

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



The Spectre of the School of Night: Former Scholarly Fictions and the Stuff of Academic Fiction

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There was something about the phrase that enticed me. It produced a thrill, almost one of recognition. What was it? What did it mean? What had once been studied so intently in the dark?

Alan Wall, *School of Night*

They are always *there*, spectres. Even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.

Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*

What happens when a formerly prominent scholarly theory, having been discredited by the consensus of the academic community as an unsubstantiated fiction, becomes the subject of *actual* fiction? What relationships exist between the methodologies, findings and trends of real-life scholarship in the humanities and fictive acts of research or historical revision depicted in contemporary academic novels? In this article, I approach these questions by tracing the fortunes of the School of Night over the past century as it transitioned from a theory that enjoyed wide, though never universal, acceptance by early modern scholars to become almost exclusively the stuff of imaginative literature. The story of the School of Night's academic rise and fall serves, in some senses, as a cautionary tale: it exemplifies how presupposition can become hardened, through mere reiteration, into widely assumed fact. With its genesis traceable to a 1903 monograph by Arthur Acheson, the so-called School of Night (a group supposedly devoted to the study of esoteric matters and purportedly peopled by a host of early modern notables, including Christopher Marlowe, Walter Raleigh, George Chapman, and Thomas Hariot) was developed and given acceptance by prominent scholars of the 1920s and 1930s

before falling out of favour due to lack of substantive supporting evidence. These days, few bona fide early modernists would lend much credence to the idea that this clandestine, Elizabethan coterie once existed, nor would they regard this belief as much more than a curiosity in the history of twentieth-century scholarship—an academic flash in the pan that, in retrospect, may have been separated by only the narrowest of margins from the realm of crackpot theory.

Typically mentioned in dismissive terms (when at all) in contemporary scholarship, the School of Night has nonetheless enjoyed a remarkable longevity in popular culture. Indeed, the theory has experienced, if anything, a resurgence of interest in recent years. Since Peter Whelan's seminal representation of the intellectual group in his 1992 play *The School of Night*, this supposed coterie has been portrayed in a variety of literary contexts. As these imaginative representations of the School of Night are frequently—and, as I posit, significantly—bound up with fictionalisations of research activity and academic enquiry, this article first traces the School's emergence and reception in twentieth-century scholarship before shifting focus to literary engagements with the now-defunct hypothesis in Alan Wall's *School of Night* (2001), Louis Bayard's *The School of Night* (2011) and Deborah Harkness's *Shadow of Night* (2012). In so doing, I argue that these three texts share far more than their near-identical titles. The revisionist impulse at work when a contemporary novelist re-evaluates or imaginatively validates the School of Night hypothesis extends beyond the mere revitalisation of a discarded theory. In these academic novels, we find the repeated constellation of the supposed Elizabethan group with broader concerns about authority, legitimacy and the historical process. As the third and final section of this essay argues, the desire to re-write early modern literary history produces curiously consistent results in Wall's, Bayard's and Harkness's novels, with the payoff of bringing a fictive researcher into contact with the School of Night ultimately being envisaged in the same way. Engagement with the School of Night provides each author, in turn, with a platform for reimagining of the nexus of personal and intertextual relationships surrounding the historical figures of Marlowe and Shakespeare. By presenting readers with new—if fictive—evidence that promises to confirm fresh facts about the opaque Marlowe-Shakespeare relationship, these works draw on and play to a history of speculation (both popular and scholarly) about the Elizabethan era's two most exalted and frequently compared playwrights. It is almost as though research impact within the storyworlds of these novels is uniformly measured by a single, simple metric: does this revise or nuance our understandings of Marlowe and Shakespeare, early modern England's best-known dramatists?

The Rise and Fall of an Academic Theory

The School of Night has been declared dead many times since the mid-twentieth century. In Samuel Schoenbaum's magisterial *Shakespeare's Lives* of 1970, for instance, the author dismissively noted that 'the whole superstructure' of this scholarly hypothesis 'rests upon an insecure foundation'.¹ Arguments in support of this Elizabethan group's existence had fallen so far out of mainstream academic favour by 1981 that Mary Ellen Lamb was able to cite it as an example of an imaginary literary circle in her article 'The Myth of the Countess of Pembroke: The Dramatic Circle'.² And, in 1991, B.J. Sokol felt confident in declaring that 'there is no life left in a once prevailing theory that certain Elizabethan courtiers convened a secret "school of Night"'.³ Other, similar examples of the School's dismissal abound, making it clear that, despite repeated exorcisms, even now the disruptive spectre of this theory continues to haunt—and I mean this in an explicitly Derridean sense—early modern scholarship.⁴ One is thus left to wonder: if the theory of the School of Night is now commonly understood to be as unverified, fanciful and utterly passé as the above quotations would suggest, then where did this ghost story come from, and how could it have risen to such scholarly prominence as to need continual discrediting in the first place?

The School of Night has its origin in two lines from *Love's Labour's Lost*, lines which may or may not technically be *Shakespearean*. According to recent Arden and Penguin editions, in Act 4, scene 3 of the play, the King of Navarre, reacting to Berowne's hyperbolic praise of his dark mistress, exclaims: 'O paradox! Black is the hue of hell, / The hue of dungeons and *the school of night*'.⁵ But it is equally possible—and many would argue far more probable—that Shakespeare's King says something else entirely.

¹ Samuel Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 737.

² Mary Ellen Lamb, 'The Myth of the Countess of Pembroke: The Dramatic Circle', *Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981), 194-202. Lamb went on to again disparagingly discuss the School of Night in 'The Nature of Topicality in *Love's Labour's Lost*', *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1986), 49-59.

³ B.J. Sokol, 'Holofernes in Rabelais and Shakespeare and Some Manuscript Verses of Thomas Harriot', *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 25 (1991), 131-5 (p. 131).

⁴ I am thinking here—and, more broadly, throughout this article—of Jacques Derrida's 'hauntology'. In Derrida's thought, haunting, inheritance, and intellectual legacy are provocatively interlinked, and the spectre itself, though paradoxically absent, nonetheless insinuates itself into what is real, present, or *there*: *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. by H.R. Woudhuysen (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1998), 3.4.250-1; William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost* ed. by John Kerrigan (1982; reissued London: Penguin, 2005), 3.4.252-3. Emphasis my own.

In *The Oxford Shakespeare* and *The Norton Shakespeare*, for example, he instead responds to Berowne's linguistic extravagance with the cry: 'O paradox! Black is the hue of hell, / The hue of dungeons and *the style of night*'.⁶ Though the true reading of 'the school of night' in *Love's Labour's Lost* has long been debated by editors, textual ambiguities did not prevent this memorable, undeniably alluring turn of phrase from taking firm hold in the imaginations of early- and mid- twentieth-century audiences. As one such reader poetically mused:

School of Night is an interesting title. It exemplifies the guilt which even this avant-garde felt in regard to their inquiries and researchs [sic]. It hints of the Black Mass, of the religious substratum which worshipped the Devil as straight-facedly as it worshipped God, hoping that whatever the outcome in the battle between good and evil its devotees would be on the winning side.⁷

When, in the year of the Elizabethan tercentenary, American Shakespeare enthusiast Arthur Acheson published *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet*, he was not unaware of the contested nature of the King of Navarre's lines.⁸ He wrote:

This expression '*the school of night*' has always puzzled commentators, and appeared to all of them so senseless that, to give meaning to an apparently meaningless line, the following emendations have, at different times, been proposed: 'scowl of night', 'shade of night', 'seal of night', 'scroll of night', 'soul of night', 'stole of night'. The Cambridge editors have proposed 'shoote of night' for 'suit'.⁹

Nonetheless, concluding that none of the alternative, 'misimproved' readings 'add a particularly strong meaning to the line, nor give a fit figure to the expression,' Acheson based a significant portion of his own argument about Shakespeare's relationship with

⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare: Early Plays and Poems*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 2nd edn (New York, Norton, 2008), 4.3.250-51; William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by John Jowett et al., 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 4.3.252-3. Emphasis my own.

⁷ Calvin Hoffman, *The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare* (1955; reissued New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1960), p. 52.

⁸ So far as I have been able to determine, Acheson does not seem to have possessed academic credentials—or at least they are not advertised on the title page of *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet*, as one might expect in a text of this era. He is identified merely as 'Mr. Arthur Acheson, of Chicago' in J. B. Henneman's review of *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet* in *The Sewanee Review* 12.1 (1904), 247.

⁹ Arthur Acheson, *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet: Displaying Shakespeare as a Satirist and Proving the Identity of the Patron and the Rival of the Sonnets* (London: John Lane, 1903), p. 90.

