

**The School of Night**

by Peter Whelan

Directed by Bill Alexander

October 30 – December 21, 2008

Mark Taper Forum

# DiscoveryGuide





L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre  
Mark Taper Forum  
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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**Doug Cooney**, Discovery Guide writer, is a playwright and novelist for young people. His youth musical *Nobody's Perfect*, adapted from his novel co-written with actress Marlee Matlin, premiered at the Kennedy Center and will embark on a national tour in 2010. *Imagine*, a new youth musical, premiered at South Coast Rep in Costa Mesa, CA, in June 2008.

## At first glance, Peter Whelan's *The School of Night* appears to be a whodunit mystery

about the murder of celebrated British poet and dramatist Christopher Marlowe. In truth, however, we already know Marlowe is dead and we know who did it — so what do we care *whodunit*? Actually, *The School of Night* is more of a *why*-dunit. Events surrounding Marlowe's murder are clouded in mystery. The official story is that Marlowe got stabbed in the eye during a bar fight and died; end of story. But this short-and-sweet version is unsettling for a great many people who point out the suspicious circumstances — something about the story *smells*.

Like what? For starters, Marlowe, the dead guy, was the most important writer of his day — a flamboyant, eccentric and shockingly progressive writer at a time when the ruling power didn't like to be shocked or progressed. Marlowe was also a former spy for the Queen and a supposed holder of dangerous secrets. Even more curious, the case was quickly closed and Marlowe's body was rushed into an unmarked grave. Everything was handled a little too fast.

And then — more curious still — Shakespeare shows up after Marlowe's death with hit-play after hit-play, tragedies, histories, romances, comedies: the greatest playwright in English verse. Skeptics argue that a man of Shakespeare's limited education and world experience could never have written this body of work. A group of literary buffs known as "Marlovians" are convinced that Marlowe is the rightful author — and even though Marlowe was pronounced dead long before the great plays were written, the Marlovians have figured out how he still managed to do it. They theorize that maybe Marlowe *didn't* die; maybe Marlowe lived on; maybe Marlowe escaped to Italy and wrote *a lot*.

In *The School of Night*, playwright Whelan spins all the historical mysteries and modern-day theories in a fascinating mix of fact and fiction. Watch the play and gauge for yourself what's real and what's not. ●

### OBJECTIVES OF THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE

- Illuminate the historical events and political climate of the Elizabethan Era
- Consider the cultural phenomenon of conspiracy theory
- Introduce Christopher Marlowe, the man and his work
- Raise the question as to who actually authored Shakespeare's plays
- Examine the interplay of fact and invention in historical fiction



**Christopher Marlowe.**

COSTUME DESIGN BY ROBERT PERDZIOLA.

# THE SCHOOL *of* NIGHT

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### Rosalinda.

COSTUME DESIGN BY ROBERT PERDZIOLA.

## “Spies

are men of doubtful  
credit who make a  
show of one thing  
and speak another.”

—Mary Queen of Scots

# The Spy Who Loved Me

Elizabeth I enjoyed a long and successful reign in England. Her throne, however, was in constant jeopardy. Across Europe, the Catholic Church sought to protect its power by blocking the rise of Protestant sects, like the Lutherans and the Calvinists. Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had broken from the Catholic Church to form the Church of England, in order to get a divorce. As a Protestant Queen, Elizabeth was vulnerable to attack by the Catholic empires, particularly Spain and Italy, which both wanted to overthrow Elizabeth and install a Catholic monarch. Additionally, as an unmarried woman with no heir, Elizabeth was mindful of her reputation as the "Virgin Queen" and the likelihood of challenges to her throne within her own kingdom.

To protect her power, Elizabeth founded the British Secret Service, naming Sir Francis Walsingham as the Queen's Spy Master. He employed a sizeable network of men, often recruited while students at Oxford and Cambridge, to root out Catholics. The royal assignment empowered men to gather intelligence by any means — to eavesdrop, entrap, even torture — all "in good service to the Queen." While it was not illegal to be a Catholic (unless you were a Catholic *priest*), it was almost impossible to practice Catholicism.

The state fined those who failed to attend the Church of England and kept a particularly close watch on professed Catholics. In this manner, the British Secret Service exposed several plots to overthrow Elizabeth — most famously, the Spanish campaign involving her Catholic cousin, Mary Queen of Scots.

**“In the name of Dog the Sire,  
Dog the Whelp and Dog the  
Holy Hound!”**

—Christopher Marlowe in *The School of Night*

The Queen and her counsel kept tight control over any expression of radical ideas — whether coming from the theatre, literature, science, universities or newspapers — silencing any thought that might destabilize the monarchy. Censorship was common. While Elizabeth favored the theatre and permitted great freedom of expression, her counsel was also quick to cut lines or entire scenes that contained offensive political content, social criticism or unpatriotic themes. The same policy applied to cracks made at overseas enemies or allies. (Shakespeare himself cut a gag about a German and Spanish dress from *Much Ado About Nothing* in response to royal concerns

about foreign policy.) Playwrights didn't toy with the Queen's approval; it was completely within her right to order executions, and Elizabeth wasn't shy about imprisonment, torture and beheadings.

