

THE REAL CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Towards the Quatercentenary 1593-1993

The purpose of this open letter was to present to the reader as true a portrait of

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FURNISHES &

to set aright the distorted image

presented by Charles Nicholl's book:

The Reckoning - The Murder of Christopher Marlowe

by A.D. Wraight

published for

THE MARLOWE SOCIETY

An Open Letter to the Murderer of Marlowe's Reputation

Dear Mr. Nicholl,

PREJUDICE is today alive and well, vigorously indulging in the assassination of historical personages on slight and dubious evidence. I am one who deplores this current fashionable trend, and see it as a blot on the honorable escutcheon of the historian. A new motto would appropriately be MORTUI NON MORDENT [The dead do not bite]. This latest character assassination, of a very great poet-dramatist on the eve of the quatercentenary of his death, cannot be passed over in silence.

To be fair, you are not the only twentieth century scholar who has been seduced to believing the malevolent words of Marlowe's detractors, all dubious characters themselves: the lewd informer, Baines, who was set to hunt him down for the Star Chamber Court; the pathetic, unjustly tortured Kyd, who hated him with bitter vengeance in his heart; and that *'profoundly slippery trio'* (your own words) who testified at the inquest on his murder, one of whom had his neck in the noose unless he could plead slaying Marlowe in 'self-defence' whereupon he could get off scot free, and did! It is too easy to present Marlowe as a nasty individual his enemies have done it for you.

Justice demands that a man *cannot be condemned on the words of his enemies alone.*

The testimony of his friends, mentioned in passing, bears no weight whatever in your assessment of him. Your research offers nothing new to warrant your sensationally defamatory hypothesis. What is new, is that your personal opinion of him touches new depths of prejudiced denigration of this undoubted genius, presenting him as an unmitigated scoundrel, a thoroughly despicable character. Did Marlowe deserve this treatment?

If the answer were that you simply told the unvarnished truth about him, based on valid evidence and impartial judgment, there would be no more to say. But a keen perusal of your book reveals that it is a woefully biased it work from beginning to end, pivoting on a narrow base of *an* unproved hypothesis. In your introduction you pose the

question: "*IS THIS A TRUE STORY?*" And you answer: "Yes, in the sense that it is fact rather than fiction." This I challenge.

The poison pen portrait presented in your pages, emphasized by the Peeping Tom picture on the book-jacket suggesting the listening spy who will betray his friends for money, is an aberration. This "poet spy" who allegedly insinuated himself into the circle of an advanced thinking nobleman "for ulterior ends", and was "snooping" on his fellow students at Cambridge to betray them, is your invention a fiction disguised as history. Your pages are spattered with pejoratives and categorical assertions for which you have no evidence.

"We find Marlowe in the company of spies and swindlers because, regrettably, he was one himself." (p 266)

"Marlowe becomes mixed up in this world because it is a way forward. It put money in his purse, gets him noticed, gives him entrée to influential circles." (169)

"Another answer might be that Marlowe enters this devious, predatory company because he was himself a devious, predatory young man." (169)

And comparing Marlowe to the informer Baines:

"They are, strangely, men of the same stamp." (132)

These are all highly speculative, illogical, personal opinions of Marlowe, aimed at being sensational, shocking and lucrative! A man who works to detect criminals cannot, by your *insinuation*, be made a criminal too. Where is your warrant for this? The creator of *Tamburlaine*, which swept him to fame, is hardly likely to have needed to seek a 'leg up' the social ladder from the world of spies. His envious fellow dramatist Robert Greene did not hail him as "Thou famous gracer of tragedians" for nothing. He was clearly not a nonentity!

Introducing your theme to the reader you state: "This is not a book about Marlowe the poet: there have been many of those ...Quite often it is not about Marlowe at all, but about the bad company he kept."

You must be referring to such men as Kyd testified he was often seen conversing with in St. Paul's Churchyard at the book stalls; Thomas **Harriot**, the mathematical genius, considered the greatest scientific mind before Newton; Walter **Warner**, the philosopher, both friends of the Earl of Northumberland; and Matthew **Roydon**: the poet. He kept company with that suave man of the world and advanced thinker, Thomas **Watson**, Latin poet and sonneteer the friend of William Byrd (a devout Catholic whom Queen Elizabeth greatly favored and protected, who wrote the Anglican 'Great Service' doubtless familiar to Marlowe from his Canterbury choirboy days). He kept company with the poets, George **Chapman**, famous for his translation of the works of Homer, and Michael **Drayton**, prolific poet of sonnets, eclogues and many other fashionable forms of this prolific age of poetry, and with the publishers Edward **Blount** and Thomas **Thorpe**; with the brilliant Sir Walter **Raleigh** and the young '**Wizard Earl**' of Northumberland a man of exactly his own age who treated men of genius as his friends and did not stand rank with them, whose passion for doing experiments with chemistry earned him his nickname; and with the drama-loving young **Lord Strange**, later Earl of Derby; and with his liberal patron and true friend, the cultured Thomas **Walsingham**, well loved from his youth by the Queen, who worked in intelligence for his 'cousin' Sir Francis Walsingham. These were Marlowe's valued friends. Some "*bad company*" this!

This was the elevated circle of men who were his genuine associates his companions in discovering and debating the delights of the mind, many of them dedicated seekers of after 'knowledge infinite' like himself. A dangerous pursuit in the sixteenth century, labeled as 'atheism' and heresy, because it led to scientific investigation which was greatly feared by the medieval minded ecclesiastical authorities. It heralded the freeing of men's minds from superstition and from the domination by church dogma. It had nothing to do with atheism, which was the stigma used to tar the 'freethinkers'; i.e. those who engaged in the exploration of nature with questioning minds. This was forbidden, as Francis Bacon discovered to his dismay when he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, to study at the age of thirteen (boys attended the universities from the age of twelve or so in those days) and left two years late, because he found that the dons had "frozen minds". He preferred to study at home under the guidance of his remarkably broad-minded father.

All this important ideological background is wholly ignored in your narrow view, confined by your myopic research in the espionage records, valuable in itself not misapplied. My criticism of your book is broadly speaking on three main counts:

1 *Your obdurate and unjustified bias against Marlowe* relentlessly pursued, discarding anything that would show him in a favourable light. This implacable prejudice is extended also to his close friend, Thomas Watson.

2 *Your gross omission of relevant data from the well-documented incidents you have called Marlowe's "knife fights"* - two events that you claim make "*plausible*" Frizer's story told at the inquest alleging Marlowe's unprovoked aggression. With these I shall deal, in detail to demonstrate that they reveal Marlowe as the very opposite of aggressive by nature, which is presumably why you don't wish your readers to know these facts? In a historian that is unpardonable.

3 *The shift in emphasis away from the sixteenth century ideological context to the purely political arena*, which distorts the real situation. The narrowness of your vision is the severely limiting factor in your book.

In this work claiming to be the first full scale investigation of Marlowe's murder you only ask: *Why was Marlowe murdered?* And come up with the answer, which is no answer, that it was "*a complex kind of meaninglessness*", reflecting your unproved theory that his murder was somehow connected with political, court rivalry.

For this no one has ever found any evidence - not Samuel Tannenbaum, not Eugenie de Kalb, not you either.

