Christopher Marlowe, (1564 –1593)

Marlowe was an English dramatist, poet and translator of the Elizabethan era. As the foremost Elizabethan tragedian, next to William Shakespeare, he is known for his blank verse, his overreaching protagonists, and his mysterious death.

Plays

- *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (c.1586) (possibly co-written with Thomas Nashe)
- *Tamburlaine, part 1* (c.1587)
- *Tamburlaine, part 2* (c.1587-1588)
- *The Jew of Malta* (c.1589)
- *Doctor Faustus* (c.1589, or, c.1593)
- *Edward II* (c.1592)
- *The Massacre at Paris* (c.1593)

Poetry

- Translation of Book One of Lucan's *Pharsalia* (date unknown)
- Translation of Ovid's *Elegies* (c. 1580s?)
- *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* (pre-1593)
- *Hero and Leander* (c. 1593, unfinished; completed by George Chapman, 1598)

Marlowe was born to a shoemaker in Canterbury named John Marlowe and his wife Catherine. His d.o.b. is not known, but he was baptised on 26 February 1564, two months before Shakespeare (whose d.o.b. is also not known), who was baptised on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Marlowe attended The King's School, Canterbury (where a house is now named after him) and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge on a scholarship and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1584. In 1587 the university hesitated to award him his master's degree because of a rumour that he had converted to Roman Catholicism and intended to go to the English college at Rheims to prepare for the priesthood. However, his degree was awarded when the Privy Council intervened, commending him for his “faithful dealing” and “good service” to the Queen. The nature of Marlowe’s service was not specified by the Council, but its letter to the Cambridge authorities has provoked much speculation, notably the theory that Marlowe was operating as a secret agent working for Sir Francis Walsingham’s intelligence service.

Spying

Marlowe is often alleged to have been a government spy and the author Charles Nicholl suggests that he was recruited while he was at Cambridge. College records indicate he had a series of absences from the university that began in the academic year 1584-1585. College buttery (dining room) accounts indicate he began spending lavishly on food and drink during the periods he was in attendance – more than he could have afforded on his known scholarship income.

In 1587 the Privy Council ordered Cambridge University to award Marlowe his MA, saying that he had been engaged in unspecified "affaires" on "matters touching the benefit of his country".

In 1592 Marlowe was arrested in the town of Flushing in the Netherlands for his alleged involvement in the counterfeiting of coins. He was sent to the Lord Treasurer (Burghley) but no charge or imprisonment resulted. This arrest may have disrupted another of Marlowe’s spying missions: perhaps by giving the counterfeit coinage to the Catholic cause he was to infiltrate the followers of the active Catholic William Stanley and report back to Burghley.
**Arrest and death**

Early May 1593: Bills were posted about London threatening Protestant refugees from France and the Netherlands who had settled in the city. One of these, the "Dutch church libel," written in blank verse, contained allusions to several of Marlowe's plays and was signed, "Tamburlaine".

11 May: The Privy Council ordered the arrest of those responsible for the libels.

12 May: Marlowe's colleague Thomas Kyd was arrested. Kyd's lodgings were searched and a heretical tract was found. Kyd asserted that it had belonged to Marlowe, with whom he had been writing "in one chamber" two years earlier.

18 May: Marlowe's arrest was ordered.

Marlowe was staying with Thomas Walsingham, whose father was a first cousin of the late Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's principal secretary in the 1580s and a man deeply involved in state espionage.

20 May: Marlowe appeared before the Privy Council and was instructed to "give his daily attendance on their Lordships, until he shall be licensed to the contrary".

30 May (Wednesday): Marlowe was killed.

In 1925 the scholar, Leslie Hotson, discovered the coroner's report of the inquest on Marlowe's death, held on Friday 1 June. Marlowe had spent all day in a house in Deptford, owned by the widow Eleanor Bull. He was with three men: Ingram Frizer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley. These witnesses testified that Frizer and Marlowe had argued over the bill (the 'Reckoning') exchanging "divers malicious words". Marlowe snatched Frizer's dagger and wounded him on the head. In the struggle, Marlowe was stabbed above the right eye, killing him instantly. The jury concluded that Frizer acted in self-defence, and he was pardoned.

1 June 1593: Marlowe was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, Deptford immediately after the inquest.

Marlowe's death is alleged by some to be an assassination for the following reasons:

1. The three other men in the room were all connected to the state secret service and to the London underworld. Frizer and Skeres also had a long record as loan sharks and con-men. Poley was known as a double-agent for the government and took part in the Catholic "Babington Plot" which intended to kill Elizabeth and put Mary Queen of Scots on the throne of England. Bull (whose house was not a tavern, but a respectable house) also had "links to the government's spy network".

2. It seems too much of a coincidence that Marlowe's death occurred only a few days after his arrest.

3. Marlowe was arrested without any evidence. Some say that this was a warning to the politicians in the "School of Night", or that it was connected with a power struggle within the Privy Council itself.

4. Marlowe's patron was Thomas Walsingham, Sir Francis's 2nd cousin once removed, who had been actively involved in intelligence work. ([http://sonic.net/~fredd/cousins.html](http://sonic.net/~fredd/cousins.html)).

5. Charles Nicholl (The Reckoning) argues there was more his death than emerged at the inquest.

**Atheism**

Marlowe was reputed to be an atheist or a Catholic. Some modern historians consider that this may have been a cover for his work as a government spy. Marlowe's accuser in Flushing was an informer called Richard Baines. Following Marlowe's arrest in 1593, Baines gave the authorities a "note containing the opinion of one Christopher Marly concerning his damnable judgment of religion, and scorn of God's word." Another document claims that "one Marlowe is able to show more sound reasons for Atheism than any divine in England is able to prove divinity, [...] he hath read the Atheist lecture to Sir Walter Raleigh and others." Similar examples were given by Thomas Kyd after his imprisonment and possible torture.

