Introduction

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The paradox of Christopher Marlowe is that he is both too familiar and rather evasive. The frequent abbreviation 'Kit' suggests an intimacy that the works themselves both solicit and repel; more appropriate, perhaps, is the slippery range of his name in official records: Marlow, Marloe, Marley, Marlin, Malyn, Morley, Merlin, Mar. Atheist, intelligencer, heretic, spy, overreacher, tobacco-loving sodomite, intellectual queen, radical tragedian, who held monstrous opinions, wrote the plays attributed to Shakespeare, did not die in Deptford in 1593 or did, and was murdered by the Queen: these are some of the rumors that have been attached to Christopher Marlowe. His characters too have correspondingly outrageous reputations – Tamburlaine for 'working words' that conquer kingdoms and dare gods out of heaven, Faustus for a demonic 'form of fortunes' that do or don't produce his damnation (who can tell?), Edward II for queerness, and so on. Marlowe's lyric 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' reverberated across the poetic and musical culture of the period, like the pop hit that is the soundtrack for a generation, and, like all the best pop stars, he died violently and young. Marlowe's literary canon is all essentially juvenilia.

In part Marlowe's mythic reputation is an inevitable supplement to the biography of Shakespeare. His life is political where Shakespeare's seems studiedly neutral; his light burns bright and brief, while Shakespeare looks back on a long career in the theatre; Marlowe's own personality seems to shape his writing, while Shakespeare slips behind the mask of his characters; his work is transgressive where Shakespeare's is bourgeois. As Al Pacino found in his vox pop in *Looking for Richard* (1996), Shakespeare now circulates largely as textual fragments: 'what's in a name?'; 'alas, poor Yorick'; 'to be or not to be'; 'neither a borrower nor a lender be'; 'now is the winter of our discontent'; 'all the world's a stage'. In the case of Marlowe, however, our first step is more often one or more oversized myths. Just

as contemporaries constructed Marlowe's life in the light of his violent death, so too have Marlowe aficionados afterwards built his reputation via retrospection. To encounter Christopher Marlowe is almost inevitably to read from the end to the beginning, from the outside in, and from his life and world to the works themselves. It is not surprising that Marlowe's most prominent place in modern culture is as a proto-Romantic hero, a Caravaggio or Byron, played in the Oscar-winning film *Shakespeare in Love* by Rupert Everett, nor that even as biographical approaches to literature have waned, the most pressing critical context for Marlowe's works has tended to be Marlowe's life.

It seems all the more important, then, that we look closely at multiple contexts and recover, explore, augment, and critique the literary and historical narratives that frame the study and appreciation of Marlowe. We are used to an idea of Marlowe as socially, dramatically, poetically, and sexually subversive, but this, too, is a construct in need of fresh assessment. This collection attempts to anchor Marlowe and 'Marlowe', to consider the multiple textual and theatrical practices that bear on Marlowe's work and reputation; the social and political issues that arise with Marlowe, during his moment, as before and after; the shifting circumstances and conceptions that may prove Marlowe to be at least as ordinary as he is extraordinary as a poet, playwright, translator.

The chapters that follow do not pretend to provide the key to all Marlovian mythologies, once and for all. All of our contributors engage the norms, assumptions, and protocols of twenty-first-century academic scholarship, whose outlines it is too early either to codify or to decode. Instead of completeness, our aim as editors and authors is to model heterogeneity, offering diverse ways of defining what actually counts as context and deciphering how it counts, when, and for whom. If we're lucky, the differences between the approaches and conclusions in the chapters here together will underscore, at once, both the contingency that comes with any reading or frame for reading history, literature, life and, at the same time, the pointedness of any connections that we, as critics, readers, and spectators make between text and context. Accordingly, we have encouraged the contributors to use their own preferred editions of Marlowe, recognising that as readers we choose the text, as well as the context, in which to encounter his works. And in the same vein, we have not sought to resolve differences in the dating of the plays and early performances.

The British plantsman David Austin has recently bred a new variety of rose, called 'Christopher Marlowe'. The description is a suggestive one. The rose is 'of a colour not usually associated with English roses', 'the

growth is short but very vigorous', and, best of all, 'Christopher Marlowe should be useful whenever a bright splash of red is required.'[1] We hope this volume will be read in that spirit.