The question you do not ask is: "*Why was Marlowe being hunted by the Star Chamber?*" So let's address it here.

The Free-Thinkers

The aspect of Marlowe's tragedy that you have signally failed to investigate is the witch-hunt against the free-thinkers. The main charge against Marlowe in the informer's dossier is 'atheism', laced with blasphemy to add the requisite touch of lewdness favored in all such indictments. It is a religious indictment, an indictment about how a man thinks. This is the kernel of the matter, which you evade.

Significantly, you never use the term 'atheist' as that sixteenth century stigma specifically fastened on the freethinkers; you use it always in its literal sense as a disbelief in God. You also never use the term 'free thinker', and whilst giving fascinating personal glimpses of Northumberland and Raleigh riding together, and playing at cards, the intellectual exploration of these men is hardly touched on. The essential link uniting them was free thought.

When referring to the investigation into Raleigh's religious beliefs at Cerne Abbas, you cite the Questions asked by the bigoted interrogator, verbatim, but not the replies. The reader is left with the impression that, albeit not proven, Raleigh and his circle such as Hariot, might perhaps have been atheists?

Above all, you strive to make all this appear only political; Raleigh's indictment of 'atheism' and the commission set up to investigate him is presented as inspired by his political enemies at court. This shallow interpretation ignores the real historic situation behind the persecution, first of Marlowe, and then of Raleigh and his circle.

For the interest of the reader of this criticism, I will outline the true situation that pertained, which is the context in which Marlowe's murder most be seen.

Dame Frances Yates is the outstanding authority, to whom you pay lip-service, but totally ignore her important research on the exciting stirrings of the emerging scientific society of the future that was so greatly feared by the reactionary ecclesiastical powers, whose domination over men's minds was tenaciously guarded by their instrument of enforcement - the Holy Roman Inquisition abroad and the Court of Star Chamber in England. The fear of losing their power-base as the minds of men became freed from superstition (Marlowe urged men not to be "afraid of bugbears and hobgoblins") was what impelled their witch-hunt against the free-thinkers.

This movement, largely underground of necessity, is what Yates calls, "the striving for illumination", the yearning for scientific knowledge, the "turning towards the works of God in nature in a scientific spirit of exploration, using science or magic in the service of man". Paolo Rossi has shown that science was emerging from magic, sometimes with inspirational leaps into infinity as with Bruno. Marlowe was being hunted because he was the epitome of renaissance man who was reaching out to embrace scientific knowledge, which the reactionary powers wanted to crush, and he became vulnerable because he rashly spoke about this to those who were not within the esoteric circle of fellow freethinkers. Atheism was the crime with which these advanced thinkers were falsely stigmatized, to be condemned and eliminated by silencing them or burning at the stake, as was Bruno for his ardent belief in the infinite universe of endless worlds a martyr to scientific thought.

The envious Robert Greene, who hated Marlowe for his brilliant success, played Judas by naming him a Machiavellian atheist, publicly in print in his deathbed valediction to the dramatist whom he had long attacked in his lampoons. His vicious diatribe was the knell that sounded Marlowe's doom. Nothing could be more inappropriate to Marlowe, who cared deeply about religion and pondered questions of Christianity and theology.

He was originally destined for a career in the church by his scholarship to Corpus Christi. His 'crime' was that he dared to think and to question, as did "deep-searching" Northumberland and his friend Raleigh, who once spent a whole night discussing religion with the Jesuit, John Cornelius, who was imprisoned at Wolverton awaiting sentence, a brave and risky thing to do on Raleigh's part.

Raleigh was constantly accused of atheism, which Sir Edward Coke used as a stigma to brand him with at his trial when he hurled "thou damnable atheist!" and "Spider of Hell!" as choice epithets at the quiet man in the dock who conducted his defence so nobly that King James was afraid to have him executed at the end. You appear to have no sympathy with these brave men whose aspirations are superbly "expressed in Marlowe's speech exhorting "us all to have aspiring minds."

One souls whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet's course
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And ever moving as the restless spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves, and never rest,

This is the genius whom you accuse of being a poet-spy who insinuated himself into Northumberland's household "for ulterior ends". But here you have to admit that you have found no evidence to support this notion:

"If I could prove this, it would be a big step forward in this investigation. It would give some concrete shape to Marlowe's intelligence work in the 1580s, placing him in this particular context of the Earl of Northumberland, and in this particular role of the poet-spy, using his literary entrée into a nobleman's household for ulterior ends."

To add credence to this unproved hypothesis of the "poet-spy" to which you adhere in the face of its patent implausibility, you seek evidence to underline your image of a man who is devious, predatory, capable of betrayal, cold, mercenary; all of which your image of the "poet-spy" implies. So you turn to Marlowe's works, and choose a quotation from Edward the Second - the speech of the devious Young Spencer, who sucks up to Gaveston seeking advancement through the king's favourite. It is the only example from Marlowe's works that you give. As this is a historical character Marlowe portrays him to the life. He is not the dramatist's invention. Your selected example falls flat as a supposed self-identification of Marlowe. I offer you a speech from *The Massacre at Paris* spoken by the dying French King Henry III, who has just been stabbed by the poisoned dagger of a Jacobin friar, when the *English Agent* arrives (a non-historical character who might well be taken to represent Marlowe himself):

Enter the English Agent

HENRY:

Agent for England, send thy mistress word
What this detested Jacobin hath done

Tell her, for all this, that I hope to live;
Which if I do, the papal monarch goes
To wreck, and th' antichristian kingdom falls;
These bloody bonds shall tear his triple crown,
And fire accursed Rome about his ears;
I'll fire his crazed buildings, and enforce
The papal towers to kiss the lowly earth.
Navarre, give me thy hand: here I do swear
To ruin that wicked church of Rome,
That hatcheth up such bloody practices,
And here protest eternal love to thee,
And to the Queen of England specially,
Whom God bath bless'd for hating papistry.

Here speaks the poet who was born and bred in the city that here the heavy scares of the iconoclasm of Henry VIII's reformation. As a choir boy he had sung to Queen Elizabeth when she spent a fortnight in Canterbury residing during her stay at the Palace of St. Augustine very near to Marlowe's home, when he was nine years old. Do you imagine this made no impression on the sensitive soul of this gifted young boy, who grew up feeling deeply the duty to protect the Queen's life from the assassin's hand? This scene exactly reflects the dangers from which they were protecting England's great Protestant Queen.

Marlowe, the Secret Agent of the Queen's government

As Chancellor of Cambridge University Lord Burghley made astute use of the connection to send his agents to scour the student body for suitable young men to recruit into the government's secret service. When Marlowe had gained his baccalaureate and become Dominus Marlowe on Palm Sunday in 1584, at the age of twenty, he was eligible for this service. Doubtless this is how his entry came about.