Naturally, this oppression created an atmosphere of paranoia, suspicion and distrust. The prevalence of spies gave rise to *double-agents*, trading information on both sides. Personal enemies could be dispatched with a single libelous lie to the authorities. No one was as good as their word, and no one knew whom to trust. ●



*Vt. quibus excepti domibus mysteria Christi  
Egerunt, quosque à funestiro schismate sanctæ  
Iunxere Ecclesie, prædant, et talia multa  
Distendunt miseris diris cruciatibus artus*

**Religious propaganda was produced by both sides.  
Here a Catholic priest is tortured on the rack.**

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## Dangerous Minds

...Black is the badge of hell  
The hue of dungeons and the School of Night.

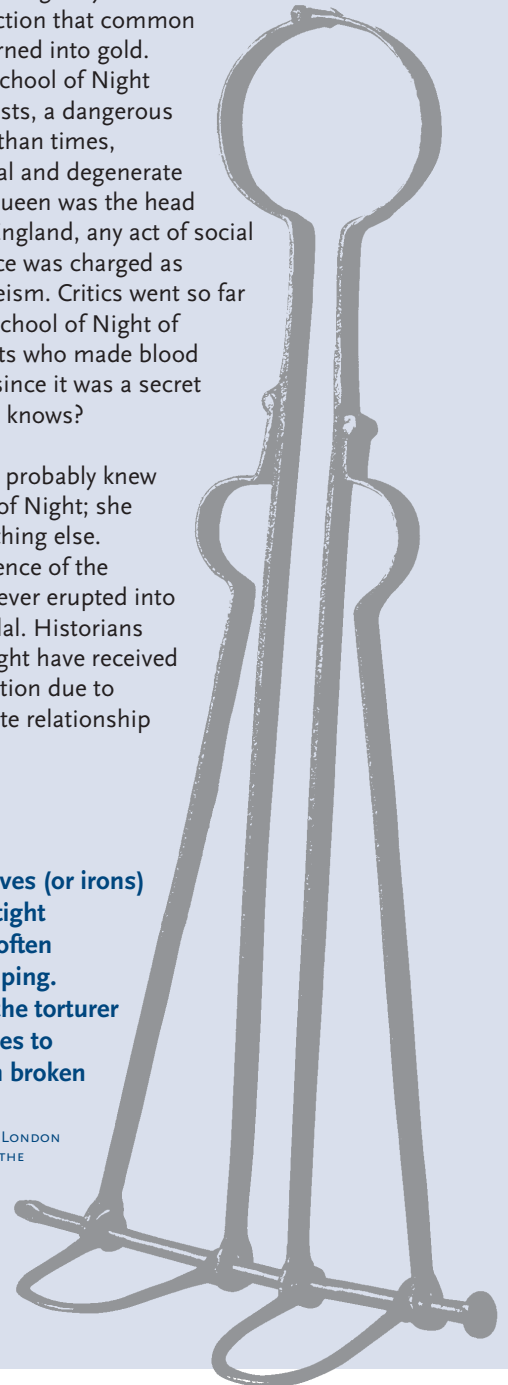
—William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act IV, Scene 3

The School of Night, led by Sir Walter Raleigh among others, was a secret society of Elizabethan mathematicians, astronomers, writers, adventurers, chemists, philosophers and poets that dared to address bold innovative new ideas. Marlowe was also a member. Group discussions among these men likely covered blasphemous topics, such as the theory that the Sun and not the Earth was the center of our galaxy or the alchemist's conviction that common metal could be turned into gold. Members of the School of Night were labeled atheists, a dangerous slander in Elizabethan times, connoting immoral and degenerate traits. Since the Queen was the head of the Church of England, any act of social or political defiance was charged as blasphemy or atheism. Critics went so far as to accuse the School of Night of harboring Satanists who made blood sacrifices — and since it was a secret society, who really knows?

Queen Elizabeth I probably knew about the School of Night; she knew about everything else. Even so, the existence of the School of Night never erupted into a full-blown scandal. Historians suggest that it might have received some royal protection due to Elizabeth's intimate relationship with Raleigh. ●

**The Skeffington's gyves (or irons) held a prisoner in a tight crouching position, often causing severe cramping. A variation allowed the torturer to compress the knees to the chin, resulting in broken ribs and spine.**

COLLECTION OF THE ET ARCHIVE, LONDON  
AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE  
ARMOURIES, LEEDS, YORKSHIRE.



