# Did Shakespeare Contribute to the Canon of Christopher Marlowe?

by Robert R. Prechter

Christopher Marlowe had a short life: he was born in 1564 and was stabbed to death on May 30, 1593. Marlowe entered the University of Cambridge in 1580; he was awarded a B.A. in 1584 and an M.A. in 1587. Shortly after earning his B.A., he undertook translations from the Latin, and immediately after earning his M.A., he began to write plays.

While a handful of scholars believe Christopher Marlowe wrote the Shakespeare canon, a larger contingent believes that Marlowe and Shakespeare were collaborators. I find no evidence for either proposition, though I do find evidence that Shakespeare, i.e., the 17th Earl of Oxford, wrote some of the material attributed to Marlowe.

Thirteen literary texts have been consistently credited to Marlowe: two translations, two Latin epistles, two poems and seven plays. We will investigate each in turn to see if we can detect any evidence that Oxford was involved in their composition and determine how to distinguish between Marlowe's and Shakespeare's literary styles.
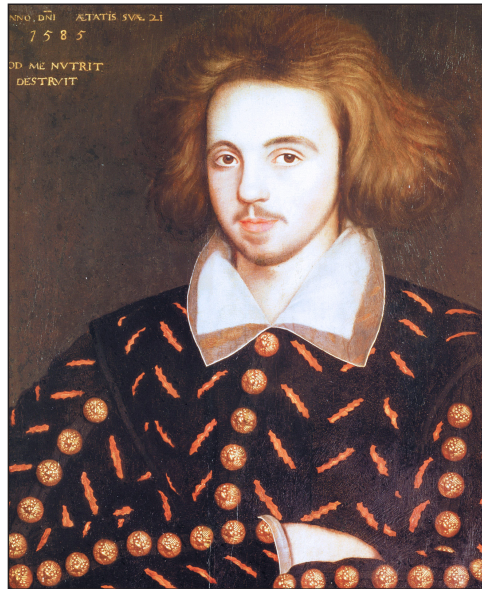


*Figure 1: Christopher Marlowe (1585). Panel painting, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.*

## The Two Translations

### *All Ovids Elegies* (composed c.1585; published 1599)

Since Shakespeare's favorite poet was Ovid, as numerous scholars have pointed out, could Oxford have been behind the translation from Latin titled *All Ovids Elegies*, issued in Marlowe's name? Three aspects of the work do not support that hypothesis.

Oxford's translation of *Ovids Metamorphoses*, published in 1565 and 1567 in the name of his maternal uncle, Arthur Golding, is written in freewheeling fourteeners (Altrocchi; Prechter 2007). Whereas Oxford added material and occasionally improved upon the original, Marlowe's translation of Ovid closely follows the original Latin text.

As opposed to the acclaim that *Ovids Metamorphoses* has garnered, appraisals of Marlowe's translation have been uncomplimentary. Tucker Brooke declared that the work is "characterized [by] metrical inexperience, and defective scholarship" (Brooke 554). Oxford's talent in 1567 was greater than Marlowe's in 1585, and it is unlikely that he would have lost his acumen in the interim.

Finally, "Copies of one edition were publicly burned [in] 1599, by order of the Archbishop of Canterbury…" (Brooke 553). The same prelate had personally approved the publication of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, so it is doubtful that he would have banned a poem by Oxford six years later. In short, there is no indication that Oxford wrote *All Ovids Elegies*.

### *Lucan's First Booke* (composed c.1586; registered 1593; published 1600)

Marlowe's second translation from Latin is a blank verse rendering of Marcus Lucanus's *Pharsalia or De Bello Civili*. The subtitle of the publication, *Translated Line for Line by Chr. Marlow*, shows that Marlowe once again closely followed the original text. Both the topic and the style of the material exhibit the literary exuberance that would make Marlowe famous, as exemplified by such lines as these:

> Romans, what madness, what huge lust of warre
> Hath made Barbarians drunke with latin bloud?

Critical appraisal of the work is akin to that of his first translation. Brooke declared, "Erroneous renderings abound on every page…" (Brooke 643). Once again, I discern no indication that Oxford was involved.

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## The Two Latin Addresses

### "To…Mary Countess of Pembroke" (in Latin) (1592)

This address, signed C.M., appeared in Thomas Watson's posthumously published *Amintae Gaudia* (1592). Marlowe and Watson were close friends, with the latter coming to Marlowe's defense in 1589 in a street fight. A translation of the poem reveals some of the muscular phrases typical of Marlowe. There appears no reason to attribute this text to Oxford.

### "Epitaph for Roger Manwood" (in Latin) (1592)

Roger Manwood was one of the jurists who decided in favor of Watson's and Marlowe's innocence in the aforementioned street fight in London. Manwood died on December 14, 1592. The personal connection to Marlowe confirms his composition of the text.

## The Two Poems

### "Description of Seas, Waters, Rivers, &c." (fragment, published 1600)

A fragment of verse with the above title appears in *Englands Parnassus* (1600) and is attributed to "Ch. Marlowe." The directness and lack of ornamentation in the language are atypical of Shakespeare's verse but are a close fit with Marlowe's style.

### *Hero and Leander* (incomplete epic poem) (composed 1593; registered and published 1598)

*Hero and Leander* is an epic poem that Marlowe never finished. The verse is rendered in rhymed couplets, a form that Shakespeare never applied to extended poems, and it contains some immature lines, such as these:

> Many would praise the sweet smell as she past,
> When t'was the odour which her breath foorth cast.

