

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

A Critical Guide

Edited by Sara Munson Deats

Continuum

The Tower Building
11 York Road
London SE1 7NX

80 Maiden Lane, Suite 704
New York
NY 10038

www.continuumbooks.com

© Sara Munson Deats and contributors 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-8470-6137-9 (Hardback)
978-1-8470-6138-6 (paperback)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

[To come]

Typeset by BookEns Ltd, Royston, Hertfordshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by [To come]

Contents

	Acknowledgements	vii
	Series Introduction	viii
	Timeline	ix
	Introduction	1
	<i>Sara Munson Deats</i>	
Chapter 1	The Critical Backstory <i>Bruce T. Brandt</i>	17
Chapter 2	The Performance History <i>David Bevington</i>	41
Chapter 3	The State of the Art: Current Critical Research <i>Robert Logan</i>	72
Chapter 4	New Directions: <i>Doctor Faustus</i> and Renaissance Hermeticism <i>Andrew Duxfield</i>	96
Chapter 5	New Directions: Imperialism as Devilry: A Postcolonial Reading of <i>Doctor Faustus</i> <i>Toni Francis</i>	111
Chapter 6	New Directions: ‘What means this show?’ Staging <i>Faustus</i> on Campus <i>Andrew James Hartley</i>	124

vi CONTENTS

Chapter 7	New Directions: The Other Black Arts: <i>Doctor Faustus</i> and the Inky Worlds of Printing and Writing <i>Georgia E. Brown</i>	140
Chapter 8	A Survey of Resources <i>Sarah K. Scott</i>	159
	Appendix: Other Productions in Brief	00
	Bibliography	00
	Notes on Contributors	00
	Index	00

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to express my gratitude to the eight studious artisans who have contributed chapters to this collection. These scholarly chapters have already given me abundant profit and delight and will, I am convinced, continue to provide pleasure and insight to students of *Doctor Faustus* for many years to come. I would also like to thank Rolland Elliot for permission to reprint his excellent photographs of the production of *Doctor Faustus* directed by Andrew James Hartley at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

Since the majority of the contributors to this volume are active members of the Marlowe Society of America, including a few presidents, both former and future, I would like to express my special appreciation to that Society for the encouragement and inspiration that it has provided to me and to all Marlowe scholars throughout the years. I am also much indebted to the general editors of this series, Lisa Hopkins and Andrew Hiscock, particularly Lisa Hopkins, who first recruited me for this endeavour and has guided me throughout this process. My deepest appreciation also goes to my editor, Colleen Coalter, whose beneficial advice and assistance have been crucial to the success of this project, and to my super-conscientious and organized research assistant, Robin Rogers, who scrupulously proof-read and formatted this manuscript.

And most of all, I wish to thank my Good Angel, my husband Gordon Deats, whose patience and support have sustained me throughout this and many other scholarly enterprises.

Series Introduction

The drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has remained at the very heart of English curricula internationally and the pedagogic needs surrounding this body of literature have grown increasingly complex as more sophisticated resources become available to scholars, tutors and students. This series aims to offer a clear picture of the critical and performative contexts of a range of chosen texts. In addition, each volume furnishes readers with invaluable insights into the landscape of current scholarly research as well as including new pieces of research by leading critics.

This series is designed to respond to the clearly identified needs of scholars, tutors and students for volumes which will bridge the gap between accounts of previous critical developments and performance history and an acquaintance with new research initiatives related to the chosen plays. Thus, our ambition is to offer innovative and challenging guides which will provide practical, accessible and thought-provoking analyses of Renaissance drama. Each volume is organized according to a progressive reading strategy involving introductory discussion, critical review and cutting-edge scholarly debate. It has been an enormous pleasure to work with so many dedicated scholars of Renaissance drama and we are sure that this series will encourage you to read 400-year old playtexts with fresh eyes.

Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins

Timeline

1564: Birth of Christopher Marlowe.

1579–80: Marlowe is a scholar at King's School, Canterbury.

17 March 1581: Marlowe matriculates at Cambridge.

7–11 May 1581: Marlowe is formally elected to receive the Archbishop Parker Scholarship at Cambridge.

1581–86: Marlowe is believed to be involved in secret service for the government.

1584: Marlowe is permitted to proceed to the BA.

1585–86: *Dido, Queene of Carthage* is written, perhaps with Thomas Nash.

31 March 1587: Marlowe is admitted to candidacy for the MA.

29 June 1587: Privy Council attests to Marlowe's 'good service' and petitions for him to be granted his MA degree.

1587–88: Marlowe probably writes *Tamburlaine, I and II*; *Tamburlaine, I and II* is performed by the Admiral's Men in London to great success.

1588–89: *Doctor Faustus* is probably written and perhaps performed (although some scholars favour a 1592–93 date).

18 September 1589: Marlowe is imprisoned with poet Thomas Watson for participation in a street brawl in which William Bradley is killed.

x TIMELINE

19 September 1589: The coroner's jury finds that Marlowe withdrew from combat and that Watson killed Bradley in self-defence.

1590: Publication of *Tamburlaine, I and II*; Marlowe may also have written *The Jew of Malta* (although both earlier and later dates have been proposed).

1591: Marlowe shares lodgings with Thomas Kyd.

26 January 1592: Marlowe is accused of counterfeiting money in the Netherlands.

9 May 1592: Marlowe is bound over to keep the peace; he probably writes *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris*.

15 September 1592: Marlowe fights William Corkine in Canterbury; after suits and countersuits, the case is dismissed.

1593: Marlowe probably writes *Hero and Leander*.

12 May 1593: Thomas Kyd is arrested on suspicion of libel and imprisoned; papers containing heretical opinions, which Kyd attributes to Marlowe, are found in Kyd's rooms.

