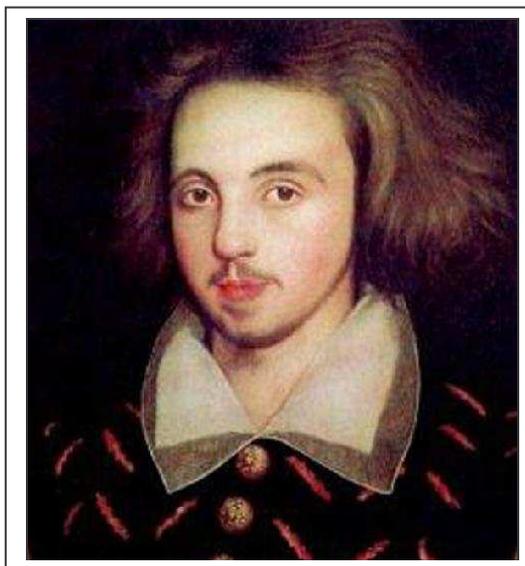


Playing Dead: An Updated Review of the Case for Christopher Marlowe

Peter Farey

In his recent book, *Marlowe's Ghost*, Daryl Pinksen tells of the 1953 Academy Awards, at which the film *Roman Holiday* won three Oscars. These included one for the best screenplay, by Ian MacLellan Hunter. Thirty years later, however, Hunter admitted that he had not in fact written it, having acted instead as a 'front' for the blacklisted writer, Dalton Trumbo—one of those imprisoned for refusing to answer questions before Senator McCarthy's Un-American Activities Committee. Pinksen comments:



Thanks to Ian McLellan Hunter's honesty, we now know the truth about *Roman Holiday*, and Trumbo has the recognition he earned. But if Hunter had died suddenly, or if the anti-Communist frenzy had remained in full swing longer than it did, we would today be none the wiser. Centuries later, a student studying mid-twentieth-century films may have noticed that the writing style of *Roman Holiday* was uncannily like that of the preblacklisted work of Dalton Trumbo. He may have written a paper arguing that Ian McLellan Hunter most likely acted as a front for Dalton Trumbo. His professors may have shot back "We have abundant evidence that Ian McLellan Hunter wrote *Roman Holiday*: his name is on the film's credits, he is listed on the official Academy Awards web-site as the writer, and there are dozens of film reviews which back up Hunter's claim to *Roman Holiday*...It is nonsense to argue against these demonstrable facts."¹

Luckily this particular deception was eventually revealed, and Pinksen describes several similar cases which have also been brought to light. It is believed, however, that there remain others which may never be discovered, because it is just too late. Marlovians think that something quite like this happened to Christopher Marlowe—with William Shakespeare acting as his 'front'—although in this case the chances of discovery were much less, partly because he was believed to have been dead when the 'ghosted' works were written. But was he really dead?

Marlowe's Supposed Death

In 1925, Leslie Hotson discovered details of the inquest on Marlowe's apparent death on 30 May 1593.² According to this, Marlowe died as the result of a knife wound above the right eye received from someone with whom he had been dining—Ingram Frizer. Together with two other men, Robert Poley and Nicholas Skeres, they had spent the day at the Deptford Strand home of Eleanor Bull, a respectable widow who apparently offered for payment a room and refreshment for private meetings like this.

Two days later, on 1 June, the inquest was held there by the Coroner of The Queen's Household, William Danby. A 16-man jury found the killing to have been in self defence. Despite Marlowe's undoubted fame, the body was buried the same day in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, Deptford, and left there to rot. The Queen signed Frizer's pardon just four weeks later.

Of the ten or more scholarly books or articles written about, or including an explanation of, Marlowe's death over the past twenty years or so—and excluding

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any 'Marlovian' publications—all but two of the authors find that the witnesses were lying. Let us see why.

From the start, doubts have been expressed over the story told at the inquest. Marlowe was reported as lying on a bed near a table at which the three others were all seated in line with their backs to him, Frizer in the middle. An argument broke out between him and Marlowe over the 'reckoning,' at which Marlowe drew Frizer's dagger—which Frizer had 'at his back'—and wounded him twice on the scalp. Frizer struggled to get hold of the dagger, and in doing so stabbed Marlowe above the eye to such a depth that he instantly died.