Kyd and Baines connect Marlowe with the mathematician Thomas Harriot and Walter Raleigh's circle. “The School of Night” is a modern name for a group of men centred on Sir Walter Raleigh that was referred to in 1592 as the "School of Atheism." The group supposedly included poets and scientists such as Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman and Thomas Harriot. The name "The School of Night" derives from Act IV, scene III of Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost: (Cf. Arthur Acheson. Shakespeare and the rival Poet (1903)).
**King of Navarre:**  O paradox! Black is the badge of hell,
The hue of dungeons and the scowl of night;
And beauty's crest becomes the heavens well.

Some critics believe that Marlowe included his religious views in his works. However, plays had to be approved by the Master of the Revels before they could be performed, and the censorship of publications was under the control of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Presumably these authorities did not consider any of Marlowe's works to be unacceptable.

**Sexuality**

Like William Shakespeare, Marlowe is sometimes described as homosexual. Some scholars argue that reports of Marlowe's homosexuality may simply be rumours produced after his death. Richard Baines reported Marlowe as saying: "All they that love not Tobacco and Boys are fools". David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen describe this as unreliable: "These and other testimonials [...] having been produced under legal circumstances we would regard as a witch-hunt". J.B. Steanes considers there to be "no evidence for Marlowe's homosexuality at all." Other scholars, point to homosexual themes in Marlowe's writing.

**Reputation among contemporary writers**

Marlowe was the most celebrated writer of his generation, bringing Tamburlaine, Faustus and The Jew of Malta to the stage and far outshting William Shakespeare during his lifetime. Within weeks of his death, George Peele remembered him as "Marley, the Muses' darling", Michael Drayton noted that he "Had in him those brave translunary things / That the first poets had", and Ben Jonson wrote of "Marlowe's mighty line". Thomas Nashe wrote warmly of his friend, "poor deceased Kit Marlowe". So too did the publisher Edward Blount, in the dedication of *Hero and Leander* to Sir Thomas Walsingham.

The most famous tribute to Marlowe was paid by Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, where he quotes a line from *Hero and Leander*

> **PHEBE:** Dead Shepherd, now I find thy saw of might,
> 'Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?' (Act 3, Scene 5)

Shakespeare also gives to the clown, Touchstone, the words

> **TOUCHSTONE:** 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. (Act 3, Scene 3)

This appears to be a reference to Marlowe's murder which involved a fight over the "reckoning", the bill, as well as to a line in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* - "Infinite riches in a little room".

Shakespeare was heavily influenced by Marlowe, as can be seen in the re-using of Marlovian themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Dido, Queen of Carthage</em></td>
<td>1586</td>
<td><em>Antony and Cleopatra</em></td>
<td>1606</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Dr. Faustus</em></td>
<td>1588</td>
<td><em>Macbeth</em></td>
<td>1605</td>
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<td><em>The Jew of Malta</em></td>
<td>1589</td>
<td><em>The Merchant of Venice</em></td>
<td>1596</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Edward II</em></td>
<td>1590</td>
<td><em>Richard II</em></td>
<td>1595</td>
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In *Hamlet*, after meeting with the travelling actors, Hamlet requests the Player perform a speech about the Trojan War, which at 2.2.429-32 has an echo of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.

In *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare brings on a character, “Marcade” (three syllables) in conscious acknowledgement of Marlowe's character "Mercury", also attending the King of Navarre, in *Massacre at Paris*. The significance, to those of Shakespeare's audience who had read *Hero and Leander*, was Marlowe's identification of himself with the god Mercury.
As Shakespeare

There is a theory that Marlowe may have faked his death and then continued to write under the name of William Shakespeare. Authors who subscribe to this theory include:

- Louis Ule, *Christopher Marlowe (1564–1607): A Biography*
- A D Wraight, *The Story that the Sonnets Tell* (1994)

Comparative timelines: Marlowe and Shakespeare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christopher Marlowe</th>
<th>William Shakespeare</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptised 26 Feb 1564, St. George's Church, Canterbury</td>
<td>Baptised at Holy Trinity Church on April 26th, in Stratford-upon-Avon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early education at King's School, Canterbury</td>
<td>Enters grammar school</td>
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<tr>
<td>1575</td>
<td>Queen Elizabeth visits Kenilworth Castle, near Stratford. The 11-year-old witnessed the pageantry of the royal progress and later recreated it in his dramatic works.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1582</td>
<td>Shakespeare (18) and Marries Anne Hathaway (26) are married on November 27th at Temple Grafton, a village about five miles from Stratford.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Susanna, the first child of William and Anne, is born. Susanna dies in 1649.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awarded a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Awarded a BA in 1584</td>
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*Dido, Queen of Carthage* 1586

1584 - 1587 believed to be a spy in the network of Sir Thomas Walsingham. Disappears, possibly to Europe on a spying mission. Awarded his MA thanks to the Privy Council. Entered the royal court circle and started his literary work associating with poets such as Sir Walter Raleigh. Became a member of the secret society, "The School of Night", related to the Rosicrucian movement. Became associated with Lord Admiral’s Company of Players, led by Edward Alleyn, as a Dramatist. Wrote *Tamburlaine the Great*, printed in 1590 (all other works were printed posthumously). Shared lodgings near the theatres in Southwark, London, with Thomas Kyd.

*Dr. Faustus* 1588

*The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta.* 1589

Two weeks in Newgate Gaol charged with murder, although he was later acquitted.