20 May 1593: Marlowe is called before the Privy Council and is instructed to give his 'daily attendance'; he is not imprisoned.

30 May 1593: Marlowe is killed by Ingram Frizer at the house of Widow Bull in Deptford. According to witnesses, Marlowe attacked Frizer after a heated dispute over the 'reckoning', or bill.

1 June 1593: The coroner's jury finds that Frizer acted in self-defence. Marlowe is buried in the churchyard of St Nicholas's Church, Deptford.

1593: Publication of *The English Faustbook* by P. F. Gent (Gentleman). This chapbook is accepted by scholars as the source for Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

1594: First recorded performance of *Doctor Faustus* by the Admiral's Men at the Rose Theatre.

1594: Publication of *Dido, Queene of Carthage* and *Edward II*.

1594: Publication of *Massacre at Paris*.

1595, 1596, 1597: *Doctor Faustus* is successfully performed by the Admiral's Men at the Rose Theatre.

1598: Publication of *Hero and Leander*.

1599: The Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury order a public burning of Marlowe's translation of Ovid's elegies.

1600: Publication of *The First Book of Lucan*, a classical translation.

1602: Philip Henslowe pays William Birde and Samuel Rowley £4 for additions to *Doctor Faustus*.

1604: The A-text of *Doctor Faustus* is published.

1616: The B-text of *Doctor Faustus* is published.

1633: *The Jew of Malta* is published with a dedication by Thomas Heywood.

1633: In *Histrionomastix*, William Prynne makes reference to a production of *Doctor Faustus* held at the Belsavage Playhouse, probably in 1588 or 1589. This reference gives support for the early dating of the play.

1662: A farcical version of *Doctor Faustus* is performed at the Red Bull with Thomas Betterton as Faustus. Despite his admiration for Betterton, Samuel Pepys found the play 'so wretchedly and poorly done that we were sick of it'.

1688, 1723: Harlequin versions of *Doctor Faustus* that combined Marlowe's play with sizable portions of *Harlequin and Scaramouche* are performed at the Queen's Theatre, Drury Lane, and Lincoln's Inn Fields. However, these versions bear little resemblance to Marlowe's original version, and Marlowe's play virtually disappears from the stage for over a century.

1744: The revival of interest in Marlowe begins with the inclusion of *Edward II* in Robert Dodsley's *Old Plays*.

1780: Isaac Reed, editor of the second edition of *Old Plays*, adds *The Jew of Malta* to the collection.

1782: *The Baines Note*, attributed to Marlowe, is published by Joseph Ritson.

1885: An amalgamation of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Goethe's *Faust* is mounted at London's Lyceum Theatre.

1896: *Doctor Faustus* is staged by William Poel for the Elizabethan Stage Society with a prologue by Algernon Swinburne.

1903: *Doctor Faustus* is presented on a simple platform stage in Heidelberger Hebbelverein, Germany. This is the first of many German productions during the next 25 years.

xii TIMELINE

1908: A spectacular production of *Doctor Faustus* is mounted by Herbert Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's Theatre, London.

1910: Tucker Brooke edits *Doctor Faustus*. Like most of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editors, Brooke favours the A-text.

1928: A revival of *Doctor Faustus* is staged by the Phoenix Society at London's New Oxford Theatre.

1929: Nugent Monck's experimental Norwich Maddermarket Theatre performs *Doctor Faustus* three times at the Canterbury Theatre.

1932: Frederick S. Boas edits *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, which includes a composite of the A- and B-texts; where the two texts are parallel, the B-text is favoured.

1936–37: Orson Welles stars in his own production of *Doctor Faustus* at the Maxine Elliott Theatre in New York.

1944: John Moody directs *Doctor Faustus* at the Old Vic.

1946–47: *Doctor Faustus* is included in the repertory of the Royal Shakespeare Company, starring Robert Harris and Hugh Griffith as Faustus and Mephistopheles, with Paul Scofield playing the role of Mephistopheles the second year.

1950: Welles revives his production of *Doctor Faustus* in Paris with Eartha Kitt in the role of Helen. W. W. Greg publishes *Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' 1604, 1616: Parallel Texts*. Greg argues that the A-text is a bad quarto and that the B-text reflects Marlowe's original play without the Birde-Rowley additions. For the next 25 years, editors favour the B-text.

1961: Michael Benthall directs *Doctor Faustus* for the Old Vic in Edinburgh.

1963: Jerry Grotowski produces the play for his Theatre Laboratory in Opole, Poland.

1966: Nevill Coghill directs *Doctor Faustus* for the Oxford University Society, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. The following year this production is transferred to film.

1968: The Royal Shakespeare Company again produces the play starring Eric Porter and Terrence Hardiman, with the first nude Helen in the history of the play's performance.

1970: The Royal Shakespeare Company's Theatregoround Troupe

stages the play at Dublin's Abby Theatre and later at Stratford-upon-Avon, featuring David Warner and Alan Howard as Faustus and Mephistopheles.

1974: The Marlowe Society of American is founded by Jean Jofen.

1974–75: A version of *Doctor Faustus* conflating the A- and B-texts is produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed by John Barton with Ian McKellen in the title role.

1980: Christopher Fettes stages *Doctor Faustus* at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith, with an all-male cast.

1981: Adrian Noble directs the play for the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester with Ben Kingsley in the leading role.

1985, 1989, 1991: Three new editions of *Doctor Faustus* based solely on the A-text are published by David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham, Roma Gill, and Michael Keefer. These editions establish the critical preference for the A- text which currently dominates Marlowe scholarship.

1989: Another all-male production of *Doctor Faustus* is directed by Barry Kyle for the Swan Theatre at Stratford.

