



This Marlowe

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1593. Queen Elizabeth reigns from the throne while two rival spymasters -- Sir Robert Cecil and the Earl of Essex -- plot from the shadows. Their goal? To control succession upon the aged queen's death. The man on which their schemes depend? Christopher Marlowe, a cobbler's son from Canterbury who has defied expectations and become an accomplished poet and playwright. Now that the plague has closed theatres, Marlowe must resume the work for which he was originally recruited: intelligence and espionage.

Fighting to stay one step ahead in a dizzying game that threatens the lives of those he holds most dear, Marlowe comes to question his allegiances and nearly everything he once believed. As tensions mount, he is tossed into an impossible bind. He must choose between paths that lead either to wretched guilt and miserable death or to love and honour.

An historical novel with a contemporary edge, *This Marlowe* measures the weight of the body politic, the torment of the flesh, and the state of the soul.

This Marlowe Details

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Author : Michelle Butler Hallett

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From Reader Review This Marlowe for online ebook

Paula says

Thanks to the 49th Shelf and Goose Lane Editions for a free copy of This Marlowe.

This is a beautifully written, well researched work of historical fiction. It is the story of the last 2 months of Christopher Marlowe's life, steeped in intrigue and suspense.

With rich detail and language specific to the period, I felt like I was right in 1593.

It took a bit of getting used to the old English dialogue and it wasn't a quick and easy read but well worth the effort.

James Fisher says

This is a masterful work of historical fiction, right from the cover (look close to see the eyes and ears embroidered on Queen Elizabeth's robe) to the printed pages. The text (in particular the conversations) may deter some readers at first; it is very much like the style of English used in the King James Bible, but once you get used to this type of approach, you'll be able to follow the story, which assuredly has all the intrigue of a modern spy thriller.

Jim says

I will attempt to do this review justice. It was a wonderfully written book. It deals with life in the late 1500's. Religious overtones mixed with near Shakespearean dialogue. I found that as I read, I started to become accustomed to her style of old English language, customary in that time period. The conversations then became the story for me. I would say, while it tested me, it also enlightened me to life in this time. I would recommend it with ease, and hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Bonnie Lendrum says

There are authors and books that make a powerful first impression. When that feeling is sustained through subsequent encounters in person and with their writing, then I know I'm in the presence of someone with a gift. Michelle Butler Hallett is such an author.

I met Michelle in the early 2000's at the Humber School for Writers in Toronto. We were both in Alistair MacLeod's seminar group and we have each written about that honour. Michelle was a student whose commitment to form and language was articulate and impassioned, yet quietly and respectfully stated. I, who was secretly stumbling about on my keyboard, was in awe that anyone could find the words to speak about writing. Since that time, Michelle has produced five novels and several short stories. Writing is as natural for her as breathing.

Michelle's most recent novel, This Marlowe, a work of historical fiction is set in the twilight of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. It's a tense spell-binding story of the last year of Christopher Marlowe's life. Marlowe,

the son of a cobbler, was also a graduate of Cambridge. The two facts, an unlikely combination for a poor boy, add fuel to the speculation that Marlowe may have been a spy for the Queen's Secretary of State, Sir Robert Cecil. Marlowe's violent death at the age of twenty-nine adds to the mystery and the rumors of espionage.

This Marlowe immerses the reader in the political machinations of an unstable time against the backdrop of Elizabethan England with all its beauty and grit. There were times when I felt like I could see, hear, smell, and touch the surroundings and experiences of Marlowe and his lover Thomas Kyd. The writing is taut, yet eloquent. Michelle has captured her characters, their language, phrasing and cadences in a way that is just shy of magic. She writes vividly about pain and suffering whether it comes from pneumonia, arthritis or torture. That same skill of offering the reader a virtual experience is equally present when she writes about love and compassion.

This Marlowe is one of the few books in my library I will be re-reading, as much for the pleasure of doing so as for the challenge of deciphering how Michelle Butler Hallett created this masterpiece.

Bonnie Lendrum is the author of *Autumn's Grace*, the story of one family's journey through palliative care.