Notes

1 www.davidaustinroses.com/english/showrose.asp?showr=4080.

PART I

Marlowe's works

CHAPTER ONE

Marlowe's chronology and canon

Martin Wiggins

We know what plays and poems Marlowe wrote, but when did he write them and how do they fit together as a coherent literary career? The dating and chronology of literary works is only straightforward when there is an unbroken sequence leading from composition to first publication, generally in fairly short order. Printed books are usually empirically datable: most bear a year of publication in their imprint (at the foot of the title page) or colophon (at the back of the book). A publisher might occasionally have reason to suppress or falsify this information – Marlowe's sexually explicit translation of Ovid appeared in a series of undated editions that misleadingly claimed to have been printed in the Netherlands – but for the most part the date of a book's publication is a secure fact. But relatively few of the significant Elizabethan authors wrote for the print market in the first instance: between composition and print there was a gap, of indeterminate duration, defined in part by the original purpose for which the work was produced. It might have been written solely for the author's personal amusement and that of his friends, and passed around in manuscript. It might have been presented to a patron in a handwritten copy, which was deemed in the sixteenth century to have more social cachet than a vulgar printed book which anyone could buy. A playwright would sell his work to an acting company, which would only release it for printing, if ever, when it was commercially advantageous to do so, usually when the play was nearing or past the end of its box-office potential. All this meant that it might be many years before a play or poem reached the hands of a printer; Marlowe had been dead for four decades when *The Jew of Malta* was first published in 1633.

This means that dating an Elizabethan play is an analytical procedure, rather than one that entails the mere location and collation of information that already exists, and the resultant chronology – which might be the basis for a history of changing theatrical fashions, or of the development

of a genre, or of an author's career – is either solid or porous depending on the quality and quantity of the available evidence. In Marlowe's case, the starting-point is a broad correlation of biographical with professional circumstances. Play-writing was fundamentally a commercial activity that required the author to have easy access to his market, the mostly London-based acting companies. Marlowe's plays were therefore most likely to have been written during the six years after his leaving Cambridge in the spring of 1587, when he too was mainly based in London. The poems could have been written earlier, as private exercises during the Cambridge period of 1581–7, though it is usually, and reasonably, assumed that the unfinished *Hero and Leander* belongs to the other end of his career, its writing interrupted by his murder at the end of May 1593. It was also often argued that *Dido, Queen of Carthage* was written at university, and that in consequence it was Marlowe's first play. In the 1580s, however, all college drama at Cambridge was written in Latin: asked to arrange a performance in the English language for a prospective royal visit in 1592, the university authorities were forced to admit that they had no English plays to offer.[1] Moreover, *Dido*'s cast includes two roles, Ganymede and Ascanius, written to be played by little boys who can be dandled on the laps of adult-sized characters. Such diminutive performers were less likely to be found among Cambridge undergraduates than in the personnel of a London choirboy acting company like the Children of the Chapel Royal, to whom the play is ascribed on the title page of its first edition of 1594. So *Dido* also seems to belong in the London period, and specifically in its first half, before the city's boy companies collapsed in 1590.

Marlowe's output is easiest to pin down at the beginning and end of his play-writing career. Late in the autumn of 1587, a performance by the Admiral's Men came to a premature end when a child and a pregnant woman were accidentally shot dead by one of the actors, and another member of the audience was wounded in the head. The incident, reported as news in a letter written on 16 November, occurred during a scene where a character was tied to one of the stage posts and shot; the borrowed firearm turned out to be loaded, and the gunman's aim was off.[2] It is a good match for the scene towards the end of *The Second Part of Tamburlaine*, which belonged to the same company's repertory, in which the Governor of Babylon is hung up in chains and shot at by Tamburlaine's men; no similar scene occurs in any other known play of the time. It is true that the letter-writer, who was not an eye-witness, did not explicitly identify the play, and in theory this might open the way to speculate that it was an otherwise wholly unknown work; but the company would hardly have

wanted to repeat the business in *2 Tamburlaine* if it had already gone so spectacularly wrong in a different play, and so there are no good grounds to doubt the identification. In short, *2 Tamburlaine* opened in London in or before November 1587. The prologue tells us it was written to capitalise on the commercial success of its predecessor, which must therefore have been written and staged earlier the same year, and must have been Marlowe's first play for the commercial theatre.