The verse does improve, and several critics have praised it. Regardless, I agree with Bullen, who wrote, "The music of Marlowe's rhymed heroics was all his own" (Bullen li).

Sometime between Marlowe's death in 1593 and the book's publication in 1598, George Chapman and Henry Petowe independently completed Marlowe's poem. Nothing in either added portion argues in favor of Oxford's authorship.

In my judgment, the translations, addresses and poems published in Marlowe's name belong entirely to him. What then of the plays?

## Traits of Marlowe's Playwriting

We will set the stage for investigating Marlowe's plays for signs of Oxford's involvement by noting aspects of Marlowe's writing that distinguish it from Shakespeare's. Numerous scholars have noted differences, to which I have added my own in the following list of ten contrasting traits:

1. Marlowe's writing style is aggressive and infused with bluster, leaving little room for love, mercy or tenderness. Shakespeare, in contrast, embraces all three of those human qualities.

2. Marlowe characters lack thoughtfulness, feelings and humor, traits that Shakespeare's characters display.

3. Marlowe sets none of his plays in Italy while Shakespeare sets a third of his plays there.

4. Marlowe sets four plays in the Middle East, Germany and Malta, Shakespeare none.

5. Shakespeare's primary characters are royal or noble; most of Marlowe's are not.

6. Marlowe has an exceptional "fondness for using military terms" (Cunningham x). Shakespeare knew battle terms, but he was not obsessed with their employment.

7. Marlowe celebrates "upward thrust and aspiration" (Spurgeon 13–15), whereas Shakespeare believes in a feudal social order.

8. The two playwrights have opposing views of fortune, or fate. Whereas Hamlet disparages "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," Tamburlaine boasts,

   > I hold the Fates bound fast in yron chaines,
   > And with my hand turne Fortunes wheel about.

9. Shakespeare knows and is fond of women, whereas Marlowe uses them as props for his protagonists. In *Tamburlaine*, female characters are given just a few lines, and they are portrayed merely as concubines or victims.

10. Shakespeare is famous for his concentrated eloquence, whereas Marlowe "lacked his rival's effortless ability to turn an unforgettable phrase" (Pointon 206–207).

Those traits and scholars' textual observations will allow us to assess the authorship attributes of each of the seven plays in Marlowe's canon.

## Four of the Seven Plays Are Marlowe's

***Tamburlaine the Great*** (composed and acted 1587)

***Tamburlaine the Great…The second part*** (composed and acted 1588, published together in 1590)

After reading *Tamburlaine*, I concluded that Oxford could not have written it. Based upon the list of traits presented above, the play has all the elements of Marlowe's writing in contrast to Shakespeare's. I hold the same to be true of *Tamburlaine Part 2*.

The plot of *Tamburlaine* describes an upstart shepherd who gathers an army and ruthlessly conquers numerous rulers. Shakespeare, on the other hand, takes a dim view of political and social ambition. Characters such as Macbeth, Richard III, Falstaff in *Merry Wives*, and to an extent King John all suffer for their attempts to usurp the existing political or social order.

Shakespeare's commonly used history source is Holinshed, but Marlowe's sources for *Tamburlaine* differ, as evidenced by the following list (Gill V.5 xxi–xxiv):
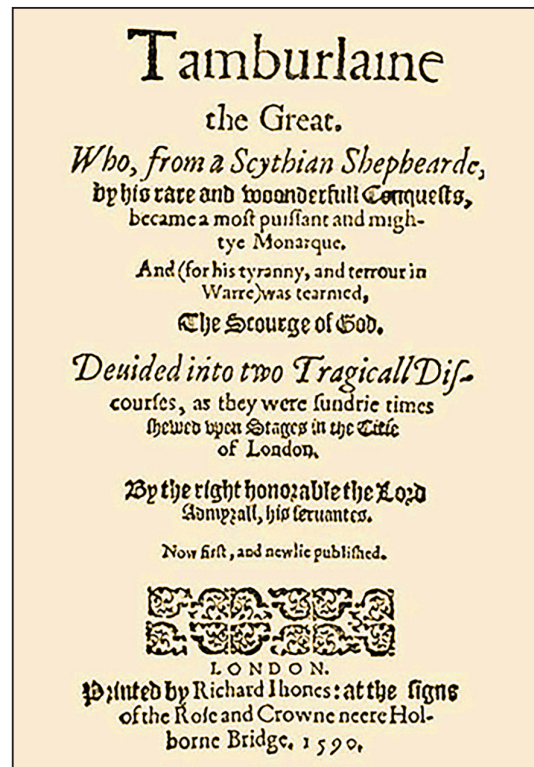
*Figure 2:* Tamburlaine *title page.*

### Sources for *Tamburlaine*

1. Pedro Mexia's *Silva de Varia Lecion* (1542)
2. Thomas Fortescue's *The Foreste of Collection of Historyes* (1571)
3. George Whetstone's *The English Myrror* (1586)
4. Petrus Perondinus's *Magni Tamerlanis* (1553)
5. John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1570)
6. Nicolas de Nicolay's *The Navigations…made into Turkie* (1576)
7. Thomas Newton's *A Notable History of the Saracens* (1575)

8.   Antonius Bonfinius's *Rerum Ungaricarum* (1543)
9.   Paul Ives's *The Practise of Fortification* (1589)
10.  Francois de Belleforest's *La cosmographie universelle do tout le monde* (1575)

Finally, both plays lack the rhetorical brilliance for which Shakespeare is renowned. "Charles Lamb…thought it a titanic task to cull even a few worthwhile lines from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*" (Ashley 221). To conclude, I find no reason to claim these plays for Oxford.