1992: Agreeing with many scholars that the A- and B-texts are best considered as two separate plays, David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen edit '*Doctor Faustus*': *A- and B-texts (1604, 1616)*.

2002: *Doctor Faustus* is directed at the Young Vic by David Lan, starring Jude Law as Faustus.

2004: A Chichester Festival modern dress production of *Doctor Faustus* is staged at the Minerva Theatre.

2005: The Working Group Company produces the play at the Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney, Australia. *Doctor Faustus* makes its first appearance at the Elizabethan Theatre of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.



Introduction

Sara Munson Deats

The Guide

Critical consensus identifies Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, probably written and performed around 1588, as the first great tragedy in the English language, a powerful drama that ushered in 30 years of unparalleled dramatic creativity on the English stage. For over 400 years, Marlowe's most often read and most frequently performed play has been surrounded by conjecture; indeed, few works of literature have evoked such violent critical controversy as Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Almost every aspect of the play has been questioned: the text has been contested; the authorship has been challenged; the date has been disputed; and the meaning has been debated. This volume seeks to guide the teacher and student of Marlowe – and, of course, all successful teachers are also students – through the labyrinth of critical controversy associated with Marlowe's most popular play, and to aid all students of Marlowe in gaining a fuller appreciation of the originality and profundity of this work.

The book contains this Introduction and eight chapters designed to approach the play from multiple perspectives. The Introduction outlines the scope and goals of the volume, examining Marlowe's changing status in the canon of English literature, whereby during the past few decades he has become accepted as one of the most influential of early modern dramatists, second only to Shakespeare. The Introduction also explores the various influences – the magus legend, the morality play tradition, and the German and English *Faustbooks* – that combined to produce this fascinating fusion of

2 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

native and classical dramatic conventions. Finally, it briefly analyses the characteristics that make this play one of the triumphs of the English Renaissance and a powerful influence on the development of the English drama.

In the first chapter, 'The Critical Backstory,' Bruce T. Brandt traces the rich and varied critical history of *Doctor Faustus*, encompassing the enthusiastic responses of early modern audiences, the disregard of the play in the seventeenth century, its rediscovery in the eighteenth century, its resurrection by critics and poets in the nineteenth century, and the passionate engagement that the play has aroused in twentieth-century critics. This chapter also surveys the lively debates provoked by the play. These focus on the two very different extant versions, the A- and B-texts; the dating of the play; the authorship of the comic sections of the drama; and, most important of all, the theological ideology dominating the tragedy. This chapter not only summarizes traditional arguments concerning the meaning of the drama, but also examines the new perspectives offered by psychoanalytical, feminist and new historicist commentators on the play.

Although undoubtedly the most frequently performed of Marlowe's plays, *Doctor Faustus*, like so many of the dramas by Shakespeare's contemporaries, has experienced both overwhelming success and virtual neglect. In the second chapter of this volume, David Bevington reviews the diversity in the performance history of the play, ranging from its immediate popularity after its premier performance, probably in 1588 (although this is much debated), to its degeneration into farcical adaptations in the eighteenth century, to its complete disappearance from the stage in the nineteenth century, to its resurrection by William Poel in 1896 and the plethora of revivals in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This chapter focuses not only on highly touted productions by companies like the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Old Vic but also on the myriad of exciting experimental adaptations performed by repertory companies and college groups in Britain, Canada and the United States, as well as radio and cinematic versions of the play.

The third chapter of this collection, 'The State of the Art: Current Critical Research', written by Robert Logan, provides readers with a broad overview of recent critical research on *Doctor Faustus*, demonstrating how during the past few decades interest in Marlowe has virtually exploded. Before examining the present state of the art in the scholarship and criticism of *Doctor Faustus*, Logan distinguishes between these two terms, using 'scholarship' to describe work that deals primarily with matters of text and print

culture and ‘criticism’ as commentary on issues of interpretation. This chapter then focuses on three central topics: first, the tendencies reflected in twenty-first century scholarship and criticism of the play; second, recurrent patterns characterizing this scholarship and criticism; and, third, areas of critical neglect and possibilities for new and rewarding inquiry. This chapter also includes a detailed listing of all editions, collections, and individual essays and chapters on the play published in the new millennium.

The following four chapters, under the rubric ‘New Directions’, employ innovative analyses of this widely studied text. These include the discovery of a new ethos for the tragedy, a postcolonial reading of the play, a first-hand account of the problems facing a director attempting to produce the drama for a contemporary audience, and an examination of the play’s relationship to print culture.

What exactly is the magic that Faustus practises, and how does it relate to both his ambition and his fall? These questions have been asked many times before but have generally been approached by equating Marlowe’s protagonist with notable Renaissance occultists such as Cornelius Agrippa and John Dee. In ‘*Doctor Faustus* and Renaissance Hermeticism’, Andrew Duxfield posits a very different ethos for the play, discovering striking parallels between Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and key passages from the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, the pseudo-historical mystic whose ideas strongly influenced Renaissance occult thought. Duxfield argues that these parallels offer a new perspective on Faustus’s aspirations and also a potential synthesis between reading the play as a celebration of an ambitious yet admirable human being and interpreting it as a moral tale about the punishment of a foolish and faithless sinner.

Characterizing *Doctor Faustus* as an anamorphic drama, in ‘Imperialism as Devilry: A Postcolonial Reading of *Doctor Faustus*’, Toni Francis assumes an untraditional perspective from which to view the tragedy. From this unconventional stance, Francis discovers a drama in which Marlowe adapts his morality play format to contemporary issues, establishing a direct relationship between Faustus’s surrender of his soul to Lucifer and England’s pursuit of imperialist power through the mechanism of colonialism. According to Francis, the play’s multiple allusions to exploitation and colonialism suggest a subtle critique of the discourse of imperialism emerging in the early modern period. In her reading, therefore, necromancy is equated with imperialism and Faustus with the colonizer who sells his soul for the power and control intrinsic to the imperialist enterprise.

