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A Dead Man In Deptford

Anthony Burgess

Anthony Burgess
A DEAD MAN
IN DEPTFORD



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To Sam Wanamaker (and family) as a
tribute to his courage in bringing back
from the dead a playhouse that
Marlowe never knew

A DEAD MAN IN DEPTFORD

Born in Manchester in 1917, Anthony Burgess was educated at the Xaverian College in that city and at Manchester University, from which he held a doctorate. He served in the army from 1940 to 1956, and as a colonial education officer in Malaya and Borneo from 1954 to 1960, in which year, his brief but irreversible unemployability having been decreed by a medical death sentence, he decided to try to live by writing - and his output comprises over fifty books. He was a Visiting Fellow of Princeton University and a Distinguished Professor of City College, New York. He was created a Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres by the French President and a Commandeur de Merite Culturel by Prince Rainier of Monaco. Anthony Burgess died in November 1993.

BY ANTHONY BURGESS

NOVELS

*The Long Day Wanes:
Time for a Tiger
The Enemy in the Blanket
Beds in the East
The Right to an Answer
The Doctor Is Sick
The Worm and the Ring
Devil of a State
One Hand Clapping
A Clockwork Orange
The Wanting Seed
Honey for the Bears
Inside Mr Enderby
The Eve of Saint Venus
The Vision of Battlements
Tremor of Intent
Enderby Outside
MF
Napoleon Symphony
The Clockwork Testament; or Enderby's End
Beard's Roman Women
Abba Abba
Man of Nazareth
1985
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The End of the World News
Enderby's Dark Lady
The Kingdom of the Wicked
The Pianoplayers*

Any Old Iron
The Devil's Mode (short stories)
Mozart and the Wolf Gang
A Dead Man In Deptford

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Little Wilson and Big God
You've Had Your Time

FOR CHILDREN

A Long Trip to Teatime
The Land Where the Ice Cream Grows

THEATRE

Oberon Old and New
Blooms of Dublin

VERSE

Moses

NON FICTION

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They Wrote in English (in Italy Only)
Language Made Plain
Here Comes Everybody: An Introduction to James Joyce for the Ordinary Reader
The Novel Now: A Student's Guide to Contemporary Fiction
Urgent Copy: Literary Studies
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Joysprick: An Introduction to the Language of James Joyce
New York
Hemingway and His World

On Going to Bed
This Man and Music
Homage to Quert Yuiop
A Mouthful of Air

TRANSLATION

The New Aristocrats
The Olive Trees of Justice
The Man Who Robbed Poor Boxes
Cyrano de Bergerac
Oedipus the King

EDITOR

A Shorter Finnegans Wake

‘He is one of the most productive, imaginative and risk-taking of writers. His specialist interest in language, literature and music has furnished him with an encyclopaedic range of references... Burgess lifts all the central players out of history and gives them personalities, motives and idiosyncrasies. His characters roam through a London which is still country. Street executions, rotting animals, sewage, smells, heretical conversations are called upon to create Burgess’s version of Elizabeth’s England. It is a clever, sexually explicit, fast-moving, full-blooded, haphazard yarn ... But most important of all is the rare spectacle of a writer displaying such enthusiastic virtuosity in one of his best performances nearing the end of a long and busy career’

Eileen Battersby, *Irish Times*

‘Burgess scores a triumphant success. He has managed to find a mode of speech which seems natural, which is not the colloquial speech of today, but doesn’t seem archaic either. That is to say, he has solved the central problem of the historical novel: how to make the characters speak. Two final thoughts: I have for some time thought of writing a novel myself with Marlowe as the central character. Burgess has done for that. Second, the vitality and exuberance of that book are astonishing. They seem to belong to a young writer rather than a veteran. His Kit Marlowe is a triumph: “Is it not passing fair to be a king/And ride in triumph through Persepolis?” Absolutely’