*Edward the Second* (printed 1594) 1590

*Henry VI, Part One, Henry VI, 2, Henry VI, 3*

*Hero and Leander* (poem) 1592

London theatres are closed due to plague.

*Venus and Adonis, Richard III*

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Comedy of Errors.*
**The Massacre at Paris**  
18 May: A warrant was issued for the poet's arrest on charges of heresy, which carried the death penalty.  
30 May: Died in Deptford, London.  
1 June: Buried in an unmarked grave.  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1593</td>
<td>Probably begins on the first of his 154 sonnets. Narrative poem <em>Venus and Adonis</em> is published (repost to Robert Greene). <em>The Rape of Lucrece</em>, <em>Titus Andronicus</em>, <em>The Taming of the Shrew</em>.</td>
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<td>1594</td>
<td>Performs with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. The group includes leading actor Richard Burbage and comic Will Kempe. <em>Love’s Labour’s Lost</em>, <em>King John</em>.</td>
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<td>1595</td>
<td><em>Richard II</em>, <em>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</em>, <em>Romeo and Juliet</em>.</td>
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<td>1597</td>
<td>Principal actor in Ben Jonson’s <em>Every Man in His Humour</em> <em>Henry IV, Part Two</em></td>
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<td>1598</td>
<td><em>Much Ado About Nothing</em></td>
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<td>1599</td>
<td><em>Julius Caesar</em>, <em>Henry V</em>, <em>As You Like It</em> The Globe Theatre opens.</td>
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<td>1600</td>
<td><em>Hamlet</em>. Narrative poem <em>The Phoenix and Turtle</em>.</td>
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<td>1601</td>
<td><em>Twelfth Night, or What You Will</em> <em>Troilus and Cressida</em> <em>All’s Well That Ends Well</em></td>
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<td>1603</td>
<td><em>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</em> is performed before the Queen at Hampton Court. The Black Death kills at least 33,000 in London.</td>
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<td>1604</td>
<td><em>Measure for Measure</em>. Staged at court before King James. <em>Othello</em>. Performed at Whitehall on November 1st.</td>
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<td>1605</td>
<td><em>King Lear</em> <em>Macbeth</em>. The play’s Scottish background celebrates the new king’s ancestry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1606</td>
<td><em>Antony and Cleopatra</em>, <em>Coriolanus</em>, <em>Timon of Athens</em>, <em>Pericles</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1608</td>
<td>London theatres are closed due to plague, from spring 1608 throughout 1609.</td>
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<td>1609</td>
<td>Shakespeare’s sonnets are published (unauthorized). <em>Cymbeline</em></td>
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<td>1610</td>
<td><em>The Winter’s Tale</em></td>
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<td>1611</td>
<td><em>The Tempest</em></td>
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<td>1612</td>
<td><em>Henry VIII</em> (with John Fletcher) <em>Cardenio</em>, the only play of Shakespeare’s that has been completely lost.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>The Globe Theatre reopens on the opposite bank of the Thames.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1616</td>
<td>Dies on April 23rd. His burial is recorded in Stratford’s Holy Trinity Church on April 25th.</td>
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Dido, Queen of Carthage (1586)

Published in 1594 by the bookseller Thomas Woodcock. The title page attributes the play to Marlowe and Nashe, and states that the play was acted by the Children of the Chapel.

The story tells a dramatic tale of Dido and her fanatical love for Aeneas (induced by Cupid), Aeneas' betrayal of her and her eventual suicide on his departure for Italy. No other play by Marlowe has such a strong female lead character. Books 1, 2, and 4 of the Aeneid of Virgil were used as the main source. In 1919, T.S. Eliot described the play as "underrated".

Dido is the least performed of Marlowe’s plays, but it was staged in the State Apartments at Kensington Palace in 2008, and at London’s National Theatre in April 2009.

The following lines appear in Dido:

Aeneas: From out his entrails Neoptolemus,
Setting his spear upon the ground, leapt forth,
And after him a thousand Grecians more,
In whose stern faces shin’d the quenchless fire
That after burnt the pride of Asia.
Dido, Queen of Carthage, II.1.183-7

Dido: For in his looks I see eternity,
And he’ll make me immortal with a kiss.
Dido, Queen of Carthage, IV.4.122-3

Aeneas: Till he hath furrow’d Neptune’s glassy fields
And cut a passage through his topless hills.
Dido, Queen of Carthage, IV.3.11-12

These are reproduced more concisely as perhaps Marlowe’s most famous lines in Doctor Faustus:

Faustus: Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships?
And burnt the topless Towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Doctor Faustus, lines 1328-30

The Aeneid was written by Virgil over the last ten years of his life. Legend has it that Virgil wrote just three lines a day. It can be divided into two main sections:

- Books I to VI: Aeneas’ journey from Troy to Rome via Carthage, modeled on Homer’s Odyssey;
- Books VII to XII: Aeneas’ battles leading to the foundation of Rome, modeled on Homer’s Iliad.

After Marlowe, the most famous translation of the Aeneid appeared in John Dryden’s The Work’s of Virgil, started in 1694 and published in 1697.

Marlowe’s Adaptation

Virgil’s Aeneid provided Marlowe with the following subject matter for his dramatisation:

Book I:
- Aeneas’ arrival in Carthage following the storm at sea orchestrated by Juno;
- Jupiter assures Venus that Aeneas will be saved in order to build Rome;
- Venus’ meeting with her son;
- the substitution of Venus’ other son Cupid for Aeneas’ son Ascanius;
- the warm welcome accorded to the Trojans by Dido.