## The Jew of Malta (composed c.1590; published 1633)

This play begins with a monologue from Machiavelli, whereas Shakespeare was not an admirer of Machiavelli's political philosophy. The opening line of the play is often where a playwright crafts a memorable statement or image, yet Marlowe's first line is clumsy: "So that of thus much that returne was made." It is a far cry from "If music be the food of love, play on." The expletive *Umh* appears in the play but never in Shakespeare. Marlowe's mighty lines erupt on occasion:

> Why, let 'em come, so they come not to warre;
> Or let 'em warre, so we be conquerors:
> Nay, let 'em combat, conquer, and kill all….

Critical appraisal follows other assessments of works by Marlowe. Earl Showerman observed that, in contrast to Shakespeare's rounded portrayal of Shylock, "Barabas is pretty much the type of one-dimensional, stock Jewish villain that one would expect from an Elizabethan playwright" (Showerman 6). Here again, there appears to be no basis upon which to claim authorship for the Earl of Oxford.

## The Massacre at Paris (composed 1592; performed January 1593; available text c.1601–02)

Shakespeare's plays come to us in impeccable quality. In contrast, the available text for *The Massacre at Paris* is "corrupted on nearly every page" (Brooke 441). What's more, many lines are copied from other plays, including Shakespeare's, so theater scholars maintain the text was compiled from memory by an acting company. Nevertheless, "Throughout the play, to the very end, occur lines of the most characteristically Marlovian quality" (Brooke 441).

As with the *Tamburlaine* plays, aggressive action permeates the plot. The theme, moreover, is anti-Catholic. Whereas friars are depicted in Shakespeare's plays as helpful, in Marlowe's play a friar stabs the King of France. Adolphus Ward concluded, "Of the *Massacre at Paris* it is unnecessary to say much" (Ward 354). Again, I find no evidence of Oxford's hand in its composition.

## Three Plays to which Oxford Contributed

***Edward the Second*** (registered July 6, 1593; published 1594)

Tucker Brooke wrote, "Marlowe's authorship of *Edward II* is stated on all the early title pages and has never been questioned" (Brooke 308). That statement was true in 1910, but a few decades later, the Ogburns concluded that "the greater part of *Edward II*" is Oxford's (Ogburn ch.18). Dorothy Ogburn offered "evidence that *Edward II* is a direct forerunner of *Henry IV* and of *Richard II* and is by the same hand…" (Ogburn 695fn).

Charlton Ogburn Jr. speculated that "the play was an early one of Oxford's that the earl turned over in draft to Marlowe to make what he could of it" (Ogburn 695). My assessment differs in that: (1) It is not an early play, and (2) Oxford wrote the entire play. Stylistic aspects of the play support these conclusions.



*Figure 3:* The troublesome raigne and lamentable death of Edward the Second, King of England *title page.*

### The Play Is Filled with Shakespearean Attributes

*Edward II* is the only play in the Marlowe canon that is set in England, recounting the reign of an English king, a topic Shakespeare treats 11 times in his canon. The title begins, *The troublesome raigne*, as does the title of the anonymous Shakespeare precursor play, *The Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England*, which historian Ramon Jiménez has assigned to the Earl of Oxford (Jiménez 2003).

*Edward II*'s literary sources include Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, widely acknowledged as two of Shakespeare's primary sources. There are "in *Edward II* a number of parallels with lines in [early Shakespeare plays]…" (Boas 191). Richard Rowland linked numerous terms in *Edward II* to two dozen Shakespeare plays (Rowland 114). James Shapiro mused, "At the outset at least, Marlowe is writing a lot like Shakespeare, not only in the
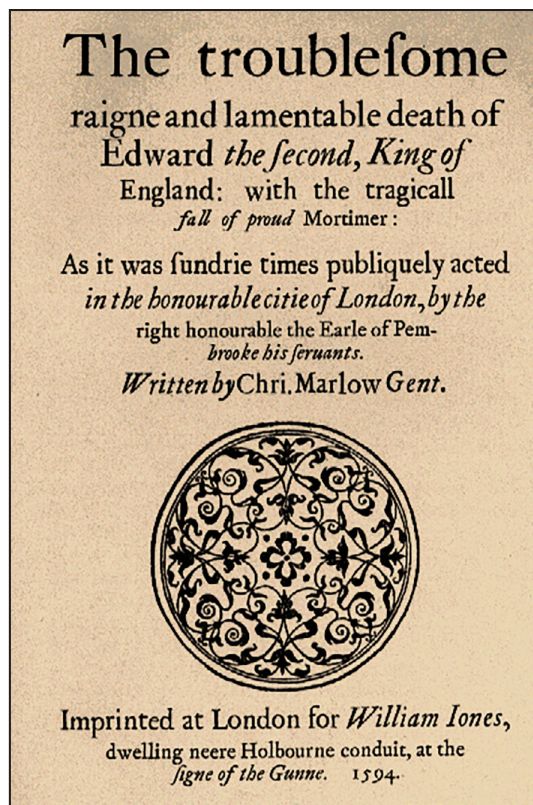
historical and political point of view, but also in the verse style" (Shapiro 92). His qualifier, "At the outset, at least," is unwarranted because all three aspects that he cited remain consistent throughout the play.

Plot parallels also abound. In Scene 6, "Marlowe here augments the rebels' motivation, as Shakespeare did in *1 Henry IV*, 1.3" (Rowland 103). In both *Edward II* (Scene 6) and Shakespeare's *Edward III* (1.2), characters complain of disrespectful jigs written by the Scots to taunt the English. At the end of *Edward II*, "The exhibition of Mortimer's head [parallels] the entrance of Macduff with the head of Macbeth" (Boas 191). Even the suspense in the play has a Shakespearean parallel: "For the combined power and delicacy of treatment, the murder of Edward II may be compared to the murder of Desdemona in *Othello*" (Ward 351).