Allan Massie, *Scotsman*

A Dead Man In Deptford is Anthony Burgess’s best book for a long time. It is a companion piece to his 1964 novel on the life and loves of Shakespeare, *Nothing Like The Sun*,

and has the same freshness, energy and linguistic gaiety. In the later book, however, the style is more adventurous and demanding, a wonderfully dense and inventive mock-Elizabethan that bobs along on a ceaseless ripple of wordplay. Burgess's life-long love affair with the English language finds its consummation here in a rich and moving work of art'

John Banville, *Observer*

'*A Dead Man In Deptford* is the work of a lifetime - no opportunistic jumping on an anniversary bandwagon that is already filled to overbalancing, but the fruit of an imaginative involvement with another writer's work which has spanned more than half a century. Moreover, the facts and apocrypha of the Marlowe case echo Burgess's fictional pre-occupations so clearly that the novel, which feigns to be an account of Marlowe's career by a minor Elizabethan actor, amounts to a thickly textured reprise of Burgess's own favoured themes... the tale is strong and Burgess's authorial relish renders even his recondite moments splendidly readable... it is the best kind of literary compliment and casts as much glory on its author as on its dead recipient'

Kevin Jackson, *Independent*

'It is the rendering of this life that is Burgess's particular triumph. The facts can be found in academic books, but the novelist must also give us the smells and sounds. This is a story of poetry and talk, politics and ideas, but also of the scaffold and the thumbscrew, and these aspects are rightly almost overwhelmed by the oppressive realities of Elizabethan daily life, the omnipresent filth and the pefumes that disguised it, the spiced food, the intoxications of liquor and tobacco. Burgess pungently evokes a contrast which was more real to the Elizabethans than to any

previous age, between the man-made landscape of the city and the man-made landscape of the countryside... This novel is a major achievement, comic, terrifying, and very moving'

Sean French, *The Times*

PART ONE

YOU must and will suppose (fair or foul reader, but where's the difference?) that I suppose a heap of happenings that I had no eye to eye knowledge of or concerning. What though a man supposes is oft (often if you will) of the right and very substance of his seeing. There was a philosopher who spoke of the cat that mews to be let out and then mews to be let in again. In the interim, does it exist? There is in us all the solipsist tendency which is a simulacrum of the sustentive power of the Almighty, namely what we hold in the eye exists, remove the eye or let it be removed therefrom and there is disintegration total if temporary. But of the time of the cat's absence a man may also rightly suppose that it is fully and corporeally in the world down to its last whisker. And so let it be with my cat or Kit. I must suppose that what I suppose of his doings behind the back of my viewings is of the nature of a stout link in the chain of his being, lost to my seeing, not palpable but of necessity existent. I know little. I was but a small actor and smaller play-botcher who observed him intermittently though indeed knew him in a very palpable sense (the Holy Bible speaks or speaketh of such unlawful knowing), that is to say on the margent of his life, though time is proving that dim eyes and dimmer wits confounded the periphery with the centre.

I see, reading the above above the rim of my raised alemug, that I am in danger of falling into the dangerous orbit of the playman Jack Marston and being betrayed into use of the most reprehensible inkhornisms. It may well be that plain English cannot encompass a life so various, tortured and contradictory. And yet it was Marston who in his innocence called him Kind Kit. He did not know him.

Words were moreover to him more than human reality. It was surely wrong of him to emend the verse about shallow rivers to whose falls melodious birds sing madrigals to his gallimaufry of Cantant avians do vie with mellous fluminosity. And not in jest neither. There is a limit to all things.

Cat or Kit I said, and indeed about Kit there was something of the cat. He blinked his green eyes much and evaded, as cats will, the straight gaze either from fear of fearful aggression or of some shame of one order or another. Even in the carnal act the eyes were not engaged, at least not often, and it may well be that the sodomitical seek to avoid ocular discourse as speaking too much of the (albeit temporary) union of hearts. Of Kit's heart I must be unsure and can but suppose, or so I suppose. Of his feline face I may add that the nose was wide of nostril and chill and moist. The underlip however was burning and thrustful. On the overlip, which was long and Kentish, it was a matter more of whiskers than of true mustachio, the beard scant also, and it may be said that he never grew to hirsute manhood. The hair of his head was an abundant harvest, though not of corn. Let me speak rather of hayricks burning. In dry weather that augured thunder it would grow horrent. Of his bared body I observed but little hair, the mane thin above the fairsized thursday. The flesh was smooth, the shape fair, the belly flat. It is, as I can personally avouch, untrue that he bore a supernumerary nipple.

