron's loyal retainer
> over a tavern bill, and from behind.

You brighten it up. You polish it like brass.
The second witness, Nicholas Skeres, a friend

to each of us in the past, dog-loyal, and skilled,
like Frizer and Poley, in the soundproof lie.

You bat away my doubt like summer flies,
distracting my mind with Italy: the art,
the poetry, the theatre, the wine.
'And months of sunshine, Kit. Escape the rain.'

> Yet rain is the stuff of home, a constancy
> that drums its comfort on familiar roofs,
> washes the face awake, peels back the blooms
> and lifts the smell of growth out from the grass.

My friend, you wrought a most ingenious plot.
As wedding to marriage, its complexity
masked future troubles. But no more than a scene
when I must go on acting to the end.

Whitgift

The Privy Councillors are cleanly split.
The half that want their spy alive lock jaws
with the half who'd have me roasted on a spit.
Archbishop Whitgift has the faggots lit.

‘Fly, Flye, and Never Returne’

Fear and the plague are one. What horrifies
is the thought of death come calling: close, now, close
as a neighbour’s son, the tailor, an old friend,
as each is smacked to bed, and rendered numb.
Carted to grey stone walls, dropped in the earth,
imprisoned in the lea of Christendom.
And fear is the contagion passed along.

Blame anyone, blame anyone but us.
Blame foreigners for eating bread and ale,
for speaking words we cannot understand.
Blame women for the looseness of their tongues,
for doing work we wouldn’t do ourselves.
Blame slaughter for the smell but relish meat;
blame sin on God, but heed the worship bell.

At Lambeth Palace, cool upon the Thames,
heads come together. Walter Raleigh spoke
against the Dutchmen, yet we passed the bill
to welcome them; we need more Protestants.
Now the people riot. And who stirs them up?
Plotters and Catholics. Upstarts, atheists.
They work a plan. Two birds. A single stone.

The page is sent to get a literate man
who’s paid to keep his secrets. ‘Make a verse
condemning foreigners. Make them the plague.
Then have it written neat enough to read
and post it on the wall outside their church.
And you should allude to Marlowe. Marlowe’s words.
Let Marlowe take the blame, should any come.’

Kyd's Tragedy

The London streets are thick with discontent,
and someone must be blamed; and someone sought,
and someone's cheek be forced against a wall
and someone's lodgings shuffled into snow.

They arrest my former room-mate. It's not hard
to get a yes to all they need confirmed:
they only have to crank his fingers out
and press a coffin's weight onto his chest.

Out spills my name. Are these my papers? Yes.
They are not his. They are not mine. A scribe
copied some lines against the Trinity
from some old book. But I'm weighed against his spine.

My confidence, he took for arrogance.
I teased him. Now his muscles tear like lace,
his fingers too divorced from knuckle joints
to hold the pen he'd sign confessions with.

A year or so from now, Tom Kyd is dead,
his ribs a cage around his silenced heart,
unable to sever by penitence or pen
his name from mine, or that word atheism;

from the fact he set inquisitors on me.
But for now, he scribbles - starving, from a cell -
of his innocence, and of my crimes as well,
as he tries to hold his index finger in.

Smoke and Fire

Some twenty miles away, I knock a pipe
ash-free. But where the habit once relaxed,
it now rides agitation, stroking hackles
which rise on its passing; aggravates a throat
where emotion clusters with expectancy,
like schoolboys for the whip. Another smoke.
My fingers shake to press the new stuff in.

'Kit,' you said, 'they won't come looking here.'
But gave me a room with sight across the moat
to the arch bad news must broach. Now dusk descends,
and a mist lies on the water like a bride
waiting to be disturbed. Only the sigh
of trees, a moorhen's cackle, and the bark
of a distant fox send quivers through her peace.

My days I fill with telling another's tale,
playing the loved and lover all at once:
lighting the lamp and swimming the Hellespont.
Evenings, we eat, and gulp wine by a fire
that crackles with hope, and prompts our talk of soon,
how this will pass. But this hour, in my room,
my faith deserts as swiftly as the light.

They'll come for me. They'll come as sure as sleep
comes to the man who's been awake too long.
With warrant and dog, they'll come as sure as sound
comes to the drum that's beaten. Even now,
the name of Marlowe leaps from lip to lip:
not wonder of the age, but atheist.
You're gentle on my shoulder. 'Kit. Come down.'

By Any Other Name

Greene's Marlowe has stuck. Now half of me says 'low'
the sound of which is like a cobbler's knee.
And something of the flavour of the ditch
resides there also, if you listen for it.

Marlowe, the name that even friends adopt
because it means me now. But dangerous,
a shifting name that has me kiss the clay
and barely props my soul against the wind.

Marlowe the name that slips into the ear
of blind authority and sleeping dog,
the name that rustles up the fishwife's sleeve
and rattles dice across a tabletop.

Fractured into a dozen parts; yet one.
For surely he sold his soul to understand
the nature of evil. Faustus. Tamburlaine.
My named slipped by degrees out of my hands.

They call me what they will. A devil, too,
and Machevil, as if my words have power
to topple kings and princes. Or the Queen.
It's Marlowe on the warrant sent for me.

Drakes

‘What will you need?’ you asked, your quill hand poised.

‘I’ll need my books. Paper and ink. Some clothes.’

‘A decent horse. Money to get you through
until you meet your contact overseas.’

You scribed it all with such efficiency.
I couldn’t bear to watch you shape that list
when all that was essential would be left
behind, in the very room I breathed in.

‘You,’
I offered. At first, you didn’t understand.
‘I’m sorry?’
‘You. Come with me.’
‘Kit, I can’t.’

You set the pen down gently, and stepped over
your sleeping hound to meet me at the warmth
of a dying fire, where I’d been standing, propped
for the last half hour. You took my hands in yours
and a feeling shivered through me. ‘If I go
the minute you are dead, what will they think?’

‘That it was faked.’

‘Or that I murdered you,’
you said, the words distasteful in your mouth
as a swig of milk that’s turned. The thought of it.

Your eyes dropped, and my hand rose to your cheek
as to a statue, banished from my touch,
whose beauty compels that most forbidden act –
to know you through my skin. My love. To feel.

You didn’t flinch. Indeed, you placed your hand
in the curls of my hair, and quietly met my gaze.
And as we kissed, the wide world looked away,
not understanding anything at all
about two friends who’ve never spoken love
but find themselves born helpless in its arms
embracing the silence that my death demands:
pretended death so resolutely played
that heaven might admit me, but not you.

And what possessed me then, surprising you,

was the ageless hunger of a starving soul
who needs to eat and be eaten, to be one
with the feast that fills him, so he might be whole.

Later, aware of morning's creeping chill,
you led me like a puppy to your bed.

We lay until eight: one sleeping like a lord,
the other, awake, preparing to be dead.
And when the stirrings of a catered house
had you sprung into breeches, I remained quite still.

'Where will we get a corpse?' I asked again.
'If the man's already dead, and I presume
you don't mean to murder someone, how will he
seem fresh to the jury?'

You pulled on your shirt
across the urgent signature my nails
had made on your back. 'He will be freshly dead,'
you answered, once again so matter-of-fact
the night might not have happened.

'Dead from what?'
'From the same disease that would have you dispatched.
Religious intolerance. There are enough
rogue preachers who await Her Majesty's noose
for us to borrow one unfortunate.'

So practical. I hated that in you
that morning. Though my life depended on it.

'So he will be hanged?'
'Ideally. And not stiff
before he is delivered.'
All the 'he'
was making me nauseous. To discuss a man
as though he were a sack of grain.
'This corpse,'
I said, 'how will it pass for me?'
You paused
at the window: some commotion on the pond
took your attention.

'Drakes will sometimes drown
the ducks they mate,' you said. 'By accident.'

My friend, each thought we have is meaningful.
The lightest observation weighs like lead
on a friend as vulnerable as I was then.

You turned your gaze to me. ‘How will it pass?
The men will swear it’s you, and be believed,
as friends of yours. The bulk of England knows
nothing of what you look like.’

‘But the staff,
and Widow Bull? If they see me arrive?’

‘Oh death’s a great disguiser, Kit,’ you said.
‘And we will add to it. A gory wound
will make the sternest-stomached soul recoil,
look anywhere but at the corpse’s face.’

‘What do you have in mind?’ I asked, afraid
of your calm, phlegmatic answer.

‘It’s the eyes
where we feel vulnerable,’ you said, your gaze
proving your point. ‘A stabbing in the eye.’

My Being

How could I give up writing? You might ask
a man to give up breathing, or a hawk
to drop a strip of fillet in your hand
and starve itself. I am compulsion's fiend.
And thought is as an irritating twitch
that can't be reached except in pen and ink.
I covet paper. Nothing inside is still
till I empty out my mind and order it.

How could I give up writing? You might ask
a fish to give up swimming, or a horse
to ditch his kick and neigh, his stamp and snort.
Or ask a man brought up inside the trades
and elevated into velvet halls
to soft-relinquish everything he's earned;
swap cloak for leather apron; kneel as if
he is a common man, and not to mind
his life turned back to nothing.
                Rather ask
a god to be your servant than request
I gag myself without complaint, when words
are all I have to stay this side of Hell.

My Afterlives

Two names were needed for my afterlives.
A name to travel under, and a name
to write beneath: believable, yet blessed
with meaning, in the way that names can be
when not devised by parents. For the first
I settled on Le Doux: the gentle man.
A name so sweet, so radically at odds
with how my enemies would have me viewed
that I'm disguised completely by its sound,
the merest tap of a tongue inside a vowel.

The pen-name, though, kept me awake for hours.
What power might I invoke to hide behind
when every word I write, stamped with my voice,
might summon, like a sneeze in hide-and-seek,
my swift discovery?

Do you believe
in the power of dreams? I drifted, with my mind
hooked on the question, and when I awoke,
the name of 'Shakespeare' spoke itself. A gift –
or thus I was persuaded by the dawn -
from the goddess Athena, warrior of the wise,
whose shield, protected with the Gorgon's head,
would freeze all those who tried to look behind.
How perfectly it works, that verbal spell.

The Christian name delivered like a foal
slipped all at once onto the stable's straw.
I knew a boy at school called William Good.
Will I Am Good, we laughed; for he was caned
most often. And the Will I Am came through
as a floated prayer; the breath of my desire.

'Will I Am Shakespeare, then,' I mouthed to the face
in the polished mirror as I shaved away
the roguish beard I'd grown to give me age.

'William Shakespeare.' Memorable yet bland
as a pat of butter shaken without salt.
If the name seemed half-familiar, I took it then
as a sign of its rightness, not the distant knell
of a long-lost conversation overheard.

What destiny hunkers in coincidence?
What paths are knitted for us by the gods
who pull such strings together? Thus was summoned

like Hecate's curse on any future road,
the printer's friend who'd worn that name since birth,
discreet as married sex. It was agreed:
a grand idea. A cloak, an extra layer.

The name is mine, I tell myself, it's bought
as a doublet's bought. Yet worn by two, not one,
it chafes where he narrows, rubs where I'm not free,
itches, fits neither of us perfectly.

Yet I am Will. I am. I say these words
over and over, like a hopeless spell.
Will I am Will. I'm Will. And Will is me.

A Passport to Return

Two classic narratives of thwarted love.
A pair of poems, like a pair of gloves,

conceived together. One, discreetly lodged
with Field in my new name. The other dropped
with 'Marlowe' on its cuff, on Kentish soil,
to circulate in manuscript, unspoiled;
the hero strangely living. Leander swims,
not to be published; for his finish begins

when my death's undone.
In each, the other sings,

their source identical. Brought side by side
the lie can be exposed: this author died?
Then how did the matching poem come to be?
And notice the motif: the telling scene
embroidered on the sleeve of Hero's dress
from the other poem, authored by 'WS'.

So brought together, these two will confess.
The perfect bookends of this man's distress.

Deptford Strand

On Deptford Strand, the famous Golden Hind
whose fine prow Drake encircled round the globe
sits broken to its bilges: souvenir'd
into a ship of bones. On breezy air,
the blackhead gulls are circling for a spoil.
The river laps at mud, and on this turn
that loops a noose around the Isle of Dogs,
slides swiftly round the bend. A hint of salt
and fishiness betrays how close the sea
is to this widening gullet. And to me.

We meet at ten on the path up to the door.
Frizer's eyebrows greet me, and he nods
at Nicholas Skeres. Frizer is strangely calm
for a man prepared to stage some murderous rage,
only Nick Skeres betraying signs of nerves
Frizer will shortly douse with beer. A twitch
as Eleanor Bull invites us: 'Gentlemen.
The room's upstairs,' she says. 'Young Martha here
will show you up. Luncheon is pork and beans.
I'll serve you there myself around midday.'

Frizer enquires, 'Is Master Poley here?'
'He's been delayed. He'll join you presently.'
How does she know? 'He arrived here yesterday.
Come from The Hague, or somewhere. He went out
first thing this morning, "tying up loose ends"
he said I was to tell you. Never fret,
Master Poley is most reliable.' She pats
me on the arm as if I were her son.
'I expect you'll want some drinks.'
'Small beers,' I say.

The window rattles with a puckish breeze
as I stand there looking down upon the lawn
lined by whispering bushes, and the path
that I expect him on.
'A friendly wind,'
says Frizer unexpectedly. 'So long
as it keeps up its direction.'
He returns
to playing patience. Skeres pouring a glass
of warm ale down his gullet. Here we are.

This is the house from which I'll disappear
and swap my comforts for a dead man's clothes,
give up all public substance, with my name

sloughed off like the reptile's skin he has outgrown.
Kit Marlowe dies here. And with that thought, a pang
for a younger self who dreamt of being hailed
a wonder of the age, but now is holed,
like a galleon in warfare, and will sink
to the mud of history beneath a lie:
the coward conquest of a wretch's knife.

Poley arrives at last. I hear his smooth
placating patter in the hall downstairs;
the laugh of Mrs Bull, charmed to her slip.
'Good fellows,' he greets us, making sure the door
is firmly shut behind him. 'Excellent news.
We have our substitute. John Penry's dead.'

And I must break this narrative to pause
and say a prayer for Penry, whose young wife
had begged for clemency. Who was condemned
for tracts he hadn't written; for belief
that his eloquence might turn the hearts of men
to a different church. And almost, we were twins
exchanged at death, not birth; for it was speech,
and love of liberty that brought us both
to a silencing. And had he not, in truth,
been executed hurriedly that May,
I might have joined him in a common grave.
Our only difference, this twin and I,
was the influential aspect of our friends.

'Backgammon,' Poley says. 'You'll have a game?
With money on the side perhaps?' He throws
his cloak over a chair. 'Come come, man, sit.
We have three hours to kill before the corpse
can be delivered. A penny down to start
us gently?'

So we play away the hours
as though the time has no significance:
I lose two shillings in distractedness.
Lunch comes at noon as promised, though I have
no kind of appetite.

Poley seems charged
with a strange kind of enjoyment. After lunch
he stretches - 'Time for a little fresh air, perhaps?' -
as though he must put on the play for us,
though we are actors too. 'A gentle turn
around the garden?'

The breeze is playful still.

We walk in quiet conference; ahead,
Poley and I, the other two as close
as lunchtime shadows.

'The north side of the house
is windowless,' says Poley. 'By the gate
that backs onto the lane, there are some shrubs
that grow there thickly. Enter them as though
you must relieve yourself. You'll find a trunk
containing Penry, separate from his clothes.
Leave yours behind, use his and flee from here
to a barque named Pity's Sake, which waits for you
on the eastern pier.'

'That's it?'
Rob Poley smiles
that noose of a smile he saves for lethal words.
'This is goodbye. The three of us will dress
the body in your gear. I'll keep the Bull
and her Martha occupied with pleasantries
while Frizer and Skeres lump-shoulder in from lunch
the loll-headed drunkard who must sleep it off.
That's you.' He brims with the beauty of his art,
the joy of his own deception. 'Go. Be gone,'
he says, 'before we wheel around again.'

Penry is in his underclothes, and pale
as the winding sheet he lacks; a crumpled ghost
of indignity. One eye is not quite closed,
gleams jealously as I adopt the clothes
his wife had stitched, that he had buttoned up
to go to the gallows, opened at the neck
for the hemp to tighten on his throat; which wound
would be concealed beneath the awkward ruff
that you ensured I wore. Oh, guilty thief,
who slides on so efficiently his shirt,
without its preacher's collar, and the gift
of being alive, in front of Death itself,
and slips onto the lane as casually
as one engaged in some delivery
of goods, and not himself.

The eastern pier
is poking its sullen finger through the flow
that now sweeps swiftly seawards. There, the boat
Poley had named jerks hard against its ropes
as though concerned to leave, knocked by a breeze
still keen for France. On the vessel sits a boy
picking his teeth distractedly, who swings
his legs round when he sees me, calls a word

to the boat's invisible skipper. From below,
as unexpected as a perfect bloom
emerging from a plant that seemed diseased,
you show yourself. An innocent mirage,
but, for a breath, I let myself believe
you're coming with me, though your face says no.

'Your papers. And a letter you must give
to the Flemish contact. Certain points in France
where you'll link with the network. And the name
of a guide who'll safely take you through the Alps.'
You tuck them inside my jacket, and your hand
so warm, so personal, I want to grab
your wrist and keep it there, close to my heart.
Instead, I watch you like a wounded child,
saying goodbye to me. 'And I will write
when it's safe to do so. Not for several months.
I'm bound to be watched. But, Kit, please write to me.'

And I am wordless, powerless to speak
the sentences that stampede to be said
and trample upon each other. In my head
I tell you my every feeling in a form
that changes the outcome; thankful, warm with love,
we sail together.
In truth, I stand here, dumb,
watching us both as if we're on the stage
forgetting our lines. Have stumbled on a scene
I've stayed awake, not writing.
'Kit, be safe,'
you say, your hand extended to my face
and almost touching.
'Master Walsingham -'
the young boy, come like a shadow to your side.
'Father thinks we should go.'
The hand withdraws.
'I leave you then. The trunk has all the books
you asked for. Paper, ink.'
'My manuscript?'
Perhaps the waves' unsteadiness beneath
the thin shell of the boat reminded me
of those lovers separated by the strip
of the Hellespont.
'I have a copy of it,
and you have yours,' you answer, 'to complete
when I, and other friends of yours, secure
an end to your exile.'
'Tom.' I grasp your hand.
'I shan't forget your help.' We grip goodbye,
brief as the pat the farmer gives his cow

before it's sent to slaughter.
'Take my cloak.'

Though you read my shiver wrongly, I was glad
to wrap myself up in the scent of you
when the salt tang of the sea unleashed its spray.
And half across Europe, something of you stayed
in the practical fibres of that everyday
reminder of you. The smell of Kent lay thick
like turf inside its hem. Sometimes I swore
as I slept beneath it, you were lying with me.
And then I'd wake, from the stare of John Penry.

I Forget the Name of the Village

There is a village, shadowed by the Alps
where early evening paints the snow as blue.
I still play French in northern Italy,
nodding 'bonsoir' when I'm bid 'buona sera'
and traipse the lane towards my rented room,
letting the creak of snow beneath my boots
return to me to the quad on Dido night.

'Poley.'
He must have seen me long before
I noticed him. Already looking bored,
he's taken in my clothes, my health, my mood,
and need not ask me.
'So. You're still alive.'

'Another year. And yes. No thanks to you.'

He squints at a sun that set an hour ago.
'How did you figure that? Without my help,
you would have swung last year.'

'Without your help
I wouldn't have been projecting for the State
and stuck my neck out.'
Poley's like the snow
on the field beside us, untroubled by boot or hoof.
'If I suggested work when you were broke,
you didn't have to take it. I was clear
about the risks involved. Who serves the Queen
must travel with the currents, like the tide
is pulled by the moon – you poets have compared
her to the moon, I think. You may wash up
on a foreign shore and find yourself alone.
Unfortunate, but true. Yet see the light.
You could be dead.'

'I am dead.'

Poley's face
shows unimpressed in the December gloom.

'And yet, you'll shortly take me to an inn
for something mulled, while I recount to you
the tale of your revenge. And think on this:
no poet is ever valued till they're dead.
I've brought you greater fame than you could buy
idling your hours in meadows. If that fame

is notoriety, so much the better.
Rather be infamous than buried bland.
Your favourite Ovid was exiled, was he not?
And doesn't exile burn into the heart
a greater fire to speak, and all the wisdom
that comes with a wide perspective?' He was right,
though I left his question hanging. 'Look, it's cold.
Let us continue somewhere off the road.'

The tavern's quiet, and we have the fire
all to ourselves. Rob Poley contemplates
a log he adds to embers, as it tempts
the fire into life again. I know there's news,
but I am not as eager as I was
to hear it from him, and refuse to ask:
for he would have me dangling on his words
like a dog who fetched a stick but won't let go.

'Not long to Christmas,' he observes, at length.
'So I have a present for you. Baines is dead.'

The Goblet

'There is a loyalty' – Poley cups his hands
around warm earthenware – 'that's rarely touched
upon, between intelligencers. But
it binds us.' He glances up to catch my eye
as sharp as any hook into a fish.
'Some of your friends felt I should look for Baines.'

He's quiet above the crackle of the fire,
which spits and pops the winter damp from logs
to punctuate his tale.
'But he is dead?'

Poley nods slowly. 'Yes. Perhaps you'd like
to hear a fuller version?'
'Carry on,'
I say, though I'm afraid of feeling glad;
of bathing too deeply in my enemy's blood.

'At first, he'd gone to ground. As will the fox
when hounds pursue it. But a year had passed,
and you were safely dead. Your reputation
as something of an enemy of the State –
excuse me,' he said, reacting to my scowl,
'- enabled him to think heroically
of his part in it. So summer brought him out
as it brings out rashes and the cheaper whores
who ply their trade on Turnmill Street. Of course
he was startled when I approached him, but my meat
and ale is convincing friendship.'
With a smile
he instantly admits me to his heart –
a sample of his wares – then drops me cold.
Poley delights in savouring his tales,
but this, served to a storyteller's ears,
has extra gravy.

'So we fell to talking
and I tempted him to a tavern where I know
the host and hostess passing well.' He grins,
and I see in the corner of that curl
his hand glide gently up a virgin's thigh.

'From the friendship I was offering, he assumed
we'd murdered you, and no bad thing, he said.
His conscience seemed troubled all the same. No, truly,
I noticed that he couldn't stop your name
peppering every sentence.'

I bless the fire:
its cheery destructive crackles fill the gap
that he has left for me. I don't react,
holding myself a heart's breath from the glee
I sense he feels at taking my revenge
for me.
'Go on,' I say.
He shakes it off,
that bothersome sense that I am not with him,
like a nuisance fly.
'At length, I offered him
the hint of some private work. Said we should talk
in another place, less public, and we moved
out of the tavern to the stable block,
taking our cups. Mine was a special thing,
a silver goblet that the hostess lets
her favourite drinkers use. "You hold my cup,"
I say as I hear footsteps, "while I write
the contact's name. It's foreign." Like a child
he takes the goblet, and, instinctively,
he hides it as the taverner comes in
(this, prearranged). The landlord challenges him,
the cup is discovered, and I wash my hands
of the whole affair.'

'He couldn't hang for that!
Just moving it within their property?'

'The stable block belongs to someone else.
They only rent it.'

Poley is clearly proud
of his plan's simplicity. 'And since they were,
both of them, in their house, that's robbery.
No benefit of clergy. He was hanged.'

He sits back like a predator whose game
digests inside his stomach. What a trick!
What practised magic with a legal sting
he brought to bear upon my enemy!

And yet I cannot thank him, for his sin
has doubled injustice in a world of wrongs.
And Baines cannot recant now he has swung,
cannot be pressed for truth, cannot undo
the document. A cinder from the fire,
spat out, smokes patiently beside my boot.

'Poley,' I say, but then can add no more.

In a Minute There Are Many Days

Between our letters, this adopted death
becomes more real. My heart slows to a crawl,
chilled by your absence, waiting for the fall
of written words to warm it up like breath.
I'm cut like a lily water cannot save.
The endless nights are stitched into a shroud
that takes my shape, and has my weeping bound.
The weeks until I hear gape like the grave.

But when your letter opens in my hands
my heart starts up, a wild bird to a clap,
and air fills lungs as though some arid land
were suddenly ocean, charted off the map.
Two pages of your hand can bring such bliss;
and yet, without your love, I don't exist.

The Hope

I dare not breathe it, yet it lives in me
as sometimes the single reason why my heart
must go on beating. Let me name the hope,
and do not take it, never tug the threads
that I've secured it with; I am afloat
by only the meanest margin, buoyed by this:
that I might be restored to life, and name.
That I might walk the London streets again
as Christopher Marlowe, not an atheist,
but wronged by suborned informers, jealous wits,
and ignorant plebeians. And not dead:
but no, the Lazarus of modern times,
raised by the new incumbent Head of State.
If only that is James. And so I wait
for the Phoenix not to rise; the crab-haired queen
to crumble in her bed, relax the grasp
tight-knuckled fingers have upon my fate,
and gasp her last.

Do not dislodge the hope
that holds in place a thousand racking sobs
for all I've lost: the stink of London town,
the cry of hawkers in my native tongue,
an English tavern's simple fare, warm beer,
an afternoon at the Curtain or the Swan
amongst good friends; though half those good friends gone
already, and the rest of them as dead
to me as I've become to all the world,
because I may not touch one's face again
or hear another's laugh.

And still, I hope,
and the hope sits like a lump beneath this poem,
and under every play, it hatches dreams:
that every word might be restored to me.
That my name be cleared, and sounded round the court,
that good King James release me from the bonds
of unjust exile. Oh, let it be James
that hefts the crown, and not some specious wretch
who wins the throne by murder.

For my hope,
it is the smallest thing, a captured bird
that beats against the bars with beak and wing
and often breaks itself, exhausted, frail.
The Queen must die, that I might tell the tale.

My hope is threaded to that soft word, home,
though home is a foreign country to me now,
a fabled kingdom where I cannot tread
because I am a ghost, and must be dead.
But do not kill the hope that I might breathe
some mist on the glass my mother shows my mouth,
or stand once more to savour every smell
that permeates the hall of my father's house:
new leather, shoe wax, iron, elbow grease.

Where I am staying now, the smell of fish
assaults me awake each dawn. The merchants' clothes
grow less peculiar daily. Random bells
become my certainties. Though there is heat
in every square and pavement, every voice
raised in a bet or bargain, still I keep
watch for more English weather. Sudden rain.

Friend, send me word. If I could slip ashore
and live in secret on some quiet estate
far from the eyes of London, let me learn.
The Queen has the best of doctors, and my hope
is struggling to breathe. Help me return.

Sickening

Doctors, I said. The night I wrote those words
I fell into a fever. As if the pen
reminded my body of an ancient trick
to provoke the care of others, I fell sick.

The Latin from which 'delirium' derives -
kept me awake all night: out of the furrow,
vexed as a hare that's tortured mad with spring,
or mad, just mad, with nothing, nobody,

short in the breath and long in sweat, a jerk
out of the straight-ploughed earth, out of my mind
for the cooling touch, for the whisper at my bed,
for the Try some soup, for the How did you sleep, my love.

For how do you sleep with Death camped by the door,
and the night as long and cold as a drawn sword?

*

They have not come for me. They have not come.

*

Oh, bile.

I throw up till there's nothing left,
sick to my stomach of regret. Each curse
I damn on others, damning only me,
condemned to the long death of obscurity
when all I had created's inside out
and me expelled - a fact I can't digest.

Oh hold me, mop my brow, my love. But, no,
some seven hundred days have passed alone
and nourishment is more than tavern soup,
or chicken wrangled off the bone.

The man
who should bring cash and letters hasn't come.
I am forgotten, stuffed in Europe's boot,
and starved, my hopeless stomach shrinks to stone,
admitting nothing, no-one. What is thrown
into this rented bowl is only bile,
and the wine that washed it down.
Anatomize
this fever: boiling rage not shouted out,

expressed in the quiet overheating cage
of a soul whose spirit languishes repressed
by a time too ignorant to hear, or see
what every human being is in heart:
intelligent, divinely conscious, free.

Yet frail, still. For the shivering that plagues
this clammy skin is mortal fear, for me.

God's wounds, how easy it would be to die.
To collapse against this bartered door unheard
and not a creature come for days. No sound
except for the sainted and persistent flies
that with their buzz persuade me I'm alive.

And should I be found, slumped cold, oh, not a word
of blessing on the stranger's grave. And years
gone by, what would you say? I disappeared.
Beyond your powers to save. Dead anyway.
Oh, Lord. I need to get me out of here.

*

Some three days in, my brain boiled up like stock,
I drag myself, wrapped up in sheets, downstairs
to scare the landlord's daughter. 'Spettro!' she gasps
knocked by the sight of me into a chair,
then up, remembers herself, and helps me sit:
brings wine, and bread, and flaps about the door,
wishing her parents home. 'Don't you dare die.
What's wrong with you?' she asks in savage French.

And I forget pretence; my native tongue,
too burdened with disease to hide itself,
spits out 'What kind of illness does one get
from swallowing the world's neglect? How do
the symptoms manifest?'
She swears, 'Inglese!'
Wondrously - how the fevered mind expands! -
then crosses herself. Flits out into the square,
a songbird suddenly freed.
I grip the bread,
smear it with butter, salt, gulp down the wine
and fall into dreams of deportation, cast
adrift in my queasy stomach.

She returns
to find me asleep on elbows, bathed in sun
from the open casement, hair at the temples wet
as though I've been baptised. Her mother wide

behind her,
'You are English, Louis Le Doux?'

'I am a child of all the world,' I say,
expansively, half drunk, and half undone
by days of throwing up. 'Check, if you will,
my Italian blood.' I cough, my handkerchief
catching the finest spray. 'See? Marcus Lexus,
a Roman soldier, garrisoned in Kent,
lifted his leg across a Kentish maid,
herself of Viking stock. Norwegian eyes.'
I blink my heritage. 'Though the blue in mine
is buried beneath French conquest – a Gallic shade
fruited from Norman chestnut. And who knows
what branch of Turkish empire, Asian slave
or native African is written there
in a litany of humpings?' I thrust the rag
towards them, though they shrink from inspecting it.
'Ladies, I'm from the world, and so are you.'

I've no idea how much they understood.
The presence of English was assault enough.