4 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

In Chapter 6, “‘What means this show?’ Staging *Faustus* on Campus’, Andrew James Hartley describes the decisions that he faced in directing this problematic play at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in April 2007. First, of course, any director must select from the two very different extant texts. Hartley chose the A-text as more compatible with his own vision of the production, which stressed Faustus’s agency and responsibility for his contract. In an effort to make the play relevant to a contemporary audience, Hartley adopted modern dress and minimized Faustus’s aspirations for power and forbidden knowledge while highlighting his yearning for celebrity, in this case, celebrity as both a magician and a rock star. Finally, Hartley cast a female actor in the role of Mephistopheles, emphasizing the inner conflict of this most undemonic of devils, who is obliged to tempt and damn a man for whom she feels pity.

According to Georgia E. Brown in Chapter 7, ‘The Other Black Arts: *Doctor Faustus* and the Inky Worlds of Printing and Writing’, Marlowe’s play is obsessed with the relationship between writing, print and performance, and the ways that textuality and corporeality might overlap. Brown argues that for all the excitement generated by its angels, devils, magic and hell fire, *Doctor Faustus* is particularly concerned with the opportunities and dangers of writing. First performed during the period when drama became a print form, the play coincides with the tentative beginnings of a writerly drama, and Brown adapts the techniques of cultural materialism to interrogate the way in which Marlowe’s play probes the nature of script and of print, and examines the relationship of writing to performance and to bodies.

Not only does *Doctor Faustus* continue to be Marlowe’s most often performed and critically debated play, but it also remains a perennial favourite in anthologies and textbooks and thus appears more frequently than any other work by Marlowe on university and college syllabi. The final chapter in this volume, ‘A Survey of Resources’, is thus designed to assist the teacher in presenting *Doctor Faustus* in the university and college classroom and proposes educational approaches that might effectively be adopted in teaching this play. In this chapter, Sarah K. Scott offers a comprehensive selection of resources – which include editions of the play, critical studies, pedagogical essays and media-based material – to suggest critical approaches, teaching strategies etc.

As noted above, Marlowe’s reputation as a dramatist has suffered multiple vicissitudes, ranging from the stunning success of his plays in the 1580s and 1590s to their loss of favour in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, to their reinstatement in the canon in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Due in part to the fervent advocacy of the Marlowe Society of America, founded in 1974, after centuries of neglect, the late twentieth century rediscovered this enigmatic figure, an *enfant terrible* in his own time. Throughout the past three decades, two or three scholarly books on Marlowe have appeared in print every year, in addition to a constant flow of critical essays, all passionately debating the political affiliations, religious attitudes and sexual preferences affirmed in both Marlowe's life and his work. Moreover, the life of this dashing yet mysterious figure has also inspired numerous biographical studies, historical novels and original dramas. Clearly, in the new millennium, Christopher Marlowe has become an increasingly hot property and *Doctor Faustus* has remained his most frequently anthologized and most often performed play.

The Sources

The roots of *Doctor Faustus* lie deep in the fertile loam of medieval legend. Many of the stories told about Faust appear in the accounts of earlier charismatic conjurers such as Simon Magus, St Cyprian and Theophilus, all of whom have been cited as possible forerunners of Faust.¹ The stories surrounding these magicians were typical magus legends, tales centring around a much-acclaimed conjurer whose magical feats were recounted with great zest and wonder. Simon Magus, the hubristic magician first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, sought to purchase from St Peter the power of the Holy Spirit and instead 'gained undying notoriety by lending his name to one of the great vices of the Church – simony'.² St Cyprian, whose provenance derives not from Scripture but from Church tradition, was consecrated by his parents to the devil at the age of 7, performed many miraculous deeds and was eventually converted, martyred and canonized. However, the most popular magus legend was the story of Theophilus, dating from 650 AD, which introduced into the tradition the diabolical blood pact. Theophilus, initially a godly man, angered at his unfair treatment by the Church, denied Christ and made a pact with the devil, signed in his own blood. Later, however, after a career of dazzling supernatural exploits, he repented and was redeemed through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

If the magus legend provided one radical source for the Faust fable, the medieval morality play furnished another root of this literary mandrake. Morality plays flourished primarily in the

6 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

fifteenth century using allegory to teach a moral lesson. These plays are peopled with abstractions like Mercy and Justice or Virtue and Vice, and the protagonist usually bears the name Mankind or Everyman to signify that he represents the entire human race. The typical plot of these plays focuses on the allegorical conflict for the spiritual allegiance of this Mankind figure. Mankind's chief tempter, commonly called the Vice, attempts to lure the Everyman hero from the straight and narrow road of virtue onto the primrose path of dalliance and sin, while the Virtue figures, often called Good Council or Mercy, urge the hero to follow the dictates of God or the Church. The entire drama thus occurs within the human psyche, which becomes a battleground on which good and evil contend for ascendancy. The morality play Vice descends from the Satan of the mystery play and like his infernal progenitor is a conniving, comic hypocrite who delights in chicanery for its own sake and speaks directly to the audience, inviting their complicity in his schemes to corrupt the Mankind figure. As a comedian par excellence, the Vice often usurps centre stage from Everyman, and even from God, to become the real star of the show. Although humorous, the Vice, representing the devil, is also horrific, and the levity of his antics in no way diminishes the terror that he inspires, since a majority of the people in the medieval and early modern periods believed in the devil as a real presence – ubiquitous, malevolent, wily, lurking behind every wheat field, awaiting the chance to lure the unwary to their doom.³

