



Christopher Marlowe
A Renaissance Life

CONSTANCE BROWN KURIYAMA

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CORNELL
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ITHACA AND
LONDON

First printing, Cornell Paperbacks, 2010

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First published 2002 by Cornell University Press

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kuriyama, Constance Brown, 1942–

Christopher Marlowe : a Renaissance life / Constance Brown Kuriyama.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8014-7688-4

1. Marlowe, Christopher, 1564–1593. 2. Dramatists, English—Early modern, 1500–1700—Biography. I. Title.

PR2673 .K87 2002

822'.3—dc21

2001007519

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Cloth printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Kurt and David

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Acknowledgments

BIOGRAPHIES, BECAUSE THEY are inherently open-ended projects, are notoriously recalcitrant and slow to evolve. This one was no exception, and while it gradually took shape its author inevitably incurred a large number of obligations.

I owe special thanks to Kate Urry, both for granting me access to the unpublished work and library of her late husband, William Urry, and for extending extraordinary hospitality to me and my family while I was conducting research in Canterbury. She is the true patroness of this book. I also wish to thank Anne Oakley, archivist of the Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library during the two summers I worked there, who quickly grasped my aims and made an extraordinary effort on several occasions to provide material I needed. Catherine Hall of the Corpus Christi College Library at Cambridge was also exceptionally helpful, guiding me expertly through the records held by this college and supplying useful information about them.

I am indebted to the officers and members of the Marlowe Society of America, past and present, for providing opportunities to present and publish some of the material I gathered during the early stages of my research. I thank Roma Gill in particular for her friendly encouragement of this project, and Sara Deats for her longstanding and enthusiastic support of my work.

My research was facilitated by funds from a variety of sources. The National Endowment for the Humanities provided a Travel to Collections Grant, and a stipend for study at the Newberry Library Summer Institute in the English Archival Sciences, whose instructors, Diana Greenway and Jane Sayers of the University of London, were remarkably tolerant of their overstressed, purblind, and somewhat unruly charges. A grant-in-aid from the American Council of Learned Societies, and a Folger Shakespeare Library Short-Term Fellowship, made part of my work with the Marlowe documents possible, as did a grant from Texas Tech University's Institute for University Research—Arts and Sciences. Texas Tech also provided a one-semester Fac-

ulty Development Leave. Ed George helped me identify some of the authors and works in Mr. Gresshop's library. I thank Kelley Lynch for permission to use a quotation from an interview with Leonard Cohen as an epigraph to chapter 4.

However, my husband, Kurt Kuriyama, and my son, David, who were obliged to live with this book on a day-to-day and year-to-year basis, often to their inconvenience, have contributed the most to its successful completion. It is therefore dedicated to them, with deepest affection and gratitude.

Chronology

- ca. 1536 Marlowe's father, John Marlowe, is born in Ospringe beside Faversham.
- 1559–60 John Marlowe is enrolled as an apprentice of a Canterbury shoemaker, Gerard Richardson.
- 22 May 1561 John Marlowe marries Katherine Arthur, a native of Dover, in the church of St. George the Martyr, Canterbury.
- 21 May 1562 Mary Marlowe is christened at St. George's.
- 26 February 1564 Christopher Marlowe is christened at St. George's.
- April 1564 John Marlowe is admitted as a freeman of Canterbury, paying a reduced fee of 4s 1d.
- 18 December 1566 Margaret Marlowe is christened at St. George's.
- 28 August 1568 Mary Marlowe is buried in St. George's churchyard.
- 31 October 1568 Unnamed son of John Marlowe is christened at St. George's.
- 5 November 1568 Unnamed son of John Marlowe is buried in St. George's churchyard.
- 20 August 1569 Jane Marlowe is christened at St. George's.
- 26 July 1570 Thomas Marlowe I is christened at St. George's.
- 7 August 1570 Thomas Marlowe I is buried in St. George's churchyard.
- 14 July 1571 Anne Marlowe is christened at St. George's.
- Spring 1573 Richard Baines, possible informer on Marlowe, petitions for permission to advance to his B.A. at Cambridge.