References and figures of speech further suggest the hand of Shakespeare. Rowland marveled at the "sheer abundance of classical references" (Rowland xxvi) in *Edward II* as opposed to Marlowe's other plays. The play also features metaphors and instances of personification, such as "I am lodgd within this cave of care, /Where sorrow at my elbow still attends," and comparisons, such as "And as grosse vapours perish by the sunne,/ Even so let hatred with thy soveraignes smile." Marlowe mostly eschews those rhetorical devices.

Hosking cited seven linguistic parallels between *Edward II* and Shakespeare, three of which should suffice to convey the intimacy of the connections (Hosking 104-07):

> I can die but once (*Edward II*, 5.1)
> A man can die but once (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2)

> Ay, if words will serve (*Edward II*, 1.2)
> Ay noble father, if our words will serve (*2 Henry VI*, 5.1)

> Earth, melt to air! (*Edward II*, 4.6)
> Our actors... are melted into air (*The Tempest*, 4.1)

Cunningham linked a passage in the play to two lines from Shakespeare, although I find the middle line also has a connection (Cunningham 330):

> He weares a lords revenewe on his back,
> And Midas like he jets it in the court,
> With base outlandish cullions at his heeles… (*Edward II*)

> She bears a Duke's revenues on her back. (*2 Henry VI*, 1.3)

> The gates of monarchs/Are arched so high that giants may jet
>     through (*Cymbeline*, 3.3)

> you whoreson cullionly barber-monger, draw. (*King Lear*, 2.2)

Chiljan cited another parallel (Chiljan 39):

> *Mortimer Junior:* Cousin, and if he will not ransom him
>     I'll thunder such a peal into his ears….
> *Lancaster:* Content, I'll bear my part — holloa! Who's there?
>                   (*Edward II*)
>
> *Hotspur:* He said he will not ransom Mortimer…
>     And in his ear I'll holla "Mortimer!"
> *Worcester:* Hear you, cousin. (*1 Henry IV*, 1.3)

In *Edward II*, Young Mortimer, facing death, says that he "as a traveller/ Goes to discover countries yet unknown." Shakespeare's Hamlet, in his most famous soliloquy (3.1), describes the afterlife as "The undiscover'd country." Rowse opined that Shakespeare "improves upon Marlowe's phrase" (Rowse 139), but our hypothesis proposes a single writer reworking his own phrase.

*Edward II* features numerous verbal connections to the anonymous Shakespeare-precursor plays, *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* and *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, and to the *Henry VI* trilogy, causing what scholars call "the baffling problem of the interrelation of these plays and their authorship" (Boas 192). To solve the conundrum, Brooke decided to "champion Marlowe as the author" (Boas 193) of the *Henry VI* plays, while other scholars have proposed co-authorship. But, as shown above, *Edward II* has intimate connections to a long list of Shakespeare plays. Either Marlowe somehow intruded upon them all, or Shakespeare wrote *Edward II*. Applying Occam's razor makes it an easy decision.

According to one study, *Edward II* is more Shakespearean than plays issued under the name William Shakespeare. Stylometricians Wells and Taylor "found an even greater conformity between function word-use in [Shakespeare's] canonical plays and that in Marlowe's *Edward II* [than they did] in many plays accepted as Shakespeare's" (Jiménez 2003, 20).

So, have scholars concluded that the play was written by Shakespeare? To date, the authority of a printed name on a title page has been too compelling for experts to overcome. Instead, they have issued statements such as these:

> [It is] the textbook from which Shakespeare undoubtedly learned many lessons of dramatic art, later used in *Richard II* and *Henry IV*…. (Brooke 307–08)

> This is the book with which Shakespeare went to school. Only five years had elapsed since *Tamburlaine*, but there is here a development as impressive as Shakespeare's was to be. (Norman)

## Scholars Have Declared *Edward II* to be Unique

Harold Bloom stated, "There seems little enough development between *Tamburlaine* (1587) and *Dr. Faustus* (1593)…" (Bloom 3). But as Rowland observed, "*Edward II*, in almost every aspect of its dramaturgy, is unlike any other play by Marlowe" (Rowland xv). And Harry Levin commented, "*Edward II* would prove…Marlowe's ability to challenge his own assumptions. To see him reverse himself…" (Levin 28). In short, the play is not merely non-Marlovian; in craft and rhetoric, it is anti-Marlovian.

Critical appraisal of *Edward II*, as opposed to that of Marlowe's other works, is uniformly positive. According to theater critics, *Edward II* is not only Marlowe's best play; it is singularly excellent:

> the critics combine in a chorus of approbation when they come to speak of *Edward the Second*, which is recognized by common consent as, after Shakespeare's, the finest specimen of the English historical drama. (Cunningham xvi)

> It is formally the most finished and satisfactory of Marlowe's plays, evidently carefully written…. (Rowse 135)

> [It is] the maturest…of Marlowe's plays [and] the most perfect in all matters of technical skill. (Brooke 307–08)

> [It] puts Marlowe for once on a par with his mighty successor, Shakespeare…. (Lewis 21)

Finally, *Edward II* is "the best preserved of the poet's tragedies…" (Brooke 307–08), a fact more indicative of Oxford's publishing practices than Marlowe's. These singularities contradict the nearly universal assumption that Marlowe wrote *Edward II*. Rather, they are potent indications that he did not.