George Chapman on the reading of this line as ‘school of night’. In providing a new, biographically oriented reading of the sonnets, Acheson’s monograph of 1903 argued that ‘the patron, the rival, and the mistress’ were, in fact, representations of ‘living actualities’, and—expanding upon a theory earlier proposed by William Minto in his 1874 *Characteristics of English Poets From Chaucer to Shirley*—Acheson confidently identified Chapman as Shakespeare’s so-called rival poet.¹⁰ Tellingly entitled ‘The School of Night and “Love’s Labor’s Lost”’, Chapter 5 of *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet* explained that Shakespeare’s Navarrese comedy was meant as ‘a distinct satire upon the theories and ideas set forth by Chapman’ in his cryptic poetical work of 1594, *The Shadow of Night*.¹¹ Positing a Shakespeare who was engaged in an ongoing and bitter literary battle of wits with this authorial ‘arch-enemy’, Acheson suggested that *Love’s Labour’s Lost*’s Biron served as Shakespeare’s mouthpiece, ‘attacking the unnatural theories of “The School of Night” as set forth by Chapman’, and that ‘the person of Holofernes excoriates Chapman himself’.¹² Acheson’s senses of precisely *what* this School of Night was and *who else* besides Chapman comprised its ranks remained underdeveloped, however: while he alleged that Shakespeare ‘attacks Chapman as the spokesman of this “School of Night” and the most eloquent exponent of its theories’, these theories are only vaguely characterised as ‘the pride of “The New Learning”’ and the ‘others of like views’ who belonged to Chapman’s group remain unnamed.¹³

Two decades later, in the collaboratively written 1923 introduction to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson greatly elaborated Acheson’s theory, filling in the lacunae left by his earlier work. ‘The secret of the play’, Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson believed, could be unlocked through a study of its ‘topical riddles’, and their introduction sought to ‘help to solve’ these presumed Elizabethan puzzles.¹⁴ Though largely dismissive of Acheson’s prior work (which they—rather ironically—felt ‘uncritically’ discussed ‘the problem of what we don’t know of Shakespeare’s private life’), Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson were confident that their predecessor had got one thing right: he had ‘hit on the discovery that a School of Night really existed, that Chapman’s *Shadow of Night* (1594) was a product of this School, and that the Academe of Navarre is Shakespeare’s

¹⁰ Acheson, p. 207. For Minto’s theory, see *Characteristics of English Poets From Chaucer to Shirley* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1874), pp. 290-2.

¹¹ Acheson, p. 78.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 93 and 83.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

¹⁴ Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, Introduction in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. xxvii.

satire upon it'.¹⁵ Noting 'a collocation of (a) an austere and fantastic Academe with (b) an inordinate number of references to darkness, light, and starts à propos of dark beauty and women's eyes, in (c) a polite play, obviously topical and full of burlesque', Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson concluded 'pretty certainly' that there was 'in existence at the time [a] School or Society' and that Shakespeare had unleashed 'the arrows of his wit' upon it in *Love's Labour's Lost*.¹⁶

That the New Cambridge Shakespeare editors recognised both the boldness and speculative nature of their proposed reading of *Love's Labour's Lost* is beyond doubt. Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson admitted that their 'conviction...rests upon a mass of evidence ranging down from facts to hints, suggestions, even bare possibilities'.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the School's curricula began to take shape in their introduction, where we also find names of the coterie's various members identified. The School of Night, as Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson conceived it, was largely synonymous with 'Sir Walter Rawleys school of Atheisme', which the Jesuit pamphleteer Robert Parsons had once mentioned (and 'where in', as Parsons alleged, 'both Moyses and our Saio^f, the olde, and the new Testamente are iested at, and the schollars taughte, amonge other thinges, to spell God backward').¹⁸ According to Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson's hypothesis, Raleigh 'headed and patronised' this intellectual coterie, a group interested in subjects including 'astronomy and mathematical calculations'.¹⁹ In addition to Chapman, the Earls of Derby and Northumberland were alleged to have been members, as were George Carey, Thomas Hariot, Matthew Roydon and 'poor Marlowe'.²⁰ As their most substantive evidence that the School of Night had existed and that its members were ultimately persecuted for their unorthodox scientific and religious beliefs, Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson pointed to the rapid demise experienced by each of the School's presumed members in 1593 and 1594.

The School of Night hypothesis, as fleshed out by Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson, seems to have found its first acceptance in (mostly British) scholarship of the 1920s. In the prefatory essay to his 1926 edition of *Willobie His Avis*, G.B. Harrison reiterated the theory. Two years later, Samuel A. Tannenbaum incorporated information about the School of Night in *The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe*—in which he presented

¹⁵ Ibid, p. xxx.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. xxviii and xxix.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. xxxii.

¹⁸ For Parsons's relevant *Responsio ad Elizabethae edictum* of 1592, see F.S. Boas, *Christopher Marlowe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 113.

¹⁹ Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson, pp. xxxiii and xxxi.

²⁰ Ibid, p. xxxiii.

the elaborate conjecture that Marlowe's murder was instigated by Raleigh, who wanted to pre-emptively silence his former friend lest he publicly reveal details regarding the School's activities.²¹ By 1929, the School of Night had attracted the attention of both Ethel Seaton and Frances A. Yates. That year, in an article entitled 'Marlowe, Robert Poley, and the Tippings', Seaton, who had done important prior work on the playwright, supported her suggestion that 'the upper as well as the lower plane of Marlowe's associates included men who were embroiled...in treasonable Matters' by citing recent work on 'that group...which has been identified...with the "School of Night"'.²² Meanwhile, Yates had begun pursuing a line of enquiry that would lead to her first published monograph, *John Florio: The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England* in 1934, and that would also help to inspire a later book on Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. In Yates's 1929 article, 'John Florio at the French Embassy', she cited the 'very interesting introduction' found in The New Shakespeare series of 1923 as evidence that the 'most recent critics' of *Love's Labour's Lost* 'tend to the theory that the play is aimed primarily against Sir Walter Raleigh and his mysterious circle of mathematicians, astronomers and "atheists"'.²³ Though clearly fascinated by this allegedly widespread and cutting-edge hypothesis, Yates's own acceptance of it in this article was tentative. 'Some modern scholars', she claimed, 'see in [*Love's Labour's Lost's*] 'Academe'...an attack on Raleigh and his following [and]...connect the phrase 'School of Night,'...with Chapman's obscure poem ..., assert[ing] that there really was a society with this name or nick-name'.²⁴ Insisting that she intended to 'make no rash

²¹ Samuel A. Tannenbaum, *The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Tenney Press, 1928). Though Tannenbaum refrained from using the precise phrase 'school of night' to describe Raleigh's alleged intellectual circle, nonetheless, his work seems to have been influenced by the Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson hypothesis. In *The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe*, Tannenbaum referenced the 'not very popular coterie which a Jesuit pamphleteer, Father Robert Parsons, branded as a "school of atheism"' and elaborated: 'It is generally held that the incomparable Raleigh, at one of whose London houses these brilliant and daring spirits—scientists, poets and philosophers—held their weekly discussions, was the leader of the group, and that for a while his powerful influence with the Queen protected them from molestation and perhaps even from prosecution' (p. 32).

²² Ethel Seaton, 'Marlowe, Robert Poley, and the Tippings', *The Review of English Studies* 5.19 (1929), 273-87 (p. 285). Seaton understood this intellectual circle to be a 'School of Atheism (i.e. free inquiry)', and, in this article, she listed its constituent members as being Chapman, Roydon, Strange, Northumberland, Hariot and Raleigh, as well as Marlowe. That Seaton may have completed further, unpublished work on the School of Night is suggested by Yates's later comment that 'Miss Ethel Seaton made some interesting points [about The School of Night] in a paper on Hariot which she read to the Elizabethan Literary Society in February 1933': *A Study of 'Love's Labour's Lost'* (1936; reissued Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 7, n. 2.

²³ Frances A. Yates, 'John Florio at the French Embassy', *The Modern Language Review* 24.1 (1929), 16-36 (p. 34).

²⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis my own.

statements’, Yates qualified her own argument about Florio’s possible School of Night associations with the disclaimer: ‘This, of course, is the kind of thing which it is impossible to prove.’²⁵

Though corroborating archival evidence affirming the existence of the School of Night failed to accumulate, citations of the theory did, and 1936 marked the pinnacle of the hypothesis’s acceptance in mainstream scholarship. That year witnessed the publication of Yates’s second book, entitled *A Study of Love’s Labour’s Lost*, as well as *The School of Night: A Study in the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh*, the third book by M.C. Bradbrook. Serving, in some sense, as companion pieces, both monographs were released near-simultaneously by Cambridge University Press. What is more, as the preface to Bradbrook’s book disclosed, not only had the author seen the proofs of Yates’s book prior to its publication, but Yates had also ‘read through [Bradbrook’s] MS., and made several suggestions’.²⁶

A careful examination of Yates’s *Study of ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost’* shows that her position on the School of Night had metamorphosed in significant ways since she first began publishing on the subject in the late 1920s. Though she was still careful to note the theoretical nature of School of Night (which she described as having been peopled by ‘Raleigh and his group of mathematicians, astronomers, and poets’ and for whom ‘Chapman seems to have [served as] poet-in-chief’), even so, Yates gave Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson’s hypothesis an air of scholarly canonicity. Her introduction confidently announced that ‘this theory is now more or less generally accepted’.²⁷ Bradbrook’s complementary monograph took the assumptions of Yates’s edition even further. Largely dispensing with her colleague’s cautious framing of the School of Night as a possible *theory*, Bradbrook’s work created the impression that the School’s existence was an historical truism backed by the weight of great authority. ‘During the last ten or fifteen years’, she wrote, ‘there has been a growing interest in the literary activities of Raleigh, and in particular in the society founded by him, and known now by Shakespeare’s nickname “The School of Night”’.²⁸ Citing—without qualification—Acheson, Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson and Harrison amongst the previous writers

²⁵ Ibid, 36.