- August 1573 Queen Elizabeth holds court in Canterbury.
- 18 October 1573 Dorothy Marlowe is christened at St. George's.
- Spring 1576 Richard Baines proceeds to his M.A. at Cambridge.
- 8 April 1576 Thomas Marlowe II is christened in St. Andrew's parish.
- 4 July 1579 Richard Baines arrives at the English seminary at Rheims to begin study for the priesthood.
- 14 January 1579– Christopher Marlowe is a scholar at the King's
ca. December 1580 School, Canterbury.
- Early December 1580 First entry of Marlowe's name in the Buttery Book of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.
- Early 1581 Marlowe pays entry fee of 3s 4d as a "pensioner," or scholarship student, at Corpus Christi.
- 17 March 1581 Marlowe matriculates at Cambridge.
- 7 May 1581 Marlowe is formally granted his scholarship.
- 21 September 1581 Richard Baines is ordained as a priest.
- 22 April 1582 Jane Marlowe and John Moore marry at St. Andrew's.
- 18 April 1582 James Benchkin, father of John Benchkin and husband of Katherine Benchkin, is buried in St. Mildred's churchyard.
- Summer 1582 Richard Baines is exposed as a traitor to the Catholic cause and forced to confess; he is eventually released and returns to England, probably in 1583.
- July–August 1582 Marlowe's first absence from Cambridge.
- January 1583 Jane Marlowe dies, apparently in childbirth.
- April–June 1583 Marlowe is absent from Cambridge; his roommates also miss part of this term.
- Spring 1584 Marlowe completes requirements for the B.A.
- July–December 1584 Marlowe is absent from Cambridge; other students are apparently absent as well.
- May–mid-June 1585 Marlowe is absent from Cambridge, along with most other students; there are extensive absences also in the first and second terms, from September 1584 to February 1585.

- 30 June 1585 (or after) John Benchkin registers as a pensioner at Corpus Christi; Marlowe is in residence.
- ca. 15 July 1585 Marlowe leaves Cambridge for the remainder of the summer (with John Benchkin?).
- 19 August 1585 Marlowe, his father, his uncle Thomas Arthur, and his brother-in-law John Moore sign Katherine Benchkin's will in Canterbury, in which she leaves the bulk of her estate to John Benchkin.
- ca. 15 September 1585 Marlowe returns to Cambridge with John Benchkin, who stays for several weeks.
- Early November 1585 Marlowe is absent from Cambridge for two weeks.
- December 1585 John Benchkin returns to Cambridge during Christmas week.
- ca. 25 February 1586 Marlowe leaves Cambridge for two weeks. He returns with John Benchkin, who stays for one week.
- 25 July 1586 Katherine Benchkin is buried.
- 1586–87 John Benchkin reenters Corpus Christi as a fellow commoner.
- 1587 Richard Baines, M.A., becomes rector of Waltham, Lincolnshire.
- 31 March 1587 Marlowe is admitted to candidacy for the M.A.
- 29 June 1587 Privy Council intervenes with a letter to the Cambridge authorities, praising Marlowe's "good service" to the queen and urging that rumors about him be quashed and that his degree be granted on schedule.
- 1587–88 Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Parts 1 and 2* is performed with great success in London; Marlowe's association with the Admiral's Men, their leading actor Edward Alleyn, and the theatrical manager Philip Henslowe begins.
- 1587 Robert Green obliquely accuses Marlowe of atheism in his Epistle to *Perimedes the Blacksmith*.