Biographers have found the seating arrangement extremely odd, whatever the four of them were doing. Some cannot accept that Poley and Skeres apparently not only did nothing whatsoever to stop either attack, but actually trapped Frizer by their failure to move so that he could 'by no means get away'. Serious doubts have also been raised by medical experts³ that Marlowe would have 'instantly died' from such a wound, the implications of which are considered later.

The conclusion reached by most biographers is that it was not self-defence as the jury accepted, but murder. There are, however, as many theories as to why he was murdered as there are biographers claiming that he was.

Marlowe certainly was in deep trouble at the time of this meeting. Brought before the Privy Council ten days earlier, apparently on charges of heresy, he had been released on bail; but accounts of his blasphemy and persuasion of others to atheism were coming thick and fast and, whether true or not, he was also thought

to have written a book on atheism which was being used for subversive purposes. Everything else being equal, trial and execution for such crimes would have been almost guaranteed, as within only the past two months at least three people—Henry Barrow, John Greenwood and John Penry—had been hanged for offences no worse than these.

Among Marlowe's close friends at that time was Thomas Walsingham—first cousin once removed of the late Sir Francis Walsingham—who had himself worked within Sir Francis's network of secret agents and intelligencers. Marlowe had been involved in similar activities, and was probably still in the employ of Lord Burghley and Sir Robert Cecil. As Park Honan says: 'One may infer that (they) were inconvenienced by Marlowe's death.'⁴ It should therefore be noted that every person involved in the incident was currently associated either with his friend Walsingham (Frizer and Skeres) or with his probable employers the Cecils (Poley, Bull and Danby).

Marlovians therefore reframe the question from 'why was Marlowe killed?' to 'why did those people meet there that day?' If it was just a social occasion, why would Marlowe be socializing with these three men? According to the evidence,

his usual companions were the intellectual elite—writers, publishers, explorers, scientists, astronomers, mathematicians, states-

Based upon what we know, there was no 'business' the four of them can be said to have had in common, and no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that Frizer had ever been involved in 'intelligence' activities, as the rest of them seem to have been.

men and patrons of the arts—not confidence tricksters and *agents provocateurs* like these. Given that at that time Marlowe was apparently in desperate trouble with the Privy Council—Archbishop Whitgift in particular—and facing trial and execution, Poley was carrying most important and urgent letters for the Privy Council, and Frizer and Skeres were occupied with the conny-catching of a young target, Drew Woodlef, a social gathering must have been the last thing on their minds.⁵

Similarly, one cannot accept a business meeting as the reason. Based upon what we know, there was no 'business' the four of them can be said to have had in common, and no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that Frizer had ever been involved in 'intelligence' activities, as the rest of them seem to have been. Furthermore, if for business, why was it in Deptford, when somewhere near either Chislehurst (where Marlowe and Frizer seem to have been living and working) or Nonsuch Palace (where both Marlowe and Poley needed to be that day) would have been much easier? One may also reasonably ask what the probability is of a business meeting ending with one of the participants dead because of a dispute over the 'reckoning', especially if, as is the case here, the only interest their 'em-

ployers'—Lord Burghley and Thomas Walsingham—might have had in common would have been to help Marlowe escape the peril facing him.

Influence From Above?

There are in fact good reasons for suspecting the involvement of those 'higher up.' First, Hotson's description of it as a 'tavern' brawl⁶ is misleading. It was a private house, the owner of which, Eleanor Bull, was named in the will of her 'cousin', Blanche Whitney—Chief Gentlewoman of the Queen's Chamber—the will having been drafted by another of Blanche's 'cousins', Lord Burghley. That Widow Bull's was a safe house used by Burghley or his son Sir Robert Cecil for their agents is therefore by no means unlikely.⁷

The sole involvement of the Coroner of The Queen's Household is not as straightforward as it has usually been presented either. The law required that violent deaths 'within the verge' (i.e. within twelve miles of the Queen's person, as Deptford Strand would have been—just) must be dealt with by a local county coroner and the Queen's coroner. That Danby officiated on his own should have rendered the whole process null and void. If Danby had also been a coroner for Kent—as his predecessor certainly was for Middlesex—he could have legitimately done it alone, although to make it legal he had to explain this in his report of the inquest, which he didn't. As none of the relevant Kentish records have survived we have no way of knowing whether he was also a county coroner or not. If he was, which despite his failure to mention it seems quite likely, it is highly significant that in the whole of England there was just one place where (a) being in Kent, he could legally officiate on his own, (b) being within the verge, the Privy Council had direct control over the legal process, and (c) being very near the place of execution for Surrey, a dead body for which he was responsible was available at just the right time within only a couple of miles. That one place was precisely where the alleged killing did occur, at Deptford Strand.⁸

