
Opening Extract from...

History Play

The Lives and After-life of Christopher Marlowe

Written by Rodney Bolt

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History Play

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Foreword

How curious and interesting is the parallel – as far as pove of biographical details is concerned – between Satan and Shal speare. It is wonderful, it is unique, it stands quite alone, the is nothing resembling it in history, nothing resembling it romance, nothing approaching it even in tradition. They a the best-known unknown persons that have ever drawn brea upon the planet. By way of a preamble to this book, I shou like to set down a list of *every positively known* fact of Shakespear life, lean and meagre as the invoice is. Beyond these details know *not a thing* about him. All the rest of his vast history, furnished by the biographers, is built up, course upon cour of guesses, inferences, theories, conjectures – a tower of a ficialities rising sky-high from a very flat and very thin foundati of inconsequential facts.

FACTS

He was born on the 23rd of April, 1564.

Of good farmer-class parents who could not read, could r write, could not sign their names.

At Stratford, a small back-settlement which in that day v

bby and unclean, and densely illiterate. Of the nineteen ›ortant men charged with the government of the town, thir- n had to 'make their mark' in attesting important documents, ause they could not write their names.

)f the first eighteen years of his life *nothing* is known. They a blank.

)n the 27th of November (1582) William Shakespeare took a licence to marry Anne Whateley.

Next day William Shakespeare took out a licence to marry ne Hathaway. She was eight years his senior.

William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. In a hurry. By ce of a reluctantly-granted dispensation there was but one ›lication of the banns.

Within six months the first child was born.

About two (blank) years followed, during which period *noth- at all happened to Shakespeare*, so far as anybody knows.

Then came twins – 1585. February.

Two blank years follow.

Then – 1587 – he makes a ten-year visit to London, leaving family behind.

Five blank years follow. During this period *nothing happened ›im*, as far as anybody actually knows.

Then – 1592 – there is mention of him as an actor.

Next year – 1593 – his name appears in the official list of yers.

Next year – 1594 – he played before the Queen. A detail of consequence: other obscurities did it every year of the forty- : of her reign. And remained obscure.

Three pretty full years follow. Full of play-acting. Then n 1597 he bought New Place, Stratford.

Thirteen or fourteen busy years follow; years in which accumulated money, and also reputation as actor and nager.

Meantime his name, liberally and variously spelt, had become

associated with a number of great plays and poems, as (ostei sibly) author of the same.

Some of these, in these years and later, were pirated, but h made no protest.

Then – 1610–11 – he returned to Stratford and settled dow for good and all, and busied himself in lending money, tradin in tithes, trading in land and houses; shirking a debt of forty-on shillings, borrowed by his wife during his long desertion of h family; suing debtors for shillings and coppers; being sued hin self for shillings and coppers; and acting as confederate to neighbour who tried to rob the town of its rights in a certai common, and did not succeed.

He lived five or six years – till 1616 – in the joy of thes elevated pursuits. Then he made a will and signed each of i three pages with his name.

A thorough businessman's will. It named in minute deta every item of property he owned in the world – houses, land sword, silver-gilt bowl, and so on – all the way down to h 'second-best bed' and its furniture.

It carefully and calculatingly distributed his riches among th members of his family, overlooking no individual of it. Not eve his wife: the wife he had been enabled to marry in a hurry t urgent grace of a special dispensation before he was nineteei the wife whom he left husbandless so many years; the wife wh had had to borrow forty-one shillings in her need, and whic the lender was never able to collect of the prosperous husban but died at last with the money still lacking. No, even this wi was remembered in Shakespeare's will.

He left her that 'second-best bed'.

And *not another thing*; not even a penny to bless her luc widowhood with.

It was eminently and conspicuously a businessman's will, n a poet's.

It mentioned *not a single book.*

Books were much more precious than swords and silver-gilt owls and second-best beds in those days, and when a departing erson owned one he gave it a high place in his will.

The will mentioned *not a play, not a poem, not an unfinished iterary work, not a scrap of manuscript of any kind.*

Many poets have died poor, but this is the only one in history hat has died *this* poor; the others all left literary remains behind. lso a book. Maybe two.

If Shakespeare had owned a dog – but we need not go nto that – we know he would have mentioned it in his will. f a good dog, Susanna would have got it; if an inferior one is wife would have got a dower interest in it. I wish he had ad a dog, just so we could see how painstakingly he would ave divided that dog among the family, in his careful business ay.