“I saw her once, just once. I was in a group, bowing low....And suddenly I had an uninterrupted view of her skirts. On the top layer...there was a border of little embroidered human eyes....The eyes of majesty that see all!”

—Christopher Marlowe referring to Elizabeth I in *The School of Night*



**The Rainbow Portrait** by Isaac Oliver shows Queen Elizabeth's gown decorated with eyes and ears — she knows all.

COLLECTION OF THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY.



## What Do You Have To Hide?

Americans don't expect quite as much privacy as we used to. Technological advances like the Internet, cell phones and the Global Positioning System (GPS) can track our movements, real and virtual. Some people even *choose* to document the intimate details of their lives on the Web or reality TV. Americans were already getting comfortable with the idea of reduced privacy — and then 9/11 happened. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack, Americans became accustomed to tightened airport security: multiple requests for personal identification, a search of carry-on luggage and the occasional pat-down. It's better to be safe, we reason, and besides, we have nothing to hide.

Since 9/11, we have also grown accustomed to the possibility that suspected terrorists at Guantanamo and elsewhere might be detained without legal rights and subjected to torture in their interrogations. It's disquieting but, it's better to be safe, we reason, and besides, they should have nothing to hide.

Strictly speaking, privacy was never expressly guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The Supreme Court found that a "right to privacy" was implied from other guarantees in the Bill of Rights protecting citizens against unreasonable government intrusion. But even here, the times are changing.

The USA Patriot Act, which stands for "**U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism Act of 2001," re-authorized in 2006, was passed in response to the terrorist attack on 9/11. It says, among many other things, that the government doesn't have to go to a judge to acquire a warrant in order to conduct surveillance.

Under this law, federal authorities can listen to telephone conversations, intercept e-mail and review medical, financial and other records without explaining their reasons or asking for permission from a judge. It's in the interest of national security, they reason — and besides, what do you have to hide? ●

**Marlowe as Merlin.**

COSTUME DESIGN BY ROBERT PERDZIOLA.



# Shock and Awe

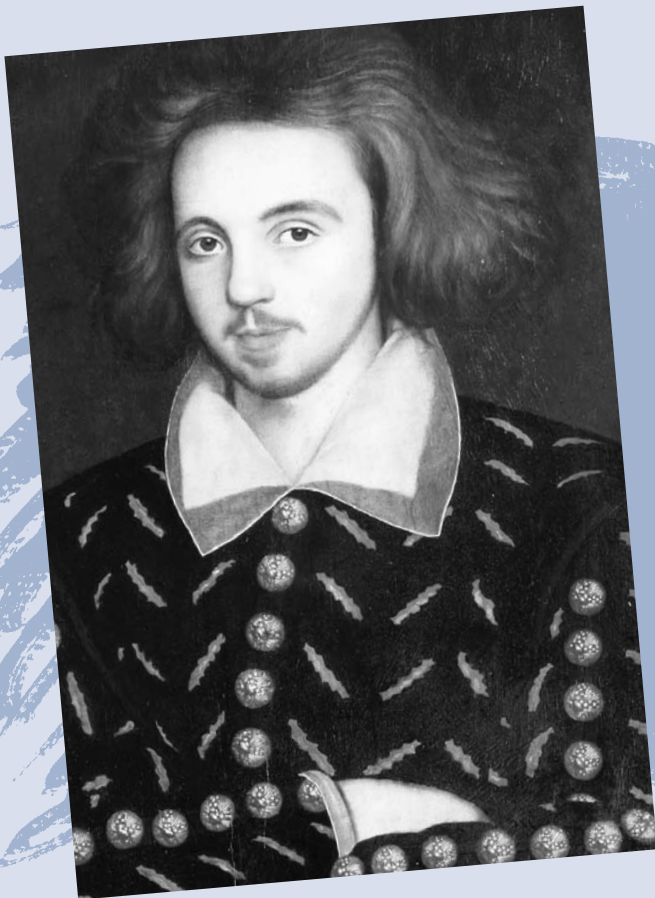


**Sir Walter Raleigh.**

COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL  
PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Christopher “Kit” Marlowe</b> | Celebrated playwright and libertine  |
| <b>Thomas Walsingham</b>         | Nobleman; Marlowe’s patron; cousin of Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen’s Spy Master |
| <b>Audry Walsingham</b>          | His wife, with an agenda of her own  |
| <b>Ingram Frizer</b>             | Agent of the Walsinghams   |
| <b>Tom Stone</b>                 | Starving actor   |
| <b>Rosalinda Benotti</b>         | Mixed-race actress from Italy  |
| <b>Thomas Kyd</b>                | Marlowe’s former roommate; a notable playwright                                      |
| <b>Sir Walter Raleigh</b>        | Marlowe’s old friend; noted explorer of the Americas; the Queen’s lover              |
| <b>Robyn Poley</b>               | Agent of the British Secret Service  |
| <b>Nicholas Skeres</b>           | Agent of the British Secret Service  |



**Christopher Marlowe?**

COLLECTION OF THE MASTER, FELLOWS AND SCHOLARS  
OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

## Elizabethan Rockstar

Christopher Marlowe blazed to fame as a truly great Elizabethan playwright/poet over the course of six brief years — from 1587 to 1593 — with four landmark plays written right out of his college days at Cambridge, *Tamburlaine the Great*, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta* and *Edward the Second*. Never heard of him?