## Why Wouldn't Marlowe Have Written *Edward II*?

Marlowe's reputed homosexuality may seem to fit the idea that he composed a play about a gay king. Rather, I think it is a contrary indication because homosexuality was a serious crime in the 1500s, and Marlowe would have been wary of advertising his sexual orientation. More important, the king in the play is not a hero but a bumbler, and his ignominious death would be anathema to the sensibilities of a gay writer.

There are two reasons why Oxford might have chosen to attribute the play to Marlowe. Because the title character is gay, he probably assumed it would be a good fit with the author's reputation. More important, the play was registered on July 6, 1593, five weeks after Marlowe died. His death offered

an opportunity to assign a potentially controversial play to someone who was unavailable to be questioned about it.

*Edward II*, moreover, fits into the continua of England's kings and of Shakespeare's plays. England's kings progressed as follows: Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI…. Shakespeare covered the latter four monarchs in his History plays. What of the first three royals? Title pages assign authorship of the Edward plays as follows:

> *Edward I*: George Peele
> *Edward II*: Christopher Marlowe
> *Edward III*: Anonymous

We concluded above that Oxford wrote *Edward II*. In 1760, Edward Capell was one of the first to propose Shakespeare's authorship of *Edward III*. Jonathan Bate, Edward Capell, Giorgio Melchiori, Eric Sams, Eliot Slater and Brian Vickers are among the scholars who have argued for Shakespeare's involvement in writing the play. Eric Sams went further, arguing that the play was entirely written by Shakespeare. Perhaps the play's anonymity was only a minor barrier for scholars compared to an attributed name, so they were free to declare Shakespeare's authorship based on linguistic evidence. The George Peele chapter of *Oxford's Voices* (Prechter 2021–2025) argues that Oxford wrote *Edward I* as well. Thus, in my view, Oxford wrote all three Edward plays, completing a series of dramatic treatments of seven consecutive English kings.

## Connections to Thomas Nashe

Shakespeare is not the only writer whose language permeates *Edward II*. Rowland detailed "the close relationship between the thought and language of *Edward II* and the works of Marlowe's friend and fellow Cambridge man Thomas Nashe, [whose] skepticism and alienation are at the heart of Marlowe's play" (Rowland, Vol.3, xxvi).

Where *Edward II* has "Weele steele it on their crest, and powle their tops," Nashe's attack on Gabriel Harvey in *Saffron-Walden* (1596) has "Steele thy painted May-pole…on their insolent creasts…." Charles Nicholl observed that "I see my downefall written in his browes" from Nashe's *Summers Last Will* (1592) "echoes Marlowe's 'I see my tragedie written in thy browes' in *Edward II*" (Nicholl 139). A reference in the play to the intense murderousness of the denizens of Naples is reprised in Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).

Why are Nashe's phrases intertwined with Shakespeare's? Discussions of the next two plays will reveal why evidence of Nashe's presence is likely.

### *Dido Queene of Carthage* (composed 1593; published 1594)

This play is billed as having been written by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe.

Some critics have argued that *Dido* must have been Marlowe's first play, written jointly with his Cambridge colleague Thomas Nashe in their overlapping college days of late 1582 to early 1584. That idea, however, is not plausible. Nashe's first publication was dated 1589, a full five years later, and the play's composition is far too mature for juvenile college students.

As with *Edward II*, *Dido* features elements that are unique within the Marlowe canon. Consider the following observations:

> "it is curious that Marlowe, who had…avoided…exaggerated alliteration…can in *Dido* repeatedly write [alliterative] lines." (Boas 50)

*Figure 4: The* Tragedie of Dido *title page.*

> "For once Marlowe seems to have descended from his fiery flight above the clouds, and to have sought repose in a trim garden-plot; instead of daring imagination, we have quaint conceits and dainty play of fancy." (Bullen xlvii)

> Instead of "…Marlowe's utter and striking lack of humour" (Lewis 27),

> in *Dido* "…Marlowe exploits to the full the comedy of a situation…." (Gill Vol.1, 119)

Marlowe, as noted above, gives women short shrift in his plays, but *Dido* sympathetically portrays three women.

Most critics claim that Nashe had little or nothing to do with the writing of *Dido*. They presume that since Nashe mostly wrote criticism and satire, he would not have penned a play as romantic and verbally decorated as *Dido*.
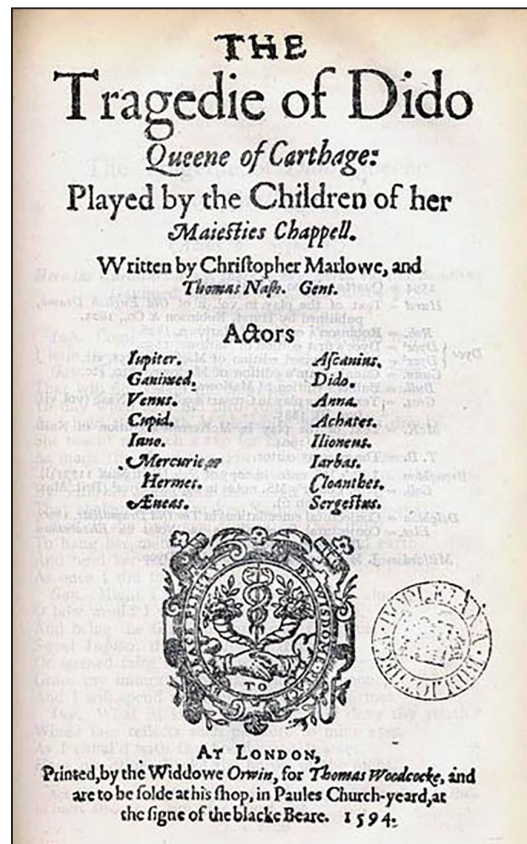
Alexander Grosart alone discerned that Nashe's contributions in fact dominate the play:

> I would state that the "vocabulary" and phrasing of Nashe are so marked in the "Tragedie"—as our Glossarial-Index demonstrates—and that of Marlowe is so slightly illustrated, that in my judgment very little of it was [Marlowe's]. (Grosart xxii)

## Acts I and II Were Written by Marlowe

Marlowe's direct approach to action and dialogue pervades only the first two acts of *Dido*, which features flashes of Marlowe's "mighty line," as in Venus's angry address to Jove:

> Juno, false Juno in her Chariots pompe,
> Drawne through the heavens by Steedes of Boreas brood,
> Made Hebe to direct her ayrie wheeles….

As with *All Ovids Elegies* and *Lucans First Booke*, Aeneas's monologue in Act II closely follows the Latin source text, which, as established above, is Marlowe's usual method.

## Acts III through V Are by Oxford

In Act III, *Dido* becomes a Shakespeare play. Consider language from Dido's rapturous soliloquy in the opening scene:

> Ile make me bracelets of his golden haire,
> His glistering eyes shall be my looking glasse,
> His lips an altar, where Ile offer up
> As many kisses as the Sea hath sands: (III,i)

From Act III onward, the play stops adhering closely to its literary source. Cope noted, "Marlowe made several additions to the Vergilian narrative." According to Cope, the principal changes are: "a framing induction, a comic nurse and multiple suicides at the close" (Cope 138–39). All three of those traits are Shakespearean: *The Taming of the Shrew* features a framing induction; a comic nurse appears in *Romeo and Juliet*; and both that play and *Antony and Cleopatra* end with multiple suicides.

Critics have made many more such observations. Francis Cunningham noted, "Marlowe's Nurse always makes me think of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*" (Cunningham 342). A.W. Ward thought that Dido's review of her suitors is very like Portia's in *The Merchant of Venice*. He added, "The closing line of *Dido* falls on the ear like the last line of Juliet's speech after drinking the potion" (Ward 358).

Two of the play's attributes point directly to Oxford's experiences. The play includes the word *interchangeably*, which scholars have identified as "legal language" and precisely "the term used for the indenture in [Shakespeare's] *1 Henry IV*" (Gill Vol.1, 279). Marlowe was not an attorney, but Oxford had studied the law at Gray's Inn. Moreover, *Dido* draws upon books 2 and 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. These "are also the books Shakespeare cites most often" (Sobran 177). Why? Because Oxford's uncle, the Earl of Surrey, translated books 2 and 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Although scholars have recognized Shakespeare's manner in dozens of ways, they do not believe he contributed to the play. Instead, they have made such statements as, "the mixed farce and romance of *Dido, Queen of Carthage* is Marlowe's most significant gift to Shakespeare" (Cope 146). Yet plays or stories that mix "farce and romance" are otherwise utterly absent from the canons of both Marlowe and Nashe.

Scholars are confused for good reason: the names of Marlowe and Nashe are on the title page, but (1) Marlowe never wrote anything resembling *Dido*, (2) Nashe never wrote a history play or a love story, and (3) numerous plot elements, sentiments and passages sound just like Shakespeare. In my opinion, the scenario is clear: Marlowe finished Act II of *Dido* and died, after which Oxford completed the play and placed Nashe's name alongside Marlowe's on the title page.

You are welcome to believe that Thomas Nashe was a real writer, but under that scenario, it is difficult to explain why scholars have found Nashe's and Shakespeare's styles thoroughly mixed not only throughout the Shakespeare canon but also in *Edward II* and acts III–V of *Dido*. A neat and elegant explanation is that Thomas Nashe and William Shakespeare are pen names of a single writer, the Earl of Oxford (Prechter 2024).

It should strike readers as curious that the title page of *Edward II* attributes the play to "Chri. Marlow *Gent*." and the title page of *Dido* attributes the play to "Christopher Marlowe, and Thomas Nash. *Gent*." The College of Arms would not have recognized the title of Gentleman for either person or persona, so why are those titles there? Applying *Gent*. where it does not properly belong appears to be one of the Earl of Oxford's authorship proclivities. Perhaps loath to attribute his works to commoners, he added that undeserved title to nine other pen names: T.C. Gent. (implying Thomas Churchyard), T.L. Gent., R.B. Gent. (implying Richard Barnfield), Thomas Newton, Gent., N.B. Gent. (implying Nicholas Breton), Hugh Gryffyth Gent., W.R. Gent., H.P. Gent. and Robert Parry Gent. (Prechter 2021–2025).

Why might Oxford have chosen the name Thomas Nashe to appear as co-author of this play? Because in mid-1593:

- He had retired (by way of a literary "death") his prolific pen name of Robert Greene in September 1592.

- His pseudonym of William Shakespeare would not become a published playwright for another five years.

- His pseudonym of Thomas Nashe had become a successful entity and in 1593–4 was at a peak of popularity.

- A year earlier, in *Strange Newes* (January 1593), Nashe had declared his eagerness to prove that if anyone "will challenge mee to whatsoever quiet adventure of Art…he shall finde that I am…a Scholler in some thing else but contention." *Dido* was Oxford's opportunity to show that his pen name of Thomas Nashe could write in any mode he wished.

