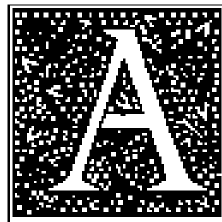
Afterword: To Bring Truth to Light

Time's glory is to calm contending kings,
To unmask falsehood, and bring truth to light,
O stamp the seal of time in aged things,
To wake the morn, and sentinel the night,
To wrong the wronger till he render right,
To ruinate proud buildings with thy hours,
And smear with dust their glitt'ring golden tow'rs.
—*The Rape of Lucrece*
(939–945)



A quibble [verbal pun] is to Shakespeare, what luminous vapours are to the traveler," opined Samuel Johnson, "[H]e follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible."[1] Commenting on this observation, Heather James notes in *Shakespeare's Troy*, "The pun lures Shakespeare into the indefinite meanings of language that takes issue with itself. Linguistically and socially subversive, the quibble will not commit to singular reference or allow any meaning to stand unchallenged by other meanings wishing to usurp the same sign."[2] As a lord of misrule, she explains, Hamlet subverts Claudius's sovereignty through the skillful use of word play: "Puns, like contaminations, create meanings that rival each other for primacy. Because the various meanings of a word or versions of a story are equally legitimate, they ultimately level notions of priority and hierarchy. The antic takes up the impudent pun as a form of language that opposes stable order, hierarchy, and the absolutist language of kingship."[3]

In many ways, this edition of *Hamlet* owes its existence to the serendipitous discovery of the puns in Act 1, Scene 5, in which the ghost plays on Archbishop Whitgift's name. No doubt some will dispute this reading and characterize the whole quest as one inspired by "luminous vapours," miring the subject in more confusion. Yet in the words of one historian, the Elizabethan era was an age "that loved puns."[4] Word play was on everyone's lips, from kings to commoners, especially puns on personal names. When King James first met Sir Walter Ralegh, he wittily remarked, "O my soul, mon, I have heard rawly of thee."[5] Elizabeth famously punned on John Whitgift's name when she elevated him to the archbishopric, but except for the queen and Martin Marprelate, who mercilessly skewered "John of Cant," no one else did so, at least publicly or in print. Jesting about the stern prelate would have been as unthinkable as taking the Lord's name in vain. Evidently, Kit felt that, with the end of the Elizabethan era, he could dare to pun on the archbishop's name. Hence "Wicked" Whitgift escaped notice for four hundred years and probably would have continued to go unnoticed except for an unusual convergence of events.

I have been fascinated with Marlowe since childhood, when my grandfather, Rev. David Rhys Williams, introduced me to the authorship controversy. A spirited champion of religious liberty, he defended many unpopular causes and latter-day heretics from his Congregational and Unitarian pulpits. In 1924 he met Dr. Thomas Mendenhall, who in a lecture described his efforts to apply the scientific method to the Shakespearean canon. As noted earlier, Mendenhall discovered that Marlowe's and Shakespeare's "literary fingerprints" were virtually identical. It was the first time that two authors had had exactly the same profile, and the discovery caused a minor sensation. However, when the long lost Elizabethan coroner's report surfaced the following year, appearing to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Marlowe had died, Mendenhall's method was considered flawed.

Yet as a fiery young preacher and social activist, my grandfather was less disposed to taking the coroner's report at face value. His own Welsh and Celtic heritage predisposed him to be more than a little skeptical of the authorized English version of history. He felt strongly that freedom of conscience and worship lay at the heart of the matter and that Marlowe had faked his death to avoid the charges of heresy hanging over him. Over the years, my grandfather preached on the subject in his pulpits in Cleveland, Chicago, and Rochester, N.Y., focusing on Marlowe's religious views. After retiring in the 1950s, he visited England along with my grandmother, Lucy Adams Pease (whose ancestry ran back to English forebears in Norfolk northeast of London). In addition to visiting Canterbury and Cambridge, they met with Dorothy Wraight and other pioneer Marlovians of that era. In

the mid 1960s, he wrote a book, *Shakespeare, Thy Name Is Marlowe*, focusing on the poet's religious views.