He signed the will in three places.

In earlier years he signed two other official documents.

These five signatures still exist.

There are *no other specimens of his penmanship in existence.* Not line.

Was he prejudiced against the art? His granddaughter, whom e loved, was eight years old when he died, yet she had had no eaching, he left no provision for her education although he as rich, and in her mature womanhood she couldn't write and ouldn't tell her husband's manuscript from anybody else's – he thought it was Shakespeare's.

When Shakespeare died in Stratford *it was not an event.* It nade no more stir in England than the death of any forgot- en theatre-actor would have made. Nobody came down from ondon; there were no lamenting poems, no eulogies, no ational tears – there was merely silence, and nothing more. A triking contrast with what happened when Ben Jonson, and rancis Bacon, and Spenser, and Ralegh and the other distin- uished literary folk of Shakespeare's time passed from life! No

praiseful voice was lifted for the lost Bard of Avon; even Be Jonson waited seven years before he lifted his.

So far as anybody actually knows and can prove, Shakespeare (Stratford-on-Avon never wrote a play in his life.

So far as anybody actually knows and can prove, he never wrot a letter to anybody in his life.

So far as anyone knows, he received only one letter during his life.

So far as anyone *knows and can prove,* Shakespeare of Stratfor wrote only one poem during his life. This one is authentic. H did write that one – a fact which stands undisputed; he wrot the whole of it; he wrote the whole of it out of his own hea He commanded that this work of art be engraved upon his tom and he was obeyed. There it abides to this day. This is it:

Good friend for Iesus sake forbeare
To digg the dust encloased heare:
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones
And curst be he yt moves my bones

Sam L. Clemens, D.Li
Missouri, US

PROLOGUE

A Dead Man in Deptford

ı high places can give you a pain in the neck, and ull's connections were positively stratospheric. She was Blanche Parry, who was a close confidante of the nd also related to Lord Burghley, Elizabeth's chief ınd the most powerful man in the land. She had an rt when she needed one, but was a servant of the court connections required it. They had made inconvenient of her before. But this time it was different. This time dead poet on her hands.

Bull had a maxim: 'A friend i' th' court is better than ı purse.' She had said it to the poet that morning. In she might well have embroidered the wisdom and had hanging above the fireplace. Her husband Richard, at the local manor house, had died three years earlier, er with some standing but little money. It was her court who helped put the pennies in her purse; in :y called on her discretion and enlisted her hospitality. 'an what we would today call a 'safe house' and letter-)eptford Strand.

has dealt Eleanor Bull a double blow. It has turned ctable, if somewhat clandestine establishment into a ern, and it linked her name for ever with the death of

: brilliant young poet and playwright Christopher Marlowe, o (as tradition would have it) was 'killed in a drunken brawl :r a bill in Deptford'. We now know that was not the case. cent research suggests that Marlowe was murdered as a conse- ence of his involvement in the shady world of Elizabethan ıionage and behind-the-scenes politicking. The subsequent fuscation of the story was deliberate.

Deptford, in 1593, was an ideal location for a safe house. It s within easy reach of London, and a convenient dock for ps that trafficked the Thames, to and from the open seas. ıeen Elizabeth's favourite residence, and a frequent meeting ıce of her cabinet, the Privy Council, was less than a mile wn river at Greenwich. Two shipyards, one for the navy and e for merchant ships, filled the air with the smells of pitch d fresh-sawn timber as they churned out vessels to plunder anish treasure, explore the globe, and protect the realm. The miral of the Fleet, Lord Howard of Effingham, had a house Deptford Green. Foreign musicians from the Queen's con- ·ts and the Chapel Royal choir lived in Deptford, as did the ners, chandlers and ropemakers of the ship industry, cadets ım the naval college at Trinity House, and a transient popu- ion of seamen . . . and spies. Sailors, travellers, foreigners and nor courtiers could mingle unheeded on the streets. English d French, German and Dutch might be heard around tables taverns. Some 4,000 incomers arrived to live in Deptford in : 1590s, and most of them descended on the lodging houses the riverfront area known as Deptford Strand. Mrs Bull's :tualling-house' would not have stood out at all.

