# Born With Teeth reimagines Elizabethan rivalry and queer bonds between Marlowe and Shakespeare



In an energetic and provocative reimagining of Elizabethan history, Liz Duffy Adams’ new chamber play *Born With Teeth* brings to life a fictional encounter between two of the era’s towering literary figures—Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. Staged at Wyndham’s Theatre in London’s West End since August 2025, the production imagines the playwrights collaborating on *Henry VI Part I* between 1591 and 1593, a period charged with political tension and surveillance. Directed by Daniel Evans, the play embarks on a daring exploration of rivalry, creative synergy, and the complex erotic and emotional dynamics between these iconic men.

The narrative digs into historians’ suspicions that Marlowe and Shakespeare’s lives—and perhaps even Marlowe’s violent death—were more closely linked than traditionally believed. Edward Bluemel embodies a watchful and evolving Shakespeare, initially subdued and overshadowed, who gradually asserts his rising reputation and wrestles with his feelings for his volatile counterpart. Opposite him, Ncuti Gatwa commands the stage with a charismatic and uninhibited portrayal of Marlowe, draped in a striking leather two-piece costume and exuding both restless desire and tender apprehension. As their relationship oscillates between competition and intimacy, the play illuminates a queer subtext that deepens the historical narrative, emphasising themes of creative collaboration set against a backdrop of oppression and danger.

While *Born With Teeth* delivers muscular performances and sharp dialogue infused with humour and intensity, the staging offers a more constrained setting. The play is contained within a sparse chamber constructed with three walls of blinder lights that serve as a cage, a wooden table acting as a stage, bed, and barrier. This minimalist design, coupled with moments where Shakespeare breaks the fourth wall to address the audience directly, diffuses some of the play’s built-up tension in the claustrophobic environment, leaving a desire for a more sustained dramatic bite. Nonetheless, bursts of violence and fierce verbal sparring punctuate the dialogue, reflecting the precarious nature of life and art under Elizabethan royal espionage, as well as the profound urgency in the men’s quest for legacy and survival.

Critics have praised the production for its modern and energetic tone that resonates with contemporary themes of artistic rivalry and queer history, lending renewed vitality to the story of two literary giants often cast in opposition. The interplay between Gatwa and Bluemel has been singled out for its magnetic chemistry, with performances capturing the eloquence and rawness beneath the polished verses. Although some reviewers note that the historical dangers hinted at throughout remain somewhat distant on stage, the political context of late-Tudor England permeates the narrative, reminding audiences of the perilous realities surrounding these artists.