As a child, I would listen spellbound to his eloquent lectures and sermons, delivered in a deep, resounding voice like that of Elizabethan actors Edward Alleyn or Richard Burbage. At a family gathering in 1957, shortly before my twelfth birthday, he introduced me to Calvin Hoffman, the dean of the Marlovian researchers, and several years later I presented my grandfather an oil canvas of Marlowe I had painted based on Kit's recently discovered portrait in Cambridge University. At college, in the early 1960s, I wrote a tongue-in-cheek article, "Tempest in a Teepee," for the Oberlin literary magazine, contending that Squanto was the real author of the Shakespearean Canon.[6] (The Pilgrims' native guide actually visited England in the early 1600s!)

Over the years, as a journalist, teacher, and medical researcher, I continued to be fascinated by the authorship question. In the mid-1980s, while working on a book on heart disease, I discovered that the pace of blank verse corresponded to that of the human heartbeat. In the space of a minute, the ordinary person can read about twelve to fifteen lines of iambic pentameter consisting of five unstressed and five stressed syllables or about 60 to 75 syllables altogether. The heart expands and contracts about 60 to 75 times during this interval—a perfect correspondence. Cardiologists welcomed my suggestion, in *Diet for a Strong Heart,* that reciting Marlovian and Shakespearean verse out loud (or even reading it silently) would help strengthen the heart and circulatory system. In the mid-1990s, I wrote *Profiles in Oriental Diagnosis*, a three-volume series of case histories on the creators of the modern mind in which I examined Leonardo, Newton, Darwin, and other great artists, scientists, and thinkers and analyzed the role that diet, health, and the environment played on their lives and thought. Applying the same methods to the authorship controversy, I concluded from a variety of iconographic and literary comparisons that Marlowe probably penned the works attributed to Shakespeare.

As the four hundredth anniversary of *Hamlet*'s publication approached, I thought about editing the play under Marlowe's name and relating it to historical events in his life. I read Lilian Winstanley's 1921 classic, *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*, one of the few literary studies to situate the play in its historical context and one that has generally been accepted by Marlovians. I admired her effort to identify the Danish prince with King James of Scotland and to a lesser extent Essex, but overall the comparisons fell short and left me unsatisfied. Dorothy Wraight, the leading Marlovian literary critic, had written convincingly of Kit's hand in *Edward III*, the *Sonnets,* and several other Shakespearean works. If I were going to find a Marlovian gloss

on *Hamlet*, I would have to start fresh. It was unclear whether the play had an overt autobiographical layer. My earlier study on *Hamlet* had focused on its comprehensive dietary, herbal, and medicinal orientation. But I had discerned few if any personal links between the play and the poet himself.

Unless there was some direct connection with Marlowe, it would be counterproductive to establishing a connection with the Shakespearean works to publish the play in his name, however compelling the other evidence for his survival and subsequent literary career. While reading Wraight's book, mention of Marlowe's earliest play, a history of an obscure Albanian prince named Scanderbeg, triggered an association. My other grandfather and namesake, Alexander Jack, a painter and illustrator, had collected old books as a hobby. Though he died in the early 1940s, shortly before I was born, our family had kept several boxes of his dusty tomes, mostly nineteenth century books on ornithology, botany, and popular science. Over the years, we carted these volumes from residence to residence, and occasionally I would thumb through them. As I recalled, the oldest volume was a history of the Balkans dating back to the sixteenth century, almost two centuries older than any of the other books. The Scanderbeg reference sent me to the basement, where I was amazed to discover in the bottom of a storage box a work entitled *The Historie of George Castriot, surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albanie, containing his famous actes, his noble deedes of armes, and memorable victories against the Turkes, for the Faith of Christ*. The book was written by Jacques Lavardin, Lord of Plassie Bovert, a nobleman of France, translated from French into English by Z. T. Gentleman, London, and imprinted for William Ponsomby in 1596.