Marlowe's career in espionage is the main theme on which your research has focused. The central hypothesis of your book, that of Marlowe the "poet-spy", seems to have been predetermined, for it has not grown out of research, since you can produce no substantiating evidence and it remains unproved to the bitter end. Speculating without warrant you imagine Marlowe beginning his career as a Cambridge "snoop":

It is possible that he was, like many of Walsingham's ferrets, a genuine Catholic sympathiser who turned, or was forced to turn, into an informer. His first targets were other Catholics at Cambridge, particularly the militant fringe of students who planned to defect to the seminary at Rheims in this game the line between treason and loyalty is a fine one. (p 219)

Is this "Catholic sympathiser" the poet-dramatist who was educated under the aegis of the Anglican church with the generous bequest of a scholarship to Corpus Christi that enabled the shoemaker's son to blossom as the 'Morning Star' of the Elizabethan drama? There is no shred of evidence that Marlowe engaged in such activities at Cambridge, although we know for certain that he entered the government's secret service whilst there. Unassailable evidence of this exists in the letter signed by no less than Archbishop Whitgift and Lord Burghley concerning the withholding by the Cambridge authorities of Marlowe's M.A. degree on suspicions aroused by his unexplained lengthy absences from his college studies, and the rumours relating to where he had been, namely to the Catholic seminary at Rheims which was a hotbed of Catholic plotting against the Protestant Queen.

At the end of June 1587 a sharp communication came from the Privy Council meeting at St. James's Palace to the Corpus Christi authorities worded:

"Whereas it was reported that Christopher Marlowe was determined to have gone beyond the seas to Rheims, and there to remain, their Lordships thought good to certify that he had no such intent, but that in all his actions he had behaved himself orderly and discreetly, whereby he had done Her Majesty good service, & deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealing. Their Lordships' request was that the rumor thereof should be allayed by all possible means, add that he should be furthered in the degree he was to

take this next Commencement, because it was not Her Majesty's pleasure that anyone employed, as he had been, in matters touching the benefit of his country, should be defamed by those that are ignorant in th'affairs he went about."

This important document you quote in full. The government would necessarily protect its agents when in trouble, but what is singular here is the personal interest cited by the Queen, mentioned twice, that is indicative of some special service rendered. This young man is surely not in the "lower ranks" of the espionage service, as you suggest, where you depict him employed in "snooping" on his Cambridge fellow students, developing this fanciful picture with relish as if it were historical fact:

"The government described Marlowe's service as 'faithful dealing', but in the performance of it there must have been much deception, much unfaithful dealing towards people with whom he consorted day by day at Cambridge, people whose violent disaffection he in some measure shared. We do not know what kind of pressure he was under, or how deeply he damaged those he informed on, but in our estimation of Marlowe we have to take on board the elements of falsehood and coldness"

This is not "our estimation of Marlowe", it is yours a figment of an overheated imagination which you are determined to sell to your reader as fact. But the evidence is all against you The letter is unequivocal in its praise of Marlowe's "faithful dealing" and refers not to Cambridge, but to Rheims, stating he did not intend "*there to remain*" (which implies that he must have been there, though some ambiguity is to be expected in a government communication about highly secret espionage work); it makes absolutely clear that he was not a defector but had "done Her Majesty good service" and that she was well pleased with him.

Since your hypothesis of Marlowe the Cambridge snoop and the poet-spy in the Earl of Northumberland's household, preferably at Petworth, requires that he remain in England, you disclaim that he ever went to Rheims. "This seems unlikely", you conclude. Why unlikely? It is the most likely explanation of all. Only look at the historical context.

The Rheims Conspiracy: The Babington Plot

The situation at Rheims in 1585-6 the years of Marlowe's extended absences from the university was seething with plotting of such a dangerous kind as to cause the government serious alarm, for the avowed aim was the assassination of Queen Elizabeth and the enthronement of Mary Queen of Scots as the Catholic Queen of England. This was the notorious Babington Plot.

The important double agent, Gilbert Gifford, was actually at Rheims in holy orders, and the two chief conspirator,, John Ballard and John Savage, were both from Rheims and keeping close contact with Gifford. Savage had sworn a great oath that his hand alone would have the honour to strike the blow to kill the Protestant Queen. These ardent conspirators saw themselves as 'The Pope's White Sons'. Rheims had nurtured them. The requirement for surveillance at Rheims, particularly of the double agent Gifford, a clever man who had been suborned to Walsingham's secret service but who was not completely trusted, was truly urgent. What was needed was a young academic, who would present himself at Rheims ostensibly as a Catholic convert wanting to study there who could be utterly trusted by the government. Lord Burghley's agents found the brilliant, patriotic Cambridge alumnus Christopher Marlowe for the job. His credentials were impeccable; he had just been awarded his B.A., he was politically astute (he had been reading Machiavelli); he was fluent in French, and of commended integrity, bright, observant, highly intelligent.

It was his risky work at Rheims, honorably discharged, that was behind Marlowe's testimonial from the Privy Council citing the Queen's pleasure at his 'faithful dealing this young man had helped to save the Queen's life! She also expressed her appreciation of Walsingham's expert decipherer Phelippes for his vital contribution in uncovering the potentially lethal Babington Plot by awarding him a pension, and she did not forget Gifford, who had dealt faithfully on this occasion. You describe the dedicated work of Phelippes as his "ghoulish industry". Would the assassination of Queen Elizabeth with the return of the Inquisition not be seen as a disaster for this country?

There is no warrant for your claim that the motivation of agents serving the country in espionage was a mixture of greed and fear, "with the question of patriotism coming a poor third." This flies in the face of evidence we have. You cast aspersions on Nicholas Berden's sincerity when he declares that his professional activities, "odious though

necessary", were motivated not by gain but for the safety of his native country, because he took money from his prisoners, allowing them to buy their releases. For this Berden requested Sir Francis Walsingham's approval, so that the cost of paying him "might be served out of the store of those traitors. What is wrong in that? It is comparable to the payment of a ransom, not to "bribery" as you term it. To release them on a sum of £20 - £30 was, in fact, to do them an act of mercy and to save the government money. Very patriotic!

The Marlowe portrait at Corpus Christi

The portrait hanging in the dining hall at Corpus Christi, Marlowe's old college, comes in for biased personal comments. You accept it as Marlowe, as indeed I do. It can be of no other on the substantive evidence we now have, discovered in a broken state during renovations to the Master's Lodge in 1953. This fortuitous discovery reinforces the identification of the sitter as Christopher Marlowe, for when he fell into disgrace, accused of the heinous crime of atheism, it would undoubtedly have been removed from a place of honour on the walls of the Master's Lodge, which we know housed a small gallery of portraits of persons associated with the college.

You give a vivid account of the portrait, spoiled by the airing of your narrow biased view of the sitter. He appears to you as "a bit unhealthy: too many late nights, too many dangerous trains of thought". You see him "with this boyish face, this sardonic air, this wary poise in a half-lit room".

A less prejudiced eye would see him differently. His gaze is steady, penetrating, direct, acutely observant. He is a dramatist, intelligently appraising people. The portrait shows a young man who is indeed boyish in appearance, highly intelligent, self-aware, a child of the English renaissance. He lives intensely. Appropriately, he has chosen a renaissance *impresa* portrait from the artist with his motto: QUOD ME NUTRIT ME DESTRUIT [That which nourishes me destroys me]. In an *impresa* the sitter's stance also imparts a message, here shown in an unusual position with areas folded. It tells us, "I am one who guards secrets". In other words, he is a trusted secret agent who will never betray what is entrusted to him to keep. This, and the dates, precisely fit the 21-year-old Marlowe, newly recruited into the service of the Queen's government, and entitled to wear the fine clothes in which he is sitting for his celebratory portrait. You rightly remark:

'In 1585 he is a young man on the rise. The son of a Canterbury cobbler, the scholarship boy at Cambridge, he now stands on the threshold of a dazzling career ... literary fame, government service, aristocratic friendships.'