As a further indication of possible influence from above, the membership of the jury, for which Danby had ultimate responsibility, is of some interest too. Inquest juries were supposed to be selected from those living within a relatively small distance of the death—normally within the same 'hundred' at least. The coroner would usually select the members from a number of suitably qualified local men provided by the bailiff of the hundred. Yet we find that two of them—Nicholas Draper, gent., almost certainly the foreman of the jury, and Thomas Batt—came from Bromley, which was some seven miles away, in a different hundred, and the parish right next to Chislehurst, where Thomas Walsingham lived. A few years later we even find Draper living in Chislehurst itself.⁹ Was the jury rigged by Danby to include friends of Frizer's employer?

One other point is that Poley, Frizer and Skeres were all known to be 'professional' liars, with Poley even on record as saying that he would be ready to per-

jure himself if necessary.¹⁰ When he reported back to court about a week later, the warrant for his payment (uniquely among the 24 such warrants he received, or that anyone else did for that matter) said that he was ‘in Her Majesty’s service all the aforesaid time’—a period which included his time at Deptford.

Most recent biographers opt for it having been a murder or assassination, but this raises further questions. Why would the ‘assassins’ need to be there all day? Why use these people, none of whom is known to have ever been associated with violence of any sort? What possible reason could all three of them or both of their ‘bosses’—Burghley and Walsingham—have for murdering him? Why was it all made so complex, requiring a royal pardon for the perpetrator, when a dagger in some back alley would have done just as well? Why not simply let the law, with trial and almost certain execution, take its course? Or, failing that, a ‘death while in custody’ arranged?

There is also that question of whether he would have died instantly from such a wound as they claimed, but which experts say is almost impossible. Park Honan suggests that they may have been lying¹¹ but, if this was how they killed him, what reason could they have for falsifying the record? It suggests that their ignorance comes from the victim having actually died in some other way.

If a death is to be faked in this way, however, a substitute body is needed, and it was David More who first identified a far more likely ‘victim’ than those suggested earlier.

The most likely purpose of the meeting must have been to save him somehow from

the extreme danger he was facing. Killing him hardly fits the bill, so, given the dead body, the faking of his death is the most logical explanation of all the facts we have. One hypothesis has his death faked—but with exile the condition—as a compromise, acceptable to the Queen, between those who would seek his death, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, and those who most probably wanted him silenced but still alive, such as Lord Burghley. God would thus be seen to have punished him for his blasphemous atheism, yet his life would actually be saved.

If a death is to be faked in this way, however, a substitute body is needed, and it was David More who first identified a far more likely ‘victim’ than those suggested earlier. On the evening before their 10 a.m. meeting at Deptford, after an inexplicable delay and at a most unusual time for a hanging, John Penry was hanged—for writing subversive literature—just two miles from Deptford. There is no record of what happened to the body. Whitgift signed the warrant and William Danby was responsible for authorizing the disposal of Penry’s remains. Those who reject the theory claim that there would have been too many signs that the corpse had been hanged for it to have been used in this way, but it has been shown

that Danby, if solely in charge and following perfectly normal procedures, would have been able quite easily to ensure that such evidence remained hidden from the jury.¹²

Marlowe and Shakespeare

If, as we can see, the most logical explanation of why they met at Deptford that day—although a seemingly improbable one—was to fake Marlowe’s death, one may wonder why no biographer has made any attempt genuinely to discuss the possibility, if only to reject it. The answer probably lies in the fact that the implications of such a survival are too dreadful to countenance. If Marlowe had survived he would, like Dalton Trumbo, have undoubtedly wanted to go on writing and, if he had, what is it that he would most probably have written? They may feel that some cans are best left unopened.

Of considerable interest to Marlovians is the fact that the first clear link between William Shakespeare and the works bearing his name was less than two weeks after Marlowe’s supposed death. Shakespeare’s first published work, the erotic *Venus and Adonis*, was registered with the Stationers’ Company on 18 April 1593, with no named author, and appears to have been on sale—now with his name included—by 12 June, when a copy is first known to have been bought, interestingly, by an apparently straight-laced employee of Lord Burghley.¹³

On its title page is a quotation in Latin from the last few lines of Book One of Ovid’s *Amores*. Here is how Marlowe himself had translated it:

Let base-conceited wits admire vilde things,
Fair Phoebus lead me to the Muses’ springs.¹⁴

This is usually taken here to refer to how worthless a playwright’s verse is when compared with true ‘poetry’, but see how Marlowe’s translation continues to the end of Book One. Its relevance to the Marlovian theory is inescapable.

