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# So Hallowed the Time

As regards Saxo's Amlethus, as a boy at home in Iceland I frequently heard the story of Amlode told by wretched old crones . . . It must have been composed after the time of the Scythian Tamburlaine, for some of the details are certainly derived from his history.

—Torfaeus, *Series Regum Daniae* (17<sup>th</sup> century)



n analysis of *Hamlet's* plot, characterizations, and allusions suggests that Christopher Marlowe largely composed the play with possible dramatic additions by his theatrical partner, Will Shakespeare. Whether all of the personal and historical echoes were conscious or unconscious remains unclear. In light of the interpretation presented in this section, let us recap some of the historical material to arrive at a plausible scenario for the origin and development of the familiar Shakespearean versions of the play.

*Hamlet's* genesis appears to go back to Marlowe's Cambridge years. For nearly seven years, he studied theology, the classics, and history, laying the intellectual foundation for his future works. We don't know why or when he entered government service. But by the end of his term, he had become a spy or courier for Her Majesty. The antic disposition he put on as a Catholic sympathizer was so convincing that the university attempted to withhold his M.A. degree. An official letter of rebuke in 1587 from several privy councilors on behalf of the queen ordered university officials to grant him his degree, bluntly informing them that they knew nothing of Kit's "good service" to his country. Ironically, the same could be said for historians, critics, and readers ever since. For four centuries, we have been out of the intelligence loop and haven't had an inkling of the varied roles and guises he assumed in the field, on stage, and in print. The portrait of young Kit from that time, so similar to Ophelia's description of Prince Hamlet, defies us to pluck out the heart of his mystery.

After mastering Homer, Virgil, and Ovid at Cambridge, Marlowe evidently turned to historical works, including Plutarch's *Lives*, Holinshed's and Hall's *Chronicles*, Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, and other contemporary accounts for inspiration. Whether through his familial connection with the Muscovy Company or some other influence, he took a special interest in Orientalism. The sea lanes to India, China, and the Far East would

soon open, but in the later part of the sixteenth century the frontier of European civilization consisted of Russia, Persia, Turkey, and Malta and other Mediterranean islands contested by the Mohammedans, Moors, or Tartars. Marlowe's earliest play on Scanderbeg, the Albanian prince brought up by Turks, does not survive. But like *Tamburlaine*, which soon followed, he took an interest in rulers on the cusp of Christendom and Islam. While thumbing through Belleforest, a source for *Tamburlaine*, Kit probably came upon the *Hystorie of Hamblet*. The Amleth myth goes back to Saxo Grammaticus, and Marlowe may also have read his version in the original Latin. But Belleforest's account is the principal source for the Shakespearean versions of the story. Since it wasn't translated into English until 1608, it has been a puzzle how Will Shakespeare, who is not known to have read French, digested it. Marlowe reportedly served as an agent in Rheims, site of the Catholic seminary in France, and his plays, such as *The Massacre at Paris*, demonstrate a fluency in the language.

Whether or not Kit first came across the story of Hamlet in Cambridge, his path intersected with another young dramatist who was also interested in composing tragedies. In London, following the success of *Tamburlaine* and other early plays, Marlowe encountered Thomas Kyd, a budding writer and playwright. Like Kit, Kyd came from a modest family, and his father was a scrivener. Kyd did not have a university education, but like Edmund Spenser he attended the Merchants Taylors' School in London and had a basic knowledge of Latin and the classics. At some point, Marlowe and Kyd became friends and possibly collaborators. Kyd lacked Kit's passion, poetry, and dazzling wit. But his straightforward plots, solid characterizations, and broad appeal filled the theater and in turn influenced Marlowe's works. *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd's masterpiece, rivaled *Tamburlaine* in popularity on the English stage and enjoyed longer runs than any Shakespearean plays.

*The Spanish Tragedy* opens with a brief dialogue between Andrea's ghost and Revenge. The noble Andrea has been treacherously murdered, and Revenge, one of the three furies, vows to help his troubled spirit achieve justice from the next world. The play's supernatural theme, ghostly presence, and courtly cast parallel these aspects of *Hamlet*. In Bel-Imperia, the heroine; Castille, her plodding father; and Lorenzo, her fiery brother, many critics see affinities with Ophelia, Polonius, and Laertes. Several passages from Kyd's play are also directly echoed in the First Quarto of the Shakespearean version, suggesting that it influenced the *Ur-Hamlet* and the earliest versions of the final masterpiece.

The earliest Elizabethan version, the *Ur-Hamlet*, is assigned by most critics to Kyd on the basis of a punning reference in Thomas Nashe's preface to Greene's *Menaphon*. The passage is worth quoting in full:

It is a common practice nowadays amongst a sort of shifting companions, that run through every art and thrive by none, to leave the trade of *Noverint* wherein they were born, and busy themselves with the endeavours of art, that could scarcely Latinize their neck-verse if they should have need; yet English Sececa read by candle-light yields many good sentences, as *Blood is a beggar*, and so forth; and if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning, he will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfult of tragical speeches. But . . . Seneca, let blood line by line and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage; which makes his famished followers to imitate the kid in Aesop, who, enamoured with the fox's newfangles, forsook all hopes of life to leap into a new occupation; and these men, renouncing all possibilities of credit or estimation, to intermeddle with Italian translations . . .<sup>154</sup>