What a pity that you then disfigure this bright and true portrait of the young genius to suit your unproved hypothesis. His folded arms you interpret as a gesture of menace. Does he hide a dagger up his sleeve, perhaps? You insinuate, as always, the worst is "somehow sinister".

Marlowe's Alleged Homosexuality

On page 4 you introduce Marlowe to your readers as "an atheist and blasphemer, a dissolute homosexual His famous quip 'All they who love not tobacco and boys are fools' has its place in the folklore."

Where does this "famous quip" originate? It exists only in the informer Baines' 'Note' and nowhere else in contemporary commentaries on Marlowe. This "folklore" is twentieth century not sixteenth century spread by scholars who have allowed their minds to become prejudiced by Baines' cunning in cleverly linking this piece of incriminating 'evidence' with tobacco smoking to which he knew Raleigh's circle were partial. Sodomy was a capital offence under the Tudors, so that to charge a victim with it was lethal, and reserved for the important prisoner whom it was considered essential to nail. He was important!

It is the twentieth century scholars from about the mid-1950s who have had a field day with Marlowe's alleged homosexuality, emphasizing this piece of the informer's dossier as though it were proven fact. No one before has bothered to investigate this young man's adolescent development, which clearly disproves any such inclination, as do his later writings.

At Cambridge, Marlowe chose to translate Ovid's *Amores*, as titillatingly heterosexual a collection of erotica could as

one could find. If he had homosexual tendencies he could, and would, have opted to translate those classical works reflecting the Greek gods' indulgence in homosexual love affairs and the literature that freely presents this. He did not. He chose Ovid.

Elegy V

In summer's heat and mid-time of the day
To rest my limbs upon a bed I lay;
One window shut, the other open stood,
Which gave such light as twinkles in a wood,
Like twilight glimpse at setting of the sun,
Or night being past, and yet not day begun.
Such light to shamefast maidens most be shown,
Where they may sport, and seem to be unknown.
Then came Corinne in a long loose gown,
Her white neck hid with tresses hanging down,
Resembling fair Semiramis going to bed
Or Lais of a thousand wooers sped.
I snatch'd her gown, being thin, the harm was small
Yet striv'd she to be cover'd therewithal
And striving thus as one that would be cast
Betray'd herself, and yielded at the last,
Stark naked as she stood before mine eye,
Not one wen on her body could I spy.
What arms and shoulders did I touch and see,
How apt her breasts were to be press'd by me!
How smooth a belly under her waist saw I!
How large a leg, and what a lusty thigh!
To leave the rest, all lik'd me passing well,
I cling'd her naked body, down she fell;
Judge you the rest, being tir'd she bade me kiss;
Jove send me more such afternoons as this.

Marlowe's Translation of Ovid's *Amores*

Ovid's influence is pervasive in Marlowe's exquisite *Hero and Leander*. In this, Neptune's lascivious pursuit of Leander as he swims the Hellespont is firmly rejected.

Ah, you will say, but what about *Dido Queen of Carthage*? In this play, the little opening scene with Jose dallying with Ganymede (so delicately handled it could not offend the sensibilities of a Victorian prude) has a dramatic purpose to present the reason for Juno's jealousy that underlies the tragedy. It is not gratuitously introduced. Are we to take it that everyone who writes about the Greeks is a homosexual?

At Cambridge he began his dramatic writing, probably at the age of seventeen, with his first full length play, *Scanderbeg*, which he sold to the Earl of Oxford's players. The play is lost, but I have studied its extant source, the history of the remarkable life of this noble Christian prince of Albania, who was brought up at the court of the Turkish emperor and trained in arms to become a marvelous warrior; he escaped to join his own people and led them victoriously against the Turks. Scanderbeg was, a man of pristine valour and chivalry who taught his soldiers to respect women, forbidding rape, even of their enemies, and was especially noted for his hatred of "the sin of Gomorrah". He adored his wife (as did Tamburlaine, the companion piece he later wrote for Scanderbeg), who accompanied him on his military campaigns. It is an inspiring and dramatic story which gives one the sense that this would have been a hero-figure for the youthful Marlowe. Certainly no young homosexual would have chosen to dramatise the life of George Scanderbeg! As Bakeless has shown, Marlowe was always very faithful to his historic sources.

Edward the Second, about a tragic homosexual king is often cited as evidence that Marlowe was a homosexual. That is arrant nonsense. Gaveston is presented as the base seducer of "the pliant king" and the cause of the kingdom's ruin. Marlowe doesn't sympathize with his homosexuality, but he treats the unhappy king with great humanity, as he does his deserted queen, presenting them as tragic figures greatly to be pitied. This play is the strongest

dramatic condemnation of homosexuality that has ever been written. The terrible end of the tragic king in his horrendous murder by driving a red hot iron rod up his anus is sufficient evidence that this is not the dramatist's self-identification with the practice of homosexuality. The scene arouses the most powerful emotions of pity and horror in the audience of any scene ever written. I do not believe that anyone who was himself a homosexual could have written this play. How can any sentient person argue this?

A far more valid deduction would be that, like his adolescent hero-figure Scanderbeg, (with whom Gabriel Harvey identifies Marlowe, naming him "Scanderbeg" and "the Scanderbegging wight" in his 'Gorgon') he hated homosexuality, but had compassion, for the person who was thus enslaved by their sexuality.

The dominant influence of Ficino in the circle of the intellectuals and poets to which Marlowe belonged also argues potently against the concept of him as a homosexual. Chaste Platonic love between dear and loyal friends was the ideal held by this group. Marlowe is a young man with high ideals and an innate sense of purity in his nature that is beautifully expressed in the delicacy of his *Hero and Leander*, which combines passion, eroticism and romantic fervour in perfect combination.

All we know short Marlowe the real Marlowe not the poisoned image derived from the informer's dossier - provides the strongest evidence against the acceptance of Baines' indictment of homosexuality

The Baines 'Note'

Baines was a cunning operator who drew on the informer's arsenal of lewd libel of every kind of sexual depravity the traditional tool of the informer down the age, to tar the innocent and nail the victim. Hitler used it against the Jews. The entire gamut of sexual crimes buggery, incest, adultery, sexual orgies with devils (succubi, the beautiful female devils were commonly cited) was the *coup de grace* in an informer's indictment. It appealed emotively to the judges, and could hardly be disproved by the most innocent while in the torture chamber it would very likely be made to stick by 'confession'. It was the stuff to make the dedicated informer lick his lewd lips, as Baines doubtless did as his quill scratched his "famous quip" on the page of his notorious 'Note'. Baines' dossier on Marlowe is a fiendishly crafty piece of work, which seems to have taken you in. You declare: "my personal belief is that the 'Note' does contain genuine Marlowe attitudes . . . in a heavily debased form."