Book II:
- Aeneas’ account of the fall of Troy;

Book IV:
- the conspiracy of Venus and Juno;
• the storm and the tryst between Aeneas and Dido in the cave;
• the intervention of Jupiter after Iarbus’ appeal;
• Aeneas’ leaving Dido;
• Dido’s suicide in a self-made funeral pyre.

But Marlowe’s play is far more than a translation exercise. As well as some editing down of speeches and rearrangements for dramatic purposes, the following plot elements are wholly Marlowe’s creation:

• the exchanges between Jupiter and Ganymede at the start of the play;
• the sub-plot involving Anna’s love of Iarbus;
• the first attempt by Aeneas to leave Carthage without Dido’s knowledge;
• the scene with the nurse and Cupid;
• the suicides of Anna and Iarbus that follow Dido’s own death.

**Interpretations of the play**

From one point of view, Marlowe is sympathising with Dido, whilst simultaneously lowering our opinion of Aeneas. The Trojan swears his love to Dido, but betrays that promise (not once as in Virgil, where no vow was ever made, but twice). His excuses after the first attempt to leave are very weak. His account of the fall of Troy also raises questions about Aeneas’ honour towards women (his failure to save his wife Creusa, Cassandra and Polyxena) and anticipates his desertion of Dido. Marlowe shows the Gods as having human flaws, so that Aeneas’ ultimate excuse (that the Gods are forcing him to leave for Italy) seems very weak.

A different interpretation focuses on the comic aspects of the play (Jupiter’s “dandling” of Ganymede, Dido’s reaction to being struck by Cupid’s dart, the Nurse’s reaction, and the final triple suicide). These show Marlowe deliberately undermining the tragic nature of the play. Dido’s love is not real, but artificially induced by Cupid, and thus Aeneas is right to decide in favour of his duty. Rather than betraying his promise to Dido, Aeneas is the victim of a moral dilemma, and his return to Dido after his first attempt to leave, shows his integrity in this no-win situation. Marlowe could be getting his audience to consider both sides of the story, presenting opposing standpoints, but without actually providing a decisive resolution.

**Possible Remembrances in Hamlet**

Hamlet’s famous Player’s Speech in Act II Scene 2 has Hamlet recalling a speech he remembers from a previous performance by the players. “One speech in’t I chiefly loved - ‘twas Aeneas’ tale to Dido - and thereabout of it especially when he speaks of Priam’s slaughter”. Hamlet begins by reciting 13 lines, before inviting a player to complete the speech. Priam’s violent death is recounted in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Marlowe’s *Dido*. The recounted speech in Hamlet bears little correspondence to either of these possible sources. There are, however, a couple of details that bear some resemblance to Marlowe’s text:

**Aeneas:** At last came Pyrrhus, fell and full of ire,  
His harness dropping blood, and on his spear  
The mangled head of Priam’s youngest son,...  

**Dido, Queen of Carthage, II.1.213-5**

**Hamlet:** Now is he total gules, horridly trick’d  
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,  
Bak’d and impasted with the parching streets, ...  

**Hamlet, II.2.454-5**

**Aeneas:** Which he disdaining whisk’d his sword about,  
And with the wound thereof the King fell down.  

**Dido, Queen of Carthage, II.1.253-4**

**Hamlet:** Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide;  
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword,  
Th’unnerved father falls.  

**Hamlet, II.2.468-470**
**Tamburlaine the Great. Part I (1587), Part II (1588)**

Loosely based on the life of the Central Asian emperor, Timur 'the lame'. The play is a milestone in Elizabethan public drama, marking a turning away from the clumsy language and loose plots of the earlier Tudor dramatists and a new interest in fresh and vivid language, memorable action, and intellectual complexity. Along with Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, it is considered the first popular success of London's public stage.

Marlowe influenced playwrights well into the Jacobean period, and echoes of Tamburlaine's bombast and ambition can be found in English plays all the way to the Puritan closing of the theatres in 1642.

**Plot**

**Part I:** The play opens in Persepolis. The Persian emperor, Mycetes, dispatches troops to dispose of Tamburlaine, a Scythian shepherd and at that point a nomadic bandit. In the same scene, Mycetes' brother Cosroe plots to overthrow Mycetes and assume the throne.

The scene shifts to Scythia, where Tamburlaine is shown wooing, capturing, and winning Zenocrate, the daughter of the Egyptian king. Confronted by Mycetes' soldiers, he persuades first the soldiers and then Cosroe to join him in a fight against Mycetes. Although he promises Cosroe the Persian throne, Tamburlaine takes personal control of the Persian Empire after defeating Mycetes.

Suddenly a powerful figure, Tamburlaine decides to pursue further conquests. A campaign against Turkey yields him the Turkish king Bajazeth and his wife Zabina as captives; he keeps them in a cage and at one point uses Bajazeth as a footstool.

After conquering Africa and naming himself emperor, Tamburlaine sets his eyes on Damascus, ruled by the Egyptian Sultan, his father-in-law. Zenocrate pleads with him to spare her father. He complies, making the Sultan a tributary king. The play ends with the wedding of Zenocrate and Tamburlaine, and the crowning of Zenocrate as Empress of Persia.

**Part 2:** Tamburlaine prepares his sons to follow him as he continues to conquer neighbouring kingdoms. Conquered kings are forced to draw his chariot, like horses. Tamburlaine's first son, Calyphas, does not want to be like his father. Seeing this son as a coward, Tamburlaine kills him after a battle in which he refuses to fight. During this time, Bajazeth's son, Callapine, plans to avenge his father's death. Finally, while attacking an Islamic nation, he burns all the religious books, including the Qur'an and claims to be greater than God. Suddenly, he becomes ill and dies, giving his power to his remaining sons. Tamburlaine still aspires to greatness as he departs life.