He ate little but drank much and vomited proportionally. He was given, when Sir Walter Stink, the Lord of Uppawaoc, brought the herb into fashion, to the rank tobacco of Barbados and filthy pipes that whistled and bubbled with brown juice. Sometimes, when he was pipeless, he smoked the cured leaves wrapped in a great outer leaf, but this opened and flowered and flared and he

would cast it floorwards cursing. At first as at last he was a fair curser and ingenious in his blasphemies, as for example (God and the reader forgive me and the licensers of print, if this should attain print, avert their eyes in Kit's own manner; after all I do but report as to posterity's own Privy Council, this is not my mouth but his) by the stinking urine of John the Baptist, by the sour scant milk of God's putative mother the Jewish whore, by St Joseph's absent left ballock, by the sore buggered arses of the twelve apostles, by the abundant spending of the stiff prick of Christ crucified, and the like. I omit to mention his height, which was no more than five foot five inches. This is not to be considered pertinent to the cursing.

Well then, let us have him at Cambridge, an undergraduate of the college of Corpus Christi, in his drab trunks, patched doublet, hose blobbed with darning, humilous scholar's gown, committed, by the nature of his Parker scholarship, to the tedious study of theology and the eventual taking of orders. His companions in the room for study he shares are all parsons' sons and so mindlessly devout that they invite such blasphemy as I above instance. So that Mr Theo Fawkes of the wry neck says: I cannot. I know I will fail. But how will you have your dialogues, reader? I will follow the foreign fashion and indent and lineate. So Mr Theo Fawkes of the wry neck and for good measure pustular says:

— I cannot. I know I will fail. So Kit replies:

— That is the sin of despair, one of the two against the Holy Ghost, hence unforgivable. And young Mr Fawkes:

— Well, perhaps God will grant one so ready for his holy work the benison of a pass, however meagre. And Kit:

— That is the sin of presumption, the other against his or her or its ghostliness and equally unforgivable. Mr Jno Battersby looks on Kit with wide eyes, though the left one does not keep exact direction with its fellow, saying:

— I protest at your invoking pure papist sins since we have done with them. And Kit:

— Yes, we found our faith upon protest. We protest against, not in holy fervour cry out for. Against the Pope in Rome and auricular confession and the sacred cannibalism of the mass. I protest against protest.

— That means you must veer back to what is proscribed, says Mr Robert Whewell, son of a rural dean, scratching an armpit. Have a care. Kit says:

— I am what Harry Eight, may devils ceaselessly prod his gross belly, I am what he and his mumbling ministers, may their fiery farts be bottled and uncorked on Unholy Shatterday, I am what we have been made. And all for a black-haired whore he had put in pod.

— It is not of great pertinence, says Whewell. What is of import is that we have the Holy Word restored to us direct, not to be filtered through the addled brains of the foul tribe of priests.

— And what is this Holy Word? sneers Kit. Addled prophecies and a God that loves the smell of roast meat and even, in its lack, of the raw blood of massacres. He makes light first and then the sun after. This sun is made to stand still by Joshua when, as all know, it was standing still already. And young Fawkes says:

— For all I care you may blaspheme against the Old that the New supersedeth. Blaspheme against the New and we will have you.

— Oh, the New is good in that it has wiped out the vindictive God of the Jews, though he is vindictive enough on Good Friday. But there are things that be unholy enough if we douse our protestant hypocrisy. Thus, the Archangel Gabriel is no more than a bawd for the lustful Holy Ghost. And Christ used his beloved disciple John in the manner of Sodom and Gomorrah. Will you now have me burned? It will relieve the tedium of your studies.

— Mr Kett shall be told.

— Mr Kett is not here to be told. Mr Kett was gently delivered into the arms of his parents, who came up from Exeter for the purpose. This was yesterday.