You do not specify which of the scurrilous items in Baines' dossier you would credit Marlowe with. Baines cleverly begins his indictment with a few items that are not blasphemous (in our sense of the word today) and reflect reasoned criticisms of biblical accounts that are open to question, such as the chronology which cannot be taken literally. Baines, who knew Marlowe, knew also that these would lend a spurious credibility to his dossier. As the informer proceeds he warms to his task and the items become increasingly blasphemous, lewd and downright scurrilous. But as Paul Kocher discovered when he researched the ancient and contemporary literature on these theological arguments, not one of the obscene opinions accredited to Marlowe in Baines' 'Note' is *original* to Marlowe! Every single one of these specifically scurrilous and blasphemous anti-Christian statements has been lifted from some, clerical authority. These books were available in print, several of them were quoted in secular Elizabethan literature, always adding the appropriate expression of horror in quoting them to disassociate the writer from the blasphemous statement, such as, "my heart trembleth to think them". I don't know whether Baines' heart was trembling when he was compiling his 'Note'. More likely he was relishing the exercise!

Your own research on Baines' career at Rheims, which is one of the most valuable contributions of your book, shows clearly what kind of man he was. Based on evidence (not on bias) Baines was unquestionably a very dodgy character, cunning, devious, treacherous by nature, of lewd mind. To quote Baines' stark confessions about himself. "I most delighted in profane writers, and the worst sort of them, such as either wrote against the truth, or had least taste of religion". He describes his own descent into apostasy when he became bored with religious study, began to blaspheme, scoffed at religion and stopped attendance at divine service, finally reaching a point of "atheism and no belief at all."

Your comment is apt:

"The extraordinary thing about this part of Baines' confession is its closeness to that other product of his pen, the 'Note' on Marlowe. What he says about his own behaviour in 1583 the 'scoffing' at religion, the 'horrible blasphemies', the efforts to draw people to atheism is the same as what he says about Marlowe's behavior, ten years later. This immediately throws new light on the Baines 'Note'."

You have even drawn the right conclusion, that this "makes the 'Note' more questionable as an indictment of Marlowe." By what contortion of mental agility do you then reject this to see the 'Note' as representing Marlowe's views in a "debased form"? Baines and Marlowe are not alike as men, not in any way at all. Baines was not a great poetic games. He did not have Marlowe's passionate love of beauty and purity. He never moved in the elevated intellectual circles in which Marlowe was a warmly welcomed, esteemed and well-loved member. Come, come, Mr. Nicholl, shake off your prejudice and try to see this young man as he really was, not as you have distorted him. Your research on Baines is something you can be proud of. Let it lead you to the right perception, otherwise you are wasting your talents.

The more research there is done on Marlowe, maugre the defamatory conclusions drawn by purblind researchers, the more the evidence accumulates that Baines, Kyd and the coroner's inquisition offer not just a partially false picture, but a wholly false picture of this genius. As Paul Kocher has the grace to admit, after doing his damned best to show that the Baines 'Note' presents Marlowe's actual critical (and blasphemous) opinions on Christianity, he is forced to another conclusion when he comes to study Tamburlaine:

"What is most surprising, in view of the Baines note and other testimonies, is that Marlowe in writing like a Christian theologian should write so magnificently. There is no question but that it is magnificent.

This truth should warn is not to over simplify the problem of Marlowe's attitude toward religion."

In effect, Kocher turns his previous premise its head. Regrettably, he fails to draw the logical conclusion from his own research on the scurrilous theological literature of the time that it is not Marlowe, but Baines who quotes these sources to embellish his 'Note'. Kocher has inadvertently shed a valuable light on the true nature of the Baines 'Note', from which others will draw the conclusions he has not perceived. That, I predict, will also be the fate of your work if you fail to draw the logical conclusions but persist in equating the nefarious Baines with Marlowe. A blinkered view will not do where this elusive and Protean genius is concerned.

Recent research by Dr. William Urry again confirms that the more know about Marlowe the more he emerges as a young man whose character is diametrically opposite to what his enemies have testified. The same is also confirmed by the earlier research by Mark Eccles. These concern the two "knife fights" - of which you suppress important data in order to argue that Marlowe's violent death at Deptford is "plausible" because he is known to have been violent. Let us look at this evidence with all the facts.

The Story of Marlowe's Knife Fights, Number 1 - Hog Lane

On 18 September 1589 Marlowe was briefly engaged in a duel with swords in Hog Lane, leading to the theatres from Norton Folgate where he and his friend Thomas Watson both had lodgings. Here the thug William Bradley, who had a record for brawling, was lying in wait for Thomas Watson with whom he had a quarrel, when, Marlowe passed by on his way to the theatre, for it was early afternoon when performances were held. There would be no doubt

on whose side Marlowe was, and presumably words were exchanged which soon led to swords being drawn a duel begun. But then Watson arrived, and Bradley, seeing his real quarry, shouted: 'Art thou now come, then I will have a bout with thee.' Bradley then "leapt upon" Watson. They fought it out, and Marlowe withdrew. The fight was serious, for Watson was wounded before he finally slew Bradley.

By then a crowd had assembled, the constables arrived, and the two friends were taken to be lodged in Newgate Prison. At the inquest next day, Watson pleaded slaying in self defence, and Marlowe was granted his freedom on bail but remained in prison for a fortnight until he managed to raise the sum of £40 as his surety. Watson lingered in prison

for five weary months before gaining his portion from the Queen.

So much for this "knife fight" cited by you as an instance of Marlowe's tendency to violence. Your account of it is brief and misleading, and you omit all mention of the events that led up to the fight which establish Marlowe's part as innocent.

You list Mark Eccles' book in your sources, and have seen his research detailing all the facts of the case. Therefore your suppression of vitally important data is on purpose to allow an ambiguous, possibly aggressive, interpretation of Marlowe's part to prevail. That is not playing fair. Here are the vital omissions.

Bradley was owing a debt of £14 to the innkeeper, John Allen, who had engaged the attorney Hugh Swift to reclaim it for him. In reply, Bradley got his put George Orrell, a notorious thug described as one who "held his neck awry" in that stance that betokens truculence to threaten Hugh Swift with a beating up if he dared to take Bradley to court. Swift lodged a plea for securities of the peace against Orrell 'being in face of death &c.' and at this stage Watson joined forces with Swift, who was his brother-in-law, and Allen to counter-threaten Bradley, who promptly pleaded for securities of the peace against Swift, Allen and Watson. *Marlowe is nowhere mentioned in all this*. Bradley (whose name was in the clear since it was Orrell who was named by Swift in his plea) now decided to attack Watson, named as his would-be aggressor. Bradley clearly aimed to do for Watson, what Watson did for him, and afterwards claim slaying him in 'self-defence'. Marlowe might have commented, "Hoist by his own petard!" as was *The Jew of Malta*, the play he was probably writing in 1589.

