

**Dr Peter Sillitoe, ShaLT**

**Collection Enhancement Report No. 6 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance  
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**Christopher Marlowe**

***NB: All photographs featured in this report are from the National Art Library at the V&A Museum and are not for reproduction (photography by Dr Maurice Hindle, ShaLT's Project Manager).***

This report focuses upon one of the leading playwrights of the early modern or 'Shakespearean' period: the life and career of Christopher Marlowe, possibly most famous in the wider community for his *Dr Faustus* play from the late 1580s. Marlowe is particularly interesting for a variety of reasons. Born in the same year as William Shakespeare, Marlowe has a good claim to be the first well-known dramatist in contemporary London. Particularly famous for his dark tragedies (often referred to by critics as 'Marlovian tragedy'), Marlowe was one of the very first dramatists to use blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) on stage, something that others, including notably Shakespeare, would go on to copy. In the period, the use of bombastic rhetoric along with the blank verse allowed the playwright to gain a reputation for his so-called 'mighty line'.

Furthermore, Marlowe has often dominated criticism of the pre-Shakespearean stage. His plays were performed several years before the arrival in London of Shakespeare, though it is clear that there was a brief period in the early 1590s when the two would have effectively been competitors. Unlike Shakespeare, Marlowe was one of the 'university wits', a group of dramatists who had studied at Oxford or, in Marlowe's case, at Cambridge. Thus, Marlowe was able to bring his learned classicism to the stage and also to print (he was also a translator

and poet). Towards the end of his short life, Marlowe was certainly accused of heresy and may have worked for Sir Francis Walsingham as a spy for the Elizabethan secret service. Thus there is a certain amount of glamour attached to Marlowe's reputation, particularly in terms of his possible homosexuality and, certainly, because of his untimely demise: in 1593 he was stabbed to death in a Deptford tavern. Indeed, literary historians have often speculated as to whether or not this was an assassination or an accident. But if Marlowe did move in the courtly circles of Walsingham and others, this ties rather neatly with his own dramatic protagonists: Marlowe's plays are celebrated for the inclusion of a central 'overreaching' character such as Faustus or the violent Tamburlaine. The actor Edward Alleyn played many of these roles at theatres in the late 1580s (probably including the four inns, the Theatre and the Curtain). But, later in the 1590s, Alleyn brought the plays to Philip Henslowe's company the Admiral's Men at the Rose on Bankside, and, like the *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd, Marlowe's plays continued to be popular at the theatres through to the closure of the playhouses in 1642.

Despite his early death Marlowe completed a short body of work that is only rivalled by early Shakespeare in the 1590s. The order of composition is uncertain, but from the late 1580s and early 90s we have the following surviving plays in print: *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, parts one and two of the hugely popular *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward II* (Marlowe's only history play), *The Massacre at Paris*, and *Dr Faustus*. At the V&A Museum the Dyce collection has the following items from the period relating to Marlowe:

1). Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris: With the Death of the Duke of Guise. As it was played by the right hon. The Lord Admirall his Servants.*

[Original ed.] E.A for Edward White n.d. [?]

(Dyce 6208) Pressmark: Dyce 25.E.18, barcode: 38041012051348

2). Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II* [...] *as it was sundry times publicly acted in the honourable Cittie of London, by the right honourable the Earle of Pembroke his servants* [...] Imprinted at London for William Jones.

(Dyce 6209) Pressmark: Dyce 25.D.40, barcode: 38041012051355

3). Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* 1605

(Dyce 6212) Pressmark: Dyce 26 Box 50/8, barcode: 38041012051363

4). Marlowe, *Jew of Malta*, 1633

(Dyce 6218) Pressmark: Dyce 26 Box 27/2, barcode: 38041012051371

This includes dramatist Thomas Heywood's dedication and both Prologues, to the Cockpit and to Court.

