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MARLOWE'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* AND SIN

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Abstract

Lo scopo di questa tesi è analizzare il concetto di peccato nel *Doctor Faustus* di Marlowe e come si relaziona al contesto politico e religioso dell'Inghilterra elisabettiana. Vengono esaminate le tensioni religiose e politiche dell'Inghilterra elisabettiana e la controversa figura di Christopher Marlowe. La tesi si propone di illuminare i modi in cui l'opera di Marlowe riflette e critica le ideologie dominanti del suo tempo, e come partecipa al dibattito in corso sul peccato, la salvezza e la dannazione. L'opera, basata sulla lettura del testo e sull'analisi storica dell'epoca, fornisce una comprensione sfumata della complessa relazione del Dottor Faustus tra peccato e potere.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the concept of sin in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and explore how it relates to the political and religious context of Elizabethan England. Religious and political tensions in Elizabethan England and the controversial figure of Christopher Marlowe are examined. The thesis seeks to shed light on the ways in which Marlowe's play reflects and critiques the dominant ideologies of its time and how it contributes to the ongoing debate about sin, salvation, and damnation. The thesis will employ a close reading of the text as well as a historical analysis of the period to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between sin and power in *Doctor Faustus*.

Introduction

The Tragical History of Life and Death of Doctor Faustus was written by Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) between 1588 and 1593 for the theaters of Elizabethan London.

The main character of Marlowe's play is Doctor Faustus, a brilliant but unfulfilled scholar in sixteenth-century Germany. Faustus rejects the conventional disciplines taught in schools—rhetoric, physics, law, and theology—in the first scene in favor of a darker art. In return for giving up his soul, the hero makes a deal with the devil to gain 24 years of power and knowledge. During the time period of the novel, Faustus journeys from Germany to the rest of the globe, committing mischievous deeds and encountering remarkable characters. The devils approach Faustus in the last scene with the intention of taking his soul. Despite his passionate pleas for forgiveness, Faustus is eventually consigned to damnation and will never find salvation.

The text appears a mere play of an overreached and his inevitable punishment at first glance. However, the author creates confusion in the minds of a reader who is just trying to enjoy the play without thinking.¹ The main themes of the play are the heroic striving for greater fulfillment and the psychological torment being the consequence of the hero's actions. Faustus suffering is rendered possibly relatable by the author, making the reader reflect upon the concept of sin and fate.² Faustus' 'overreaching audacity' captures and repels the reader at the same time, as we are both fascinated and repulsed by his relentless pursuit of power that eventually costs him of his soul.³ The issue of Faustus's condemnation and salvation is complicated and contentious, and it may be examined from a variety of approaches. Some contend that Faustus's impending damnation prevents him from being saved, while others claim that his rushed repentance gives rise to hope for his salvation.

Marlowe's portrayal of the ambiguity surrounding Faustus's condemnation and salvation invites readers to question the nature of sin, redemption, and the limits of divine mercy. This gets

¹ Margaret Ann O'Brien, 'Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus', in *ELH*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1970, pp. 1-11 (p. 11).

² Thomas McAlindon, 'Doctor Faustus: The Predestination Theory', *English Studies*, 76 (1995), pp. 215-220 (p. 215).

³ David K. Anderson, 'The Theater of the Damned: Religion and the Audience in the Tragedy of Christopher Marlowe' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 54, no. 1, (2012), pp. 79-109 (p. 79).

even more complicated given the historical changes that occurred during Marlowe's time, such as the Protestant Reformation, the consequently growing skepticism towards traditional religious beliefs and the rise of different branches of Christianity.

Lutheranism and Calvinism further add to the complexity of Faustus's salvation. Lutherans believe in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, suggesting that if Faustus truly repents and believes in God's mercy, he may have a chance at redemption. On the other hand, Calvinists emphasize predestination and divine sovereignty, implying that Faustus's fate may already be predetermined, and his repentance may be futile. Marlowe's exploration of these theological debates is deeply intertwined with the play, highlighting the uncertainty surrounding Faustus's ultimate destiny.

Historically, during the Elizabethan era not only was the authority of the Church challenged but also that of many monarchs that succeeded one another, which created a sense of instability and uncertainty in society.

This context adds another layer of complexity to Faustus's struggle, as he grapples not only with his own personal fate but also with the larger forces at play in the world around him. Marlowe's exploration of these themes serves as a reflection of the anxieties and tensions of the time, making *Doctor Faustus* a powerful commentary on both individual and societal uncertainty. Thus, exploring Faustus's salvation becomes not only a theological inquiry but also a reflection on the evolving understanding of spirituality in Renaissance society.