Not a word of all this colorful background is cited by you, and you make the tendentious comment - that the fight in Hog Lane might have started as merely "scuffle after an alcoholic lunch" between Marlowe and Bradley which Watson came along to "separate", leaving the reader with the impression that Marlowe was possibly the aggressor! You appear to have the arrogant notion that you are entitled to rewrite history to suit your thesis eliminating George Orrell, who "held his neck awry" and threatened Swift with a beating up; eliminating Bradley's crafty move in going to Hog Lane with clear intent to sort Watson out after pleading securities of the peace against him; eliminating reference to Bradley's record for brawling; eliminating Watson's loyal support of his brother-in-law Hugh Swift, whom he came forward to protect from these thugs and suffered a wound and five months' imprisonment on his behalf. This testifies the true character of this brave and brilliant friend of Marlowe.

The facts, I think, speak for themselves and it is obvious why you have left them out of the picture. Next we have a Canterbury tale of "knife fight" number two, which has some intriguing and revealing quirks. It is, in fact, an amusing story! Not tragic, but witty and very human.

Knife Fight Number 2 - A Canterbury Tale

On 10th September 1592, Marlowe and his fiend William Corkine, the tailor, who was also a chorister of the Cathedral (probably they had once been choirboys together), were walking near in a Westgate in Canterbury when in they fell into a heated argument. Corkine lost his temper and set upon Marlowe and did "beat, wound and maltreat" him, inflicting other "atrocities" (*enormia*) to his "grave damage". Five days later, on 15th September, Marlowe staged a tit-for-tat intending to teach his bellicose friend a lesson, this time armed with "staff and dagger". How did he use these weapons? Not as one might expect from the man whom you paint as aggressive by nature!

Corkine took the matter to court, and claimed that he had "suffered loss" and "incurred damages to the extent of £5." Not one word about physical injury! Not even a scratch! So what did Marlowe do?

Apparently he armed himself with intent to frighten Corkine, and perhaps pinned him against the wall and then - perhaps cut off his buttons? - costly items of clothing. Appropriate punishment for a tailor! The cutpurse in *The Massacre at Paris*, probably then being written, it is his last play, cuts off Mugeroun's buttons at the coronation of Anjou as King Henry III, and this kind of dramatic reflection from real life in Canterbury is typical of Marlowe, as Dr. William Urry has shown. Damages of £5 refer to property, in this case clothing would be most likely.

You cite none of this evidence in your brief, inaccurate account. The only mention of the £5 damages is carefully tucked away in your Notes. You make the extraordinary claim that: "His attack on the tailor Corkine is, on the face of

it, a clear instance of aggression", adding: "What the truth was we do not know. By the time it came to court the two men had patched up their differences, and the case was dismissed."

But we do know. The legal record makes it possible to reconstruct fairly accurately what had transpired. We certainly know that Marlowe did *not* injure Corkine physically, but that Corkine had injured/beaten and wounded Marlowe to his "*grave damage*". Who was the aggressor then?

These fascinating details are to be found in William Urry's posthumously published book, edited by Andrew Butcher, which cites the legal records verbatim. This also gives the delightful corollary to the case, which you wholly ignore. I am pleased to quote it here since it throws a refreshing and gentle light on Marlowe that is diametrically opposite to the allegedly nasty, violent character you present.

When Dr. Urry, in researching the Canterbury archives, opened the Plea Book 390 years later, he found a Tudor rosebud pressed between the pages where this case was recorded. It may have fallen from the lapel of the clerk of the court who traditionally wore such a flower, but the indications are that it had been *laid* there. We think by the hand of the poet who 'plucked' it from the clerk's gown with a suitable gesture, and asked for it to rest there as a symbol of the reconciliation of two old Canterbury friends, the poet-dramatist and the musical tailor, who had once fallen out in a quarrel but made it up again. It is the kind of poetic gesture one would expect from the poet whom Thomas Thorpe called "that pure elemental wit, Chr. Marlowe". This Tudor rosebud is now preserved in a case in the archives. We have named it 'The Rose of Reconciliation'.

This incident establishes Marlowe as a delightful young man with wit and humor, who was immensely loyal and forgiving to his friends. Probably Corkine had always been a bully, and he bashed Marlowe up once too often, venting his vile "atrocities" on him, so Kit taught him a lesson. It was all schoolboy stuff really!

THE MURDER OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, 30 May 1593

Your view of the murder itself, the central event of your investigation, is marked with inconsistency. You admit that the documentary records of the trio of witnesses at the inquest "are virtually a seamless tissue of deception and dirty tricks"; they are a "profoundly slippery trio. The account given in the coroner's report is to be trusted precisely as much as they are." But then, after some clever pussyfooting around the issue of how much to believe, or not to believe of these dubious sources, lo and behold, you plump for crediting them! This is your style throughout to state evidence and opinions for, and against, as though impartial, but having cunningly prepared your reader, you then invariably land on the side of the detrimental for Marlowe. (This same unjust and unjustifiable treatment is meted out to Marlowe's good friend Thomas Watson, whom you treat very cruelly.) Concerning the Deptford murder you are emphatic;

"the story of his assault on Ingram Frizer is plausible - we know that anyway." (p 87)

"Their account is plausible: Marlowe had been involved in knife fights before, one in Canterbury lost a few months previously." (p 21)

These we have examined and the readers will have made up their own minds as to whether they give evidence of Marlowe's violent and aggressive nature. I would say that in this age when all gentlemen regularly donned a sword on venturing abroad, and those of lower rank had daggers, compared with Ben Jonson, who was notably hot-tempered and inclined to be physical, Marlowe was a lamb - a lamb led to the slaughter at Deptford. In his most violent play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe introduces from his own invention (not from history) the character of Calyphas, Tamburlaine's third son, who is actually a modern-type Pacifist, who will not kill for conscience sake. He is no coward, and his two war-like brothers are amazed at his courage in withstanding the furious will of their father. Having established his bravery, his conscience and his nobility, Calyphas awaits his father's wrath with calmness, and is slain by him never making a gesture, or word or cry of remonstrance - truly a lamb to the slaughter, a sacrificial lamb perhaps. Marlowe is full of depths, not "cruel" as you see him!

For the benefit of the reader I give here the facts of the story of the murder as we know it from the coroner's inquisition and other documented data.

The story tells of an eight-hour meeting (from ten o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the evening) in the busy little port of Deptford at the home of Dame Eleanor Bull, a respectable widow who was a 'cousin' of Queen Elizabeth's dearly loved gentlewoman Blanche Parry, who had been a kind of nanny to the Queen from her childhood. Widow Bull therefore had connections at court. A room was rented for the day, with meals served. Those present were:

1. Robin **Poley**, gentleman, a very experienced, smooth-talking espionage agent who had worked closely with Thomas Walsingham in the successful uncovering of the Babington Plot. He had arrived straight from The Hague where he had been "in post" delivering Her Majesty's letters of "special and secret affairs of great importance", and was due to return there after the Deptford meeting and his appearance as a witness at the inquest held two days later.
2. Nicholas **Skeres**, gentleman, also an espionage agent who had played a minor part in the Babington Plot assignment. He was a close friend and associate in fraudulent financial and property dealings with the third man, and was also known to Thomas Walsingham professionally.
3. Ingram **Frizer**, gentleman, the servant or family retainer of Thomas Walsingham and also in some sort his business agent. There are records of property deals from 1589, and a particularly complicated financial swindle in which Skeres was his accomplice that brought these two together as cunning con-men in 1593 covering the time of the Deptford murder, when they were fleecing a young country heir of his money.