My astonishment at discovering an Elizabethan book (whose French original may have been a source for Marlowe's first play) in the cellarage turned to awe when I opened the first page. It was dedicated "To the honorable, Sir George Carey, Knight Marshall of Her Majestes Hovse, goverovr of the Isle of Wight, and sonne and heire apparent to the Lord of Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlaine, &c." Carey inherited his father's theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, in which Shakespeare was an actor and shareholder. Though the leather binding had long since disintegrated and the paper was brittle, the print was remarkably clear. At the time, I did not realize that one of the Carey's duties, as Knight Marshall, was to oversee the verge—the judicial radius of the queen's person—that played such a pivotal role in the Deptford inquest. Later I came to suspect that he was in on the plot and a key player in Marlowe's survival and subsequent career. Stumbling across a book dedicated to the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men under whose aegis *Hamlet* was first performed seemed auspicious.

With renewed enthusiasm, I dove into the text of *Hamlet* to see if I

could find a key to unlock the door to a fresh Marlovian interpretation. If "every word doth almost [tell] my name," as Sonnet 76 puts it, there must be some connection I had overlooked. Not long afterwards, while scrolling through some passages from *Hamlet* in an Internet version of the play, the name "Whitgift" seemed to pop off the screen in my face. It was the passage in Act 1, Scene 5, in which the ghost reveals to the prince the details of his murder: "Ay that incestuous, that adulterous beast, / With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts, / O wicked wit, and gifts that have the power / So to seduce; won to his shameful lust / The will of my most seeming-virtuous Queen" (1.5.47–51). I had read the passage many times and found it one of the most harrowing in the play. In an instant, I realized it was the skeleton key to unlocking the high ecclesiastical tower and turrets, the lowly dissenters' keep and dungeon, and the ghostly battlements of the entire play.

The revelation was breathtaking. Archbishop Whitgift was Marlowe's great nemesis, and who but Kit (or Martin Marprelate) would be bold enough to pun on his name like this in print? My conviction was later strengthened while researching the poet's birth and family background. I knew he had been born early in 1564, a few months before Will Shakespeare, but the exact date had not made an impression. In fact, his actual date of birth went unrecorded. As with many Elizabethans (including Shakespeare), all we have is Marlowe's date of christening. He was baptized on February 26, 1564 in St. George's Church near his home in Canterbury. The date struck me as familiar. Looking back through my diary, I was amazed to discover that the *satori* (sudden enlightenment) in front of the computer occurred on February 26, Marlowe's day! I felt as numb and speechless as the Danish prince when the ghost first appeared to him. I think my hair stood on end like that of the proverbial porcupine.

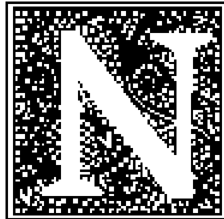
Despite these favorable signs and portents—and the spirit of my grandfather beckoning me forward—I continually agonized over whether "to publish" or "not to publish" *Hamlet* under Marlowe's name. Though probably coincidental, the omens spurred me to take action but did not constitute proof. I still needed some independent verification that the ghostwriter was honest. During my quest, the Russian connection of which I was unaware strengthened, the Hecate theme and symbolic link between May 30 (the day of Marlowe's "death" in Deptford") and *Hamlet* and the other plays emerged, and many other new associations developed. At the same time, the conviction that Kit may have survived his destiny spread into the mainstream, receiving the blessings of Westminster Abbey and the new Globe theatre. The time was clearly ripe for a new paradigm. Yet the deeper I plunged into the authorship maze, it became clear that William Shakespeare was as important to the success of dramatic partnership as

Marlowe. In presenting Kit and Will as co-authors and taking a middle way between the Stratfordians and anti-Stratfordians, I hope my grandfather's spirit is not too "unhousel'd, disappointed, and unanel'd" (1.5.81).