What makes Marlowe significant for us today, is the high quality of his surviving plays from the late 1580s and early 1590s. For the first time it appears that a dramatist now stood out from his contemporaries, praise being heaped on him as the leading Elizabethan playwright - albeit for a relatively short time. Although he usually worked in the tragedy genre (such as his two best-known hits *Tamburlaine* and *Dr. Faustus*) Marlowe also produced one play that looked back to the history of the English monarchy in his *Edward II*, a work of 'chronicle history'. This was a genre that would soon become dominated by Shakespeare following Marlowe's death in 1593. Although Marlowe had quickly made a name for himself and was easily the most famous dramatist in the period before the success of Shakespeare, many English Renaissance plays - including Shakespeare's early work and *The Spanish Tragedy* - do not carry the name of the dramatist on the printed title page. There is strong evidence that leading actor Edward Alleyn, who achieved fame by playing the lead characters of

Marlowe's plays, owned a number of the plays and took them with him as he moved from one acting company to another. Firstly, the possession of Marlowe's plays was of much significance in this period, since he was so obviously the dramatist for other writers to emulate at this moment. Secondly, Alleyn's transference of the plays shows us that they were performed at more than one venue, and by more than one company.

**Areas of interest for the general public:**

The Museum does not exhibit the Marlowe texts at the present time. Yet any kind of exhibition on Shakespeare and / or his contemporaries would do well to make the most of this remarkable collection: Marlowe is probably the most famous playwright of the early modern period besides Shakespeare, and has often been taught at school and university, unlike nearly all of the other contemporary playwrights. Members of the public might actually have some idea about his fascinating and murky background, and he is a popular cultural figure (appearing, for instance, in *Shakespeare in Love* in which Rupert Everett's performance as Marlowe is absent from the credits, and the more recent peculiar film entitled *Anonymous*). Thus an exhibition or display might point out that Marlowe was the leading dramatist before Shakespeare, that he greatly influenced him, and that his works are highly valuable on their own: *Dr Faustus* is nearly as well-known as the plays of Shakespeare.

**Specific areas of interest for the general public:**

1). Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris: With the Death of the Duke of Guise. As it was played by the right hon. The Lord Admirall his Servants.*

*The Massacre at Paris* was printed only once, probably in the year 1594 after Marlowe's death in 1593. This is the edition of the play in the Dyce collection and it would certainly be appropriate to exhibit this particularly rare quarto. Along with the scarcity of the text, the quarto is interesting owing to the unusual nature of the copy. As Marlowe editor Mark Thornton Burnett puts it:

...this is a work that survives only as a fragment of a lost manuscript. It is little over half the length of a typical Renaissance drama, and the consensus of opinion holds that the surviving printed version is a ‘memorial reconstruction’ – an imperfect recollection by a company of actors of the play that was taken on tour. (‘Introduction’, *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), p. xxv).

Thus, the Dyce collection can claim to have a very rare and rather extraordinary Marlovian text for display purposes. In terms of the actual title of the play, the massacre referred to is that of St Bartholomew’s Day in France 1572, in which French Roman Catholics killed thousands of Protestants. Thus, it seems religious intolerance and resulting sectarian violence was as topical in the 1580s as it is today.

## 2). Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*

Although a Marlowe text from the 1590s is clearly of considerable interest, the National Art Library Catalogue claims that this is a copy from the first ever printing of the play in 1594:

<http://catalogue.nal.vam.ac.uk/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=13L676JD48706.5790&menu=search&aspect=subtab114&npp=10&ipp=20&spp=20&profile=nal&ri=3&source=%7E%21horizon&index=BC&term=38041012051355&x=0&y=0&aspect=subtab114>

However, please follow this link for the crucial observation that this is actually the 1598 second printing in quarto form:

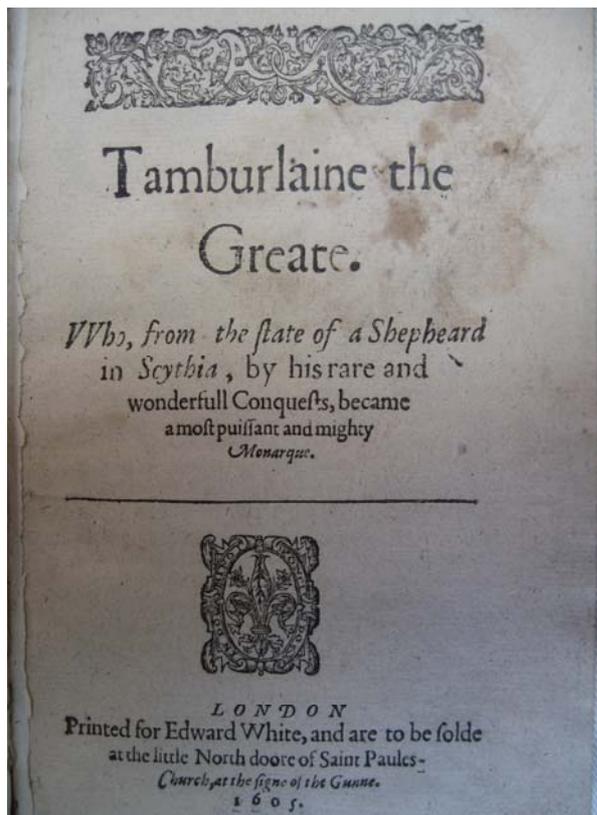
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2916384>

