



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2024 Study Guide



Christopher “Kit” Marlowe

- Born around February 26, 1564 in Canterbury, Kent, England.
- Master’s degree in danger of being withheld by Corpus Christi College in 1587 due to multiple leaves of absence; eventually awarded only after intervention from the Privy Council. These absences sparked the beginning of the speculation that Marlowe was a secret agent in service to the Queen.
- Moved to London around 1587; spent the next six years continuing to write such notable works as *Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, and *The Jew of Malta*.
- Overall, Marlowe is credited with 6 plays and a number of long and short poems, including a complete translation of *Ovid’s Amores*.
- The New Oxford Shakespeare series credits Marlowe as co-author in Shakespeare’s three *Henry VI* plays, though other scholars dispute any collaboration.
- According to the report of the inquest, Marlowe died on May 30, 1593, as a result of a dagger wound above the eye from a brawl during a meeting at the house of Mrs. Eleanor Bull.
- Marlowe is buried in an unmarked grave at the Churchyard of St. Nicholas



Born With Teeth

by Liz Duffy Adams



Dan Donohue as Richard III in OSF’s *Richard III*, Photo by Jenny Graham.

“Born With Teeth”

The title of the play is taken from a line in *Henry VI, Part III*, spoken by Richard of Gloucester (who would later become King Richard III), after he has just murdered Henry VI. He references the exclamation of women at his birth, and the suggestion is that he should thus ‘snarl and bite’, and behave like a dog, since he was ‘born with teeth’. It is an example of Richard’s view of himself, and how he believes the world views him, which we see in all of the *Henry VI* plays, as well as *Richard III*. This perception is a prime motivating factor in all of Richard’s decision-making throughout.



Liz Duffy Adams

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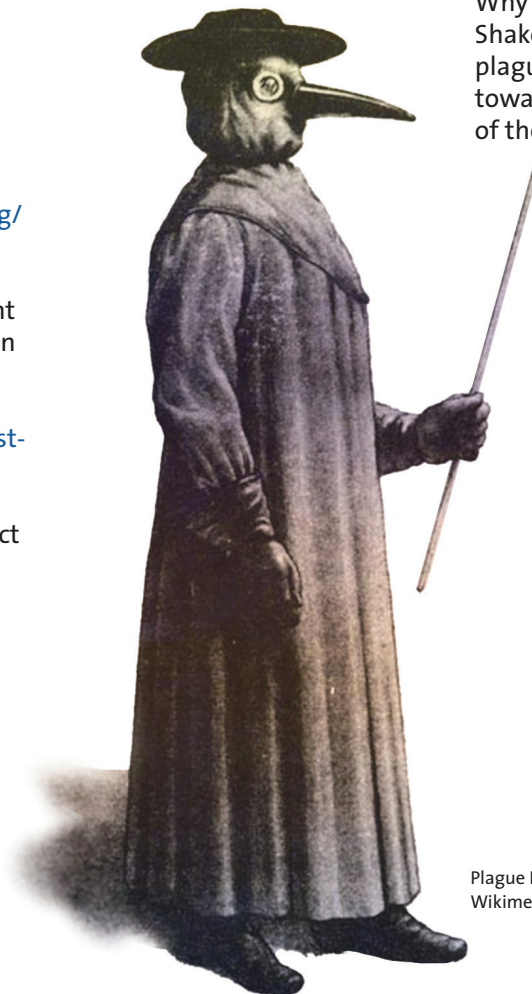
Originally from Ipswich, MA, but holds dual citizenship with Ireland. She has degrees from NYU and Yale School of Drama. She has received many awards including Women of Achievement Award and the Lillian Helman Award.

Born With Teeth won the 2021 Edgerton Foundation New Play Award. Other plays she has written include: *Or, Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World*; *Buccaneers*; *Dog Act*; *Wet or, Isabella the Pirate Queen Enters the Horse Latitude*; *The Listener*; *The Reckless Ruthless Brutal Charge of It or, The Train Play*; and *One Big Lie*.



Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research the Wars of the Roses and the reign of Henry VI. Who were Margaret of Anjou and the Earl of Suffolk? How did they influence the politics and events of Henry's tenure? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VI-king-of-England>
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/British-Army>
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Margaret-of-Anjou-queen-of-England>
2. Research theatre as an industry in the Elizabethan period. What were the different views and opinions of theatre? How did this affect the way in which theatre was produced? What was the role of the aristocracy? What were the advantages and disadvantages of having a patron (or sponsor) for producing theatre within the city limits? How might this have affected playwriting? These and other websites provide information:
<https://americanshakespearecenter.com/2021/08/26226/>
<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/podcasts/60-minutes-shakespeare/aristocracy-and-theatre/>
<https://www2.cedarcrest.edu/academic/eng/lfletcher/henry4/papers/mthomas.htm>
<https://www.gregory-isaac.com/news/2017/2/16/the-influence-of-the-monarchy-on-the-theatre-and-playwrights-of-the-english-renaissance>
3. Research Shakespeare's contemporaries. Who else of note was writing at the time? How might Shakespeare have been influenced by them? What were the playwriting conditions of the era and how did this affect what was written and produced? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeares-contemporaries/meet-the-contemporaries> https://www.worldhistory.org/Elizabethan_Theatre/
4. Research Robert Cecil, specifically his role in government up until 1593. In what ways might his position have been related to Christopher Marlowe, and to theatre overall? This and other websites provide information:
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Cecil-1st-earl-of-Salisbury>
5. What is blank verse? Describe its development and impact on Elizabethan Theatre. What are its benefits and shortcomings in playwriting? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.britannica.com/art/blank-verse>
<https://poets.org/glossary/blank-verse>
6. Research the plague doctor. Describe the function and appearance of their uniform. How did they operate? Were they effective? How has our understanding of disease prevention changed now? This and other websites provide information:
<https://poets.org/glossary/blank-verse>
7. Research sexuality in the Elizabethan era. How did their views differ from our own today? What effect did their views have on everyday life? This and other websites provide information:
<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/life-and-times/social-context/sexuality-in-shakespeares-england/#:~:text=Just%20as%20the%20term%20%E2%80%9Cheterosexuality,sex%20desire%20were%20somewhat%20flexible>
8. Research Sir Walter Raleigh and the School of Night. What were the views on religion in the Elizabethan era? What is an atheist? How might these opinions have affected the way in which theatre was produced at that time? What kind of danger did this mean for playwrights? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walter-Raleigh-Englishexplorer> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_School_of_Night
<https://www.elizabethan.org/compendium/7.html>
<https://spartacus-educational.com/Atheism.htm>
9. Research torture during this period. What did this mean regarding the government and law enforcement? What role did torture play in censorship? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/crime-and-punishment-elizabethan-england>



Why does William Shakespeare wear the plague doctor clothing toward the end of the play?

Plague Doctor,
Wikimedia Commons

Was Marlowe a Spy?

There is little documentation yet plenty of speculation over the details of Christopher Marlowe's life. At one time or another, he was suspected of being a secret agent, a heretic, an atheist, and more. His reputation for disreputable behavior was well known at the time, and only added to his lore.

Conversation around Marlowe as a spy stems from his time at Corpus Christi College (CCC), Cambridge. During his pursuit of his Master's of Arts degree, records showed that he had taken leave from his lessons on several occasions, as well as spent a significant amount of time away from the university. The university initially withheld his degree, and it wasn't until members of the Privy Council intervened on his behalf that it was finally awarded, noting that he had been employed "on matters touching the benefit of his country" and citing "good service" to the Queen, in a letter to the university.

**Coincidence? Government conspiracy?
Drunken brawl over money? Who can say,
but this is the information as it
exists today. You be the judge.**

Suspicion at CCC first arose through rumors of a visit by Marlowe to the English seminary at Reims, France. The university may have feared an intent by Marlowe to be ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, which at the time was a criminal offense due to an edict issued by Queen Elizabeth. The letter from the Privy Council clarified matters, but also lends credence to the possibility that Marlowe was working as a spy. Many English Roman Catholics used the Jesuit seminary college at Reims as a refuge, and were thought to be plotting an overthrow of the English monarchy. The Babington Conspiracy was plotted there in 1586, and its efforts were unsuccessful, due in part to the work of secret agents placed there by the intelligence service of Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's principal secretary (later titled Secretary of State). Given the timeline and circumstances, it is not unreasonable to consider Marlowe's mysterious leave-taking, and the Privy Council's subsequent support in the issuing of his degree, as somehow relating to his involvement in government affairs.

The final question mark in all of this are the events surrounding Marlowe's death. There is plenty of lore about him being stabbed in a bar brawl, perhaps by a jealous lover, perhaps for his suspected atheism, or something else; but there are actually a few more specific details worthy of consideration in this debate. Tension was already high in the spring of 1593, due to riots and an ongoing plague outbreak that began in June of 1592. Marlowe was already under suspicion due to multiple accusations of heresy and other slander, and was commanded to report daily to the Privy Council, which he did beginning on May 20. He was killed on May 30.

The official coroner's report of Marlowe's death, which was taken two days later on June 1, by the Queen's coroner, was discovered centuries later, in 1925. According to the report, Marlowe had spent the day at the lodgings of Eleanor Bull, not a tavern, meeting with three men and ordering food. The account of the three men following the incident is that a fight broke out over the bill, which resulted in Marlowe being stabbed above his right eye, killing him instantly, but, notably, all three men were connected to the Walsingham family. Two helped uncover the Babington Plot, and the third was a servant to the household, likely in a financial capacity. The Queen's coroner was unaccompanied by a local county coroner, which would have made the entire inquest null and void, had it been communicated. Scholars questioned later as to whether the wound, as described, could even have caused instant death. Marlowe was buried the same day as the inquest in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, Deptford.

Coincidence? Government conspiracy? Drunken brawl over money? Who can say, but this is the information as it exists today. You be the judge.