'You have to leave this house.'
'Then I will die,'
I say, with far less drama than I might.
'But I will go. It is your house.' I push
myself up on the table, and at once
collapse to the floor like laundry.
'Apologies.
Perhaps you'll help me to the door.' They run
to lift me by the armpits (pity them)
and do my bidding; I am light as bones,
and the hefty mother hefts me off my feet
on the left-hand side. The daughter breathes on me
a lunch of peaches. 'Woah! I am not dressed,'
I remember, coiling the sheet about my loins.

'We'll bring your clothes down presently,' the whale
of a woman replies. 'Let's get you outside first.'
'But, my things. My trunk.' I stop them at the door.
Can you send my trunk to –'
Here, the comedy
collapses. Christ, I can't imagine where
my trunk might safely be received. What friend
would take it in, and me, except at home?
Some leafy, rutted lane in England's shires:
the vision, clear as through a polished glass,
comes bridled with a shiver as I feel
the wind in the hedgerows, hear the clattering cart

that hauls my books and bones the final miles.

Then heat returns, and I am in the square,
undressed and homeless, manhandled by girls.

'Scusi,' I say, embarrassed by the tears
that squeeze their way past every last defence
and fall, now, freely.
Melt the landlord's daughter.
She leads me like a lamb back to the cool
of the kitchen, sits me down, and takes my head
onto her bosom, which I wet with grief.
Her mother tuts Italian. 'He can't stay here.'

'We cannot simply throw him on the street.
Have some compassion.'

'Who is he, anyway?
Pretending to be French. Dishonesty
is not a pleasant house guest.'
'Mother, please.
He understands Italian.' She takes my cheeks
between her palms and looks into my eyes
as kindly as a sister. 'Tell me, sir,
why the great sorrow? And why disguise yourself?'

She presses her handkerchief into my hands
and sits beside me as I dry my face.

'I've never told my story,' I explain,
'except to ink and paper.'
'Then you must,'
she urges me. 'An untold story sits
like rust in the heart. It makes the blood go sour.
Press on.'
So hesitantly, I begin.

'At home – and I still call it home, although
I'm almost two years exiled – I wrote plays.'

'Exiled,' she breathes. 'So, so. There is the grief.
Go on.'

'I wrote a comedy. A farce.
Most popular. The protagonist so extreme
in his two-faced treachery, you'd have to laugh
or despair at humanity.'
'This is a tale
that promises to stretch to supper time,'
the mother sighs. 'All poets are the same.

Enamoured with the beauty of their words,
they spin three yards when half an inch will do.
Skip quickly to your banishment. What crime
have you committed?'

'Why, the crime of truth,'
I say. 'For every fiction has a core
of honesty. The seed of the idea
plants in the mind from life. This 'character' –
though I changed his name, location, race and creed –
was a man my friend had worked with. And his tales,
those tavern entertainments, spun the plot
that then became my play. I didn't dream
the dangers of my profession. I was glad
only to see the theatre glutted out,
the play a staunch success.'

'What of this man?'
the daughter asks. I wish I knew her name;
protecting myself from that was purposeless,
and I am half in love with her already,
for caring enough to ask me who I am.
'He recognised himself?'
'He must have done.
Although I told myself, this was a fiction,
and therefore, how could he find fault with it?
Stupid.' I stop. Once more, I'm almost floored
by the weight and depth of my own ignorance.

'What happened?' she asks, as gentle as a breeze
lifting a tattered poster from the wall
for an event long-past, and half-forgotten. 'Then?'

I skip the coining, and the failed betrayal.
Speak only of 'invented' blasphemies.

The mother has turned her back, and has a hare
stripped of its skin and on the chopping block.
'A fishy tale,' she says, 'If they were lies
then you could surely say so.' And the knife
chops off a haunch.
I flinch. 'In England now,
religion is the tetchiest of notes
that one might pipe on. Since our Virgin Queen
passed the point of bearing issue … laws have changed.
Even to be accused of heresy
is taken by the courts to signal guilt.'

'My mother's right,' the daughter says, as soft
as a pillow I could expire on. 'Surely lies

could be turned out and booted down the street.
Be honest, please. Was there some truth in it?'

Her eyes search into mine so tenderly
I cannot think of lying.
'As a student
they trained me to debate theology;
a habit I enjoyed. Sometimes with friends
I openly expressed opinions which
I'd not want written down.' She turns her face,
ashamed for me. 'But who, when they are young
is prudent every moment? Which of us
can claim great wisdom when we're high on wine
and the company of those we love and trust?
If I have sinned – and I confess I have –
it is against myself. I'm in the hands
of God completely and, by his design,
I never sinned enough that I should die.
Or I'd be buried now.'
She takes both hands
and reads me quickly, scans me like a script
to find her part.
'And where would you be now
if not consigned to exile?'
'Why, in love.'

The shock to both of us has cleft the air
into a silence, following the thud
of her mother's cleaver, finished dismembering.
Was it my need for rest that brought that word
out of my lungs? Or just the strange relief
of finding kindness in a world of stones?

'You barely know my name,' she says.
'It's true.'
'Venetia,' she says.
'And mine is Christopher.'

'Clear off, she's spoken for.' The mother's lunge
towards us with a cloth to wipe the table
shocks us both to our feet, and I, unbalanced,
weak in the legs, am floored a second time,
and coughing my surprise into a rag.

Venetia crouches to help me up. 'It's true
I'm spoken for. And you are far too ill
to imagine yourself in love with me. Your fever,
and fear of death, can be the only cause.
But I will help you – Mamma, stop clucking, please –
I'll help you find some passage back to home.'

She's leading me to my bed. I say, 'But, home –
they think me dead at home. All but a few.'
'Then one of those few can nurse you back to health,
before you're truly dead,' she says.
'But what
if I'm recognised?'
She stops us before the mirror
at the foot of the stairs. Says, 'Do you see yourself?
Do you recognise that man?'
A sallow face
whose skull shows through his skin. A ragged beard.
'No,' I admit.
'Then no-one will know you.
And if they do, and you're imprisoned for
the crimes you fled, what difference will it make
to die that way, or here, so far from home?'
I glance at her breasts. 'I'll have nowhere so soft
to rest my head at home.'
She laughs and shakes
her head at me. 'You are delirious.
Lie down, Christopher, Monsieur Louis Le Doux,
whatever your name is. You are not in love.

I lay down meekly. 'Why are you so… kind?'

Her eyes, then, spring with tears. 'I had a brother.
Had others been kind, I'd have a brother still.'
Then, brushing the thought to air, 'No more of that.
I'll find a merchant willing to take you home.'

How powerful that one word has become.
I might as well die there as anywhere.

Straits

What part of her she gave – they had no gold –
I'd rather not imagine. In a week
my nights were sweated on a merchant ship
above a hold of Orient silks and spices
bound for an English dock.
                Across the sheer
blue of the Mediterranean, the threat
of Barbary pirates threaded through my prayers.
And in Gibraltar's strait those prayers contained
the damnable Spanish, who might scupper us.
Yet we sailed through as smoothly as a promise.

Montanus

Only the sea becomes my enemy.
As we plough northwards through a deeper swell,
it builds the waters mountainous and cold
as the Alps I had avoided. I awake
to a storm whistling the masts into a creak
that would awaken monsters from the deep.
And we are rolled and yawed, and tossed and dumped
as a dandled plaything on a Titan's knee.

I light a candle, prepare my ink and pen
and record that simile before it flees,
follow with how it feels inside my skin,
then the ominous eerie whistling of the wind,
the slewing about of all that's not lashed down
(retrieving the ink that slides across the boards),
and how a part of me's already drowned
in the fatal fear of knowing I cannot swim.
Then the door bursts open. If the seaman's face
were a single word, it wouldn't be polite.

'The cap … What are you doing?'
I can't explain.
To most folk, this would be no time to write.
'The captain wants you.' His glance, suspiciously
on what I'm writing, which he cannot read.

'We must turn into port,' the captain says,
shouting above the racket of the wind.
'The storm is too much.'
'What country?'
'Maybe France.
Or maybe Spain. The pilot's lost our course.'
He nods at the man twitching above a map.
'You have your documents?'
'He has a pen,'
says the seaman who fetched me. 'Likes to write with it,'
and smiles with Venetian coldness.
Like a king,
the captain dismisses him and stares ahead,
into the howling dark as though it might
unpeel, revealing stars. 'So earn your keep,'
he says. 'Make a note for the vessel, something that
will pass in either country. And for yourself.
And, oh –' he stops me as I return below,
'- the English are hated everywhere,' he says.
'Be anything but English.'

*

Friend, we survived
our docking and mending, and the curious eyes
of Spanish officials on my forgery.

Now ploughing the sea again, I have prepared
a passport, in perfect secretary hand,
and dated almost exactly one year ago
in the name Pietro Montanus, faithful servant
to the honourable Anthony Bacon. By this name,
which ties us to our common love, Montaigne,
Anthony Bacon knows who it is that sails
into the Thames to seek his sanctuary.

Bishopsgate Street

It's May again. Two years have cycled round
as I return, unrecognisable,
to a neighbourhood that used to meet my boots
with a cheery ring. I scrape and hobble now,
pared to the bone by sickness. Here, the street
slides deep into the skirts of Bishopsgate:
the former mistress who disposed of me
and now mistakes me for a foreigner.

She smells the same. I catch her foetid breath
as a Gascon servant ushers me indoors
beneath a blanket.

Through the afternoon
she gossips through the window like a wife
or former lover, oblivious to my pain,
quite blind to the man who's aching to chime in -
and almost says my name a time or two,
mar-something – but she's moved to lovers new
while I am dying quietly within.

So close to Hog Lane that I hear the pigs
driven to slaughter. And the laughing whores
that kick about these evenings, are the same –
I swear, at least for certain one's the same –
that I have hired to celebrate success,
have sat on my lap and tickled, pouring beer
into my mouth, and flooding hers with it
in a drunken, lustful kiss. She glances up
but doesn't know this shadow of myself.

Half of me dreams up schemes where I will kneel
upon this bed and roar across the roofs,
'Hey, England! Look, it's me! Your fool is back!'

As if I had a voice. As if a ghost
could solidify to flesh and hope to live,
when he scares both wives and horses. I'd be struck
back to the graveyard of my deep pretence.

I sleep the first few days. Good Anthony
(a kinder man I could not hope to serve)
appreciates that love can mend disease.
He stations a boy to see I'm fed and clean,
visits me frequently. 'What do you need?'

And still – despite the letters not received,

the last two months of silence on your part,
the change in me, embittered by disease,
a silent voice is mouthing, 'Walsingham.'

How close you are. Now, not an inch of sea
roughens the air between us. You might ride
just half a day and touch the lips of me:
except these lips are blistered, and my pride
can't bear that you would see me broken down,
the tattered sail of that good barque we planned
holed and gone under with the barest sound.
I want your love to know a better man.
So I sleep. Imagine the air I'm breathing in
came straight from your lungs, disguised as summer wind.

I lie, within a lie, in Bishopsgate,
the name entirely false, the heart still true.
I long to hear 'Kit' or 'Christopher' again.
And when I think of love, I think of you.

Madame Le Doux

'Come. I've a treat for you.' My gentle host
responds to my better health with a surprise.

He leads me to a draughty room. A dress
is draped on the bed as though just recently
vacated by a princess. 'It's your size,'
he says. I try to read his face. Contained
within those eyes, the quiet expansive hint
of naughtiness.
'My size, but not my colour,'
I say, addressing my fingers to the cloth.
'I'd rather blue.' I'm playing out the joke,
whatever the punch-line. 'No,' he says, 'this green –'
I interrupt: 'The colour's surely "sludge".'
With a teacher's patience, he repeats, 'this green –
an oceanic green – it sets your tan
off beautifully.' And holds it to my chest,
tilting his head as if the angled light
has made me feminine. And then he laughs.
'Perhaps the moustache might go.'
'What, my moustache!
You will not have it, sir!' I fence him off
with my forearm. 'Swive, it takes three months to grow.'
'A soft, half-hearted thing,' he smiles. 'Believe
me, Kit, it will be worth the sacrifice.'

My name dropped like a stitch. We hold the air
and listen for servants. Not a creaking board.
And in that stop, I breathe the nectar in –
to be myself, and to be 'Kit' to him –
I almost dare not say what that is worth.

He starts again, contrite, 'Monsieur Le Doux,
if you might play your wife, then we have seats
in the balcony to see the latest play
by a certain William Shakespeare.'

Me, see me?
In one disguise to watch my other's work,
pretending I don't know it? Can I fake
indifference to a script I'll know as well
as my tongue knows every crevice of my mouth?
Might I pretend those phrases new to me
whose words have kept me up at night? And not
demand some public credit for what spouts
out of the actors' mouths? 'I cannot do it.'
I sit down, heavy.

'Fie!' He gives a laugh.
'It's Ferdinando's Men. Now working for
the good Lord Chamberlain. You cannot miss it!'
He sits beside me softly. 'Richard the Third.'

What spirits ride the draught I dare not name,
but ghostly fingers stroke me to a thought
that stirs a shiver. 'I heard they poisoned him.'

Bacon looks puzzled. 'Though my history
may not be deep, and I've not seen your play,
I recall that he was stabbed.'
The curtain breathes.

'No, Ferdinando Stanley. My Lord Strange.'

Anthony nods. 'The Earl of Derby's death
was most mysterious. If Catholics
were the cause of it, I have not found the proof.
I have been looking, trust me.' And my hand
is taken in his, and held, and gently placed
back where he found it, just before it's missed.

'Do come,' he says. 'Come for your old friends' sakes.'
'Which friends?'
'The quick, the dead, and all those souls
who've wished you well, who've kept your secret safe,
and hoped that you might one day see on stage
the final quarter of your history play.'

'Does anybody know?'
'No. Not a soul.'
'And is it safe? Can I pass for a maid?'

He laughs more loudly than the room can take.
'A maid? Certainly not! Though it heartens me'
- he crosses the room to open a chest of drawers –
'that your vanity's survived such tragedy.
No, but your shaven face is soft enough
to make a widow of the plainer sort.'

'The sort no-one will look at?'
'That's the plan.
Best not to draw attention to the man
in woman's clothes, by making him beautiful.'
'It's risky, still.'
'I regard your biggest risk
as wearing my mother's hair.' He throws the wig
into my lap. 'I stole it years ago
for some revels at Gray's Inn. You'll find the itch

is somewhat testing. Like the woman herself.'

'And if I look male?'
'I will not let you out.'

But 'out' is what tugs me, strongly as a hook
this fish has swallowed and life is reeling in:
the street with its hum of voices, and a stink
as homely as my armpits – even now
I'm savouring the ride to Gracechurch Street,
past a dozen taverns I know well enough
to stumble from, and maybe with a glimpse
of someone I might know.
But then, the show.
And all the bloody deaths that it entails.
And all the ghosts that curse and swear revenge.
And me without a sword to fight for them.

'I wish that you had booked a comedy.'
'Could you have laughed?'
'I'd rather laugh than cry.'

He comes to join me, looking at the street,
which, this midsummer evening, light as noon,
is filling up with revellers and song,
the shriek of swifts and martins, stitching roofs
in gentle loops.
'Yet welcome what tears come.
They'll only enhance your womanly disguise.
Now don't be long. See? There's the coach outside.'

As he turns to go, I halt him. 'Wait! Will he –
the man from Stratford who is playing me –
will he be there?'
My host laughs. 'Have no fear.
He comes to London only twice a year.
More often, and he'd be fencing off requests
to rewrite scenes. You will not see him there.'

Curious, glad and sorry, I stepped in
to the sludge-green dress, arranged the wig with care.
Persuaded by my metamorphosis,
I left that house obsessed with who I'd see,
and not concerned enough with who'd see me.

The Theatre

Perfumed and powdered, I am led inside
on Anthony's arm. The smell of roasted nuts,
of beer and sawdust, brings me close to tears.

My place. My home. Yet no response to me.
No hush, no cheer, no recognition sound;
no lump in the throat to correspond with mine.

As though a hound I'd raised up from a pup
forgets his old master, trotting past my scent
to sniff the hands of new adopted friends

I choke unnoticed on the loss. There's cheer
around me, and I in a bubble of different air,
mull how the past included me. Our seats

are cushioned and shaded in the balcony.
Anthony pats my hand, and grins. 'Not long.'
Then surprised to see me suffering, 'What's wrong?'

I wave his concern away. There are no words
in the moment ever. Only emotion's saw
hewing and hacking at the grain of me,

which won't for hours make verses worth their keep;
no words that I won't have to labour for
in the quiet distillation of no sleep.

Those who don't write – or like dear Anthony,
knock off a poem when the Muse allows –
imagine we who live and breathe the pen

are eloquent, and better-equipped than them
in the face of feeling, to describe that pain.
How could they know it's we who are struck dumb,

and ill-equipped to process what we feel,
are urged by that loss to find our horror's name.
For this we scratch while others safely dream.

Not to be known is such a slicing pain
I find myself half wishing for a cry
out of the crowd, a finger quivering:

'It's Marlowe!' and the sudden press and throng
and even swift arrest, even the rack,
the hangman and the slit from throat to prick

seems longed-for resolution, comforting
against this bitter nothingness, this blank.
In my nostalgia, I forget to fear.

Dick Burbage sidles on: the crowd falls quiet.
Some offstage music ruffles him; his eye
ranges with joyful hatred, drilling deep

into the groundlings. Now he grins and limps
to the centre of the stage. Here come my words.
Later, later, I shush my heart. I want

to be alive to this experience,
however sharp. And taste the blade go in,
the better to know the fruits of human sin.

Interval

All through the gasps and jeers, the groundlings' boos,
I entertained this suicidal prompt:
throw off the costume, let what happens come.

But then, and then … I pulled upon the thread.
Investigations, friends called to account:
your certain execution at the end.
I may not care to live, but love my friend.

And love, as if summoned in another form,
to seal my commitment to the raft of life,
weaves like a spring breeze through the drinking crowds.
Anthony whispers suddenly, 'Don't speak!'

And there, making straight towards us, is my past –
the Earl of Rutland, whom I barely know,
and the Earl of Southampton. If his beauty shone
in that garden once, then it is blinding now.
And the three years since we parted in the lobby
of my employer's and his guardian's house
seem shallow, thirsty years, and he a draught
both delicious and refreshing. Though at first
he doesn't see, sees only Anthony.

They greet each other. Being feminine
I'm less important and uninteresting.
I'm able to take him in, this sweet mirage
who'd pass for a girl more easily than me
for all his adopted swagger. Then he sees.
Stops dead.
'Excuse me,' he starts.
'My lord, may I
present Madame Le Doux?'
'Why, enchanté.'

Something has passed between us. Is that eye
so suddenly fixed on mine because it sees
what others can't? Did I communicate
so accidentally, in the way I stared?
He kisses my hand, at no point looks away,
and I'm almost shaking. 'Comment allez-vous?'
Though he's turned twenty-one, he bears the cheek
of a schoolboy with an earl's authority.
'I'm afraid,' says Anthony, 'her voice has gone.
A terrible summer cold. You know how travel
can weaken the system.'
'Yes, indeed I do.'

He smiles. I swear he knows.
'She is the wife
of a friend of mine,' Bacon adds. He's feeding rope
to a man long overboard.
Southampton's face
is a fairground of delight. 'May I enquire
how long she's staying with you?' I am lost.
He knows, he knows!
But Anthony holds firm.
'A month or so, I think. There's no fixed plan.'

'I'll call on you soon.' Southampton says, quite high
on discovering me.
'We may be leaving town,'
says Anthony, nervously.
Southampton shifts
as a summer sky will thicken up with cloud;
takes my host's hand. 'Sir, I seem frivolous.
I apologise I can't mask my delight
at meeting a lady so exceptional.'
His eyes address me. 'But I am dedicated.'
To Anthony, 'Truly, dedicated to
the same good cause as you. The life of a friend
is no mere bauble. If dedication serves
as a token of trust, then you must let me call.'
To the Earl of Rutland, 'Come, we'll take our seats.'

He leaves me speechless, Anthony in sweat.
With dedication, he picked out the word
that signifies precisely what he knows.

For in order not to draw the hounds upon
those hands that helped me slip out from the noose,
and needing to launch my pseudonym in print
with works protected by a noble name,
with his permission, granted through his kin,
I dedicated both those poems to him.

A Change of Address

‘We have to get you out of town,’ he says,
turning his back as I step from the dress.

‘I believe he can be trusted.’
Bacon sighs.
‘Gossip follows him everywhere. As dogs
will follow the heels of every butcher’s boy,
his beauty drags jealous tongues in tow. Besides,’
he turns for a moment, catching my bare skin,
then studies the wall again, ‘I have to move.
I’m sunk with debt. The agents I maintain
abroad for the Earl of Essex from my purse
have proved too costly lately. And the rent
is two months overdue. I’m taking rooms
in Essex House, at my Lord’s invitation.
I can’t take you.’
I button up my shirt
and feel him watch me. ‘I should leave you, then.
Go back on the road and take my chance.’
‘No, no,
I have a plan,’ he says, taking my hands.
Come, let’s go down for supper. I’ll explain.’

He’s generous with wine. ‘So is this plan
that I pass out, you stuff me in a sack
and throw me in the Thames?’
He shakes his head,
amused. ‘A Kittish joke. Not every kit
that seems unwanted ends up in the drink.
But the play restored your humour. I am pleased.’
He tears some bread with difficulty. He
has the gout again.
‘That cough of history
is not the last,’ I say. ‘I’m put in mind
of another Richard.’
‘You knew many Dicks,’
says Anthony gamely.
‘No, the royal sort.
Tell me your plan.’
He has to finish chewing.
Holds up a finger, swallows, sips some wine
and spills the arrangement: through a maternal aunt,
his relative is Sir John Harington,
a cousin of the Sidneys. Friend to poets.
He has a son in need of tutoring.
‘In Rutland?’
‘At Exton. Burley on the Hill.

A fine house. Far enough away from here
to save you from snoops. But close enough for friends
to visit at Christmas, when I hear he lodges
over a hundred guests.'
'When should I go?'
'Tomorrow,' he says. 'My instinct tells me so.
I always heed my gut, when it persists
in griping pain. The last three hours were hell.
To you, my friend.'
Our glasses rise and kiss.

How Richard II Followed Richard III

My brain's at work. What further history
chews on the flavours I have licked from life
than the tale of Bolingbroke? First, sent away
on the lies of false accusers, by his king –
that second Richard, limp as the third was lame –
and banished into exile, suffering
the loss of his native tongue, and his good name –
anguish as known to me as my own hand.

Then he returns, still loyal, yet conquering
the rank injustice that set him aside.
And just as my Faustus captured my own doom,
perhaps this script could write me back alive.

No, dream, but do not plot, dear Posthumous.
The way back into life is hard, and strange
and doubtless more complex than I write some lines
and let God make them true for me. But this –
the thought of where I'll start, the opening scene,
inspires me. Imagine this, my dream.

Burley on the Hill

If I must be imprisoned, let it be
in a house like this one. If I must be kept
from all that once informed me I was free
then give me marble floors, a sweeping drive,
three dozen colonnades. A stable block
more sumptuous than my father's cobbling shop.

Give me its broad façade, its sweeping arms
embracing those invited to approach;
its lofty chambers where the words of kings
can echo back from ceilings, magnified;
this hilltop seat, its broad commanding view
laying the country out like a tablecloth:

perspective, now, on all that I have lost
and all that I might conquer, given room.

Correspondent

A fine place to retire, if I were old.
A good position, if I favoured sleep
and didn't mind oblivion. A house
to settle in, as dust upon a stair.

Safe as a nut, for who can even find
the county on a map? Rutland's a fleck
in the eye of God, and I am holed in it,
hugged in the murder of inconsequence,
and teaching numbers to a three-year-old.

My host, discretion's knight, is deathly kind.
With paper freely given, I retreat
into the grand adventures of my head:
the plots and coups that forward history,
where I would be, with sword instead of pen,
in a finch's blink. Your letters urge me, Wait.

For Elizabeth to die? I could be dead
myself before the pampered girl expires.
My loyalty to her strung up this noose
that tightens slowly, day on gag-bound day;
the suffocating knowledge every play
my heart creates, lifts high another's name.

You ask if I, now well restored to health,
would not be more content in Italy,
with drier reds, and weather as a friend,
and not so tempted by the closeness of
the familiar haunts and homes of those I love.

I answer: this master keeps an open house.
All visitors welcome. There is here a man
who used to count your friendship as a jewel,
and how the sight of your face would bring relief
from endless lake and hill and cloud and sheep.

I sing and pretend and play the perfect guest.
I chant the alphabet for a rich man's son.
I finish the play that no-one knows is mine.
Your letter arrives, saying you will not come.

Nothing Like the Sun

Some dark wind huffed and made her manifest.

The first week of October. Coming in
from a stroll by Rutland water, I am met
by notes as strangely tuned in to my heart
as a mother's lullaby: faint in the hall,
but strong, insistent, as they beckon me
towards the drawing room where at the keys
of the virginals, a woman sits and plays
such melancholy music that my eyes
begin to fill. If she has noticed me
she doesn't break her step: indeed, she starts
to sing just as I wander through the door,
as though I am the ear she's waited for.
The song, in French, seems penned, alone, for me.

Sweet bird in exile – so the first line goes –
why do you sing so distantly of love?
Do you not know the cage has an open door?

I paraphrase; perhaps if I had seen
the words on the sheet I might find I was wrapped
in some sorcerer's illusion and the song
was a list of gizzards, scales, and contumely.
How could I tell? For watch me, I'm entranced.

She comes to the end and halts. 'Monsieur Le Doux?'
'How do you know my name? I don't know yours.'
'Excuse me. I was sent by Jacques Petit.'
Anthony's Gascon servant. 'With a message?'
'With just myself. I do apologise.'
She rises. 'Chevalier Harington is out?'
'Until tonight. The servants let you in?'
'With a letter from Jaques, who suggests I could be nurse
to Chevalier Harington's infant girl.'

Her eyes
have the promise of storms; a power that augurs change.
'Where should I wait? I don't know where to go.'

I sell my afternoon into her care.
She spills her story out as if her trust
were won just by my asking for her name.
'I go by Ide du Vault,' she says. 'Why laugh?
What's funny?'
'Sorry, the name comes to the ears
as Hide the Fault, in English.' Hide the Fault.

Much more of a giveaway than Louis the Sweet.

She looks ashamed. Her eyes drop to her lap.
'That is the name I'm given for my sins
by a wicked man. A joke at my expense.
I see. And now I can't escape the joke,
for all my papers bear it.'
'It is false?'
She looks at me accusingly, my twin.
'No falser, I know, than yours.'
'What do you know?'
'Just that you're not a Frenchman,' she replies.
'Your accent's fine: but the lascivious gaze
a Parisian would deliver has betrayed
you, by its absence, for an Englishman.'

So dangerously smart; so unafraid.
Yet vulnerable, for in the next rich braid
of the beautiful tale she's weaving, she reveals
'I'm hiding from my husband.'

'You are married?'
'Unfortunately, yes. Though in that name
I shan't be known, I'm Madame Vallereine.'

So open, so bare, a field prepared by plough
for whatever seeds Fate plants; the ruffled wind
is lost on her. Her tongue reels out her woes
and reels me in upon them. How Monsieur
had betrayed her publicly, then set a slur
against her name to furnish his excuse –
'and all the eyes of Paris were upon me.'
Hers fall into her lap again. 'And he,
believing his own story when he drank
began to beat me also for the shame
I brought onto his head. Such wicked men –'
she broke her thoughts. 'I shouldn't speak of him.
He is a curse that gives me nightmares still.
For there are men who prey on women's minds.
I only hope you are not one of them.'

I try to look softer. 'I was raised with sisters
and a mother I respected.'

Though her head
shakes at this point in open disbelief
it's not my information, but her own
losses she's moved by, like a weather vane
bothered from both directions.

'Do go on,'
I press her, gently, noticing a tear –
a tear as fiercely wiped as though it comes
from the scoundrel husband.

'So of course I fled
to a nunnery in the hills. I did not say
of course, I could not tell them I had wed
two years before. It's true I told them lies –
but also true, I gave my heart to Christ.
Still, when he found me –' Here she blanches white

and I will stop. For though a woman's tongue
will often shake off secrets, that report
does not become the listener's currency.
What matters is the love that had begun
to surge through my veins, like running down a hill
with the wind behind me, sure her body was
calling me with its longing; love so strong
that it washed me from my reason. I was won
the moment she lied to me and hooked the truth
of my own pretence. She was both warming sun
and rain on the shoots of hope, sat on that stool
with all the beauty of a ruined nun.

The Game

My mistress plucks my strings, and I am played
as expertly as any lute. She first
encourages, then shoos my love away,
reluctant to intensify my thirst.

She promises nothing. Sweet as nothings are
an urgent need for something keeps me up
long past the hours where lovers sigh at stars,
wishing my love were pure, and not corrupt.

Wrapped in her arms, with all my hope unwrapped;
between her legs, and breathing in her must,
she chides I mustn't. I am free, yet trapped,
a moth who beats his own wings into dust.

As she completes me, so I fall apart.
Love then, my Muse. For she has all the art.

Petit

December chills the sheets. Much warmer they
become when doubly occupied. She stops
resisting me, my garrulous, lovely Ide,
to obtain my furnace in her bed. The month
brings more than sharpening frost and softening thighs.

A party descends, two weeks before the feast
is due to start, some forty men and maids
on horse, on foot, in carriage. It's the Earl
and Countess of Bedford, daughter of Sir John.

With Jacques Petit. He is a stick-limbed man,
plucked from his mother's dugs too soon, a face
like a smear of butter on a stale bread roll.
Yet Anthony sends him; and with him, a list
of friends who will descend here presently:
a Christmas to crown all Christmases!

A glow
must shine from me as I emerge with this
knowledge from my room; first Jaques Petit
attempts to trip me on the stairs with 'What
did my master say of me?' I freeze. The sheer
effrontery is baffling. 'If he
had wanted you to know, assure yourself,
he would have scribed in French,' I say. His flinch
is measurable. His spine contorting like
a sausage shrinking over flame. 'But you
will recommend me to Sir John, perhaps?
To stay for Christmas?' And a smeary smile
is plastered on with effort.
'When he's free
to see me,' I say. 'He's with his daughter now.'

Something about the Frenchman bothers me,
but I brush it from my mind, as one might brush
a cobweb from a velvet sleeve. My friends,
Southampton among them, coming here! Again
the joy so strong it draws into my path
its opposite – the darkness of my love,
who is pouting more than usual because
of Jacques Petit's arrival. He it was
who gave her the punning name, apparently.

