

strategy by means of which the companies might all profit, namely, the exploitation of one another's repertorial successes' (141); both comedies thus served to revive interest in old plays. But is there any evidence that Dekker's allusions related to revivals of the plays he cited, and are his citations simply affectionate?

*Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* offers a challenging perspective on the activities of playwrights and the relations of the companies of actors between roughly 1590 and 1610. If Roslyn Knutson is right, commercial interests were predominant in the workings of the theatres at that time. It is, of course, now recognized that collaboration in writing plays was a normal mode of operation so that our concept of authorship has changed. It is plausible that the companies of players worked to support one another in their common commercial interests. So, the argument of this book demands attention, and points to alternative ways of interpreting evidence, as in relation to the plays on similar topics commissioned by the Admiral's Men and the Chamberlain's Men at various times. What if they were not competing, but rather both companies were exploiting 'popular topics in fashionable genres' (49)? I found the argument less compelling as it went on and least persuasive in the later chapters on *Hamlet* and on Jonson and Dekker. However, the general thesis, that the prime concern of the players and playwrights of the period was to maintain good business at the box office or its equivalent, and to work more by cooperation than by competition, is very appealing.

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Constance Brown Kuriyama. *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. Pp xxi, 255.

Constance Brown Kuriyama's new biography is an important contribution to Marlowe studies. It presents all of the documentary evidence of Marlowe's life in a tidy, concise narrative and corrects some errors made by previous biographers, as well as summarizing the weight of scholarship since Bakeless's documentary life of the 1940s and supplying fresh transcripts of the most important documents. Anyone studying Marlowe's life in the future will thus begin with this book.

In addition to providing a standard reference work, Kuriyama has a more combative aim of '[c]ounterbalancing the tendency toward disproportionate sensationalism in Marlowe biography' (6). In particular, she provides counter-

arguments to the theory that the playwright's death in a tavern brawl was really an assassination brought about by his connections with spies, recusant Catholics, and 'projectors' for powerful lords. While not denying the value of recent research into his links with intelligencers, Kuriyama argues that our understanding of Marlowe has been distorted by over-imaginative interpretations of the documentary evidence. Her book thus provides a stimulating and provocative contrast with Charles Nicholl's *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (1992). Nicholl, armed with brilliant archival scholarship and an engaging prose style, presents Marlowe as an over-reaching agent, framed and murdered by men who saw him as 'an impediment to the political ambitions of the Earl of Essex' (327). While indebted to Nicholl's wide-ranging research, Kuriyama contests his claim that Marlowe was assassinated. She does not refrain from speculation, which she acknowledges to be inevitable when the records of a man's life are so fragmentary (1–3), but she repeatedly emphasizes more mundane explanations than those offered by Nicholl. For her, Marlowe was small fry: a failed counterfeiter and frustrated poet whose role in espionage may have amounted to little more than that of a delivery boy. Her methodology is summarized when she contrasts Nicholl's assumption that 'what is plausible and convenient is not necessarily true' (Nicholl, 21) with her own insistence that 'in the absence of contradictory evidence, plausibility has distinct virtues' (136).

Kuriyama's sober approach results in new interpretations of the incidents that make Marlowe's life seem so dangerous and subversive. She does not see the arrest of Marlowe and Richard Baines in Flushing for counterfeiting as evidence that Marlowe was 'a Cecil projector within the circle of Lord Strange' (Nicholl, 246). The incident in Flushing was 'less like a secret mission than a debacle' in which two underpaid and overconfident agents tried to become criminal counterfeiters, but produced only a single unconvincing Dutch shilling before they were discovered. For her, Baines's claim that Marlowe was plotting to aid Rome with his coinage was merely the bluster of a frightened or malicious man trying to divert attention away from himself (108–12).

Similarly, Marlowe's involvement with espionage is put into perspective. It may seem remarkable that the Privy Council ordered Marlowe's MA to be awarded because he had been employed 'in matters touching the benefitt of his countrie', but the involvement of the Privy Council was by no means unusual in such trivial matters as the awarding of degrees. Kuriyama points out that there is no evidence that the reported rumors of Marlowe's presence in Rheims are true, and noting the lack of evidence for Marlowe's involvement in major espionage activities, suggests that his tasks were limited to delivering letters or messages (70–1). Of crucial importance here is her most important

documentary revision: she notes that the date on which Marlowe witnessed Katherine Benchkin's will has been continually misrepresented despite being clearly visible. Correcting this date proves that one of Marlowe's enigmatic absences from university was spent on visiting his family in Canterbury, rather than on secret service work, as some biographers have speculated (4–5, 59–60). Similarly, Kuriyama rereads the *Buttery Book* accounts at Corpus Christi College and shows that Marlowe's frequent absences from university are not unusual when compared to those of other students (6).

Kuriyama's scepticism toward the notion that Marlowe was an important spy or projector leads to a refreshingly straightforward account of his death. She condemns all conjecture about assassinations or faked deaths as either 'highly speculative theories or outright fictions based on tenuous, selective, or nonexistent evidence' (136) and concludes that the coroner's report is correct: Marlowe, sulking after an argument about the bill, attacked Ingram Frizer without warning from behind and in the ensuing struggle was stabbed in self-defence. Kuriyama carefully questions the evidence for a conspiracy. Although the men in the room, Frizer, Nicholas Skeres, and Robert Poley, were all involved in various types of espionage, this does not mean that their meeting with Marlowe was business: all four men were servants of Walsingham in different capacities and might be expected to spend their free time together (137). Kuriyama notes that a busy establishment like Widow Bull's house would be a poor location for an assassination, citing the numerous witnesses who heard the arguments and the subsequent murder. Furthermore, she points out that Marlowe was the likeliest man in the room to start a fight. His companions, Frizer, Poley, and Skeres, may have been heartless con-men, but their names are never recorded in connection with violence (139–40), whereas Marlowe had previously been indicted for attacking a tailor and was thus the only man of the four with a history of instigating violence (115–16, 140). The coroner's report is thus entirely plausible in suggesting that Marlowe attacked Frizer without warning. Kuriyama suggests that the real reason so many have questioned the coroner's verdict is that we do not like to see our heroes dying as a result of their own unattractive behaviour (140–1).

