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Marlowe, History, and Sexuality: New Essays on the Life and Writings of Christopher Marlowe (Ams Studies in the Renaissance)

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The year 1993 marked the 400th anniversary of Marlowe's death by stabbing in a tavern brawl. It also served as a rallying point for novels, plays, a film and many scholarly events. Marlowe's life and writings, his commitments and ambivalences, his politically correct and violently anti-establishment posturings make him a man for the 1990s. This work contains 13 essays by Marlovian writers of today. The book is organized around three topics: Marlowe's intellectual life and career; the relationship of his writings to conditions in England of the 1580s and '90s; and the representation of gender and sexuality in Marlowe's work. In the first group of essays writers examine Marlowe's mutually supportive careers in the theatre and espionage, and demonstrate how "Marlowe seems to be living out the kind of tawdry convoluted fictions which he put on stage in plays like 'The Jew of Malta'" (Nicholl). In the section on political, economic and social conditions in England, the climate for Marlowe's heterodoxy is set by the Protestant Reformation and makes possible the pro-Catholic persona that Marlowe cultivated to infiltrate subversive groups as a secret British agent. Patrick Cheney shows how Marlowe challenged Spenser as the champion of pleasure over didacticism. Marlowe's countercultural writing in "Hero and Leander" and the "Elegies" are discussed, as is the impact of Marlowe's celebration of sexual free choice on the shakey virility of England's male ruling class. "Edward II" is characterized as both subversive and supportive of the state, voicing contemporary anxieties about the state of Elizabeth's later years. In "The Jew of Malta" Marlowe reflects the contest between the older, aristocratic warrior class and the rising middle-class pursuit of detente and international commerce. Sexual themes dominate the third group of essays. While avoiding anachronistic applications of Freud and modern perceptions of sexuality, the authors tease out Elizabethan attitudes in "Dido", "Tamburlane" and "Edward II".

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