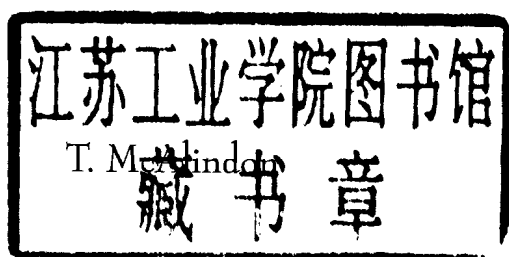


Doctor Faustus
Divine in Show

T. McAlind

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

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Doctor Faustus: Divine in Show

Thomas McAlindon

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Putative portrait of Christopher Marlowe. *Reproduced by permission of the Master, Fellows, and Scholars of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.*

Note on the References and Acknowledgments

Doctor Faustus has come down to us in two forms, the A text of 1604 and the B text of 1616. The B text is an amplified and slightly altered version of the A text (or its source); presumably it contains the additions that the theatrical financier Philip Henslowe commissioned William Birde and Samuel Rowley to write in 1602. Scholarly and critical preference has oscillated between the two texts, but at present there is a marked shift of opinion in favor of the A text. In this book, I have used Roma Gill's New Mermaid edition (New York: Norton; London: Black, 2d ed., 1989); it is based on the A text but has an appendix containing those scenes from the B text that are either "straightforward additions to the play presented in the A text" or "have been substantially reworked" (69). I am not inclined to believe, as some now claim, that the B text is either inferior to, or conspicuously different in meaning from, the A text, or both. In fact, I am impressed by the way in which the B-text additions and variations show a sensitive understanding of the pattern of ideas, images, and motifs that inheres in the shorter version. The B text, in my view, offers the first and in some ways the best interpretation of Marlowe's play.

Thus, although my own commentary is firmly based on the play as given in Gill's A-text edition, I have, from time to time and with due specification, cited additional evidence from the B text in a manner intended both to register my respect for that text and to reinforce my own reading of the A text. In this way, I hope to provide an account

of the play that is not seriously affected by the textual dispute—a dispute that, despite current certainties, is unlikely ever to achieve a lasting settlement. The B-text material in Gill's appendix has no lineation; my quotations from this material, therefore, are followed only by a page reference (thus, B.85). Citations of B-text material not given in Gill's appendix are from Greg's parallel edition of the two texts and are followed by line reference (thus: Greg, 280). Citations of Gill's A text are followed by scene and line reference (thus, "2.109" is scene 2, line 109) or chorus and line reference ("chor.4.6" is chorus 4, line 6).

I should like to thank Rowland Wymer and Robin Headlam Wells for the care with which they scrutinized what I have written here, eliminating errors and blemishes, and making fruitful suggestions.

Chronology: Christopher Marlowe's Life and Works

- 1558 Accession of Elizabeth I.
- 1564 Shakespeare born. Marlowe born in Canterbury to shoemaker John Marlowe and wife, Katherine. Marlowe's father is gregarious, forceful, quarrelsome, and improvident; well acquainted with debt and the law.
- 1568–1572 Catholic opposition to Elizabeth, supported by Spain and the pope, culminating in the unsuccessful Northern Revolt. Seven hundred Catholics executed.
- 1573 Elizabeth makes peace with Spain. Beginning of a period of maritime and commercial expansion abroad and of industrial development at home.
- 1578 English privateering and military support for Philip's rebellious Protestant subjects in the Netherlands renew Spain's hostility to Elizabeth. Marlowe becomes a scholar at King's School, Canterbury, his fees probably paid for by charity or patronage.
- 1581 First of several Catholic plots against Elizabeth's life uncovered. Penal laws against Catholics enacted.
- 1580 Sir Francis Drake returns in triumph from his voyage round the world, laden with Spanish plunder. Marlowe is awarded an Archbishop Parker scholarship and begins his studies at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.
- 1583 Archbishop Whitgift begins his "inquisition" against Puritan dissent, whose intellectual center is Cambridge University.
- 1584 Marlowe passes his B.A. examinations. Remains on scholarship at Cambridge for two more years, presumably on condition that he will proceed to holy orders.