**Significance**

*Tamburlaine*’s significance is in creating a stock of themes and, especially, in demonstrating the potential of blank verse in drama. It had a great influence on the drama of the 1590s and is still regarded as the text above all others "wherein the whole restless temper of the age finds expression" (Long). The play exemplified, and even created, many of the typical features of high Elizabethan drama: grandiloquent and often beautiful imagery, hyperbolic expression, and strong characters consumed by overwhelming passions. Many Asian tyrants and “aspiring minds” appeared in the drama of the 1590s. Jonson condemned “the Tamerlanes and Tamer-chams of the late age, which had nothing in them but the scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers.”
Stephen Greenblatt (Will in the World (2004) 189-249) considers it likely that Tamburlaine was among Shakespeare's first London theater-going experiences and inspired early works like the three Henry VI plays. The play is often linked to Renaissance humanism which idealises the potential of human beings. Tamburlaine’s aspiration to immense power raises profound religious questions as he arrogates for himself a role as the "scourge of God" (an epithet originally applied to Attila the Hun). Some readers have linked this with the fact that Marlowe was accused of atheism.

Performance

The first part of Tamburlaine was performed by the Admiral's Men late in 1587, a year after Marlowe's departure from Cambridge University. Edward The play's popularity, prompted Marlowe to produce the sequel and led to numerous stagings over the next decade.

The Royal National Theatre production in 1976 featured Albert Finney in the title role and was directed by Peter Hall. This production is generally considered the most successful of the rare modern productions.

In 1993 the Royal Shakespeare Company performed an award-winning production of the play, with Antony Sher as Tamburlaine and Tracy-Ann Oberman as Olympia. The Shakespeare Theatre Company put on the play from October 28, 2007 to January 6, 2008.

The Jew of Malta, (1589 or 1590)

An original story of religious conflict, intrigue, and revenge, set against the struggle for supremacy between Spain and the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean that takes place on the island of Malta. The Jew of Malta is considered to have been a major influence on Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice.

The title character, Barabas, is a complex character likely to provoke mixed reactions in an audience. Like Marlowe's other protagonists, such as Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus, he dominates the play's action. There has been extensive debate about the play's portrayal of Jews and how Elizabethan audiences would have viewed it.

Performance

The first recorded performance was in 1592. It was acted by Lord Strange's Men seventeen times between Feb. 26, 1592 and Feb. 1, 1593 and was performed by Sussex's Men on Feb. 4, 1594, and by a combination of Sussex's and Queen Elizabeth's Men on the 3rd and 8 April, 1594. More than a dozen performances by the Admiral's Men occurred between May 1594 and June 1596.

The Jew of Malta was a success in its first recorded performance at the Rose theatre in early 1592, when Edward Alleyn played the lead role. The play remained popular for the next fifty years, until England's theatres were closed in 1642.

There have been a number of modern productions. Barabas was been played by Alun Armstrong at the Royal Shakespeare Company and by Ian McDiarmid at the Almeida Theatre. Jeff Dailey directed the play for The Marlowe Project in New York City in November, 1999. F. Murray Abraham performed as both Shylock in The Merchant of Venice and Barabas in The Jew of Malta at the “Theatre for a New Audience” in February and March 2007.

Summary

The play contains a prologue in which the character Machiavel, a ghost based on Niccolò Machiavelli, introduces "the tragedy of a Jew." The Jewish merchant, Barabas, is introduced as a man owning more wealth than all of Malta. When Turkish ships arrive to demand tribute, however, Barabas's wealth is seized and he is left penniless. Incensed, he begins a campaign against the Maltese governor who robbed him.
With the aid of his daughter, Abigail, he recovers some of his former assets and buys a Turkish slave, Ithamore, who appears to hate Christians as much as Barabas. Barabas then uses his daughter's beauty to cause the governor's son and his friend to fight a duel in which they both die. When Abigail learns of Barabas's plot, she goes to a nunnery, only to be poisoned (along with all of the nuns) by Barabas and Ithamore for becoming a Christian. The two go on to kill a couple of friars who threaten to report their crimes. Ithamore, however, is lured into disclosing his secrets by a beautiful prostitute and her criminal friend. Barabas poisons all of them in revenge, but not before the governor learns of his deeds. Barabas escapes execution by feigning death, and then helps the Turkish army to take Malta, for which he is awarded governorship of the city. He then turns on the Turks, allowing the Knights of Malta to kill the Turkish army. The Maltese, however, turn on Barabas and kill him as they regain control of Malta.

**Significance**

As with Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, the evil of *The Jew of Malta*'s anti-hero suggests anti-Semitism. However, like Shakespeare's Shylock, Barabas also shows some evidence of humanity, particularly when he protests against the unfairness of the governor's ruling that the Turkish tribute will be paid entirely by Malta's Jewish population. It is because of Barabas's protests that he is stripped of all he has and consequently becomes a sort of monster. He has more asides than any other character, making his isolation from the other characters, including his fellow Jews, all the more evident, and he constantly has to operate in what he does alone: even his daughter becomes detached from him before long, and Ithamore, too, soon loses interest in his former loyalty towards his master.

In his first meeting with Ithamore he has his most famous speech that begins: "I walk abroad a-nights/ And kill sick people groaning under walls," and follows this with descriptions of various murders and robberies he has apparently performed. Nothing in his personality implies that such a person would suddenly tell the truth as he does, and it is possible that he speaking about transforming into, rather than actually being from the beginning, the very thing that anti-Semites portray him as. It could be for this reason that Machievelli, in the Prologue, describes it as the "tragedy" of a Jew.