One critic called *Dido* "perhaps Marlowe's best piece of total theater…" (Cope 138). That positive appraisal runs counter to the typical review of Marlowe's work and fits a composition written mostly by Oxford.

### *Doctor Faustus* (composed 1588–9; registered 1600; published 1604 and 1616)

*Doctor Faustus* runs along Christian lines in dramatizing a man's decision to trade his soul for the pleasures of earth in lieu of the promise of heaven. None of Shakespeare's plays or poems overtly treat such a theme. Roma Gill noted textual connections to *Tamburlaine*, *Tamburlaine Part 2*, *The Massacre at Paris* and *Lucans First Booke* (Gill V.5 xxi–xxiv). All those works, as determined above, were written entirely by Marlowe.

Scholars have determined, however, that someone else contributed the prose portions of the play after Marlowe died. Who might have done so? We can identify the co-author from several observations. The prose portions of *Doctor Faustus* provide the play's humor and feature a clown. The opening lines of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* mock the
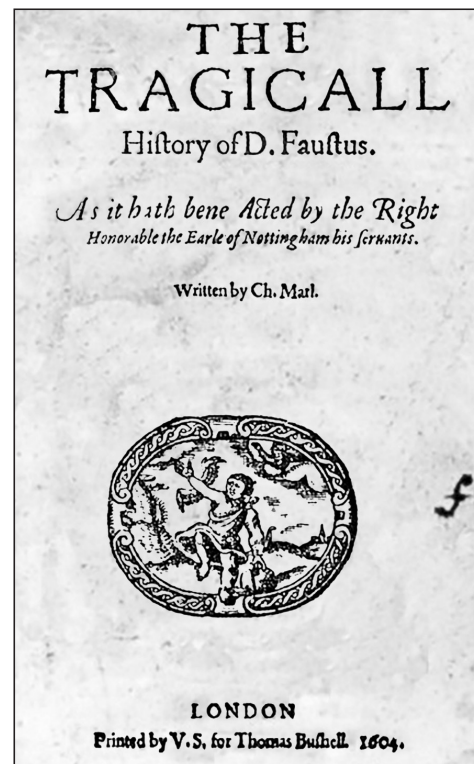


*Figure 4:* The Tragicall History of D. Faustu*s title page.*

very idea of employing clowns in plays, but Shakespeare's characters include both fools and clowns.

Paul Kocher cited dozens of prose lines from *Faustus* that resound "throughout the length and breadth of [Thomas] Nashe's works." He identified Nashe's presence "from the community of ideas, style, and tone which they have with his acknowledged works" (Kocher 18). Some of his examples also connect with Shakespeare. For example:

> *Doctor Faustus*: "I'll turn all the <u>lice</u> about thee into <u>familiars</u>."

> Thomas Nashe in *Terrors of the Night:* "The Druides…are reported to have been <u>lousie</u> with <u>familiars</u>."

> Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (I,i): "<u>louses</u> [are] a <u>familiar</u> beast to man."

Just as with *Edward II* and Acts III–V of *Dido*, stylistic aspects common to Shakespeare and to Thomas Nashe permeate the prose portions of *Doctor Faustus*, revealing the presence of the same writer, the Earl of Oxford.

Another intriguing connection to Shakespeare indicates that Oxford expanded the verse portions of the play as well. Derran Charlton observed, "the opening [four lines] spoken by the 'Lord' in the Induction of the anonymous *The taming of a Shrew*…are identical to the words spoken by Faustus" (Charlton 108). The text is as follows, with *Doctor Faustus*' spelling changes in brackets:

> Now that the gloomie [gloomy] shadow of the night [earth],
> Longing to view Orions drisling [disling (i.e. *dazzling*)] lookes [looke],
> Leapes from th'antarticke [th'antartike] World [world] unto the skie[,]
> And dims [dimmes] the Welkin with her pitchie [pitchy] breath.

Those lines were obviously inserted into the play because they appear between the stage direction, "Enter Faustus to conjure," and what were surely Marlowe's opening words for him, "Faustus, begin thine incantations."

Jiménez confirmed Oxford's authorship of *A Shrew* (Jiménez 2018, 222–248). Why would Oxford have reused those lines of text? The reason seems clear: he had deleted them from his later version of the play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, but found a new place for them in the foreboding opening scene of *Faustus*.

Kocher concluded, "…Marlowe wrote a fairly short play, almost wholly in serious verse, as were his other plays. Since by 1594 it had grown somewhat stale, Nashe was employed to freshen it up and insert comedy. He did so probably in the summer of 1594 in preparation for Henslowe's revival of the play in the autumn of that year" (Kocher 17).

It was about this time that the signature "Thomas Nashe" was placed on the back of the title page of a sourcebook that also contains two handwritten marginal notes referencing Faustus (Nicholl 97), a juxtaposition supporting Kocher's case that Nashe was the play's reviser. Under the hypothesis that "Thomas Nashe" was a pen name of Oxford's, one might speculate that Oxford was planning to add Nashe's name to the publication of *Doctor Faustus* just as he had with *Dido* and left behind a piece of evidence linking his persona to the play. But by the time the play was published in 1604, Nashe had been absent from the press for four years, and it was too late to follow through.

An expanded version of *Doctor Faustus* was published in 1616. Most critics have credited the additional scenes to Samuel Rowley and William Bird, whom Henslowe paid in 1602 for the express purpose of expanding the play (Wikipedia). That text is not incorporated into the present analysis.

## A Verbal Test

To test the hypothesis that Oxford wrote *Edward II* in its entirety and co-authored *Dido*, I compiled a list of 52 notable words found in Shakespeare and counted instances in all seven plays in the Marlowe canon as well as *Hero and Leander*.