She was used to taking in tired travellers from across the ıannel – the 'projectors' and 'intelligencers' of the secret vice network controlled by the Secretary of State, Sir Francis ılsingham, and after his death by Lord Burghley's hunchback ı, Sir Robert Cecil. She soothed spies ravaged by seasickness h her famous posset (milk and egg yolks 'seethed on a fire',

poured from on high into a bowl of warm ale or sack, and witl a little 'ginger and synomon cast on'*), passed on letters an packages from one unnamed man to another, or waited quietl out of earshot while visitors spoke to men from court.

Of the four men who arrived at Eleanor Bull's on the mornin of Wednesday, 30 May 1593, two were known to her. The poe had been coming in every morning at 'the tenth hour befor noon' for the past ten days. No reason was given. He simpl stayed for an ale, then left. She knew not to ask any question It was something to do with Sir Robert Cecil. She was to sen Cecil a message 'incontinent' (immediately) if the poet did nc appear. She didn't like Sir Robert. An ambitious little bunch backed toad, she thought, and had said as much to the poe She was generally wise enough to keep such opinions to herseli but she had liked the poet, and he seemed to hold no higl opinion of Sir Robert himself.

She may well have heard of Christopher Marlowe before h started appearing daily on her doorstep. Just a few years earlie his play *Tamburlaine* had been the talk of London, even i respectable circles, and he had followed it with further successes But then, in Elizabethan times, it was the theatre company nc the playwright that took the credit, and a play's title not it author that achieved renown. If the name Kit Marlowe wa familiar to her, it was more likely that she had heard it mu mured during quiet conversations under her own roof.

The second man she knew better, though not always by th same name. Robert Poley was a frequent visitor – a universit man with a flattering tongue; a king of smiles and a beguiler c women. 'Sweet Robyn' they called him. Lately, he was close witl Sir Robert, and seemed to have some position of control. H frequently arrived to collect packages from other visitors, or (i

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* Gertrud Zelle, in *The Bare Truth: Stripping Spies' Cover*, gives Eleanor Bull's recipe for posset in an appendix.

med) to pass on instructions or make introductions. Often had about him large amounts of good gold. In the past few ınths he had been travelling a lot to the Low Countries. Word ıped out about who was boarding which ship, even when coins sed lips and eyes. The other two men, she was to learn later, re Ingram Frizer and Nicholas Skeres. Of them she could say thing, except that Skeres was most certainly not a gentleman. They had come at about ten o'clock. The poet and Frizer ived together. Sweet Robyn and Skeres were there to meet ım. She had given them a room apart, as asked. They talked quiet sort together' most of the day, but this was not unusual. anor Bull was accustomed to the hushed back-and-forth tones agents imparted their information. She gave them a passable ıch: pottage, neat's-tongue pie, a little cold lamb ('goode from ster to Whitsun' – she had just made it, Whitsun in 1593 fell the following Sunday), a 'sallat' of boiled onions served with egar, oil and pepper, capon with prunes, currants and dates, d as a treat 'baken stagge' (another May favourite, probably ned through one of her connections – there were royal hunt- grounds at Lewisham and Blackheath).* That would custom- ly have been at eleven o'clock. Later they walked in her den, staying there until six, when they came back to the same ım for the supper she had laid out. Sweet Robyn took her de to talk about the bill. She didn't see the others come in. The poet Marlowe was resting when the supper was cleared. ere was one bed in the room, against the wall. In front of it, bert Poley and Ingram Frizer were seated playing 'tables' ıckgammon). Skeres was drinking ale. Later, voices were sed and there were sounds of a scuffle; she was called in to room. Frizer had two gashes on his head and the poet was ad. He had been stabbed above the eye, and his face was ered in blood. (The blade severed the internal carotid artery,

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Zelle, *Bare Truth*, p. 234.

and probably also caused an air embolism.) Sweet Roby hastened to calm her. It was too late for a surgeon, and he didn' call the watch. Instead, they waited for the coroner.