As the son of a noverint, or scrivener, Kyd fits the description, and the pun on "the kid in Aesop" further identifies him as Nashe's target. In this reference, critics find evidence not only that an early version of *Hamlet* was staged by 1589, when Nashe's screed was published, but also that Kyd was the probable author. However, the passage can also be read to further Marlowe's claim to primacy. Essentially, Nashe is complaining that Kyd (to the manner of a copyist born) left his father's profession to become an imitator of others. His Senecan tragedies bear an affinity to the popular *Hamlet*, but Nashe does not say who composed this earlier work. Mention of the "fox's newfangles" punningly points to Marlowe, whose nickname Kit means young fox, as the author. Hence the sense of the passage could be that Kyd was so enamoured with Kit Marlowe's dramatic innovations in *Tamburlaine* and the putative *Hamlet* that he took up writing for the theater as a career.<sup>155</sup>

Whether or not Marlowe penned the original *Ur-Hamlet*, it was evidently revived on the stage several years later. Henslowe's diary mentions a performance of *Hamlet* in 1594, and Thomas Lodge described a devil in another play "as pale as the vizard of a ghost, which cried so miserably at the Theatre, like an oyster wife, 'Hamlet, revenge.'"<sup>156</sup> Until James Roberts entered the play at the Stationers' Register in 1602, these are the chief references to the earlier version.

Another clue to the play's paternity is the character of Revenge. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the fury appears under this melodramatic stage name, revealing Kyd's genius in appealing to a mass audience. In the Marlovian and Shakespearean works, she is usually referred to by her Greek name, *Alecto*, meaning "Unceasing" or "Relentless," betraying the poet's classical orientation.<sup>157</sup> In the opening of *Der BB*, the German *Hamlet* incorporating material from the *Ur-Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, the fury embodying revenge appears as Alecto, and the two other furies, as well as Hecate, queen of Night, are introduced by their Greek names. (*Megaera* means "Begrud-

ging” and *Thisipone* “Avenging”). The proper names suggest that Kit either revised Kyd’s original prologue to the *Ur-Hamlet* or composed it himself. During this period, Marlowe was experimenting with forbidden knowledge in *Dr. Faustus* and probably introduced supernatural themes in several early plays that later were attributed to Shakespeare, including the second and third parts of *Henry VI*. Under the guise of history and religious orthodoxy, these works provided the playwright a platform to expound on magic, witchcraft, religious nonconformity, and political subversion. In addition to Joan of Arc who is portrayed as a witch, Margaret of Anjou dabbles in the black arts, and Jack Cade, the lord of misrule, stages a political uprising under cover of a May Day celebration. The carnivalesque themes continued in the *Henry IV* plays, where Falstaff styles himself as a squire of the Night (i.e., Hecate) and a forester of Diana.

While rooming together, Marlowe and Kyd shared not only manuscripts and dramatic themes, but also reference materials, including the paper containing “vile, hereticall conceipts” against Jesus Christ that was discovered in Kyd’s lodging on May 12, 1593. By the time Kyd’s flat was raided, Kit was residing at Thomas Walsingham’s estate in Scadbury. Under torture, Kyd implicated Marlowe and told the authorities that the incriminating document was Marlowe’s and had inadvertently been shuffled into his own papers two years earlier. On the basis of this discovery and confession, the investigation focused on Kit. His name had already surfaced in connection with the Dutch Church libel when doggerel signed “Tamburlaine” was scrawled on a seditious wall poster in April, and Lords Buckhurst and Puckering were on his case as early as six months previously.

Kyd can hardly be faulted for turning in his former roommate and fellow playwright. He was compelled to testify on the rack, and his subsequent charges of heresy and blasphemy against Marlowe cannot be taken at face value. The offending document, a passage from an Arian tract, may have been disregarded as inadequate even by the Star Chamber. It was originally printed in a duly licensed book by an orthodox theologian, who quoted the Socinian passage only to refute it. It was exactly the kind of reference material that an M.A. in theology like Marlowe would be expected to have in order to disprove the conceits of heretics and unbelievers. Still, it served as the pretext for Kit’s arrest warrant and opened Pandora’s box to more serious allegations in the statements attributed to Baines and Cholmeley.

Given the witch hunt and its growing number of victims, Marlowe had virtually no choice but to stage his death and exit the Elizabethan stage. He had overreached, willfully tweaked the nose of authority, and put his own life in jeopardy. By simulating a fatal accident, he could end the official inquiry, protect his companions, and quietly depart to return another day. I like to

think the papers in Kyd's flat in which the Arian passage was shuffled consisted of the original draft of *Hamlet*! Certainly the Unitarian sentiments of the offending passage are consonant with Hamlet's greatest soliloquies on the nobility and sovereignty of reason, though these probably would have been added later.

Fortunately, a copy of the *Ur-Hamlet* survived, and the next year Henslowe, who was Marlowe's and Kyd's theatrical manager, reprised the early version of the play on the London stage. By this time, Kyd was dead; Marlowe was probably in exile in Italy turning his hand to comedies. The Danish prince was perhaps pacing the back corridors of the poet's labyrinthine mind in his inky cloak.<sup>158</sup>

Back in London, *Venus and Adonis* came out under Shakespeare's name a couple of weeks after the Deptford affair. As an esteemed patron of the arts, the Earl of Southampton, the man to whom it was dedicated, had the requisite abilities and public confidence to serve as an aristocratic foil for Will and insulate the arrangement from the Crown and censor. The earl and Kit may have had some prior relationship dating back to their university days, but Burghley, Southampton's fatherly guardian, evidently brokered the deal. The following year, *The Rape of Lucrece*, another narrative poem, appeared, also under Shakespeare's name. A steady stream of plays followed with no name on the title page, beginning with *Titus Andronicus* and including *The First part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, *The true Tragedy of Richard Duke of Yorke*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Originally composed and produced from the late 1580s to the mid 1590s, they show the strong literary influence of Marlowe's early plays. For five years, between 1593 and 1598, eight Shakespearean plays were published without attribution. It would seem that it took Will several years to grow into his new role as author and dramatist.