Barabas says that, in his continual acts of treachery, he is only following the Christian example. He notes that according to Catholic teaching, "Faith is not to be kept with heretics", to which he adds "And all are heretics that are not Jews" (Act II). Barabas also says in the same act:

> Good sir,  
> Your father has deserved it at my hands,  
> Who, of mere charity and Christian ruth,  
> To bring me to religious purity,  
> And, as it were, in catechising sort,  
> To make me mindful of my mortal sins,  
> Against my will, and whether I would or no,  
> Seiz'd all I had, and thrust me out o' doors,  
> And made my house a place for nuns most chaste.

This reference to the example set by Christians is similar to Shylock's famous "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech in Act III, Scene 1 of "The Merchant of Venice," which concludes:

> If a Jew wrong a Christian  
> What is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian  
> Wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by  
> Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you  
> Teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I  
> Will better the instruction.

Very few of the play's other characters show significant redeeming qualities.

- The play ridicules Christian monks and nuns for engaging in forbidden sexual practices.
- A pair of try to outbid each other to bring Barabas (and his wealth) into their order.
Malta's Christian governor, in addition to his unfair treatment of the city's Jews, is revealed to be a grasping opportunist who seize any chance to get an advantage. The Turkish slave Ithamore is somewhat idiotic and has no qualms about getting drunk when offered wine (and sex) by a prostitute (quite apart from his role in multiple murders). Turkish invaders plan to make the city's defenders (the Knights of Malta) into galley slaves.

Barabas is derided throughout the play by Christians for not showing proper Christian charity, and yet the Christians show him no mercy. The hypocrisy is made all the more powerful when, after the Turkish leader's soldiers have all been killed in an explosion created by Barabas, the Christians take the remaining Turks prisoner, and the governor gives thanks to Heaven.

T. S. Eliot's poem "The Portrait of a Lady" has an excerpt from The Jew of Malta:

Thou hast committed
Fornication: but that was in another country,
And besides, the wench is dead."

The same line is quoted by P.D. James in the first of her Adam Dalgleish mystery novels, Cover Her Face, and indirectly in more than one of her latter novels, including The Lighthouse and Innocent Blood.

The same line is also quoted in Ernest Hemingway's 1950 novel Across the River and into the Trees, and is referred to in his 1926 novel The Sun Also Rises. In the earlier text it is by the character Bill Gorton. The narrator, Jake Barnes, introduces Bill as "a taxidermist" and he replies:

"'That was in another country,' Bill said. 'And besides all the animals were dead.'"

Doctor Faustus (1589 or 1593)

The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus is based on the Faust story, in which a man sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. Doctor Faustus was first published in 1604, eleven years after Marlowe's death and at least twelve years after the first performance of the play.

No Elizabethan play outside the Shakespeare canon has raised more controversy than Doctor Faustus. There is no agreement concerning the nature of the text and the date of composition.

Performance

The Admiral's Men performed Doctor Faustus twenty-five times in the three years between October 1594 and October 1597. The powerful effect of the early productions is indicated by the legends that quickly arose. In Histriomastix, his 1632 polemic against the drama, William Prynne records the tale that actual devils once appeared on the stage during a performance, "to the great amazement of both the actors and spectators". Some people were allegedly driven mad, "distracted with that fearful sight". John Aubrey recorded a related legend, that Edward Alleyn, lead actor of The Admiral's Men, devoted his later years to charitable endeavors, like the founding of Dulwich College, in direct response to this incident.

Two versions of the play exist:

1. The 1604 quarto, sometimes termed the A text. The title page attributes the play to "Ch. Marl".
2. The 1616 quarto, enlarged and altered text, sometimes called the B text. Reprinted in 1619, 1620, 1624, 1631, and as late as 1663.

The 1604 version is believed by most scholars to be closer to the play as originally performed in Marlowe's lifetime, and the 1616 version to be a posthumous adaptation by other hands. However, some disagree, seeing the 1604 version as an abbreviation and the 1616 version as Marlowe's original fuller version.
Comic scenes
In the past, it was assumed that the comic scenes were added by other writers. However, scholars today consider the comedy an integral part of the play, showing the change in Faustus' ambitions, suggesting Marlowe did oversee the composition of them. The clown is seen as the archetype for comic relief.

Faustus learns necromancy
As a prologue, the Chorus tells us what type of play Doctor Faustus is. It is not about war and courtly love, but about Faustus, who was born of lower class parents. This is a departure from the Medieval tradition; Faustus holds a lower status than kings and saints, but his story is still worth telling.

Faustus comments that he has reached the end of every subject he has studied. He appreciates Logic as being a tool for arguing; Medicine as being unvalued unless it allowed raising the dead and immortality; Law as being upstanding and above him; Divinity as useless because he feels that all humans commit sin, and thus to have sins punishable by death complicates the logic of Divinity. He dismisses it as "What doctrine call you this? Que sera, sera" (What will be, shall be).

He calls upon his servant Wagner to bring forth Valdes and Cornelius, two famous magicians. The Good Angel and the Bad Angel dispense their own advice. Faustus is won over by the possibilities Magic offers to him. Valdes declares that great things are possible with someone of Faustus' standing.

After creating a magic circle and speaking an incantation, a devil named Mephistophilis appears before him. Faustus commands it to change its appearance to a Franciscan friar. He tries to command the devil but Mephistophilis already serves Lucifer, the prince of devils.