Stephanie Todd says

A powerful portrayal of playwright Christopher Marlowe as a reluctant spy who only wants to save his lover, Thomas Kyd, from imprisonment and torture. Devastating in its rendering of the violence of Elizabethan England, both state inflicted and domestic.

Peter says

This morning I finished Michelle Butler Hallett's "This Marlowe". This novel will always be special to me. If you read it, you'll know why. It was more than 20 years in the making, from what I understand. It shows. The writing style is so beautiful. The story is told in a kind of dreamy mix of first and third person, using a dialog style that I have never seen before. No quotation marks, instead, simply a dash - to indicate speaking. Italics are used to indicate private musings. This helps to distinguish between the interior and exterior dialogues, all of which are written in the rich language(s) of the time: 1593. London. Shakespeare was in his most productive period, but not a mention of him, even once in this novel, and good for that. This novel is about Christopher Marlowe, famous for, amongst other plays, "Doctor Faustus", and "the Jew of Malta". He was murdered in a pub brawl (so it was reported), after entanglements of one sort or another, with the budding espionage industry that served in the protestant/catholic conflicts of the period. You can learn more here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christo...>

What makes this novel so good, is that it is damn gritty. Gritty, and intimate. Something about the refreshing lack of "he-said-she-said", or the psychological distancing effected by quotation marks, coupled with the flow of the language(s), dialects, contemporary slangs, crudity, and poetics, makes this an unusually engrossing read. It gets into your head, even though, you sometimes have to infer the meanings, draw them out of the context. It is a bit like what I would imagine "mainlining" a novel would be like. The result is vivid, intense, and ultimately tragic. Each character is picked most strongly by the differences in their mentality, and the interplay of what they say, and what they think, which we get through this mix of

perspectives. It's awesome. The research that went into this book is astonishing, and yet the skill of making it appear so effortless, so natural, is more astonishing still.

I will give no spoilers: just know that you are in for a story about rival spies, love, passion, cruelty, politics, and language, and that NO punches are pulled. You will not forget it. You may read it more than once.

A quote that struck me, and I think describes the novel well:

"Pregnant England cried out for guidance. Social flux writhed, soon, many feared, to thrash in riot and fire. The very language flowed in cross-currents and riptides, each sentence, each word, chosen to act as layered nuance within intricate Latinate rhetorics for different possible meanings. Better days must come, would come: a cleansing."

Indeed, this a novel of nuance, and riptides, tension, release, and subtlety. Damn, 'tis fine. Enjoy it.

David says

With due acknowledgement of my bias -- the only one of my favourite authors that I actually married--this is her best. Until the next one. MBH explores recovery, in a multitude of manifestations. The 1590s live in this book.

Thebookthief says

A gorgeous, complicated, intelligent, rip-your-heart-out book.

Christopher Marlowe is a fascinating historical figure, and Hallett takes this fairly mysterious man and gives us a look into the final few months of his life. There has long been speculation that Marlowe was a spy and that this was what ultimately led to the strange manner of his life, and the way in which Hallett explores this feels entirely real and reasonable, no matter how much it breaks your heart along the way.

In this version of events, Marlowe is in a romantic relationship with Thomas Kyd, and although there aren't many scenes between the two of them, their connection comes across very clearly and resonates throughout the book.

And the misery of Marlowe's final days, the horror and sorrow of his end, plays out in such a way as to stay with you and keep breaking your heart long after the story ends. The emotional power of Hallett's writing is incredible. I can't wait to read more of her work. Plus, Canadian! Wow, do we have some amazing writers.

I will say that the lack of quotation marks for dialogue takes getting used to; I've read other books that do this, and while I am not a huge fan, I am able to become accustomed to this particular stylistic choice. The highly stylized Elizabethan dialogue can also take several pages to adjust to, but it really helps to sell the world and time period and the atmosphere of Elizabethan England.

Overall, I loved this book. I can see how it would be a difficult read for people, and it is definitely not a

"beach" read, but it is an immensely rewarding and complex piece of writing. Please do give it a try if you're at all interested in it. I think you'll be impressed.