Doctor Faustus both adopts and alters the schema of the morality play to its tragic format. Like the morality play, Marlowe's drama enacts the *psychomachia* between good and evil for the allegiance of the protagonist; however, as in classical tragedy, Marlowe's tormented hero is not an Everyman figure but an exceptional individual. Moreover, Marlowe imports a number of emblematic characters from the morality play: the Good and Bad Angels probably derive from the fifteenth-century morality *The Castle of Perseverance*; the Old Man assumes the customary role of Good Council of Mercy contesting with the Vice Mephistopheles for the soul of the protagonist. However, in his Mephistopheles, Marlowe creates a tempter unlike any Vice that had ever trod the medieval or early modern stage, a potentially tragic devil capable of both compassion and suffering. In addition, despite the emblematic quality of the morality play figures and the comic characters, Marlowe brackets his tragedy with two of the most eloquent and internalized soliloquies in early modern drama, soliloquies more appropriate to classical tragedy than to the morality play. Finally,

whereas the majority of the morality plays conclude with the redemption of the often-erring hero, Marlowe's drama, as relentless as classical tragedy, ends in a harrowing denouement.

Critics suggest that the religious controversies of the period between Catholic/Anglican/Lutheran free will and Calvinist predestination modify the play's morality *psychomachia*. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen posit that Marlowe's tragedy departs markedly from early Catholic moralities like *Everyman* and more closely resembles the Calvinist morality plays of the 1560s and 1570s, which dramatize issues of election and reprobation.⁴ Lily Bess Campbell offers another possible homiletic source for the play: Nathaniel Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience*, a Calvinist work based on the spiritual biography of Francesco Spira.⁵ Lastly, Susan Snyder interprets the play as an inversion of the saint's legend, staging Faustus's conversion to evil, his embrace of the sacraments of devil worship, his bogus miracles, his multiple repentances to Lucifer, his mystical vision of Helen and his final damnation. Moreover, Faustus's consistent inversion of Scripture supports Snyder's reading of the play as an ironic hagiography.⁶

Having briefly canvassed the literary sources of the Faust legend, I shall undertake a search for the historical Faust. Like the majority of humanity's myths, the Faust legend appears to have had some basis in fact. Records show that a Georgius of Helmstadt matriculated at the University of Wittenberg in 1483 and later became known as Johann Faustus. Bevington and Rasmussen suggest that 'Faustus', meaning 'auspicious', may have been a Latin cognomen granted the magician in recognition of his magical exploits.⁷ Between 1507 and 1540, many references to a wonder-worker bearing the name Johann or Johannes Faustus appeared in contemporaneous letters and diaries. These documents limn the portrait of a widely-travelled, well-educated, rather shady miracle worker, who was also a braggart, a vagabond and something of a mountebank. After his death, this Faustus became a lodestone about which gathered a mass of superstition, the deposit of centuries, including tales associated not only with Simon Magus, St Cyprian and Theophilus, but also with Empedocles, Virgil and Roger Bacon.⁸ This slightly disreputable figure has had an indelible impact on the literary imagination of the western world, through the alchemy of myth transformed into an archetypal symbol of humanity's aspirations, follies and impossible dreams.

Throughout the latter decades of the sixteenth century, oral and occasional written accounts of Faustus's magical feats circulated around Europe. It was not long before an enterprising publisher saw

8 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

the commercial possibilities of the legend and in the year 1587 a German press produced the first coherent biography of *The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*, compiled by a man named Johann Spies. *The German Faustbook*, as this work was popularly called, narrates the story of the insatiable speculator who taking to himself the wings of an eagle desires to fly over the whole world and to know the secrets of heaven and earth. In his obsession for forbidden knowledge and worldly pleasure, Faustus studies necromancy, conjures the devil and makes a blood pact with Mephistopheles, promising his soul to Lucifer in return for 24 years of hedonistic delight and intellectual satisfaction. The centre section of the book details the puerile practical jokes on which Faustus squanders his dearly purchased power and the final chapters conclude on a solemn, cautionary note, graphically recounting the ‘deserved death’ of the ‘damnable’ necromancer. *The German Faustbook* blends soaring aspiration and grovelling lust, rollicking humour and tragic despair, all combined in the hybrid figure of its hero. In 1592, or perhaps even earlier, *The German Faustbook* was adapted into English by a man known only to posterity as P. F. Gent (Gentleman), and critical consensus accepts this version as the source for Marlowe’s great tragedy. P. F., in his free-wheeling, sometimes grossly inaccurate, but always sprightly rendering into English of Spies’s biography, expanded, condensed, diverged and interpolated at will, and some of these modifications help to identify *The English Faustbook* rather than the German version as Marlowe’s source. *The English Faustbook* retains the oxymoronic quality of the German original, both its mixed form – part tragedy, part jestbook – and its hybrid hero – part titan, part buffoon – and Marlowe adopts both the cross-bred genre and the hybrid hero to his tragedy.⁹

The Play

In *The Tudor Play of Mind*, Joel Altman situates the problematic dramas of the early modern period within the theatrical tradition of arguing on both sides of the question. According to Altman, the interrogative plays so popular at this period are constructed from a series of statements and counterstatements, both equally valid, thereby imitating the form of a sophisticated debate in which thesis provokes antithesis, yet without resolving synthesis. Thus, these plays ask questions rather than provide answers and deliberately evoke mixed reactions from their audiences.¹⁰ Although all of Marlowe’s plays have traditionally incited multiple responses, none

has provoked the heated controversy generated by *Doctor Faustus*. Establishing the polarities of these responses are Una Ellis-Fermor and George Santayana at one extreme, who identify *Doctor Faustus* as the ‘most nearly Satanic tragedy that can be found’ and Faustus as a ‘martyr to everything that the Renaissance prized – power, curious knowledge, enterprise, wealth, and beauty’, and Leo Kirschbaum, at the other, who insists that ‘there is no more Christian document in all Elizabethan drama’.¹¹ Although the majority of commentators assume less hyperbolic stances, Faustus still arouses widely disparate reactions in audiences and critics alike, ranging from breathless admiration for the magician’s aspiring mind and eloquent verse to utter contempt for his inane tricks. These widely divergent responses suggest that in *Doctor Faustus* Marlowe has penned an interrogative drama that brilliantly argues on both sides of the question.