Using Mephistophilis as a messenger, Faustus strikes a deal with Lucifer. He is to be given twenty-four years of life on Earth, during which time he will have Mephistophilis as his personal servant. At the end he will give his soul to Lucifer as payment and spend the rest of time in Hell. This deal is sealed in Faustus' own blood. After cutting his arm, the wound is divinely healed and the Latin words "Homo, fuge!" (Man, flee!) appear upon it. Faustus disregards the inscription with the assertion that he is already damned.

Faustus begins by asking Mephistophilis a series of science-related questions. However, the devil seems to be evasive. The reader then starts to ask himself whether Mephistophilis is to be trusted.

Two angels, one good and one bad, appear to Faustus: the good angel urges him to repent and revoke his oath to Lucifer. This is the largest fault of Faustus throughout the play: he is blind to his own salvation.

Lucifer brings to Faustus the personification of the seven deadly sins. Faustus recognizes these as not as bad and ignores them. From this point until the end of the play, Faustus does nothing worthwhile, having hoped that he would be able to do anything. He gives a speech about how he is damned and eventually seems to repent. Mephistophilis comes to collect his soul, and he exits back to hell with him.

The Calvinist/anti-Calvinist controversy
The theological implications of Doctor Faustus are the subject of debate. One point of contention is whether the play supports or challenges the Calvinist doctrine of absolute predestination, which dominated the lectures and writings of many English scholars in the latter half of the sixteenth century. According to Calvin, predestination meant that God, acting of his own free will, elects some people to be saved and others to be damned — thus, the individual has no control over his own ultimate fate.

At the time Doctor Faustus was performed, this doctrine was on the rise in England, and under the direction of Puritan theologians at Cambridge and Oxford had become the orthodox position of the Church of England. Nevertheless, it remained a source of vigorous debate. The dispute between the Cambridge intellectuals had nearly reached its height by the time Marlowe was a student there in the 1580s, and would have influenced him deeply, as it did many of his fellow students.

The Calvinist concludes that Faust’s damnation was inevitable. His rejection of God and his inability to repent are evidence that he never really belonged to the elect, but was predestined from the very beginning for hell. For the Calvinist, Faustus represents the worst kind of sinner, having tasted the heavenly
gift and rejected it. According to this view, the play demonstrates Calvin’s “three-tiered concept of causation,” in which the damnation of Faustus is first willed by God, then by Satan, and finally, by himself.

The anti-Calvinist view, however, prefers to interpret Doctor Faustus as a criticism of such doctrines. One of the greatest critics of Calvinism in Marlowe’s day was Peter Baro, who argued that such teachings fostered despair among believers, rather than repentance among sinners. Faustus expresses a similar sentiment regarding predestination:

"The reward of sin is death." That's hard.
..."If we say that we have no sin,
We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us."
Why then belike we must sin,
And so consequently die.
Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
What doctrine call you this? Che sera, sera,
"What will be, shall be"? Divinity, adieu!

The play includes a well-known speech addressed to the summoned Helen of Troy, in Act V, scene I.

FAUSTUS: Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?--
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.-- [kisses her]
Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!--
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
I will be Paris, and for love of thee,
Instead of Troy, shall Wittenberg be sack'd;
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest;
Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel,
And then return to Helen for a kiss.
O, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appear'd to hapless Semele;
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms;
And none but thou shalt be my paramour!

Another well-known quote comes after Faustus asks Mephistophilis how he feels out of Hell, to which Mephistophilis replies:

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?

Themes

One theme in Doctor Faustus is sin. Faustus is continuously making wrong choices. His first sin was greed. Faustus feeds sin with his need for power, praise, and trickery. He becomes absorbed in the way people look up to him, believing him to be a sort of ‘hero’. In the end, Faustus realizes his mistake in believing the knowledge power will bring him happiness. At the end of his twenty-four years, Faustus is filled with fear and he regrets his past actions, yet this comes too late. When fellow scholars find Faustus the next morning, he is torn limb from limb, with his soul carried off to hell.
Satanism and death are also prevalent themes. Marlowe sets the story in Wittenburg, Germany with Faustus selling his soul to the devil. Marlowe shows throughout the play that his vow to be a servant of Satan affects his life. Had he known what he was getting into, he would not have made a deal with the devil.

Magic is also a major motif. Dr. Faustus’ downfall began with his love of knowledge, which leads to his need to use magic. Faustus loves the praise that he gets when people view him as a ‘genius’. He enjoys playing tricks on people by using his magic powers. He summons demons with magic, and later conjure up Helen of Troy to comfort him in his final hours. The use of magic is a show of Faustus’ ‘demoralization’. He no longer wants to be a mere mortal ... he wants to be as powerful as the devil himself.

One of the most important themes in Doctor Faustus is the battle between good and evil. At the beginning of the play, Faustus finds himself torn between good and evil, knowing the distinction and consequences of the two, but overwhelmed by his desire for worldly pleasures. Faustus’s desire for mortal satisfaction is personified through the seven deadly sins who all speak to him and tempt him. The battle between good and evil is shown through the good and evil angels which try to influence his decisions and behavior. Kiessling says, “Although Faustus does not heed the plea, Marlowe very evidently implies that the chance for redemption still exists”. Although Faustus recognizes the consequences of choosing to listen to the evil spirit over the good spirit, he cannot resist the temptations of the devil and the worldly and mortal pleasures he offers.

Edward II (c. 1592)

_Edward II_ is one of the earliest English history plays. The full title of the first publication is _The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England, with the Tragical Fall of Proud Mortimer._

Marlowe found most of his material in the third volume of Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles (1587). He stayed close to the account, but he embellished history with the character of Lightborn (or Lucifer) as Edward's assassin. The play was first acted in 1592 or 1593 by Pembroke's Men.