'He's full of evil, as an egg-bound hen
is full of egg,' she says.
'Excuse me, love?'

‘That stupid man you left not seconds ago
fawning and crawling. Petty Jack. The spy
from Anthony Bacon’s house.’

‘Shush! He’s no spy.
Anthony’s sound. We’re friends. The man is just
obsequious. Loves Anthony too much
and the rest of us too little, for the threat
or competition that we pose. My love –’

‘Love is for later on. The letter he brought.
It lit you like a candle, and you ran
away from us all to read it, like a cat
who caught a bird. Since I share all with you –
most intimately - what will you share with me?’

‘My body,’ I say, stroking her shoulder.
‘No,
you cannot sell me what’s already mine.
I have your body. I would know your mind.
The letter. What moved you?’

‘It is just some news.’
She waits.
‘Of friends,’ I say.
She’s waiting still,
her tongue ticking against her palate.
‘Friends
who are coming to visit.’
‘So!’ she says, and smiles.
‘I will know more, but not in corridors.
The rest you will tell me when we are alone.’

With her tongue on my thigh, unholy in its course,
intent on torturing out of me the name
that most delighted me. ‘So he’s an earl?’
A fire is blazing in the grate. A touch
of her lips, like coals.
I groan, ‘So you’re a nun?’

She laughs like broken glass. ‘A woman has
so many faces. I have worn the veil.’

‘You didn’t learn this at the convent.’
‘No.’
She leans back on her elbow, drags her hair
across my belly like a paintbrush. ‘No,
the skill is natural. It comes from liking.’
‘You have experience.’

Her eyes grow dark
as if turned inwards. 'What have I to sell
except the thing men most desire, myself?
But flesh is only ever rented out.
My heart, I'm saving.'
'Saving for me?'
'Perhaps.
If it pleases me. And then I will move on.'
'Perhaps I'll move on now,' she teases, 'go
to the other wing and find myself a man
who does not keep such secrets.'
'Ide –'
'Not Ide!
Call me my name, Lucille. And tell me yours.'

'I can't. It's dangerous.'
She makes a noise
like swallowing poison, turns her head away
when I see her eyes have filled with sudden tears.
She shrugs off the hand I reach to her, 'No good,'
she says. 'No good, we do not use the names
that we were born with. Lovers should be true
to themselves, they should be honest.'
'Ide –'
'Lucille!'
She's half across the room now, every inch
as naked and angry as a trodden snake.
More blaze in eye than grate. 'My name's Lucille.
And what is yours?'
She looks so beautiful,
my sulky temptress, that the ache for her
might almost conquer reason.
'Here. Lucille.
Come back to bed.'
Her skin, so biscuit brown,
shivers a little.
'Not without your name.
I do not sleep with strangers anymore.'

The fire spits some gobs upon the hearth
of wood it has rejected, all in flame.

'There is a tale attached to it,' I say.
'And you must hear the whole tale in my arms
if you're to have my name. For they are one,
the name, the story, and they must be held
between two lovers, closer than the child
that might come from that union. Lie down.
I promise you, you will be satisfied.'

So in her bed, with all the house asleep,
kissing her neck to warm her up to me,
I make her promise on a future child
(which I may plant in her, should luck decree)
to keep to herself the story I'll reveal
or know her tongue itself will be the axe
that severs her lover's head, and turns these lips
cold and unyielding as the winter ground.

The thrill of being entrusted with my life
quickens her sighs, and she responds as wild
as I have known love, tugging me inside
and reaching instantly that mounded peak
few women ever climb: two stops of breath,
then blushing flooding to her chest and cheek
like soldiers running onto battlefields
when war is over. Softened,
'Tell me more,'
she says, half satisfied. 'What is your crime?
What do you hide? Who are you, man of mine?'

Will Hall

Come. Am I stupid? Maybe for as long
as it took to watch her climax on the thought
she could be the death of me. A woman's tongue
is looser than a man's, and half as loyal.
Desire, which might have told her everything,
grew sober to feel her hot, unruly mouth
feed fiercely on my danger. So I switched
the name in an instant. And the name I gave
bore ounces of truth for being worn before
in government service; so nudged past her doubt,
though she did repeat it twice: 'Will Hall? Will Hall.'
And chewed on it, momentarily. 'How strange.
I had an inkling of another name.'

'What name?'
'Oh, you would laugh at me.'
'Not so.'
'I thought perhaps I was kissing Kit Marlowe.'

'Why him?' I say too quickly. Then, 'Who's he?'
'You silly, the man who wrote the play,' she says,
'about the Paris massacre. There is –
you must know, there is rumour that he lives?'

My heart is beating like a captured bird.
'He died in a house in Deptford. In a brawl.'

'He was a wanted man. It is too neat.
I like to think he lives,' she says. 'Don't you?'

'Not if you'd leave my arms for his,' I say.
'What made you think I was him anyway?'

'I don't know. Something. That you hide away
all day in your room, just writing – don't deny!
The ink is here on your fingers, look!' She holds
my hand to my face for evidence. 'And that
you pretended to be French. He wrote in French.
And the name, Le Doux, I thought could be a joke
that one so dark could call himself "The Sweet".
So why are you hiding? What for, the pretence?
Who do you run from? What is your offence?'

I tell her a little of my narrative.
The part that does belong to William Hall,
the government agent who was sent to Prague
to mix with necromancers, alchemists,

and sniff out the Catholic plot that cursed an earl -
my former good Lord Strange – towards a death
of sudden twisting poison. She is quiet.
'But why must you hide?'
'So I will not be next.'
'And what do you write all day?'
'Religious tracts.
Pamphlets to turn the Catholics from sin.
I publish them beneath a pseudonym.'

'I've seen such things,' she says. 'They are' - she smiles –
'useful to wipe oneself upon I think.
What a pity you're not Kit Marlowe.'
'Why?'
'Because.
For him I have a passion. You, perhaps,
have grown a little stale for me.' She turns
her back as though she's keeping shop and must
now tend to another customer.
'Lucille.'
She doesn't answer. 'When I write those tracts
I make things up, you know.' The fire now
is burning lower, crouching in its grate,
but my bare need is stoked by her rejection
and I must heed the ache. 'Imagination
can be a place to stoke desire, Lucille.'
She breathes as though asleep.
'We could pretend.
I could be any man you want.'
'Of course,'
she sighs into the pillow.
'I could be
pretending to be Will Hall.' Her shoulders shrug.
'I hope so. William is my husband's name.
I have too many Wills already.'
Yes,
and one more than she knows. 'Perhaps you could
imagine me Kit Marlowe.'
Now she turns
and smiles with teeth.
'So tell me I am right.'
'You're right, Lucille. You found me out.'
These words
unlock her like a casket full of jewels,
and I have her glittering eyes, her ruby tongue
suddenly willing. 'You are famous, then?'
she coos, stroking my cheek. 'Oh, infamous.'

'Tell me again how famous!'
'You yourself

had heard of me in France.' 'Yes, as a rogue!'
'And the playwright of the Massacre.' 'Say more!'

I talk her to her climax seven times.

'What would they do to you?' 'They'd make me dead
as I'm supposed to be.' She chews my arm;
she grinds her pelvis into me, and groans.

And is she done? She sighs. 'But people know.
Your friends know.' 'Some of them.' 'How can you hope
to keep yourself a secret?' 'No-one talks.'
I flop beside her, grateful her desire
has come to some conclusion. Not so, mine.
'They know the danger to myself, and them.
In any case, the Queen has sealed it tight.
She has me writing plays, just as she likes,
but through her censors. She would not be pleased
to have me exposed and killed. That I still live
is purely through her will.'
'She has a will?'
She giggles. 'She has grown too manly then,
in her man's position. I prefer this will.'
She seeks it out and grips it.

Why the mind,
so glorious in all it apprehends
should be encased in flesh, I do not know.
And why its workings shudder, stall and drop
to the call of base desire's a mystery
no priest has ever purposed. Thus enslaved,
I lose all higher sense, all urgent goal
except the spilling of myself, in her.

'Call me his name,' I urge, 'call me his name.
Tell me you want Kit Marlowe.' And she does:
the name huffed out of her with every thrust
resurrects me by degrees. My hungry corpse
fiercely asserts its need for life and love
like the soldier soon to risk his all in war.

And afterwards, the silence almost throbs
with the bruise of my forbidden name. What chance
that the walls, or sleep, contained it? 'I must go,'
I whisper, though I sense she isn't there,
but in a dream of goose-down infamy,
fresh bedded by the rogue she thinks is me.

I pull on clothes, now greyed out by the dawn
and make for my room. But as I cross the floor

I swear that something scuttles from the door.

My True Love Sent To Me

Yet I was not uncovered, and the quiet
that hung over breakfast tables, white as cloth
prepared for a christening, was shaken off
in under an hour by more distracting things:

the Countess of Bedford's evident delight
at the Christmas plans, which she swore quite the best
of the fifteen years since she was born. 'See here,'
she squealed to her father, waving in his face
the letter that occasioned her to dance.

'The Earl of Southampton's hiring Pembroke's Men
to come from London with a play. A play!
How wonderful! Let's hope a joyous one,
full of romance and clowning.'

Lutes and drums
were in her head, but I thought *One of mine.*
He's bringing one of mine.

'And Rutland too,
with quite an entourage.' She mouthed the French
with gusto that the dogs around her feet
took as a cue to whine as though they sensed
a hare on the lawns outside.
'Twelve days of fun!'
She twirled with the thought of 'Lords and ladies here!
So many lovely gentlefolk!'
My mind
was stuck on the play, what play, and would the cast
be old familiars, fooled by no disguise?
Until a certain name fell from her tongue,
undid me, straight.
'… and Thomas Walsingham!'

Stopped

Could time run slower? Only if God's hand
were pressed against the sun to keep it still.
If shadows made to inch across the floor
were painted in their places. Come. Please come.
Before the weight of waiting buries me.

The boy's sums take forever. Afternoons
grow whiskers, even though the days are short.
And nights would stop completely, but for Ide
badgering me to look into her eyes.
'What's wrong with you?' she says 'Where have you gone?'
I say I'm nowhere but between her thighs.

But I'm lost in you, beyond my boots in you,
and the blessed future day when you arrive.

Dogs

A faithful dog, I raise my head to see
each visitor arrive. It's never you.
The hurt of half-imagining your arms
on a coach's door, or seeing at the end
of the drive, on horseback, someone of your frame
melting to unfamiliar on approach
has steeled me thus: I'll have no faith in you.
I'll not believe you're coming till you do.

I immerse myself in scripting thwarted love
while the hubbub grows around me. Christmas Eve,
and a hundred guests expected down below
as I scratch doomed love towards oblivion.
A knock, as soft as a servant's, come to feed
some logs to the fire.
'Come,' I say. 'Come in,'
intent on my sentence, finishing the line
before I sense no housemaid at the grate
but a solid, watchful presence.
'Hello, Kit.'

And there you are, like a month of blessed rain
on a field of sun-blanched wheat: too much, too late,
and yet, embraced at once. I clasp your flesh
like a storm would tear me from your mast, the chair
I've abandoned faking a gunshot as it falls.
I hold you like a once abandoned babe
clings to its mother, though your arms, round me,
seem hesitant, as though you're scared to touch
something so live, so hot, so not the same.

You smell of Kent. You smell of Scadbury.

'I dare not let you go,' I tell your ear,
and feel your breath draw in. 'And yet you must' -
you unclasp my arms as gently as you might
undo the bonds of a prisoner soon to hang –
'or how can I look a dear friend in the face?'

Your own is plagued by nervousness. 'The door -'
'I'll lock the door,' I say. 'Don't move an inch.'
And you obey, as if the world will fall
if you exhale. There is a chill in you
like you brought the outside inside.
'You are cold.
You've only just arrived?' I feed the fire
with all the logs there are. 'That ought to help.

Sit down,' I say, and offer you the chair,
put right on its feet, while I perch on the bed.

'Tom, I'm so glad you came. I thought perhaps –'
Though words are what I worship, mine are lame
straight from the mouth, uncrafted. 'You had said
you wouldn't come.'

'That was the safest course.'
Your eyes are troubled. You barely look at me
as though afraid I really am long dead,
a spectral illusion. My own eyes are slaves
to the face I worked so hard to conjure up
that effort erased each feature over time:
they relish and restore to me the slant
of cheek, of neck, of nose, the different hues
within your hair. I wait for your voice, which comes
like a rumble over mountains: 'Kit, I fear
I put us both in danger being here.'

I reach to take your hand. Cold as a bed
no-one has slept in, but the pulse in it
connects me to your heart. 'But, Tom, you came.
You cast off fear and came. What made you come?'

Twelve weeks without a letter was the start.
And as you told the tale of how you'd sat,
your heart as heavy as a mason's stone,
at Chislehurst Common, at the crossroads there,
unable to point your horse towards your home,
or spur her to chase a chosen compass point,
my heart rose up to kiss the thought of you
statued by doubt, and every ounce of me
sang that your strange paralysis was love.

The smallest tug of your arm, and you are mine.
You are the puppy suddenly, and I
the master commanding that you kiss my face.

The strangest transformation's wrought by fear:
you are quite melted, subject to my will.
Though all these thirty months you've held like rock
to a separateness, you now consent like snow
consents to its thawing underneath the sun;
consent to let me in, consent we're one.

So let the fire crackle that perfect hour
when we, again, go deeper now than friends,
swim in our Hellespont, and hope to drown.

Friend

You dress yourself; each button carefully
replaced in its hole as though it never left.
The evening lights you coldly, now the fire
has dimmed to embers. It is only six,
just gone, and the house below us thrums halloo
as the hunting set return.

'Thomas, you said' –
It's hard to be naked when you're fully dressed;
I pull my shirt on also. 'When I left,
you said you couldn't follow me because
some might suspect your role in it.'

Your boots
are going on now, laces tugged as tight
as a good spy's cover story. 'That's still true.'

I picture the cobbler measuring your calf;
of how you'd talk more easily with him
than you do with me.
I say, 'But time has passed –'

Your eyes stay with the laces, concentrate:
this notch, that hole, criss-cross. 'Nothing has changed,'
you say. Then glancing up, 'We cannot be
together, Kit. You want a dozen whys?
Because you're dead. Because you're known in Kent.
Because I have a house and staff to run.
Because what we are sometimes drawn to do
is a capital crime. Because I want a wife –'

You read my eyes and save the other seven.
I'm washed up into tears so easily
that I might be your wife, but for one thing.

'Sorry.' You watch the floor as though your words
are spilled on the rug between us. 'Kit, I swore
I wouldn't – '
You leave me to fill the line.

I don't oblige. I concentrate on dressing
to distract me from the tightness in my chest.
As long as I'm turned away from you, you stare:
I feel it hot as a brand upon my skin,
an undisguised desire to drink me in
that slides to the fixtures when I look your way.

I shiver.
'Come sit by me. It's warmer here.'
I move as I'm bid. Again, you apologise,
and this time touch my arm. So you're forgiven.

'Nobody doubts I'm dead?'
I watch your eyes
rest anywhere but on me, like the bee
that lights from flower to flower. 'Not nobody.
But mostly, yes, your death is very famous.
More famous than your life was.' There, a smile
like the sort I knew of old. A tug at me.
I sneeze; the thought of my death is full of cold.

'But you might safely visit me abroad,
if I'm forced abroad again?'

Your sigh's released
like old tobacco smoke: 'It won't be safe.'

You pick up the poker, stir the dying fire.
'Kit, I can't live pretence. For years my job
was setting up secret schemes, devising lies
for others to populate – and I can bite
as hard on my tongue as any man, but not
if I'm in your company. Who are you now?
Will Hall? Louis Le Doux? What if I slip,
one night, in the grip of wine, and call you Kit
in a public place? It only takes one ear,
one English-speaking, sly, take-profit ear
to root through my history and dig you up –
and snap, you're jigging on a hangman's rope
and your heart cut out still beating. No, I'll not
be a part of it. It's bad enough I'm here
to spend Christmas with you. I should not have come.'

Again, constriction. You, the conjurer
whose words alone can starve me of my breath.
Just one word more, and I might turn to stone.

You prod and poke, and tiny tongues of fire
burst into silent speech, and then subdue.
Somewhere, I find inside of me, your name.
'Tom –'
'I believed –'
We stall.
'You first,' I say.

But a knock at the door is first. It is a maid
with a supper tray, and wine: 'Monsieur Petit

said I should bring it for your gentleman.
He said the two of you would dine alone.'

As if he had intruded in the flesh,
all thin-stretched smile and stale obsequious French,
a flicker of annoyance finds me words.

'Monsieur Petit does not get to decide –
but as it comes, this suits us very well.
The fire is dying also – would you mind?'
She bobs, and in her smile, the signature
of a private joke unnerves me. She brings wood
stacked up like consequences. When she leaves
we break the bread in silence.

'What I lost –'
I take a gulp of wine to steel my blood.
Afraid of what is written on my face,
you say, 'Say nothing more. I understand.'

No appetite at all, I watch you chew
until obliged to say it anyway.
'What keeps me hidden is my love of you.'

You swallow. 'Then love me constantly,' you say,
'if you cannot love yourself.'
'What's there to love?'
And I begin the list of all my faults.
And you turn off the faucet with a kiss,
your only weapon.

'Kit, you must stay hidden.'
There was a quiver in you, in your eyes.

I suddenly understood your presence there
was underwritten not by love, but fear.
You feared that I was breaking. Hence, you came.
And after that, I watched you differently.
As a lover who gifts his mistress beauty's dress,
but then insists she never take it off.

'I'm not the only thing that keeps you sane.
You've said it yourself before, you live to write.'

A sudden laugh downstairs. All out of time
with our private bartering, yet to my ears
the laugh of the universal gods. 'I do.
What else do I have but writing? Where my friends
and drinking used to be, or riding down
to the river for a boat, or afternoons

engaged in the playful fare of theatres,
there's pen and paper and those endless hours
in which to fill it.'
'You speak bitterly.'

And as if to sweeten me, you fill my cup.
Drink loosens resistance. Still I play along
to numb the pain of understanding you.

'If there were no hope, Tom, I might be restored
to my former life and reputation –' Here,
my mind lets go and free-falls at the thought,
unable to fill that gaping 'if'.

'Oh, Kit,'
you say, and though my name means more than gold,
and to hear you speak it still delights my heart,
that Oh, that empty Oh's another hole
that can't arrest my falling.
'Do you think
I can't be rescued? I can't be restored?'

Your eyes, which testify the truth of this,
look anywhere but mine. 'We worked so hard
to have this lie believed. It isn't time
to undermine it. They would have you killed.'
'Who, they?'
'Archbishop Whitgift and the rest.
Come on, Kit, nothing's changed. You can't go back
to the life we've buried. There is nothing left.'

Your silence closes like a coffin lid.

The fire spits something burning at my feet;
you stamp it out.

'So there's no hope for me?'

'All hope is in our current plan,' you say.
'The plan to keep you writing, and alive.'

'But no-one knows it's me.'
'That is the point!'
Infuriation shoots you to your feet
and you settle, swaying, plant yourself more solid
before you say. 'You have to live with it.'

'What if I can't?' I watch you steadily
Your eyes are focused on the fire whose light
flares up in them.

‘Then you will die for it.
And I will swing beside you.’

Dearest friend,
I wondered then if it was me or you
that you feared most for. I’d not have you dead
through any fault of mine. Should death weigh hard,
I’ll take my life alone, in privacy.

I felt that night you’d given up on me.
Forgive me, then, if I gave up on you.

Hal

Deserts stay rainless year on chafing year.
Then glutted with months of water in a night
they bloom, their hidden sand-beleaguered seeds
seeming to conjure flowers out of air
in sudden, excessive beauty. My blessings too
fell fast and all at once.

Coming downstairs
from supper with you, into the banquet hall
they clear now for a dance, I glimpse his hair
and the glowing face of the girl he's talking to.
You notice I've stopped, and must retrace three steps
to hiss at me 'Don't stare.' My feet are stuck,
so thank you for the words. They are a jolt.
'Your obsession with that boy's insufferable.'

Your eyes are angry, and your mouth's a wound.
Insufferable is right. I too have wished
his beauty didn't draw me like a sword
I cannot wield, which cuts me constantly.

And yet I'm drawn. As I reach his side, you've gone,
slipping away like years slip from a bride,
unwilling to make believe. This is a move
too dangerous for you.

'Monsieur Le Doux!'
I'm beckoned close to meet the youth I know
too well, and not at all. 'Young Henry Wriothesley,
the Earl of Southampton. Meet Louis Le Doux.'
Sir John's a little drunk. Southampton turns
and a ripple passes through hi. So intent
does his gaze become, the girl is melted free
from his company as wax from flame. 'Le Doux?'
Cracking his voice, a hint of broken boy.
'I believe I met your wife some weeks ago.'
His lips smile playfully. 'At the theatre.'

'At a public playhouse? Surely not!' Sir John
puffs stiffly.
Southampton soothes our host: 'Sir John,
the Queen herself brings those same plays to court
as highly suitable for men and women
of the finest breeding.' And to me, 'Was it
your wife?' The boy must play. All his delight
is focused on how I'll answer him.
Breathe in,

exhale. 'My Lord, forgive me, but I fear
you must be mistaken, for I am not married.'

He can't resist. 'Perhaps it was your sister?
Now I think of it, there was a likeness there…'

'My mistress, perhaps,' I say.

'Too many dogs!'
Sir John barks, shocking us silent till we see
he's waving his arms at servants, and the hounds
marauding beneath the table. 'Get them out!'
and he stomps away.

The laugh is a relief,
and the absence of his ears a blessing too.

'Kit, how are you?'
'Le Doux!' I say, alarmed.
'My Lord, though I would have it otherwise,
we're not alone.' As if to make my point
young Rutland brushes past us with his arm
on the waist of Lucy Harington. The room
is light with Christmas, crammed with gentlemen,
their wives and sisters. Yet between we two
the air is close and intimate.
'"My Lord"?
Surely the time has come to call me Hal.
I loved your poems. The second was very dark,
but the story clear. You are the nightingale,
singing of your destruction. Have a glass
of wine.'
He puts his own into my hand,
and takes another from a passing tray.
The spot where his lips have kissed the sheen away,
he turns towards my own. 'You need a drink
to warm you through.'
'My Lord, it isn't safe,'
I say. 'The tongue behaves like an unschooled child
when doused in alcohol. I am the proof.'

'The smallest sip,' he says. 'The smallest sip.'

So, yes, I press my lips where his have been
and taste a draught of his intoxicant.

He smiles at me. 'So many thing aren't safe,
yet pleasurable. Come to my chamber, then.
But you shan't enter till you call me Hal.'

'And may another know this Hal?'
It's Ide,
all bosoms in her dress, or largely out,
and lips as wide as the Thames at Deptford Strand.

'The Earl of Southampton. Ide du Vault,' I say,
and watch her almost spill out of her dress
as she curtsies deeply. 'Please forgive me, sir.
I'm French. And may be "tipsy", that's the word?'

For a moment, he is fazed, as if his wit
were wiped by the candid beauty of her face,
erased by her perfection. 'Miss du Vault,
you are forgiven.' Lifting up her chin
to fall into the disaster of her eyes.

It's clear at once: he's struck. Her look alone
transforms reluctant boy to aching man,
turns Ganymede to Zeus. One glimpse of her
could suck the moon to hang before her face,
abandoning its celestial course to stare
lovingly into her oblivion.

She senses instantly her hook is in,
and takes my arm to sink it deeper. 'My
Monsieur Le Doux has mentioned you before.'

'I don't recall,' I say. She says 'Of course.
You were asleep.
He will talk in his sleep,'
she says to my lovely boy, all matter-of-fact,
as though she hasn't strung me from her keel
as she ploughs her way towards him.

'Is that so?'
Southampton eyes me archly. 'Walls are thin
in the tutors' quarters?'
'Thinner than the wing
of a butterfly,' she says, so prettily
that I forgive her everything. 'But I
can keep a secret. If I have my Will.'

I swear the woman spoke in capitals.
Her meaning landed there upon his face
in a look of intrigue. 'Then you must come too.'

'Must come? To what?' All wine and innocence.

'To a private party hosted in my rooms
just after midnight.'

‘What - with only men?
You have mistaken me for someone else,
Monsieur My Lord.’ But hung there like a fly.
A dazzling fly, all emerald and lace.
And when, for a moment, she had turned her face,
he grabbed my arm: ‘And you must come at ten.’

Your Fool

I find you waiting in my room, your face
an accusation.
'What? Two years alone
and I should stay a hermit? Never trust
another living soul apart from you?
You think that after all these friendless months,
just one should be enough? You're going away.
You said so.'
'Kit –'
'I have lost everything!
My reputation. Work. The very name
my parents had me blessed with at the font
is flushed like so much turd into the ditch.
Am I to sit here cloistered like a monk?
What's left to nourish me, that I should pass
on this sudden feast of friendship?'

'Kit, you're drunk.'
The disappointment sinks you to my bed.

'What if I am? What is the bastard point
of sobriety?' You flinch. 'And it's not wine.
I'm drunk on the rush of feeling loved again.
And if it's fleeting, all the more reason why
I should have my fill of it.' What's in your eyes
is sobering, however, and it brings
me to my knees in front of you: the boards
as hard and cold as penitence. 'My fill.
Yet you would be enough for me, I swear,
if you would make a promise…'

'Kit, the girl.'
'The girl?'
'The dark-skinned girl. Hung off your arm.'
The supplicant's position I am in
has weakened me, and chafed against your mood.
I stand, brush off my knees.
'Who is she, Kit?
I've never seen a woman look so knowing.
What have you shared with her? And who is she?'

I stalk across to the window.
'Jesus' balls!
What have I shared? Who is she? Tom, a wife
would ask less prying questions. She has been
my comfort, is all.'

'You cannot be familiar,'
you say, 'with anyone. What does she know?'

I bite my lip.
'She knows I am not French.'

Your eyes say idiot.
'What could I do?
She's French! She knows a Frenchman from a nail.'
You punch the bed, send up a cloud of dust –
both your dead skin and mine launched into air –
then stand, your hands in fists, as though you might
punch me for satisfaction.

Dearest friend,
forgive me, that I keep our argument
fresh in my head as new earth on a grave.
Had you not left, I would have more to save,
but can't discard this moment, or its pain.

'There's quicker forms of suicide,' you say.
'And ones that don't put friends' necks in the noose.'

People are leaving. Carriages outside
rattle towards the gatehouse.
'Tom-'
'And worse
you've let Southampton in on it.'
'That's not
my fault! I met him at the theatre.'

Your eyes roll to the panelling above
as if you hope for God to intervene
and bring the ceiling down. I'd been so ill,
I want to say, if you had seen me thin
you'd take me to the theatre yourself –
for all the risk – to let some life back in.

'Your obsession with the earl cannot protect
you from his fickleness. You are his pet.
And now his thrilling secret. But be sure
the moment he sniffs disaster, he will shrug
you off like last year's codpiece.'

And the rest,
the comparison with you, you leave unsaid.
Your loyalty thickens in my heart, like glue.

'You've lain with him?'
'Never!'

‘But you’ve lain with her.’

I cannot lie to you; you read the Yes
in my dumb response. And like a beleaguered boat,
you half set sail, then lurch back to my dock,
quietly sinking.
‘Tom. This all stops here.
I promise. But be with me.’ I pull you close.

At first you are sack of wheat; your arms
hung loosely at your side. But then your breath
responds to my kisses, and the huge machine
of mutual longing slides us into bed.

The Authors of Shakespeare

You cannot know how often I replay
our conversations in my head. Your voice
inhabits the space where friendship used to be,
which rattles less when I rehearse these scenes,
tell them like bedtime stories, tell them fresh
for ears beyond our own, should one day this
sad tome of cipher meet posterity.

I see us clearly: pillowed in our sweat,
recovering our breath and sanity
in the gentle flicker of fire and candle light;
coverlet kicked to floor, a trail of clothes
like offerings to the god of sodomy.

What livens our bed-talk is the threat of death;
the scythe of its humour cutting me my lines.

'You said you would not have me here, and yet,
I do perceive you've had me thoroughly.'

Though serious, your smile's no more contained
than a frog's contained when placed upon a dish,
and yet you say
'I would not have you here.
My Kit – ' Your hand, a blessing on my cheek,
removed. 'I swear to God, you are not safe.
The public are sheep and fall for any lie,
but private rumours circulate amongst
the curiously literate in town.
A lawyer playwright told me in faith last week
that William Shakespeare's not a real name.'

'He's a real man!'
'But not that can be seen.
He only comes to London twice a year.
Picks up a play from Bacon, drops it off,
collects his cash. He is invisible.
To all intents and purposes, not here.
The masses are none the wiser, but the cream
of literate society suspects
the name's a front for someone else.'
'For me?'
'For Bacon. Or the Earl of Oxford.'
'What!'

'Don't be offended, Kit! You had a death
more documented than most royalty.

The lewder gossips spin it off in yarns
you could strangle cats with. Since you're loudly dead,
the suspects are the living.'
'Oxford, though.
The man's a nincompoop. He churns out verse
fit only for lighting fires.'
'It could be worse.
'How so?'
'They could be gossiping it's you.
The clues you keep leaving, Kit, for pity's sake.
As if your style itself weren't badge enough
for your friends to work it out. Your enemies
must be gifted nothing. Non licit exigius.
Let them chase shadows. Let them not chase Kit.'

These words float from that bed across the years.
And thus, the Turnip kept my greatest prize
and earned for his silence more than I was paid
for my verbosity. That a man discreet
as a bolted door, by nature taciturn,
should be rewarded handsomely to keep
counsel, is like a housecat crowned a king
for being good at sleep. And yet I knew
he could be trusted not to puff and crow –
and never claim he wrote them: only show
his face, and not his handwriting for then
he'd show he was a stranger to the pen
and risk his death as well as mine. So. So.

'Let them chase shadows. Let them not chase Kit.'

Writing these words I sense the tenderness
your staunch good sense kept from me. Finding my fist
resting against my lips, I kiss that flesh
lightly, as if to say, again, goodbye.

Mr Disorder

'Who are you watching?'

You, in winter garb,
mounting a chestnut mare, exchanging talk
with our host in a cloud of breath.
'It's just the hunt.'

I came down to the east wing's sitting room
for a panorama of your exit scene
through its windows' tall, wide-open eyes. Ignoring
my mistress installed in a chair, and quietly sewing.