*Born With Teeth* offers a compelling counterpoint to the shadow Shakespeare typically casts over Marlowe’s legacy, inviting audiences to reconsider the Elizabethan epoch as a period of both creative ferment and fraught survival. By revivifying this imagined encounter, the play enriches our understanding of the intertwined lives behind some of the greatest works in English literature, even as it yearns for a sharper dramatic climax. Running through early November 2025, the production solidifies its place as one of the standout theatrical events of the year, propelled by a bold script and two standout performances that ensure Marlowe’s voice resonates as powerfully as Shakespeare’s.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/03/born-with-teeth-review-ncuti-gatwa-wyndhams-theatre-marlowe-shakespeare-edward-bluemel), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/e33651f9-a079-4aad-8d2a-eed10281cdae), [[4]](https://rsccmslive.azurewebsites.net/born-with-teeth), [[5]](https://www.delfontmackintosh.co.uk/whats-on/born-with-teeth)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/03/born-with-teeth-review-ncuti-gatwa-wyndhams-theatre-marlowe-shakespeare-edward-bluemel), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/e33651f9-a079-4aad-8d2a-eed10281cdae), [[6]](https://chris164reviews.wordpress.com/2025/08/16/born-with-teeth-wyndham-theatre/), [[7]](https://playoffthepage.com/2023/03/review-of-born-with-teeth-at-the-guthrie-theater/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/03/born-with-teeth-review-ncuti-gatwa-wyndhams-theatre-marlowe-shakespeare-edward-bluemel), [[6]](https://chris164reviews.wordpress.com/2025/08/16/born-with-teeth-wyndham-theatre/), [[3]](https://www.thetravelmagazine.net/born-with-teeth-the-royal-shakespeare-company/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/e33651f9-a079-4aad-8d2a-eed10281cdae), [[3]](https://www.thetravelmagazine.net/born-with-teeth-the-royal-shakespeare-company/), [[7]](https://playoffthepage.com/2023/03/review-of-born-with-teeth-at-the-guthrie-theater/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/03/born-with-teeth-review-ncuti-gatwa-wyndhams-theatre-marlowe-shakespeare-edward-bluemel), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/e33651f9-a079-4aad-8d2a-eed10281cdae), [[3]](https://www.thetravelmagazine.net/born-with-teeth-the-royal-shakespeare-company/), [[5]](https://www.delfontmackintosh.co.uk/whats-on/born-with-teeth)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/sep/03/born-with-teeth-review-ncuti-gatwa-wyndhams-theatre-marlowe-shakespeare-edward-bluemel> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/e33651f9-a079-4aad-8d2a-eed10281cdae> - An article from the Financial Times discussing Liz Duffy Adams' play 'Born with Teeth', which imagines a fictional encounter between Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare in 1591. The play explores their creative rivalry, sexual tension, and the political climate of Elizabethan England. Actors Ncuti Gatwa and Edward Bluemel portray Marlowe and Shakespeare, respectively, bringing charisma to their roles. The production is described as energetic and modern, with themes of creative collaboration and queer history. The play premiered in London's West End in July 2025.
3. <https://www.thetravelmagazine.net/born-with-teeth-the-royal-shakespeare-company/> - A review from The Travel Magazine praising 'Born with Teeth' as one of the best theatrical productions of the year. Directed by Daniel Evans, the play imagines a meeting between William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, two great playwrights of their time. Ncuti Gatwa and Edward Bluemel deliver mesmerising performances, exploring the discourse between the two men. The play is set in late-Tudor England, a period of political tension and surveillance, adding depth to the narrative.
4. <https://rsccmslive.azurewebsites.net/born-with-teeth> - The Royal Shakespeare Company's official page for 'Born with Teeth', a play by Liz Duffy Adams. The play imagines a collaboration between Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare on the Henry VI history plays. Directed by Daniel Evans, the production features Ncuti Gatwa as Kit Marlowe and Edward Bluemel as Will Shakespeare. The play premiered in London's West End in August 2025 and runs for 11 weeks at Wyndham's Theatre.
5. <https://www.delfontmackintosh.co.uk/whats-on/born-with-teeth> - The official page for 'Born with Teeth' at Wyndham's Theatre, London. The play, written by Liz Duffy Adams, imagines a collaboration between Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare during a dangerous time for artists. Directed by Daniel Evans, the production stars Ncuti Gatwa as Kit Marlowe and Edward Bluemel as Will Shakespeare. The play runs from 13 August to 1 November 2025 at Wyndham's Theatre.
6. <https://chris164reviews.wordpress.com/2025/08/16/born-with-teeth-wyndham-theatre/> - A review of 'Born with Teeth' at Wyndham's Theatre, highlighting the performances of Ncuti Gatwa and Edward Bluemel. The review discusses the minimal set design and the actors' dynamic portrayals of Marlowe and Shakespeare. The play's dialogue is noted for its contemporary feel, with moments of humour and intensity. The reviewer expresses enthusiasm for the production and the actors' performances.
7. <https://playoffthepage.com/2023/03/review-of-born-with-teeth-at-the-guthrie-theater/> - A review of 'Born with Teeth' at the Guthrie Theater, discussing the play's exploration of the relationship between William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. The review highlights the electric chemistry between the actors portraying the two playwrights and the play's examination of creative collaboration and survival under oppression. The review also touches on the historical context of the play, set in a volatile time for artists.