- 1587 John Benchkin matriculates at Cambridge.
- 1588–92 Marlowe writes *Doctor Faustus*, *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*; the exact order of composition is uncertain, although *Edward II* is usually assigned to 1592. *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, the translation of Ovid's *Amores*, and the translation of *The First Book of Lucan* may (or may not) belong to the university period. The famous lyric "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" also cannot be dated precisely.
- 18 September 1589 Marlowe is involved in a swordfight in London in which William Bradley, an innkeeper's son, is killed by Thomas Watson, Marlowe's fellow playwright and poet, and his probable mentor; Watson and Marlowe are jailed on suspicion of murder.
- 19 September 1589 Coroner's jury finds that Marlowe withdrew from combat and that Watson killed Bradley in self-defense.
- 1 October 1589 Marlowe is released on bail of £20; he agrees to appear at the next Newgate Sessions.
- 3 December 1589 Marlowe and Watson appear at the Newgate Sessions and are exonerated; Marlowe is released; Watson's pardon is issued on 10 February 1590.
- 1590 *Tamburlaine the Great* is published, without the author's name on the title page.
- 6 April 1590 Sir Francis Walsingham, often supposed to be Marlowe's employer in government service, dies in London.
- 1591 Marlowe and Thomas Kyd share the same workroom, as well as the patronage of Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange, whose players, Lord Strange's Men, perform their plays.
- 1592–93 Outbreak of plague seriously disrupts theatrical activity in London.
- 26 January 1592 Marlowe, in Flushing, is accused by Richard Baines of counterfeiting and of intent to go over to the enemy (Spain and Catholicism). He is sent back to London by Sir Robert Sidney, the governor of

- Flushing, to be examined by Lord Treasurer Burghley, but is apparently released.
- 9 May 1592 Marlowe is bound to keep the peace by the constable and subconstable of Holywell Street. At some point in 1592, Marlowe loses the patronage of Lord Strange, perhaps because he mentioned Strange's name to Sir Robert Sidney while being questioned in Flushing.
- 19 June 1592 John Benchkin is identified in a plea roll in Canterbury civil court as a student of Cambridge; he becomes an admitted freeman of Canterbury in November.
- 3 September 1592 Robert Greene dies. Shortly thereafter, stronger, more explicit allegations of Marlowe's atheism appear in Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, possibly authored or co-authored by Henry Chettle. This pamphlet also attacks Shakespeare, whose work as a playwright is just beginning to be recognized.
- 15 September 1592 Marlowe fights William Corkine in Canterbury. A suit by Corkine and countercharges by Marlowe are filed. The case is dismissed on 9 October.
- 26 September 1592 Thomas Watson is buried at St. Bartholomew the Less in London, possibly a victim of plague.
- December 1592 Henry Chettle, in his preface to *Kind-Hartes Dream*, reports that Marlowe and Shakespeare took offense at the allegations in Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*.
- Early 1593 Marlowe writes *Hero and Leander*. His current patron is Thomas Walsingham, the nephew of Sir Francis Walsingham. Marlowe is known to frequent Scadbury, Walsingham's estate in Kent, probably as a refuge from the plague in London.
- 12 May 1593 Thomas Kyd is arrested on suspicion of libel and imprisoned; some papers containing heretical arguments, which he later claims were Marlowe's, are found in his possession.
- 18 May 1593 The Privy Council issues a warrant for Marlowe's arrest.

- 20 May 1593 Marlowe appears before the Privy Council and is instructed to give his “daily attendance”; he is not imprisoned.
- 26 May 1593 Possible date of the delivery of the Baines Note alleging Marlowe’s “damnable judgment of religion and scorn of God’s word.” A second copy of the note claims that the note was delivered on 2 June, but this may be a mistake, since Marlowe was already dead on 2 June.
- 30 May 1593 Marlowe is killed by Ingram Frizer at the house of Widow Bull in Deptford. According to witnesses, Marlowe attacked Frizer after a heated “public” dispute over the “reckoning” or bill in which “divers malicious words” were exchanged.
- 1 June 1593 The coroner’s jury finds Frizer acted in self-defense; Marlowe is buried in the churchyard of St. Nicholas’s Church, Deptford.
- 10 June 1593 Ann Marlowe marries John Cranford at St. Mary Bredman in Canterbury.
- 28 June 1593 Ingram Frizer is pardoned; Richard Cholmeley is arrested on suspicion of seditious activities. Cholmeley was the subject of two reports by an anonymous spy, one of which alleges that Cholmeley claimed he had been persuaded by Marlowe to become an atheist. Two warrants for Cholmeley’s arrest had been issued in March 1593 and on 13 May 1593.
- 1594 Publication of *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Edward II*, both bearing Marlowe’s name as author.
- 29 May 1594 John Benchkin takes out a license to marry Katherine Grant of Kingston.
- 30 June 1594 Dorothy Marlowe marries Thomas Graddell at St. Mary Bredman in Canterbury.
- 16 July 1596 Thomasin Benchkin, daughter of John, is christened at St. Mildred’s, Canterbury; other children, Thomas (1598) and Katherine (1605), follow.