— No.

— Ah yes.

Ah yes in truth. Francis Kett, Kit's tutor in theology, had been sequestered for some weeks and his cats had been let loose on the streets. Of these he had had many, but twelve in particular that he called his Apostles and named for them. Kit had now the stink of those cats in his nostrils still. He had sat often enough in Mr Kett's study, the cats playing ambushes with musty folios all over the filthy floor. And Kett, the last time, smiling in a manner of manic eagerness, had said:

— All that is written may be subjected to the anatomising knife of the sincere enquirer. Holy Writ included. We need no book to tell us of God's existence nor convince us of the necessity of his taking on mortal flesh for our sins.

A cat on Kett's knee had purred at him as in approbation. Kett had said:

— Not that Christ is God as yet. No, not God but God *in potentia*, a mere good man that must suffer not once but many times for the world's iniquities. He will have his ultimate resurrection and then he will be God.

— Have you delivered this heresy at high table?

— Ah no. We must observe discretion. Machiavelli says that we must conform and show the world what we are not.

— That is for men of power only.

— What is great men's power to God's power? And Kett had inclined closer, the frowstiness of cat on his clothing bidding Kit close his nose holes. God has placed Jesus Christ in Judaea, together with his disciples, it is the

gathering of his Church. We must all go in good time to Jerusalem to be fed on angel's food.

He frowned at a black cat that boldly relieved itself on a Jerome Bible on the floor in a corner. He pointed a shaking finger at it and said:

— That one, see, is Judas. Yes yes, we must go. Costly but needful. How much money do you have?

— None. A poor scholar and a cobbler's son.

— Well, I will go help prepare the way. I will walk thither and I will beg. Kneel with me now among these creatures made by God on the tenth day of Creation and let us pray for the realm's purgation, lustration, salvation. Kneel.

— I am not here to kneel.

— You are not? Kett spoke mildly with mild interest, his face thrusting into Kit's. You are not here to kneel?

— There is a time and place for kneeling.

Kett of a sudden boiled and cried aloud:

— Kneel kneel kneel damn you kneel. You are to be blasted, sir. I know of your sins. And he trembled, a struggling cat in his arms.

Did he know of his sins? Was that a sin that the Greeks approved, that was practised by holy Socrates? Kit said now to his fellow students:

— Clearly out of his wits. No longer as he had been, intermittently in his senses. Religion can do this to a man, nay to a whole nation can it. See, look, there is sport outside.

And indeed through their bottle-glass window they could see a sort of riot beginning to proceed outside the tavern opposite, the Eagle. Undergraduates, their gowns aswing, were kicking a man into the mud. There was much mud after long summer rain. Wonder of wonders, the Vice-Chancellor of the University stood afar looking, ordering no quelling of the riot.

— We'll join, Kit said. It has happened at last.

— What has?

— You're deaf to all except God's doubtful Word. This has been coming. Walter Raleigh got the farm of wines. That means the right to license whatever vintners he chooses and collect one pound a year from each one in the country. The Queen gave him this right, but the Queen's writ does not run here. That is why there is no interference. The fists of the students are doing the Vice-Chancellor's work.

— It is not godly to stick a man's face in the mud.

— Ah come.

Down there in the street the man enmudded was permitted to rise from his cursing misery only to be thudded down again. His wife at the tavern door howled. A man called from an upper window of the tavern:

— Sir Walter shall know of this. I am Sir Walter's agent. You hear? There shall be writs. This is rampant breaking of the law.

Kit saw flushed glee on raw student faces. They had done with the tavern-keeper, they would now have at his wife. But she slammed the door, giving her dripping dirty husband no chance to enter. He ran dripping down the street. He would turn at its end and make his way in by a rear door. It was all over, save for the crying of the man at the window. An official call of Arrest him from afar was translated into student stone-throwing. The man withdrew and fastened the casement. A gentleman by Kit, finely dressed and in a red cloak, whined:

— See, there is mud over me. This is filth.

— You take your chance, sir, Kit said. But the mud will scrape off. Though it must dry first.