About my head be quivering myrtle wound,
And in sad lovers’ heads let me be found.
The living, not the dead, can envy bite,
For after death all men receive their right.
Then though death rakes my bones in funeral fire,
I’ll live, and as he pulls me down mount higher.¹⁵

Marlovians base their argument less upon the alleged unsuitability of Shakespeare as the author—the approach favored by most anti-Stratfordians—than upon how much more suitable Marlowe would have been, had he survived, than anyone, even a highly literate and well-educated William Shakespeare. Daryl

Pinksen gives an impressive list of quotations from over the years,¹⁶ of which the following are just a few:

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)

In the relation of master and apprentice, the two may even then have been busy revising the two earlier plays which were to become the Second and Third Parts of *Henry VI*. (John Bakeless, *The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe, Volume I*, 1942)

This is the play [*Edward III*] 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. (Charles Norman, *Christopher Marlowe: The Muse's Darling*, 1946)

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. (A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare: The Man*, 1973)

Yet Marlowe, himself a wild original, was Shakespeare's starting point, curiously difficult for the young Shakespeare to exorcise completely. (Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Major Dramatists: Christopher Marlowe*, 2002)

The fingerprints of [Marlowe's] *Tamburlaine* are all over the plays that are among Shakespeare's earliest known ventures as a playwright. (Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, 2004)

Perhaps the most ironic is the following:

Marlowe did come back from the dead after the Deptford stabbing: his ghost astonishes us even as we read and hear the verse of Shakespeare. (Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, 1997)

and the most topsy-turvy?—

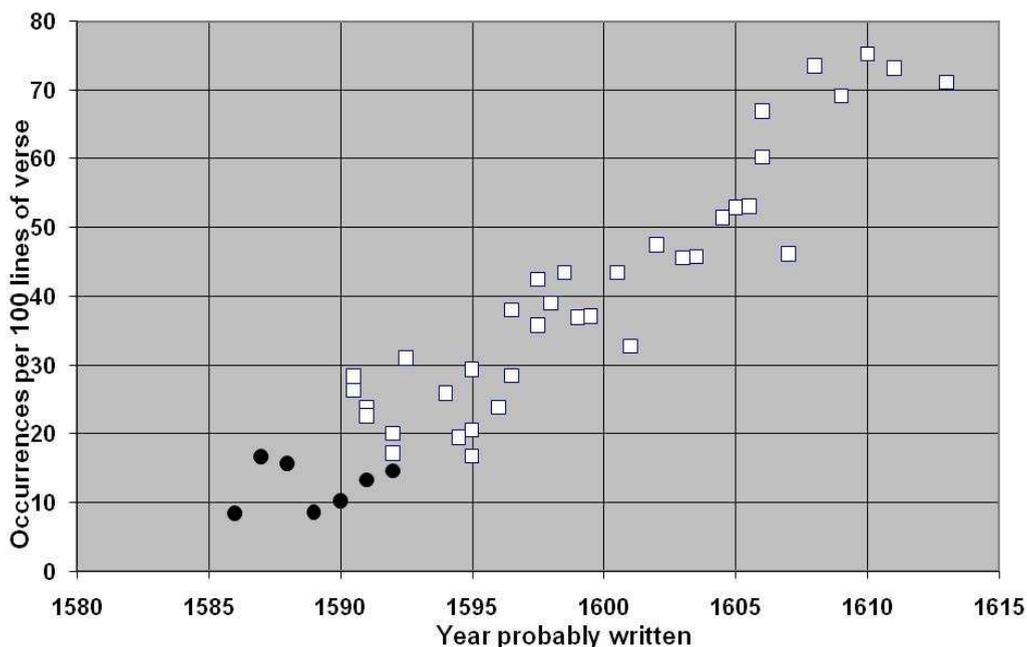
At the outset at least [of *Edward III*], Marlowe is writing a lot like Shakespeare, not only in the historical and political point of view, but also in the verse style. (James Shapiro, *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare*, 1991)

Styles

The styles of Marlowe and Shakespeare do nevertheless differ in several ways. Some of these differences are only statistically apparent, and some more immediately noticeable by the audience or reader. However, although their ages were almost identical, there is little if any overlap of the periods when they were writing. This means that one cannot in either case be certain that these differences are because the works were written by two different people, as orthodoxy has it, or because they were written by the same person, but at different times, as Marlovians believe.