Ian says

This Marlowe by Michelle Butler Hallett is a spellbinding account of the last months of the life of English playwright Christopher Marlowe, who was murdered brutally under mysterious circumstances at the age of twenty-nine on May 30, 1593. The historical record suggests that Marlowe was an agent working for the English government who took on assignments on the European mainland, where tensions had arisen between Protestant and Catholic factions. The novel accepts Marlowe's role in international espionage as fact and fleshes out the scant official record with sufficient incident and dialogue to make for high drama. In 1593 Queen Elizabeth, at age sixty, had no heirs, and there was no apparent successor to the throne. The lack of an heir was causing unrest at her court, and behind her back a struggle was underway to control the course of events after her death. Central to the action is the scheme hatched by Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, to discredit his main rival, Robert Cecil, Elizabeth's Secretary of State and Marlowe's employer, by implicating Marlowe in an incident that became known as the "Dutch church libel." Notices were posted around the City of London threatening Protestant refugees with violence while making overt reference to Marlowe's plays. Butler Hallett slowly builds a story in which much whispering takes place behind closed doors, innocent bystanders fall victim to a byzantine political mechanism, and where everyone has an agenda. The author's Elizabethan London is a damp, filthy place where concepts of innocence and guilt are malleable and even those who have done nothing wrong have reason to fear a knock on the door in the middle of the night. But Marlowe himself is the main attraction, a man with a conflicted and contradictory nature, whose self-destructive tendencies in the end spell his doom. Openly homosexual and ungodly in an age when being just one or the other would be enough to place him at odds with prevailing morals and civil and religious authorities, he does not bother to conceal his defiance and often baits and provokes those in a position to do him harm. *This Marlowe* asks a lot of the reader. It deploys a sizable cast of characters whose motivations are sometimes hazy, and it speaks in a voice that will sound alien to our modern ears. But this is a marvelous and masterful novel. Taking up the challenge it presents is more than worth the effort. (This excerpt is taken from a longer review to appear in Galleon issue V.)

Ronan O'Driscoll says

Richly textured story with vivid characters from the last months of Christopher Marlowe's life. Elizabethan dialogue is well captured as well as the gritty circumstances of the time.

Catherine Thompson says

This Marlowe imagines the last few months of poet, playwright, and supposed spy Christopher "Kit" Marlowe. It begins with Marlowe's deportation from Flushing, an English garrison town in what is now the Netherlands, on charges of counterfeiting. On his return to England, Marlowe finds himself the pawn in a power game being played by the Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux, against his master, Sir Robert Cecil. Essex, through his agents Robin Poley, Ric Baines, and others, tries to win Marlowe away from Cecil, but Marlowe refuses the tangerine silk which is the symbol of allegiance to Essex. Cecil sends Marlowe to Scadbury, Sir Thomas Walsingham's estate, ordering him to stay there until sent for.

But Marlowe cannot, for he loves Tom Kyd, fellow playwright and sometime collaborator. And Kyd has been arrested on suspicion of being the author of the Dutch Church libel, a dangerously seditious document signed "Per Tamburlane"...

As an undergraduate English major, I was of course subjected to Marlowe, in the form of his play *Tamberlaine*. And like many young female undergrads, before and since, I fell a little in love with Marlowe, at least the legend. It's all very dashing, after all: possibly a spy, certainly a "bad boy" with an artistic temperament. (The only extant portrait doesn't hurt, either.) So naturally I was drawn to this novel when I stumbled across it at the library.

It has some stylistic quirks (dialogue, for instance, isn't indicated by quotation marks but by em dashes, which makes for difficulties when the actual dialogue includes an em dash) which bothered me a bit, but overall, I enjoyed the book. Hallett has done well with her version of Kit Marlowe, giving readers a glimpse into Elizabethan London at the same time.

Kathy says

I really enjoyed "This Marlowe", it took me a bit to get into the writing style of Ms. Hallett, but once I did, it was a fun, fast read. I wanted to smack half the characters, which, to me, is always a sign of a great book. To become emotionally involved enough to sign out loud or roll your eyes or tear up (did all of those, lol).

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