It was thirty-six hours before a coroner came. Not the distric man, but William Danby, 'Coroner of the household of our .. lady the Queen'. Normally, such a grand official wouldn't b bothered for a minor stabbing, but Danby had jurisdictio 'within the Verge', defined as the area within a twelve-mile radiu of the body of the sovereign. Eleanor Bull's house was under mile from the palace at Greenwich, and the Queen was in res dence. At the trial, sixteen mostly local men made up the jur gentlemen and yeomen, a couple of bakers, a grocer and th miller of Deptford. They were told how 'malicious words' wer uttered between 'Christopher Morley' (Marlowe) and Ingrar Frizer about the 'payment of a sum of pence, that is, *le recknynge* and that Marlowe, who was lying down, 'moved in anger' agains Frizer, who was sitting at the table with his back to the bed, wit Poley and Skeres sitting on either side. Drawing Frizer's dagge 'which was at his back', Marlowe attacked him from behinc wounding him twice on the head ('two wounds . . . of the lengt of two inches & of the depth of a quarter of an inch'). In th struggle to retrieve his dagger (valued at 12*d*) Frizer stabbe Marlowe, causing a wound 'over his right eye of the depth c two inches & of the width of one inch', killing him instantl Frizer 'neither fled nor withdrew himself', and the inque found that he had acted 'in the defence and saving of his ow life, against the peace of our said lady the Queen, her now crow & dignity'. Frizer was briefly imprisoned but quickly received royal pardon. The body was carried that day along the Commo to St Nicholas's church, and buried in an unmarked grave.

If Eleanor Bull wondered why Ingram Frizer's dagger was s easy to get at, why the argument with Marlowe reached such pitch without Frizer turning to face him, why the other me appeared not to intervene, or how in the struggle Frizer ha

naged to dispatch the poet with such apparent neatness and ciency, she wisely said nothing. William Danby was an experi-ced and high-ranking official, a friend of her kinsman Lord rghley from their days together at the Inns of Court. Perhaps scented the hand of Sir Robert Cecil in this. But Eleanor ll never made a fuss and, as ever, Robert Poley paid her ndsomely. With a little extra for the inconvenience. We can ly imagine her displeasure with the world of spies as she aned away the blood and set her room to rights. Assignations one thing, assassinations quite another.

There we could leave Widow Bull (she died peacefully three rs later), were it not for something that not even she sus-cted.

The body on the bed that May evening was not that of Chris-her Marlowe.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

Prefaces to Shakespeare

In the year that Calvin died and Galileo was born, when t world was racked by religion and beginning to dream of scien two babies were baptised whose lives fortune's fingers wou entwine in a knot that we still cannot completely untie. In t parish of St George, near the great cathedral in Canterbu Christopher Marlowe, the newborn son of a local shoemak was carried howling to the font on Saturday, 26 February 15(Exactly two months later, on 26 April, in the country town Stratford, William Shakespere, mewling son of a glovemak was entered in the parish register. By the late 1580s they wou both be living in London and working for the same compa of players, their affairs becoming increasingly entangled. Th in 1593, Marlowe would disappear from view and Shakespe would publish *Venus and Adonis*, calling it 'the first heir of i invention'. The two events were not unconnected. We ha learned that the incident in Widow Bull's house in Deptfo was not all we perhaps thought it was – or rather, that it wa little more than we thought it was. To reconstruct what ha pened up to that point, we begin with the story of baby Marlov

The infant that Goodwife Roose, the local midwife, pronou ced 'lusty and like to live' was John and Katherine Marlow second child in a string of nine, and by far the brightest. Perha

owed that to his father, who – fairly uncommonly for a shoe-ıker at the time – could read. Perhaps it was from his father ɔ that little Christopher inherited a venturesome curiosity, ıich at times could be insatiable. No-one knows from whom got his beautiful singing voice. For his infant howls soon ınsmuted into a tinkling treble, far superior to the singing of y of his siblings, and he was taken up by Thomas Bull, the thedral organist and master of the choir, who lived almost xt door to the Marlowes near St George's church.*

John Marlowe (or Marloe, or Marley, or Marlyn, as he was also own in that lackadaisical way Elizabethans had with spelling general and surnames in particular) was an immigrant to nterbury. In the mid-1550s, when he was about twenty, he d walked there from Ospringe, near Faversham in Kent. Soon er arriving he took up an apprenticeship with one Gerard chardson, a shoemaker, and by the end of April 1564 was eady a freeman of the city. This would suggest that he was at ıst part-qualified when he arrived in Canterbury, and that his prenticeship was something of a ruse as a short cut to citizen-ip (apprenticeships usually lasted seven years and began at e age of fifteen). Being a freeman was a coveted position that sed a man a notch above his fellow artisans, enabling him to ve his own shop ('hold craft and opyn windowes withoute 'e'), take on apprentices and participate in city council meet-gs. Marlowe married Katherine Arthur, whose family came ɔm Dover, and they settled in the parish of St George.