— I cannot ride on to Newmarket like this.

— You had done better not to dismount, sir.

— It is on my face too. I must wash. Where can I wash? As for my horse, it is at the farrier's, a matter of a loose

shoe.

— If you would deign to honour the humble lodging of a student, I can bring water in a bowl and find a tough brush for the brushing.

— I must be in Newmarket by nightfall.

— Night falls late this season. This way.

The bedchamber Kit shared with young Ridley, at that time lovesick and gathering flowers by the Cam, was very bare. His visitor, cloakless now and displaying a slit doublet, black velvet over, gold silk under, also a collar of cobweb lawn, nodded at what he saw, saying:

— Very bare. It was the same at Bologna. I took my degree there. I.V.

— Ivy?

— I.V. *Iuris Vtriumque*. Proficient in either law, civil, canon. Thomas Watsonus I.V. studiosus. And you?

— Christopher. The other name is unsure. Marlin, Merlin, Marley, Morley. Marlowe will do. Wait. Thomas Watson. They were showing around Sophocles done into Latin. The *Antigone*. Are you the same Thomas Watson?

— My *Antigone* was a mere boast. I prefer to be known for my *Passionate Century of Love*.

— An honour, Kit said, though he did not know the work. I would send out for wine if I had money. A poor student of divinity, no more.

Watson dug a shilling from his purse. Kit yelled for Tom. Watson started. But Tom was no uncommon name. The Tom that entered was a boy, tousled and with an incisor missing, bare feet filthy, in cast-off trunks and jerkin too large. Kit told him to bring sherris and be quick. Watson took from Kit's table a scrawled sheet. He read aloud:

*What armes and shoulders did I touch and see,
How apt her breasts were to be prest by me?
How smooth a belly under her wast saw I?
How large a legge, and what a lustie thigh?*

*To leaue the rest, all lik'd me passing well,
I cling'd her naked body, downe she fell.
Iudge you the rest: being tirde she bad me kisse,
Ioue send me more such after-noones as this.*

Ovid, he said. Fifth Elegy of Book One.

— Correct. And not fitting for a divinity student.

— I like the *breasts prest*. A rhyme confirming that there are two of them. You are a lover of breasts?

— The swinging udders I was nursed at? I am given otherwise but here I am but the English voice of Ovid.

— Otherwise? I see. The slim flanks of a boy. The choristers of the King's Chapel are known, I believe, for their delectability and amenability. Ability, in a word, to arouse.

— I am of Canterbury. I was briefly in the cathedral choir. I learned early what men could do with boys.

— Here you have your own ragged catamite?

— Not young Tom. Young Tom is sacred. I take it you are not that way inclined.

— I follow nature up to the point where nature says *breed*. There is something absurd about grown men rubbing their beards together and untrussing. Something pathetic but appealing about the traffic of man and boy. There is much of it in the theatre. This line of yours, where is it, yes - *Ioue* send me more such after-noones as this - it seems to me for some reason to be a theatre line. I hear it on the stage. You know plays?

— In Canterbury we had visits from the Queen's Men. Dick Tarleton and his *Seven Deadly Sins*. The Earl of Surrey's troupe came to regale us here. We were not impressed.

— And you propose for yourself life in a country vicarage?

Kit looked at him. Watson was some ten years older than himself, fixed, he could see, in a world where country vicarages were a shuddering nightmare, sole end of men from the universities whose talents lay not in advancement in the secular fields. They must all come to it unless.

— Unless, Kit said, fortune my foe becomes my friend. What is there? My ambition, you may have guessed, lies in poetry, but no man can live on it. Patrons are hard to find. The stage? I have not thought of the stage.

— It diverts both the washed and unwashed. I shrug but I work at play-botching. They talk of Tom Watson's jests. In balductum plays. You know the word?

— Trashy, tawdry. Groundling stuff.

— You know of groundlings, then. Shillings slide into my purse and shillings, by mean alchemy, turn to gold. But my *Passionate Century* sold well. You must come to London.

— To do what?