²⁶ M.C. Bradbrook, *The School of Night: A Study in the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh* (1936; reissued New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. viii. Bradbrook’s final chapter, in particular, seemed to speak to Yates’s work, as it also took Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as its primary subject.

²⁷ Yates, *A Study*, pp. 5, 7, and 9.

²⁸ Bradbrook, p. 7.

who had treated the topic, Bradbrook declaratively announced at the outset of her own work:

Raleigh was the patron of the school; Thomas Harriot, a mathematician of European reputation, was its master. It probably included the earls of Northumberland and Derby, and Sir George Carey, with the poets Marlowe, Chapman, Matthew Roydon, and William Warner. They studied theology, philosophy, astronomy, geography and chemistry: and their reputations differed as widely as their studies.²⁹

Moreover, Bradbrook went on not only to provide detailed literary analyses of alleged allusions to the School in its members' writings, but also to devote an entire chapter to the nature of the School's 'esotericism', its 'free intellectual thinking' and the 'strong tinge of the occult' in its curriculum.³⁰

Both Yates's and Bradbrook's monographs received favourable coverage in *The Times Literary Supplement* by reviewers who wholeheartedly subscribed to the theories about School of Night that underpinned them. G.B. Harrison's review of Yates's book asserted that it 'has for some time been generally held' that 'Shakespeare was commenting [in *Love's Labour's Lost*] on a small group of famous men' who were ostracised for their unorthodox dabblings in 'the new astronomy and philosophy', and he enthusiastically endorsed *A Study of 'Love's Labour's Lost'* for showing 'that this controversy was more considerable than is generally realized, and it was not only a matter of temperament but of *actual cliques*'.³¹ Similarly, Harold Hannington Child's review of Bradbrook's monograph began with the assertion that 'the existence and composition of the "School of Night" are now widely known' and went on to elaborate:

Miss Bradbrook has now published the closest study that has yet been made of the school, its beliefs, its members, and their writings... The whole story fits neatly together with the personal relations of those concerned and other details of the setting... Their leader in thought was the astronomer, Harriot, whose scientific studies and expertise seemed to shake the foundations of belief in the

²⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 53.

³¹ G.B. Harrison, 'Clues to "Love's Labour's Lost"', review of *A Study of 'Love's Labour's Lost'* by Frances A. Yates, *The Times Literary Supplement* 1789 (16 May 1936), 414. Of course, Harrison's statements were hardly unbiased, considering the role that his own 1926 edition of *Willobie His Avis* had earlier played in legitimising and propagating this same theory.

commonly accepted cosmogony. And there is no doubt that the School more than dabbled in the occult.³²

It is clear that many scholars of the 1940s—scholars hailing from both sides of the Atlantic, it should be added—agreed with these *Times Literary Supplement* reviewers that the Elizabethan School of Night’s existence had been established as hard fact. The examples are numerous. Marjorie Nicholson, for instance, writing of Northumberland in a 1940 article for *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, claimed without qualification that ‘with Raleigh and Hariot, he was one of the original members of the ill-fated “School of Night”, which Shakespeare may have satirized in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*’.³³ And a contribution to the same journal two years later by Walter E. Houghton, Jr suggested that ‘the School of Night... could be called the first school of virtuosi in England’.³⁴ In a *Huntington Library Quarterly* article of 1943, Eleanor Rosenberg not only assumed the historical existence of the School, but was eager to add members to its roster. Advancing the name of Giacopo Castelvetro, the concluding lines of her article provocatively asked: ‘Was there fire behind the smoke? Was Castelvetro another member of the “School of Night?”’³⁵ Clearly wanting to capitalise on the growing academic interest in the School of Night, in the early 1940s, Eleanor Grace Clark released a revised and much expanded edition of her 1937 *Elizabethan Fustian* re-titled *Raleigh and Marlowe: A Study in Elizabethan Fustian*. Clark’s freshly reworked book featured what one reviewer described as ‘a small sketch on the flyleaf, showing human figures (three stories tall) standing atop an Elizabethan building and eagerly scanning the heavens’. A legend below this sketch conspicuously reading ‘Black is the Badge of Hell and the School of Night’ signalled the work’s timely concerns: Clark’s new material mostly centred on the School of Night, and she offered extensive readings of Marlowe’s supposed literary references to the Elizabethan coterie.³⁶

Nonetheless, despite ample evidence of the theory’s acceptance by many scholars of the 1930s and 1940s, it is clear that there were School of Night naysayers from the start. In

³² Harold Hannington Child, ‘The School of Night’, review of *The School of Night: A Study in the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh* by M.C. Bradbrook, *The Times Literary Supplement* 1813 (31 October 1936), 881.

³³ Marjorie Nicolson, ‘Kepler, the Somnium, and John Donne’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1.3 (1940), 259-80 (p. 272).

³⁴ Walter E. Houghton, Jr, ‘The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century: Part I’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3.1 (1942), 51-73 (p. 68).

³⁵ Eleanor Rosenberg, ‘Giacopo Castelvetro: Italian Publisher in Elizabethan London and His Patrons’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 6.2 (1943), 119-48 (p. 145).

³⁶ Ernest A. Strathmann, review of *Raleigh and Marlowe: A Study in Elizabethan Fustian* by Eleanor Grace Clark, *Modern Language Notes* 58.6 (1943), 475.

a 1937 bibliography of ‘Recent Literature of the English Renaissance’ that appeared in *Studies in Philology*, the compilers abherently appended a lengthy annotation beneath the entry for Yates’s *Study of ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost’* criticising Yates’s ‘attempt to treat *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as a topical document’.³⁷ And both Walter G. Friedrich, who reviewed Bradbrook’s *School of Night* for *Modern Language Notes*, and Francis R. Johnson, who reviewed the same work for *Isis*, found her arguments deeply problematic. Friedrich, troubled by the way in which ‘conjectures [about the School of Night] become historical facts’ in Bradbrook’s work, damningly wrote: ‘Those readers who enjoy tripping lightly along “the primrose path of conjecture” will find this volume delightful. Those who still believe that literary history is a discipline will find it extremely provocative.’³⁸ In a similar vein, Johnson effusively complained:

Miss BRADBROOK’S work is the latest study of this supposed ‘School of Night’ coterie. It adds no new facts, however, to our fragmentary information concerning HARRIOT, RALEGH, and their associates, nor does it attempt to do so. Instead, the author assumes as proved a supposition that her predecessors have more often allowed to remain frankly conjectural—namely, that there was a definite school or society in the nineties of which RALEGH was the patron and HARRIOT the master...[H]er main thesis is built from a tissue of conjecture...The reader, therefore, must be on the alert to disentangle pure assumption from demonstrable fact.³⁹

Other sceptical voices sounded out during this era, and one of the most visible opponents of the theory was American scholar Ernest A. Strathmann. His 1941 article ‘The Textual Evidence for “The School of Night”’ opened by drawing attention, once again, to the seemingly fanciful nature of the hypothesis. Though Strathmann promised that a fuller refutation of the School of Night would ‘be included in a study of Sir Walter Raleigh and Elizabethan skepticism, now in preparation’, he limited the focus of this 1941 article to a simple re-examination of the contested Shakespearean phrase ‘school of night’ and, thus, to the shaky foundation on which the whole conjecture had been initially constructed.⁴⁰ And when, in 1952, Strathmann’s promised volume, *Sir*

³⁷ Hardin Craig, David Patrick and William Wells, ‘Recent Literature of the English Renaissance’, *Studies in Philology* 34.2 (1937), 260-382 (p. 314).

³⁸ Walter G. Friedrich, review of *The School of Night: A Study of the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh* by M. C. Bradbrook, *Modern Language Notes* 52.8 (1937), 616-17.

³⁹ Francis R. Johnson, review of *The School of Night: A Study of the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh* by M. C. Bradbrook, *Isis* 29.1 (1938), 114.