For example, with stylometric approaches one can identify certain characteristics which are typical of Shakespeare, such as the frequency with which various common words or particular poetic techniques are used, and these have been used to argue that Marlowe could not have written Shakespeare’s works.¹⁷ In every case so far where these data have been plotted over time, however, Marlowe’s works have been found to fit just where Shakespeare’s would have been, had he written anything before the early 1590s, as all of Marlowe’s were. A good illustration of this—which is also extremely bad news for Oxfordians, given the Earl’s death in 1604—is how their use of enjambments (run-on lines) and feminine endings increased over the years. In this chart the black circles represent Marlowe’s plays and the white squares Shakespeare’s.¹⁸

Enjambments plus feminine endings



One way of measuring style was devised by Dr. T. C. Mendenhall, at the end of the 19th century. He suggested that authors' styles might be 'fingerprinted' by counting the numbers of letters in the words they used. He illustrated this by means of a graph showing how many 1-letter, 2-letter, 3-letter words, and so on, they tended to choose. Some examples using this method, which also lend support to his theory, may be found on-line.¹⁹ Having heard about this, a wealthy 'Baconian' sought Mendenhall's help, and paid for the work involved. Unfortunately for him—but hardly surprising given that plays were being compared with prose—Mendenhall found the profiles of Bacon and Shakespeare to be quite different. As a control experiment, however, Mendenhall had also asked his two 'word counters' to calculate a profile for Marlowe. As Mendenhall put it, 'something akin to a sensation was produced among those engaged in the work' and 'In the characteristic curve of his plays Marlowe agrees with Shakespeare about as well as Shakespeare agrees with himself.'²⁰

Further research has confirmed this²¹, and an even more extraordinary correlation is obtained if Marlowe's later plays (which do differ slightly from his earlier ones) are compared with Shakespeare's tragedies, histories and 'Roman' plays (which similarly differ somewhat from his comedies, a genre not attempted by Marlowe). See this illustrated at <<http://www2.prestel.co.uk/re/appx4a.htm>>.

As for the less quantifiable differences, mainly to do with the content, Marlovians say that they are all quite predictable, given his significantly changed circumstances—with new locations, new experiences, new learning, new interests, new friends and acquaintances, possibly a new political agenda, new paymasters, and new actors (such as Richard Burbage instead of Edward Alleyn as his lead actor or better 'female' leads, in much the same way that Shakespeare's material for the 'Clown' changed with the departure of William Kempe and the arrival of Robert Armin).

***In the characteristic curve of his plays,
Marlowe agrees with Shakespeare about
as well as Shakespeare agrees with himself.***

Much has been made in the past—particularly by Calvin Hoffman²²—of so-called 'parallelisms' between the two authors. For example, when Marlowe's Jew of Malta, Barabas, sees Abigail on a balcony above him, he says: 'But stay! What star shines yonder in the east? / The lodestar of my life, if Abigail!'. Most people would immediately recognize how similar this is to Romeo's famous 'But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!' when she also appears on a balcony above. There are many such examples, but the problem with using them in argument is that it really is not possible to be sure whether they happened because they were by the same author, or because they were—whether consciously or unconsciously—simply copied by Shakespeare from Marlowe.

A significant point has been noticed by Daryl Pinksen, however, which he backs up with appropriate quotations from Bakeless (that Marlowe ‘habitually repeats himself’ and that ‘the abundance of Shakespeare’s quotations, echoes, and allusions [of Marlowe] is especially important because he lets his other literary contemporaries severely alone’) and Norman (‘the impact of other writers on [Marlowe] is negligible, without trace’). As Pinksen asks: ‘Both Shakespeare and Marlowe frequently echo Marlowe in their work, but no other writer. Could it be possible that we are not dealing with two writers, but one?’²³

Shakespeare’s Sonnets

Shakespearean scholars mostly deny that the Sonnets say anything useful about Shakespeare’s life. For example, John Kerrigan confidently asserts ‘The Sonnets are not autobiographical in a psychological mode.’²⁴ Marlovians say that this is because—other than the references to Shakespeare’s name ‘Will’ and a possible pun on ‘Hathaway’—there is no connection between what is said in the Sonnets and anything that is known about his life. For a discussion of how such opinions have changed over time, see Chapter XII of Daryl Pinksen’s book.²⁵ Assuming that Marlowe did survive and was exiled in disgrace, however, the Sonnets must reflect what happened to him after that.