Young Tom brought, panting, the sherris from the buttery in a crock. He dealt copper change. Watson lordily bade him keep it. Kit unhooked two battered college tankards from the wall. He poured. They drank, toasting what they did not know.

— To prepare your advancement. But you must first dissemble your distaste at your prospects. You have a father in orders who sent you here to sustain a family line of comfortable clerisy?

— My father makes shoes. I came on a scholarship from the King's School, holy orders being the one end in view. Your lips twitch at the shoe-making.

They were meaty lips under a Turkish nose. The black eyes caught the summer afternoon light and dealt it at Kit more in compassion than merriment.

— Who would laugh at shoes? We shall go on needing shoes until our feet are permitted to tread the golden street or dance on hot bricks. The trade is noble enough.

Dissemble and take your degree. Be a master of arts, without that you are nothing. But you have the long vacation coming. You propose returning to Canterbury? Come to London. Stay at my house. In the Liberty of Norton Folgate.

— Liberty?

— It is in London and yet not in it. Outside the jurisdiction of the City officers. I am at the corner of Bishopsgate Street and Hog Lane. Close to the Theatre in the Liberty of Holywell. You shall see the Theatre. Also the Curtain. More important, you shall see Sir Francis Walsingham.

— Walsingham. A holy name. And what is he?

— Universities forbid universal knowledge. You are cut off. You know nothing of the Service?

— Tell me. See, the mud is dried. It will soon come away.

— I will tell you of Sir Francis, Frank as I call him. We met in Paris. I was seventeen, studying if it could be called that. He was England's ambassador. He was kind without condescension. He corrected my Latin verses, listened to the songs I wrote. It was perhaps a relief for him in the midst of such troublesome business St Bartholomew was preparing. You know surely of the massacre? The mob screaming for the blood of the Huguenots. Two thousand Huguenot corpses on the Paris streets.

— We all know of this. See, it is as if there had never been mud. I will pour more.

— Listen. The Queen has never been willing to see how the faith of the Huguenots is England's faith, or near to it. She sent a baptismal font, all gold, worth all of a hundred thousand, when the French king's daughter was born. She stood as godmother, imagine. The font was taken by Huguenot pirates in the Channel. Friendly with a France that murders Protestants. She calls it diplomacy.

— Which means double-dealing. Go on.

— Sir Francis is no double man. Perhaps it is easier for a woman to deal double, in state affairs as in the amorous life. They are all Eve's daughters, treacherous by nature. However, Sir Francis runs his service mostly from his own purse. This is love of country at its most shining and laudable. He knows the Catholic threat.

— And not the Puritan one?

— Pooh, that is nothing. There is no Puritan candidate for the throne. But there is a Catholic one, and she is the daughter-in-law of the Medici bitch who has all the French power. I weary you.

— No, you do not. But I must consider myself unworthy to receive confidences about affairs of high state import.

— Pish, all the world knows them. Sir Francis needs spies. There is money in spying. There, that is something new for you.

— You wish to turn me into a spy?

— I wish nothing. I tell you only a way of advancement. I shall be in London during the summer. You know where I am.

— I shall note it on the verso of this Englished Ovid. There, you may dress again, as immaculate as before you were maculated.

— Do not try your pretty word-play with Frank Walsingham. He is a plain man. Well then, we shall meet. I thank you for your hospitality.

— It was all yours. The wine, I mean. A cup for the stirrup.

He poured. They drank, and Watson spat the lees from his lips: pt pt. He took Kit by the shoulders and seemed about to lift him to tell his weight.

— To my mother in Newmarket, then. Master - what is it - Merlin? Marlin?

— Marlowe will do. Or Marley. Marl is clay and lime, my name's lowly constant. I will be in London.

Kit had copied from the manuscript of Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, then in circulation in Cambridge, these words: Nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as divers poets have done. Her world is brazen; the poets only deliver a golden. Kit thought: I am a poet, I must not be lowly. London must not terrify me. If I see London. As he stood with his eyes beyond the world (brazen), his roomfellow young Barnabas Ridley came in, a different dream in his own eyes. He said:

— Ah, she is cream and strawberries. Such a straight leg.