Lucille is clipped. 'I have been hunting you.
Three days you've avoided me.'
'I have been ill.'
'You don't look ill.'
I answer, 'You're a nurse
as well as a nun?'
'I'm more things than you know.
Today a seamstress. This dress has a tear
would make a harlot blush.' I turn to see
the green dress she was wearing Christmas Eve;
her smile as she sews the rent across the breast.

'How did that happen?'
'Chérie! Do you care?'
'Sarcasm doesn't suit you.'
'Nor do lies
suit you. Your friend is leaving now?'
'He is.'

'He won't stay for theatricals tonight?'

Horses are stamping in the yard; the hounds
sniffing and milling round their hoofs. But you
will head not for the fox, but for the south.

'Pity, I hear the play is very good.
If a little bloody.'

Titus Andronicus.
You couldn't bear to see the players come.
Or watch Southampton's surreptitious gaze
in my direction as my words were staged.
You found the play 'too vengeful, anyway'.
'Forgiveness,' you said, 'might bless you. Not revenge.'

You kiss the countess's hand. Some final words.
From the portico, a thin-lipped Jacques Petit
steps forward, slides a letter in your hand.
You tuck it in your breast, oblivious.

'He calls you Mr Disorder.'
'Who?'
'Petit.'

Despite the window's frost, I watch you leave
through a clearing my hand has made upon the glass:
a static wave you never turn to see.
How perfectly you have forsaken me.

'Do you not care?' she says.
Do I not care?
I care beyond all measure, and my heart,
already three-way-splintered, sinks with lead.

'I've been called worse,' I say.

'He is a rat,'
she says. 'He means to poison everything.'
I turn. She is unpicking stitches made
in anger's error. 'I don't like the man.'

'What do you know about him?'
'Only that
he stirs the gossip in the servants' hall.
And often enough, I leave my room to find
him in the corridor, starting away.'

'Perhaps he is protecting you.'
She snorts.
'Write to your Anthony. Tell him he must leave.'

You're at the gatehouse, now, and rein the mare
to the right. A six-day ride to Scadbury.

'I think he's here for me.' Said absently,
but her hiss gets my attention. 'I despair!
The man is running rumours, sure as rain.'

Yet Anthony's trust was not won easily.
And though the man was welcome as the flu,
obsequious and greased with copious smarm,
he seemed to serve a purpose. And perhaps
that purpose was to keep this ghost from harm.

She folds the dress across the chair, as if

it is the limpest girl, dragged from a lake,
and comes to my side. Her hand is on my cheek
as tenderly as yours has ever been,
and plants a simple need that I be held
as if you'd never left, and she was you.

I go to kiss her.

'No,' she says, 'not safe.
No more for you till you shoo that rat away.'

Revenge Tragedy

The real play is off-stage. It's her and him:
the Lord of Gorgeous and my fatal nun.
She's squeezed beside him, palms beneath her chin,
pretending to watch, but gleefully as sin
distracting him with whispers. I'm the one
he should be eyeing, yet he's eyeing her,
as if forgetting who the play was for.
The once or twice he glances, I am stern
and he half-guilty, like a man disturbed
in the act of stealing ripe fruit from a tree
that tickles his fence. Now hungry, now unsure
whether it's right to lord it over me.

While players strut, while boys bake in a pie,
while throats are cut - she hums the line, 'Say Aye.'

So

Example of foolish thought love makes occur:
“I’ll win him back with poems about her.”

In Disgrace with Fortune and Men's Eyes

Three weeks have passed since I last scratched a note
to you in this book of sorrows. I confess
I've written only sonnets to a lord,
sliding them nightly, underneath his door
adorned with the initials 'W.S.'

As well you are not here. As well that I
shan't send the bulk of this until my death.
As well it's all in cipher, for Petit,
I know, has 'borrowed' papers from my desk.
Nothing of consequence: I do take care,
despite your certainty that I'm a fool;
my drafts are burned before I leave the room.
But he is always up and down the stairs,
outside my door, or hers; cleaning his shoes,
wiping a smirk, pretending to polish air.

More of him later. First, I want to say
forgive the weakness that your absence spawned;
this dawn tip-toeing for want of him, or her.
Love is the only point of drawing breath,
and I'm marooned without it. The poems seemed –
given Hal's love for those I wrote before –
my only power. But so much for art.
My stormy, merciless mistress has his heart.

She tugs us on a double-baited hook.
She kisses me swiftly, then returns to him.
'Banish Petit,' she says.

Tonight, in tears
she came to my room with letters for two friends
in London. I am to deliver them.

For a letter in cipher came from Anthony,
compelling me to leave. Her every fear
about Petit is true. He's threatening
to expose us both, disgusted, so he says,
by our moral laxity.
Oh moral laxity,
how you have sweetly leavened my flat dead hours,
deliciously inspired both prick and pen.
Only a juiceless man denied such good
could call it evil.
Lucille placed her head
upon my shoulder, sobbing properly
how sorry she was, and she was in my hands,

and could I deliver, please … and all my thoughts
I must confess, were on her bosom there,
most warmly pressing. Even as her tears
soaked through my shirt, I went to raise her head
and kiss her mindlessly.
I leave first light.

Essex House

January ends, but passes winter on
as seamless as this river meets the sea.
The edge of the Thames is creaking. Ceaseless snow
falls from a sky white as a winding sheet,
obliterating what marks street from street.

As light fades, I dismount at Essex House,
swaddled against the cold up to my eyes:
disguise itself disguised as keeping warm.

Anthony isn't happy.
'I am here
myself by the earl's good grace. Which may be stretched
as far as lodging dead men if you stay
all times in this room, in case you're recognised.
We'll find you service shortly.'

I'm in pain.
I've warmed my feet too quickly by the fire
and my toes are aching. His good-natured smile
is cooler than I remembered it. The source
is soon apparent.
'Tell me, does the air
in Rutland cause conversion?'

I'm unclear.
I run my mind through maths and alchemy
while he gulps a brandy.
'I believed we shared
- proclivities.'
And though his meaning dawns
with that word's hesitance, I feel compelled
- annoyed perhaps that he should limit me –
to tease him with 'Montaigne? Italian verse?'

'Your Edward the Second and his Gaveston!
Your Gany - Ganymede.' A stuttered halt.

I massage my foot to urge the chilblains out.
'I write of killers, yet I am not one.
Nor am I Doctor Faustus, though the world
would have it so. Though Adonis disdained
the arms of Venus, must I do the same
because I write the tale?'

No answer comes.
He's picking at his thumbs.

‘Although it’s true
I might enjoy male intimacy too.
But what I value most, experience,
is not found compassed in a single shape.’

He shifts uncomfortably.
‘I cannot share
your taste for female flesh.’

No remedy.
I slide the foot back in its chilly boot.

‘And I don’t ask you to. But don’t ask me
to love no more than half humanity.
Beauty is sexless. It’s found everywhere.’

He lowers his gouty frame into a chair
and watches me as though I might combust
and turn to ash in front of him.

‘It’s clear,’
he says, ‘that we must find some task for you.
And more engrossing work than tutoring.’

The Earl of Essex

A bear of an earl. This cousin of the Queen
requires to meet the man he's sending off
to serve him on the Continent. He stands
like a monument to pure nobility,
his back to the room. Though younger by a year
than me, his person breathes entitlement.
From his padded shoulders to his slender knees,
he's dressed like a king in waiting, and might seize
the whole air of the room to draw a breath.
His beard is red as embers, and his eyes
- now rested on my face - as shocking soft
as tenderness upon the battlefield.
And in his presence, one might quite forget
what one is for. He clears his throat.

'My friend
the Lord Southampton tells me you're discreet.
And Mr Bacon, that you pass as French.
I gather you're a victim of this war
against the Catholics.'
'I served the Queen
until I was slandered grievously.'

He nods.
'And now you may serve me. I pray, sit down.'

I take the seat that faces him.
'My aims,'
he says, 'are much as hers. Protect the realm.
And gather knowledge of our enemies.
But where Her Majesty refuses flat
to favour a successor –' In his eyes,
the spark of meaning I am meant to catch.
'Say that you had a preference for the throne –'

He leaves the silence open as a hand
that I must shake correctly, brotherly.

'The King of Scotland.'
'Good. Then we concur.
Plans cook abroad, and thicker year by year,
to plant a Catholic. Though Lord Burghley has
averted many plots, he isn't well.
A younger man must take the mantle on.'

The beard seems fiercer, somehow, in the sun
that filters weakly through the window pane.

Some six week's snow has settled.

'So. We're done.
Here is a memo, written out in French
by Mr Bacon's servant. You will find
all your instructions. You'll accompany
the Baron Zeirotine to Germany,
and send news from the court. Then on to Prague
and should conditions suit, to Italy.
I gather you have the language.'

'Sir, my tongue
has peeled that fruit, and others.'

'Has it so?'
His eyebrow rises like a proving loaf.
'I trust you won't resort to poetry
when filing reports.'
I'm chastened. 'No, sir, no.'

'My wife's first husband favoured poetry.
You know his work, I'm sure.'
He pares his nails
with some device he's fished out from his desk.

'And I know yours,' he says, letting the weight
of his words sink in my chest. 'I know the names –
true names – of all my agents. That includes
the slandered one you left behind.'
I try
to meet that gaze: that steady, kingly gaze.

'My Lord –'
'No, please. You'd best to hear me out.
Should you prove true and loyal to my cause
I will ensure your restoration comes
as surely as the King of Scots is crowned.'

'I swear –'
'And you are eager, I can see.
No oaths are necessary. That's the point.'

He hands across a seal: the name Le Doux
with the impress of an ape.
'This, I will trust.
Work diligently then. For both of us.'

Small Gods

Small gods they are that shuffle men like cards,
dealing them into courts, minding their hands,
and laying wagers they will stay ahead.
Again, I'm alchemized to Mercury.

Letters delivered. Nobles led to Prague.
Messages tramped across the lines of war.
Armies estimated; counts dispatched.
Rumours reported and alliances forged.

And though I miss the semblance of a home,
and a dark-eyed mistress I might dream upon,
the European air is savoury
as wine to a man just recently set free.

For I shape more than one boy's alphabet.
Licensed to roam, observe and scribble down,
to mingle amongst the gossip of the troops
and privy councils both, to taste the sounds

of history thrashing to be born, to breathe –
my usefulness to England warms me through
Bohemia, and the cold of Germany.
When you know this, may you be proud of me.

For though I've put you away, as soldiers do –
folded and dog-eared, sewn into a coat –
still all is done in reference to you
and love is inclined to catch me at the throat

when it sifts from the crowd a voice that rings like yours.
I fill my head with duty, discipline
but when I sleep, my heart slips from its post
and slips on the outfit of a future year

when I'll reclaim the plays I send from here
and reimburse the man who's loved me most.

Merry Wives

My fear, at first, was that familiar tropes
would shout my name in each delivered line,
hanging their author from a stylish rope.
Could they tell my invention's work from mine?

My fear now is, they do. This sheltering name,
beneath which wisdom grows as sorrow's fruit
is fathering plays I still hope to reclaim
but sharper, without the arrogance of youth.

And who will know them mine? How can I snag
some threads of myself to show I passed this tree,
and not stuff Kit into the drowning bag?
I write in fits and starts, a comedy,

between the inns and lodgings of the road –
bizarrely peppered with some scraps of me
too ghostly for the ignorant to see,
disguised, as truths had better be, as jokes.

In the Theatre of God's Judgements

A book stall in Frankfurt. How the ear homes in
on the English language, as a lamb's attuned
to its mother's bleat and trots with wagging tail –
in my case, to be startled. For within
two steps I heard my name at Cambridge, 'Marlin.'

There by a pile of English tracts, a man
I didn't recognise – who had not called
across to me, but read out loud a book
he cradled in his hands for a laughing friend.
Adopting a preacher's tone despite the scorn
in his Rheinish accent:
                'See what a hook the Lord
put in the nostrils of this barking dog!'
Some joke in German. Then, 'May the good Lord
preserve the English from their atheists!'
A scoff, and the book's rebalanced on the pile
before they saunter back into the crowd.

What do I do? What joke is this of Fate's
to drag me over Europe to this spot
for the moment that a stranger turns a page
- a random page, just where the spine decreed -
and reads my name aloud?
                And 'atheists' –
it surely is about me.
                No. Too mad.
If raw coincidence can cook that up
then I'm a pig in pastry.
    Sweat breaks out
like catcalls in a madhouse. Who is here?
Whose eyes are on me, who paid them to bait
me with that tome, that conversation?
                Fear
stamps my heart, rapid as the rabbit's foot
that warns the warren. Fake it, saunter past,
or find a dagger's hilt between your ribs.
(I'm told you never know it instantly.
That to be stabbed feels only like a punch
until the heat and fluid soak you to
notice your life blood leaving, stem the flow.)

At the edge of the marketplace I find a spot
beside a wall, and sink me to the ground.
I breathe as if a fist has winded me,
but slowly return to focus. People mill
and natter. There are children playing jacks.

The sun shines meekly. Browsers move from stall
to stall like bovines, grazing. I'm alone.
I am prey to paranoia; this I know.

For half an hour I fidget with my thoughts.
What is it called, this book? How can I find
it elsewhere, when I only know it by
its uppermost position on that stack?

But if this slander's published, I must know
what else it says about me. To be sure,
what's snacked upon in Germany will be
meat and potatoes to the London crowd.

I could ask a boy…
I do not have enough
to buy it though…
I could return disguised…
Yet by that time, what book will be on top,
and that one buried?
Thus I venture back
a little closer, testing how it goes,
and fret myself, sifting the market stalls
for suspicious loiterers, for patent spies
who might be focused on that book, and me
(the most suspicious loiterer of all),
until the vendor, free of customers,
descends upon that teetering stack of wares,
beginning to rearrange it, as a trickster
whisks a marble underneath three cups –
and I'm running like a child,
'Nein, nein, nein, halt!'
and wrest the book from where he buried it.

A thick book though. Author, one Thomas Beard.
I skid my thumb through pages, nothing, where?
Then set it on its spine to fall apart.
And again. And again. The fifth time, it is there –
the page where 'Merlin' leaps into my face,
the phrase 'a poet of scurrility'.
And worse, far worse. All Baines's points transcribed
and summarised as fact. A gory death
painted as if Beard mopped the blood himself.

I close the tome, disgusted. Come, sweet blade,
into my guts. Sharp steel could do no worse
than printer's ink to wound me.

Then despair's
consumed in the heat of anger. I will fight.

By God, I will set sail to England now
to claim my name, to shake this lying Beard.

Did I die swearing? No, see how I live!
Swearing most certainly, but full alive.

And how does God perceive me? See this eye,
this unstabbed brain.

Am I wretch? A villain?
Do I look filthy? Tell me to my face,
so close and living you can take my pulse;
judge for yourself the odour of my breath,
and what is a fact, and true. And what is death.

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Who Steals My Purse Steals Trash

I drink it out, of course. Drink out that rage
into a pool of vomit by the road.

For some time after, I sit with my head.
How helpless we are to write our histories.

As I made Richard crookback, so these flies
lay maggots in my life's realities
and print bestows them with authority,
cold worm-gnawed fabrications.

My side of it –
these papers that build quietly with me –
become the very breath of me because
else there I am, and that is what I was.

Slander

Because I can't fight back, because we've sworn
my disappearance from all mortal men,
new stings arising from the angry swarm
are sunk into the name I left for them.

A corpse can't shake itself, so slander sticks,
encasing the mind as heavily as wood –
as lies, far more delicious on the lips,
obliterate my every trace of good.

Poor truth, already exiled in disguise
is truly now deceased and heaped with earth.
For what slim chance this man could ever rise
to claim a name no longer wreathed with worth?

Yet join me in my silence. Don't defend
that man, and put at risk his dearest friend.

A Kit May Look at a King

Reviled as brawler, traitor, heretic,
as resident in lies as in my skin,
my loyalty remains with England still,
my skill with knowing chaff and wisp from will.

[October 1598. The Hague.]

Burghley is dead. And I am working for
the French. So say my papers. Since the King
of France signed peace with Spain, my mission is
to ascertain the trueness of his heart
as I shuttle his general's letters back to him.

The road to Paris. More familiar now
than boyhood lanes; though conkers rain here too.
Then through the northern gate, down boulevards
where you and Tom Watson, many years ago,
wrestled each other into bars.

The Court
swallows me up as a snake slip down a mouse
whole, for digestion later. I may walk
around the fountains, through the panelled halls
or rest in my chamber until I am called.

'And have you heard from Anthony?'
The King
and he spent years together in Navarre.
'How is his gout?'
'He's been in bed two months,'
I say in French.
'Bad business. Why the good
are struck with such afflictions beggars me.'
His warmth to me seductive, friend to friend.
'You stayed with him in London?'
'Three years past.'
'You know Petit?'
'I hesitate to say.'
'Why hesitate?' The twitch around his mouth
appears to invite my playing. I have missed
banter more keenly than an English ale
with beef and kidney pie.
'Because to know
suggests a depth that I have failed to plumb,
Your Majesty.'
His smile cracks in his beard,
breaks like a sunrise. 'Yet he's surely not

a shallow man,' he answers graciously.

'Oh no, indeed.' En garde. And then engage.
'Since I have failed the fault must lie with me.
He wears misanthropy like battle-dress.
I'm not equipped to pierce it.'

'I perceive
some modesty. You seem amply equipped.
Where were you schooled? I reason, not in France.
Our academies are dull.'

'In Wittenburg,
Monsieur Le Roi.' I chose it playfully,
having once immersed myself inside the head
of its most famous heretic.
'I see.'
He beckons a servant carrying a bowl;
announces, selects, 'a juicy gift from Spain,'
and breaks a fig between his thumbs. 'Like Faust,
you tired of scholarship and sold your soul
for power and influence.'
'Your Majesty?'

'You might have been a Fellow. Write and teach.
But you carry post. A most intriguing choice.
I'll know you better. Come, sit by my hand.
I've several other messengers to see.
Observe them, and recount their traits to me.'

Thus is my afternoon accounted for,
amusing the King as though I were his fool.
How this man's eyes could not leave off his boots,
and how another's collar did the work
his mother left unfinished, strangling him.
Jests for that mangled turn of phrase, those shoes.
Easy unkindnesses.

'How did you find
the ambassador from Norway?'
'Full of puff'
He wears his limp as if he made it up.'

'And none of these fellows, note, do as you do.
You're easy with the Crown. It's puzzling.'

'I believe we are both men.'
He takes me in:
a drenching, sideways look. 'I am a king.'

'Respectfully Your Highness, so might I
have been, had your mother borne me.'

I detect
that the servants, locally, have turned to stone,
as though afraid Jehovah's thunderclap
might singe them as it smites me. I might choose
to be afraid myself, except my taste
for subjugation has grown less of late.
He stares at me all seriousness, and when
he fails to find the crack, starts chuckling.
'How very odd you are!' He claps his hands
delightedly, and makes the servants jump.
'The show is almost through. Who have we left?'
He reads the courtier's finger. 'Ah, just one.

And what a one.

My breath stops in my throat.
The great hall is in shadow by that door,
and what steps through it glimmers like an ounce
of wishful thinking. Caramel, chest-length hair.
I thought he was a figment, made of dust.
But no, he is announced, and I am stuck
watching him bow before me, then look up –
and almost react. As startled as a horse
spooked by a gust of nothing, and reined in.
He stares, tries not to stare, then stares again.
Then builds a wall between us in the air.

'I came at your request,' Hal says. 'You asked
to see me, Your Most Christian Highness?'

'Yes,'
the King replies. 'I wanted to confirm
you had returned from England quite unchanged.
You left the embassy so suddenly
in August, I was quite concerned. And since
your return, there have been rumours. I could not
accept them without seeing you myself.'

A fleeting tiredness shifts across the face
I've loved so pointlessly. And then a steel
glints into it; the glittering eye of pride.

'You've heard that I am married, then.'
'Indeed.
And are you?' 'Certainly.'
Here, I am cut
down from love's gallows with a hearty thump.

‘Then you must dine with me, to celebrate!’
the King says cheerily. ‘Return at eight.
And bring your wife with you’
‘She is – detained.
In London.’ Hal replies. His halting words
betray an awkwardness the King has dammed
and now is fishing, smilingly.
‘Detained?’
Hal nods his lovely head.
‘She’ll follow you?’
‘More likely I’ll return to her,’ he says.
I sense, where tenderness might be, regret,
an aching to acknowledge me expressed
in the stiff tilt of his neck. He and the King
exchange more formal pleasantries before
he is dismissed. And as he bows, I swear,
a glance at me from underneath his brow,
swift as a spark, and instantly snuffed out,
too brief to be understood. Southampton sweeps
out of the room like summer warmth.

‘“Detained!”
Wonderfully delicate. She’s in the Fleet,
disgraced by a swelling belly. Are you well?
You’ve gone quite pale.’
‘Your Majesty, I am –
fatigued.’
‘By all that gorgeousness, no doubt.
How did he strike you?’
‘As a man who knows –’
And here I blank. Should I betray this love?
Or sift myself and lump here as I am,
a lovesick, shamed pretender of a man?

The King is sharp. ‘“Who knows -”? Do you not know?’
More knowing than I wish. So I begin.

‘Who knows how he’s regarded, as he sees
himself reflected in the eyes of men
with hair that tumbles on imagined sheets,
lust for a mouth, and jealousy for skin,
but nothing inside of substance, since their gaze
falls only on the crust of him.’
‘Bravo!’
the King applauds. ‘You’ve earned yourself a drink.’
More claps bring wine. His smile is quivering.
‘He looked at you most oddly, don’t you think?’

A Rose

The King has proved a friend. Not through my art –
all art was dashed the moment love stepped in –
but through his willingness not to unmask
an English agent felled with a single Rose.

A Rose with whom I now seek audience
at the embassy, where you and Watson played
tables till dawn, some sixteen years ago.
Since all you described is laughter, this is new:
the marble floor, the yellow curtains snagged
like sour cheeks into smiles. The chairs, too high,
that lift feet from the floor, make one a child.

He leaves me twitching in the corridor,
hours, it seems, until
'Monsieur Le Doux?'

Excusing his secretary. Yet alone,
maintaining the pretence. 'How can I help?'

By recognising me. By being the same
man who passed me his glass two years ago
at Burley, asking me to call him Hal.
I look at him amazed. Wait for the ice
to thaw. He asks again, with feigned concern
for something on his desk, 'How can I help?'

Perhaps some spy is hidden in the room.
I search his face, and ask 'Are we observed?'

'I took you at your word,' he says, surprised.
'You must no more acknowledge me, you said.'
'In a poem, yes.'
'I took you at your word.
"I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
Lest my bewailéd guilt should do thee shame,
Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
Unless thou take that honour from thy name.'"
'In public, Hal. May I still call you Hal?'
His hand, like snow inside my leathered palm,
melts out of it.
'I do not think it wise,
even in private. Circumstances change.'
'What circumstances?'
'I am older now.'
'Your marriage –'
'That does not come into it!

Your dangerous position is the point.
I've taken your advice.'
'I wrote in pain!'

He urges me to hush. 'If you must shout,
then shout in French. Or with an accent. Sound,
Monsieur Le Doux, stays not within four walls.'
He invites me to sit down, as if my hurt
might be contained by horsehair and brocade.
'You wrote acknowledging your name's destroyed.
In England, to love Marlowe is to swear
allegiance to the Devil.'

He says love!
How stupidly my heart sings at the word,
like a girl sings as she launders her own blood.

'What kind of dead man are you? Turning up
all over the place. The plan was disappear.'

'And to all the world I have!' I stand again,
my lungs craving more air. 'Except to you.
Perhaps we are drawn together.'

'By the stars?
By sun and moon? Then I am truly doomed,'
he says, and does seem stricken. 'Your disgrace
will not be mine.'

I whisper, 'My disgrace?'

'It's said you died blaspheming. That the knife
into your brain was punishment from God
for all those statements in the note from Baines.'

'But I didn't die!' I grip his arm to prove
how real I am. 'And the rest is all made up!'

'The note from Baines was real.'
'But it was lies!
At least, exaggerations.'

Like a splat
of mud, he shakes me off his arm and stands.
He's very tall. Willowy, yet more broad.
So young, so splendid. I catch sight of me
in the window's dusk: a shorter, balding man
whose clothes are slightly crushed, whose older face
is quivering, and shadowed beneath the eyes.

‘Forgive me,’ I say. ‘May life be good to you.’
I make for the door, my throat as lumped and tight
as if Eden’s apple chokes me.

‘Wait,’ he says.
His eyes are also brimming. ‘I would like
to give you something dear to me.’ He pulls
open a drawer, withdrawing a small book.
‘Your friends are working still, to save your name.
Shore up your reputation. This I thought
quite beautiful.’
He hands the book to me
as a nurse would hand a baby to its mother.

So full was I, of taking last goodbyes,
I didn’t read the words upon the cover,
and twilight on the frosty Paris streets
prevented me from knowing what I held
until, in my room, I lit a candle on
this – what can I address it as, but horror?

And dedicated by Ned Blount to you,
who gave my script away for this to happen.
‘Hero and Leander, begun by Christopher Marlowe,’
and no. No, no.
‘and finished by George Chapman.’

Chapman's Curse

How dull a dead man is. How short on wit.
How absent at the dinner table, too.
How tedious in friendship, how like air
to every sense that used to hold him true.
Dissolved into a fiction of your making,
how unreal I must seem, these days, to you.

The proof sits in my hands. The smallest book;
and yet, between its covers, I am slain.
This poem we agreed I would not finish
until some king brought me to life again,
you have allowed another man to end,
who adds more wordage than the story needs,
alters my structure and destroys the tone,
and dedicates it to your recent bride,
flourishing friendship that I thought my own.

One poet not enough for you, perhaps.
Or this first one so lamed by Fortune's spite
that you craved other architects of verse,
and seeking my echo in the school of night,
found ghost-eyed Chapman, swaying from the pipe,
fresh from communing with the spirit world.
And he might pass, for he can turn a line
you might develop fondness for, or worse.
Although your heart is still attached to mine,
the difference is that he can come to Kent.

And did you, pray, invite him to complete
the interrupted story of our love,
relinquishing all hope of my return?
Or did you, so convinced of your own fraud,
in the absence of letters agents fail to pass,
begin to believe that I was truly dead
and ask the man to channel me?
                I rage
through the dutiful plodding of these stolid lines
Chapman has patched where I would write with fire.
But I don't blame him. He believes the dead
are guiding him.

                But what has guided you?
Has five years in perdition ruined me
and you must plunge me now into the dark?
Or has mere absence puffed your love away
like so much Old Man's Beard? I understand
how unrewarded longing bursts like song

upon the merest kindness, after years
of knocking its head against the lost and gone –

but you have given up my words, and let
another write my ending. Brother, friend,
how should I read it? Even in Judas' kiss,
Christ was never more betrayed than this.

Bare Ruined Choirs

All in a day, the birds were stripped from trees.
The flowers lost their petals, and their scent
dissolved like an echo of forgotten song.
Yet nothing changed: for any other man
who walked this lane would swear there's nothing wrong;
not holding in his heart this heavy stone.

The fault lies not in you, not in my Rose
but in that youth convinced he couldn't fall:
proud of his swift ascension, scorning Hell,
oblivious to the feathers falling from
the wings he fashioned in his prison cell,
that room above a home-town cobbler's shop.

Words: he commanded them. Called them his slaves.
Yet the rope that Fate would put around his neck
he wove himself with words too freely spent;
youth's certainty, a preening arrogance
born out of turning shepherds into kings.
If I could travel back and shake that boy –

no good would come of it. He had a friend
who warned him even then, said 'hush' to jokes
whose laughter came from outrage. Chide me, then,
as Fortune does, for my stupidity.
No massacre occurred. There is no husk
of glory to mourn. No ruin here, but me.

Knives

Of course, you are Brutus. Moral, careful man,
persuaded my death is for the higher good.
Chapman perhaps your Cassius, whispering knives.
So many stab me that the blame is lost.
Your blade the last: and my surprise enough
to kill a man not used to shocks. But I,
old hand, am merely robbed of sleep, my brain
wrestling words to make some sense of pain -
burning the stinking tallow, gulping wine,
and scratching another version of this tale.

My cure, the manuscript. The first scene goes
to a rabble-rousing cobbler. You'll recall
a witty friend once free and sharp as him.
Later a poet's murdered by mistake,
confused with a conspirator: his name
condemning him to death. Shall I go on?
I'm already Caesar, whose swift rise was feared,
a conqueror of men, too confident.
Mark Antony, who moulds the crowd with words
to any shape he wishes. Portia too,
the swallower of fire, transparent, true.
Most any part is me, but you play Brutus.
Sleepless counsellor, wisdom's constant friend:
haunted by ghosts, loved to the bitter end.

Concerning the English

Dispatches received by my Lord Buzenval,
at Antwerp, this year, 1599.

Essex is sent to Ireland. It is said
in a fierce debate, the Queen had boxed his ears
and his hand, instinctive, touched the hilt of his sword.
Undrawn. But her silence slicing off his head.

Essex sets off with sixteen thousand men.
A four mile double line of citizens
cheering him and the troops until the sun
gives way to rain and hail. They scatter then.

The largest army ever to set foot
on Irish soil arrives in Dublin close
to St. George's Day. He throws a lavish feast.
The Earl of Southampton's Captain of the Horse.

Can that gentle face bark orders? Do men ride
into battle blinded with their love for him?

The rebels, marched upon, melt into woods
and bogs, know where to ford and how to milk
their native land's advantage. Essex rides
to empty battlefields. His marchers tire.

The army's provisions falter. Rebels strip
horses and food from land beyond the Pale.
The Queen stamps feet to hear Essex bestows
copious knighthoods, dwindling loaves of bread.

She sends the order to attack Tyrone
directly, but his force outweighs the troops,
now dwindled to five thousand. Essex has
some ailment now, perhaps a kidney stone.

Essex decides to parlay with Tyrone
against the Queen's instructions. Rides a horse
up to its belly in the River Glyde
for private conversation. Half an hour.

And so, cessation. All that cost and not
the promised victory. Peace rests on the oath
of a man who can't be trusted, in a tongue
that slips interpretation like an eel.

In mid-September, sources intercept

an order from the Queen: he must stay put.
On no account must the Earl of Essex leave
Ireland without the Queen's express command.

I pick up this news in Zeeland. If all hope
for resurrection rests with Essex, this
rage of the Queen adds mortar to my tomb.
He's falling as fast as I did.
                I get drunk
in a back room with two soldiers, wake up bruised
unsure of why or how. My friend, I fear
I'm falling sick again. It's in my bones:
a deep appalling ache. Each morning leaves
more hair on my pillow as my body fails
to restore itself to health. And then worse news.