Toward the end of the 1590s, a flurry of dramatic and literary activity brought Marlowe's and Shakespeare's names to prominence. Marlowe's works underwent a revival on stage, and *Hero and Leander*, *Ovid's Elegies*, *Lucan's First Book*, and *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* were published for the first time. *Dido Queen of Carthage* may have been revived, as Henslowe's diary notes payment in 1598 for a boy actor, and his inventory of stage properties includes Cupid's bow and arrows and Dido's robe. The first play printed under Shakespeare's name, *Love's Labor's Lost*, came out in 1598; the play transports some of the same characters in Kit's *The Massacre at Paris* to a romantic setting. The following year, Archbishop Whitgift stepped up his persecution of poets and satirists, and Kit's work, along with that of Nashe, Harvey, and several others, was publicly burned. Several weeks or months later, the new Globe theatre opened, probably featuring *As*

*You Like It*, with its tribute to Marlowe as the “Dead shepherd” (3.5.81), and its provocative allusion to “a great reckoning in a little room” (3.3.15), and other Marlovian refrains. All of this activity suggests that Marlowe returned from abroad or sent fresh manuscripts, his friends quietly began issuing his works, and he boldly stepped up the satirical content of his work.

In 1600, the last of the Italianate comedies—*The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*—appeared under Shakespeare’s name, while the daring *As You Like It* was registered but stayed for publication, perhaps because of prudence. With its patriotic call to arms featuring a “band of brothers” (4.3.60) (a band resembling Tamburlaine and his commanders, according to James Shapiro, who called it “a kind of *Tamburlaine*, Part Three”<sup>159</sup>), Shakespeare’s *Henry V* came out anonymously in 1600. Its allusion to the Earl of Essex as “the general of our gracious Empress” (5.prologue.30) flattered Queen Elizabeth. But its further depiction of the gallant leader of the Irish expedition “Bringing rebellion broached on his sword” (32) shocked contemporaries and verged on sedition. The Second Part of *Henry IV* also appeared, with its immensely popular Falstaff. Two years later, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* appeared, at the request of Queen Elizabeth, who had asked to see Falstaff in love. But from light romantic fare and impassioned nationalism in the mid and late 1590s, the Shakespearean plays returned to tragedy and darker themes. This shift is precisely what we would expect if Marlowe had been living in Italy and returned to England, where his name and reputation were tarnished, his physical movement was limited, and he faced the constant risk of exposure.

As the archbishop’s bonfires roiled the artistic community, Marlowe evidently turned his attention to *Hamlet* for the first time in nearly a decade. If he did not have his own manuscript copy, he could have obtained one from Henslowe. In the tale of the Danish prince, he found the perfect vehicle for a penetrating critique of Tudor absolutism, as well as a mirror to hint at his own fate and a stage on which to enact his literary revenge. A decade’s worth of experience and reading of authors, including Timothy Bright and Montaigne, find their way into the revised manuscript. In July 1602, printer and publisher James Roberts was entrusted to register the play at the Stationers’ Company on St. Christopher’s Day. Since 1593, Roberts had enjoyed a monopoly on printing playbills for the London stage, where he may first have met Marlowe, and he later registered and printed *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>160</sup>

As he was surrounded by danger on all sides and under the influence of wealthy and powerful patrons and protectors at court, Marlowe’s first complete revision of *Hamlet* as reflected in the First Quarto was extremely circumspect. There are no allusions to Denmark being a prison, to the Essex

rebellion, to the war of the poets, or to other contemporary events. The Claudius/Whitgift and Gertrude/Elizabeth constructions and the autobiographical parallels that appear later are minimized. It is not clear exactly when and where the first productions of this *Hamlet* took place, but according to stage tradition Shakespeare played the role of the ghost, reinforcing the conviction that he was the play's author.

The First Quarto of *Hamlet* was published in 1603 by Nicholas Ling and John Trundle. The association between Marlowe and Ling, a London stationer, went back a decade or more. On May 17, 1594, one calendar year after the warrant was issued for Marlowe's arrest, Ling registered *The Jew of Malta*, but if it was published, no copies of the first edition survive. In the same year, Roberts and Ling collaborated to bring out Thomas Kyd's translation of *Cornelia*. Earlier in his career, in the mid-1580s, Ling had published several collections of sermons by John Udall, the Puritan minister who was later suspected in the Marprelate affair, sentenced to death, and pardoned as part of a deal brokered by London merchants, possibly connected with the Russia Company, to banish him to Turkey. Ling also published several of Nashe's works, including a reprint in 1599 of Greene's *Menaphon*, in which Nashe alluded to the *Ur-Hamlet* in his preface, and an edition of Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*. Some critics recently have suggested that Ling edited *England's Helicon* in which Kit's poem, *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*, first appeared.