All three men have records as clever liars who could persuade their hearers to believe anything they had a mind to.

4 Christopher Marlowe, gentleman, a highly placed government secret agent and famous poet-dramatist in the patronage of Thomas Walsingham, and his dear friend, at whose moated manor house, Scadbury at Chislehurst in Kent he was staying to escape from the plague in London at the time of his arrest nine days earlier on a charge of 'atheism'.

The warrant for Marlowe's arrest was delivered by a pursuivant of the Court of Star Chamber following the arrest on a similar charge of his fellow dramatist Thomas Kyd, whose room had been searched on suspicion that he was the writer of seditious verses inciting race riots against London's immigrant Huguenot settlers. This was a false trail, but it led to the discovery of an 'atheist' treatise among Kyd's papers. Poor Kyd was taken to Bridewell prison and tortured on the rack for questioning. He there confessed that the paper belonged to Marlowe and had become "shuffled" with his own as a result of their writing in one room together. This document, a theological heretical disputation some fifty years old which was available in print, was the slender excuse for drawing Marlowe into the net of the Star Chamber Court. Unlike Kyd, he was not haled off to prison to be racked, but was granted bail on condition that he report his presence to "their Lordships" daily. This freedom on bail was about to end, for the informer's dossier was now completed and a copy already delivered, probably lying on Lord Burghley's desk.

The Privy Council doubled as heads of the Star Chamber Court together with some thirty bishops, lawyers and officials who administered this dread court, the only one that could legally use torture in its prosecutions. Heresy was a capital crime and even under Elizabeth's benign reign could lead to burning at the stake.

This is the background to Marlowe's tragedy which you do not have in your sights. There is no question of a political plot. It was clearly a persecution of him as a free-thinker and aimed at the suppression of the circle of free-thinkers to which he belonged. It should not be too difficult for us to understand for equivalent situations existed until recently in Soviet Russia, when the dissidents, whether secret Christians, or simply lovers of freedom exercising the right to think freely and not along prescribed lines of the Communist-Marxist dogma, might expect to receive a visit from the secret police and be arrested, perhaps never to be seen again. I had friends in Nazi Germany who did not join the Nazi Party and were accused of being Communists, though they were nothing of the sort, but liberals, lovers of liberty, and two of them ended up in concentration camps. We haven't experienced this in England, but such things still go on in many unhappier countries in our world. Marlowe's tragedy is an old one, and has something to teach us even today.

It is for this reason that I particularly deplore the attack that you have made on his reputation. We need to put his murder into its proper perspective, not bury the man, his genius and his works under yet another layer of calumny.

Wednesday, 30 May 1593 would have been the last day of his freedom on bail. It was therefore an eleventh hour meeting at Deptford. Something you also do not mention. These four men spent all day together and dined, and sometimes walked in the garden "in quiet sort together". What they discussed together that took all day we do not

know. It is not adequately explored in your book. The narrowness of your hypothesis does not permit a wide exploration, which alone could find the answer. For answer there must be. I do not accept your premise that it was a "meaningless" death.

After supper, we are told, a quarrel arose between Marlowe and Frizer "about the payment of the sum of pence, that is, the reckoning", as the inquisition gives it. At the time Marlowe was lying in the bed behind the bench and table at which Frizer was seated, with the two other men on either side of him on the bench. After "divers malicious words," Marlowe apparently seized Frizer's dagger "which was at his back" and gave Frizer "two wounds on his head of the length of two inches and the depth of quarter of an inch", (they were scalp wounds which some scholars have suggested were self-inflicted to corroborate Frizer's story). In the ensuing struggle when Frizer tried to get his dagger back, he gave Marlowe a wound "over his right eye of the depth of two inches" of which he "then and there instantly died". (This has been clinically questioned by Dr. Samuel Tannenbaum and other scholars). Frizer claimed that he did the deed "in his own defence & for the saving of his life" because he was hemmed in by the other two men on the bench and "in no wise could take flight". It must have taken all the ingenuity of Poley, Skeres and Frizer to convince the coroner, who was the Queen's royal coroner William Danby, who presided because this murder took place 'within the verge' that is within twelve miles radius of the Queen's person, who was then residing at her palace of Nonsuch near Cheam, Surrey, just about ten miles from Deptford. Frizer's story and plea of slaying Marlowe in self-defence was accepted, Marlowe's body was buried in an unmarked grave in Deptford churchyard, and Frizer was lodged in prison for the brief spell of twenty-eight days, until his pardon from the Queen arrived. Is this a record for speedy release of the time? You did not investigate this aspect. It sounds to me as though someone was pulling strings. Your handling of this crucial central investigation of your thesis is disappointingly incomplete. Many questions are left hanging in the air. Debate is directed away from considering them. You tie up the package with the comment:

"This may be called the official story of Marlowe's death, a trifling quarrel, a tragic mishap, a thorough investigation, a decent burial, a sensible verdict."

Well, it was hardly any of these things. 1), Bakeless, Marlowe's greatest biographer, has commented that the discovery of the coroner's inquisition raises more questions than it answers, and finds "There is something queer about the whole episode. "But you do not pursue the trails. Instead you digress to fruitless reportage of the inaccurate gossip about Marlowe's death in the various versions of the Puritan pamphleteers, whose sole aim was to denigrate this 'atheist' who was a play maker to boot, all grist to their mill in the campaign to have the theaters closed, which they saw as cess pits of evil and vice. In two chapters devoted to the Puritan pamphleteers you do not mention that this was the purpose behind their propaganda. For a book that is expressly an attempt "to fill in the missing pieces of the jigsaw" in this "unsolved murder" it is written to a remarkable degree with averted eyes. No wonder its meaning eludes you. Closed minds cannot open doors.

The significance of Baines' 'Note' is not that it represents a reflection of Marlowe's opinions (it does not), but that it is evidence of why he was being persecuted. It testifies to the climate of oppression of the freethinkers that descended like a cloud in the 1590s. This informer's dossier is as much to be believed as the records of the KGB listing the 'crimes' of their victims, also featuring blasphemy not against Christianity, for that would be applauded! - but against the State religion, Communism. presumably you would not be inclined to believe them? An informer's dossier is not concerned with the truth about its victim.

Special credence is given by you to the poison pen letters of Kyd, a broken man, unjustly tortured on suspicion of atheism on Marlowe's behalf, who is echoing what news he had picked up from tavern gossip about Frizer's story of the death of Marlowe; that Marlowe had "on sudden & of his malice aforethought" attacked Frizer from behind his back 0, reprehensible! inflicting two scalp wounds. Now compare Kyd's desperate begging letter to Lord Puckering citing Marlowe's "rashness in attempting sudden privy injuries to men." Kyd is asking Puckering to testify that he was innocent of atheism, the fatal taint which still clung to him so that his former Lord and patron had rejected his services and he was destitute. His whole aim is to blacken that vile atheist Marlowe (now dead) to whiten himself (still living miserably) and "shake the viper" from his hand. He is not impartial. He hates Marlowe and offers to turn informer on Marlowe's 'atheist' friends and bring them under the Star Chamber's power. After Kyd's arrest and torture fear stalked the streets of London. People were lying low, scurrying to safety. Nashe suddenly took to writing a religious *book* *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* to dissociate himself from his former friend, Marlowe.