Marlowe’s legacy has largely been overshadowed by William Shakespeare, his notable contemporary. Academics hold that Marlowe was the bold innovator who made Shakespeare possible. “Marlowe was way ahead of his time,” says director Bill Alexander. He was a provocative and deliberately scandalous writer whose ideas would have been shocking to an Elizabethan public accustomed to ideas from the pulpit. By contrast, Alexander continues, “Shakespeare, the greater theatrical genius, was right in his time, with no ideological purpose other than to comment on ‘the form and body of the time.’” Alexander views his role as *The School of Night*’s director to be to “give a contemporary American audience some sense of how outrageous Marlowe was.”

Known as “sweet Kit Marlowe” to friends, Marlowe was a rowdy party-guy, fun to hang out with but known for his violent temper. A portrait believed to be Marlowe depicts him as a young dandy with a wry smile — but he was also up-front and aggressive about his preference for sex with men. Even by today’s standards, Marlowe pushed a lot of buttons. ●



## WHAT HAPPENS

### Act One, Scene One:

Marlowe has worked through the night. In the morning, he prays to “Dog” — and experiences a vision of his own death.

Marlowe rehearses a love scene with Tom Stone and Rosalinda Benotti. He has tweaked the scene to tease his former friend Sir Walter Raleigh.

### Act One, Scene Two:

Marlowe’s scene jokes about Raleigh’s infidelity to the Queen. It tanks; Raleigh is deeply offended.

Marlowe tries to repair things with Raleigh by recalling the good ol’ days and asking him to restart the School of Night.

### Act One, Scene Three:

Thomas Kyd clues Tom Stone in on everything that went down the night before.

It comes out that Tom Stone is actually William Shakespeare, the other “hot” playwright in London. Marlowe is angry at being deceived.

### Act One, Scene Four:

Marlowe crashes Rosalinda’s bedroom and grills her about her new lover, Stone, and then suggests a threesome. Marlowe boasts about not being afraid of the Queen — and then he gets a little metaphysical about his destiny.

### Act One, Scene Five:

The Queen’s police raid Kyd’s rooms and find papers written long ago by Marlowe, containing dangerous ideas and opinions.

### Act Two, Scene One:

Rosalinda performs an Italian commedia scene for Marlowe, Stone and the Walsinghams. The Queen’s police arrive to arrest Marlowe; he goes peacefully.

### Act Two, Scene Two:

Raleigh visits Marlowe in prison and offers protection in exchange for the written records of the School of Night. The Walsinghams post bail.

### Act Two, Scene Three:

Marlowe hides at the Rose Theatre with Stone and Rosalinda. Walsingham and Ingram arrive with plans to whisk Marlowe to exile in Italy where he can continue to write under the name Shakespeare. Stone thinks it’s a bad idea; Marlowe doesn’t know what to think.

### Act Two, Scenes Four-Six:

Stuff happens. Watch the play.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### Act One, Scene One:

Marlowe is a defiant atheist, living large at the estate of Sir Walsingham.

Marlowe likes to shock people with his plays — and his lifestyle. Everyone subtly tries to determine newcomer Stone’s loyalties and affiliations.

### Act One, Scene Two:

This is a dangerous rumor: Raleigh *has* been unfaithful to the Queen. If she finds out, he’s dead.

If infidelity wasn’t funny, the School of Night is even worse; the Queen and her counsel would freak.

### Act One, Scene Three:

Almost everyone here has spied for the Queen, Marlowe included. Trust no one.

In this time of spies, hiding your identity is *highly* suspicious. Who is Stone working for?

### Act One, Scene Four:

Marlowe thinks he’s untouchable because he knows too much; on the other hand, his knowledge combined with his recklessness are precisely what put him at risk. Note the suggestion that his death might be at the Queen’s command.

### Act One, Scene Five:

Kyd and Marlowe used to be roommates — and probably lovers — so we can assume Marlowe is the target of the raid. Ingram’s presence implicates the Walsinghams.

### Act Two, Scene One:

The commedia “play within the play” offers ironic comment and foreshadowing of Marlowe’s death.

### Act Two, Scene Two:

Marlowe feels Raleigh fishing for information and doesn’t trust him.