Moreover, Marlowe's own personality and life must be taken into consideration when analyzing the deeper meaning behind *Doctor Faustus*. Known for his rebellious nature and controversial beliefs, Marlowe's personal experiences likely influenced the complex character of Faustus and the exploration of themes such as ambition, desire, and the consequences of unchecked power. Understanding Marlowe's background can provide valuable insights into the motivations behind his writing and shed light on the societal context in which *Doctor Faustus* was created.

This thesis will propose that, even though pride, gluttony, demoniality, and his extraordinary curiosity are primarily to blame for Faustus's downfall, what ultimately condemned him was his own belief that he was undeserving of God's love and the accompanying despair. This thesis aims to conduct an analysis of the historical and religious context in which the play was written, also considering the extraordinary life of its author, and of the criticism and interpretations of the hero's condemnation. Specifically, my analysis centers on what condemned Faustus to an eternity of sufferings.

In chapter 1, I will provide some general information on the historical context. Under the Tudor dynasty, which controlled England from 1485 until 1603, the country prospered economically and culturally. But as previously stated, there was also instability throughout this time, and the authority of the rulers was questioned. I will also delve into the religious landscape of the time, meaning the break with the Church of Rome, the English Reformation, and the rise of Protestantism. The influence of religion on society will be examined.

In chapter 2, I will give an overview of the extraordinary life of Christopher Marlowe, starting from his early years in Canterbury and his education at Cambridge University. I will explore his literary achievements, including his groundbreaking plays such as *Doctor Faustus* and *Tamburlaine the Great*. Additionally, I will delve into Marlowe's controversial personal life, including his alleged involvement in espionage and his untimely death under mysterious circumstances. I will explain Marlowe's complicated relationship with religion and its representatives.

In chapter 3, I will initially provide a brief introduction to the play and later develop an analysis of the Christian doctrine in the play. I will also examine the issue of the redemption and condemnation of Doctor Faustus from religious and moral perspectives. Lastly, I will analyze Faustus' sins and their consequences in relation to his religious beliefs.

Chapter 1

Religion and politics in early modern England

1.1 From Henry VIII to Elizabeth I

In this first chapter, I find it necessary to analyze the historical period in which Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* is set in order to better understand the ideas influencing the play's protagonist and accompany him in his choices. The historical context of *Doctor Faustus* is crucial to comprehend the play's themes and motivations. The Renaissance era, with its emphasis on individualism and humanism, greatly influenced Marlowe's portrayal of Faustus as a man seeking knowledge and power beyond the limits of humanity. Indeed, it can be said that the hero of the work carries with him the typical values of the Renaissance man, although condemned by the Protestant Reformation. Marlowe's Faustus is a complex character that embodies the tension between Renaissance humanism and religion, reflecting the cultural and intellectual climate of the time. When religion and politics are closely intertwined, as during the period under examination, it is a challenge to accurately separate one from the other as they influence each other. This character can serve as a lens through which to view the complex relationship between religion and humanism during the Renaissance.⁴ By examining how this tension is embodied in the character, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and intellectual climate of the time. Political changes will affect the religion of a country and vice versa, and both will shape society, which will have to adapt accordingly.

The Tudor dynasty ruled England from 1485 to 1603 and under their rule, England flourished. The court became the center of culture, wealth, and of course power; cities increased in size, international markets developed, and literacy steadily increased thanks to the technology of printing. As a result of the economic and social well-being that had been created, the development

⁴ Arieh Sachs, 'The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 63 (1964), p. 627.

of international relations, and the impetus of the Italian Renaissance, which was already in its full splendor, English intellectuals and clerics began to look for a connection to ancient Greece and ancient Rome. This took the name of Humanism in England. To earn favor and help the Commonwealth, humanists sought access to the court. They proposed that if the prince or monarch absorbed classical literature and offered advice, the commonwealth would thrive. The atmosphere that surrounded the court harbored danger though: proximity to it meant both the allocation of titles and favors and the exposure of courtiers to treachery and intrigue.⁵ In 1509 Henry VIII ascended to the throne when Henry VII, his father, died. Henry VIII's reign marked a significant period of political and religious upheaval that also impacted the cultural developments of the era. During the first half of his reign, he maintained the economic and social stability of the kingdom he had inherited.⁶

On the contrary, during the second half of his reign England had to undergo some issues: first of all, Lutheranism that started to spread in England in the 1520s. Early criticism of Catholic thought had, indeed, already emerged in the late 14th century when the English theologian John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English. This strand of heretical thought was taken up at the University of Wittenberg by Martin Luther in 1517, who promoted not only the translation of the Scriptures but also their individual reading, as this was supposedly the only way to awaken authentic faith and salvation in the individual.⁷ Luther and Protestantism will be covered in more detail later.