If we focus only the action of the play, the Christian apologists have the stronger case. Critics advancing this position cite the many changes that Marlowe makes in his source, *The English Faustbook*, that tend to deflate Faustus and his heroic aspirations.

First, the shift in emphasis from a longing for forbidden knowledge (the trespass of Prometheus) to a desire for power (the sin of Lucifer) radically alters the nature of the magician’s transgressions. Both *Faustbooks* offer two primary motivations for Faustus’s fatal contract: an itch for sensual pleasure and a voracious curiosity. In his dramatic adaptation, Marlowe surpasses his source in deeply probing his hero’s motivation during the first two acts of the play, allowing Faustus continuously to rhapsodize on his dreams. The majority of these passages centre not on sensual pleasure (although he does refer to this on more than one occasion) nor on forbidden knowledge (although he does make casual reference to the ‘resolution of ambiguities’ and the ‘secrets of foreign kings’). Rather, Marlowe’s magician revels in visions of power, glory and wealth, like Tamburlaine, another of Marlowe’s titanic over-reachers, elevating the sweet fruition of an earthly crown above knowledge infinite and the puissance of a god above both. Therefore, so the argument goes, despite Faustus’s frequent intellectual debates with Mephistopheles, the language of the play minimizes the lure of forbidden knowledge and such curiosity as Marlowe’s Faustus does exhibit is strongly vitiated by the yearning for power, fame and wealth. Moreover, by magnifying his hero’s aspirations (the necromancers of the *Faustbooks* never presume to be ‘great emperor of the world’ or strive ‘to gain a Deity’) and sharply curtailing his realization (Marlowe’s Faustus gains few, if any, of his grandiose dreams), Marlowe stresses the hiatus between

10 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Faustus's over-reach and grasp and thus arguably renders his hero more truly tragic.¹²

Marlowe's exclusion of extraneous elements from his source further clarifies Faustus's downward trajectory as he falls under the spell of magic. According to G. K. Hunter's schema, the play traces the magician's descent through activities, associates and adversaries.¹³ The play initially presents Faustus as a type of polymath, an adept in the four doctoral-granting disciplines of the early modern period: philosophy, medicine, law and divinity. Having rejected these four disciplines and embarked on his perilous journey into necromancy, Faustus first requests information about astronomy as his reward, thus partially vindicating himself as a knowledge-seeker. However, he soon discovers that Mephistopheles, unable to discuss first causes, can provide only the rudimentary knowledge already available to Faustus, and even to Wagner. Frustrated in his attempt to discover astronomical truth, Faustus moves from heaven to earth, devoting himself to cosmography, or what we would today call geography, enjoying something equivalent to the Grand Tour as he visits the capitals of Europe. In Rome, Faustus progresses downward from cosmology into politics, since his activities in the papal court, although primarily involving slapstick antics, relate tangentially to politics, at least in the B-text.¹⁴ In the emperor's court, he further descends from Pope-maker to court entertainer, conjuring simulacra of Alexander and his paramour for the pleasure of Emperor Charles; the man who earlier exulted, 'The emperor shall not live but by my leave', now serves the emperor. Faustus's status is further reduced in the court of Vanholt, where he performs the function of an errand boy, a type of 'greengrocer', sending Mephistopheles around the world to fetch grapes out of season for the pregnant duchess. Ultimately, he degenerates into comic shenanigans with horse coursers and carters. At the same time that his field of activity deteriorates, Faustus suffers a social demotion, as he moves from the court of the Pope to that of the emperor to that of the duke, and the status of his adversaries diminishes from Pope, to jesting knight, to horse coursers and carters. Although Faustus's professional and social decline is more carefully delineated in the B-text than in the A, the elements of descent pervade both versions and this consistent demotion stresses the degenerative effects of the contract.¹⁵ Finally, both texts of the play include a farcical sub-plot that parodies and deflates the necromancer's achievements, thus further diminishing his heroic stature by associating him with clowns like Robin and Rafe in the A-text and Robin and Dick in the B.¹⁶

According to the Christian exegetes, Marlowe not only adapts

The English Faustbook to reflect the early modern obsession with power, but he further alters his source to accentuate Faustus's responsibility for the pact, presenting his hero as agent of his own damnation as he doggedly seeks to finalize the contract with the devil. In his opening soliloquy, a masterly exemplum of reason pandering will, the discontented divine rejects all learning as trivial and embraces damnation as unavoidable, thus providing a rationale for his infernal contract. Later, in order to make his contract appear less threatening, he convinces himself that hell is only a fable and confounds it in Elysium. When confronted with undeniable evidence to the contrary – Mephistopheles come from hell to seize his 'glorious soul' – Faustus employs fallacious reasoning to convince himself that the demon cannot really be in hell. Finally, Faustus ignores Mephistopheles's passionate warning 'to leave these frivolous demands | Which strike a terror in my fainting soul' (I.III.83–84).¹⁷ Here, in one of the most stunning changes in his source, Marlowe reverses the roles of tempter and tempted. The tempter of both *Faustbooks*, like the morality Vice and like any savvy salesman, minimizes the liabilities and maximizes the advantages of his product until he has his victim's name on the dotted line, while the vacillating conjurer of the *Faustbooks* seeks the best bargain possible. Conversely, in Marlowe's tragedy, Mephistopheles even urges his 'customer' to abstain from purchasing his product at such an exorbitant price, and Marlowe's Faustus himself plays the devil's advocate.¹⁸