September 24th. The Earl has sailed
for England.

                An act as close to treason as
that twitch for his sword. And two weeks on, a whirl
of gossip. My friend, confirm if this is true:
that the Earl of Essex burst upon the Queen
ungowned, unwigged in her chamber, so intent
on explaining himself, he glimpsed the royal dugs.
That since that day he's under house arrest
and Cecil entreats Her Majesty to press
a charge of treason. Friend if this is true –

I broke three days, not knowing what that 'if'
should lead to. Beset with shivering and pain.
Anthony writes: the earl cannot sustain
intelligencers. He is growing debts
as lesser men grow buboes, and the court
whose will he needs to know lies close to home.

My misery, no longer so inert
or held in its place by hope, is moving in;
and others see it in my eyes, I know.
The weather, and bad fortune, weakens me.
It rains a week.

                I dreamt of him, the earl,
magnificent, his beard a ruddy spade,
his armour bloody from the battlefield,
about to offer me all that I crave:
my reputation, my identity,
the right to be called Kit Marlowe and be safe.
But as his mouth opened to say my name
what fell out was a fish, another fish,

gag after silver gag of fin and scale
which servants bagged in nets and took away,
and then the earl himself, all shrunken, pale.

No further letter, and no payment comes.
The network of agents I've depended on
now falls apart, and I must make my home
wherever I am useful. And away
from incessant rain; the wide, tormenting grey
of the English Channel.

Once or twice this year
I imagined I had seen the Dover cliffs,
and even the dots of samphire pickers there.
But the pickers were gulls, feeding above the sea;
the land a bank of cloud, and not my home.
I long for warmth, and rest; some sanity.
I leave with a mission travelling to Rome.

Orsino's Castle, Bracciano

Spring, and the first flowers of the century
break colour to me gently. There's a rash
of tulips running southwards to the lake
visible even as I lie in bed
in this stony room. It pains me to get up
when I have slept so little. I make lists.

A list of things I might have died without.
My linguist's tongue. My rapier and knife.
My trunk of books, the lock upon it. Jokes
Tom Watson told me, which I shared with thieves.
Your cloak. Ten angels from the King of France
concealed in the hem of it. Remembered words
from the Bible, Ovid, Virgil's Ulysses.
A letter of introduction to the Duke
Orsino in the name of William Hall.

A list of Bracciano's benefits.
The peace to write. A room to settle in.
A view of the lake, and sunlight on the wall.
A climate kind to grapes, and wine as good
as the host who serves it. Somewhere to read books
and not depend on memory alone.
The sense of permanence that comes from stone.

A list of reasons I am still myself.
I write.

I'm writing more, and better than
I could, contented. For the sting in this
prison of circumstance stirs in my blood
more honest wit than comfort ever could.
And as my mouth was stopped, so must my pen
speak volubly, and clear - and cleverer
than those who would be my decipherers.
Those who would have me killed, led by the nose
to a wall that butts them stupid. Those called friends
led through the forest, note by rhyming note
to find me in my exile. If they would.

Writing the date alarms me. That sixteen
obliterates Kit Marlowe's century;
the zeroes like a slate some hand wiped clean
when I had all my thoughts chalked down on it.
New spring, new century: if these spell hope
to other men, they toll "all gone" to me.
No plan except await news of the Queen.

Meanwhile my days are sluiced down castle walls
like yesterday's food; passed through and poisonous.

I'm writing a comedy. Oh, you will like it.
A fairytale, adapted as all tales are.
I've added a stupid William, who would woo
and win the love of Audrey-Audience
despite his blunted wit and Cuntry Ways.
There's a threat for him. And melancholy Jacques
in a tribute to my little friend, Petit.
For me, whose folly made him wise, Touchstone,
by whom base metal can be told from gold,
expounds on the truth and fake of poetry.

And yet, the long nights won't let go of me.

Ghost

I met me on the stairs. I had an eye
bloodied and scabbed as our poor story told,
and I, or it – there was no human there –
urged me, 'Revenge! Revenge!'

Startled awake,
I swear the shadows dragged me out of bed
to mix my ink, and tell –
what would I tell?
Kyd's fishwife tale, written this time from Hell,
with all the suffering that whips me mad
in castellated prose: in tricks and turns,
and watching the dark, and how the candle burns,
and God preserve us from these men of stone,
their murdering of truth.
To be?
To not?
Might I set straight this crooked path we paved
with a dark laugh, a play within a play?
Where does the playing end? I rip the speech
from Dido Queen of Carthage like a badge.

He hesitates to act. And yet he acts
with constancy. With words, he sets a trap
to catch the confession of a guilty look.
While faking kills his love, he hides in books.

Yet how to end it all? For, could he kill,
nothing would separate him from his Hell.

The Author of Hamlet

He is only a piece of chaff. He is a blot
that trails persistent sickness page to page.
A dying man's drool. A mad dog chasing smells
to the corners of his brain. A puppet king
with not a string to his fingers, miming shows
in the back of his head. A tempest, all his rage
that might sink fleets or tear the steeples down
dissolving into out-breaths on a stage.

What a clown he is, this prince of perfect souls,
dragging his thoughts to dinner to be chewed
by dogs beneath the table, though he's raw
as a mutton chop, as helpless as a stew
that's served to drunkards to be puked outside
and cursed in the morning. How at sea he is
in his pain and motley. Only a fool writes plays
and hopes to be understood. He is unhinged.

Christ, how the nights possess him with their dark,
mocking the stench of his extinguished light
as he stalks through rooms he cannot call his own,
wrestling a thousand wrongs, and fencing right
till he slides the point through its throat, and feels the blade
unleash his blood. If he could choose again
he'd choose oblivion in the world of men
who save their violence for a proper fight.

But no. He builds his muscle like the worm
that crawls through the apple, bittering its taste.
He paints with private torment, of the waste
and rank injustice of a sleeping world
carved into gargoyles by ambitious men
who stage this blazing farce upon a pin.
He dresses the hurts of others with his skin
until they heal, his own wounds festering.

He is Ophelia, gathering up her weeds
when love has blown her out. He is the queen
who takes the poison, tasting in its bile
the bite of love. He is his father's ghost
tricked of his life and kingdom, who now roams
the silent battlements, and when he speaks,
asks him for vengeance like a thing from Hell.
He knows him not at all. And very well.

Quiet. I hear him knocking in my head.
I've nothing for him. Nothing. Words, just words

like a billion grains of sand that shift and blow
until a world is buried. Oh, this brain,
made mad with faking, and with playing dead,
condemned to ever clevering the tongue
until it cannot say the simplest thing.
There is no fool in Hamlet. Only him.

In Praise of the Red Herring

A storm. The mountains light up like the bones
of shattered Titans. Every past disgrace
is blasted by God into a reliquary.
The heavens' sluice gate opens; crackling air
converts to deluge in a single breath –
a wall of water fit to drown all woes.
The ceiling weeps, two inches from my desk.

I snuff the candle, better to watch the land
flash into being, disappear again,
like lives across an aeon.
A night like this,
in my ungrateful country, years ago,
a friend ran through the rain.

'Kit! Thank the Lord,
you're safe.'
'And dry. The gods have pissed on you,
however. Tell me, why would I not be safe?'

Southwark, two years before the bastard Note.
'I thought you were dead,' Nashe said. 'I had a dream.'

Described how I was 'pale as baker's dough,
your left eye hollowed out, and in the air,
hovering by your head, a dagger blade,
so real I went to touch it, and awoke –'
He showed me his hand, three fingers cut across.
His voice was trembling.
'You sleep with a weapon
beneath your pillow?'
He swore that he did not.
'Come, friend,' I smiled, 'this is a foolish joke.
Did Watson put you up to it?'
He swore.
'You think I'd cut and drown myself for fun?'
In my back, a muscle spasmed, three times, four;
as though my spirit pinched me to wake me up.
'It's nothing,' I said. 'It's not a prophecy.
It's pointless to fear what we cannot explain.'
I ribbed him on that dream relentlessly,
squashing all claims of 'vision'. Till the month
I left my dagger in the curtained room
where the dough-pale face of Penry would play mine.

So understand, that when you write he's dead,
but no-one's seen Tom Nashe's corpse, or grave,

I doubt your news. I doubt it grievously.

For surely, if the reaper stepped his way,
Nashe would get wind of it, and pack, and flee.
Might even now be on his way to me,
crossing the mountains in this flashing storm,
to talk himself around the guards, the gates,
to clatter up stairwells, nattering to maids,
until I greet him, dripping, at my door.

Sojourn

A year ago, my ear perceived as strange,
as oddly off, the sing-song 'i' and 'o'
that every word must end with. And the sun
whose midday fierceness sends all men to sleep
was alien, its kiss a souvenir
on English skin. How I have changed since then;
an incremental metamorphosis
adapting me to exile.

This is home.
The language comes to my ear, its sense intact
as I slip my shadow through the marketplace,
a neighbours' quarrel entering my head
in violent detail. And my skin, once pale,
is tanned antique: the native patina.
The street cries spell out food. Only the eyes
which stare so brightly at me when I shave
out of this darkened face, surprise me still.

I'm not the man who travelled stealthily.
I wear each pseudonym like second skin;
answer to almost any name except
my own. Will Hall here, and elsewhere
Le Doux. So comfortable as that Monsieur
that I've feigned ignorance to Englishmen
who've then conversed their secrets in my face
believing that I couldn't comprehend.

And yet, inside, I'm England. I'm the clay
that clogs your boots on Kentish lanes, the cloud
that lowers itself like London's eiderdown,
to soften the sleep of all the put-upon.
The sudden shower that sends the cats inside,
the blatant rose that blooms above its thorns,
the nightingale that sings to spite the dark.
My dreams are hybrids where historic kings
are tricked out of their crowns by Harlequins.

And England, Italy, are much the same -
though one eats anchovies, the other stew;
one basks in heat, the other can't decide
what clothes to wear; one likes its women slim
but plumps them up on marriage, while the shrews
of England make for better wives than sheep.

Both countries forged in human contradiction,
in ignorance and perspicacity:

in smug and blind assumption sent to sleep,
in envy greed and folly forced awake,
in love and loyalty, hauled from the brink -
and nothing good or bad except the view.

But no. One sits more soundly in my heart,
without the gaps a sudden wind might frisk.
It's England's shores that call me to return,
embrace my fears and shoulder any risk
that I might spend another night with you.

So this most welcome message in my hand,
deciphered into being in the slant
of Italian morning sun ignites my heart.
‘Meet me at six, beyond the olive grove.
I am to take you where you wish to be.
Special commission from her H. T.T.’

T.T. & W.H.

Beyond the olive grove, there is a hill
which twists the stony road around its hip.
A stone-built barn whose roof is not repaired
open-mouth laughs some rain to fall in it
but the sky's relentless blue, the earth parched dry
as crumbled bones. A tremble in the trees
reminds me to check my dagger's in its sheath.
As I reach the barn, the road's old curves reveal
Thorpe sitting on a wall in meagre shade.

'My dear,' he says. 'You're looking very brown.
I had imagined you encased indoors,
shunning the sun and penning tragedies.'
He's reading a map that's laid out on his knees.
He pats the wall beside him. 'Come. Sit down.'

Cicadas scratch the gap between his words
and my lack of movement. As I seek his eyes
beneath the generous brim that shadows them
my stallion heart kicks at the stable door.
Harder to trust Her Highness, since she slapped
the Earl of Essex under house arrest.
I do not know the game. And though Thorpe seems
an unlikely cold assassin – flaccid hat
and rose-oil scent, his slight unmuscled calves
that surely never walked here, and a flower
drooping in his lapel - that's just the sort
one shouldn't bare one's ribs to.

'Suit yourself,'
he says. 'I thought you'd like to see the route
I've planned for us.'
'As long as it's not to Hell.'
'Tush tush! Does the Devil wear Venetian hose?'
'I've never met him personally,' I say.
'Unless you're he.'
'My darling boy,' he laughs,
though still my junior by some years, 'are we
old friends, or not? What's changed? Did I betray you?
Or speak your name without due care? Or cut
your purse while you were sleeping? Though dead drunk,
you'd not have noticed. I remember well,
the state of you, though it seems your memory
of me is somewhat hazy. Sir, give up!
Accept the Queen has asked you to return
and shake the hand of your deliverer!'

He folds the map, places it by his side,
and rises to offer a hand so limp and pale
you'd mistake it for a lady's cheveril glove.

'There!' he says. 'There! My goodness, you were less
cautious when you were freshly dead. What rogues
have stripped you of your trust?'
There was a time
when I'd have snapped his bait and gulped it down.
And yet it feels like bait, despite that Thorpe
is genuine, I think.
'What does the Queen
recall me for?'
'My dear, what else, a play!
A comedy again – you must forgive.
You are so good at them.'
'Where would I stay?'
'In London, sir. With me.'
'But can I not
pen the play here, send it the usual way?'

Why now? Have Whitgift's spies got wind of me
and hired this friendly face to reel me in?

He cocks his head, surveys me as a dog
will stare at a thing he doesn't understand.

'You prefer it here?'
'I'm getting used to it.'
'There is a woman?'
'No!'
'Then why would you –
I thought the exile's only dream was home.'

And he conjures, with that word, the London streets,
their cries and smells, horse hoof on cobbled stone
and a thousand once familiar things I've missed –
yet pushing through this vision's loveliness
someone who thinks he knows me, swift arrest,
and me clapped in a cell, awaiting death.

I rub my neck free of imagined hemp.
'You have my pardon?'
'What?'
'My pardon, sir.
A paper signed by Her Majesty to show
that Christopher Marlowe is no heretic.'

Thorpe sucks air through his teeth. 'I've no such thing.
Only the Queen's request that you should come

disguised, preparing for Orsino's own
visit to Court some months away. I bring
his invitation also.' Pats his chest,
where the royal seal must be. 'But I should first –
she stressed this most precisely – speak to you.'

He flatters me. I know he flatters me,
a speck in her larger vision. Yet the hope
that I am vital to her plans, that she
should even think of me to call me home,
softens the pardon's absence. And perhaps,
while in her compass, close enough to see
the powder crease on ageing royal cheek,
if I could demonstrate my loyalty –

'I've watched a spider in my room,' I say,
'spinning a web so delicate, a girl
could wear it on her marriage day. And yet
the only nuptials that it renders there
are those of flies, wedding eternity.'

He laughs. 'You are the rarest. Come, sit down,
and save the nonsense for your comedies.
If you were wanted dead, would I be here,
and not some Poley, some more slippery fish?
Have I worn out a pair of boots for this?
Come. Come!'
The host who will not take a 'No'
unless you punch him on the nose with it,
and I'm not inclined to violence.

'So. Is that
not better? In the shade? The legs at ease?
What was the thought that kept you standing up?'

'That you were sent to kill me,' I reply,
worn out by subterfuge. Thorpe rubs his chin
in laughing disbelief.
'You've cooked too long
in the sun, my friend. What must you think of me?
What, murder the man who fathered Juliet,
broke Romeo with that one word, banishéd,
and with the woeful error of their deaths,
christened each woman's face and forced each man
to say it was dust that splintered in his eyes?'

'Not you then, but the Queen.'

'Indeed. Rare fellow.'
He stares at a foal and mare beneath a tree:

the mare stripping the willow's drooping leaves,
and swatting her flanks with undramatic tail.
'You're worth more than you know. Truly, you think
she'd have you killed? More likely that grey mare
would kick the flop-eared creature in its shade.
She has no wish to hurt you. Though you caused
embarrassment in your more careless days,
she likes your plays the best. Even the ones
that have a dig at her. Titania dear,
indeed. And you're the ass, we must suppose.'

The foal flap-shakes its ears free of the flies.

'Archbishop Whitgift, then.'
Thorpe folds his lips
in on themselves. 'Indeed, he is a man
who'd like you soundly dead, I grant you that.
And should you return and shout out in the streets
"I am Kit Marlowe, whom God did not punish"
the Queen has made it plain he'll have his way.
A special cell in Bedlam is reserved
for any maniac who makes that claim
or says Kit Marlowe never died. There's five
immured already. No-one you know,' he says
in response to my face's question. 'Just the sort
that found your death's convenience too slick
to swallow, and do not trust official oaths.'

I recall those nights, threaded with Bedlam's moans,
mad cries and laughter, as I tried to write.
Its windows dark, no ounce of soul in them.

'So why must I come to London? Is it safe?
'I would deceive you if I answered yes.
But safe enough, if you are well disguised,
to cast your eye about those men at Court
who most deserve to be a Sovereign joke.
The Queen grows weary, since Lord Essex has –
been absent. She laughs so little. There's concern –'
and here he whispers, though an olive grove,
a mare, a foal, and a high-circling hawk
are all our company, 'The Queen grows old.
Her health has lessened since she banished him
from her company.'

I quickened, I confess,
at the thought she might be waning. Hand me a lute
and I'll write a song to sing the Queen to death.
Hasten King James, a man to boldly reign
and overturn the past's injustices.

If I could be in London when the news
breaks of her death, his kingship; collar a friend
to make a plea for me while power is fresh
and generous in bestowing its rewards …

‘But what disguise could keep me safe at Court,
which brims with agents? Or the London streets?’
‘The work’s half done,’ he says. ‘Thanks to the sun
you have the very semblance of a Moor.
All we need now’s a source of cotton sheets.’

Twelfth Night

Guests are arriving at the great Noon-Hall,
and snow is falling like small promises
as I cross the courtyard 'wrapped as a corpse should be,
in winding sheets.' (As Thorpe said, when I swam
through my ancient haunts, first time in seven years,
without a flicker I was seen at all.)

A small and foreign man, his skin deep brown
through race or cobbler's dye; they wouldn't care
to look close enough. In the country, people stare,
but London chooses not to notice who
takes shelter in her, bumped as if he's air.

Three months I've ducked through mishap and mischance,
scribbling a play to celebrate misrule
which tonight, by the grace of the Lord Chamberlain's Men
will play before Her Majesty.
'Percy!'
A young man dressed in finery hails a shadow
lighting a pipe outside. 'You coming in?'
The answer both sweet and tart, like damson jam.
'Not yet. I'm waiting for a visitor.'
Puffs at the pipe, his eyes searching for stars
that the falling snow obscures.
'My Lord,' I say.
'My Lord Northumberland.' He shakes my hand
distractedly, his gaze towards the gate
where others enter. 'Delighted. We will speak
later, perhaps, when we are introduced.'

He takes me for a foreigner, unschooled
in proper etiquette. I hold my ground,
and remember a line that he will recognise.
'Above our life, we love a steadfast friend.'

He stares at me intently.
Then,
'My word!
The note – I'd not imagined your disguise.
Your mother would fail to know you.'
'Then all's well.'
He reads my face intently as a page
of mathematics. 'You are keeping safe
in this monstrous lie?'
His breath surprises me:
enriched with whisky.
'I am glad to be

in England again.' He huffs. 'If England knew
she'd have you quartered. Such does England treat
its poets and thinkers. We're all heretics.
You'd like some tobacco?' Offering the pipe.
'It doesn't suit this Moorish outward show.'
He nods, 'A shame,' and puffs as if for me.
Taps out the glowing heart. 'Shall we? Inside?'

Noon-Hall is lit for Christmas with enough
candles to burn a thousand heretics.
A crush of courtiers and titled guests
mingle, or sit, before the fervent hush
preceding the Queen's arrival.
                Here she is,
gleaming and pale, her dress a nest of pearls
but in that nest a thin-armed woman, frail
as eggshell after hatching. Power rests
in her hawkish eyes alone: as if shrunk there,
withdrawn from withered limbs until it set
in two blue points of purpose. Yet the dress,
the dress is the outfit of the freshest girl.
And with her Duke Orsino, and with him
Archbishop Whitgift. Like a pair of cruets –
one oil, one vinegar – these opposites
who singly, threw me out or took me in.

At the back of the hall are Heminges and Condell
in their livery as the Lord Chamberlain's Men:
not acting tonight, but managing the purse,
guarding the props. And here a thought occurs.
'Is Shakespeare here?' I whisper.
                'Never comes,'
Northumberland says. 'Or rather, he came once.
He rarely comes to London, to avoid
the requests for on-the-spot revisions, but
he did come to a court performance once.
Hoping to meet the Queen.'
                'And did they meet?'
'Most certainly they did. And never again.
Your stand-in had not reckoned on the depth
of the Queen's own knowledge of this matter. She
humiliated him.'
                'What did she say?'
I confess myself eager to imagine him
deflated by the monarch he admired.

'"Why have you brought this puff-cheeked, small-chinned man
towards me like the pudding course?" she said.
When told he was the author, she replied
"Of his own conceits and folly. Send him home."'

My heart glowed then with more love for my queen
than a pup feels for its mother. For this night
I dropped all longing for her death, and grinned
so madly, on and off, that servants stared.

These are my notes. Yet I was taken past
the point where words have any use at all.
For how to describe the sharp surprise of tears
as the lute and harp began to pluck my song
before the Queen, and my words echoed there
to the thousand-candled ceiling glittering
on a scene now more than my imagining:
'If music be the food of love, play on.'

An Execution

Essex was exiled only to his house.
Yet how exclusion wounds a righteous man,
bruises his heart. I know the depth of it.
And though he had his country and his name,
his reputation tattered in the wind,
like a standard flag with endless residence.
And though he had wife and child, and wine and friends
the nearness of the thing denied to him –
his queen, the Court – buzzed madness in his brain
as a bee will knock against a window pane
to sense the flower outside, so bright, so close.

The year turned, and he sickened. So unjust
to be condemned for speaking truthfully –
and he more loyal than those whisperers
who fawn and aye and bow extremely low,
unpicking the seams of kingdoms as they go.

Determined to speak to her, and right these wrongs
he gathered those who loved and honoured him,
would vouch for his loyalty and love for her,
and marched on the Court. Not in rebellion,
yet the boots, in concert, had a martial ring,
and the righteous anger spurring them towards
their queen caused dogs to growl and doors to bolt.
And those who'd cheered him on for Ireland
peeked behind curtains, mimed they were at work.
The wind had shifted unaccountably,
and the streets fell silent, empty bar the march
of Essex and his band. And then a shot,
a challenge, lines of soldiers shuffling up
and aiming nervously at noble heads.

How blind and mindless do old rulers grow,
afraid for their legacies; more fearful still
of their snuffing. Jealously extracting oaths
as insubstantial as a smudge of soot
from those who do not love them, while the pure
untainted soul is viewed suspiciously:
as if some bitter motive lies beneath
his love, as if his constancy's a plot
to inherit the crown and all its fractured woes.

You'll hear that Essex rose against his queen.
The word that fills the streets is 'uprising',
a word so bloodied by its history
it can't contain its entrails. Thus his love,

his desperation to be seen and heard,
is treachery; and all who followed him
to swear his honour are made traitors too.
Including Hal. The boy is in the tower.

Today, I passed the pikes on London Bridge.
There was the head of Essex, scabbed and black,
a March wind ruffling that reddish beard
like the fingers of a mistress. Upturned eyes
rolled back and white as if to know the brain
that read, so grievously wrong, his circumstance.
Three dozen years of bold entitlement
severed and sacrificed to bitter gods.
And knots of people stood awhile and stared
into that face for remnants of the faith
they hand in him.
                Unwound.
                Went on their way.

William Peter

Thorpe's home, in Southwark, rattles in the rain.
Leaks through the beams upstairs, like crying saints.
Makes noise as if at sea, a creaking ship
sailing us down the street towards the Thames

Thorpe ushers in the youth who lately knocked
so softly we had thought it was the wind
tapping a branch on something.
'He's for you,'
Thorpe says, with a servant's smile, as though the lad
is my dessert. He is eighteen, no more,
wet as a man who's swum in all his clothes,
and nervous, making note of Thorpe's retreat
before he speaks.
'Will Hall?'
That makes his task
a governmental one. And I detect
a delicate air.
'I might go by that name.
Who asks?'
'I'm William Peter,' he declares
as love's declared, full-hearted, passionate.
'I'm sent to remove you to a safer place.'
'What place?'
'Abroad.' Vibrating on his heels.
'There is some urgency? Must we go now?'
'No,' he replies, attempting to be still,
though his eyes are darting to the door.
'A drink?'
I cross the room to where a bottle of sack
sits half-exhausted by two pewter mugs.
He nurses his, unsure. I gulp from mine.

'First, I will know about this place, Abroad.
Is it very far? Is its population fair
or dark-skinned? Can you name its capital?'

An earnest reply: 'Abroad is not a place –'

'It is a place, I promise you. I was
in residence there myself some seven years.'

He offers back a doe-eyed blink, confused.

'Abroad. You know, Abroad, that wave-arm place
where awkward squirts are sent. Within its bounds
no man may settle, since there is no house,

no job or friend that will not slip from him
as sand shifts underfoot. Its very streets
become the hairs one brushes from one's pillow
and the cities, scabs one must apologise
to lovers for.'

He's barely understood
a word of my invective. I regret
impaling him so.
'Go on. Drink up, return
to your master. Tell him William Hall's retired.'

'My master?'
His eyes are very wide and pale.
His clothes are leaking rain onto the floor
in rivulets.
'You work for Robert Cecil?
It was his father christened me Will Hall.
I'll not work for the son.'

He doesn't leave.
'Go on. Be gone, I say!'
And still the boy,
his lips as full and pink as ripened figs,
stands motionless. Then, quite as though the broom
of his spine is stripped from his puppet's back, he falls,
translated to laundry.

Gathered in my arms,
and heavy as conscience rests on murderers.
He seems all gone, and yet there is a breath
on my cheek when I bend close enough, as soft
as sudden sleep.

Heeding my cry, Thorpe comes
and stares as though he witnessed an assault.
'Bring water,' I say.
'The wound?'
'There is no wound.
Bring water! The boy has fainted.'
And his eyes
come open slowly, beautiful and pale
as two moons rising on a lake.
'You fell,'
I say, to explain his body in my arms –
though neither he nor I yet move away.
I feel a pulse that might be mine or his
where he rests against my shoulder.
'Now you know.
I have the falling sickness,' he replies.

Thorpe comes with water, and I mop his face,
gesture for sherry, let him sip at it.
'You think me defective.'
I wring out the cloth.
'I think you most dramatic. What a ruse
to claim a man's attention.'
'It's no ruse,'
he says with boyish petulance. 'It is
a curse. A curse by which you have the power
to have me dismissed.'
'I will do no such thing.'
'You'll keep a secret?'
'Certainly. Can you?'
I tip the cup towards him, motherly.

'You are in danger, and must come away,'
he says, refusing more.
'With you?' I ask.
I see the danger clear. His cheek, his neck,
the tempting lips that he is speaking with.

'I'll serve you and protect you,' he replies.

'If my protection rests on sickly boys
I'm doomed indeed.' I help him to a chair

and he recounts the mission: Elsinore.
My smattering of Danish marks me out
to visit the very castle where my pain
ranged nightly on the battlements: the boy
can hardly know, and yet he seems to know,
that Denmark will hook my curiosity
more firmly through the lip, and fling me out
of my native waters.
'You seem better now.'
'It passes,' he says. 'So will you come with me?

'What if I don't?
He blanches, very pale.
Paler than when he fell, and for a tick
I wonder if he'll pass out in the chair,
or fake a fit to make me leave with him.

'Tell me the danger.'
'Please,' he says. 'Just come.'
'The danger.'
The boy sighs heavily. His breath
defeated.
'If you'll not co-operate
I'm told to give this message, word for word.

Your name will be exposed. And every child
you've sired in secret will be put to death.
If you care not for your life, then care for them.'
He cannot know what he's delivering;
only I know the children are my plays.
And from his face, he must believe them flesh,
and dandled in some mother's lap somewhere.

'You threaten me?'
'Not I, not I sir, no.
I am a messenger.'

A pretty one
to carry such poison in his beak. I go
to the window. Rain is muddying the street
and across the way a candle flickers on
to quell the early dark. A neighbourhood
I've kept myself apart from, like a cyst.

I gather my things, as many times before
to leave my country. Go to Elsinore.

Elsinore

Forgive that the boy is in my bed. The cold
in Denmark is persistent. As I write,
he breathes as softly as a passive sea
laps to announce a ship has passed through it.

Upon all hours, they set off ordnance:
a savage shout to the surrounding hills
that power is here, and not to challenge it.
And still I startle, not quite used to it.

My own commission to disarm the Danes
rests on my wit. For I am sent to woo
the brother-in-law of our most wanted James
with the benefits of patience. Should he force

his kin's succession, bolstering the case
with men, and horse, and blunderbuss, the Queen
will melt her promise, fling the crown elsewhere.
Patience, all patience, for the Scottish king.

For my fate hangs as perfectly with his
as if we shared a skin. As if our cloaks
might side by side be hooked, the doors pushed wide
and both together, launch our lives, begin.

I Lie With Him

'What would your children think of this?' Will asks,
his sweet cheek on my arm.
'Of this?'
'Of us.
Are any of them as old as me?'
I breathe
and calculate how I might lie to him
whilst being truthful. 'Dido's as old as you.'

'Dido!' he says. 'After the Carthage queen!
You know the play? My Oxford tutor said
it was abominably poor. The speech
on Priam's slaughter dragging on and on –'

'Excuse me,' I interrupt. 'The play I know
requires skill to act. I hear it has
been sawn apart by actors, but the text
is delicate. The humour of it missed,
as often as the tragedy is clanged.'

'I don't mean to offend you.' He's concerned
that I've sat up in bed, and strokes my back.
'I'm not offended.'
'You seem very sore.'
'Dido's so much derided.'
'Will, the play
reflects not on your daughter.' Strokes, and strokes.
I lie back with my eyes upon the beams.

'You write yourself,' he says, without the curl
of a question mark.
'Letters and ciphers, yes.'
Twice, these past weeks, he's entered while my desk
is thick with papers, watched me shuffle them,
fast as a trickster's cards, into my trunk.
My need for privacy's unclear to him,
and must remain so, if he's to be safe.

He's silent awhile. Then slides himself beneath
our blankets.

*

Five nights on, a fearful wail
curls up the staircase. 'Jesus' nails, what's that?'
the boy says, shocked to a students' curse.
'It is –
I fear it is the Queen.' Anne Catherine

is lying-in with Denmark's future king,
just one week old. The wail grows like a wave
carving sheer cliffs of grief which topple now
to capsize the castle's peace. From Danish shouts
first piercing, and then tangling the air,
I tug this thread: 'The baby boy is dead.'

