Introduction: Christopher Marlowe: Identities, traditions, afterlives

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Abstract

(Introduction to Early Modern Literary Studies: Special Issue 23) The collection of essays commemorates the 450th anniversary of the birth of the early modern poet and dramatist, Christopher Marlowe. It arrives at a particularly vibrant moment in the history of Marlovian criticism and performance. But an anniversary brings with it a certain quality as well as quantity of attention. As a marking of the passage of time, it invites a retrospective examination, not just of the period of the subject’s life and work but of the course that work has taken in the intervening years; it begs the question, ‘what has happened to Marlowe’s work, and our sense of it, over the last four centuries?’ As the differing level of coverage of the Shakespearean and Marlovian aspects of this anniversary year demonstrate, it also represents an opportunity to consider the place that subject occupies in the popular imagination today. With this in mind, the present collection aims to contribute to the anniversary year’s Marlowe scholarship by examining his work and his influence diachronically; that is, it seeks to examine Marlowe’s work in the context of the material conditions of its production, but also seeks to illuminate the ways in which that work both responds to pre-existing literary traditions and contributes to the creations of new traditions long after the author’s death. Alongside consideration of what his work reveals about the ontology of the early modern soul, the understanding of the British Isles as a geographical space and the material proximity of open sewage to the public theatre, the essays in this collection also apply focus to Marlowe’s manipulation of his source material and to the ways in which subsequent writers — from the late sixteenth century to the early twenty-first — have appropriated and reconstructed Marlowe’s authorial and biographical identity. In so doing, the contributions to the collection cover a range of Marlowe’s texts including Tamburlaine the Great, Doctor Faustus, Edward II, Hero and Leander and the translations of the Amores, as well as considering the Marlovian implications of work by other authors, such as Ben Jonson’s Poetaster, Anthony Burgess’s A Dead Man in Deptford, Iain Sinclair and Dave McKean’s Slow Chocolate Autopsy and a selection of recent novels focusing on the apocryphal ‘School of Night’. At the end of the anniversary year, then, this collection considers Marlowe not just at, but across four-hundred-and-fifty years, from his upbringing and classical education to his continued resonance in contemporary fiction.
Christopher Marlowe's contribution to the drama, however, was complete. He had returned high poetry to its rightful place on the stage and left us characters as fiery and passionate as their creator, preparing the way for a poet even greater than himself – William Shakespeare. 1. 1 “Christopher Marlowe”, Moonstruck Drama Bookstore, http://www.imagination.com/moonstruck/clsc24.html. 080203. Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The Cambridge Introduction to Christopher Marlowe - February 2012. Seven years after his death, then, Marlowe's contemporaries were very much aware of his literary afterlife, and it is with various forms of that afterlife that this chapter is concerned. The first section will deal with early modern responses to Marlowe and his work; the second will discuss some examples of his plays' afterlife in performance; and the third will cover two appropriations of Marlowe in non-theatrical media. It is impossible to provide anything like a comprehensive survey in the space available; readers looking for that might want to consult MacLure (1979) (which covers critical Doctor Faustus (Marlowe). by Christopher Marlowe. Buy Study Guide. About Doctor Faustus (Marlowe) Doctor Faustus (Marlowe) Summary Character List Themes Act I, Chapters 1-2 Act I, Chapters 3-5 Act II Act III, Scenes 1-10 Act IV, Scenes 1-4 Act IV, Scenes 5-7 Act V, Scene 1 Act V, Scene 2 Related Links Quiz 1 Quiz 2 Citations. Doctor Faustus (Marlowe) Summary. Christopher Marlowe, also known as Kit Marlowe (/ˈməʊrloʊ/; baptised 26 February 1564 – 30 May 1593), was an English playwright, poet and translator of the Elizabethan era. Modern scholars count Marlowe among the most famous of the Elizabethan playwrights and based upon the "many imitations" of his play Tamburlaine they consider him to have been the foremost dramatist in London in the years just before his mysterious early death. Some scholars also believe that he greatly influenced William