Notable words from the Shakespeare canon:

> amaze(d), bees, bliss, bootless, bower(s), complain(t), content, counterfeit, crystal, delight(s), despair(ing), discontent, disdain(s), dissemble(d)(ing), distilling, doleful, dolor(ous), fountain, grief(s), grieve(d), groan(s), grove(s), honey, joy(s), labyrinth, lament, lily, moan, nectar, pearl (noun), overspread, rose (noun), saint (secular), shadow (noun), sigh(s), smart (noun), sob(s), sorrow(s), substance, surfeit(ed)(ing), sweet (except taste), tears (noun), torment, toy(s), traitor(s), treason, treasure (noun), unbridled, wail(ing), weep(ing), woe(s), woeful.

Total instances in the Marlowe canon:

> *Edward II*: **162**
> *Dido*: **114**
> The rest (including *Doctor Faustus*) average **79**.

This is precisely the result one would expect if Oxford wrote *Edward II* and collaborated on *Dido*.[1]

## Did Marlowe Contribute to the Shakespeare Canon?

The opening salvo in *Tamburlaine* mocking the use of clowns in plays; Marlowe's disdain for fortune, fate and the divine right of kings; and his positive treatment of political ambition over the established order suggest that he saw himself, at least in those regards, as the "anti-Shakespeare" playwright. It is unlikely that men holding such contrary values would collaborate on plays.

Scholars' claims that Marlowe contributed to the Shakespeare canon have been based not on documentary evidence of collaboration, of which none exists, but on textual overlaps in the printed plays. Unfortunately, Oxford's contributions to three plays in Marlowe's name, as outlined above, undermine the integrity of all studies to date purporting to find Marlovian work in Shakespeare's plays. A proper test requires excluding Oxford's contributions.

## Conclusions

Based on the preceding evidence, I propose that, after Marlowe's death, Oxford composed *Edward II*, finished *Dido*, and expanded *Doctor Faustus*.

Table 1 outlines the canon of Christopher Marlowe in accordance with the above analysis.

| Table 1: The Canon of Christopher Marlowe, Properly Attributed | | |
|---|---|---|
| **100% Marlowe** | **Dual Authorship** | **100% Oxford** |
| "Description of Seas" | | |
| *All Ovids Elegies* (est.1585) | | |
| *Lucans First Booke* (est.1586) | | |
| *Tamburlaine* (1587) | | |
| *Tamburlaine Part 2* (1588) | | |
| *Doctor Faustus* (orig. est. 1589) | | |
| *Jew of Malta* (est.1590) | | |
| *Massacre at Paris* (est.1592) | | |
| "To Mary Countess of Pembroke" (1592) | | |
| "Epitaph for Roger Manwood" (1592) | | |
| *Hero and Leander* (partial) (1593) | | |
| | **Marlowe Dies 5/30/93** | |
| | | *Edward II* (reg. 7/6/93; pub. 1594) |
| | *Dido* (1593; pub. 1594) (completed by Oxford) | |
| | Published version of *Doctor Faustus* (expanded c.1594 by Oxford; pub. 1604) | |

## Appendix

### A Song Lyric Linked to Marlowe

**"Come Live with me and Be My Love"** (published 1599, 1600)

A song lyric beginning, "Come live with me and be my love/ And we will all the pleasures prove," was credited first to "W. Shakespeare" in *The Passionate Pilgrime* (1599) (sans the first word). Then, under the title, "The passionate Sheepheard to his love," it was credited to "Chr. Marlow" in *Englands Helicon* (1600).

Despite the dual attribution, critics have universally attributed the lyric to Christopher Marlowe. There are several reasons to question that consensus.

Shakespeare employs the most precious of the song's words—*Corall*, *Amber* and *Melodious*—approximately half a dozen times each. Those words are absent from Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, and they appear but once each throughout all the plays credited in this paper to Marlowe, and even then, he uses *coral* and *amber* unpoetically.

The term *Madrigal* in the lyric refers to a type of Italian choral music with which Oxford was familiar. He supported madrigalist William Byrd, and his song lyrics appear in Byrd's *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs* (1588) as well as in John Mundy's *Songs and Psalms* (1594). Composer John Farmer dedicated both his books of madrigals, dated 1591 and 1599, to the Earl of Oxford and publicly praised him as a musician and composer. The word *madrigal* does not appear anywhere in the Marlowe canon.

Shakespeare was a songwriter. His plays include more than 2,000 references to music, over 400 separate musical terms, and around 100 songs. A character in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (3.1) even sings a portion of the song in question.

Marlowe, on the other hand, was not known as a musician, and his plays are totally devoid of songs. Aside from "Come live with me," Marlowe is not credited with any song lyrics at all.

If the lyric were Marlowe's, it would be surprising that it survived since the bulk of his first known poem did not survive, nor did a proper manuscript of *The Massacre at Paris* or the original version of *Doctor Faustus*. Many of Oxford's song lyrics have survived intact.

On balance, I think Oxford is the more likely author of this well-known Elizabethan lyric. The text, however, is not unequivocally his, so uncertainty remains.

# Endnote

1. Adjusting for the lengths of the works has no substantive effect on the verbal dichotomy between Oxford's and Marlowe's texts, but it does increase the per-page Shakespearean influence detectable in *Dido*, which is notably shorter than *Edward II*. That result supports the conclusion that Oxford not only wrote Acts III–V of *Dido* but also contributed to Acts I and II. For details, see the Christoper Marlowe chapter of *Oxford's Voices*.

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