With I a sort of father, he in my arms,
we drift as the cries, the wailing, dissipate;
perhaps he is more bothered for my sake,
for I must be asleep and he awake
when he murmurs,'Unimaginable pain
to lose a child.' And, like an open gate
one's cherished horse escapes through, I reply,
'Then let us both stay childless.'

His response,
speechless and motionless, breaks through my sleep
as though that flow had met a heavy stone.

'You like to lie with me?' he says at last.
I let time pool. 'You like to lie with me?'
He takes my hand and rests it where the lie
in question is defined.
'I do.'
'Then truth –
and only truth – should be your currency.'

He sits up, lights the taper. In the glow
he shines, a bronze Adonis, freshly cast.
'You only confirm what I have reasoned out.
When will you trust me? When I bare my chest
and ask you to thrust the sword in? I am yours
in every sense you wish, and I am sworn
to protect you for Her Majesty the Queen.
What does a lie suggest you think of me?'

I sit up, grip his shoulders. 'Not a lie.
Not one lie, William Peter, but a cloak
of lies so vast it's hard to breathe beneath.
Why would I want to smother you with that?
Why would I throw this shroud on both our heads?
I'd need to cleave to you till death.'
'Then cleave,'
he says, intensely locking eyes with me.
'I sense you are extraordinary. That,
whoever you are, a greater spirit beats
inside this heart' (his palm upon my chest)
'than I'd be blessed to meet in any life.
Cleave to me. Let me be your certainty.

And shed your burden. These most hateful lies.'

May Fate have mercy. Had you seen his eyes
you would have tipped up baskets of your truths
to soak in their redemption. If that youth,
regaled with an understanding of my sins,
had opened the door and called the torturers in
I'd help them break my spine in disbelief.
Let love be dead if he's no love of mine.

He's pacing then, across the naked floor.
'Your children are books.'
'Are plays.'
'Are plays,' he mouths
and slowly comprehends. 'Dido is yours!
Forgive me –'
'How could you know?'
His eyes ride up,
racking some mental library of facts,
'Your name,' he murmurs.
'Don't be concerned with that.'
'You're Marlowe!' he cries, and sits hard on the bed.

I wait for the weight to sink in him. 'Not dead,'
he murmurs. Then 'Where's your injury? Your eye
was stabbed.' Inspecting my face.
'No, no, not I.
A substitute.'
'Don't tell me any more.
No, tell me everything.' His switch as fast
as a dog sent mad by fleas. 'No, lie no more!
Marlowe was a blasphemer, heretic.
You're no more Marlowe than the rising sun
is a chamber pot.'
He pales and smacks his mouth
on invisible cake; the first sign that he's gone,
snuffed out by his brain's crossed purpose.
When he wakes
from this second fit in twice as many days
I offer this: 'There's not a man alive
whose death won't change him. And what tales are told
posthumously may not reflect the man
in any case. It's true I freely spoke,
shared inklings that, at Cambridge, passed as jokes,
but in London taverns stank of blasphemy;
and through my speaking, lost my liberty.
But I'm not the devil they have painted.'

He
breathes calmly now, and takes me in, like air

from an opened window.
'I am glad of that,'
he says. 'Too poor that I should suffer this
and fall in love with a devil.'
There, a smile,
the parting of clouds. And I will have my love.

More Sinned Against than Sinning

1602. September. Exeter.

I came to live close to him. Close as a coin
in the pocket, or a tattoo on the skin:
drunk on the boy's devotion, and the joy
of unloading every feeling into him.

Rewrote, revised, and focused on the thought
of the Queen's impending death. But all the while,
like the scabrous itch that crawls beneath the skin,
the knowledge I was just a ride away
from the man whose name, attached to every play,
was shaking London's hands, retiring quiet
to his manor to count the coins I earned for him.

Anthony Bacon died with us abroad.
The old route for the scripts, once copied clean
by his brother's hired boys, closed up like sand
that a stick is drawn through. And my loyal love
stepped in to scribe, and to deliver them.

'Give my regards to the Turnip.'
Will is shocked,
and breaks from lacing a riding boot to say
'He shields your life!'
'He is a parasite,
born to suck glory from the quills of men
too wise for the age to stomach them. His name
and his silence are his finest attributes.'

'When the Queen dies –'
'When? That woman has the art
of hanging on, finer than any tick.
Pull off her body, still the jaws would clamp
on crown and kingdom.'

Uncomfortable with me,
he finishes dressing silently, and slides
the play into a satchel.
'You should write
this poison out,' he says. 'Before you find
you're muttering treason in the street. Or worse'

He packs a travelling bag, resignedly,
and starts to go. 'I'll be six days.'

'You're right.'

I catch his arm. ‘You’re right. I apologise.’

Sighing, he sits beside me. ‘That you want
to claim these plays as yours, I understand.
Your soul sings through the lines as though through bars.’
A flash of Southampton, locked still in the tower;
the axe through the neck of Essex, juddering.
I shudder.
‘What thought?’
‘The head that spoke to me
of restoration, falling in a bowl.’
‘Which is the fate we must protect you from.
Write, and say nothing. I will plant this seed
with the Turnip, as you call him, and in time
you’ll harvest it. Be cheery while I’m gone.’

‘Cheery?’
‘Not melancholy. I will send
my sister to see you. Liz. She’ll cook and clean
and listen to you politely.’
‘Does she know?’
‘She knows we’re the closest friends. The best of friends.’
He kisses me. ‘I’ll leave you to your pen.’

Liz

How like him she was. As if he was made twice,
but one time female, softer than the brush
of a flightless wing. A he with breasts, with skin
as velvet as mole's pelt, but as light as light.
She filled his absence with a gentle hum
of kindness, and forgiveness. Left a scent
behind her that I dreamt of, when she'd gone.
Four days, and I had drawn her to my tongue.

I loved her bruisingly, the way that ground
loves a fallen apple. She had all his eyes
and an inches softer bosom: all the love
that a carer for foundling kittens satisfies
herself to give another, came to me.
Beyond lust, I admired her as I had
the Virgin Queen, when I was twenty-one
and first her servant. Will was not surprised.
He read the air between us in a blink –
convenient cover for an illegal love –
and swallowed it.

The week the old Queen died
Will Peter's sister, Liz, became my wife.

Iago

Oh, foolish heart, to store your beating hope
in the whim of an unmade king. The wind blows in
from the north, as icy, suddenly, as glass
stuck in the throat.
A friend will ask a friend
to ask a friend to ride and put to him
the case for my resurrection.
How my heart
thumps strangely in my ears, keeps me awake
beside my wife through hours that only those
haunted or haunting come to know so well.
It knocks like a stranger not at any door.

And every day, no message, though the King
is riding southwards, closer.

In the square,
where Exeter's merchants come to chop and chat,
I hear Southampton has been freed. This is
the king to set injustice straight. But still
no end of endless sentence comes to me.

A Never Writer to an Ever Reader. News.

'A letter!'
Will Peter's panting from the ride.
He drops it in my lap; a baby bird
he prays I might revive, and stares at me –
all fear, all hope, all sharp expectancy.
The seal is still intact.
'So you don't know
what's written here?'

Will Peter shakes his head.
'For God's sake, open it.'

'You couldn't tell
from his face?'
'His servant brought it. Open it!'

'I can't.'
'Then I will!' Lunging for it.
'No!'
I snatch it flat to my bosom. 'No. Call Liz.'

'I'm here,' she says, appearing from behind
the doorframe.

Hands that shiver (as she slides
a paring knife beneath the waxen seal)
like new-sprung beech leaves rattled by the wind.

The night before we said our marriage vows
I told her who she married; that she might
one day be Mrs Marlowe. You would laugh
to know how she shuddered at the very thought:
'Then I'll be married to a heretic!'
'No,' I promised, 'I'll not take the name
until it's cleared of every blot and stain
the world has heaped upon it.'
'So the King's
pardon is necessary?'
'As the blood
that keeps these sweet lips red.' I kissed her then,
but sensed her fear my past would swamp us both,
King's blessing or no. Thus it was her I chose
to open the letter, knowing what would thrust
a knife in my ribs might be my wife's relief,
so that her joy might temper breaking grief.

And should that letter free me up to live,

to witness her love for me throw over fear.

Her lips are trembling and her eyes have filled.
Just for a moment, grief and joy are one,
impossible to tell apart as twins.
'He –,' she says, 'You –.' and cannot tell me what.
Will Peter is impatient. 'Give it here!'
He snaps it from his sister's floured hands,
and as he reads, grows angry.

Now, I know,
and a cold seeps from the ground up through my feet,
my legs, my waist, my chest, as liquid soaks
up a wick prepared to take it.
'He cannot,
apparently, risk restoring you. He feels
such action is impossible, would be
dangerous – for you and also him –
damn him, the coward! "That I must unite
these countries bleeding from religious wounds
is difficult enough without the taint
of a decade-long deceit."'
My dearest boy
punches the door shut. Grunts, then slaps his head
as if it were the King's. 'Not least, he says,
that no-one will believe your innocence.
Your name is too deeply blackened. Curse the man!'

Liz on her knees before me, takes my palm,
anoints it with tears and kisses.

'This is wrong!'
Will Peter storms. A wasp caught in a jar.
'You've been nothing but loyal to England. Saints alive,
all this has come from one man's double-cross;
a personal vendetta. If the King
were any kind of man at all…'
'William –'
His sister chides him, all her eyes and mind
on me, in case his words unstitch me.
'No!
I'll not be stifled. There has been enough
silencing here to stuff ten monasteries
till kingdom come. Only a damned man hangs
the truth and lets the lie perpetuate
for convenience!'

'And yet he's right,' I say,
so quietly Will Peter almost rides
across my words, all driven by his ire –

until the sense breaks through and trips him. 'What?'

'I fear he's right about the name,' I say,
afraid of my own calmness; for the calm
is a dressing over such a gaping wound
I dare not look at it.
'What can you mean?'

'You know yourself what Marlowe meant to you.
The name is this age's bugaboo. "Beware!"
say mothers, hearing children fudge their prayers,
"or God will smite you, swearing, in the head
as he did that Marlowe."'

'You exaggerate.'

'You think so. Tell me, do those pamphlets sell
that have Marlowe on them? No, they're tucked away
in back rooms for the connoisseurs of shame.
For being Marlowe's, dozens are tossed on fires.'

How we shield ourselves from what we fear to see.
A part of me has known this all along;
steps forward only now the part of me
that hoped against hope is struck entirely dumb.

'And all the plays that I've adopted out
beneath a name untainted by my sins –
those plays that are lauded, loved, and lifted high –
should we shout, "This is the father! This cur, here,
who is thought in league with Satan"? Every line
reads differently through judgement. "To the fire
with the atheist's plays!"'
'Or with the atheist,'
Liz whispers to my hand. I lift her face.
'Fear nothing, my sweet Liz. The king is wise
who knows his power's limits; that his scope
remains outside the made-up minds of men.
And I will bend with him.'
Her kiss, my skin.
I'm playing courage. Playing some strange part
I wrote not for myself but for a man
better than me. A man I dreamed to be.

Will Peter stares at me as at a prayer
whose text he can't decipher.
Soft, to him:
'Can a king's pardon shift a nation's curse?
Unpick a belief groan hoary with old age?
No. Marlowe is fully dead. No more pretence.

We have to live with this.'

I stand, and he
crumples into the chair that I have left,
Liz watching me as if I'm darkened sky,
holding her breath for where the lightning falls.
I ground myself.
'Hand me the letter, Will.'

I read it as a man stands in the rain
whose love has betrayed him, soaking to the bone
until, into his sorrow, he's dissolved.

I let the words run through me like a sword
on the battlefield – I watch my body, slain,
fall separate from me; my spirit still
where all of me was a blink ago, and now
so without substance that my killer walks
across and through me, and I'm undisturbed.

And when those words are wholly understood
I let our fire burn them, and the warmth
brings a desire for whisky, which we drink,
all three of us, talking of trivial things.

And only later, when I'm skin to skin
with the woman who shows such tenderness to me,
and only when I have set desire free
in that mock of death, that sudden, pure release
where hope and love and sorrow close their gap,
do I sob, and sob, and sob, into her lap.

The Mermaid Club

'There is a plan hatched at the Mermaid Club.'
'Whose plan?'
'Ben Jonson's.'

Six months since I wrote,
and in that half a year I've understood
how clever writers are. How good at code;
at understanding what's beneath the line.
How able, some of them, in tracking style
back to its source like water. And how loyal
on discovering one of their number wrongly bound.

The knowledge grew like fungus; underground
but quietly sprouting in the still of night.
I saw hints in the prefaces of books.
Where Shake-speare fell in two, as though it led
these soldier authors to a private fight,
I knew who knew, how far the knowledge spread.

How it spread safely I can only guess.
A voiced suspicion to a friend, a shush,
and each initiate sworn in with an oath
and a prick of blood. It seems I have more friends
than the tree outside has pears. The Mermaid Club
is the name they've chosen. William Peter grinned
to tell me of its existence, share the name.

'You are the mermaid. Mythical, never seen.'

'Half girl half fish?'
'Leander, as you wrote him.
But Leander Club sounds too much linked to you.'

'And what is their purpose?'
'Build so great a myth
around the silent author of these works
that the Turnip rattles in the heart of it,
falls out like a weevil with the smallest shake.
To ensure his claim is stumped at every turn.
To keep you safe, and lift your plays so high
no flames can touch them.'

He sat on the bed
where I've lain weeks now like a sunken ship
unmoved by tide, unable to expel
the heaviness inside me. 'Honest aims,'
I said. 'What motivates them, do you think?'

‘An admiration for your work.’ His glance
alighting on all the crossings out upon
the papers at my bedside; on this play
I have so little heart for.
As I stacked
their smudgings together, ‘How do they propose
to prevent him being William Shakespeare? Given
he is?’
‘But not the author.’
‘Known to us
and the Mermaid Club. But he has passed for years.
And well enough for Heminges and Condell
to believe his inkless fingers are the source
of their meat and gravy.’ Will reached for the hand
withdrawing from him.
‘Liz!’ I called. ‘Dear Wife!’
She came, as she does. ‘We have wine in the house?’

‘It’s lunchtime. Will you eat?’
She asked so timid
I knew she expected No.
‘Perhaps some bread.
But mostly wine,’ I said, and watched her wince.

The bread came quickly. ‘Don’t forget the wine!’
I called, breaking a little off. ‘My boy,
whatever the Mermaid Club cooks up, he has
the name. We rented him like lodgings, left
my precious belongings there. And when he sees
I can’t be back to claim them, sure as cats
kill mice, they’re his by default. Ah, the wine!’

‘Stop sending him plays, then.’
‘God!’ I ruffled his hair
with violence. ‘Beautiful boy. Would that I could.
But he is my only means to reach the stage.
You think I should write, but keep my creations close?
Though pus beneath the skin builds to a boil?
I write for all the world, and he’s the tap
through whom the writing pours. You know this, Will.’

We drank. Will only to keep me company.
He fudged and flailed, said it was all in hand,
that every mind was devising measures.

Today,
he imparts the plan. Master Ben Jonson’s plan.

‘A lawyer friend of Marston’s, Thomas Greene,

will keep him in check.'
'How so?'
'He'll lodge with him
in Stratford-on-Avon.'
'What if he objects?
Or his wife does?'
'Then the fake will be revealed
for what he is without revealing you.
In Stratford, they know nothing of the claim
he is a playmaker, nor that his wealth
comes so much from the theatre, with all
the immorality the stage implies:
actors who make dishonesty an art,
pet boys, loose trulls, et cetera. He would
be ruined.'
'You're quite ruined yourself,'
I observe, of his dusty face and clothes. He feels
self-conscious then, and crosses to the bowl
of water by the window; washes skin
free of dirt the kicked up on London Road.
'Marston and Greene have drawn up documents
and he has signed them.'
'Why would he do that?'
'To protect his honour and his income. Greene
will simply ensure that nothing due to you
is passed to the Great Pretender.' Dries his hands
and pats his cheeks. 'Tell me you're pleased with this.'

'So Greene is his legal shadow?'
'Close as fug
to a beggar's armpit.'
I rise from the chair
where I've sat all morning, wrestling with a scene
that won't reveal its story.
'And yet still
he will be credited,' I say. 'His shares
in the players' company, and in the Globe
will see to that. He need not say a word
when blind assumption follows him around.'

The window shows me England, undisturbed
by my lack of recognition. June unfurls,
full of its own perfection, ripe and green.

'Assumption has kept you safe these last ten years,'
Will Peter replies. 'And we rely on it.'

He hand touches the small of my back as though
he means to push me, gently, in to swim.
In a pool of my own reality, perhaps.

I turn to him. ‘You must think me stone-headed,
repeating the story I have told to you.’
‘And do you not need reminding?’
‘Yes, I do.’

‘You must believe, you are Will Shakespeare now.
People – ’ he takes my hand, ‘they love your plays.
Your new work speaks to people with a depth
that must come from your circumstance; the pain,
perhaps, or the perspective gifted by
this exile you are forced to. Your new work –’

‘Not this new work –’ But he is undeterred.

‘The plays you have finished in these last four years
surpass for greatness all the plays yet written
If you’ve lost heart, gain heart. Believe it’s true.
The future will right this wrong,’ he says. ‘It will.
So long as your work survives, and Marlowe’s too,
posterity will see how Shakespeare blooms
out of the bud of Kit.’
I touch his face.
A frisson. A shiver. He looks to the door
as if his sister might walk in and see
our tenderness. I say, ‘It’s market day.’
A kiss as juicy as the purple cherries
my wife is haggling for.
‘Oh my,’ he breathes.
‘I’d forgotten who you were.’
‘Yes. So had I.’

Exit Stage Left

One tale before I go. A tale of drink.
A London tavern where a stranger sits
lining his guts with ale. He shouldn't be
so close to the playhouse. But the play is his,
it's mine he tells himself; this time out loud
from the look on that wench's face. He's here to feed,
to recreate those nights worn years ago
when he revelled in glory seeded from his pen,
full-grown and showering blossom on his head.
Weathering admiration. Not long now
till the groundlings enter, high on their own applause.

Another beer while he's waiting. Then, sweet joy,
they're spilling through the doors, full of his play,
rattling with the violence of the scene
where the hero dies, the mute face of the queen
as she poisons herself.
                And how he breathes it in,
leans back against the wall, closing his eyes
imagining how each word is due to him,
until he hears:
                'Eeze odd that Amlet though.
Ee shoulda killed the King two hours ago.'
The man has a nose bashed as a cobbler's awl.
The stranger's swallow sticks as the men agree,
and he contradicts them, under his hand. They hear.

He might have drunk up then, and left. But no.
Good Lady Alcohol has slipped her hand
half up his thigh, encouraging desire
to be a part of almost anything,
so no, he argues. And they argue back.
And the five of them (for there are five of them)
all hold the same opinion: he is wrong,
and they tell him so.
                'Ah ha, but you are wrong,'
(and he may have slurred a little), 'I should know.
I am the author.'

                A decade's secrecy
snuffed in the puff of a pointless argument,
as gossip said his life was.

                Idiot.

Perhaps you are surprised it took this long.
But a decade built me to the point: this snap,

this wild attempt to resurrect myself
unthought-through, yet imagined many years
through long nights painting my head's scenery
where thought played every possibility.
And now to find what's on the untried page.

'You're Shakespeare?'
'No, he's not. I've seen the man.
And he isn't fond of drinking, that I know.
He doesn't mix with the likes of us.'
'That arse
is not the author.'
Swaying like a tree
caught in a gentle westerly, I cling
to my beer-fuelled boldness. 'This is my play. My play.
I'll tell you why Prince Hamlet dithers so.
He isn't of a violent temperament.
Simple as that. Though simpletons like you
might throw a punch rather than hurt the brain
to figure something cleverer, the Prince
(I mark how you restrain him; excellent;
and you, Fist-Man, thus name yourself a clod)
the Prince of Denmark, if I may continue,
prefers a quip to murder. As all do
who value the art of thinking. (Hold him well!
I'm really not worth the bruising.) There is much
to think about, surely. Is his father's ghost
a figment of Hell? Did not the Christian God
say "vengeance is mine"? Then who is he to slay
another? Yet the urging drives him mad.
And at the same time, into a sanity
more clear than any of you will ever know.'

'Lads! Let me go!' the held-back brawler shouts
and I see a look pass through them like a breeze
that will furnish the ground with apples.
'No you don't!'
says the wench who served me, 'No more breakages.
Broken noses is one thing, broken stools
I've had enough of. Out.'
'Who me?'
'It's you,
or the five of them, and you look easier
to get to the exit. Help me, darlin, please,
come easily. It's best.'
I let myself
be coaxed from the tavern like an orphaned calf
is coaxed from its field towards the market place.

To steady me, she pulls my arm around,

and draped, faux-passionate, around her neck,
'You know I tell the truth,' I say. 'I am
the author of that play.'
'You are, you're not,
what does it matter?'
Her arm around my waist
as if she's my lover, steadying my sway
towards the door. And I, outraged, begin
my heart's defence.
'What does it matter? Why –'
I stop to concentrate upon the words
that will convince her.
'Not here, love, outside.'
She tugs at me. 'Now, darlin.'

In the snow.
We're in the snow. She is so practical,
so tiny-nosed.
'If they enjoy the play,
what does it matter?'
'That I wrote the play?'
'That they know you wrote the play. What does it matter?'

It's falling fast. She's cold. Crosses her arms
across a goose-bumped bosom. 'Anyways.
Drink's done you in. You didn't write that play.
You're soft in the head with boozing. Silly man.'
She pats my cheek. 'You're maybe clever enough.
But I've seen him, Shakespeare. Comes in now and then
when he visits London. From a country house
they say, a big one. Wears a velvet cap.'
I'm outraged, though I've broken sumptuary laws
more often than I've broken wind.
'How can
a man of so mean standing –'
'Not so mean.
He is a gentleman. Was granted arms.'

'Bought them more like.'
She squints me with an eye
expert at filling just below a pint
without attracting notice.
'That may be.
But he comes across more gentleman than you.'

'And does he boast about his plays?'

'No, no.
Umble as mumblin. Not so in his dress,
but in his manner. None of yer spouting off.'

My spouting off. The dart's not aimed at me,
but it hits the bull – what landed me right here,
in a filthy street, tipped out like so much turd
from an upper window, wrenched free of my plays,
condemned to stay anonymous Will Hall,
is my spouting off.
'You're right,' I say, 'I'm not
called William Shakespeare. That man is a fence.'
She fast objects, 'There's no offence in him!'
'A fence of the sort that keeps intruders out.
A broker of plays behind whom any man
who wishes to stay anonymous can write.
I'll tell you a secret.'
She laughs, 'I'm sure you will.
Six pints of my husband's brew would turn a priest
onto his head and rattle him upside down,
for a neighbourhood of secrets. Go on then.'

'I'm Christopher Marlowe!'
She squawks like a bird.
Folds in half where her apron strings are tied
and laughs out her disbelief until she can
stand up half-straight.
'You fool,' she laughs, 'he's dead.
And you look nothing like him, anyways.'

'What does he look like?'
'Why, a corpse!' she laughs.
'All bone and worm food. But I saw him once,
when he was alive. A young bloke. Lots of hair.
Wild in his manner. Loved to pick a fight,
I heard.'

'So I've lost my hair. And aged ten years.'
She cackles. 'Go on with you! Put on some weight
and shrunk some too.'
'Shrunk some?'
'Why certainly!
He was five or six inches taller.'
'And how old
were you, when you saw him?'
'Twelve, thirteen,' she says.
'And shorter?'
'Listen, sir,' her finger wags,
'I'm not the one who's making up this tale.
Now stop your nonsense and be off with you
or I'll call the constables.'

She'd more than call,

had she believed me. She'd have shouted, yowled,
summoned the brawlers out to hold me down
until the law came. I'd be bundled off
to prison, and the executioner.
Though often I've wished for that oblivion.

But friend, this lie we fashioned from our need
has taken sustenance, and grown, and bred.
It nests in the heart of all who gave it ears,
devouring truth, which cannot be recovered
even by shoving fingers down its throat.
The lie has fully digested me, and can't
vomit me out.

And yet, I tasted there
for the smallest moment, all my pain resolved.
Before their disbelief, before her squawk
of extraordinary laughter, for a breath I was
entirely me, and honest with the world.

How glittering a resurrection feels,
when what was gone forever is regained,
its value multiplied by loss, reclaimed.

And I shall know it more, shall write it through
in every play until I die; a prayer
that by its repetition may come true.

Again, and again, the posthumous will rise
to claim their crowns, their loves, amaze their friends,
confound their enemies, rewrite their tales.

And I will live that drama yet. I swear.

The Marlowe Papers: Notes

DEATH'S A GREAT DISGUISER
'the plague pit where Kit Marlowe now belongs' Marlowe is supposed to have been buried in an unmarked grave in the grounds of St Nicholas Church, Deptford.

CAPTAIN SILENCE
'You learnt the tongue from Huguenots?' After the Paris Massacre of 1572, Huguenot refugees flooded into southern England. Many settled in Canterbury, where Marlowe was born and spent his boyhood.

TOM WATSON
Tom Watson was a poet and playwright who wrote in Latin. A documented friend of Marlowe's, Watson was nine years his senior and a friend of **Thomas Walsingham**, first cousin once removed of **Sir Francis Walsingham**, Secretary of State, who set up the first English intelligence network to help Queen Elizabeth gauge and contain the Catholic threat.
Richard Harvey was rector at St Nicholas, Chislehurst, in Thomas Walsingham's parish.
Gabriel Harvey, his brother, was a don at Cambridge while Marlowe was a student. He published numerous references to Marlowe and quarrelled bitterly with his friend Thomas Nashe.
Lord Burghley, as Lord Treasurer one of the most powerful men in England, signed the 1587 Privy Council letter testifying that Marlowe 'had done her Majesty good service . . . in matters touching the benefit of his country'.
'my only other option was the Church' The scholarship under which Marlowe attended Cambridge for six years, graduating both BA and MA, had been bequeathed by Matthew Parker, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, and under its conditions Marlowe would have been expected to take Holy Orders.

THE LOW COUNTRIES
The Low Countries include the modern countries of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. From 1581 parts were under Spanish occupation, while others, such as the area around Flushing and nearby Middelburg, were held by the English. Protestant England had been under threat from Catholic Spain since the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, as the Spanish king, Philip II, had been made King of England and Ireland through his marriage to the previous queen, Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary.
'the daughter stumbles in/with bleeding stumps for hands' alludes to *Titus Andronicus*. The first recorded performance of this play, on 24 January 1594, suggests it was written in 1593, and though some consider it an earlier work it includes, like *The Rape of Lucrece* published in the same year, the rape and brutal silencing of a heroine.
'the silenced woman turned to nightingale' In *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia, whose hands and tongue have been removed by the rapists so she cannot identify them, points to Ovid's tale of Philomel to explain what has happened to her. Philomel was raped and her tongue cut out by her brother-in-law Tereus, but wove a tapestry to tell her story, and was transformed into a nightingale.

ARMADA YEAR
In May 1588, the Spanish Armada would set sail.

'Still hiring the horse, though' Marlowe had hired a grey gelding and tackle when first arriving in London in August 1587; a status item he clearly had problems affording. In April 1588, he borrowed money from fellow Corpus Christi alumnus Edward Elvyn and was sued for non-repayment six months later. In the same law term he was sued by the hackney man for failing to return the horse.
'who now is qualified a gentleman' Marlowe's MA gave him gentleman status, meaning, among other things, he was allowed to carry a sword.
'The execution of the Queen of Scots' Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, had been executed the previous February, after the exposure of the Babington Plot. Several people connected to Marlowe – including his patron Thomas Walsingham and the two official witnesses to his 'death' in 1593 (Robert Poley and Nicholas Skeres) – were involved in the government's framing and unmasking of this plot. The messages that had Mary executed for treason were passed through double agent Gilbert Gifford, whose name is an intriguing reversal of that of the man arrested with Marlowe in 1592.
'Tom had been writing plays for Ned for months.' Though no plays are extant, Tom Watson's employer William Cornwallis testified that devising 'twenty fictions and knaveries in a play' was his 'daily practise and his living', and Francis Meres in 1598 lists him as among 'our best for Tragedy'.

MIDDELBURG
Middelburg is adjacent to Flushing (or Vlissingen), their centres being less than five miles apart. It is here that Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores* was apparently printed – a book that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London ordered to be banned (and burnt) in 1599.
Le Doux and his trunk suggest one way in which Marlowe might have led his 'posthumous' existence. Marlovian researcher Peter Farey's discoveries among the Bacon Papers in Lambeth Palace Library include a list of books in a trunk belonging to a Monsieur Le Doux. The Bacon Papers are the papers of Anthony Bacon (brother of lawyer and philosopher Francis), a spy who lived abroad from 1579 and sent intelligence back to his uncle, Lord Burghley, and Sir Francis Walsingham. Returning to England in 1592, he became spymaster for the Earl of Essex, gathering intelligence through an international network of agents. One of these was Le Doux, who Farey and fellow Marlovian A. D.Wraight speculate was an English agent posing as a Frenchman, as other English agents, such as Anthony Standen, had done. The presence on the book list of French and Italian dictionaries, but no English one, supports this theory, as does the fact that the list, though in French, is written in English secretary hand rather than the italic hand a French writer would have used. According to the International Genealogical Index, the only occurrence of the name Le Doux in England in three hundred years (sixteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries) was in the Huguenot population of Marlowe's home town Canterbury; Louis Le Doux was more or less the same age as Marlowe and therefore a possible boyhood friend (Farey, 2000). The trunk contained numerous books identified by scholars as Shakespeare sources, and a number pertinent to Marlowe's canon. Le Doux was in Exton, Rutland, in late 1595, in London briefly in early 1596 and then abroad (Wraight, 1996), writing to Bacon for the last time from Middelburg on 22 June 1596.
'the outline of a marigold' Two different versions of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* were published in 1598. On the title page of the quarto published by Paul Linley a woodcut shows two marigolds, one open to the sun, the other closed at night, with the motto *Non Licit Exigius* which means either 'not permitted to those of mean spirit' or 'not permitted to the uninitiated'. The marigold was a flower with strong Catholic

connotations; often linked with the Virgin Mary, it was also explicitly linked with Mary Tudor (Milsom, 2010: 20).
T.T. are the initials under the mysterious 'Mr W.H.' dedication of Shake-speare's Sonnets (1609), usually taken to be Thomas Thorpe. Thorpe, it was recently discovered, worked (like Marlowe) as an intelligencer, and was connected to Catholic figures who were considered a threat to the realm. In autumn 1596, he was in Madrid as 'the guest of Father Robert Persons, the outspoken Jesuit opponent of the English government and close adviser to the Spanish' (Martin and Finnis, 2003: 4).