Leafing through the Canterbury borough plea books, we find hn Marlowe to be belligerent and litigious, setting himself rier-like against everyone from fellow shoemakers to the local ntry. In return, there were various suits launched against him, ıce for assaulting his apprentice and drawing blood, but mostly r debt. He did not pay his rent, he did not pay his rates, and

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* See Julia Wells, *Tho's a Dear: Bull's Boys*, pp. 16–17.

his business finances were generally in a state of chaos. This lacl of business sense was something else his son was to inherit. Tha and a sharp temper. Life in the little house behind the cobbler' shop was not calm. At least one other of the Marlowe brood Christopher's younger sister Anne, showed the characteristi family quarrelsomeness. Later in life she was publicly criticise for being 'a scowlde, comon swearer, a blasphemer of the nam of god', and as a fifty-five-year-old widow laid into one Willian Prowde with 'staff and dagger', and the following year witl 'sword and knife'. Nor was the family home in a particularl reposeful part of town. St George's parish, though close to th cathedral, lay between the cattle market and the butchers shambles. This may have been convenient for the leather tha was the material of John Marlowe's trade, but it wasn't terribl salubrious. Just yards away, animals would bellow and screan as they were herded to slaughter. Barrows of blood and stinkin entrails were trundled past the Marlowe front door (cf. 'Have lived to be carried in a basket, like a barrow of butcher's offal? *Merry Wives* III v). The acrid smell of crowded cattle and the earth pungency of manure hung in the air and clung to clothes. We ma imagine that the young Marlowe whiffed. He certainly knew hi blood and butchery. The knowledge he shows in his plays of hov blood spurts 'like a fountain', how it darkens as it coagulates forms black clots, and follows a withdrawn knife, is impressive and his haunting recollection of a slaughterhouse quite moving

> And as the butcher takes away the calf
> And binds the wretch, and beats it when it strays,
> Bearing it to the bloody slaughter-house . . .
>
> And as the dam runs lowing up and down,
> Looking the way her harmless young one went,
> And can do naught but wail her darling's loss . . .
> (*2 Henry VI* III i 210–16)

: also, incidentally, shows a fine knowledge of leather, no ubt gleaned from his father's workshop. He knows, for ample, that cow's leather was used for shoes, sheep's leather r bridles, and how far cheverel will stretch.

As if the screams of cattle and cantankerous sisters were t enough, the sturdy steeple of St George's housed the great king bell, which was rung at 4 o'clock every morning and s loud enough to get the whole town out of bed. Just across e way from the church tower was Newingate, the medieval te that was the highest point in the city wall. Scholars have gued that these two looming structures inspired the 'Two ty Turrets that command the Towne' mentioned in *The Jew Malta.*

The town that these turrets commanded was not a large one. point of pilgrimage ever since the assassination of Thomas à cket in 1170, Canterbury was also renowned for its cloth arket and the quality of its fish, and in the late sixteenth ntury had a population of somewhere between 3,000 and 000. It was, as the Marlowe biographer William Urry points t, a city close to the countryside: 'Cows grazed within a hun-ed yards of John Marlowe's shop and local women went milk-g every morning. Gleaning went on at harvest-time in Barton elds, stretching into St George's parish. Fifteen minutes' walk uld have taken the young Marlowe far out into the meads, e orchards and primrose lanes. His contact with the open untryside was as close as that of the small boy Shakespeare.' e know that he enjoyed country jaunts. It took just ninety inutes to walk to the stretch of coastline between Sandwich d Deal, a trip he made often with his father, and perhaps also th a playmate Nat Best, the son of a tanner from Wingham village just six miles east of Canterbury) with whom John arlowe had business dealings. Later in life Marlowe was to ve us an extraordinarily evocative recollection of how, as a ung boy visiting his maternal grandparents in Dover, he would

lie at the very edge of the cliffs, gazing below him or staring out to sea.