— Which you saw entire?

— Handled. In the hay of the barn I covered her with flowers.

— Enough. There is a party of us going swimming in the river. You will come?

— That is forbidden. Nakedness. A whipping in the college hall by the Proctor. I beg you not to.

— Grantchester. There we shall not be seen. Cleanse from your body the sweat of the fornicator. I can smell it from here.

— I do not fornicate. I am in love.

As the summer moon came up Kit splashed and swam with George Taplow, Jack Fothergill, Abraham Curlew and small nameless boys of the village who loved the water games but ran home to their mothers when the play took a different turn. There. Now. Have at thee. Ease of the body, turn and turn about. Under the elms by the water's margent. Naked. Altogether too animal, save that animals did not. The work of breeding too urgent and life too short. Love? Mind and mind? It did not apply.

So, then, I suppose it to have been. I saw Kit for the first time in London at Burbage's theatre, named aptly the

Theatre, when I played Bel-Imperia in *The Spanish Tragedy*. He was on a stage stool, next to Watson, much taken by Ned Alleyn, younger than he by a year but altogether the quavering ancient as Hieronimo, Marshal of Spain:

*What outcries plucke me from my naked bed
And chille my throbbing heart with trembling
feare,
Which neuer daunger yet could daunt before?
But stay what murdrous spectacle is this?
A manne hang'd up and all the murdrers gone!
And in my boure to laye the guilt on me!
This place was made for pleasure not for death.
These garments that he weares I oft haue seene.
Alas it is Horatio my sweete son,
O no but he that whilom was my son.*

— He would not say that, said Kit. This was after, in the tiring room. I was unwigging myself, wiping off the white from my chubby boy's face, easing myself out of bodice and fardingale. Kit saw me an instant in a boy's nakedness and seemed to glow. The tiring room the afternoon sun had baked was a cram of players, Dawson, Hawkes, Crampson, Digges, Birkin, Timmes, the rest, transformed now from Portugal and Spain their notabilities into men and boys of the street, cursing at their thirst, thumping each other over tripped entrances, slowness on cues, a stutter, a finger-snapping momentary forgetting of a phrase put right by Haddock the bookholder. Tom Kyd, whose play it was, was there, a timid little man with bowed legs though not timid in defence of his work. He said:

— The distracted brain can oft turn to a kind of logic which we see as mad, absurd also, but the absurd can be a face of the tragic. This Seneca knew. This I know. You are one of these university puppies that think they know better.

— Cambridge has taught me Seneca. Puppy I may be, but I am right to whimper at that *whilom*:

— *Whilom* is very good, Ned Alleyn said. It is old-fangled but so is the speaker. There is nothing wrong with *whilom*.

— I defer, Kit said. I was moved. My back hairs bristled. I sweated. It was hardly to be believed.

And Ned Alleyn, removing from his young and blank face the paint of lined age, smirked, a creature of null person as of null features, the condition of his art, the empty vessel to be filled with what the poet brewed, what there was of him so to say with the buskins off was a nullity that nonetheless gave off a manner of heat. He said in a voice as of song, wiping:

— The skill is long to learn. Meaning he had been at it some five or six years, starting like myself as a bound prentice to his company. Long, yes, it seemed long. And then: We will go drink. Then Smigg the door-gatherer came in swinging his leathern bag, so Alleyn asked what was the take.

— Two pounds thirteen and some odd bad coins.

— Ruination, said James Burbage, who owned the Theatre and the Curtain and whose son Richard had his own ambitions, the chief of which was not to be an arm-swinging actor like Alleyn. Dick Burbage, who had carried a pike, said:

— The ruination will not come from low takings. We shall be closed. An officer I know to be of the Lord Mayor was looking in for another prentice riot.

— They were quiet today. Besides, we are in Middlesex, not London. The Mayor's men may keep their long noses out.

— London prentices, London laws. And Dick Burbage shook his head. It is all a shaky business.

The Unicorn on Bishopsgate Street had as landlord Ned Alleyn's elder brother Jack. Kit and Watson, Alleyn, Kyd and