Although I attribute the primary authorship of the Shakespearean works to Marlowe, I remain open to Will's indispensable literary as well as dramatic role. It is entirely possible that his "native wit" lent itself to writing poetry and drama, and his hand may appear in the various versions that have come down to us. As Kit's dramatic partner and spokesman, he may have overseen numerous changes—small and occasionally substantive—on the London stage or during performances at court when Marlowe was not present. Jotted down on the rolls that cued actors to their lines and in playbooks and inserted on marked-up manuscripts, some of these spontaneous changes and alterations very likely found their way into the quartos and folio. Similarly, Kit very well may not have been present when the printed versions were composed, proofed, and printed, and stationers would have consulted Will as the final authority. Finally, some of the allusions and puns in the plays and poems appear to refer to Will, further suggesting that like Hamlet and Horatio, Marlowe's and Shakespeare's relation was warm and intimate, possibly even approaching a marriage of true minds.

Purposes Mistook

> If all the pens that ever poets held
> Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts
> And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
> Their minds and muses on admirèd themes
> --
> Yet should there hover into their restless heads
> One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least,
> Which into words no virtue can digest.
> —*Tamburlaine*
> (5.1.161–173)



ext to my grandparents, I would like to pay tribute to several other family members. My late father, Dr. Homer A. Jack, a Unitarian minister, human-rights activist, and secretary-general of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, inspired in me a devotion to freedom of conscience and religious toleration. My uncle, George Hunston Williams, a professor of church

history at Harvard Divinity School, shared some of the same interests and pastoral qualities of Archbishop Whitgift. Fortunately, my relation with my late uncle, an authority on the Radical Reformation, was the opposite to that of Hamlet and Claudius. Though he never became passionately involved in the authorship question, he kept an open mind about his father's Marlovian pursuits and always encouraged me in my pursuits.

Ironically, in an example of what Hamlet called "purposes mistook / Fall'n on th'inventors' heads" (5.2.382–383), Archbishop Whitgift's suppression of religion set in motion the Great Migration to the New World that firmly established the separation of church and state. As Protestant clergymen, my grandfather, father, and uncle were all involved in the continuing struggle for religious liberty. I would have followed them into the pulpit except that I was dismissed from divinity school for turning the university chapel into a sanctuary for a soldier who refused to fight in Vietnam. Nevertheless, I continue to lecture on the unity of world religions and lead workshops on overcoming prejudice (such as that heaped on Marlowe).

To my sweet wife, Gale, whose love and healthful cooking sustained me through this project; the fair Masha, our lovely daughter; the plucky John, our son living in Texas; and sergeant Hanz, our demanding three-year-old grandson, I am deeply appreciative for their love, steadfast devotion, and encouragement. My mother and sister also made many helpful comments and suggestions for which I am grateful.

Several years ago, my cousin, Portia, who bears a striking Shakespearean name, gave me a portrait of our grandfather, whose countenance in my office, like Hamlet's ghost, urged me on in this endeavor. I like to imagine that her late husband, Tom Weiskel, an English professor at Yale, would also approve. Besides my family, I am grateful to many teachers, mentors, and associates through the years for their inspiration, encouragement, and confidence, especially Franklin Myers and William Painter, my English teachers at Scarsdale High School, who introduced the authorship question in their classrooms.

I would also like to thank my associates at Planetary Health, a small nonprofit devoted to promoting a healthy diet and lifestyle and the healing power of literature, music, and art. I am also grateful to my many colleagues, students, friends, and neighbors in our shire of Becket (named after an earlier archbishop of Canterbury, the saintly Thomas) who have enlivened my lectures and workshops on philosophy, literature, and the arts. During a recent Ovidian interlude, I have been assisted and encouraged by Jeanette and John Kozinski, Charles Millman, Patricia Price, Adelbert and Wieke Nelissen, Edeard Esko, Heike Albers, Jane and Lino Stanchich, Kezia Snyder, Susan Krieger, Rosemary Cadigan, Masato Fry, Polly Licht, Meg

Wolfe, Linda and Bob Norris, Astri Lindberg, Sherman Goldman, and Maria Milland for which I am appreciative.