This is how I describe the ‘story-line’ of the Sonnets, together with a justification—not included here—of some of the more contentious claims, in my *Hoffman and the Authorship*.²⁶ The relevant sonnet numbers are in brackets.

‘One has only to take as a starting point that he usually means what he actually says, rather than what he ‘must’ have meant if he was who most people think he is. For example, take ‘a wretch’s knife’ to mean a wretch’s knife, rather than assume that he must have really meant Old Father Time’s scythe; take an ‘outcast state’ to mean an outcast state, not just a feeling that nobody likes him; and accept that when he says his ‘name receives a brand’ it means that his reputation has been permanently damaged, and not simply that acting is considered a somewhat disreputable profession.

In Sonnet 25, for example, we find that something unexpected (‘unlooked for’) has happened to the poet, which will deny him the chance to boast of ‘public honour and proud titles’, and which seems to have led to some enforced travel far away, possibly even overseas (26-28, 34, 50-51, 61). We get confirmation that this going away was probably a one-off event (48), and whatever it was, it is clearly also associated with his being ‘in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes’, that ‘outcast state’ (29), his ‘blots’ and ‘bewailed guilt’ (36).

What he most enjoyed about his past life seems, according to him, to have been the reason for his downfall—‘Consumed by that which it was nourished by’ (73) or *Quod me nutrit me destruit*, as Marlowe’s putative portrait at Corpus Christi,

Cambridge, puts it. In fact he thinks that, just like Marlowe, he will be remembered as having died a cowardly death, knifed by some base ‘wretch’ (74).

There is some concern that the identities of either the poet or the addressee might be discovered (76), but presumably not by the latter’s friends and descendants, for whom his name at least will have ‘immortal life’ because of these Sonnets (81). However, even though the poet says that the poems will last for all time, he knows that for some reason he will not be remembered as the author of them (81).

In Sonnet 110, we finally discover just what apparently caused the disgrace and ‘outcast state’ mentioned earlier, what the ‘vulgar scandal’ (112) is, and how it is that his ‘name receives a brand’ (111). Not only has he ‘looked on’ spiritual truth ‘askance and strangely’, but publicly expressed these views in a way that defiled and cheapened them. He now regrets this, and blames having to get his living from the public for these ‘public manners’. There is also a possible reference (‘ore-greene my bad’) to an attack on him by Robert Greene for those views (112).

For him, there is no God but his friend, and no Heaven to be found but in his bosom (110). Christian ritual is of no importance to him; nor are any actions based upon the assumption of an after-life, in which he apparently doesn’t believe (125).’

Much ink has been spilt over the question of just who the apparent dedicatee of the Sonnets, ‘Mr. W.H.’, really was. Calvin Hoffman took the ‘only begetter ...Mr. W.H.’ to be the inspirer of the Sonnets whom he believed to be Thomas Walsingham, the ‘W.H.’ coming from the—if hyphenated—name ‘Walsing-Ham.’²⁷ A. D. Wraight subscribed to Hotson’s theory that it was William Hatcliffe, but also concealing Walsingham.²⁸ In his *Master W.H., R.I.P.*, however, Don Foster said this about ‘the only begetter’:

As it happens, Thorpe’s contemporaries had precise notions of what constituted ‘begetting’ a text. According to this popular conceit, only the (pro)creative author may be called a ‘begetter,’ and then only if the textual offspring was self-begotten, upon the author’s own ‘Fancy’ or ‘Mind’ or ‘Brain’ or ‘Invention.’ Translators do not qualify—nor do commentators, publishers, patrons, paramours, scribes, inspirers of poetry, or purloiners of manuscripts. With but one unremarkable exception, nowhere do I find the word begetter, father, parent, or sire used to denote anyone but the person who wrote the work.²⁹

Nobody appears to have ever challenged this, although subsequent editors have either rejected or ignored it, presumably because it is difficult to see how *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* could have been written by a ‘Mr W.H.’. Foster argues for it being a misprint³⁰, but few commentators accept this explanation.