### Act Two, Scene Three:

Walsingham’s plan could be a setup for Marlowe, then again, maybe not. Walsingham has sworn his trustworthiness throughout the play, but he also works for the Queen. Is there a double-cross in motion?

### Act Two, Scenes Four-Six:

No spoilers.

## Exercise



### The Me Nobody Knows

Playwright Whelan took an “outrageous” historical figure (Christopher Marlowe) and brought him to life as a living, breathing person onstage. Choose a historical figure you like or one that you happen to know a lot about. Answer the following questions about that person. If the item seeks information that you don’t know and can’t find out, make it up — but keep it believable. Find the character’s voice in your responses; respond in the words the person you’re inventing might use.

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_

When I look at myself, I see: \_\_\_\_\_

When other people look at me, they see: \_\_\_\_\_

Every day, I always try to: \_\_\_\_\_

When I kick back, I go somewhere and: \_\_\_\_\_

You don’t want to be near me when: \_\_\_\_\_

Friends tease me about: \_\_\_\_\_

Enemies criticize me for: \_\_\_\_\_

I keep promising myself to quit: \_\_\_\_\_

The saddest thing that ever happened to me is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The best advice I can give someone is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If I wasn’t doing what I do, I’d probably be: \_\_\_\_\_

After I die, people will always be able to say that I: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



### Talk Like an Elizabethan

| Don't say... | Say...  |
|--------------|---|
| Hello        | Good morrow;<br>God save you;<br>How now?<br>(To Elizabethans, “hello” was an exclamation of surprise.) |
| Okay         | Very well; 'Tis done; As you will; Marry shall I  |
| You          | Thee; thou  |
| Yours        | Thy; thine  |
| Why?         | Wherefore?  |
| Wow!         | Marry! 'Zounds!<br>I'faith! Hey-ho!<br>Hello! God's<br>Death! What ho!                                  |
| Wait!        | Stay!   |
| Excuse me    | Forgive me; Pray pardon; I crave your forgiveness; By your leave  |
| Please       | Prithee; If you please; An thou likest; An it please you; By your leave                                 |
| Thank you    | Gramercy; I thank thee; My thanks; God reward thee  |
| Gesundheit!  | God Save You!   |
| Bathroom     | Privy; Jakes; Ajax;<br>Little room of office  |
| No           | Nay; I shall not;<br>Nay, it is not so;<br>(Just say <i>nay</i> .)                                      |

# Once More, With Feeling

Historical fiction is a broad title that applies to any fictional story that occurs during an event or period from the past. Typically, the fictional story takes one of two approaches:

- 1) the story uses a historical event as a backdrop to add credence and depth to an imaginary tale peppered with historical figures; or
- 2) the story breathes life into prominent people from history and blends them with newly-minted characters to consider actual events from the perspective of people who lived during that time.

Landmark literary examples that use history as a backdrop for fictional characters include Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (set in Russia during the Napoleonic Wars), Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (set in London and Paris during the French Revolution), and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (set during the American Civil War.) Plays that dramatize the lives of historical figures include many plays written by Marlowe and Shakespeare (e.g. *Tamburlaine the Great*, the *Henry* plays, *Richard III*). History has also been a popular source of inspiration for the television and movies of today. The list includes: *The Indiana Jones* series, *The Tudors*, *Deadwood*, *Rome*, *MASH*, *The Other Boleyn Girl* and on and on.



Historical fiction should not be mistaken for an accurate chronicle of history. Academic historians are of two minds. On the one hand, the genre is enormously engaging in its approach to history. Many students would never develop an interest in the Civil War, for example, if not for *Gone with the Wind*. On the other hand, writers of historical fiction freely employ artistic license to reinvent history — what's true and what's not can be balanced in many different ways — and to cultivate empathy for the personal lives of their characters. As a result, their historical accounts are loaded with the author's singular perspective and an unreliable yet entertaining blend of truth and fiction. ●

## The Dark Lady

*... I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright  
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.*

— William Shakespeare, Sonnet 147

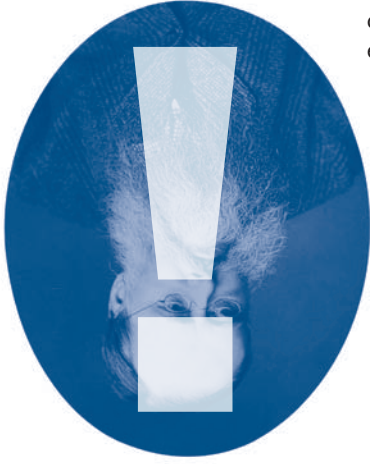
Whelan blends fact with fiction in suggesting the identity of the “Dark Lady of the Sonnets,” a woman described as “coloured ill,” whose skin is “dun,” (a dull, grayish brown color). Some literary scholars contend that the description of the “black wires ... on her head” suggest that the Dark Lady was of African descent. Others assert that the Dark Lady is merely a fictional conceit; that her “darkness” is not literal but instead suggests the “dark” desires of physical lust. What is remarkable about the Dark Lady in Shakespeare's love poems is that a woman of fair hair and pale skin was considered the ideal beauty of the day.