There is speculation that Q1 of *Hamlet* itself was originally a condensed version of the play written for traveling players, and the *Der BB* version may have been performed in Germany by a troupe of English actors as early as 1603, the year it was published. Q1's printer, Valentine Simmes, originally served as part of the Marprelate conspiracy and was jailed and tortured at Whitgift's command and interrogated by Buckhurst and Puckering. He printed eight Shakespearean quartos, including *Richard II* and *Richard III*, and was one of the printers singled out by name by the archbishop during the book burning episode in 1599. Over the years, Ling was Simmes' principal business associate.<sup>162</sup> Edward Blount, Kit's self-styled literary executor, contracted Simmes to print John Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays*, a major source for some of the soliloquies in *Hamlet*. Simmes also printed *A Warning for Fair Women*, an anonymous play that is a contemporary influence on the revenge theme in *Hamlet*, and he printed the first edition of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* in 1604. In 1605, Simmes printed an account of the Lord Admiral's trip to Spain as special envoy from King James.

This intricate web of connections, stretching from the Marprelate affair through *The Jew of Malta* to the publication of *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *Dr. Faustus*, ties Marlowe to a network of printers and publishers with a long

history of bringing out not only his own previous works but also controversial and, in some cases, subversive material.

With the setting of Elizabeth's sun and the anticipated dawn of James's reign, *Hamlet's* First Quarto was substantially revised. With its allusions to the Essex rebellion and the Poets' War with Ben Jonson and its harsher portrait of the queen, the Q2 of *Hamlet* (published by Ling and printed by Roberts) included topical references to events occurring from about 1600 to 1603. It probably attained its final form after Elizabeth's death in March 1603. No doubt the puns on "Wicked" Whitgift, missing from Q1, were added after the archbishop's passing in February 1604. Some surviving copies of Q2 have a publishing date of 1604 and others 1605, suggesting that it came out in two print runs. (Recall that England observed the Julian calendar then, and the year began on Lady Day, March 25.) I like to imagine that the first run appeared on October 31, 1604, the night the play begins (see below), and the second run on May 20, 1605, the anniversary of Marlowe's arrest and (as May 30 New Style) "death" in Deptford.

Kit appears to have rewritten the play easily, enlarging it by about half. The impending or actual end of Whitgift's long reign of terror and the queen's complicity would have provided a tremendous impetus for him to hold up a mirror on stage and in print to their joint rule in usurping ancient liberties. Still, the playwright would have had to be extremely careful not to touch on religion directly or to arouse any other unpleasant emotions or memories associated with his past life and career.<sup>162</sup> As in *The Comedy of Errors*, *King John*, *Twelfth Night*, and earlier plays, this would have been accomplished indirectly through similar themes, parallel characterizations, and other constructions (see Table 6). The imminent or actual accession of James—the most dramatic event in England since the defeat of the Spanish Armada—would have been on everyone's mind during this period. Kit appears to have had no illusions about James, as is demonstrated in his portrait of Fortinbras in the play. But the public's wildly optimistic expectation of their new ruler would have inclined early Stuart audiences and readers to look for allusions and parallels to James in the portrait of the play's main protagonist, Prince Hamlet. Hence, the themes of adultery/murder, seizure of the crown, and princely revenge—reflecting Scottish intrigue and parallel events in James's early life—would have provided topicality and local coloring to the play.<sup>161</sup> At the same time, they would serendipitously mask the deeper, more fundamental critique and references arising from the poet's own life and circumstances.

With the end of the Elizabethan era, even before the old queen was buried and the new king was enthroned, a thousand ministers of the Church of England signed a Millenary Petition. On King James's journey south



from Scotland in early 1603, *The Humble Petition of the Ministers of the Church of England desiring Reformation of certaine Ceremonies and abuses of the Church* was presented to him on behalf of those seeking “redresse of diverse abuses of the Church” and wishing to “acquaint your Princely Majestie with our particular griefes.”<sup>163</sup> This astonishing appeal, arising at the end of a generation of persecution, may have emboldened Marlowe to revise the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* and substantially enlarge its religious imagery, allusions, and other constructions. Old, ailing, and reeling from this public rejection of his stewardship, Archbishop Whitgift would be dead within a year, and Kit evidently now felt free to pun on his wicked deeds and name.

Yet the word play remained cleverly concealed behind the play’s astonishing abundance. “The purpose of playing,” as Prince Hamlet observed, “. . . was and is, to hold, as ’twere the Mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature; scorn her own Image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (3.2.16–19). Despite its contemporary resonances, reading and viewing audiences, then as now, would have been attracted to *Hamlet* primarily because of its nobility and truthfulness. In its own right, apart from any personal or historical echoes, its canvas depicts an epic story whose clash of personalities, emotions, and ideals is universal.

Why was the prologue of the *Ur-Hamlet* and *Der BB* dropped from Q1, Q2, and the Folio? This is one of the minor mysteries that remains unsolved. If Marlowe’s view of Providence had changed, as Prince Hamlet’s does in the play, perhaps after a decade the poet considered the prologue too deterministic. Then again, it may have been too similar in spirit and tone to the supernatural passages in *Dr. Faustus*, which also came out in 1604, and Kit was afraid that his identity would be revealed. Or perhaps he had grown embarrassed at its sophomoric rhyme scheme, reminiscent of the “rhyming mother-wits” (Prologue 1) he lampooned in *Tamburlaine*.<sup>164</sup>