⁴⁰ Ernest A. Strathmann, ‘Textual Evidence for “The School of Night”’, *Modern Language Notes* 56.3 (1941), 176-86 (p. 186, n. 40). A similar, though less thoroughly articulated, objection based on textual

Walter Raleigh: A Study in Elizabethan Skepticism, did appear, his argument was greeted by many as a persuasive rejoinder to—and perhaps even the much-needed deathblow for—the School of Night theory. To borrow Merritt Y. Hughes’s wording, the monograph was seen as a ‘solidly and skilfully documented reexamination’ of the idea that Raleigh had ever held significant heterodox beliefs.⁴¹

By the time that Strathmann’s book was published, it is clear that the debate about the School of Night had already grown stale, however. When, in the early 1950s, Arden Shakespeare released its revised fourth edition of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, the text was prefaced by with a new introduction that gave extensive consideration to the play’s topical references, including those to the alleged School of Night. This edition, explicitly aimed at secondary school and university student audiences, was greeted by more than a few academic reviewers who were by then tired of hearing the School of Night referenced as fact. Reiterating the same objections and counterarguments that critics of the theory had by then been posing for over a decade, T.M. Parrott—who began his review by noting editor Richard David’s somewhat surprising lack of academic credentials (‘There is nothing on the title-page or elsewhere to indicate the qualification of Mr. David as an editor of this peculiarly difficult play; he is, I believe, the London manager of the Cambridge University Press’)—complained that David was overly ‘entangled in the super-abundant critical matter that has accumulated’ around the play’s apparent topicality, and he lamented that ‘too much time has been spent in the last fifty years on this more than doubtful matter’.⁴² And, similarly, though he acknowledged that ‘no reader of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* can doubt that this work had many meanings for its original audience of which we are now unaware’, Sidney Thomas bristled at the way in which readers of this Arden edition were given ‘the notion that unproved speculation is almost undeniable fact’, noting once again that ‘the

grounds had earlier been made by Janet Spens in ‘Notes on *Love’s Labour’s Lost*’, *Review of English Studies* 7.27 (1931), 331-4 (p. 333).

⁴¹ Merritt Y. Hughes, review of *Sir Walter Raleigh. A Study in Elizabethan Skepticism* by Ernest A. Strathmann, *Modern Language Notes* 68.6 (1953), 423. Drawing similar conclusions about the implications of Strathmann’s work, a reviewer for *The English Historical Review* suggested that the book ‘disposes...of the pother that has been made by English scholars recently about the “School of Night”’, while a reviewer for *Shakespeare Quarterly* likewise concluded: ‘There can be little reason to associate Raleigh with a “School of Night”, if such a group is pictured as encouraging any departures from orthodox religious thought. Professor Strathmann...has withdrawn one of [the School’s] most promising pupils’: A. L. R., review of *Sir Walter Raleigh. A Study in Elizabethan Skepticism* by Ernest A. Strathmann, *The English Historical Review* 67.264 (1952), 442; Harold S. Wilson, review of *Sir Walter Raleigh. A Study in Elizabethan Skepticism* by Ernest A. Strathmann, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 2.4 (1951), 359.

⁴² T. M. Parrott, review of *The Arden Shakespeare’s Love’s Labour Lost* ed. by Richard David, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 52.3 (1953), 404, 407.

whole School of Night interpretation of the play, which Mr. David presents with assurance, rests upon the flimsiest of foundations'.⁴³

Though uncritical references to the School of Night would continue to crop up here and there in later scholarship (and occasionally continue to do so, even to the present day), it is clear that by the time the fourth Arden edition of *Love's Labour's Lost* was published, mainstream academia had already become increasingly wary and weary of the theory. Interestingly, it seems to have been at precisely this point in history that the School of Night hypothesis started to be absorbed into the work of fringe researchers and early modern conspiracy-theorists, who, in a trend that is still continuing, increasingly associated the School with the historical figure of Marlowe. The most notable mid-century example of this trend is *The Man Who Was Shakespeare* of 1955, wherein the theatre-critic cum armchair literary detective Calvin Hoffman elaborated a theory that Marlowe was not murdered after all, having instead fled to the continent in 1593.⁴⁴ Calling attention to parallelisms between those texts respectively ascribed to Marlowe and Shakespeare—arguably specious, yet given the weight of authority by their reproduction in a thirty-page appendix of textual correspondences—Hoffman suggested that the exiled Marlowe was subsequently responsible for penning the Shakespearean canon, which he sent back to England in regular instalments from his new home abroad.

Unsurprisingly, Hoffman's monograph was received dismissively by the scholarly community. Germane to my larger discussion, however, is the fact that this sensationalised biography of 'the man who was Shakespeare' had absorbed the School of Night theory into the fabric of its complex Marlovian authorship argument. Hoffman's portrait of Elizabethan London is romantically filled with 'fecund' women and 'sensual' men; it is 'a world of robust talk and robust action' and of 'Rabelaisian appetites', in which, curiously, 'there were no dictionaries, no encyclopedias, and no English grammars' and 'the mass of the people had been but recently disenchained from the intellectual manacles of the Middle Ages'.⁴⁵ He suggested that, against this colourful, if not exactly historically accurate, backdrop operated 'a clique whose thinking and observation was centuries ahead of its time' and in which Marlowe played a key role. Rather charmingly, Hoffman departed from prior scholarship, which had typically credited Shakespeare with coining the clandestine coterie's sobriquet, by claiming that the assemblage dubbed themselves. 'With the little-boy ritualism of the Elizabethan,' he

⁴³ Sidney Thomas, review of The Arden Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* ed. by Richard David, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5.1 (1954), 81.

⁴⁴ Hoffman's work was later reissued under the alternate—and even more provocative—title, *The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare*.

⁴⁵ Hoffman, pp. 55 and 57.

wrote, ‘they even gave their number a group name: the “School of Night” was one of them; sometimes known as “Raleigh’s Circle”’. Though he included no explicit citations to back these claims, Hoffman reported as fact a number of details about this society. Presupposing a detailed knowledge of the group’s meeting habits and activities, he claimed that ‘the illustrious members of the School of Night, which comprised some of the most powerful and glamorous figures of the late sixteenth century, ...[were] forced to meet secretly’, and he elaborated that the clique convened ‘regularly to discuss proscribed subjects’ in an act of blatant ‘defiance of the edicts against free-thinking’ then in effect.⁴⁶

A second mid-century, popular biography that presented Marlowe as a central figure in the Elizabethan School of Night was A.D. Wraight and Virginia F. Stern’s 1965 illustrated *In Search of Christopher Marlowe*. In a chapter appropriately entitled ‘The School of Night’, the authors described Marlowe’s post-university life, claiming that ‘after leaving Cambridge it was not long before he joined another kind of university, more exclusive, stimulating, and esoteric than any existing officially’.⁴⁷ Raleigh, they claimed, had ‘gathered around him a group of men who were ready and eager to adventure with him on voyages of discovery in the realms of the mind’. Admission to this unofficial ‘university’ was allegedly class-blind, for ‘courtiers and commoners were welcome alike, so long as they shared Raleigh’s aristocracy of spirit’.⁴⁸ And what did the School of Night do? Like Hoffman, Wraight and Stern were confident in their ability to provide details:

They studied, discussed, experimented, and earnestly sought to extend the bounds of scientific knowledge, then in its infancy and frowned upon as dangerous thinking. Meeting behind closed doors to discuss such subjects as were proscribed by mediæval university curricula, their very secrecy excited

⁴⁶ Hoffman, pp. 51-3.

⁴⁷ A.D. Wraight and Virginia F. Stern, *In Search of Christopher Marlowe : A Pictorial Biography* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1965), p. 132.

⁴⁸ Raleigh shared leadership of this group with Northumberland as well as Henry Brooke, Baron Cobham. Other members and associates included Edmund Spenser, Lord Strange, Matthew Roydon, Richard Hakluyt, Lawrence Keymis, Nicholas Hill, Nathaniel Torporley, Walter Warner, Robert Hues, Michael Drayton, George Chapman, George Peele, George Carey, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Allen, Thomas Watson, Thomas Campion, Thomas Hariot—and maybe Thomas Walsingham and John Marston, as well. Philip Sidney and John Dee were not, strictly speaking, members of the School themselves, though they had social connections to and some intellectual affinities with this secret group. Reading this account, one begins to wonder who *wasn’t* involved.

suspicion which fed on the superstition of that age and earned them the...sinister title of 'The School of Night'.⁴⁹

We thus sense in Wraight and Stern's account, as in Hoffman's before it, the exaggerated conclusion of a trend that had been occurring over several decades in mainstream academic scholarship: that is, the drift of the School of Night from the explicitly conjectural to conjecture presented as likelihood to likelihood presented as historical certainty, with past scholarly speculation coming to assume the character of certain fact.

These days, *Love's Labour's Lost* no longer commands the levels of critical attention that it once did, yet it is clear that the spectre of the School of Night continues to haunt contemporary understandings and treatments of the play. John Kerrigan's 1982 introduction to the Penguin edition relates: 'Fifty years ago, it was fashionable' to read *Love's Labour's Lost* as referring 'to a group of writers, scientists, and freethinkers centred on Sir Walter Raleigh'. Observing that 'this theory has...fallen into disrepute' within the academic community, Kerrigan notes that 'the notion that the play is about a group called 'the school of night' persists among readers and theatregoers (largely because it has found its way into popular editions)'.⁵⁰ More recently, H.R. Woudhuysen's introduction to the Arden edition is wary of turning 'alleged contemporary associations into direct sources for the play' and cautions that 'it is easier to put forward elaborate theories' about the play's topical references, including those supposedly referring to the School of Night, 'than to disprove them'.⁵¹ And William C. Carroll's New Cambridge Shakespeare introduction to *Love's Labour's Lost*, which asserts that 'the only problem with this theory of a School of Night is that there is no evidence to support such a claim', retrospectively reflects that 'this particular scholarly fantasy gained traction in part because of the eminence of Bradbrook, Yates, and Dover Wilson, but also because it played to the recurring sense among many scholars that there is something topical about the play'.⁵² Though the editors of these recent student editions of *Love's Labour's Lost* ostensibly agree that debate over the School of Night has now been laid to rest, we are left to wonder: by reiterating the fallacies of this academic hypothesis, have such comments instead helped this theoretical spectre to achieve further longevity? Put otherwise, does contemporary scholarship paradoxically

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 133-4. Eleanor Grace Clark appears in the endnotes as Wraight and Stern's main credited source of information on the School of Night.