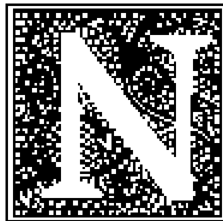
I would especially like to thank George Ferger, a Shakespearean scholar in Williamstown, Mass., and his wife, Mary, for their incisive comments and suggestions on portions of an early draft.

One of my greatest joys in working on this project has been the poetry itself. As all lovers of Marlowe and Shakespeare know, their works produce an altered state of consciousness that can be described as felicitous, magical, and divine. Enveloping myself in *Tamburlaine* and the other early works led to epiphanies at many levels. Even if new evidence undermines the thesis of this edition, I will take some consolation in perhaps inspiring a few readers to discover Marlowe's plays and poems for themselves. Among the Shakespearean texts, the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* proved the most rewarding. It has long been out of print, but on the Internet I discovered a second hand bookstore that had a rare facsimile edition of the 1604 original in the Huntington Library. The text of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Volume 1 of this edition is based primarily on that version and seeks to mirror its simplicity, clarity, and elegance.

A Wheaten Garland

CERES. Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest!
Scarcity and want shall shun you,
Ceres' blessing so is on you.
—*The Tempest*

(4.1.10–17)



otwithstanding my long interest in nutrition, I have avoided commenting on the profound dietary influences on Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Elizabethan society that shaped and influenced the events described in this book. I wrote at length on these in *Profiles in Oriental Diagnosis* and hope to update that material in the light of new information that surfaced while working on this project. Suffice it to say that Kit's motto "*Quod me nutrit me destruit*"—the Ovidian equivalent of "you are what you eat"—has a strong dietary component that permeates the plays and poems.

As the environmental crisis worsened, my colleagues and I formed Amberwaves, a network devoted to protecting rice, wheat, and other essen-

tial foods from the dangers of genetic engineering, global warming, and other potential threats. Over the last several years, we have networked with individuals, families, and farmers across the country to protect the global harvest. While working on this project, I was delighted to learn that a pioneer conference on organic farming and the challenge of genetically modified (GM) crops recently convened in Helsingor (Elsinore), Denmark, site of *Hamlet*. I have often used the beautiful quote "As peace should still her wheaten garland wear" (5.12.44) as an introduction to lectures.

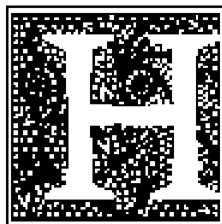
In his last public event, actor Edward Alleyn appeared as the Genius of the City of London in an elaborate spectacle for the arrival of King James from Scotland on March 15, 1603. Passing through a series of imposing commemorative arches, the king and his entourage were greeted with an elaborate city wide performance featuring Eirene and Euporia, Peace and Plenty, bearing doves, ears of barley and wheat, and the caduceus, or healing wand of eloquence. Accompanied by children representing the Nine Muses, the stately figure of Astraea, or Justice, and other classical figures, it was a panoramic event that Marlowe and Shakespeare would have enjoyed.

As we have seen, November 8, the day on which the First Folio was registered, is the anniversary of Mania, the mother of ghosts, the Roman Hecate, whose name means "Madness." Whether this is a punning glance at *Hamlet* and *Macbeth,* a Baconian conspiracy, or coincidence, we may never know. I would like to think that if the date was deliberate, it was selected to honor the annual harvest festival of Ceres, the ancient grain goddess, which fell on that date. Her bounty is celebrated in *Hamlet* and the other works.