With or without a prologue, Hamlet’s ghost first walked late on the evening of October 30, St. Marcellus’s day, as scholars Steve Sohmer and Steve Roth have noted in separate articles.<sup>165</sup> The action in the play opens shortly after the stroke of midnight, the next calendar day, October 31, marking the beginning of All Hallows Eve (observed today as Halloween). It was the traditional night when the ghosts and spirits of the dead appeared and a time for revels, the election of lords of misrule, and the inversion of social values and hierarchy. Hecate’s annual feast fell on May 30, and her monthly Suppers and remembrance of the dead were also celebrated on the thirtieth of each month. With its tricks and treats, Halloween, the modern version of All Hallows Eve, derives from her monthly celebration in October. Hence, like the Deptford affair, *Hamlet* opens on a day sacred to

the goddess of Night. In this sense, the prologue is superfluous. The names of Alecto, Megaera, and Thisiphone may never have made it into the authorized versions, but their spirits, transmuted into the pursuit of poetic justice, permeate the texts.

The play's time frame is integral to its overall theme and meaning. *Hamlet's* action spans about three and a half months, and as Sohmer and Roth have shown convincingly it is plotted according to the festive calendar. According to their chronology, Prince Hamlet determines to put on an antic disposition the following day, November 1, All Saints' Day, fulfilling the injunction to his father's spirit to "remember me" (1.5.95). During Advent, the critics observe, the apparition fails to appear, substantiating Marcellus' observation that on "that season . . . / Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated, / . . . no spirit dare stir abroad, / . . . no planets strike / No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, / So hallowed, and so gracious is that time" (1.1.169–175). On January 4, the traveling players arrive, and Hamlet conceives the idea of the play-within-the-play. The following night, *The Mousetrap* is performed. Twelfth Night, January 5, marked the end of the twelve days of Christmas and was also a time for merry-making. (The Lord Chamberlain's Men performed four times for Elizabeth on this festive occasion between 1596 and 1602.) As Hamlet's production reaches a climax at about midnight, Claudius abruptly arises and calls for the lights. The moment coincides with the arrival of Epiphany, January 6, the traditional feast of lights. With the end of Advent, the furies and witches resume stirring the caldron of deceit and revenge. Polonius is slain, and the ghost appears to Hamlet in his mother's bedchamber. After Hamlet is detained and sent abroad, Ophelia loses her bearings. The prince is gone for about two months, toward the end of which his forlorn lover drowns. The graveyard scenes, culminating in her funeral and the fencing contest, take place on February 14, St. Valentine's Day, foreshadowed in one of her songs and the distribution of flowers. In 1602, the year *Hamlet* was registered, as Roth notes, Valentine's coincided with Shrove Sunday, the first of a three-day period of revels and misrule known as Shrovetide. Going back to the Roman Saturnalia (another ancient festival whose roots extend to Hecate), it marked the turning of winter to spring and the end of the carnival season. Following Shrovetide came Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, and a forty-day period of fasting and penitence. Hence, as Sohmer and Roth conclude, all of *Hamlet's* action takes place during the distaff period of the year, a season of royally sanctioned pranks, puns, and lewd jokes, traditionally presided over by a king of fools. In producing the play-within-the-play, Prince Hamlet serves as master of revels and lord of misrule.

We can now take this insightful reading of the play one step further. Like

Marlowe, Hamlet's role in the script he prepares for the king and queen is concealed, and the play-within-the-play is performed under the guise of the principal player and his acting troupe.

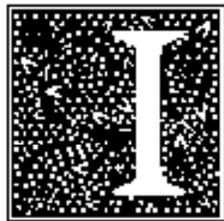
And what was Will Shakespeare's role in all this? As in the play, Marlowe could not have succeeded without his real life Horatio. A careful reading of the text and appreciation of the dangerous conditions under which it was composed, performed, and published suggests that Will played an integral role in bringing *Hamlet* to life. In light of what we have seen, he may not have written or revised Marlowe's scripts, but he performed the starring role in the Shakespeare Compact, the decades-long partnership that gave birth to the collected comedies, tragedies, and histories identified with his name. As Kit's sounding board, literary alias, and second self, his spirit also appears in *Hamlet* and is as indistinguishable as that of the poet's.

Throughout the Shakespearean canon, the fool or jester plays a subversive role, voicing the sentiments of the downtrodden and dispossessed, serving as a touchstone for the monarchs' own repressed consciousness, and representing the composers themselves.

## The Election Lights

. . . I do prophesy th'election lights  
On Fortinbras, he has my dying voice  
—*Hamlet*

(5.2.351–352)



In supporting Fortinbras's succession, Hamlet casts his vote not only for his Norwegian rival, but also in a broader sense for the Commons and democracy. Critics are divided about exactly what form governance takes in the play. Early modern Denmark had an elective form of kingship, a proto-constitutional monarchy, in which a council of elders ratified the new sovereign. As a rule, kingship passed from father to son, but not always, and in either case it had to be approved. As a minor, Prince Hamlet might have been passed over in favor of his uncle, who was brother to the former king, so his claim is not absolute. Some critics even contend that Hamlet was illegitimate and thus ineligible to rule. Still, the prince himself clearly feels robbed of his rightful inheritance when he says that "He that hath kill'd my King and whor'd my mother, / Popp'd in between th'election and my hopes" (5.2.69–70). His sentiments suggest that he expected to succeed his father

but was shunted aside. An overhasty vote may have been taken while he was away at school or fraudulently cast or tallied. Most likely, his mother threw her support to her new husband. "He's loved of the distracted multitude" (4.3.4), Claudius observes, possibly voicing Whitgift's fear of democratic rule and glancing at Marlowe's popularity on the London stage.