Whelan's *The School of Night* clearly positions Rosalinda Benotti, a fictitious character, as the source that inspired Shakespeare's real poetry. Rosalinda, a commedia actress from Italy, of African descent, certainly qualifies as a “dark lady” — but does her relationship with Shakespeare inspire love poetry? ●

**Exercise**

## Artistic License: A Learner's Permit

Take the historical figure in your character sketch and place him/her in a scene with another character, either real or imagined. Write a page of dialogue between these two people in which the historical figure receives information that he/she takes to be bad news. (Not slightly bad news — but seriously bad news.) How does your historical figure cope with the news? What action might your historical figure take to protect him/herself? What about damage control? Is there anything to be done to “undo” the bad news? As with the character-sketch, anything you don't know, you are freely encouraged to invent.



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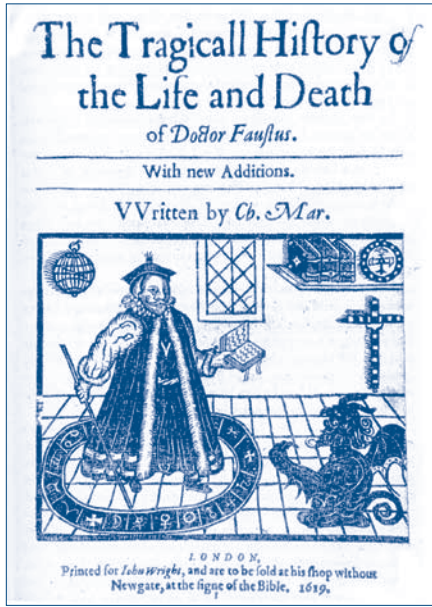
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# A Full House

The Elizabethan era was the first time that theatre was attended by an audience ranging from the upper ranks, seated in the balconies, down to the common working class known as “the groundlings” that stood in the pit before the stage. Elizabethan playwrights spoke to the full breadth of society and, as Bill Alexander, the director of *The School of Night*, contends, “created such a new and vibrant force in people’s lives that it changed a whole society’s way of looking at the world and at itself.”



**Doctor Faustus** was first published in 1604. The title page of this 1619 version features an engraving of the good doctor making his deal with the devil.

COLLECTION OF THE PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

So how did those playwrights hook both the high-brow *and* the low-brow? They invented new ways to tell the story: an aggressive hook into the story; multiple plots and subplots that merge at the end; globe-trotting locations, filthy rich characters as well as dirt-poor; laughter and tears; comedy, sex and violence; a quirky play-within-a-play; and the ultimate showdown between good and evil. ●

## Exercise

### The Play Within The Play

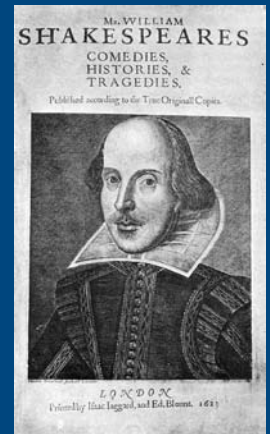
Choose three characteristics of Elizabethan plays listed at left, and write three separate paragraphs describing how playwright Peter Whelan incorporated that element into his modern-day play, *The School of Night*. Identify specific moments in the play to make your case and describe the moments in detail.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

# If Not, Then Who?



The collected works of William Shakespeare, totaling 37 plays and 154 sonnets, sit on the highest pedestal of English language arts and letters. Shakespeare, the man behind the words, has acquired almost mythic proportions. But who exactly was he? Not much is known. Since mere commoners were not likely to have their lives documented in detail, little was recorded about Shakespeare's circumstances, background, character and personal affairs. This air of mystery has led to an even greater mystery. One school of thought believes that Shakespeare could not possibly have written the works credited to his name.