- 1597 Thomas Beard cites Marlowe's death as an instance of divine retribution in *Theatre of God's Judgments*.
Thomas Walsingham is knighted.
- 1598 *Hero and Leander* is published, with a dedication to Sir Thomas Walsingham by Edward Blunt; Marlowe is identified as author.
- 1599 The Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury order Marlowe's translation of *Ovid's Elegies* burned.
- 1600 *Lucan's First Book* is published; Marlowe is identified as author.
- 1602 Philip Henslowe pays William Birde and Samuel Rowley £4 for additions to *Doctor Faustus*.
- 1604 The A-text of *Doctor Faustus* is published; Marlowe is identified as author.
- 23 January 1605 John Marlowe makes his will.
- 25 January 1605 John Marlowe is buried.
- 17 March 1605 Katherine Marlowe makes her will.
- 19 March 1605 Katherine Marlowe is buried.
- 1616 The B-text of *Doctor Faustus* is published; Marlowe is identified as author.
- 2 December 1616 John Benchkin, aged fifty, deposes that he wrote a will for Thomas Harflete, knight.
- 1633 *The Jew of Malta* is published, with a dedication by Thomas Heywood; Marlowe is identified as author, and praised in the prologue as "the best of Poets in that age."

Abbreviations

BAC	Canterbury city court records
BL	British Library (Harleian, Lansdowne, and additional MS)
CCA	Canterbury Cathedral archives
CKS	Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone
DAC	Canterbury diocese records
GLRO	Greater London Record Office (Middlesex Records)
PRC	Records of the Prerogative Court (currently held at CKS; also available on microfilm at CCA)
PRO	Public Record Office, London

Christopher Marlowe



Introduction



With cheerful hope thus he accosted her.

Hero and Leander, 198

ALTHOUGH BIOGRAPHY IS technically nonfiction, all life-writing is an amalgam of fact and interpretation, logical inference and speculation, truth and myth. Biographers, like all writers, inevitably bring cultural and personal biases to their work, and, consequently, what they write often reveals more about the author than about the subject. When the subject is a sixteenth-century playwright such as Marlowe, whose life is sparsely documented at best, the biographer's task becomes doubly problematic, for generally speaking biographical speculation is inversely proportional to biographical information. Particularly when the biographical record is deeply tinged with actual or potential sensationalism, as it happens to be in Marlowe's case, the temptation to weave hypothetical scenarios, and to mistake one's conjectures for fact, becomes all the more powerful.

Various strategies for minimizing this temptation exist, all of which have pitfalls amply demonstrated in existing Marlowe biographies. Perhaps the most obvious method is to emphasize the documents that make up Marlowe's life record, a tactic widely employed by early biographers and biographical researchers such as Leslie Hotson, F. S. Boas, Mark Eccles, C. F. Tucker Brooke, and John Bakeless. Old documents seem to offer safe ground because they are concrete objects and, as a rule, indisputably factual. No one doubts that Christopher Marlowe was christened on 26 February 1564 in St. George's Church, Canterbury, as the parish records indicate.

Unfortunately, not all documents are as straightforward as parish records, and even parish records can be problematic—as they are in the case of the christening record of Margaret Marlowe, the sibling who immediately followed Christopher. Three completely different dates for Margaret's chris-

tening exist in the surviving parish register of St. George (which is a copy of the original records) and in the archdeacon's transcript. Since Margaret's arrival was a significant event in Marlowe's early childhood, this is no trifling matter, but records, like the people who keep them, are subject to error and corruption.