⁵⁰ *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. by Kerrigan, p. xxiii.

⁵¹ *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. by Woudhuysen, p. 71.

⁵² William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. by William C. Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 31.

continue to provide this theoretical ghost existence through its ongoing denials of the School of Night's credibility?

Fictionalising a Scholarly Fiction

Having become marginalised in the scholarly world, the School of Night has found new life in the literary realm. Sustained imaginative treatment of the School was first seen in Peter Whelan's *The School of Night*, which received wide exposure when it was performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1992. Whelan's play, prefaced in its printed form by a note that it was 'inspired by the works of Calvin Hoffman', centres on Marlowe and the final stages of his failing friendship with Raleigh.⁵³ The School of Night has already ceased operation by the time the dramatic action of the first act is set (in 1592), yet the social climbing Raleigh is unpleasantly haunted by its memory and perceptibly hostile to any suggestion that he and Marlowe resume their former intellectual activities. When the erstwhile friends find themselves in a dicey political conundrum, Marlowe is eventually convinced that he ought to flee England. Loosely following the narrative outlines of the Marlovian authorship theory presented by Hoffman, a 'dead man's switch' is planned: it will be made to look as if Marlowe has been murdered in Deptford, and arrangements are put in place for the future plays that he will inevitably pen to be sent back to England and 'produced alongside' Shakespeare's own, 'under [his] name'.⁵⁴ Yet the plan is foiled (in a manner that resembles Tannenbaum's 1928 theory) when Ingram Frizer abruptly kills the dramatist just prior to his planned departure for the continent.

Following Whelan's high profile stage treatment of the School of Night, this supposed Elizabethan coterie has been represented a number of times in contemporary fiction, most of which has followed Whelan's lead in closely associating Marlowe with the activities of the alleged School. And it is to three recent novels, in particular, that I here turn to examine the School of Night's resonances in contemporary literature. The first of these works, Alan Wall's 2001 *School of Night*, is narrated by Sean Tallow, an Oxford-educated, former BBC World Service employee of humble origins who becomes obsessed with proving the historicity of the School of Night. In the second novel, Louis Bayard's 2011 *The School of Night*, a discredited American academic named Henry Cavendish ends up on a deadly treasure hunt following the emergence of

⁵³ This note appears just below the 'Cast of Characters' on an unnumbered page at the outset of Peter Whelan, *The School of Night* (London: Warner Chappell Plays, 1992). As this edition contains no running line numbers, subsequent citation of the play is by page number.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78 and 80.

new documentary evidence that seemingly confirms the School's historical existence. And, finally, Deborah Harkness's 2012 *Shadow of Night* describes the supernatural adventures of Diana Bishop and Matthew Clairmont, two scholars with ties to Oxford—who also happen to be a romantically entangled witch and vampire—as they time travel to Elizabethan London and interact with Marlowe and the other members of the School of Night.

To begin with, it is worth noting that the School of Night has achieved a representational fixity in contemporary fiction. All three of the novels under my consideration more or less agree on *what* the School was and *who* constituted its membership. As it is conceived in Wall's novel:

Other phrases had been used to describe them, including Robert Parsons' 'school of atheism,' but the [name] School of Night... conjured the danger, the secrecy, the notion of a truth so bright it must be shrouded in darkness. These were men with dangerous ideas. Some of them spent most of their lives in prison. Some of them died at the hands of the State. They were careful that the words they shared with one another were never made public.⁵⁵

In this account, 'at the centre of it all was the elusive Hariot', and 'Marlowe... was... a leading member' of the group, which also included Raleigh, Northumberland, Chapman, Roydon, Nashe and Lord Strange (183, 140). Bayard's novel—which posits the School of Night's members as having included Hariot, Marlowe, Raleigh, Northumberland, Chapman, Roydon and Warner—largely concords with this assessment:

From the start, the school's members understood the risks they ran. They met exclusively in private, exclusively at night. As far as we know, they kept no record of their conversations. They published none of their findings. Until Shakespeare gave them a name, they had none... They talked about things no one could talk about... They were this quiet little *knife* in the heart of Elizabethan orthodoxy.⁵⁶

And Harkness's work, presenting Hariot, Marlowe, Raleigh, Northumberland, Chapman and Roydon as coterie members, succinctly agrees that 'the School of Night held heretical opinions, sneered at the corrupt court of Queen Elizabeth, and scoffed at the

⁵⁵ Alan Wall, *School of Night: A Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), p. 74. Subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically.

⁵⁶ Louis Bayard, *The School of Night: A Novel* (London: John Murray, 2011), p. 21. Subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically.

intellectual pretensions of the church and university'. In short: "Mad, bad, and dangerous to know" described this group perfectly.⁵⁷

Even more germane to my larger argument than the above observation about the School of Night's semantic stability in contemporary fiction, however, is the fact that all three of these novels can be loosely categorised as academic fiction. Notably, these texts share significant structural and thematic similarities with a recent British subgenre described by Suzanne Keen as 'romances of the archive':

These stories of archival research...have scenes taking place in libraries or in other structures housing collections of papers and books; they feature the plot action of 'doing research' in documents. They designate a character or characters at least temporarily as archival researchers, as questers in the archive. They unabashedly interpret the past through its material traces; they build on a foundation of 'documentarism,' answering the postmodern critique of history with invented records full of hard facts.⁵⁸

In these contemporary fictionalisations of the School of Night, engagement with the supposed Elizabethan coterie is closely bound up with representations of academic enquiry. Given the School of Night's real-life status as a dubious scholarly hypothesis long plagued by a lack of corroborating material evidence, it is hardly unexpected to discover that these academic novels are all similarly motivated by the desire to imaginatively produce that necessary archival foundation for the coterie's historical existence that never materialised in real life. As I go on to demonstrate in the remainder of this section, each novel thus heavily features what Keen would call 'the plot action of "doing research"'. What is more, each text is appreciably haunted not only by the substance of the theory itself, but also by the legacy of its controversial history of acceptance and rejection in twentieth-century scholarship.

As Derrida's relevant historicisation of the archive at the outset of *Archive Fever* underscores, from antiquity onwards, the concept of the archive has always been inseparable—temporally, politically, physically—from the establishment and expression of authority, and it is clear that *School of Night* (2001), *The School of Night* (2011) and *Shadow of Night* (2012) all implicitly share in Derrida's conception of the archive as a propulsive system through which power is selectively generated and

⁵⁷ Deborah Harkness, *Shadow of Night* (London: Headline, 2012), p. 14. Subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically.

⁵⁸ Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 3.

exerted.⁵⁹ As such, these novels share a collective interest in representing the means by which diagnostic and expository dominance is achieved in the academic sphere. At the heart of each, we sense a concern with the historical process and an interest in the struggle for interpretative dominance—or what we might alternatively describe as the historian’s impulse to harness the power of the archive and thus to gain hermeneutic control of history. Each of these novels, in its own way, uses fictive depictions of academic research to broach broad and unresolved questions about the mechanics and, perhaps even more importantly, the social dimensions of scholarly authority.

If we turn to the first of my examples, *School of Night*, Wall’s novel clearly establishes a sense of the alleged School’s troubled significance in the history of twentieth-century scholarship from the start. The conspicuous role that the interpretation of textual or documentary evidence plays in the construction of historical narratives is highlighted even in the novel’s twinned pair of prefatory epigraphs:

The oddest thing about the School of Night is the irresolvable effect it produces in regard to memory and analysis, one not dissimilar to that of the synoptic gospels, and which might be described thus: how something so luminous in its brilliance, its sheer intensity of life, is in all crucial respects neither provable nor disprovable, but must remain a matter as much for faith as science.