Kuriyama thus argues against ascribing Marlowe's death 'to the hypothetical malice and connivance of powerful adversaries when other forces working against him, both external and internal, can plausibly explain what happened in Deptford' (105). Her remark about 'internal forces' signals the only problematic aspect of the book: its occasional forays into speculative psychology. Kuriyama sometimes offers brief psychological profiles of the main protagonists: Richard Baines 'may have been a perpetual malcontent who was inclined

to resent any form of authority' (66); Richard Cholmely was probably 'a loose cannon, a man with no true loyalties' (128); and the Flushing incident is reframed as 'a psychodrama rather than a spy novel' (111). She also hints at a psychological through-line for Marlowe's life, without stating overtly that she is doing so. This line of argument begins with an intriguing exploration of the psychological effects of Elizabethan schooling in which Kuriyama suggests that '[t]he humanist insistence on the dignity and potential of each individual', coupled with 'a society which increasingly based rewards on achievement rather than birth,' had the unintended side-effect of tending 'to encourage narcissism in its most talented and ambitious youth' (29–30). Having produced such creatures, Elizabethan society 'was less effective in rewarding them once a young man moved beyond the grammar school or university', and the results of this rejection might be 'depression, rage, and destructive or self-destructive violence when honour, praise, and personal advancement were denied' or 'an extreme style of self-promotion that might be called aggressive auto-inflation' (30–1). Although this exercise in psychoanalyzing the Elizabethan student is not supported with any contemporary evidence, it underlies Kuriyama's description of Marlowe's life. She sees the Flushing incident as the likely behaviour of two educated men frustrated with their lack of advancement (110), and Marlowe's fight with a tailor as symptomatic of a man who is 'resentful and angry, and developing an explosive temper', having been 'forced to confront his limitations' (118). She also suggests briefly that Marlowe's frustration may be related to 'the gradual diminution of his heroes from the colossal Tamburlaine to mere fallible, ineffectual mortals' (118). While all of these theories are interesting, the inclusion of psychological hypotheses in a documentary biography needs some justification, since Kuriyama's frustrated narcissist is as much a speculation as Nicholl's overreaching spy. We don't *know* that Marlowe was frustrated, or for that matter, that he was unrewarded – a man who could fill theatres with popular plays is surely entitled to some overweening pride, and we do not know how much he was paid for his plays or his government work.

Nonetheless, while the inferences that Kuriyama draws from the documents are often highly speculative, they are extremely valuable as alternative hypotheses and have the virtue of assuming that Marlowe's death seems more important to us than it did to most Elizabethans, including his employers and enemies. Furthermore, despite her concerted attempt to present Marlowe's life in a less sensational light than other recent biographers, Kuriyama's book is never dull; she keeps the pages turning, as her intrigued reader wonders how she will

contest each enigmatic item of evidence. This important biography is thus not only a solid reference work, but also an enjoyable and occasionally thrilling read.

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Tom McAlindon. *Shakespeare's Tudor History: A Study of Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. Pp 225.

Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays feature two of his most famous characters, Falstaff and Hal, who metamorphoses into the legendary Henry V, victor of Agincourt. The fact that Shakespeare wrote the plays as a twin set is in itself significant. No other two works in the canon are quite this closely linked, since the action of the second play connects seamlessly with the penultimate scene of the first play. When Rumour, famously painted full of tongues, enters at the start of *2 Henry IV* we are returned to the inside of the first play. Traditionally the two parts are played off against each other, with *Part 1* almost invariably coming out on top as the more interesting of the two. This is due in part to the prominent roles played in it by Hotspur and Falstaff. Hotspur in particular is not only Hal's glamorous 'changeling' (a phrase ruefully applied by Bolingbroke about his feckless son), but he is married to the affectionate Kate and engages in a battle of wits with the Welsh warrior Owen Glendower.

When Glendower notes portentously that he can 'call spirits from the vasty deep', Hotspur replies, 'Why, so can I, or so can any man, / But will they come when you do call for them?' After this we love him and cease to care whether or not he is of the devil's or the rebels' party. His political recklessness suddenly matters as little as his cheerfully grating remarks on poetry. The sheer verve of Shakespeare's portrayal of Hotspur carries all before it, including his politics. These may well be misguided; at least Bolingbroke thinks so, but then we can never be sure about how much we are meant to trust him. This is after all the same Bolingbroke whose claim to the throne is extremely precarious. Shakespeare never lets us forget that, and the three Henry plays that follow *Richard II* all revert to his usurpation, and not just in the drawn-out death-bed scene in *Part 2*. In *Henry V*, before Agincourt, Hal as Henry V prays that his men may not on the morrow have to pay the penalty for his father's usurpation and promises to do even more than he has to honour the remains of Richard.

As so often in Shakespeare (for example in *Antony and Cleopatra*), the play's imaginative dynamic pulls in the opposite direction from its historical and political frame. But it is with the 'frame' that this new and comprehensive study