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- 1585 England goes to war with Spain in the Netherlands. *Dido and Aeneas*, thought to be Marlowe's first play.
- 1587 Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, Catholic claimant to Elizabeth's throne. Expedition of Sir Francis Drake to "sing the King of Spain's beard." Cambridge University refuses to award Marlowe the M.A., irritated, perhaps, by his abandonment of a clerical career, but also suspecting him of Catholic sympathies and of visits to the English Catholic seminary in Rheims, France. The Queen's Privy Council intervenes instructing the University to award him the degree; he has been "employed . . . in matters touching the benefit of his country"—possibly spying on English Catholics abroad. Secret agent Marlowe gets his M.A. Probably in this year, too, he captivates London audiences with his drama of heroic conquest, *Tamburlaine the Great*. Its success leads promptly to a sequel, *Tamburlaine Part II*.
- 1588 Spain attacks England. Defeat of the Great Armada, but the threat of invasion persists, and England remains at war with Spain until after Elizabeth's death.
- 1589 Marlowe and his friend Thomas Watson, the poet, are involved in a fight with one William Bradley in Hog Lane, London. Watson kills Bradley. Both Marlowe and Watson are imprisoned but successfully plead self-defense.
- c. 1589 *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe's tragedy of Machiavellian intrigue and religious conflict.
- 1591 Marlowe shares a room with dramatist Thomas Kyd, author of the popular and influential *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1585–90). After Marlowe's death, Kyd will describe him as "intemperate and of a cruel heart," prompt to deliver "sudden privy injuries to men," and shockingly irreligious.
- c. 1591 Marlowe's historical tragedy with a homosexual hero, *Edward II*.
- 1592 In January, Marlowe is arrested in Flushing (an English possession on the Dutch coast) and sent back to England on a charge of counterfeiting, the evidence against him supplied by his chamber-fellow, Richard Baines. He and Baines accuse each other of intending to join England's Catholic enemies abroad. Nothing comes of these charges. In May, Marlowe is arrested in London for breaking the peace; he is bound over for the sum of £20. In September, writer Robert Greene pens a deathbed pamphlet in which he laments that Marlowe, "famous gracer of tragedians," is blinded by "diabolical athe-

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ism," and warns that he will find in "that liberty . . . an infernal bondage." In September–October in Canterbury, Marlowe is charged with assaulting William Corkine "with staff and dagger." After a cooling period, Corkine drops the charge.

- 1592–1593 *Doctor Faustus* probably written and first performed about this time. (Some scholars favor an earlier date.)
- 1593 In January, first performance of Marlowe's topical anti-Catholic tragedy on religious conflict in France, *The Massacre at Paris*. On 11 May, Kyd is arrested on suspicion of libelous activities and interrogated under torture on the rack; allegedly heretical writings are discovered in his room, but he claims they belonged to Marlowe. Letters written later by Kyd suggest that under torture he also accuses Marlowe at this time of making heretical and treasonable statements. The Privy Council issues a warrant for Marlowe's arrest. On 20 May, Marlowe gets off lightly, being ordered to make a daily appearance before the council until their lordships decide otherwise. Marlowe spends 30 May feasting with three companions in Deptford. He quarrels over payment of the bill with Ingram Frizer. Approaching the seated Frizer from behind, he pulls out Frizer's dagger and strikes him, probably with the handle. Frizer grapples with him and in the tussle the dagger enters Marlowe's skull above the eye. He dies immediately. (There have been several theories that Marlowe's death was politically contrived rather than accidental.) Possibly on 2 June, unaware of Marlowe's death, Richard Baines delivers his famous note to the Privy Council, giving a detailed summary of the atheistical, heretical, blasphemous, and treasonable opinions to which Marlowe, he claims, gave regular and uninhibited utterance. On 29 June, professional informer and government spy Richard Cholmley accuses Marlowe of being expert in atheistic arguments and of telling him "he gave the atheist lecture to Sir Walter Raleigh and others." Baines's note may be a rough summary of this lecture.
- 1594 Publication of *Edward II* and *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*. Released from prison, Thomas Kyd dies a broken man, abandoned by his aristocratic patrons and in debt.
- 1598 Publication of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, an unfinished love poem.
- 1599 Marlowe's translations from the Latin of Ovid's erotic poems, the *Amores*, are among books publicly burnt on the orders of the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London.

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Written perhaps during his Cambridge days, these translations were probably published shortly before they were condemned.

1600 Publication of *The First Book of Lucan*, Marlowe's translation from Lucan's epic on the civil wars of Caesar and Pompey. Possibly another Cambridge composition.