Thomas Bridewell, *Raleigh’s Secret Circle* (1926)

The hue of dungeons, and the School of Night

William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*

As we soon learn, it is these two works, *Raleigh’s Secret Circle* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, which form the textual basis for Sean Tallow’s two decade, pseudo-scholarly obsession with the School of Night. Sean’s demise within the novel is presented as a tragedy both of unbridled overspecialisation and of amateur research conducted in a vacuum. As Sean recalls the years that he spent as an undergraduate studying history in Oxford, we sense that he was always drawn—and perhaps too drawn—to ‘that curious mixture of darkness and light which is the bridge between Elizabeth’s England and that of King James’ (71). The blinkered nature of Sean’s early, undergraduate forays into historical research is only further exacerbated by his chance discovery of a book written by one Thomas Bridewell in 1926. Sean’s unearthing of *Raleigh’s Secret Circle*—which serves as his first introduction to and primary resource on the School of Night—initiates

⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. pp. 1-5.

a further narrowing of his research scope, which comes to centre exclusively on this esoteric coterie. For those readers who have already remarked Bridewell's absence from my overview of the School of Night's academic rise and fall in the first section of this article, it will come as no surprise to discover that *Raleigh's Secret Circle* is a phantom authority (and a very cleverly constructed one, at that). This fictive work of scholarship has a certain aura of historical plausibility: it dates to precisely the era, post Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson, when hypotheses about the School of Night were on the ascendancy, and the quoted excerpts from the text included in *School of Night* suggest that, like all early proponents of the theory, the fantastical Bridewell had advanced an argument about the group that was dependent on a topical reading of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

That Bridewell's monograph and the theories it espouses may be the product of a former academic fad never occurs to Wall's amateur historical detective, who evinces no sense that his interests are out of step with contemporary trends or beliefs. Yet, as readers of the novel, we cannot help but note that Sean is explicitly an academic outsider: his ideas are rooted in musty, out-of-date scholarship, and his fascination with the School of Night is shown to be a source of exasperation for the novel's sole professional historian, his overly benign university tutor. Wall's Sean, in obsessively studying Bridewell's monograph and its implications, unknowingly retreads the same textual and argumentative ground as—and confronts the same weaknesses of the School of Night hypothesis that were debated by—real-life, early- and mid-twentieth century scholars. And yet, the same *lack* of authoritative, archival evidence for the School that irked critics such as Friedrich, Johnson, or Strathmann alternatively intrigues and inspires Sean, who sees in the School of Night a tantalising 'paradigm of historical knowledge, or rather as a paradigm of its absence, whenever you most need it'. It is thus that *Raleigh's Secret Circle* supplies Wall's protagonist with the 'puzzle' that he adopts as his 'life's assignment' (71-2). Believing he is 'uniquely situated to the task' of confirming the School's existence, Sean obsessively searches for documentary evidence that 'might confirm the speculations' of Bridewell's work, and the very nature of his mission underscores the archivally rooted nature of historical narrative (75).

At the outset of *School of Night*, it appears that Sean may well have found precisely the sort of confirmation that he has been seeking for the past twenty years, for Wall's novel opens with the protagonist's momentous theft of the Harriot Notebooks. Described as 'two buckram-covered volumes, only recently discovered, in an archive not long before acquired' that Sean pilfers from an unspecified university library, these manuscripts represent Harriot's 'testimony', now rescued from 'from four centuries of oblivion and obscurity'. Though, at first, the enciphered passages contained within the notebooks are

admittedly ‘as unintelligible’ to Sean ‘as they were to everyone else’, Wall’s resourceful protagonist quickly cracks Hariot’s code—or at least believes that he has—and finds the burden of proof that he has long been anticipating (3-5). Hariot’s notebooks not only appear to provide a second, non-Shakespearean mention of the School, complementing and corroborating the reference in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, but their ‘definitive lists’ of coterie members’ names also confirm the identities of those ‘Elizabethan illuminati...who wanted to know what kept the stars shining and the skies dark’ (20). In effect, the secrets revealed by the notebooks mean that those ‘things [Sean] knew to be true might now be proven’ (114). The only problem, of course, is that he is unable to publicise his discovery due to the dubious circumstances under which he acquired the evidence.

Unresolved problems of authority and legitimacy—both historical and narrative in nature—are deftly intertwined with depictions of academic research throughout *School of Night*. Sean’s reliability not only as a scholar, but also as a narrator is deliberately compromised for the novel’s audience in a number of significant ways. The palpable marginality of the academic theories to which Sean subscribes reflects his more general social and psychological marginality, and readers of Wall’s novel are encouraged to question the objectivity and credibility—even the very lucidity—of this self-proclaimed ‘ochlophobist’ with ‘noctivagant’ tendencies (223). Are we, then, to believe our compromised narrator when he says he has cracked the code of Hariot’s notebooks? Or is the corroborating evidence for the School of Night that Sean alone finds encrypted there merely a figment of his imagination? In raising these questions, Wall’s novel leads us towards what is, perhaps, the inevitable postmodern conclusion: all attempts to definitively reconstruct the past or access non-subjective historical truths in *School of Night* are ultimately futile.

As in Wall’s earlier novel, in Bayard’s 2011 work of (nearly) the same name, concerns of legitimacy and reliability inform its fictional treatment of the School of Night. Playing on similar anxieties about the relationship of the archive to authority, Bayard’s *The School of Night* queries how the discovery, revision, omission, inclusion—and even forgery—of documentary evidence can be used by those in positions of hermeneutic power to establish or sway scholarly consensus. Adopting, as a central concern, the social and political dimensions of either upholding or challenging dominant historical narratives, Bayard’s work, like Wall’s, poses familiar yet troublesome questions about the capacity of historical, archivally based research to reveal unmitigated historical truth.

Like Sean Tallow, Dr Henry Cavendish, the protagonist of Bayard’s novel, is an academic outsider. Unlike Wall’s Sean, however, Henry has found himself on the

periphery of the scholarly world not because of a lack of formal training or a set of unusually obsessive interests, but rather because of a research faux pas that has permanently damaged his credibility. Once ‘a redoubtable Elizabethan scholar’ with a Raleigh specialism, Henry got off to an auspicious start in life (14). He recalls: ‘I was summa cum laude. I had my Ph.D. by twenty-six. Oriel freakin’ College invited me to read a paper. An American! Talking about Raleigh!’ (148). But things took a decided turn for the worse when Henry’s nascent research career was ‘derailed by an eighteenth-century dilettante’ (332) and ‘a Peruvian bibliophile-adventurer domiciled in the Caymans’ (56). After credulously purchasing (at a very steep price from a private collector) a manuscript that was being hawked as a previously unknown Raleigh poem, Henry suffered great public humiliation when this bogus manuscript was subsequently revealed to have been one of William Ireland’s eighteenth-century Shakespeare forgeries. By the time that we meet him at the novel’s start, he has been reduced to an unstable and impecunious life of adjuncting.

It is Alonzo Wax, Henry’s longstanding friend and a ‘nationally recognized... collector’ (36) who had accumulated ‘one of the most esteemed collections of Elizabethiana in the world’, rather than Henry himself who is the novel’s primary School of Night obsessive (44). Indeed, Henry was first introduced to the hypothesis by Alonzo when the two took in a student production of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* during their undergraduate days. Surprised to learn that Henry knew nothing of the ‘most secretive, the most brilliant—God, the most *daring*—of all Elizabethan societies’, Alonzo (citing Bradbrook and Tannenbaum as well as ‘Shakespeare’s goddamned plays’ as textual authorities) laid out for Henry the theory that *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is ‘nothing more than a satire of these great men and these pretensions’ penned by a ‘little northern upstart’ (20-1). The veracity of the School of Night hypothesis as outlined by Alonzo is seemingly confirmed by the dual structure of Bayard’s novel, which juxtaposes early modern chapters featuring Thomas Harriot with the contemporary chapters centred on Henry’s twenty-first century exploits. In one of *The School of Night*’s historically set chapters, Harriot and Raleigh watch a performance of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (in a distinct echo of the novel’s earlier scene in which young Alonzo and Henry see the same play), and the men are startled to find their own secret coterie being parodied onstage: ‘the stuff of their arguments, com[es] back to them in fragments, warped, scarcely to be recognized’ (68). Nonetheless, even if the historical existence of School of Night is thus verified for readers in the work’s Elizabethan chapters, *The School of Night*’s modern-day researcher Henry shares the same problem implicitly faced by Wall’s Sean: the factually oriented members of the contemporary academic community will require convincing evidence before they will generally accept the School of Night hypothesis.

At the beginning of *The School of Night*, as in Wall's earlier work, it appears that the protagonist may have gained access to a previously unknown, early modern manuscript that could serve as 'definitive proof that the School of Night existed'. This personal letter written by Raleigh, if authenticated, 'might form the springboard for...quite a *splendid* academic treatise'—a scholarly work that, in turn, could serve as Henry's 'entrée back into academia' (16-17). But, as in Wall's novel, this piece of documentary evidence corroborating the School of Night's existence ultimately remains unpublicised. Faced, once again, with a situation in which his personal and professional legitimacy is at stake, Henry is understandably wary. Will this document hold up to rigorous scrutiny? Knowing full well that verifiability is a necessary condition for scholarly acceptance, Henry is, simply put, uncertain if his evidence is good enough. All too aware that, like the 'Raleigh' poem that earlier upset his career, this newly discovered Raleigh letter might be another forgery, Henry leaves it—and academia—behind at the end of *The School of Night*: 'Once I'd decided, it was the easiest thing in the world to drop those two pieces of aged rag paper in a padded manila envelope and mail them, anonymously, to the Folger Shakespeare Library.' No longer associating himself with their ranks, he suggests that it is now up to 'the experts' to 'sort out the truth' (334). The audience of Bayard's *The School of Night*, having already seen the 'truth' of the coterie's existence established in the early modern chapters of the novel, is thus left to ponder the conspicuous disjunction that has emerged between what has been presented as historical fact and modern scholarship's all too limited capacity to recover the 'truth' of the past.