Thorpe does nevertheless seem to be saying that the one and only author of the Sonnets is ‘Mr W.H.’, but this is of course not the problem for Marlovians that it would be for others. As Foster puts it: ‘One hypothesis, which I leave for others to expound, is that Shakespeare was not the author of *Shake-speare’s Sonnets*.’³¹ If Marlowe had indeed survived and was now living under an assumed identity, then there is no reason at all why that name couldn’t have had the initials ‘W.H.’, even with the first name ‘Will’. For example, although he actually argues for William Herbert as the inspirer, Samuel Blumenfeld says of a William Hall who had apparently worked as an intelligencer for the Privy Council both before and after 1593: ‘Willm Halle might very well have been Marlowe under one of his many disguises.’³²

Clues in the Plays

The story-lines of Shakespeare’s plays over and over again involve faked—or wrongly presumed—death, disgrace, banishment, changed identity and a yearning to be pardoned. Unlike Oxfordians, however, Marlovians tend not to go seeking parallels between Marlowe’s known or predicted life and these stories, since one can find in them whatever one wants to find related to anyone’s life if one looks hard enough. On the other hand there are some places where it is difficult to know just why something was included if it were not some sort of in-joke.

For example, how can Touchstone’s words ‘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’ (*As You Like It*, 3.3.9-12) be a tribute to Marlowe, as commentators suggest? As Agnes Latham wonders in the Arden (second series) edition of the play, ‘nobody explains why Shakespeare should think that Marlowe’s death by violence was material for a stage jester.’³³

Alex Jack has also pointed out how Hamlet’s father’s ghost brings the words ‘wit’ and ‘gift’ together, as a probable reaction to Archbishop Whitgift, who not only wanted Marlowe dead but who had Marlowe’s Ovid translation publicly burned in 1599.³⁴

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts,
Oh wicked wit and gifts that have the power
So to seduce.

And when in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (III.i.23) Evans is singing Marlowe’s famous song ‘Come live with me and be my love...’ to keep his spirits up, why does he inexplicably mix it up with words based upon Psalm 137—‘By the rivers of Babylon’—perhaps the best known song of exile ever written?

After 1593

If Marlowe did survive 1593, he must have lived the rest of his life under a different identity (or identities). Despite the existence of several plausible possibilities, however, Marlovians have as yet been unable to find clear proof of any such person. Among ideas offered so far have been a Hugh Sanford, who was based with the Earl of Pembroke at Wilton House in Wiltshire,³⁵ a John Matthew alias Christopher Marlowe—or vice versa?—who entered the Catholic College at Valladolid in Spain in 1599,³⁶ and a Monsieur Le Doux, a spy for Essex, but working as a French tutor in Rutland in 1595.³⁷ There was also an Englishman who died in Padua in 1627, said by the family he lived with to be Marlowe.³⁸

Conclusion

This article has shown that by far the most logical explanation of why those particular people met—at Deptford Strand of all places and on that day of all days—was to fake Marlowe’s death. The evidence also suggests that this was most probably at the behest of some or all of the members of the Privy Council and with the Queen’s knowledge.

Assuming this to be the case, therefore, most of the non-academic specialized knowledge supposed to have been possessed by Shakespeare could, one assumes, have been acquired during Marlowe’s ‘exile’. Some of this would have certainly been spent overseas—probably including Italy—and much of it back home incognito, either under the protection of nobles (such as the Earls of Northumberland, Essex and Pembroke) and/or the gentry (such as Sir John Harington, Raleigh and the Bacon brothers) most of them providing access to the aristocratic life, to their own or their friends’ expert knowledge, and to the magnificent up-to-date libraries they had at their disposal.

If he survived 1593 we may also confidently assert that, of all the main alternative ‘candidates’ for the authorship, Christopher Marlowe was unique in all of the following ways:

- He had an absolutely cast-iron reason for writing the plays and the poems behind a ‘front’.
- His continued anonymity was essential even after his death.
- He was known to be an excellent poet apparently already employed by Lord Burghley when the first seventeen sonnets—thought by many to have been commissioned by Burghley—were written.
- His works, despite the huge difference in their education and authorial experience, are stylometrically indistinguishable from Shakespeare’s contemporary histories and tragedies.
- There was a precise date clearly requiring the handover to Shakespeare.
- He is directly referred to in a Shakespeare play, and quoted in several.