1603 Death of Queen Elizabeth and accession of James I.

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LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1

Renaissance and Reformation

As the reign of James I progressed, many of his disillusioned subjects began to look back nostalgically to the age of “good Queen Bess.” They saw there a stable, prosperous, and unified nation ruled by an upright and dignified monarch, and a court that was justly admired throughout Europe for its splendor and decorum. There was a core of substantial truth in this conception, but as my brief chronology should indicate, it was an utterly simplified conception, too. The foundations of Elizabethan society were insecure from the beginning of the period to the end. Its cohesion was due in large measure to the continued threat of invasion and to the harsh repression of internal dissent. Its sumptuously elegant court was a place of hungry ambition and Machiavellian intrigue. At the center of this court was a conscientious Christian ruler who regularly resorted to ruthless and cunning stratagems in defense of her regime; she was a learned queen, too, who accepted plunder from piratical adventurers with unashamed gratitude: “Arise, Sir Francis. . . .”

Christopher Marlowe’s life and works assuredly reflect the contradictions of this extraordinary time, for here was a scholar and intended clergyman who engaged in espionage and frequented the

seedy underworld of Elizabethan informers. He was an obedient servant of the Protestant state and an arrogantly rebellious freethinker, a greatly imaginative writer, and a fatally compulsive brawler. His plays bear witness in equal measure to an intense and refined love of beauty and to a fascination with violence and cruelty. They celebrate exuberant self-expression, and they ironically unfold the self-destructive folly and inevitable punishment of untrammelled individualism. Marlowe's sudden, violent death preempted an appearance before the Privy Council that could have had frightening consequences. It is almost as if in dramatizing the rebellion and damnation of Faustus he was offloading a personal nightmare, shadowing forth a nocturnal apprehension of his own present and future state. The relationship between his work, his life, and his time was one of intricate and, in the end, uncanny intimacy.

The most distinctive features of the Elizabethan period—its achievements, its contradictions, and its tensions—can be explained in large measure, and with some simplification, in terms of two great cultural movements, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Affecting England (like Spain) much later than Italy, the Renaissance signified an awakening of imaginative, intellectual, and social energies based on a return to classical literature and the moral and aesthetic values it enshrined. It entailed a turning away from medieval asceticism, with its contempt for the body, its ideal of humility, and its insistence that the world is but a vale of tears where the soul prepares for happiness in the afterlife. What the Renaissance fostered was a new regard for the individual, for human potential, for natural beauty and the emotions, and for the joys and pleasures of this world. Inverting a cherished medieval hierarchy, it exalted the life of action—the life of man and woman in society—over the life of contemplation and retreat. In short, the Renaissance provided a secularized view of life. Many sober minds felt that it constituted a pagan threat to Christian belief and practice, but the leading Christian humanists—those scholars who masterminded the study of classical texts and the propagation of classical ideals—were sincerely convinced that the two cultural traditions were fundamentally compatible. They promoted a form of education that combined religious and humanistic studies, developed moral and

aesthetic awareness, and prepared the student for life in a civilized society.

A central feature of Renaissance education, both at school and university, was the study of rhetoric as taught by the great Roman masters Cicero and Quintilian. Students were drilled in the art of disputation and in the choice and fashioning of styles appropriate to every subject and occasion. Speaking well—eloquence—was the aim, and its purpose was to equip students for public office and, more generally, to help them negotiate the multifarious circumstances of life in a ceremonious, hierarchical society. Both at school and university, rhetorical training was reinforced by the performance of plays, which perfected the arts of memory and delivery. Rhetoric and drama are natural allies, and the combined effect of their contribution to Renaissance education was to intensify the theatricality of social life, the conviction that all the world's a stage, where success depends on how well we play our appointed or chosen role. Rhetorical education, too, provided a perfect context for the nurturing of dramatic talent, developing as it did not only a mastery of different styles and voices but also the dialectical frame of mind, which delights in the interaction of opposing viewpoints. Drama, as the French critic Brunetière has said, is the art of conflict.

The more fervent representatives of the Reformation were deeply hostile to theatricality and eloquence, associating them with the delusive arts of the devil and the showiness of Roman Catholicism. After decades of vituperation against the stage, the Puritans eventually closed the English theaters in 1642; in the pulpit they replaced Latinate grandeur with native plainness. In general, the Reformation did much to cool the ardors and enfeeble the optimism released by the Renaissance. Whereas the humanists emphasized the dignity of human nature and man's capacity to win salvation for his soul through reason and divine revelation, Calvin and Luther preached the utter degradation of fallen human nature and the total incapacity of mortals to save themselves from the damnation that they so thoroughly deserve. Whereas humanists regarded human beings as free to choose what they will become, Luther and Calvin saw them as miserable creatures in bondage to Satan and the law and insisted that those who are