Harkness's 2012 *Shadow of Night*, the second instalment in her supernatural All Souls Trilogy, differs from the prior novels that I have been discussing in that it presents the School of Night's existence as both an historical fact *and* an accepted certainty in contemporary culture. Indeed, the authenticity of the School of Night is painstakingly confirmed in a variety of ways throughout her novels. Perhaps most obviously, the School's historicity is established when Harkness's protagonist, Dr Diana Bishop, uses her magical powers to time travel to early modern London. Subsequently finding herself in 'a hornet's nest of Elizabethan intrigue' (14), Diana is able to witness the famed School's 'verbal ripostes' firsthand (605). Discovering that her new husband, an Oxford geneticist and vampire, formerly used the alias Matthew Roydon, Diana unexpectedly finds herself wedded to 'the most shadowy figure associated with the mysterious School of Night' (13). Thus, the School of Night's certitude becomes fixed in *Shadow of Night* in part through the direct glimpses that the novel's readers are given of the coterie's lively activities.

Although the existential status of this early modern intellectual group remains unchallenged in *Shadow of Night*, Harkness's fictionalisation of the School of Night perceptibly engages with many of the same concerns about the establishment of historical fact that are so conspicuously highlighted in both Wall's *School of Night* and Bayard's *The School of Night*. In opposition to Wall's and Bayard's earlier novelistic treatments of the subject, within the storyworld of Harkness's All Souls Trilogy, the historical reality of the School of Night largely coincides with twenty-first century knowledge—both popular and academic—about this esoteric group. We see the School's acceptance within the world of the novel being carefully established, for example, through the pseudo-documentary reproduction of a newspaper article supposedly printed in the *The Times* on 30 June 2010, which breezily mentions the School of Night as though its existence were common knowledge (608-9).

Also of particular relevance is the air of scholarly canonicity with which the School of Night theory is imbued when it is referenced by Diana, who is—like Harkness herself—a professional historian of science. Serving as the trilogy's primary voice of authority on matters historical, Diana is unambiguously presented to readers as a trustworthy expert: she possesses an impressive academic pedigree, and her impeccable 'scholarly credentials' are elaborated in detail at the outset of *A Discovery of Witches*, the first novel in the series.⁶⁰ Indeed, the trajectory of Diana's charmed career might strike some real-life academics as hardly more likely than her identity as a non-human witch. After pursuing a doctorate in Oxford, this American specialist in early modern chemistry 'fought fiercely for a spot on the faculty at Yale, ... churned out two books, won a handful of prizes, and collected some research grants' before achieving tenure—all of which she managed to do before the age of thirty-three.⁶¹ No doubt, Harkness's trilogy strongly suggests, this precocious string of academic successes owes much to Diana's rigorous and responsible research methods. Despite her supernatural genetics, she has deliberately 'created a life that depended on reason and scholarly abilities' rather than magic. To this effect, she is aware that her 'findings [will] be published, substantiated with extensive analysis and footnotes, and presented to human colleagues, leaving no room for mysteries and no place in [her] work for what could only be known through a witch's sixth sense'.⁶² In Diana's view, 'scholars do one of two things when they discover information that doesn't fit with what they already know. Either they sweep it aside so it doesn't bring their cherished theories into question or they focus on it with laserlike intensity and try to get to the bottom of the mystery'.⁶³ Diana is implicitly one

⁶⁰ Harkness, *A Discovery of Witches* (London: Headline, 2011), p. 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

of those scholars of ‘laserlike intensity’ who objectively and empirically extracts impartial, verifiable truths from the messy mysteries of historical scholarship. Therefore, when our carefully established expert is shown to know (presumably from her prior research on related subjects) a number of details about the School of Night, the Elizabethan group is given an unmistakable air of mainstream academic credence. Though Diana does offhandedly note that ‘these days few scholars were interested in this group of intellectuals’, Harkness’s audience is given no further sense that the coterie itself might be seen by some of Diana’s colleagues as hypothetical rather than factual in nature, nor is there explicit discussion of the real-life scholarly controversy surrounding the School of Night.⁶⁴ Rather, within the storyworld of *Shadow of Night*, the sixteenth-century existence of the esoteric intellectual group becomes an historical certainty presumably corroborated by enough unelaborated textual and material evidence to have already passed Diana’s scholarly muster.

Renegotiating the Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection

The Derridean ghost story that I have been relaying is one that primarily concerns the discursive trajectories, generic transformations and cultural currency of a discredited scholarly idea through time. As such, my analysis to this point has centred on the critical fortunes of an hundred-year-old literary hypothesis. I have sought to illustrate that, however many times the School of Night has been declared lifeless, early modern scholarship has historically been—and continues to be—haunted by earlier scholars’ beliefs about this Elizabethan intellectual coterie’s historical existence. What is more, the spectre of this appealing (if now professionally marginalised) belief has migrated over time from its original locus within the exclusive domain of scholarly nonfiction; the School of Night is now an established presence in the storyworlds of contemporary academic fiction, where recent ‘romances of the archive’ have engaged with this theory almost as a form of shorthand to raise irresolvable questions about the nature of hermeneutic authority and to question what the archival assembly of aleatory fragments can tell us of the past. What I want to suggest in the closing section of this article, then, is that there is a second perceptible *type* of haunting at work in these materials. This is not simply the story of a tenacious theory that mutated and jumped genres, so to speak. Rather, it is also a story that illustrates how the authorial ghosts of Shakespeare and Marlowe continue to haunt and counter-haunt one another’s texts, both in academic scholarship and the popular imagination.

⁶⁴ Harkness, *Shadow of Night*, p. 44.

Born only about two months apart in 1564, Marlowe and Shakespeare share conspicuously congruent personal and professional profiles. Though their educational paths seem to have diverged in early adulthood, nonetheless, these two sons of tradesmen had both become established, London-based playwrights and poets by their mid-twenties. Their similar ages, backgrounds and early career trajectories, along with a handful of well-known similarities and echoes found within their respective works, has meant that the possible social associations between and mutual literary influences of these authors on one another have long been subjects of interest. Nonetheless, as Robert A. Logan evocatively puts it in *Shakespeare's Marlowe*, 'endeavors to make definite the lines of influence' between the two early modern authors 'have been seriously hampered by problems encountered in trying to fathom what is historically unknowable.' Resultantly, as Logan further observes, 'discussions of Marlowe's effect on Shakespeare, as well as Shakespeare's on Marlowe, have all too often blurred the line that separates fact from speculation'.⁶⁵ Sound familiar?

Though there is little historical evidence to support it, the idea that Shakespeare and Marlowe were particular rivals has been long held; the supposed competition between these men is given sustained academic treatment in works such as James Shapiro's 1991 *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare*. Furthermore, as David Bevington notes, 'an often-repeated truism about Marlowe is that he had already achieved more than his exact contemporary... and that if both had happened to die in 1593 the dramatist to whom we would pay greater attention today is Marlowe.'⁶⁶ This idea is exploited to great comic effect, for instance, in John Madden's 1998 *Shakespeare in Love*, where young Will is repeatedly and frustratingly overshadowed (yet also directly inspired by) by his more fashionable and prolific authorial rival. Given the longstanding fascination, both scholarly and popular, with the parallels and interconnections between these two men—or what we might alternatively conceive as the hauntings and counterhauntings of their spectres—it is perhaps only to be expected that in *School of Night* (2001), *The School of Night* (2011) and *Shadow of Night* (2012) fictive acts of research relating to the School of Night are used as a springboard for re-examining the Marlowe-Shakespeare relationship. Consistently contrasting Marlowe's literary precocity with Shakespeare's allegedly duller reputation in the early 1590s, all three of these novels play off of the idea that, in the early years of his career, Shakespeare was perceived as nothing more than an 'upstart crow' (*à la* Robert Greene's famed and oft-

⁶⁵ Robert A. Logan, *Shakespeare's Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 1.

⁶⁶ David Bevington, 'Christopher Marlowe: The Late Years', in *Placing the Plays of Christopher Marlowe: Fresh Cultural Contexts*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 209-22 (p. 209).

repeated comment from *A Groatworth of Wit*) while Marlowe contrastingly enjoyed his contemporaries' acclaim.

In Wall's *School of Night*, Sean's obsession with the Elizabethan School comes to intersect with what he calls the 'enduring question of authorship, the aristocratic claimants, the Shakespeare cryptogram' (49). Years of studying the matter lead this Marlovian conspiracist to conclusions that sound suspiciously like the thesis of Hoffman's *The Murder of the Man Who Was Shakespeare*:

I became more convinced that Marlowe had not in fact died that night in Deptford.... That...Walsingham had arranged for a drunken sailor of his height and build to be killed...and to be dressed in Kit's clothes. A local inquest had been fixed and swiftly conducted. Promises had been made; money had changed hands.... This way Marlowe did not have to return to Star Chamber, and so did not have to talk of what happened in the School of Night.... He was spirited abroad, under a false name.... He went to live in the north of Italy, there to continue writing plays.... But there was a problem. If these astounding works were to be published, under whose name could that be done? Well, who better than another low-born theatrical character with gifts above his station, though nothing like Kit's, born in the same year, his father another leather worker, and with whom Kit had already collaborated, using the actor for his working theatrical knowledge while he provided all the intellectual substance? (231-2).