> . . . How fearful
> And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
> The crows and choughs that wing the mid-way air
> Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way down
> Hangs one that gathers samphire – dreadful trade!
> Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
> The fishermen that walk upon the beach
> Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark
> Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy
> Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
> That on th' unumb'red pebble chafes
> Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;
> Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
> Topple down headlong.
> (*King Lear* IV vi 11–23)

Young Christopher got on well with his irascible father – though rather less so with his mother, who like her daughter Anne was sarcastic, frosty and domineering. As Tony Bordel points out, most of the families in Kit's plays are single-parent ones, or involve step-parents. Sons and mothers – such as Hamlet and Gertrude, or Coriolanus and Volumnia – have especially volatile relationships.*

Fiery he might have been, but John Marlowe had a sharp wit and amongst his friends a reputation as a raconteur. A court case of 1565 gives us a glimpse of the company he kept. He was called to testify in the defamation hearing of *Hunte* [or Hurte] *alias Chapman v. Applegate.* His close friend, the Canterbury tailor Laurence Applegate, who had a shop on the High Street near

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* Tony Bordel, *Word Plays*, p. 222.

e Vernicle alehouse on the corner of Iron Bar Lane, had :en sowing scandals about Godliffe, the daughter of Goodwife ıapman. On the road to Dover, one summer's day in 1564, ɔplegate had boasted to John Marlowe that he had 'hadd [his] easure of godlyve Chappmans Daugher'. Though he made arlowe promise to keep it secret, the news was soon all round e town, and an outraged Goodwife Chapman in retaliaɔn refused to repay Applegate two shillings she owed him. ɔplegate was heard to say in mixed company in the Vernicle vern, and later in the shop to two of John Marlowe's apprenːes (and, it would seem, anywhere else where Marlowe could ;g him on to tell the tale, at 'divers tymes syns and in sondrie aces'), that it was quite a bargain 'for that I occupyed Godliffe r Daughter fower times which was for everie tyme vj d [i.e. ɕpence – the sums do work out, as the old shilling was worth ːd, so that two shillings equalled four sixpences]'. As Godliffe ıs about to get married, an outraged Goodwife Chapman took ɔplegate to court. The case was inconclusive, but Applegate ıd to perform public penance.

Such stories linger, and this one was no doubt still being ırrated with embellishment and delight by the time Chrispher was old enough to listen in. Wisps from the world of lults float in to young minds; sometimes they snag and remain, ːrfectly preserved if not fully understood. Later we may reːamine them: odd, untarnished strands in our fabric, suddenly en with a fuller perception. In Christopher's case, he worked em into his plays.

Two other stories gleefully gossiped around St George's ached the ears of the little boy who, watchful and inquisitive, ıs known to eavesdrop from the corner of his father's shop, · from behind the thin walls of the family house. The first, the le of Dorothy Hocking, happened in the year Christopher was ɔrn, but so delighted the good folk of Canterbury that it was ːmly lodged in local legend for years to come.

Dorothy was comely but a little dim, and was kept in drudgery and virtual imprisonment by her mother and stepfather. They lived in the parish of Holy Cross, near Canterbury's Westgate and next door to the tailor Robert Holmes. Between the 'backsydes' (back yards) of the houses there was a wall. It was built of stones and earth, bonded with hair and coated with lime or roughcast. It probably had a capping of thatch to keep off the rain, and it certainly had a hole. We know this because Dorothy Hocking's dog had nipped through the gap and stolen a conger eel from the Holmes's yard. Under the pretext of discussing this incident, Robert Holmes's wife drew Dorothy 'from her mothers busyness in hir mothers backsyde' for a secret discussion through the hole in the wall. Dorothy had fallen in love with one Richard Edmundes, and Goodwife Holmes had a mind to help her out. It was 'about five or six of the clock in the afternoon'. Dorothy agreed that Goodwife Holmes should send for Richard, so she could speak to him through the hole in the wall. Robert Holmes found him nearby, playing bowls in 'the backsyde of goodman podiches house', and brought him to the hole. By then Dorothy's parents had gone out. Goodwife Holmes took Dorothy's hand through the wall, and gave it to Richard to hold by the finger, asking 'knowe youe who this is that hath youe by the finger'. Dear but dull-witted Dorothy answered 'no not yet'. Robert Holmes told her 'it is Richard Edmundes', and open-mouthed she asked 'what . . . he wold have with her?'. Richard replied: 'well my wench I beare youe good will and if thow canst find it in thie harte to love me and wilbe ruled by me I will delyver thee out of thye miserie'. She answered she could 'find it in her hart to love him above all men', and Edmundes asked her how old she was, saying, perhaps with a fillip of flattery, 'I thinck you bee neere hand 16 or 17 yeares of age'. This seems to have somewhat thrown Dorothy who replied 'yea that I am, for I am neerer 20 yrs ould but my age is kept from me'. Edmundes then asked her if she was betrothed to anyone else,

ıd when she answered 'no' said, 'can you finde in your harte
forsake father and mother and all men lyving for my sake?',
ıd she replied with a heartfelt 'yea'.