Records are particularly problematic when they are isolated and fragmentary. Marlowe's incomplete school records, for example, while they are strictly factual, often raise more questions than they answer. We know that Marlowe held a scholarship at the King's School, Canterbury, in 1579–80, and that he also won a scholarship to Cambridge. Unfortunately, we do not know how he achieved either distinction, or if there was some connection between the two, or where he was educated before he entered the King's School. Similarly, we know (mostly) what Marlowe's scholarship payments were during each term at Cambridge and also (mostly) what he spent in the buttery for items over and above what he ate and drank in commons. Information from the Corpus Christi Audits and Buttery Book, which are both incomplete, can be combined to provide some information about Marlowe's entire period of residence at Cambridge. These records tell us a great deal about Marlowe's patterns of attendance, but they do not tell us where he was or what he was doing when he was absent—much biographical speculation to the contrary. Documents often mean both more and less than they seem to mean, instilling a false sense of security that may deter and often has deterred scholars from examining them more closely and critically.

The tantalizing partial information that these documents contain can also lead to the second pitfall of a document-based approach: rather than simply fostering the complacent belief that we know enough by taking them at face value, they may also encourage premature inferences. Isolated scraps of information, like the pieces of an incomplete jigsaw puzzle, may seem to fit together when actually they do not, and a chronic shortage of information makes the urge to leap to conclusions hard to resist. For example, given that the Privy Council wrote a letter to the Cambridge authorities commending Marlowe for his "good service" to the queen and urging that his M.A. degree be granted on schedule, and also that one of Marlowe's patrons was Thomas Walsingham, Marlowe biographers have concluded that his long absences from Cambridge were spent in government service. Similarly, his biographers often assume that because Marlowe, according to the council, was rumored to have gone to Rheims, he actually went there, and so on. But if Marlowe's records are compared to those of other students at Cambridge, his patterns of attendance do not appear to be exceptional, and one of his long absences was demonstrably spent visiting his family in Canterbury. In this

case, consideration of a broader range of evidence points to a less exciting but far more likely conclusion: Marlowe spent most of his absences from Cambridge doing the same things that other students were doing.

Yet another pitfall of relying heavily on documents, as the example of the Privy Council's letter also illustrates, is that they tend to record exceptional rather than routine events. This can lead to a highly distorted, sensationalized view of the subject. Legal and government documents in particular can be quite misleading, especially when there are so few markers on the trail. Two undisputed facts, that Marlowe was summoned by the Privy Council to appear before them and that he was killed ten days later, are regularly construed by Marlowe biographers as ominous, sinister, and interconnected events. Yet there may be no causal connection whatsoever between them. The fact that Marlowe was merely summoned rather than being imprisoned like his fellow playwright Thomas Kyd could be viewed as a positive rather than a negative sign—and this argument has of course been made by Tucker Brooke, William Urry, and others. But conspiracy theories had a powerful emotional appeal in the jaded anti-authoritarian climate of the later twentieth century, and the sensational or potentially sensational content of some of the Marlowe documents also seems to encourage suspicion.

Legal documents also have a strong tendency to encourage negative rather than positive conclusions. Marlowe's virtually iconic status as the designated outlaw or bad boy of Elizabethan drama rests mainly on the records of his clashes with William Bradley, William Corkine, the constable and subconstable of Holywell Street, and finally Ingram Frizer. Yet the first twenty-five of Marlowe's twenty-nine years passed without incident. Instead of judging Marlowe's character solely on the basis of the last few years of his life, perhaps we should ask what he was like during the first twenty-five, when he had already begun to produce his most important work. We could then ask, as we should, what caused the apparent shift in his behavior, particularly during his last sixteen months.

The last and perhaps the most pernicious drawback of a document-based approach to Marlowe biography is that it encourages piecemeal analysis, digression, and rambling. The tendency of Marlowe biographers to organize their books around locations—Canterbury, Cambridge, and London—does reflect the geographical progression of Marlowe's life, but it also seems to be influenced by the locations of key documents on which Marlowe biographies are based, and by the availability of other material evidence that may help fill the gaps in documents, such as maps, drawings, and photographs. This geographical scheme has its merits, but relying too heavily on such a