This was not political as you see it. It was the oppression of free thought which entered a menacing phase throughout Western Christendom in a horrifying *fin de siècle* wave of expression that finally expired in the destructive furor of the Thirty Years War. In England it took marked effect in 1593, "the wonderful year", as Gabriel Harvey with acute perception called it in his extraordinary, cryptic poem *Gorgon* which your facile interpretation has not even begun to fathom. In March 1593, the notorious Richard Topcliffe came into his own province with special powers to prosecute and horrendously to torture Catholics and heretics, who of course included 'atheists'- like Marlowe.

Galileo and Marlowe and the 'Wizard Earl' were all born in 1564. He came of a generation of courageous minds who dared to think, but did so at their peril, or wisely went underground. We can be proud that Marlowe was a leading player in this movement of scientific thinking, which was that false dawn of the 'Enlightenment' which Yates has so brilliantly researched and which was so tragically crushed. This is the background to Marlowe's tragedy, to which you appear blind.

Thomas Walsingham

There is one person in your book to whom you are surprisingly kindly disposed. This is Thomas Walsingham, whom you describe as just "one of Marlowe's patrons", and you see him as Marlowe's friend and protector. You do not, however, clarify whom or what was protecting him from. You are right, of course. But this kindly attitude has a purpose.

To make your thesis viable you need to marginalize Thomas Walsingham's significance in relation to the murder. For it is his shadowy figure's undeniably close connection with all the four men at Deptford that is the most striking feature of the murder. This is an embarrassment to you. He gets in the way of your hypothesis, which seeks to weave some sort of connection with Essex, so you want no competition from Walsingham. His obvious association is dismissively treated: "It is too vague and easy put him up as the schemer behind the scenes." Essex's links are far more vague, but this doesn't count with you. As for the "easy" bit, for this read 'obvious'. Very awkward for you. How to get around this?

You contrive to shift the emphasis away from the reactionary persecution of the free-thinkers to the arena of political courtly infighting for position between Essex and Raleigh which is the essence of your theory about the murder. Since 1592 Raleigh was out of the running, banished the court in disgrace because of his clandestine marriage to Elizabeth Throckmorton, while Essex had gained his ambitious seat in the Privy Council, so that it was by now a rather one-sided fight with Essex the clear winner. As situation hardly likely to have led to the deployment of political murder! Posed at this level as a supposed fix for Essex (with no evidence to support it), the answer to your question, Why was Marlowe murdered? is that it was *meaningless*. But, in fact, it was pregnant with meaning.

The Real Marlowe

I have endeavoured to show you that your unfounded portrait of Marlowe as a Cambridge "snoop" ready to betray his friends is false, as is the preposterous suggestion that he was a "poet-spy" in the close circle of the freethinkers of that brave nobleman, the 'Wizard Earl' of Northumberland. This you suppose to be the poet who wrote -

"Above our life we love a steadfast friend."

Hero and Leander

But you cannot square the circle, Marlowe cannot be made to fit into the straitjacket of your besmirched image of him, for he was not just an espionage agent working to protect his Queen and country, he was also a great poet-dramatist. His writings testify to the man and his spirit, his philosophy.

Although you state you are not concerned with his writings, you have not resisted the temptation to draw invidious analogies to refer to his plays as "'cruel' in their frequent depiction of brutality". Marlowe's plays indeed show man's cruelty to man, but they evoke pity in the writing that reveals the dramatist's deep sense of compassion. He preached through his plays, but his words have fallen on stony ground in your heart.

You refer to impressions gleaned from performances. Misguided productions, taking their clue from such books as yours, for instance, can easily misrepresent a play. Good actors can put anything across! There is not the slightest indication that Marlowe identified with the cruelty of such characters as Tamburlaine (taken faithfully from history) or Barabas (a figure of black comedy) in *The Jew of Malta*. The plays of Shakespeare, let alone Webster and his generation, contain plenty of cruel, depraved characters, but these dramatists were not haunted by a Baines, a Kyd or a Frizer.

With your book the vilification of Marlowe has come full circle from Baines' virulent dossier and the malicious hearsay reportage of the Puritan pamphleteers, to this twentieth century onslaught on his reputation in an age when we are fortunate to enjoy the freedom of thought that was denied him.

I believe there are many like myself, who will not accept your merciless portrayal of this vibrant young genius, in which you have overreached yourself. If this riposte is far longer than I had intended, it is because it has fallen to my hand to answer half a century of academic dogma misrepresenting and denigrating Marlowe that has culminated in your book on the eve of his quatercentenary. If it has all landed on your head, I only express my sincere regret that you have asked for it by sticking your neck out.

After 400 years it is time to pension off his detractors, Baines, Kyd and Frizer, and to turn to the testimonials of his true friends, with whose words I write my farewell to you on behalf of Christopher Marlowe.

May you come to know him better to the future.

Thomas Heywood

Marlowe, renown'd for his rare art and wit,
Could ne'er attain beyond the name of Kit.

Edward Blount

His Dedication of *Hero and Leander* to Sir Thomas Walsingham

Sir, we think not ourselves discharged of the duty we owe to our friend, when we have brought the breathless body to the earth: for albeit the eye there taketh his ever farewell of that beloved object, yet the impression of the man, that hath been dear unto us, living an after life in our memory, there putteth us in mind of farther obsequies due unto the deceased.

(On his posthumous publication of the poem in 1599)

J.M. (probably John Marston)

Kind Kit Marlowe.

Michael Drayton

Neat Marlowe, bathed in the Thespian springs,
Had in him those brave translunary things
That the first poets had; his raptures were
All air and fire, which made his verses clear;
For that fine madness still he did retain,
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.

Thomas Thorpe

that pure, elemental wit, Chr. Marlowe.

Gabriel Harvey

Weep Paul's, thy Tamburlaine vouchsafes to die.
Is it a dream? or is the highest mind
That ever haunted Paul's or hunted wind,
Bereft of that same sky-surmounting breath,
That breath that taught the Tympany to swell.

Robert Greene

Thou famous Gracer of Tragedians.

George Peele

Unhappy in thy end, Marlowe the Muses' Darling.

Thomas Nashe

Let me see, hath anybody in Yarmouth heard of Leander and Hero, of whom, divine Musaeus sung, and a diviner Muse than him, Kit Marlowe?

Henry Petowe

Marlowe admir'd, whose honey-flowing vein
No English writer can as yet attain;
Whose name in Fame's immortal treasury
Truth shall record to endless memory;

* * *

What mortal soul with Marlowe might contend,
That could 'gainst reason force him stoop or bend
Whose silver-charming tongue mov'd such delight,
That men would shun their sleep in still dark night
To meditate upon his golden lines,
His rare conceits, and sweet-according rhymes.
But Marlowe, still admir'd Marlowe's gone
To live with beauty in Elysium.

This is the genius whose quatercentenary we shall be celebrating in 1993, whose splendid contribution in the creation of Shakespearean blank verse and Shakespearean drama was the torch he passed on to Shakespeare, burning brightly.

Yours sincerely,
A.D. WRAIGHT
London
August 1992