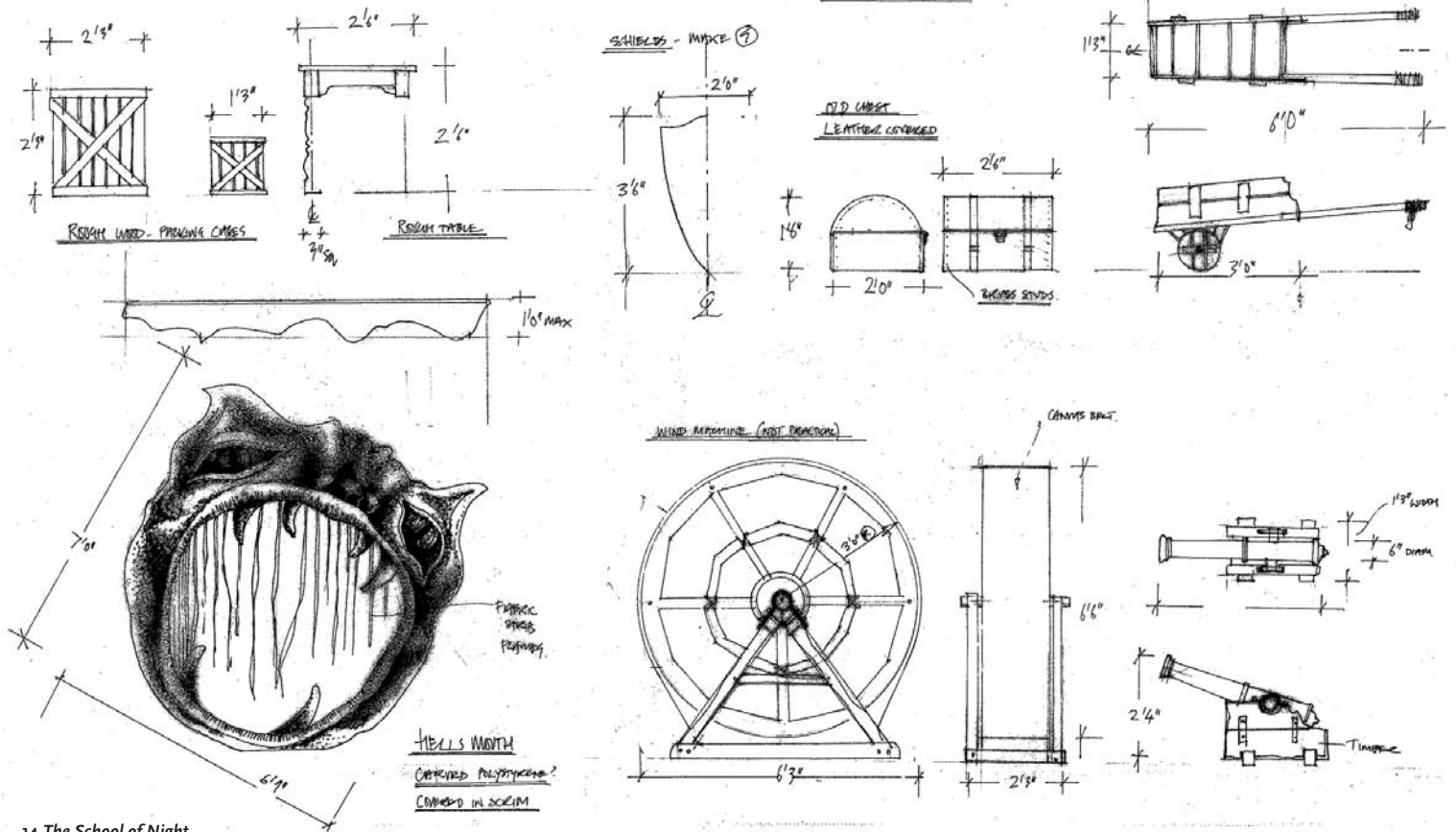
A great many people have absolutely no patience with the suggestion that Shakespeare did not write "Shakespeare." Director Bill Alexander dismisses the idea that Marlowe is the "true" author of Shakespeare's works as "ludicrous," asserting "you only have to compare the plays." Marlowe's plays are known for their soaring poetry and dramatic power, but otherwise they offer minimal plot, two-dimensional characters and an almost simplistic moral statement regarding the world. Shakespeare's plays are much more densely plotted, with lush language and fine-tuned insights into both the sweep of history and detailed aspects of human nature.

The question of Shakespearean authorship was first raised in the early 18th century. Critics began to doubt whether the man described as Shakespeare — of limited education, resources, cultural exposure and world experience — could have possibly generated the substance, poetry, majesty and the sheer vocabulary contained in these great works. Theorists argue that it was a common practice in the day to write under a pseudonym, an assumed name. Over the years, many alternate authors have been suggested, including Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby, and even Queen Elizabeth herself. In each case, researchers pick through history, unearthing facts and details to strengthen their arguments.

Alexander charges that the simple question of Shakespearean authorship is "a classic example of how snobby the English can be" in dismissing Shakespeare-the-man due to his common origins and limited education. "Genius," Alexander, who is English himself, asserts, "has nothing to do with either class or education." Even so, he concludes, Whelan's explanation as to what happened regarding Marlowe's murder is "as good as any. I should think there were many who wanted him dead. Then again, it may have just been a row [fight] over who paid the bill!" ●

## The School of Night set and prop design drawings.

SIMON HIGLETT, DESIGNER.