We are told that Robert Holmes then called his journeyman,
arry Jenkinson, from indoors to act as a witness. 'Where and
han, Edmundes toke Dorothie by the hand throughe the hole
the wall and then said Dorothee unto Edmundes these words,
z. I Dorothee take youe Richard to my husband forsaking all
her for your sake and thereuppon I give you my faith and
outhe. Then said Edmundes, in faith wench, I were too blame
I would not speak the like woords unto thee.' He did so, and
alled for a drinck and dronck to Dorothy', giving her 'an ould
ıgell [gold coin]' to seal the ceremony. Now that she was
ɛtrothed, Dorothy – perhaps not so dim after all – was freed
her parents' tyranny. As soon as her circumstances had
ıanged she broke off the engagement, bringing down a breach
contract case against herself, thus leaving us a record of her
ory. This droll titbit of Canterbury gossip was, of course, to
emerge as the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer*
ight's Dream.

The second Canterbury tale overheard by the young Marlowe,
ɛrhaps from customers in his father's shop, perhaps as he
ipped in and out of neighbours' kitchens, centred on William
arrell, who was a canon at the cathedral, and Clemence Ward,
notorious harlot. The story was told by Goodwife Pratt as she
t working at her door at harvest-time 1575, with Goodwife
homasina Newen, overheard by the newly widowed Goodwife
ulverhouse as she suckled her child, and repeated by a Mrs
unt to Goodwife Joan Moyse, who told it in her kitchen to
lemence Ward's landlord John Foster. Clemence lived near
ıe Marlowes, in the neighbouring parish of St Alphege, and
as of sufficient 'suspect behaviour' to be required to do pen-
ıce clad in a white sheet on the porch of St Alphege before
ıe Sunday morning service, and to be excommunicated when

she refused to comply. Goodwives Newen and Pratt opined 'Yt is a pity she is not carted out of the town.' However the core of the tale they told sitting at Goodwife Pratt's front door at harvest-time concerned something Goodwife Lea had witnessed in the cathedral precincts. She had seen two people staggering with a peculiarly heavy laundry basket, through the Christchurch Gate, along the great length of the cemetery, through the Norman gateway to the inner cemetery until they came to Canon William Darrell's house, where they put the basket down among a clump of oak trees. But soon, seeming to act on a tip-off, one of the cathedral's lay clerks – Mr Whyting, perhaps, or Mr Wade – appeared, drew his dagger and plunged it into the basket. Out leapt a furious Clemence Ward, wounded in the arm. We do not know if it was this that destroyed Canon Darrell's reputation (he had already been accused of misbehaviour at court while chaplain to Queen Elizabeth, and had run up considerable debts), but he was eventually suspended from his canonry. The canon's downfall inspired Falstaff's nemesis in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which the sack-swilling knight is tricked into hiding a laundry basket during his attempt at seducing Mistress Ford.

Noisy, nosy and malodorous though the parish of St George was, it was home, in addition to the goodwives and gossips, to a number of artists and musicians. Residents included Thomas Bull, the cathedral choirmaster; William a Lee, a tabor player; and John Johnson, who in addition to painting, made rude labels to pin to witches. It is a city quarter that was also evidently a nursery for playwrights. In Sun Street, in the parish of St Alphege near the cathedral gate, lived John Lyly. Some ten years older than Marlowe he was to become famed for his *Euphues*, a prose romance written in a peculiar, heightened style, giving us the word 'euphuism'. Like Marlowe, he was to move to London, and in the 1580s and 1590s wrote plays – not the rough-and-tumble theatre preferred by the young Kit, but finely

afted dramas for court and boy actors. However the neigh-
ɔur who perhaps most influenced the course of Marlowe's
ɔuth was Stephen Gosson, a grocer's son who was the same age
John Lyly, and who was also to become a dramatist. New
ɪidence, in what appears to be rough copy for a pamphlet on
arlowe, probably written in the early 1590s while Gosson was
ctor of Great Wigborough, and recently discovered among
aterial that once belonged to the great Elizabethan actor
ɪnd Gosson's lifelong friend) Edward Alleyn, points to a rela-
ɔnship between Gosson and his younger neighbour that
nounts to a form of hero-worship on Marlowe's part.* Both
ɔys appear to show an early desire to escape the stifling air of
George's, and Canterbury, and it is Stephen Gosson who
ɪows the way.