Lifting Hecate's Ban

Pluto's blue fire, and Hecate's tree.
With magic spells so compass thee
—*Dr. Faustus*

(3.2.21–22)



amlet combines two of the main genres associated with Marlowe, tragedy and history. (The descriptive title, a "Tragicall Historie," also appears in *The Tragicall History of Dr. Faustus*, which was published in 1604, the same year as the Second Quarto of *Hamlet.*) Given the autobiographical layer of the play, one wonders whether Kit deliberately hinted at its self-portraiture with this title. Hamlet's banter with Polonius on the various ways to com-

bine tragedy, comedy, history, and the pastoral further suggests that the play is multidimensional and that the plot synthesizes themes and elements from several traditions, such as the ancient Nordic, the classical Roman, the Renaissance European, and the contemporary Elizabethan, as well as the life of the poet and his dramatic collaborator.

From his earliest work, the lost play on Scanderbeg, the Albanian warrior brought up by Turks who discovers he is a Christian prince, Marlowe was fascinated with hidden knowledge and mistaken identity. As Stephen Greenblatt observes in his insightful new biography of Shakespeare, *Will in the World*, "Again and again in his plays, an unforeseen catastrophe—one of his favorite manifestations of it is a shipwreck—suddenly turns what had seemed like happy progress, prosperity, smooth sailing into disaster, terror, and loss. The loss is obviously and immediately material, but it is also and more crushingly a loss of identity. To wind up on an unknown shore, without one's friends, habitual associates, familiar network—this catastrophe is often epitomized by the deliberate alteration or disappearance of the name and, with it, the alteration or disappearance of social status."[7] While Greenblatt intends this as a description of works by Shakespeare, clearly it has powerful resonances with Marlowe's life trajectory.

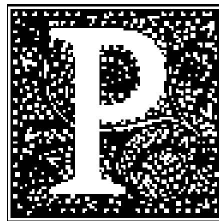
Falling on May 30—the annual festival of Hecate, the queen of Night and goddess of forbidden and hidden knowledge—Marlowe's "death" on that early midsummer eve adds a supernatural dimension to the event that can only be called Shakespearean. Whether the date was deliberately chosen or coincidental, the real play-within-the-play staged in Madame Bull's residence enabled Kit to avoid the capital charges hanging over him. Like Prince Hamlet, he was providentially enabled by the events in Deptford to escape his destiny and start anew. At a stroke, the coroner's verdict rendered the dramatist invisible, placing him beyond the reach of the archbishop and the bane of the aging queen.

As in *Faustus, Dido, Hero and Leander*, and Marlowe's other early works, the sable goddess's role in human affairs permeates the Shakespearean canon. Hecate or her Furies appear in about two-thirds of the works that followed, including *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer's Night Dream, Macbeth,* and *King Lear.* But her greatest role was in *Hamlet*, where she and her denizens stir up mischief in the putative prologue, and she is summoned in *The Mousetrap* to spring the trap on the king. In revealing his murder, the ghost likens Claudius/Whitgift to the real witch subverting the moral and social order. The vial of poison Claudius pours into his brother's ear echoes the pestilential articles and practices that Archbishop Whitgift forced into the popular ear. The o'erhasty marriage of Claudius and Gertrude glances at the incestuous alliance of Church and State. The envenomed pearl (known

as a Union) slipped into the cup in the final swordfight further mirrors this unholy union and points to the corrupting influence of the surplice and crown.

Unlike his earlier protagonist, Marlowe had never made a Faustian bargain with the devil to surmount the pestilential evil around him and realize his earthly desires. Instead of being dragged down to his doom at the stroke of twelve, he was rescued by the dark muse. A series of magic circles, beginning with the verge, the twelve-mile radius of Queen Elizabeth's person, protected him, erasing his identity and enabling him to live and write freely. The theater of illusion encompassed the close-knit circle of kinsmen, merchants, and patrons in Deptford and at court who evidently facilitated his escape; the ring of entrepreneurs, actors, and other theater people who, if they suspected or knew about his survival, kept his secret; and the brotherly band of printers, publishers, and other stationers who brought out his later works. As in a fairy romance, the Dumb Show in Deptford invoked Hecate's hex on his enemies and shielded him from bodily harm. Continuing his quest to "comprehend the wondrous architecture of the world" and "climbing after knowledge infinite," he continued to move "as the restless spheres" until he reached "the ripest fruit of all" (*Tamburlaine* 2.7.21–27), the Shakespearean poems and plays.