2024 *Born With Teeth* costume design for Christopher Marlowe by Raquel Barreto.

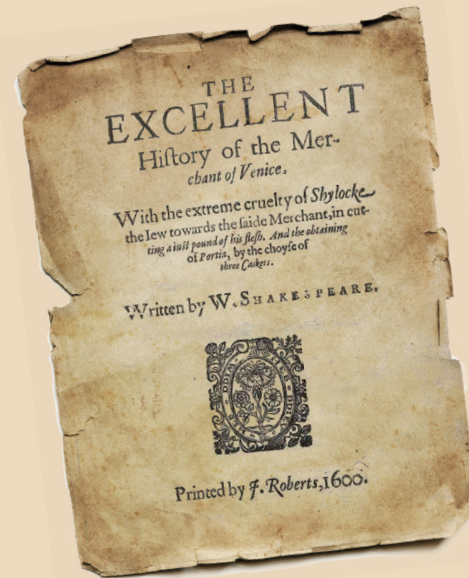
After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on the Wars of the Roses. How do the *Henry VI* plays help frame the story of the play? Why does the playwright use the Margaret/Suffolk farewell as the only extended piece of Shakespeare's text? What parallels might the playwright be trying to draw?
2. Refer to your research on the role of aristocracy in Elizabethan Theatre. How might this have played a part in Shakespeare and Marlowe's decision to write about historical fiction? What other factors could be involved?
3. Refer to your research on Shakespeare's contemporaries and blank verse. How might Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, John Fletcher, and others have influenced Shakespeare's writing? Compare and contrast Kit and Will's writing styles in the play.

What is betrayal? What are the different ways in which someone can betray or be betrayed? What are some of the reasons? What are some of the consequences?

4. Refer to your research on the plague doctor. How is this used to dramatic effect in this play? What information regarding the circumstances does it give you?
5. Refer to your research on sexuality. What part does sexuality play in Kit's life in the play? In Will's? In their relationship to each other in the play?
6. In this play, love seems to have different meanings for Will and Kit. What does love mean to Will? What does it mean for Kit? How do their viewpoints change over the course of the play?
7. In this play, why might Kit involve himself with Cecil? How are Kit's feelings for Will different from his implied relationship with Robert Cecil? What moments in the play demonstrate this?
8. Refer to the sidebar on the title "*Born with Teeth*". Why does the playwright use this as the title, and what does it imply about the characters and/or the play?
9. What is betrayal? What are the different ways in which someone can betray or be betrayed? What are some of the reasons? What are some of the consequences? How does Kit betray Will? How does Will betray Kit?
10. Refer to your research on torture. How does torture and/or the threat of torture influence the information that is acquired? How does it influence decision-making in the play?

Timeline of Notable Theatre Events Surrounding the Play



1576 London's first playhouse built, The Theatre, in the parish of St. Leonard's, Shoreditch.

Mid/late 1580s Marlowe writes *Queen of Carthage* in collaboration w/Thomas Nashe.
1587-8 Marlowe writes *Tamburlaine Parts I and II*.

1588 Holinshed's *Chronicles* (2nd edition) published.

1589 Thomas Kyd writes the *The Spanish Tragedy*. Marlowe writes *The Jew of Malta*.

1590-1 Shakespeare writes *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

1591 Shakespeare writes *Henry VI Parts II & III*.

1592 Shakespeare writes *Henry VI Part I*. Marlowe writes *Dr. Faustus* and *Edward II*.

1692 Plague closes London theatres in June.

1592-3 Shakespeare writes *Richard III*.

1593 Marlowe killed.

1594 Theatres re-open in the summer.

Marlowe and Shakespeare

Maybe Marlowe faked his own death, fled to another part of Europe, continued writing under the name Shakespeare, somehow sending his writings back to England to be produced, maybe he didn't. Nothing is known about their actual relationship, including whether or not they ever even met each other, though the likelihood is high. What is evident, however, is the influence of Marlowe's writing on Shakespeare's plays, particularly the early ones.

Some argue that Marlowe would be every bit as highly regarded as Shakespeare is today, if he had lived as long and written as prolifically.

Marlowe and Shakespeare were the same age, both born in 1564, though Marlowe gained notoriety earlier, with the success of *Tamburlaine* around 1587, which is generally regarded as the beginning of the Elizabethan Age of Theatre. Shakespeare's success roughly follows Marlowe's death, sparking the above speculation. Some argue that Marlowe would be every bit as highly regarded as Shakespeare is today, if he had lived as long and written as prolifically.

While there is little concrete information regarding the two, we do have clues of the respect (or contempt, perhaps) Shakespeare held for Marlowe. In *As You Like It*, Phebe's reference to "Dead Shepherd" is a nod to Marlowe's poem, *Hero and Leander*. Touchstone makes a second reference with "...strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room.", alluding to the circumstances of Marlowe's death.



Memorial to Christopher Marlowe on the Eastern Wall around St. Nicholas Church, Deptford Green



Portrait of Christopher Marlowe.

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