Beyond the intricacies of Danish law and the prince's personal fortunes, the play's larger theme touches on the inherent corruption of an absolute monarchy. As reflected in Claudius's and Gertrude's rule in the play, Elizabeth and Whitgift reigned by divine right and reacted in horror at the slightest breath of representative government or self-rule. England's queen regularly scolded parliament for interfering with her prerogatives and dispatched wayward members to the Tower or placed them under house arrest. In the ecclesiastical arena, the archbishop brooked no opposition or dissent and formulated a new doctrine that claimed bishops ruled by divine authority. Invoking the fear of anarchy and mob violence, as in the play, England's queen and her spiritual adviser regularly attacked "innovation" and "novelty" such as the Essex uprising, Jack Cade's rebellion in *2 Henry VI*, and the Rippon incident in which Separatists protested the death of one of their imprisoned parishioners with placards denouncing the archbishop and his cronies.

As primate of the Church of England, John Whitgift railed against all attempts to reform the church and recognize a more collegial form of governance. For example, in a letter to Theodore Beza, the leading Calvinist theologian in Geneva, he related how tolerating the slightest change would inevitably lead to chaos: "[S]ome being carried away, began to inveigh, first, against some habits and rites, and then against the Liturgy; and so, at length, against the whole manner of ecclesiastical government here appointed."<sup>166</sup> Where will it end? he appealed rhetorically: "[The Puritans] have a mind to abolish all Bishops . . . and if you could commit the sum of all ecclesiastical affairs to the whole Church, what is it else than to bring back an *ochlocracy*, [rule by the multitude] or at least a *democracy*?"<sup>167</sup>

Kingly sovereignty encompasses absolute, unchallenged reign. Prince Hamlet stands for precisely the opposite—the sovereignty of reason. Applied to the human intellect, which throughout the play has been described as "noble in reason" and "infinite in faculties" (2.2.295–296), the concept suggests that each person's mind and spirit is free, independent, and autonomous. Twice in the play the terms "sovereign" or "sovereignty" and "reason" are conjoined (1.4.79, 3.1.158), and on one occasion reason is described as "godlike" (4.4.40), suggesting that the real life Hamlet and Horatio (Marlowe and Shakespeare) stood for complete artistic, intellectual, and spiritual freedom. As Patrick Cheney shows in *Marlowe's Counterfeit*

*Profession*, the works published under Kit's own name can be seen as establishing a counter authority to Tudor absolutism based on upholding *libertas* (ancient liberties) and the rights of the Commons. The Shakespearean works continue to challenge kingly might with the nobility and sovereignty of reason. As the Danish prince declares, it is a contest culminating in "the pass and fell incensèd points / Of mighty opposites" (5.2.65–66). In *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, Andrew Hadfield contends that the collected works constantly challenge political authority and question absolute monarchy. "Shakespeare seems to toy with the idea that hereditary monarchy may not be the most obvious or best form of government, and his plays explore the merits or demerits of alternative political forms in practice."<sup>168</sup> Following *Hamlet*, which he says primarily addresses anxieties growing out of the Elizabethan succession crisis, Hadfield asserts that under James, the Shakespearean work is "more focused on the question of *how* to govern than of who had the right to do so."<sup>169</sup>

Marlowe's personal life intersects with several progressive political influences as well as religious ones. Among those who sought asylum in the Netherlands, Robert Cushman, a close neighbor to Kit's family in Canterbury, made the arrangements for the *Mayflower* to sail to the New World in 1620. William Brewster, William Bradford, and the other Pilgrim fathers who founded the Plymouth colony belonged to Separatist congregations in Holland and England that survived the execution of Barrow and Greenwood in 1593. John Winthrop, the head of the Massachusetts Bay colony, a more orthodox Puritan community but one that also viewed the Church of England with suspicion, arrived in America on the *Arbella*. It is tempting to muse that toward the end of his life Marlowe, like Prospero, the wise magician in *The Tempest*, set sail for the New World and found a measure of contentment in what Hamlet's forebears knew as Vineland.

In the context of the religious controversies of the time, especially the Church of England's doctrine of uniformity and Elizabeth's and Whitgift's repression of Protestant reformers, Catholics, and freethinkers, *Hamlet* is an eloquent appeal for freedom of belief and respect for individual conscience. It anticipates an era of universal toleration, enlightened rule, and self-government, and in many parts of the world it is still ahead of its time.

Marvelously unifying the personal, the social, and the spiritual, *Hamlet* continues to defy augury and final interpretation. Though some of the individual examples cited in this section may miss the mark, the play's overall theme and rhetoric mirrors the contest of mighty opposites between Marlowe and Whitgift for the ear of Elizabeth and the soul of England.

## The Breath of Kings

BOLLINGBROKE. How long a time lies in one little word!

[banishment]

Four lagging winters and four wanton springs

End in a word: such is the breath of kings.

—*Richard II*

(1.3.213–215)



In spite of her absolutist tendencies, Elizabeth presided over a glittering court and brought stability to a nation torn by religious strife, political intrigue, and foreign entanglements. It is not difficult to see why a young, aspiring scholar like Christopher Marlowe would enter her service. In the wake of the great victory over the Armada, many poets, artists, and musicians sang her praises, including young Kit in *Edward III* and *The Massacre at Paris*.