- He had published his own translations of Ovid, Shakespeare's favourite poet.
- He is known to have suffered the apparent death by 'a wretch's knife', the 'outcast state' and the branded name described in the Sonnets.
- Foster's unrefuted argument that 'Mr. W.H.' was the poet himself poses no problem for him.
- His lyric poetry is acknowledged by almost all scholars to equal Shakespeare's.
- He not only wrote blank verse of 'Shakespearian' quality, but he created the original model of how to do it.
- He had written enormously popular plays, and was—as Shakespeare became—the most famous playwright of his day.
- Although they were born within only two months of each other, he was the 'master' to Shakespeare's 'apprentice', with Shakespeare copying him throughout his career.

And something space has prevented us discussing, but which—as a probable 'smoking gun'—may be crucial:

- He is cryptically stated by name in the Stratford monument to be sharing it with Shakespeare.³⁹

Finally, Marlowe was also of course the only candidate known beyond doubt to have the originality, the love of language, the genius, theatricality, and sheer poetic power to have matched the author 'William Shakespeare'. All he needed was time.

Notes

¹ Daryl Pinksen, *Marlowe's Ghost* (2008) 213.

² Leslie J. Hotson, *The Death of Christopher Marlowe* (1925) 26-36.

³ Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe, Poet & Spy* (2005) 352-3.

⁴ Honan, 355.

⁵ Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: the Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (2002) *passim*.

⁶ Hotson, 41.

⁷ Nicholl, 43.

⁸ Peter Farey (1), *Was Marlowe's Inquest Void (2)?* (2008). 30 June 2009

<<http://www2.prestel.co.uk/reyl/inquest2.htm>>

⁹ Peter Farey (2), 'The Deptford Jury', *The Marlowe Society Newsletter 31* (2008).

¹⁰ Nicholl, 38.

¹¹ Honan, 342.

¹² Farey (3), *Hoffman and the Authorship* (2007) 24-6. <http://www2.prestel.co.uk/reyl/>

hoffman.htm

¹³ Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare, A Documentary Life* (1976) 131.

¹⁴ E. D. Pendry & J. C. Maxwell (eds.), *Christopher Marlowe: Complete Plays and Poems* (1976) 441.

¹⁵ Pendry & Maxwell (eds.), 441.

¹⁶ Pinksen, 6-12.

¹⁷ See, for example, Gary Taylor's 'The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare's Plays', in his (with Wells *et al.*) *A Textual Companion to their Oxford Complete Works* (1983) 83.

¹⁸ For the data, see Farey (3) Appendix I. 30 June 2009 <http://www2.prestel.co.uk/rey/hoffman.htm>

¹⁹ 30 June 2009 <http://www2.prestel.co.uk/rey/appx3a.htm>

²⁰ T. C. Mendenhall, 'A mechanical solution of a literary problem', *The Popular Science Monthly*, Vol.LX no.7 (1901) 97-105.

²¹ Pinksen, 52-61.

²² Calvin Hoffman, *The Murder of the Man who was Shakespeare* (1955) 16-20.

²³ Pinksen, 11.

²⁴ John Kerrigan, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (Penguin, 1986) 11

²⁵ Pinksen, 90-98.

²⁶ Farey (3) 33-40.

²⁷ Hoffman, 139-140.

²⁸ A. D. Wraight, *The Story that the Sonnets Tell* (1994) 144.

²⁹ Donald W. Foster, 'Mr. W. H., R.I.P.', *Periodicals of the Modern Language Association*, Vol.102 no.1, (1987) 44.

³⁰ Foster, 49.

³¹ Foster, 48.

³² Samuel Blumenfeld, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection* (2008) 239.

³³ Agnes Latham (ed.), *As You Like It* (Arden, 1997) xxxiii.

³⁴ Alex Jack (ed.), *Hamlet* (2005) 211.

³⁵ Louis Ule, *Christopher Marlowe (1564-1609): A Biography* (1992) 265.

³⁶ Ule, 448.

³⁷ A. D. Wraight, *Shakespeare: New Evidence* (1996) 58-74.

³⁸ *Much Ado About Something* dir. Michael Rubbo, The Helpful Eye, DVD, 2002 (and *The Guardian*, 11th July 1983).

³⁹ Farey (3) 3-8.

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OXDOCS
Alan Nelson

A number of **important documents** relating to the **Earl of Oxford** in 'diplomatic transcription'* by UC Berkeley English professor, **Alan H. Nelson** from documents in the British Library, the PRO, the Folger, Huntington, and other archival collections.

Website includes the beginning of a similar set of transcriptions from the life of **William Shakespeare**. Transcriptions may be found under the rubrics

OXDOCS and SHAXDOCS

Socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/

*As close to the original document as possible, with the least possible interference via modernization, translation, etc.