TAMBURLAINE THE SECOND
Robert Greene was a popular writer of romances and plays, described by the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as 'England's first celebrity author'(Newcomb, 2004).
'Alphonsus, King of Aragon' is acknowledged as one of Greene's several attempts to cash in on Marlowe's success.
Thomas Walsingham was Marlowe's senior by three or four years. He was in Paris with Tom Watson in 1581, working out of his older cousin Sir Francis Walsingham's embassy. At one point involved with intelligence operations, he was to become Marlowe's friend and patron.

HOTSPUR'S DESCENDANT
Hotspur's descendant In 1592 Marlowe claimed to be 'very well known' to Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland, also known as the Wizard Earl, a direct descendant of Henry Hotspur of *Henry IV Part I* fame. Marlowe's friend Tom Watson dedicated two works to Northumberland. The earl, who amassed a library of over two thousand books at Petworth in Sussex, visited the Low Countries in 1588. (Nicholls, 2004) His librarian, Walter Warner, was named by Thomas Kyd as an associate of Marlowe's (Nicholl, 2002: 508).
'a history play' The fashion for English history plays began with Marlowe's *Edward II* and the *Henry VI* trilogy, plays attributed to Marlowe by scholars for two hundred years until the late 1920s (Riggs, 2004: 283).

FIRST RENDEZVOUS
Venus and Adonis, registered anonymously six weeks before Marlowe's 'death', was on the bookstalls two weeks after it. It is the earliest historical record to associate the name 'William Shakespeare' with literature (and there are no theatrical records mentioning that name before this date either). Scholars recognise 'compelling links' between this poem and Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, which was not to be published for another five years (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, 2007: 21).
Richard Field, printer of *Venus and Adonis* and originally from Stratford-on-Avon, is usually referred to as a 'school friend' of Shakespeare's. He worked frequently for Lord Burghley, whose ward was the Earl of Southampton, to whom *Venus and Adonis* was dedicated.

'Let base conceited wits admire vile things./ Fair Phoebus lead me to the muses springs' is Marlowe's translation (from *Amores*) of the two-line Latin epigram on the title page of *Venus and Adonis*. This poem closes, 'Then though death racks my bones in funeral fire,/I'll live, and as he pulls me down, mount higher'.

THE FIRST HEIR OF MY INVENTION
'The first heir of my invention' is the author's description of *Venus and Adonis* in his dedication to the Earl of Southampton.

THE JEW OF MALTA
Thomas Nashe, one of the University Wits, was a writer of satirical and topical pamphlets. He, too, was educated at Cambridge, but by summer 1588 was living in London. Gabriel Harvey referred to Marlowe and Nashe as 'Aretine and the Devil's Orator'; Nashe defended Marlowe as one of his 'friends that used me like a friend'. His name appears with Marlowe's on the 1594 quarto of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.
'religion is made by men' 'That the first beginning of Religion was only to keep men in awe' This and other of Marlowe's views on religion are listed in the famous Baines Note. (See Note on 'A Slave Whose Gall Coins Slanders Like A Mint'.) Three versions of the Note exist. The transcripts of these, and other documents relating to Marlowe, can be found in Kuriyama (2002).
William Bradley In March 1588, William Bradley borrowed £14 from John Alle(y)n, inn-keeper, manager of the Admiral's Men at The Theatre, and Edward Alleyn's brother, promising to pay it back the following August. This defaulted loan caused the subsequent feud between Bradley and those associated with John Allen, including Watson, his brother-in-law Hugh Swift, and Marlowe (Eccles, 1934: 57-68).
Hugh Swift is thought to have acted as John Allen's lawyer after Bradley's loan defaulted. In autumn 1589 he was threatened by Bradley's friend George Orrell and took out a surety of the peace. A similar surety was lodged shortly after by Bradley, naming Hugh Swift, John Allen and Tom Watson.

THAT MEN SHOULD PUT AN ENEMY IN THEIR MOUTHS
'A comedy' It is a common misrepresentation of Marlowe that he couldn't be funny. We know there were comic scenes in *Tamburlaine* which the printer confessed to omitting, thinking them too frivolous for the serious subject matter. *Doctor Faustus* contains a number of comic scenes and *The Jew of Malta* can be played as a farce. There is also great deal of comedy in *Hero and Leander*. Marlowe was widely referred to as a wit, and one has only to read the accusations in the Baines Note to appreciate Marlowe in full comedic flow.
Padua was the university attended by Danish students named Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in 1596.
Chronicles *Hall's Chronicles*, chief source for the history plays.

THE UNIVERSITY MEN
Poley Robert (Robin) Poley was a key figure in the Elizabethan government's intelligence service. Described by Ben Jonson's tutor William Camden as 'very expert at dissembling', he had been instrumental in trapping the conspirators associated with the Babington Plot, which in turn led to the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.
Cornwallis William Cornwallis (not to be confused with his cousin the essayist) bought Fisher's Folly in Bishopsgate from the Earl of Oxford in autumn 1588. A suspected Catholic recusant, he was under government surveillance. Watson, appointed as the family tutor not long after his arrival in London, was likely part of this surveillance.
Arbella Stuart was first cousin to James VI of Scotland, and at this time, like him, was considered a strong contender to succeed to the throne. In spring 1589 (when her tutor 'Morley' was appointed) she was fourteen years old.

THE TUTOR
Perhaps on account of his 'bad boy' reputation, and a belief that Arbella was resident in Derbyshire when Marlowe was in London, scholars have discounted the idea of Marlowe as Arbella Stuart's tutor without thorough investigation. However, the 'Morley' described by Bess of Hardwick, the **Countess of Shrewsbury**, who was the orphaned Arbella's grandmother and guardian, in her September 1592 letter to Lord Burghley, is a better fit for Marlowe than any other proposed candidate. Writers were frequently employed in this capacity and Marlowe's experience as an 'intelligencer' would make him well suited to such a sensitive position. That he had previously been employed by the State in a matter of extreme trust is confirmed by the 1587 Privy Council letter signed by Lord Burghley and other members of the Privy Council. That the 'Morley' in question asked for forty pounds a year, complaining of being 'so much damnified by leaving of the university' and that in the very month that Marlowe was called an atheist in print the countess writes of 'withall of late having some cause to be doubtful' of the tutor's 'forwardness in religion' fits Marlowe perfectly. Marlowe's documented presence in London at points during 1589-92 does not clash with Arbella's known movements. We know that in 1589 Arbella spent much of her time in London with her aunt and uncle (Gristwood, 2003: 99) and was there with her grandmother from October 1591 to August 1592. It was only after that summer's discovery of a kidnap plot that her movements became more restricted.

THE HOG LANE AFFRAY
The most authoritative source on this incident remains Eccles's *Christopher Marlowe in London* (1934), but details can be discovered in any Marlowe biography.

LIMBO
Marlowe was in Newgate prison from 18 September to 3 December 1589. In November, just before Marlowe's release, Thomas Walsingham inherited Scadbury on the death of his brother Edmund. Watson was not released until 12 February 1590.
Sir William Stanley fought loyally for the Queen in Ireland and at the taking of Deventer in the Low Countries in 1587, but shortly afterwards handed Deventer back to the Spanish and converted to Catholicism, maintaining an 'English Regiment' loyal to the Catholic cause. He favoured his cousin Ferdinando Stanley for the throne, or Arbella Stuart, whom he planned to kidnap (Kendall, 2003: 170).
John Poole was a Catholic counterfeiter, brother-in-law to Sir William Stanley. The Baines Note tells us that Marlowe was acquainted with Poole, and that he met him while imprisoned in Newgate. For more on Poole, see Nicholl (2002: 286-98).
Ferdinando Stanley The future Earl of Derby was, until his father's death in 1593, known as Lord Strange. Marlowe claimed to be 'very well known' to him in 1592, according to Sir Robert Sidney's letter to Lord Burghley. Nashe (see Note on 'The Jew of Malta') was connected to him also, and is thought to have dedicated to him a bawdy poem known as 'Nashe's Dildo'. Strange's Men staged both late Marlowe and early Shakespeare plays.

POOLE THE PRISONER
'We're in a place the State denies exists' Limbo being a Catholic concept. The official State religion had been Protestantism since Queen Elizabeth had succeeded to the throne in 1558.

A TWIN

'never blots a word' In the *First Folio* (1623) Heminges and Condell, Shakespeare's business partners (as shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain's Men), say, 'We have scarce received from him a blot in his papers.' Ben Jonson, in a private notebook published posthumously, says 'I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing, (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, Would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech.'

'shareholder in the player's company' The first mention of William Shakespeare in connection to the theatre is a payment in the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber in March 1595 for company performances at Court during Christmas 1594. There is good evidence he was a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men but no reliable primary source to support the idea he was an actor.

'Nashe is in prison' Thomas Nashe was imprisoned for *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem* in 1593. He was helped in prison, and afterwards, by George and Elizabeth Carey, respectively the son of the Lord Chamberlain who would found Shakespeare's company The Lord Chamberlain's Men, and the sister-in-law of Lord Strange (who founded Marlowe's) (Nicholl, 2004)

NECESSITY

Thomas Kyd wrote *The Spanish Tragedy* and is considered by some to be the author of an early version of *Hamlet*, known as the *Ur-Hamlet*, on the basis of a reference by Nashe in 1589 to 'whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls of tragical speeches' just after an apparent allusion to Kyd. Kyd's first letter to Lord Keeper Puckering after his arrest in 1593 testifies that he and Marlowe were 'writing in one chamber two years since'. A version of *Hamlet* was certainly staged in 1594.

Bedlam The original Bethlehem Hospital (for the insane) was situated in Bishopsgate, directly opposite the Cornwallis house, Fisher's Folly.

'Hamlet, revenge… a fishwife's cry' Thomas Lodge in *Wits Miserie* (1596) writes of "the ghost which cried so miserably at the theatre, like an oyster-wife, Hamlet, revenge".

'Ann Watson's there' Ann Watson's brother, musician Thomas Swift, was brought up in the Cornwallis household.

THE SCHOOL OF NIGHT

The School of Night refers loosely to the free-thinkers who gravitated to the Raleigh/Northumberland circle.

Sir Walter Raleigh In an anonymous agent's report on Richard Cholmeley, Marlowe is said to have 'read the Atheist Lecture to Sir Walter Raleigh & others' (Kuriyama, 2002: 215). The Baines Note quotes Marlowe as saying that 'Moses was but a juggler, & that one Heriot being Sir Walter Raleigh's man can do more than he.'

'I have a mathematician in my pay' Thomas Harriot's connection to Marlowe is mentioned in the Baines Note, and by Kyd in his first letter to Lord Keeper Puckering. Mathematician and astronomer Harriot was employed both by Raleigh and by Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland.

'Come Live With Me and Be My Love' Raleigh famously wrote a verse response to Marlowe's lyric poem 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' entitled 'The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd'.

George Carey Second cousin to the Queen, brother-in-law of Lord Strange and Lord Chamberlain from 1597, when he followed his father as patron of Shakespeare's

company of players. His father, Lord Chamberlain Henry Carey, was son of the Queen's aunt (Mary Boleyn), and considered by some to be her half-brother, illegitimate fruit of the affair between Mary and Henry VIII.
Matthew Roydon Poet, intelligencer, an associate of Marlowe, according to Kyd.

THE BANISHMENT OF KENT
King Leir was performed at the Rose Theatre on 6 and 8April 1594, and registered for publication that May. Widely agreed as a source of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, this earlier version of the story was finally published as *The True Chronical History of King Leir and His Three Daughters* in 1605. It does not contain the sub-plot of slander revolving round Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund, or the banishment of Kent. Some scholars argue the same author wrote both versions.

TOBACCO AND BOOZE
That Marlowe did not originally say 'tobacco and boys' but rather 'tobacco and booze' was first suggested by Stewart Young (2008). The word in the Baines Note is 'boies'. 'Booze', though it sounds modern, is a variant of 'bouse' (*c*. 1300) and *OED* examples of its usage include 'bowsing'('boozing') in a 1592 pamphlet by Thomas Nashe.

BURYING THE MOOR
'Moor' was the Queen's nickname for Sir Francis Walsingham. He died on 6 April 1590 owing the Queen about £42,000, 'largely from expenditure on the Crown's business without obtaining privy seal warrants'. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, his burial at night was to avoid his creditors (Adams et al., 2009).
'the tomb of his son-in-law' Walsingham's daughter Frances was the widow of Sir Philip Sidney, courtier poet, to whose sister, the Countess of Pembroke, Marlowe was to dedicate Tom Watson's posthumous *Amintae Gaudia*. Frances Sidney née Walsingham would go on to marry the 2nd Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux.
'Phaeton' Ovid tells how Phaeton, son of the sun god Helios, obtains his father's permission to drive the sun chariot, but fails to control it, with fatal results. Marlowe references Phaeton in *Hero and Leander*, *Tamburlaine Part 2* 5.3, and *Edward II* 1.4; Shakespeare in *Henry VI Part3* 1.6 and 2.6, *Richard II* 3.3, *Romeo and Juliet* 3.2 and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* 3.1.

SOUTHAMPTON
'Why should I marry who that man decrees?' Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, was a ward of Lord Burghley, who wanted him to marry his granddaughter Lady Elizabeth Vere (neglected offspring of the Earl of Oxford). That the first seventeen of 'Shake-speares Sonnets' are addressed to the Earl of Southampton, who would turn seventeen on 6 October 1590, was first proposed by Nathan Drake (1817) and has been widely supported.

ARBELLA
The Earl of Essex Arbella Stuart had a fondness for the Earl of Essex which she continued to express for many years (Gristwood, 2003: 105-6).
'your cousin Frances had his child tucked in her belly' The birth of a son in January 1591 indicates that Essex and Lady Sidney conceived their child around the time of her father's funeral.

The Duke of Parma's son, Farnese Arbella's possible marriage to Farnese was being brokered in Flushing by Robert Poley's man Michael Moody only weeks before Marlowe's presence there. She was also linked romantically to the 9th Earl of Northumberland, and Burghley's grandson (Kendall, 2003: 170).

POISONING THE WELL

Richard Baines was an English intelligence agent who penetrated the Jesuit seminary at Rheims and was ordained as a priest during the time that Tom Watson and Thomas Walsingham were in Paris. He confided to a friend his plan to murder everyone at the seminary by poisoning the well. The friend betrayed him and he was subsequently tortured, his wrists being tied behind his back before he was suspended by them (the strappado). Boas (1949) was the first to recognise him as the model for Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*. Roy Kendall's book on Baines is invaluable in understanding his relationship with Marlowe and espionage (Kendall, 2003).

DANGER IS IN WORDS

'I go as Morley' Elizabethan names were flexible. Marlowe was known by many names including Merlin and Marlin (at Cambridge), Morley, and Marley. He is referred to as Morley on a number of official documents: the Privy Council letter of 1587, the Coroner's Inquest document, and Tom Watson and Ingram Frizer's pardons. As Sarah Gristwood observes in relation to his dual lives as intelligencer and writer, he 'managed to split the different sides of his life completely' (Gristwood, 2003: 459).

FLUSHING

Richard Cholmeley claimed that Marlowe made him an atheist. Cholmeley was 'a companion' of Thomas Drury in 1591, and arrested with him, but it seems he was subsequently released and paid for his role in turning Drury in to the authorities (Nicholl, 2002: 332).

Drury Thomas Drury describes Richard Baines as one who 'used to resort unto me', and appears to claim that it was he who procured the Baines Note, in a letter to Anthony Bacon dated 1 August 1593 (Kendall, 2003: 336).

A RESURRECTION

Gilbert Gifford, known by his alias Jaques Colerdin and his cipher '4', was a double agent who, like Baines, became a Catholic priest. He spent time at the Catholic seminaries at both Douai (during Tom Watson's time there) and at Rheims (missing Baines on several occasions, and by the smallest margin). After gaining the trust of Mary, Queen of Scots and being given the key to papal ciphers, he was instrumental in unravelling the Babington Plot. His death in a Paris gaol is supported by the scantiest of evidence: in a letter dated November 1591 from Henry Walpole, Jesuit chaplain to Sir William Stanley's regiment. Two months later 'Gifford Gilbert' appears in Flushing in the company of agents Marlowe and Baines (Kendall, 2003: 144-51).

THE FATAL LABYRINTH OF MISBELIEF

'I've as much right to coin as the Queen of England' Marlowe was quoted as saying this in the Baines Note.

Governor Sidney Sir Robert Sidney, brother of the dead courtier, soldier and poet Sir Philip Sidney, and of Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, was governor of Flushing in 1592.

BETRAYED
'To see the goldsmith's cunning' The reason for the counterfeiting that Marlowe gave to Sir Robert Sidney, as stated in his letter to Lord Burghley dated 26 January 1592, where other details of this conversation appear.

RETURNED TO THE LORD TREASURER
'the Strand' Cecil House, Lord Burghley's London home, was an imposing house in the Strand.

COLLABORATION
'My play' *Henry VI Part I* is widely considered to be co-authored, and somewhat of a mess. F. G. Fleay (1875) argued the authors were Marlowe, Greene, Peele and an unknown writer of limited skill, whom A. D. Wraight identifies as Edward Alleyn (Wraight, 1993: 251-76).
'the Crow' Despite a well-established belief that the 'upstart Crow' in Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* alludes to William Shakespeare, there are good reasons to believe it actually refers to the actor Edward Alleyn (Pinksen, 2009). That actors take precedence over writers in the public's mind is at the heart of Greene's complaint. Plays were associated with theatre companies, not their authors, and the line Greene quotes from *Henry VI Part III* would evoke in his readers' minds not the unknown author but the actor who played the part. In the main text of *Groatsworth*, Roberto (whom Greene identifies with himself) meets a 'substantial' Player, who asks Roberto to write for him, promising he will be well-paid. In 1592, readers would have recognised this wealthy Player 'thundering on the stage' as Edward Alleyn, chief shareholder and manager of Lord Strange's men. Greene wrote for Alleyn. In a letter following the main text, Greene reports he is now dying from poverty, and urges fellow playwrights Marlowe, Nashe and George Peele not to trust actors, 'those Puppets . . . that speak from our mouths', and in particular one 'upstart Crow' who believes himself 'as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you', this last phrase aimed specifically at Marlowe. From April to June 1592, Lord Strange's men were performing *Tambercam,* a probable rip-off of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine:* Phillip Henslowe, buying it from Alleyn in 1602, refers to it uniquely as 'his book'. Thus converging lines of evidence identify Alleyn as Greene's singular target: the Player and upstart Crow who imagined he could write, left his writers to die in poverty after benefiting from their talents, and was 'in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country'.

THE SCHOOL OF ATHEISM
'An anonymous agent' Richard Verstegen is believed to be the author of *An advertisement written to a secretarie of my L. Treasurers of Ingland, by an Inglishe intelligencer as he passed throughe Germanie towardes Italie* (1592), a condensed version of Jesuit Robert Persons's *Responsio.* The attack, focused on Lord Burghley, accused Sir Walter Raleigh of running a 'school of atheism'.
'teach scholars to spell God backward' This claim, directed at the 'school of atheism' in *An advertisement,* can be read as a reference to *Doctor Faustus*: 'Within this circle is Jehovah's name,/Forward and backward anagrammatiz'd' (Act I scene iii). Marlowe was thus implicated in this dangerous public accusation of atheism.

HOLYWELL STREET

Holywell Street Robert Greene died in the house of one Mistress Isham in Dowgate, but he had previously fathered a son with the prostitute Em Ball. He seems to have fallen out with her by the time he was approaching death but Marlowe's biographer Mark Eccles notes the possibility that 'Greene was staying in Holywell, where his mistress lived, at the same time that Marlowe was bound over to keep the peace toward the constables of Holywell Street in May 1592' (1934: 126). Less than five months later, and following Verstegen's tentative allusion to Marlowe's atheism in *An advertisement*, Greene was the first to finger Marlowe as an atheist in a direct and identifiable manner (in *Groatsworth of Wit*).

A GROATSWORTH OF WIT

'Greene's Groatsworth of Wit' – and despite the current scholarly consensus it is almost certainly Greene's rather than Chettle's (Westley, 2006) – was registered on 20 September 1592, seventeen days after Greene's death. Gabriel Harvey shows familiarity with the contents as early as 8 September, so it may have been published before this.

'St Paul's' The area around St Paul's churchyard was the centre of the publishing trade, full of stationers and booksellers. Thomas Kyd, Thomas Thorpe, Gabriel Harvey and Sir John Davies all speak of it as one of Marlowe's haunts.

'Thom Nashe was gone to spy on the Church' Nashe, in a secretarial capacity, was staying with Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift at his palace in Croydon.

'A priest' A reference to Robert Parson's *Responsio*.

THE COBBLER'S SON

Corkine On Friday 15 September, just below the Chequers Inn, Canterbury, Marlowe attacked the tailor William Corkine with a stick and dagger. He was bailed by his father, John. In October the case was dropped by mutual consent (Urry, pp.65-8).

A SLAVE WHOSE GALL COIN SLANDERS LIKE A MINT

'There is a note' The dating of **'**A note Containing the opinion of one Christopher Marley Concerning his Damnable Judgment of Religion, and scorn of gods word' is uncertain. The carefully edited final version endorsed 'as sent to her H' says it was 'delivered on Whitsun eve last', but this date (2 June 1593), falling after Marlowe's apparent death, would make the Note (and its two carefully altered versions) pointless. Drury was sent to 'stay one Mr Baines' as a condition of his release from prison the previous November. He writes of delivering to Lord Keeper Puckering and Lord Buckhurst (Whitgift allies) 'the notablist and vilest articles of atheism that I suppose the like were never known or read of in any age', saying the Note was 'delivered to her Highness and command given by herself to prosecute it to the full' (Kendall, 2003: 336). Most scholars, assuming error rather than deliberate obfuscation, assign the Note a delivery date of 26 May, a week before the 'Whitsun eve' declared, but it may have been in existence much earlier. Historians of Chislehurst in the nineteenth century stated that the Baines Note was the reason for Marlowe's retreat to Scadbury, and Tucker Brooke arrived independently at the possibility that the Baines Note preceded the arrest warrant of 18 May (Kendall, 2003: 308, 281). Gabriel Harvey (a contemporary of Baines who was with him at Christ's College Cambridge for five years) thanks an unnamed person for 'his invaluable Note, that could teach you to achieve more with the little finger of Policy, than you can possibly compass with the mighty arm of Prowess' and paraphrases the Baines Note's first line, in a letter dated 27 April (Barber, 2009).

'To Scotland where your friend went' Thomas Kyd said of Marlowe 'He would persuade with men of quality to go unto the King of Scots whether I hear Royden is gone and where if he had lived he told me when I saw him last he meant to be.' Roydon had left for Scotland some time after 26 April 1593 (Nicholl, 2002: 312).

THE PLOT

'the Verge' was defined as an area within twelve miles of the Queen's person. Any killing occurring within the Verge would be handled by the Queen's Coroner.

Ingram Frizer, a loyal servant of the Walsingham family, often acted as their business agent. After apparently killing Christopher Marlowe he received the Queen's pardon with unusual swiftness (in one month). He was doing business for Thomas Walsingham the next day and remained in the family's service until his death. On the accession of King James I in 1603 he was granted numerous leases in reversion on Crown lands (Bakeless, 1942: 1: 165).

Nicholas Skeres was a minor player in the Babington Plot, a business partner of Ingram Frizer (in conning gullible young gentlemen out of their money) and had loaned money to Matthew Roydon.

WHITGIFT

John Whitgift In 1593 the Archbishop of Canterbury and his supporters on the Privy Council had growing influence on the Queen, and were in conflict with Lord Burghley (now ageing and in ill-health) over the prosecution of religious dissenters. Peter Farey has recently argued that Marlowe's disappearance – which would be unlikely to succeed without official sanction - was essentially a compromise between those members of the Privy Council who wished to keep him in the service of the nation (Burghley, Essex) and those who wished him prosecuted for atheism (Whitgift, Puckering). A faked death not only allowed him to be silenced and controlled but to be paraded by the Church as an example of the punishment God would inflict upon sinners. Puckering's involvement in the cover-up may be read from the fact that amendments to the Baines Note, including the alteration of 'sudden and violent death' to the more equivocal 'sudden and fearful end of his life', are in his hand (Nicholl, 2002: 323). Whitgift's knowledge of it may be indicated by the fact that he personally signed the licence for *Venus and Adonis* when it was 'relatively unusual' for him to do so (Duncan-Jones, 2009: 743), and from his subsequent suppression (through the Bishops' Ban of 1599) of works where doubts about the identity of Shakespeare were aired.

FLY, FLYE AND NEVER RETURNE

The title is from a line in the Dutch Church Libel. This poem in iambic pentameter, posted on the wall of a Dutch churchyard on 5 May 1593, 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'.

Walter Raleigh spoke against the Dutchmen In late March 1593, Raleigh was 'the lone voice of dissent' in opposing a House of Commons Bill to extend trade privileges to immigrant (largely Dutch) merchants (Nicholl, 2002: 358-9). Government policy was to welcome the immigrants on the grounds they were Protestants. Raleigh and Marlowe were connected to each other, and to atheism, in government documents.

KYD'S TRAGEDY

'They arrest my former room mate' With Marlowe being absent from London, the direct result of the Dutch Church Libel was the arrest (and, probably, torture) of his former room-mate, Thomas Kyd (Freeman, 1973).
'Some lines against the Trinity' The papers contained anti-Trinitarian arguments similar to the tenets of Arianism that had been published openly four decades earlier in John Proctor's *The Fall of the Late Arian* (1549).
'from the fact he set inquisitors on me' Kyd's letter and note to Puckering were written when he believed Marlowe was already dead. (He says, in Latin, 'the dead do not bite'). That 'the ignorant suspect me guilty of the former shipwreck' suggests he was being blamed for what happened to Marlowe.

BY ANY OTHER NAME
'Machevil' The spelling favoured in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*: 'Make evil'.
'It's Marlowe on the warrant' The Domestic State Papers record it as 'Marlow'. On his appearance before the Privy Council two days later, he is 'Marley'.

DRAKES
'Death's a great disguiser' In *Measure For Measure* 4.2, Claudio, who has been sentenced to death, is saved when Duke Vicenzio suggests substituting the head of the executed prisoner Barnardine for his. When the Provost objects that Angelo has seen them both and will discover the switch, Vicenzio says "O, death's a great disguiser; and you may add to it. Shave the head, and tie the beard; and say it was the desire of the penitent to be so bared before his death: you know the course is common."

A PASSPORT TO RETURN
'A pair of poems' *Venus and Adonis* (Shakespeare), *Hero and Leander* (Marlowe).
'the telling scene embroidered on the sleeve of Hero's dress' Marlowe describes "Her wide sleeves green, and bordered with a grove,/Where Venus in her naked glory strove/To please the careless and disdainful eyes/Of proud Adonis, that before her lies."

DEPTFORD STRAND
'Come from The Hague' Robert Poley was carrying urgent letters from The Hague, yet inexplicably delayed their delivery by ten days. For two of those days, the so-called 'feast' on 30 May, and the inquest on 1 June, he was in Deptford. A payment to Poley covering 8 May to 8 June states explicitly that he was in the Queen's service 'all the aforesaid time'.
John Penry was 'one of the most important martyrs of Congregationalism'. The possibility that John Penry's corpse was substituted for Marlowe's was first suggested by David A. More (More, 1997). Sentenced to death on 25 May, Penry was executed at St Thomas-a-Watering, two miles from Deptford, on 29 May. His body is unaccounted for, but would have been within the control of Queen's Coroner William Danby, who conducted Marlowe's inquest (Farey, 2007).

THE GOBLET
If Marlowe's detractor is the same Richard Baines who was hanged at Tyburn in 1594, as Kendall argues persuasively, the parallels between his case and the cup-stealing scene in *Doctor Faustus* between Robin and Dick smack of something more than coincidence, strongly suggesting the scene is a post-1594 addition. Richard can be shortened to 'Dick' and Robert Poley was often called 'Robin'. In *Doctor Faustus*, Robin gets Dick to hold the cup while he is searched (Kendall, 2003: 322-8).

No benefit of clergy. He was hanged Ben Jonson, on killing a man, escaped execution through 'benefit of clergy', the ability to recite from memory Psalm 51 (referred to as 'neck verse'). The Richard Baines hanged at Tyburn was found guilty of robbery (a crime for which one couldn't plead benefit of clergy) rather than burglary (for which one could); the distinction being that the victims were present in the property when the theft took place.

THE HOPE
'the Phoenix' An emblem commonly associated with Queen Elizabeth I, possibly after the Phoenix portrait by Nicholas Hilliard (*c*. 1575).

SICKENING
'Even to be accused of heresy' Leading legal adviser to Archbishop Whitgift, Richard Cosin, had published *Apology of sundry proceedings by Jurisdiction Ecclesiastical*, a 700-page defence of ex-officio oaths, by April 1593. In it, Cosin explains that against 'a grievous crime' such as heresy or atheism, a judge has the power to proceed even without evidence (Shagan, 2004: 559).

MONTANUS
Pietro Montanus Peter Farey has explored a number of possible Marlowe aliases in addition to Louis Le Doux. One of these is Montanus. On 9 May 1595, someone calling himself Pietro Montanus arrived in London, ill and without funds. He had entered the country using a forged passport, which alleged he was a French servant of Anthony Bacon. Bacon looked after him while he was ill. On 15 and 23 March, he wrote two letters (in Latin) to an espionage agent of Lord Burghley, Peter Edgcombe, in which he complains he has not been supplied with the provisions, money and safe conduct he was promised. He speaks not only of his illness, but of his 'great calamity'. Farey notes that in *Hamlet*, the original name of the man sent by Polonius to spy on Laertes was not Reynaldo but Montano (Farey, 2000). Anthony Bacon's documented connection to Marlowe begins with Thomas Drury's letter to Bacon two months after the Deptford incident. Le Doux is associated with Bacon throughout 1595-6, and the Bacon Papers contain several letters from and about Le Doux in this period.

BISHOPSGATE STREET
Bishopsgate Street Anthony Bacon rented a house in Bishopsgate Street, almost next door to the Bull Inn, and within easy reach of the theatres of Shoreditch, from April or May 1594 until September 1595 when he moved to a suite of rooms in Essex House (Du Maurier, 2007: 131, 154).