Publication

The play was entered into the Stationers' Register on July 6, 1593, five weeks after Marlowe's death. The earliest extant edition was published in 1594, printed by Robert Robinson for the bookseller William Jones; a second edition, issued in 1598, was printed by Richard Braddock for Jones. Subsequent editions were published in 1612, by Richard Barnes, and in 1622, by Henry Bell.

Synopsis

The play covers Edward II's reign in a single narrative, beginning with the recall of his favourite, Piers Gaveston, from exile, and ending with his son Edward III's execution of Mortimer Junior for Edward II's murder. The play opens with Gaveston rejoicing at the recent death of Edward I and his own resulting return to England. In the following passage he plans the entertainments with which he will delight the king:

Music and poetry is his delight;
Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay. (I.i.53-59)

Upon Gaveston’s re-entry into the country, Edward gives him titles, access to the royal treasury, and guards to protect him. Gaveston himself is not of noble birth and the nobles soon demand his exile. Edward is
forced to agree and sends Gaveston to Ireland. The Queen, Isabella of France (sometimes described as the She-wolf of France), persuades Mortimer, who later becomes her lover, to argue for his recall, so that he may be murdered. The nobles soon turn on Gaveston again, and capture and execute him. Edward in turn executes two of the nobles, Warwick and Lancaster.

Edward seeks comfort in a new favourite, Spencer (Despenser), and his father, alienating Isabella, who takes Mortimer as her lover (one of the "great romances of the Middle Ages") and travels to France with her son in search of allies. France, however, will not help her, although she does get help from Sir John of Hainault. Edward, is soon beaten. He takes refuge in Neath Abbey, but is betrayed by a mower, who carries a scythe (the symbol of death). Both Spencers are executed, and the king is taken to Kenilworth and then to Berkeley Castle, where he meets the cruel Lightborn, whose name is an anglicised version of “Lucifer”. Lightborn kills him, on the orders of Mortimer.

(Historically) Isabella began an affair with Roger Mortimer, and the two agreed to depose Edward and the Despenser family. Isabella returned to England with a small mercenary army in 1326; moving rapidly across England, Edward’s forces deserted him. Isabella deposed Edward, becoming regent on behalf of her son, Edward III. Many believe that Isabella arranged the murder of Edward II. Isabella and Mortimer’s regime began to crumble, thanks in part to her lavish spending, but also due to Isabella’s unpopularity.

(In the play) Isabella warns Mortimer that Edward III, her son with Edward II, has discovered their plot. Before they can do anything, her son arrives, accusing Mortimer of murder. Mortimer is arrested and taken away. Isabella begs her son to show Mortimer mercy, but he refuses. Edward III orders Mortimer’s death and his mother’s imprisonment, and the play ends with him taking the throne.

In 1330, Edward III deposed Mortimer, taking back his authority and executing Isabella’s lover. Isabella was not punished, however, and lived for many years in considerable style, although not at Edward III’s court, until her death in 1358. Isabella became a popular "femme fatale" figure in plays and literature over the years, usually portrayed as a beautiful but cruel, manipulative figure.

Stage history

The first quarto of 1594 states that the play was originally performed by the Earl of Pembroke’s Men. The title page of the 1622 edition states that the play was performed by Queen Anne’s Men at the Red Bull Theatre, showing that Edward II was still in the active repertory well into the seventeenth century.

Since the 20th century, the play has been revived several times. The Prospect Theatre Company’s production of the play, starring Ian McKellen and James Laurenson, caused a sensation when it was broadcast by the BBC in the 1970s. Numerous other productions followed, starring actors such as Simon Russell Beale and Joseph Fiennes. There has even been a ballet created for the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

In 1991, the play was adapted into a film by Derek Jarman. In 2000, a production was presented in Los Angeles by the ARK Theatre Company, founded by former RSC member Paul Wagar. The production was directed by Don Stewart. In 2005, Jeff Dailey directed the play at the American Theatre of Actors in New York City. He won a Jean Dalrymple Award (the Off-Off Broadway equivalent of a Tony) for “Best Direction of a Classic Play” for this production.

The Washington, D.C.’s Shakespeare Theatre Company 2007 staging used mostly fascist-era and jazz age costumes. The production strongly emphasized the gay relationship between Edward II and Gaveston and was one of two Marlowe works inaugurating the company’s new Sidney Harman Hall.
The Massacre at Paris (c. 1593)

This play concerns the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, which took place in Paris in 1572, and the part played by the Duc de Guise in those events.

The Lord Strange's Men acted a play titled *The Tragedy of the Guise*, thought to be Marlowe's play, on Jan. 26, 1593. The Admiral's Men performed *The Guise* or *The Massacre* ten times between June 21 and Sept. 27, 1594. There are a surprising number of Shakespearean borrowings and paraphrases in the text.

The only surviving text is an undated quarto that is too short to represent the complete original play and in all probability it is a memorial reconstruction by the actors who performed the work. It preserves a lot of the violence and stabbing jokes but deletes most of whatever social value the play may have had, except for one long soliloquy near the beginning.

## Fictional Works about Marlowe

- Louise Welsh. *Tamburlaine Must Die*, the last two weeks of Marlowe's life. 2004 (Novel)
- Anthony Burgess. *A Dead Man in Deptford* account of Marlowe's death. 1993 (Novel)
- Peter Whelan. *The School of Night* (about Marlowe's playwriting career after his faked death at Deptford). (Play)

## Additional Reading

- Bevington, David and Eric Rasmussen, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, OUP, 1998;
- Honan, Park. *Christopher Marlowe Poet and Spy* Oxford University Press, 2005
- Trow, M. J. *Who Killed Kit Marlowe?*, Sutton, 2002;