In addition, Christian advocates point out that the introduction of emblematic characters from the morality play further reinforces the centrality of human choice, stressing Faustus as an agent of his own fate rather than the victim of a malevolent deity. These morality play figures include the Good and Bad Angels as well as the Old Man. Christian expositors would insist that the two debating angels, as well as the Old Man, would be theologically and dramatically gratuitous were Faustus predestined to damnation as many heroic interpreters insist.

In summation, Christian interpreters assert that despite the allegedly heterodox opinions of its author, *Doctor Faustus* is paradoxically the most orthodox of Marlowe's dramas. They further insist that the containment and ironic undercutting of Faustus's radical subversion of Christian authority constitute a reaffirmation of that authority.

Challenging this impressive array of evidence, exponents of a heroic reading assert that both verbal statement and visual imagery create an irony that undermines the ostensible orthodoxy of the

12 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

tragedy. Heroic advocates find support in two quotations from the play that arguably problematize the drama's affirmation of free will and personal responsibility. The first of these occurs in the Prologue's description of Faustus's Icarian flight and his disastrous fall: 'Til, swoll'n with cunning of a self conceit. | His waxen wings did mount above his reach, | And melting heavens *conspired* his overthrow' (Prologue 20–22; emphasis added). The second quotation is Mephistopheles's boast to Faustus in Act V, in which the fiend accepts responsibility for inspiring Faustus's fatal fallacious syllogism in scene i:

'Twas I that, when you wert i'the way to heaven,
Damned up thy passage. When thou took'st the book
To view the Scriptures, then I turned the leaves
And led thine eye.

(B.V.ii.98–101)

The first of these quotations certainly seems to imply the presence of a malignant deity conspiring against Faustus and perhaps predestining him to damnation; the second, although contradicting Mephistopheles's fervent warning to Faustus to 'Leave these frivolous demands', definitely interrogates Faustus's free will. Heroic commentators further cite the threatening figures of the infernal trinity – Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephistopheles – hovering over Faustus's initial conjuring (I.iii) and over his final desperate soliloquy (V.ii) to suggest a world presided over by malevolent forces. They also stress the appearance of Lucifer instead of Christ in answer to Faustus's desperate plea, 'Ah, Christ, my Saviour, | Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul!' (A.II.iii.82–83; cf. B.II.iii.84, which reads, 'Help to save distressed Faustus' soul!'), as an emblem of the absence of God or Christ and the presence of evil as the controlling force of the play. Lastly, heroic expositors adduce the didactic speeches of the two angels at the play's denouement, which confirm Faustus's inexorable damnation, pointing out that these diatribes call into question the omnipresent possibility of repentance asserted by the Christian exponents and thus their affirmation of a benevolent providence presiding over the play. Moreover, Kristen Poole asserts that rather than unequivocally affirming human agency, the two duelling angels represent the two different theologies – Catholic/Anglican free will and Calvinist predestination – informing the play. Critics of this persuasion insist, therefore, that the contrary signals embedded within the play create an ideological disjunction that implicitly subverts the orthodoxy explicitly

endorsed in the drama.¹⁹ However, since the sinister imagery of the infernal trinity presiding over the initial and final scenes, Mephistopheles's boast concerning the fallacious syllogism and the final tirades of the two angels are all absent from the A-text, advocates of a Christian reading might rebut that this ostensible ambiguity results primarily from textual corruption rather than ideological contrariety.²⁰

Ultimately, the heroic interpreters must rely primarily on something much less tangible than visual tableau or explicit statement, offering instead the sense of identification and sympathy with which readers and audiences alike have traditionally responded to Faustus, the fallible human being desperately seeking to transcend human limitation. Two recent books present new readings to support this audience identification with Faustus. Patrick Cheney gives a novel twist to the heroic reading of the play, interpreting the tragedy not only as a deconstruction of Calvinist theology but also as an affirmation of artistic freedom in the face of restrictive religious orthodoxy. By merging Faustus the magician with Marlowe the playwright, Cheney interprets the play as the 'author's affirmation of his own artistic power to be free from the orthodox Christian forces dangerously afoot in the universe'.²¹ Conversely, adapting a feminist approach to the play, Alison Findlay suggests that female audience members would have particularly identified with Faustus who, like them, is bullied by a patriarchal authority figure and denied desired knowledge.²² Although I find both of these interpretations intriguing, I locate the source of audience empathy elsewhere, in both Faustus's complexity and in his eloquence. For in *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe has created not only a morality play but a lacerating tragedy, as revealed in the two soliloquies with which Faustus opens and concludes the play. In his opening soliloquy, Faustus rationalizes his reasons for rejecting traditional learning and fatally choosing magic over divinity; in his final soliloquy, he struggles between desire for repentance and despair. In both speeches, Faustus portrays an *interiority* that anticipates Hamlet's famous internal conflicts, and this psychological inwardness evokes from the audience both pity and terror. Moreover, I suspect that the empathy, pity and terror that audiences frequently feel when confronting the tragedy derive to a large extent from Faustus's glorious language. For Faustus, like so many Marlovian protagonists, pits the magnificent word against the ignoble or, in this case, the inane deed. Those listening with a sensitized ear to Faustus's sonorous rhetoric while turning a blind eye to his foolish escapades will adopt a heroic reading. Conversely, those turning a deaf ear to