## What I Heard Was...

Marlowe's murder was faked. Elvis lives. The Apollo Moon landings were actually shot in the Nevada desert or a Hollywood sound stage. John F. Kennedy was shot by the Mafia. Princess Diana was murdered by British intelligence services. Anthrax scientist Bruce Ivins was framed and murdered by the FBI. Each of these assertions is classified as a conspiracy theory, a term applied to any effort to blame an event (or its cover-up) on a secret plot by powerful and influential people or organizations.

Conspiracy theories are derived from the belief that things are not as they appear, that all of history is driven by conspiracies, that nothing is haphazard or coincidental, that negative forces always gain on the greater good of society and that world events are driven by power, money, sex and fame. Because of the somewhat cynical aspect of these convictions, the term conspiracy theory has acquired a pejorative edge and is often used to dismiss claims that are considered outlandish, irrational or extreme. Social commentator Christopher Hitchens dismisses conspiracy theories as "the exhaust fumes of democracy" — the unavoidable consequence of too much information circulating among too many people.

Even so, psychologists have indicated that conspiracy theories have considerable power just by their simple existence. The mere fact of a conspiracy theory will get people to question their perspective on a particular event, without weighing the merits or strengths of the theory itself. And not all conspiracy theories are crazy; certain theories have been proven accurate, like the Watergate burglary, the plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln, the Iran-Contra scandal or the Charles Manson murders. ●



## Exercise

### Elizabethan Smackdown: Choose Sides and Bring It On

Traditionalists maintain that William Shakespeare was certainly a poet, playwright and an actor, who authored the *Collected Works of Shakespeare*. "Marlovians" insist that Christopher Marlowe, alive or dead-in-exile, is a much more likely candidate. What do you think? Did Shakespeare write Shakespeare? Or was it Marlowe — traveling through Italy with long hair and wicked ways in an Elizabethan witness protection program?

Conduct an Elizabethan debate. Divide into Shakespeareans and Marlovians. Use the arguments gleaned from the play and additional research. Construct your arguments using the structure of a well-crafted argument, as you did in your response to the exercise titled "Knock, Knock" on page 7, and debate the authorship of Shakespeare. Be careful not to mistake historical fiction for fact!

Bonus points if you talk like an Elizabethan. Double-bonus points if you manage to quote Shakespeare or Marlowe.

## Concluding Remarks

We hope this guide has enhanced your experience of *The School of Night* by offering context for Christopher Marlowe, Elizabethan England and the question of Shakespearean authorship, as well as the thrall of conspiracy theories. Although they have been challenged as a worthwhile area of study in the public school curriculum, the arts remain important to our culture for many reasons, including the ability to explore a variety of perspectives on world issues and as a useful tool in persuading others to share a certain perspective.

# Resources

## Websites

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muchado/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muchado/)

“Much Ado About Something”: a fascinating compendium on the authorship debate between Shakespeare and Marlowe, including a useful quiz and a terrific teacher’s guide

[www.shakespeareauthorship.com](http://www.shakespeareauthorship.com)

A website dedicated to the proposition that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare

[www.elizabethan.org/compendium](http://www.elizabethan.org/compendium)

“You are there.” Everything you want to know about Elizabethan England

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/launch\\_gms\\_spying.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/launch_gms_spying.shtml)

Elizabethan Spy Game. Win or be beheaded!

[www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/magazine/15-11/st\\_best](http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/magazine/15-11/st_best)

The best conspiracy theories

## Books

***The Murder of the Man who was Shakespeare***  
by Calvin Hoffman (Grosset & Dunlap 1960)  
The Marlovian Bible

***The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe***

by Charles Nicholl (Harcourt Brace, 1992)  
A fresh analysis of the conspiracy theory concerning Marlowe

***A Dead Man in Deptford***

by Anthony Burgess (Allen & Unwin, 1993)  
A celebrated novelist spins the myth of Marlowe

## Film and DVD

***Frontline: Much Ado About Something***  
(PBS Home Video, 2008) PBS Frontline documentary on the authorship debate between Shakespeare and Marlowe

***Shakespeare in Love***

directed by John Madden (Miramax, 1999)  
Rupert Everett appears briefly as Christopher Marlowe in this popular historical fiction based on the life of William Shakespeare

***Elizabeth***

directed by Shekhar Kapur (Universal Studios, 1998) Starring Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Rush as Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen’s Spymaster

***Elizabeth: The Golden Age***

directed by Shekhar Kapur (Universal Studios, 2007) Starring Cate Blanchett and Clive Owen as Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Raleigh

For 38 years, Center Theatre Group’s P.L.A.Y. (Performing for Los Angeles Youth) has served 25,000 - 35,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residencies, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson and Kirk Douglas Theatres for low or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to the development of young people’s skills and creativity through the exploration of theatre, its literature, art and imagination.

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