In her twilight years, spanning the decade of the 1590s until her death in 1603, the queen took on the mantle of a spiteful *crone*. Relying on Burleigh, Whitgift, and her other aging *cronies*, she denied advancement to a younger generation of ambitious courtiers, including Francis Bacon and Robert Devereux, setting the stage for the final tragedy of the Essex Rebellion (and a graver labor for *crowners* or *coroners*). As she had throughout her reign, she refused to name a successor as the end drew near, leaving the matter to Providence. The succession crisis threatened to plunge the nation into religious civil war after her death. A shrewd judge of her audience, Elizabeth observed that the common people worshiped the rising sun and that she had no intention of playing the role of the setting sun. Yet during her later years, Gloriana, whose motto “ever the same” bespoke constancy and immutability, metamorphosed into Cynthia, the ever changing moon, and then into Hecate, goddess of the Night. Like the triple-faced divinity of ancient Greece and Rome, she presented three visages to her subjects. As Juno, she presided over an empery of lesser deities, strutting marshalls, and literary peacocks. Like the Olympian queen, she pushed the territorial boundaries of her domain, engaged in endless dalliances, and routinely vented her rage and jealousy. As Artemis, the chaste goddess of the wilds, she made an icon of her virginity and substituted her cult for that of Mary, the mother of Christ, whose worship she suppressed. As Athena, she read seven languages fluently, dazzled ambassadors by speaking extemporaneously in Latin, played the lute and virginal, and presided over the greatest flowering of the theater since ancient Athens.

Yet in the end, as Elizabeth tried to deny her mortality, her countenance hardened into that of the dark harridan of classical myth. “The Queen was old, crotchety and cantankerous; the established religion to which she clung was a collection of theological platitudes divorced from living faith or inner meaning; and her court was a brittle charade as encrusted with ritual as old Bess herself was ‘thick with jewels,’” as one biographer noted.<sup>170</sup>

In this cauldron of *fin de siècle* discontent, the Shakespearean *Hamlet* came to birth. Whether intentional or not, the poet portrays Hamlet behaving like an acolyte of Hecate, the sable queen of Night. “Good *Hamlet* cast thy nighted colour off,” Queen Gertrude peremptorily instructs him in their opening exchange (1.2.69). The prince’s lament that “The time is out of joint” (1.5.204) invokes the goddess’s triple visage, facing simultaneously the past, the present, and the future. In the play, the eternal return in which time is ever present is known as mythic time. As Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, and other mythologists have explained, traditional society saw time as cyclic or spiralic. The same patterns and rhythms occur over and over again, with slight changes and variations, as things gradually change into their opposites. This is the yin/yang lesson of Homer’s epics, the *Aenied*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. It is the basis of the festal and religious calendars with their seasonal observances, as well as the farmer’s almanac. In the Marlovian and Shakespearean canons, mythic time also continually breaks through linear or modern time, as in the supernatural scenes in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, and many other plays.

*Hamlet’s* quantum time frame silhouettes the archetypal reversal in the roles of Marlowe, the queen, and the archbishop. In Kit’s life, he was originally cast, like his hero Tamburlaine, as the fearless scourge of the London stage and, like Faustus, as the practitioner of the black arts, daring God out of his heaven. He was the priest of Night, the antipode to Elizabeth’s Gloriana, the goddess of Day. But over the course of time, they exchanged places. After his chariot went off course and plunged into the sea, Marlowe reemerged reborn, relinquishing tragedy and history for comedy and romance. The queen’s star dimmed, and as Diana, the virginal moon, she futilely tried to enforce her cult of chastity on the court. In the end, she assumed the role of aged Hecate, obsessed with her appearance and sacrificed her own children like Essex on the altar of obedience. John Whitgift too metamorphosed from a passionate young “heretic” ready to face a martyr’s death into a grand inquisitor. Like Paul in Ephesus who organized a bonfire against the priests of Hecate, he railed against idols and unbelievers. In the end, the archbishop turned into a caricature of the archfiend. Like Mephistopheles in his role as playmaker, he personally took to supervising the London theater, orchestrating legislative masques in Parliament, and

staging public executions of heretics and witches.

Ironically, Marlowe was never suspected as the composer of the tragical history he plotted in *Hamlet* and the tragical-comical-historical-pastoral works he orchestrated with Shakespeare. Unlike so many other members of their supporting cast, including Elizabeth, William Cecil, Raleigh, Southampton, Northumberland, Arbella Stuart, James Morice, and Essex, he never was imprisoned in the Tower—London's Elsinore—the symbol of England's rottenness. Nor did he ever stand before the dreaded Star Chamber and ecclesiastical High Commission or, so far as we know, be catechized by Master Topcliffe. Like Lao Tzu, whose penetrating wisdom almost cost him his head, he disappeared peacefully into the sunset. As critics have noted with surprise, for all of Marlowe's interest in the supernatural, there are no ghosts in his early works. Yet the adamantine destinies fated that he become a living ghost. After his empty grave was dug, his name and reputation interred, and charges of atheism and other dirt heaped on his memory like Pelion on Ossa, he was free to do as he liked. His partner, Will Shakespeare, was also allotted a spectral-like destiny. Except for scattered legal documents, property transactions, and civil complaints, he remains virtually invisible.