Furthermore, in his edition of the play, Martin Wiggins states that only one copy of the original 1594 printing survives (in Switzerland), though various copies survive from 1598, 1612 and 1622, but that “[t]here are also a number of peculiar and unlikely variants in a manuscript version of the first seventy lines of the play, in the Dyce collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Produced to replace the first two leaves of a quarto, this is

dated 1593, and so purports to be the earliest surviving text of *Edward the Second*. Recent scholarship, however, has shown that the manuscript was probably prepared by a scribe copying from Q.” (Martin Wiggins, ‘Note on the Text’, in *Edward the Second* ed. Martin Wiggins and Robert Lindsey (London: A&C Black, 1997), p. xxxix).

However, the Dyce edition of Marlowe’s *Edward II* could be exhibited for a number of reasons: it is one of the better-known works by Marlowe, and it is a copy from the second Elizabethan printing from 1598, making it a rare item itself. Furthermore, the manuscript additions could illustrate to the public the peculiarities and difficulties of the scholarly editing of old texts.

### 3). Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* 1605

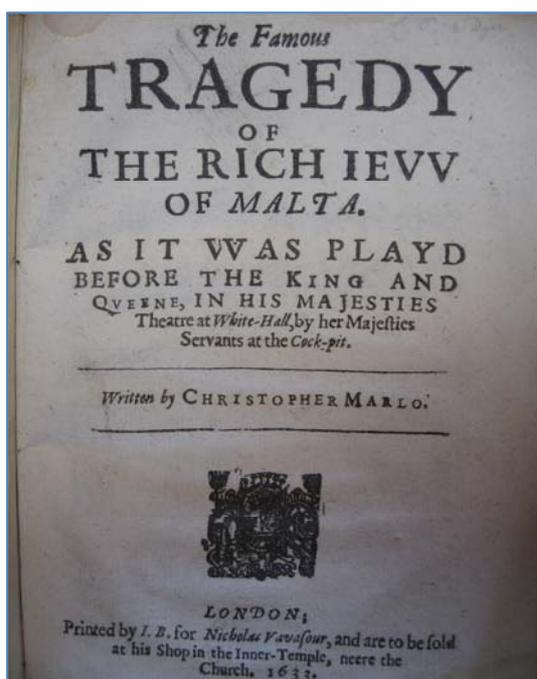


Because this edition is one of the later printings of this huge theatrical hit from the late 1580s it is perhaps not as important as other aspects of the Marlowe materials in the Dyce collection. However, it is of course evidence of the continued popularity of certain plays throughout the period: here is a text from perhaps as early as 1587 still being acted and even printed nearly

twenty years later. Furthermore, we might note the absence of Marlowe as author, despite the fact that it was well known as his most famous and popular work in the period (first printed while Marlowe was still alive in 1590, whereas all other works were printed after his sudden death).

4). Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1633

Although this play actually dates from the late 1580s or perhaps the early 1590s it was not



actually printed until 1633, making this Dyce copy a first edition of the play. As above, this is worth pointing out to the general public, as the play was still clearly popular well into the Caroline period via revival, only nine years before the closure of all theatres and the outbreak of civil war. The play, then, had survived three reigns (Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I) and this tells us much about the idea of theatrical success and repetition in the Renaissance.

In terms of the title page, for display purposes we should note that the author's name is now featured, forty years after his death. Furthermore, in Marlowe's lifetime *The Jew of Malta* was written for the public amphitheatres and yet by the Caroline period it is performed at that most exclusive of venues, the Cockpit-in-Court, an indoor elite theatre for the king and his court at Whitehall Palace. Thus, the title page in Dyce usefully problematizes modern assumptions about so-called 'public' and 'private' Shakespearean theatre: here an old 'popular' play is revived before the exclusive Caroline court, and the printers are keen to make this point as clear as possible on the title page.