Bridging the Avon and the Stour



utting it succinctly, A. L. Rowse observed: "[I]n unnumbered touches, phrases, quotations, Shakespeare went on remembering Marlowe all of his days . . . [W]e may conclude that [Marlowe's] was the greatest individual loss our literature has ever suffered."[8] In the world of transmigrating souls, Hamlet is as old as Adam, as young as the newborn babe. He is a composite of all of our hopes and dreams. The young prince riding on Yorick's back, he is the Christ child spirited to safety by the giant St. Christopher. He is Perseus slaying Medusa, the sum of all of our fears, by holding a mirror to her face. He is Andromeda chained to a rock waiting for her animus to come on his winged sandals. He is Pip seeking to learn the secret of his birth from Mrs. Haversham and Stephen Bloom sinking into melancholy over Molly's unfaithfulness. He is everyone striving to be resolute and remain true to his or her deepest self amid a sea of troubles. He is humanity journeying through the 25,800-year precessional cycle, balancing faith in divine order with the fickle turn of Fortune's wheel. He is each one of us mounting the throne of sovereign reason on the eternal pilgrimage of life. In the end, as

Hamlet is borne aloft by flights of angels—in stark contrast to his spiritual twin, Faustus, who is dragged down by legions of devils—we know that, like our innermost soul, he is ageless and immortal.

Like a tale from Ovid, Marlowe's own life, death, and rebirth have mythic dimensions. Its theme of a slain poet, or dead shepherd, come back to life recalls the ancient myths of Osiris, Tammuz, and Adonis. In these fables of the lost Golden Age, the aspiring young hero attracts the wrath and jealousy of a dark, humorless rival, often an older uncle or brother, who treacherously plots his death and destruction. Yet with the aid of his muse or paramour, the hero is resurrected from the Underworld and returns to fructify the realm that has declined into a spiritual wasteland during the reign of the usurper. With slight variations, the classical epics devoted to the Trojan War and its aftermath, the Mahabharata epic of India, and the Grail legends also essentially follow this theme.

Though it may have started out as a revenge tragedy, the story of Christopher Marlowe, prince of poets, and William Shakespeare, natural wit and stoic actor, metamorphosed into a comedy of errors in which domestic felicity prevailed. Balancing high and low, the divine and the human, and the personal and the universal, their works created an eternal bond between them and also with their admirers. In bringing truth to light, they earned the laurel bough that eluded them in their lifetimes but which a grateful posterity has bestowed on the fruits of their collaboration. When the true story of their relationship is known, Kit and Will will be remembered together as the muses' darlings and the sweet swans of Avon and the Stour.

With the four hundredth anniversary of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's most sublime work, the time has come for Hecate's last ban to be lifted. From her star-spangled coach, the mistress of misdirection has sprinkled fairy dust on generations of audiences, readers, and critics, enchanting them with the myth of the immortal Bard of Avon. From "the table of [our] memory," let us wipe away all "all trivial fond records, all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past" (1.5.102–104) regarding the Shakespearean authorship. As the quincentenary of the performance and publication of their immortal works gets under way, the opportunity arises to break the spell that has been cast over us and to celebrate Kit's and Will's remarkable partnership. Remembering "the jewel inestimable" (liberty and freedom of conscience) for which so many brave men and women—Protestant, Catholic, and Jew; Separatist, freethinker, and wiccan—gave their lives in that perilous age, let us be guided by the sovereignty of reason, report their cause aright, and proceed together into the light of understanding.