Once this theory that Shakespeare was 'Marlowe all along' has 'become defined, dogmatic' in his mind, Sean discovers 'more clues' in support of this hypothesis 'whenever [he] open[s] up the Collected Works' (252-3). And he finds—again, like Hoffman before him—the 'startling parallels' between the works respectively attributed to Marlowe and Shakespeare particularly persuasive (183).

Sean briefly believes his long-held suspicions about Marlowe's continental flight and assumed Shakespearean pseudonym have been archivally confirmed when he deciphers a passage from the stolen Hariot notebooks that reads: '*we spoke of the possibility of [Marlowe] disappearing; living elsewhere and otherwise; continuing his important work in secrecy*' (75). Nonetheless, Sean's cherished Marlovian authorship beliefs come crashing down around him at the end of the novel. A further deciphering of Hariot's encoded words leads to Sean's anagnorisis, or realisation that he is a 'fool' who has been 'pointing in the wrong direction' for most of his life. More specifically, Sean finds an entry in which Hariot mentions that Shakespeare—a man who formerly struck the members of the School of Night as 'no more than Marlowe's apprentice'—has

unexpectedly risen to great prominence in London. The School's constituency, according to Harriot's notebooks, has been wondering how it is possible that 'this man, given who he is, given who he isn't, gather[s] so much into his work'. Faced with a new scrap of freshly decoded textual evidence—evidence confirming the fact that Shakespeare was, indeed, esteemed by his contemporaries as an author of some repute—Sean jarringly realises that he has been misreading the playwright's works: 'All of the proofs I had found in Shakespeare's text had simply shown its inexhaustibility; how it could be interpreted in an infinity of ways... In paying so much attention to the words and the myriad of clues they might contain, I'd actually missed the plot' (289-91).

In Bayard's *The School of Night*, a newly discovered piece of documentary evidence again promises to shed new light on the contours of the Marlowe-Shakespeare relationship. In the Harriot-centred, historically set chapters of the work, we learn that the members of the School of Night once collaboratively produced a scandalous, atheistic poem—a piece they refer to as their 'dark treasure'—which they proceeded to incinerate almost as soon as it was written. At the time, only five men were present: 'Harriot, Raleigh, Northumberland, Marlowe... and a stranger', the latter initially identified only as 'Marlowe's latest acolyte, granted... a rare berth in the Academe's sanctum' (266-7). When an anonymously authored, 'appalling piece of dramaturgy' (i.e. *Selimus*) later makes its way into public circulation and is found to include the same damning poem composed and believed to have been destroyed by the School, 'the only possible suspect was the mild young man' (170) introduced into their midst by Marlowe—an unassuming character who had seemed 'green and easily cowed' at the time (67). At the novel's end, when our modern-day researcher Henry finally reads the Raleigh letter in its entirety, he discovers that its text does more than merely confirm the School of Night's historical existence. Rather, its contents have the potential to change the face of contemporary Shakespearean scholarship. The youthful 'stranger' who historically committed this act of literary betrayal against the School by publishing *Selimus* is revealed to be none other than Shakespeare himself, the poorly treated and insignificant seeming former lover of Marlowe. Henry realises that this fresh piece of documentary evidence has the potential not only to explain the derogatory portrait of the School of Night in *Love's Labour's Lost* but also to fill in details of the Bard's so-called 'Lost Years' and to confirm speculations about Shakespeare's sexual orientation by proving that Marlowe was more than 'just Shakespeare's colleague or rival or associate but his *intimate*'. If authenticated, the contents of this letter could 'give Shakespeare's career an entirely new trajectory: an arc of revenge' (329-30).

And, finally, Harkness's All Souls Trilogy again uses its extensive engagements with the School of Night as a starting point for re-reading Marlowe's relationship with

Shakespeare. Like Wall's novel, Harkness's work repeatedly draws our attention to the literary similarities between the two authors. Congruences between the men's textual output begin to be highlighted at the end of *A Discovery of Witches*, the first novel in the series, when Matthew shows Diana a book with 'black leather bindings' and 'simple silver borders'. Examining the volume more closely, Diana recognises it to be an authorial copy of *Doctor Faustus*, wherein she finds 'written in thick black ink on the first page, in a tight, spiky script of the late sixteenth century' the following lines: 'To my own sweet Matt... Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?' Saliently, Diana initially perceives this inscribed dedication to be a Shakespearean quotation, but Matthew corrects her, explaining that these lines were Marlowe's before they were Shakespeare's: in Act 3, scene 5 of *As You Like It*, Phebe is, after all, quoting *Hero and Leander*. As Matthew puts it, 'Will was something of a magpie when it came to collecting other people's words'.⁶⁷

From the beginning of *Shadow of Night*, Diana's personal interactions with Marlowe and the other Elizabethan members of the School of Night are coloured by her prior reading of Shakespearean text. This modern historian is hyperaware of 'what Shakespeare would soon say about this extraordinary group' in *Love's Labour's Lost* (33), even though, as Matthew reminds her, the text that would coin the coterie's name was yet to be written: 'Will dreams up the School of Night as a jab at Kit, but not for a few years yet' (14). Though Harkness's protagonist discovers in the 'mercurial' and (literally) demonic Marlowe a dangerous rival for her husband's affections, meanwhile, Shakespeare—rumoured to be an 'enterprising' (376) though 'impoverished scrivener from Stratford who trails after [Marlowe] in hopes of becoming a playwright'—is known for most of the novel only by second-hand report (230-1). It is not until after the masochistic, 'glass-half-empty daemon' Marlowe has met his demise in Deptford that the novel's readers finally catch a direct glimpse of the Bard (474). In *Shadow of Night*'s concluding chapter, Shakespeare confiscates a scrap of paper from one of Marlowe's former servants, a young girl who had been holding onto it 'for a remembrance'. A complex and highly intertextual literary in-joke emerges as Shakespeare reads the 'last words of Christopher Marlowe' aloud:

Black is the badge of true love lost.
The hue of daemons,
And the Shadow of Night.

⁶⁷ Harkness, *A Discovery*, 675.

This supposed literary ‘magpie’ muses to himself: ‘Shadow of Night. It was a limp, predictable ending to the verses—the kind that George Chapman would fall upon for lack of something more original’. Nonetheless, Shakespeare, too, takes inspiration from these lines, using ‘the alchemy of his talent’ to transform them into something ‘no longer recognizable as Marlowe’s work’:

Black is the badge of hell
The hue of dungeons and the school of night. (627-9)

What is more, after glancing once more at Marlowe’s phrase ‘true love lost’, Shakespeare jots down in his own notes the title ‘*Love’s Labour’s Lost*’. Thus, Marlowe’s ghost becomes a posthumous Shakespearean collaborator, serving as the literary as well as the topical source of inspiration for the School of Night reference in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (630).

If we stop, in closing, to ask *why* the payoff of engaging with the School of Night hypothesis is so remarkably similar in *School of Night* (2001), *The School of Night* (2011) and *Shadow of Night* (2012)—with the same spectral academic theory ultimately being used as a means to re-evaluate not only the mechanics of scholarly authority, but also the ambiguous contours of the Marlowe-Shakespeare relationship—this question brings us full circle. It is certainly true, on the one hand, that the interpenetrating concerns of truth, history, factuality and credibility that inform these recent novelistic engagements with a discarded academic theory are concerns that similarly colour the ongoing contemporary speculation about the influences and associations between Elizabethan England’s two best-known playwrights. And it is also clear that the promise of new insight into the Marlowe-Shakespeare relationship is being used in these novels (and perhaps in popular culture more generally) to model the potential power of historical revisionism. But it would seem that there is more at stake here than mere theoretical parallelism, the attraction of these particular novelists to archivally unsubstantiated scholarly beliefs, or the revisionist impulse at work. The desire to read Marlowe into Shakespeare and Shakespeare into Marlowe—like the compulsion to locate authority in the archives—is a powerful one. The School of Night theory, after all, had its first origins in Acheson’s argument about *Chapman* and Shakespeare, and yet, over time, Marlowe (a different ‘rival poet’ altogether) insinuated his way in. As the theory of the School of Night was expanded and developed over the course of the twentieth century, the figure of Marlowe increasingly took on more and more of a starring role in the alleged intellectual coterie’s activities. And just as Marlowe’s presence came to definitively haunt an increasingly untenable theory about the topical references in a Shakespearean play, so too can we sense a reciprocal counter-haunting at

work in contemporary fictive reimaginings of the School of Night, wherein the young 'upstart' Shakespeare rises to cast his own long shadow over Marlowe's corpus. 'Marlowe and Shakespeare, Shakespeare and Marlowe', as Sean muses in Wall's *School of Night*, 'it's hard to disentangle Shakespeare's early work from Marlowe's hand' (139).