MADAME LE DOUX
The Earl of Derby's death Ferdinando Stanley died 16 April 1594 after a mysterious illness. It was widely suspected he had been poisoned after informing the government of a Catholic plot intended to place him on the English throne. After his death, key figures from his acting company formed the Lord Chamberlain's Men.
'He comes to London only twice a year' Despite the sustained myth of his deep involvement in the day-to-day business of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, there is little evidence to support William Shakespeare's continuous presence in London (where his lodgings were of a temporary nature) and much that argues against it.

INTERVAL

The Earl of Rutland Friend of the Earl of Southampton and, with him, an avid theatregoer, Rutland was at Padua University at the same time as two students named Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
'through his kin' 'Kin'here is loosely defined, since the reference is to Southampton's guardian, Lord Burghley, for whom Marlowe and the printer Richard Field both appear to have worked.

A CHANGE OF ADDRESS
Sir John Harington, of Exton, Rutland, was first cousin to Sir Philip Sidney (the soldier poet, first husband of Sir Francis Walsingham's daughter), Sir Robert (governor of Flushing) and their sister Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, to whose sons Shakespeare's *First Folio* was dedicated in 1623. His daughter Lucy married at fourteen to become Countess of Bedford.
Burley on the Hill Le Doux arrived at Burley in October 1595 and remained there until 25 January 1596 when he left with Sir John Harington.

HOW RICHARD II FOLLOWED RICHARD III
Posthumous is the unusual given name of the hero of *Cymbeline*, a man of low birth but high personal merit, who is banished from the kingdom for exceeding his station. It was also the name of the first cousin who connected Anthony Bacon to the Haringtons.

NOTHING LIKE THE SUN
Jaques Petit Anthony Bacon's Gascon servant Petit was to arrive at Burley on 10 December 1595. The woman known as Ide du Vault, appointed as governess to Harington's small daughter, had preceded him.
Ide du Vault/Madame Vallereine The woman depicted here as the Sonnets' Dark Lady was indeed known by both names. She signs her name 'du Vault' on her letters, but they are endorsed as being from 'Madame Vallereine'. In one of his letters, Jaques Petit refers to her as Ide du Vault and in another plays on both names by calling her Miss-worth-nothing (Mzel Vaultrein). (Wraight, 1996).
'ruined nun' Petit says du Vault is a defrocked nun. He refers to her as '*la nonain*' but also calls her a whore.

WILL HALL
Unconfirmed evidence of an agent named 'Will Hall' is reported but not referenced in *The Shakespeare Conspiracy* (Phillips and Keatman, 1994). Hall's first appearance in the records is allegedly recorded in Canterbury in 1592 in connection with writer and intelligencer Anthony Munday. A payment to 'Hall and Wayte' for carrying messages to the Low Countries was supposedly made on 19 March 1596. (It is a William Wayte who takes out a surety of the peace against one William Shakespeare in November of the same year.) On October 1601 'Willm Halle' returns with intelligence from Denmark. The Sonnets' dedication famously begins, 'TO THE ONLIE BEGETTER OF THESE ENSUING SONNETS MR W.H. ALL HAPPINESSE' and Donald Foster has demonstrated that 'begetter' at this time is, with one deliberate exception that plays on the convention, always a reference to the author. Foster's solution is that 'W.H.' is a typo for 'W.SH.'(Foster, 1987). A solution suggested by Peter Farey is that the author is at this point going by the name of Will Hall (Farey, 2000).

MY TRUE LOVE SENT TO ME

'Pembroke's Men to come from London with a play' The Earl of Pembroke's men played *Titus Andronicus* at Burley on the Hill during the Christmas Le Doux was there. Reporting on the Christmas festivities in January 1596, Petit notes that 'the tragedy of Titus Andronicus' was played, adding 'but the performance was better than the subject matter'.

HAL

Ganymede in Greek myth was abducted by Zeus to be cup-bearer to the gods, and his sexual plaything. Zeus also seduced women.

THE AUTHORS OF SHAKESPEARE

'A lawyer playwright' A reference to John Marston who, with Joseph Hall in various publications from 1597-8, discussed an author they nicknamed Labeo, whom Marston implies is the author of *Venus and Adonis*. He identifies Labeo with a heraldic motto used exclusively by Francis and Anthony Bacon, 'Mediocra Firma'. H. N. Gibson, who argued against a range of authorship candidates in his book *The Shakespeare Claimants*, calls this 'the one piece of evidence in the whole Baconian case that demands serious consideration' (Gibson, 1962: 63). All copies of the books in which Marston and Hall discussed 'Labeo' were subsequently ordered to be burnt by Archbishop Whitgift and the Bishop of London (1599).

'Picks up a play from Bacon' On 25 January 1595 – incidentally the day that Le Doux left Burley – Francis Bacon wrote to his brother Anthony from Twickenham Lodge 'I have here an idle pen or two, specially one that was cozened, thinking to have gotten some money this term; I pray send me somewhat else for them to write out besides your Irish collection which is almost done' (Cockburn, 1998: 147). Cockburn says 'Bacon evidently had several young men at the Lodge doing copying work for him' (148). That Francis Bacon (or his scribes) had possession of several Shakespeare works, including *Richard II* and *Richard III*, is supported by The Northumberland Manuscript (164-183). On this mixed inventory of works from 1595-7, the name 'William Shakespeare' is scribbled repeatedly as if for practice. No play was published under the name 'William Shakespeare' until *Richard II* and *Richard III* in 1598. The *First Folio* comments of Heminges and Condell regarding blotless manuscripts make it clear that they only received fair copies of the plays, and that this was unusual.

'verse fit only for light fires' Oxford's talent in the poetic arts can be determined from examples of his work at http://www.elizabethanauthors.com/oxfordpoems.htm

MR DISORDER

On 14 December 1595, Petit complains that Christmas is the cause of 'much vain expense' for 'des tragedies & jeux de Mr le desodre': the tragedies and games of Mr Disorder.

IN DISGRACE WITH FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES

'letters for two friends in London' Ide du Vault wrote two letters dated 24 January 1595, one to Jean Castol, minister of the French Church in London and friend of Anthony Bacon, the other to a Madame Vilegre. Le Doux was to be the carrier. Someone copied both letters on to a single sheet of paper and sent these copies to Bacon.

THE EARL OF ESSEX

'cousin of the Queen' The maternal great-grandmother of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, was Mary Stafford, née Boleyn, elder sister of the Queen's mother, Anne.

1 'a memo' Essex issued Le Doux with a passport on 10 February 1596 and another a month later (Wraight, 1996: 55-6). A document headed 'Memoires Instructives' (LPL MS 656 f.186) details what the Earl of Essex expects from his new agent on the Continent. He is particularly keen for intelligence from Italy. Intimate first-hand knowledge of certain Italian cities has long been one of the arguments against the man traditionally attributed with the authorship of the Shakespeare plays and poems. The author's detailed knowledge of a fresco in the northern Italian town of Bassano, as revealed by passages in *Othello*, has led one scholar to propose recently that he *must* have visited Italy (Prior, 2008).

'a seal' In the Manuscripts section of the British Library, Peter Farey found a seal, identified by the Library as sixteenth century, bearing the name Louis Le Doux. It depicts a man in Elizabethan dress, in all respects normal except his face is covered by a blank mask.

MERRY WIVES

'some scraps of me' In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Act III scene i) the verse that Sir Hugh Evans sings to cheer himself up is from Marlowe's 'A Passionate Shepherd to His Love': 'Mercy on me! I have a great dispositions to cry,' he says, and on a second attempt, mixes Marlowe's poem with words based on Psalm 137, 'By the rivers of Babylon', which Farey points out is 'perhaps the best known song of exile ever written.' Sir Hugh also mangles 'fragrant' to 'vagram', perhaps as close to 'vagrant' as the author dares. Further details in Chapter 5 of *A Deception At Deptford* (Farey, 2000).

IN THE THEATRE OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

The Theatre of God's Judgments was a bestselling tract by Thomas Beard, detailing the punishments God metes out to heretics, atheists and blasphemers. First published in 1597, it was reprinted several times over the next fifty years**.**

A KIT MAY LOOK AT A KING

'Burghley is dead' William Cecil died on 4 August 1598.

'working for the French' A letter dated 28 October 1598 reveals a man named Le Doux is working for Lord Buzenval, French ambassador at The Hague, carrying messages and money between him and the King, Henri IV, in Paris. Le Doux continued travelling between the two for the next eleven months, spending marked periods with the King (Gamble, 2009).

'France signed peace with Spain' In a diplomatic move, the Protestant Henri IV had converted to Catholicism in 1593, saying, 'Paris is well worth a mass'. On 2 May 1598 he signed a peace treaty with Spain to the dismay of the English. The money he was sending to Lord Buzenval, however, appears to have been in support of Dutch resistance against Spanish occupation.

'Navarre' The King had formerly been the King of Navarre, and Anthony Bacon had formed a strong friendship with him during his twelve years in France (1580-92). The inexplicably detailed references to the court of Navarre contained in *Love's Labours Lost* include the pointed caricature (as Don Armado) of a man both Anthony Bacon and Henri IV knew well, Antonio Perez. Le Doux mentions both Perez and Edmund Walsingham (Thomas Walsingham's brother) in a letter to Bacon dated 20 April 1596. Two and a half years later, a man named Le Doux is in direct contact with the former King of Navarre (Gamble, 2009).

'Wittenburg' The real-life Faustus attended this university, as did Shakespeare's Hamlet.
'he is announced' The Earl of Southampton had arrived at the Paris embassy in April 1598 and remained there until November, bar a short return to England in August to marry Elizabeth Vernon, a cousin of the Earl of Essex whom he had impregnated. Le Doux delivered a letter to the French king in late October 1598.
'She's in the Fleet' Queen Elizabeth, always outraged when one of her maids of honour got married without her permission (and especially when they got pregnant) had imprisoned her.

A ROSE
'some sixteen years ago' The anonymous author of *Ulysses upon Ajax* (1596) speaks of 'witty Tom Watson's jests, I heard them in Paris 14 years ago', putting Watson there in 1582.
'It's said you died blaspheming' This myth began with Beard (1597).
Ned Blount Edward Blount published Marlowe's unfinished *Hero and Leander* (1598) with a dedication to the recently knighted Sir Thomas Walsingham describing Marlowe as **'**the man, that hath been dear unto us'. The other 1598 edition, published by Paul Linley, in which George Chapman had completed the poem and broken it into sestiads, also carried the dedication from Blount to Walsingham, in this version signed only with the initials E.B. Thorpe addresses Blount as Marlowe's friend in a letter accompanying Marlowe's translation of *Lucan's First Book* (1600). Blount was also publisher of the *First Folio* (1623).
George Chapman completed Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and published it in 1598 with a dedication to Thomas Walsingham's wife Audrey, contributing more lines than Marlowe had written and altering the structure.

CHAPMAN'S CURSE
'fresh from communing with the spirit world'

> 'Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
> Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?' Sonnet 86.

It was chiefly these lines that caused a number of scholars, starting with William Minto in 1874, to identify George Chapman as the Rival Poet. Chapman claimed to have been visited by the spirit of Homer while writing his translation of *The Iliad,* published the same year. The chief reason this identification was not ratified was that no connection could be found between George Chapman and William Shakespeare.

KNIVES
'The first scene goes to a rabble rousing cobbler' The Second Citizen steals *Julius Caesar* 1.1 with a number of cobbling witticisms.
'Later a poet's murdered by mistake' In *Julius Caesar* 3.3, roused by Mark Anthony's speech, citizens set upon Cinna the poet, believing him to be Cinna the conspirator. He says he is Cinna the poet but they kill him anyway: "Tear him for his bad verses!"

CONCERNING THE ENGLISH
'I'm falling sick' On 24 September 1599 Essex set sail from Ireland against the Queen's express command; his decision to do so would have been taken days earlier. On 25 September 1599, Buzanval writes to King Henri IV, 'I will shortly send you Le Doux who has been here three days, unwell.'

'Cecil' Lord Treasurer Burghley's son, Robert Cecil, now a privy councillor.

ORSINO'S CASTLE, BRACCIANO
Orsino Duke Orsino's seat was a castle at Bracciano, in a mountainous region north of Rome. Inspired by Leslie Hotson's work on *Twelfth Night*, A. D. Wraight speculated that Marlowe may have spent some time there around 1600 (Wraight, 1994: 369-423).
'Oh, you will like it' *As You Like It,* where all the central characters are living in exile, contains a discussion of *Hero and Leander*, of the 'feigning' nature of poets, and a allusion to Marlowe's death (paraphrasing a line from his *Jew of Malta*) that reveals inside knowledge. (That the dispute resulting in Marlowe's apparent death was supposed to have been over 'the reckoning' (the bill) was not in the public domain until 1925. All early commentaries from Beard onwards gave different and conflicting causes.)
'A stupid William' The exchange in Act V scene i between William, Touchstone and Audrey – characters not present in the source story – is a curious one. The self-confessed unlearned William is recognised by scholars to be a parody of the Stratford-born William Shakespeare, but if it is a self-parody, Touchstone's reaction to him is inexplicably vicious. Touchstone, whose name symbolises a reference point against which other things can be evaluated, tells Audrey that William 'lays claim' to her and tells William 'that drink, being pour'd out of a cup into a glass, by filling the one doth empty the other; for all your writers do consent that *ipse* is he: now, you are not *ipse*, for I am he'. (*Ipse* = 'he himself'.) Touchstone is determined to marry Audrey (whom Wraight suggests stands for the Audience) and threatens to kill William 'a hundred and fifty ways' if he doesn't 'abandon' his claim to her. *As You Like It* was registered in 1600, but its publication was stayed until 1623.

GHOST
'Kyd's fishwife tale' See Note on the *Ur-Hamlet* in 'Necessity'.
'the speech from Dido Queen of Carthage' The speech recounting Priam's slaughter of which Hamlet makes so much in front of the Players (and of which Polonius comments, 'This is too long') is in imitation of an even longer speech by Aeneas on the same subject in Marlowe's earliest play.

IN PRAISE OF THE RED HERRING
'red herring' Thomas Nashe's final prose work, *Lenten Stuff* (1599), is also known as *The praise of the red herring.*
'no one's seen Thom Nashe's corpse, or grave' Nashe disappears around 1601. Two epitaphs appear that year, but we have no idea when or where he died, or in what circumstance. He was thirty-three.

T.T. & W.H.
'Bedlam is reserved for any maniac who makes that claim' Thanks are due to Peter Farey for this excellent suggestion on how the secret of Marlowe's faked death could be enforced by the State. There is a long history of Shakespeare sceptics being accused of (or even committed for) insanity, and that this might have begun in the late sixteenth century seems entirely possibly, given the level of State suppression at the time. Committal to Bedlam in the early 1600s was a threat not to be considered lightly.

TWELFTH NIGHT

Leslie Hotson suggested *Twelfth Night* was written to celebrate the visit of Duke Orsino to London in early 1601. A. D. Wraight developed a Marlovian version of this theory, speculating that the author might have been present, perhaps disguised as a Moor.
'As Thorpe said' In the letter that fronts Marlowe's translation of Lucan, published in 1600, Thorpe addresses Marlowe's publisher thus: 'Blount: I purpose to be blunt with you, and out of my dullness to encounter you with a Dedication in the memory of that pure elemental wit, Chr[istopher] Marlow; whose ghost or Genius is to be seen walk[ing] the Churchyard in (at the least) three or four sheets. Me thinks you should presently look wild now, and grow humorously frantic upon the taste of it.'
'And did they meet?' Orthodox scholars assume Shakespeare was frequently at Court. However, there is no evidence to support the idea that Shakespeare performed at Court or met the Queen. Indeed, Diana Price has demonstrated he was in Stratford on several key occasions when the Lord Chamberlain's Men were performing at Court (Price, 2001: 32-35). In payments for court performances, his name is only once recorded among those of other company shareholders.

AN EXECUTION
Following his bursting in on the Queen, unwigged and ungowned, when he returned unbidden from Ireland, the Earl of Essex was ordered to remain in his own house. He remained there from October 1599 to August 1600. Though his freedom was then granted, his basic source of income had been stopped and the Queen would not allow his presence at Court. The earl grew increasingly desperate, and on 8 February 1601, supported by a party of nobles and gentlemen, he marched from Essex House into the City in an attempt to force an audience with the Queen. He was opposed and forced back to his house, where he eventually surrendered. On 19 February 1601, he was tried for treason. On 25 February 1601, he became the last person to be beheaded in the Tower of London.

WILLLIAM PETER
Elsinore *Hamlet* was written some time between 1599 and 1602. Between the publication of the first and second quarto, Danish 'flavour' was added, according to John Michell (1996: 221). As noted above, William Hall was supposedly paid for returning from Denmark with intelligence on 2 October 1601.

ELSINORE
'brother-in-law of our most wanted James' James VI of Scotland was married to Anne, sister of the Danish king. The Earl of Essex had been a strong supporter of James's succession to the English throne. After Essex's execution, there was concern that James would forcibly depose Queen Elizabeth with the help of his Danish brother-in-law's army.

I LIE WITH HIM
'The baby boy is dead' Christian IV of Denmark (1577-1648) had seven children with his first wife, Anne Catherine of Brandenburg. The first two of these died in infancy, including an unnamed son who was born and died in 1601.

LIZ
'The week the old Queen died' Queen Elizabeth I died on 24 March 1603. We know nothing of the marriage of Will Peter's sister Liz. But one of the curious anomalies in that privately printed poem *A Funeral Elegy*, which claims to be by one 'W.S.' but is now attributed to John Ford, is its statement that the coyly referenced 'subject of this verse' had been married for nine years when John Ford was well placed to know that the putative subject, William Peter of Whipton near Exeter, had only been married for three. Thus is drawn into a Marlovian framework the possibility daringly suggested by Richard Abrams; that even though *A Funeral Elegy* is not written by Shakespeare, it may be *about* him (Abrams, 2002).

IAGO
'A friend will ask a friend' On 28 March 1603 Francis Bacon wrote a letter to lawyer and writer John Davies – apparently the John Davies, later to be knighted, whose epigrams had been published alongside Marlowe's translation of *Amores*. Davies was riding north to meet the new king, James, as he travelled from Scotland to London. Bacon closes with the phrase 'So desiring you to be good to all concealed poets'. Baconians assume this is a reference to Francis himself but there is no necessity for it be self-referential, and nothing supports the idea that Francis Bacon possessed any capacity for writing verse (though his brother Anthony did). Bacon's biographer Spedding said 'the allusion to 'concealed poets' I cannot explain' (Cockburn, 1998: 14-15).

A NEVER WRITER, TO AN EVER READER. NEWS.
The title is copied from an open letter attached to the 1609 quarto of *Troilus and Cressida*, published, like the Sonnets in the same year, by George Eld.

THE MERMAID CLUB
'Shake-speare' The frequent hyphenation of Shakespeare's name is not, as is sometimes claimed, due to the requirements of kerning fonts (the need to separate the tails of a long *k* and a long *s*) since the name is often hyphenated in the absence of them and also left unhyphenated at times when they are present. Its frequent hyphenation in early texts is highly unusual when compared with the treatment of other names, and it has never been satisfactorily explained.
Thomas Greene No relation to Robert Greene. A writer and lawyer whom John Marston and his father sponsored to enter the Middle Temple in 1595. Greene was appointed steward of Stratford-on-Avon in August 1603, and is believed to have lived with the Shakespeare family at New Place from 1603 to 1611 (Newdigate, 1941: 200). A published poet himself, whose works include a sonnet praising Michael Drayton, he shows no awareness of his host's reputation as a writer, and though he keeps a diary, and the Sonnets were published during his stay at New Place, he makes no mention of it. Nor does he comment on William Shakespeare's death in 1616 (though he mentions the deaths of others) (Jiminez, 2008). However, he appears to have taken that event as a cue to resign his clerkship, sell the Stratford house he had moved into in 1611, and go to live in Bristol (Fripp, 1928: 58-60).

Appendix A: Marlowe as Shakespeare's Progenitor

For the following collection of quotations, I am indebted to Daryl Pinksen, who collected them for the International Marlowe Shakespeare Society website.

Of greater significance than the point at which the sense of emulation emerges as documentable evidence is 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, Robert. 2007. Shakespeare's Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry. Hampshire England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.p.8

When Marlowe is writing like this [in *Tamburlaine*] he bears comparison with Shakespeare in his finest flights of rhetoric – the battle speeches of *Henry V*, the eloquence of Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar* or of Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*.
Wells, Stanley. 2006. Shakespeare and Co. London: Allen Lane (an imprint of Penguin Books). p.84

That he was mightily impressed and influenced by Marlowe is not in doubt; it is also clear that in his earliest plays Shakespeare stole or copied some of his lines, parodied him, and generally competed with him. Marlowe was the contemporary writer that most exercised him. . . . He haunts Shakespeare's expression, like a figure standing by his shoulder.
Ackroyd, Peter. 2005. Shakespeare:The Biography. Vintage Books: London p.140

Shakespeare almost certainly saw [*Tamburlaine*], and he probably went back again and again, … from its effect upon his early work, it appears to have had upon him an intense, visceral, indeed life-transforming impact.
Greenblatt, Stephen. 2004. Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company.p.189

Yet Marlowe, himself a wild original, was Shakespeare's starting point, curiously difficult for the young Shakespeare to exorcise completely.… And yet that means the strongest writer known to us served a seven-year apprenticeship to Christopher Marlowe, only a few months older than himself, but London's dominant dramatist from 1587 to 1593, the year of Marlowe's extinction by the authorities.
Bloom, Harold, ed. 2002. Bloom's Major Dramatists: Christopher Marlowe. New York: Chelsea House. p.10

The player [Shakespeare] seems to have acted in the Cambridge poet's *The Jew of Malta*—a work Shakespeare recalled closely in his own plays and which was not in print.
Honan, Park. 1998. Shakespeare: A Life. Oxford: Oxford University Press.p.124

Shakespeare, I suggest, only became Shakespeare because of the death of Marlowe. And he remained peculiarly haunted by that death.
Bate, Jonathan. 1997. The Genius of Shakespeare. London: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd.p.105

Charts of selected tests demonstrate a clear correlation to Marlowe's patterns in *Edward III*.
Merriam, Thomas, 'Marlowe's Hand in Edward III', Literary and Linguistic Computing, 8 (1993), 59-72.

Shakespeare seems to be very much aware of what Marlowe is up to and chooses to plot a parallel course, virtually stalking his rival.
Shapiro, James. 1991. Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.p.103

The two men may have been acquainted; certainly Shakespeare knew Marlowe's work and responded to it in his own first efforts.
Schoenbaum, Samuel. 1977. William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.p.166

In short, Marlowe's historic achievement was to marry great poetry to the drama; his was the originating genius. William Shakespeare never forgot him: in his penultimate, valedictory play, *The Tempest*, he is still echoing Marlowe's phrases.
Rowse, A. L. 1973. Shakespeare: The Man. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press. (1988 reprinting) p.43

But above all *Dido* suggests *Antony and Cleopatra*. . . . Marlowe's imagery here is very like Shakespeare's.
Steane, J.B. 1964. Marlowe: A Critical Study. London: Cambridge University Press. (Reprinted 1970). p. 59

Shakespeare, too, must have seen *Tamburlaine* at the Rose . . . . perhaps his reaction to *Tamburlaine* was the rewriting of part of a new history of *Henry VI*. His opening lines were certainly inspired by that play, and a finer tribute to Marlowe than anything written by the University Wits.
Halliday, F.E. 1961. The Life of Shakespeare. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd (reprinted with revisions 1964).p.61

What we may anyhow believe is that in [1593] there perished at Deptford the only man of Shakespeare's age who could have been a rival poet.
Wilson, F.P. 1951. Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare. The Clark Lectures Trinity College, Cambridge. Oxford: Clarendon Press.p.131

Even without the contrast of Marlowe's influence on his followers, including Shakespeare—especially Shakespeare—the impact of other writers on him is negligible, without trace.… That they met, that they afterwards collaborated, is certain; the work that bears Shakespeare's name, and which is, in part, Marlowe's, testifies to this. . . . This is the play [*Edward II*] that shows how Marlowe, if he had lived, would have matured; this is the book with which Shakespeare went to school. Only 5 years had elapsed since Tamburlaine, but there is here a development as impressive as Shakespeare's was to be—perhaps it was more impressive. . . .
Much that Shakespeare was to do is found in *Edward II* in epitome, and all of it is shadowed forth in verse not even he surpassed. p.171
Norman, Charles. 1946 Christopher Marlowe: The Muse's Darling. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merril (1971 reprinting).p. 61

Shakespeare quotes Marlowe or alludes to his plays repeatedly … practically the whole of Marlowe's work as it is now known.
Bakeless, John. 1942. The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe. Vol II. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.p.208

Shakespeare already admired Marlowe to the point of close imitation; now he ventured on rivalry. He too would write a poem in the same style [as Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*], claim a place amongst the poets, and perhaps win the poet's reward in the patronage of some great Lord. He found his theme in the embroidery of Hero's garments.
Harrison, G. B. 1933. Shakespeare at Work: 1592-1603. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press (1958 reprinting). p.39

For in *Edward II* [Marlowe] shows the dramatic taste of Hamlet, using all gently, suiting the action to the word, the word to the action, with special observance that his actors o'erstep not the modesty of nature.
Brooke, C.F. Tucker. 1930. The Life of Marlowe and The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.p. 48-9

The father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse was therefore also the teacher and the guide of Shakespeare.
Swinburne, Algernon Charles. 1919. Contemporaries of Shakespeare. London: William Heinemann.p.3

He first, and he alone, guided Shakespeare into the right way of work.… Before him there was neither genuine blank verse, nor genuine tragedy in our language. After his arrival, the way was prepared; the paths were made straight, for Shakespeare.
Algernon Charles Swinburne, The Age of Shakespeare, 1908 p.40

[*Richard III*]shows the influence of Marlowe to a greater degree than any play of Shakespeare's shows any single influence, and displays to us the young dramatist advanced a further step in seeking to rival his most successful competitor with his own weapons in his on field.
Schelling, Felix E. 1902. The English Chronicle Play: A Study in the Popular Historical Literature Environing Shakespeare. New York, N.Y.: Burt Franklin.p.96

Throughout Shakespeare's '*Richard III*' the effort to emulate Marlowe is undeniable.
Lee, Sidney. 1898. A Life of William Shakespeare. Hertfordshire: Oracle Publishing Ltd (1996 reprinting). p.63

But of all those illustrious dead, the greatest is Christopher Marlowe. He was the first, the only, herald of Shakespeare.
From the 'Saturday Review' (19 September 1891). [The unveiling of the Memorial to Christopher Marlowe by Mr. Henry Irving] in Maclure, Millar, ed. 1979. Marlowe: The Critical Heritage 1588-1896. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p.185

Blank verse, as we understand it, as Shakespeare understood it, came into birth at the bidding of Christopher Marlowe.
Verity, A. W. 1886. The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Earlier Style. Folcroft PA: The Folcroft Press, p.85

But it is only Shakespeare who can do everything; and Shakespeare did not die at twenty-nine. That Marlowe must have stood nearer to him than any other dramatic poet of that time, or perhaps of any later time, is probably the verdict of nearly all students of the drama.
Bradley, A.C. 1880. From Christopher Marlowe, in 'The English Poets, Selections', ed. T.H. Ward (1880), I, 411-17 p131

This only [*Richard III*] of all Shakespeare's plays belongs absolutely in the school of Marlowe. The influence of the elder master, and that influence alone, is perceptible from end to end.
Swinburne, Algernon Charles. 1880. A Study of Shakespeare. London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly. p.43

Only the almost superstitious reverance we have for the name of Shakespeare has kept in comparative oblivion the rival drama [*Edward II*] – certainly the masterpiece of history plays at the time of its production.
Fleay, F.G., ed. 1877. Marlow's Tragedy of Edward the Second. London and Glascow: William Collins, Sons, and Co. p.8

Marlowe was the first poet before Shakespeare who possessed any thing like real dramatic genius, or who seemed to have any distinct notion of what a drama should be.
Revival of 'The Jew of Malta' by Edmund Kean. From an unsigned review in 'Blackwood's Magazine' (May 1818), iii, 209-10

Appendix B: Diana Price's Chart of Literary Paper Trails

	Ben Jonson	Thomas Nashe	Philip Massinger	Gabriel Harvey	Edmund Spencer	Samuel Daniel	George Peele	Michael Drayton	George Chapman	William Drummond	Anthony Mundy	John Marston	Thomas Middleton
1. Evidence of education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
2. Record of correspondence, esp.concerning literary matters	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-
3. Evidence of having been paid to write	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Evidence of a direct relationship with a patron	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-	-
5. Extant original manuscript	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
6. Handwritten inscriptions, receipts, letters etc touching on lit. matters	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7. Commedatory verses, epistles, or epigrams contributed/received	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
8. Misc records (e.g. referred to personally as a writer)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9. Evidence of books owned, written in, borrowed, or given	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-
10. Notice at death as a writer	Yes	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-

Reproduced from Appendix: Chart of Literary Paper Trails in Diana Price, *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*, Greenwood Press, Conneticut & London, 2001. Pages 302-305 with additional post-publication material from http://www.shakespeare-authorship.com/resources/errata.asp

	John Lyly	Thomas Heywood	Thomas Lodge	Robert Greene	Thomas Dekker	Thomas Watson	Christopher Marlowe	Francis Beaumont	John Fletcher	Thomas Kyd	John Webster	William Shakespear
1. Evidence of education	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-	-
2. Record of correspondence, esp.concerning literary matters	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	-
3. Evidence of having been paid to write	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	-
4. Evidence of a direct relationship with a patron	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-
5. Extant original manuscript	-	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. Handwritten inscriptions, receipts, letters etc touching on lit. matters	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Commedatory verses, epistles, or epigrams contributed/received	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-
8. Misc records (e.g. referred to personally as a writer)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
9. Evidence of books owned, written in, borrowed, or given	-	-	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	-	-
10. Notice at death as a writer	-	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	-

Reproduced from Appendix: Chart of Literary Paper Trails in Diana Price, *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography*, Greenwood Press, Conneticut & London, 2001. Pages 302-305 with additional post-publication material from http://www.shakespeare-authorship.com/resources/errata.asp

Details for each table entry, and reasons why some evidence (for all writers) was discounted, can be found in Price's Appendix and on her website

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