14 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

some of the most soaring poetry in the early modern theatre and seeing only the trivial action on the stage will judge Faustus fatally flawed. Spectators able both to hear and to see simultaneously, and thus to perceive both the swan and the crow of Marlowe's perspective painting,²³ will probably achieve the fullest experience of Marlowe's tragedy.²⁴

With its interiorized protagonist and its double perspective, *Doctor Faustus* occupies a pivotal position in the development of the English drama. Scholars have long credited Marlowe with introducing into the drama a flexible and dynamic verse through which emotion could be communicated and character created. I further assert that in the person of his tormented hero Marlowe creates the first fully internalized character on the early modern stage. Finally, I speculate that in *Doctor Faustus* Marlowe may be the first English playwright to script a dialogical drama that inscribes the multiplicity and indecidability of human experience, thereby anticipating, and perhaps even precipitating, the greater achievements of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy. On many levels, I suggest, reading or viewing *Doctor Faustus* allows us to participate in the creation of the English drama.

Notes

- 1 For a full account of the forerunners of Faust, see the excellent study by Philip Mason Palmer and Robert Patterson More, *The Sources of the Faust Tradition* (1936) (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), pp. 9–77, to which this brief summary is deeply indebted.
- 2 Palmer and More, *Sources*, p. 10.
- 3 For two definitive discussions of the distinctive characteristics of the morality play, see David Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) and Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).
- 4 David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, introduction to '*Doctor Faustus*': *A and B Texts (1604, 1610)* (1993) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 10.
- 5 Lily Bess Campbell, '*Doctor Faustus*: A Case of Conscience', *PMLA* 67 (1952), pp. 219–39.
- 6 Susan Snyder, 'Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as an Inverted Saint's Life', *Studies in Philology* 63 (1966), pp. 565–77.
- 7 Bevington and Rasmussen, introduction to *Doctor Faustus*, p. 4.
- 8 Palmer and More, *Sources*, pp. 81–126, evaluates the historical evidence for a magician named Johannes or Johann Faustus in considerable detail. My brief summary draws freely from this valuable study. See also useful discussions by William Rose in his introduction to *The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 3–22, and by Bevington and Rasmussen, Introduction to *Doctor Faustus*, p. 4.
- 9 See the discussion by E. M. Butler of the German and English *Faustbooks* in *The Fortunes of Faust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. 3–41. See

- also William Rose, introduction to *Historie*, pp. 23–45. For the definitive examination of the sources and background of Marlowe's tragedy, see Bevington and Rassmussen, introduction to *Doctor Faustus*, pp. 3–15. For a detailed comparison of *The English Faustbook* to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, see Sara Munson Deats, 'Doctor Faustus: From Chapbook to Tragedy', *Studies in Literature* 3 (1976), pp. 3–16.
- 10 Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).
 - 11 For the heroic interpretation of the play, see Ellis-Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 143, and Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1910), p. 147. For the Christian reading, see Kirshbaum, 'Marlowe's *Faustus*: A Reconsideration', *Review of English Studies* 19 (1943), p. 229.
 - 12 For a more detailed analysis of Marlowe's changes in his source, see Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (1962) (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), pp. 191–231, and Deats, 'Doctor Faustus: From Chapbook to Tragedy', pp. 3–16.
 - 13 G. K. Hunter, 'Five Act Structure in *Doctor Faustus*', *Tulane Drama Review* 8.4 (1964), pp. 84–99.
 - 14 In the papal court, the A-text *Faustus* limits himself to high jinks and practical jokes without political implications and thus Hunter's schema works much better in the B-text than in the A-text.
 - 15 Although Hunter offers the most detailed analysis of *Faustus*'s descent down the ladder of early modern professions, the term 'greengrocer' derives from Helen Gardner's 'Milton's Satan and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy', *English Studies* (1948), p. 48.
 - 16 The most comprehensive treatment of the deflative comic sub-plot in both texts can be found in Robert Ornstein, 'The Comic Synthesis in *Doctor Faustus*', *ELH* 22 (1955), pp. 165–72.
 - 17 See Deats, 'Doctor Faustus: From Chapbook to Tragedy', pp. 7–9.
 - 18 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from the play are taken from the A-text in the edition by Bevington and Rassmussen; citations will be included within the text.
 - 19 For an insightful defence of the anti-Christian reading, particularly the contrariety produced by the sinister supernatural figures, see Max Bluestone, 'Libido Speculandi: Doctrine and Dramaturgy in Contemporary Representations of *Doctor Faustus*', in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 33–88. Poole further supports the interrogative nature of the play in 'Dr. *Faustus* and Renaissance Theology,' in *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, ed. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr, Patrick Cheney and Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 96–107.
 - 20 Leah Marcus in 'Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: The Case of *Doctor Faustus*', *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989), pp. 1–29, argues that the differences in the two texts are so significant that we cannot legitimately discuss the single play *Doctor Faustus* but should treat the two versions as two separate dramas.
 - 21 Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 190–220.
 - 22 Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Backwell, 1999), pp. 11–25.
 - 23 The allusion is to the 'couzening picture, which one way | Shows like a crow, another like a swan,' from George Chapman, *All's Fools*, I.IV.47, quoted in Ernest B. Gilman, *The Curious Perspective: Literary and Pictorial Wit in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 36.

16 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

- 24 For a fuller discussion of the interrogative tone of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, see my essay, 'Marlowe's Interrogative Drama: *Dido*, *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *Edward II*', in *Marlowe's Empery: Expanding His Critical Contexts*, ed. Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2002), pp. 117–20.