It is even more straightforward to date his last play, *The Massacre at Paris*. It appears, under its original title, *The Tragedy of the Guise*, in the theatre financier Philip Henslowe's note of his receipts at the Rose playhouse on 30 January 1593, when the take was £3 14s. Henslowe compiled his records in arrears, rather than adding a new entry each day, and he sometimes got muddled: the true date of the performance was 26 January, four days earlier. (The actual 30 January play, listed at the top of the next page of the account-book, was *Friar Bacon*.) In the misdated entry, he marked the play as 'ne', his spelling of the word 'new'.[3] Marlowe would have been writing the tragedy during the second half of 1592, when the plague was virulent and the London theatres were closed as a public health measure. It was the second new play in the Rose repertory since its reopening at the end of December, and the resident company, Lord Strange's Men, probably began preparing the production soon after the first, *The Jealous Comedy* (a lost play by an unknown author), premiered on 5 January.

The Massacre was the only play Marlowe is known to have written for one of Henslowe's companies during the period covered by the surviving accounts (which start in February 1592), and there are no comparable records that would enable the same degree of exactitude in placing the others. Even so, we can be fairly sure that, immediately before writing *The Massacre*, he devoted some of the first half of 1592 to *Edward II*. The title page of the 1594 edition establishes that it was performed by the Earl of Pembroke's Men, a company created in mid 1591 and resident at James Burbage's playhouse, the Theatre. Two factors suggest that Marlowe probably did not write the play for them in the first months of their existence. In the process of composition he followed the typical Elizabethan practice of occasionally borrowing verbal figures from his fellow dramatists; and some of these debts are to plays written in late 1591. For example, London audiences had recently heard a queen carp at a well-dressed social inferior who 'bears a duke's revenue on her back', just as Gaveston wears a lord's revenue on his, and remark that an enemy 'commands the narrow seas', as is also said of the Danes in *Edward II*; Marlowe was drawing on the original two-part version of *Henry VI*, which Shakespeare probably wrote

for the same company, Pembroke's Men.[4] Likewise, when Spencer Senior wishes that Edward will reign 'in peace triumphant, fortunate in wars', he is repeating, word for word, the hope expressed of Queen Elizabeth in the 1591 Lord Mayor's inaugural pageant, scripted by George Peele and performed in the streets of London on 29 October.[5] This evidence pushes *Edward II* towards at least the end of 1591, where we collide with Marlowe's other, murkier career. He was overseas during the winter of 1591–2, apparently engaged in an espionage operation that ended with his arrest, towards the end of January, as an accomplice in a criminal counterfeiting racket in Flushing; after interrogation by the town's English Governor, Sir Robert Sidney, Marlowe was shipped back to England. What he did next was, in all likelihood, write *Edward II*.

Aside from this kind of substantive chronological evidence and analysis, it also helps if, subjectively, a dating 'feels' right. *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* seem to belong together. Both tragedies deal with the conflict between royal authority and ancient baronial rights, centred on the role and influence of the King's parvenu minions. Both eschew exotic settings in favour of political realism, figuring power in terms of competing interests within a monarchy, rather than as an offshoot of some outside force such as war, magic, or mercantile wealth. Both are written – as far as it is possible to judge *The Massacre* from the boiled-down, pirated text that survives – in a 'greyer', less florid style than Marlowe's other plays, localising his distinctively lush, allusive, metaphorical writing into arias by characters indulging their imagination with either sexuality or sadism. But the trouble with subjective impressions based on literary assessments of the plays is that they can come unstuck if the criteria for assessment change. For instance, there was once a consensus that *Doctor Faustus* was written in 1592, because it was considered Marlowe's greatest achievement and must therefore belong to a 'mature' phase of his work; whereas today we accept that judgements of maturity or otherwise, which can seem natural when applied to the two decades and nearly forty plays of Shakespeare's professional career, are somewhat less meaningful in the littler confines of Marlowe's six years. But is this shift essentially any different from the way a case becomes vulnerable when there is a change in the profile of the factual evidence on which it is founded? A late dating of *Doctor Faustus* used to seem inevitable because its likely narrative source, P. F.'s *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*, appeared to have been published in 1592; it was later shown that the earliest extant edition was a reprint of a work that first appeared in *c.* 1588.[6]