As a ghostly mirror held up to the Elizabethan Crown, *Hamlet* represents the dutiful subject/son's last effort to confront his wayward ruler/mother and have her look into the window of her own soul. By then, in the sunset of her reign, it was too late for her to change course, but with its call to remembrance the play could perform a redemptive function. Whether *Hamlet* was staged at court or Elizabeth ever read the play in manuscript, we may never know. Chances are she died without knowing that Marlowe survived and went on to collaborate with Shakespeare in bringing out new works. In the same way that Kit was entangled in his own youthful folly and could only be rescued by leaving him to his own devices, Elizabeth harbored unreal fantasies about imposing uniform beliefs on her subjects and tended to throw herself away on strong, unworthy courtiers and churchmen whose lust for power, riches, and honors continued until the end. To the extent that Elizabeth never changed, *Hamlet* administers last rites to a fickle queen and her high priest. Encrusted with precious stones, Elizabeth possessed every earthly treasure and diadem but one—"the jewel inestimable," liberty and a due respect for freedom of conscience.

In *Henry VIII*, which came out several years after the queen died, Elizabeth's birth is celebrated and her legacy is acknowledged, if only in contrast to the dissolute reign of her successor. Surrounded by lawless resolute, the Fortinbras-like James made the Tudors look wise and noble by comparison. In another glancing tribute to Elizabeth in a Stuart play, the

goddess Diana appears in *Pericles* as a benign queen of Night, protecting the virginity and honor of the protagonist. In possibly his last play, *The Tempest*, where Prospero, the wise magician, holds his adversaries to a final reckoning but has long forgiven them, the poet finally comes to terms with his own tumultuous past.

Freudian critics have zeroed in on Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude as the crux of the play. A Marlovian reading affirms this insight, but the dynamic between mother and son is less psychological and sexual than the-ological and social. As the sovereign mother of England, Elizabeth was fair game for filial rebuke by her realm's most gifted son and poet.

## The Merry Songs of Peace

In her days every man shall eat in safety  
Under his own vine what he plants, and sing  
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbors.

—*Henry VIII*

(5.4.33–35)



As a meditation on the human condition, a critique of Tudor rule, and a tableau of the poet's interior landscape, *Hamlet* has mesmerized audiences and readers for four centuries (see Table 7 for a summary of major resonances). In his plays before and after the events in Deptford, Christopher Marlowe's pen turns our deepest fears and loftiest dreams to dramatic shapes and gives them a local habitation and a name. Like his namesake, St. Christopher, the Christ-bearer, Kit helped modern society cross the seas of medieval ignorance, religious fanaticism, gender bias, and other forms of intolerance. The future he envisions is one in which everyone, including kings and commoners, men and women, gay and heterosexual, Christian and Muslims, will join together in peace and harmony. Ironically, the return to lost paradise in the above passage is prophesied for the future reign of Henry's daughter, the infant Elizabeth. Its language and tone bear an uncanny resemblance to the vision of a utopian society in Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. (Incidentally, the "vine" was an Elizabethan symbol for religion, reinforcing the idea that everyone was a lamp unto him- or herself.)

"Bred of Marlin's race," in Robert Greene's words, Marlowe proved the supreme magician. By staging his death in Deptford, he convinced the world that he died in a tavern brawl at a tragically young age. By surrendering



credit for his future works to Shakespeare, he was able to follow his muse and live the balance of his life as a free human being. By creating the illusion that Will was an immortal bard whose incomparable genius eclipsed ordinary mortals, he guaranteed that the dark, impenetrable literary void at the center of Will's life and career would largely escape detection. Through the consummate use of literary sets and props and dramatic smoke and mirrors, Marlowe's and Shakespeare's secret has been kept for four hundred years. In the Shakespeare Compact, Marlowe, the master espial and projector, created his ultimate illusion. Like Tamburlaine riding in a carriage pulled by defeated kings, Faustus's summoning of the shade of Helen of Troy, Bottom's bewitching of Titania, Hamlet's staging of the Dumb Show, and Prospero's drowning of his book, the poet has captivated us with the tale of the Sweet Swan of Avon. Through the misdirection in Deptford and the literary sleight of hand on the title pages of the quartos and folio, our gaze has been directed elsewhere.

Illuminating Kit's story does not in any way diminish Will's. His leading role is actually enhanced, considering that he, not Marlowe, served as the public persona for the Shakespeare Compact through the end of the perilous Elizabethan era until well into that of the uncertain and disappointing Stuart reign. Lest we focus only on Kit's authorial role, we need only remember that the muses govern acting and dramatic performances as well as verse. And among players, Will grew into the greatest Roscius and Plautus of his—and perhaps any—age, not through his performance as Hamlet's ghost and other small parts, but in his commanding role as Shakespeare, “the Star of Poets.”

In “Hecate's Ban,” we have examined and presented the case for Kit's survival and continuing authorship. New historical, scientific, and literary evidence suggests that the poet staged his death on May 30, 1593 and went on to bring out his subsequent works in collaboration with actor William Shakespeare with the help of powerful protectors at court, the support of relatives and friends in Deptford, and the devotion of a network of literary patrons, printers, and publishers. The comical history of Christopher Marlowe, clown prince of England, and his dramatic partner and leading actor, William Shakespeare, is more sublime than anything written or staged. Among the shining lamps of heaven, which include Elizabeth Tudor, John Whitgift, Mary Sidney, William and Robert Cecil, Arbellia Stuart, John Penry, Robert Devereux, Thomas Sackville, Richard Baines, and all the members of their supporting cast, Marlowe's and Shakespeare's shine brightest whenever *Hamlet* and the other immortal plays and poems are read, performed, or remembered.