Henry VIII quickly sensed that it constituted a threat to secular authority. He tried to extinguish Lutheran ideas in England through a combination of censorship and oppression. In 1520, Henry VIII published *The Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*, defending the Catholic Church, and earned the title 'Defender of the Faith'. Yet, Henry's relationship with the Catholic Church soured

⁵ Robert Bucholz and Key Newton, *Early Modern England 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), p. 99.

⁶ Stephen Jay Greenblatt and Meyer Howard Abrams (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 1: The Middle Ages through the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, 8th ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 486-8.

⁷ Greenblatt and Abrams, *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 490-1.

over his desire to annul his marriage to Katherine of Aragon due to childbearing difficulties, leading to the English Reformation and the establishment of the Church of England.⁸ In 1532, Henry VIII suspended the First Fruits Tax, which clergy had to pay annually to the Catholic Church. These annates were suspended by the Crown, indicating the king's intentions.⁹ This move was followed by the Act of Supremacy in 1534, which declared Henry the head of the Church of England and effectively broke ties with Rome. This marked a significant shift in religious power and authority in England. In 1536, as part of the plan to undo the Catholic Church's authority in England, Thomas Cromwell, the king's chief minister, started the dissolution of the monasteries, claiming their land and property for the Crown. The reason for this action was twofold: first, monasteries reported directly to Rome, not the English crown, and second, the dissolution of the monasteries provided a solution to the chronic financial problems of the crown. In 1536, a series of uprisings in Northern England, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, collectively attacked the King's religious positions.¹⁰ The Pilgrimage of Grace increased Cromwell's pressure for reform; in 1538, he launched an iconoclastic campaign against religious pictures that led to the destruction of sacred art. Moreover, he mandated that every church get a copy of Miles Coverdale's updated Tyndale Bible translation in English.¹¹

Cromwell's campaign, also known as the 'Great Destruction', aimed to remove all religious images and decorations from churches and monasteries, and resulted in an intensification of the conflict between reformers and traditionalists in England. Interestingly, it was Cromwell the prime mover behind the Protestant reforms. Henry wanted to eliminate the Pope's authority in England, as he saw his own threatened, and once that happened, his interest in reform largely ended. Indeed, he returned to focusing on the search for a wife who could bear him an heir to the throne.¹²

⁸ Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 28.

⁹ Bucholz and Newton, *Early Modern England*, p. 127.

¹⁰ Peter C. Herman, *A Short History of Early Modern England: British Literature in Context*, (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), pp. 79-80.

¹¹ Herman, *A Short History of Early Modern England*, p. 83.

¹² Herman., *A Short History of Early Modern England*, pp. 75-83.

Edward VI, Henry's son, became king in 1547 on his father's death. He was 9 years old and often sick, and thus incapable of ruling. Before dying, Henry VIII had established a council of 16 peers to administer England collectively until his son was eighteen to avoid the issues linked to having a young monarch. However, the Duke of Somerset and Edward Seymour, Edward's uncle, altered the will, making Edward the Lord Protector and, in essence, the ruler of England until Edward reached maturity. The young King and Seymour supported the deepening of Protestant reform since they were devoted to it. The Edwardian Injunctions of 1547 encouraged Bible reading on the part of the laity by ordering parishes to provide copies of the Great Bible to laymen, overturning the 1543 Act for the Advancement of True Religion. Parliament later abandoned its insistence on clerical celibacy and repealed heresy laws that were offensive to Protestants. The first Book of Common Prayer, which was obviously a translation of the Latin prayers, was issued in 1548 by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and was made mandatory for use in 1549 by the Act of Uniformity.¹³ Archbishop Cranmer oversaw the elimination of the Latin rite and the promulgation of a vernacular church service. This revised liturgy mandated the removal of high altars in favor of a table set up in the church naves for the celebration of Holy Communion as a communal meal. The second Book of Common Prayer, written by Archbishop Cranmer in 1552, was even more Protestant than the first. It omitted all prayers for the dead and reduced the bread and wine of the Communion to mere symbolism. Furthermore, the second prayer book insisted on justification solely by faith and rejected purgatory. The Catholic notion of justification by good deeds was challenged by the Protestant doctrines of justification by faith alone 'sola fide' and justification by Scripture alone 'sola scriptura'. These two doctrines were fundamental in breaking from the Church of Rome. Purgatory and papal authority were rejected by Luther's school of thought contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Grace was a gift from God and could not be earned, Protestantism challenged the notion that Christians had to work for their salvation by performing

¹³ Bucholz and Newton, *Early Modern England*, pp. 160-3

good deeds or purchasing indulgences, a system of fines in exchange for forgiveness.¹⁴ Parliament approved a new Act of Uniformity in 1552 that made failure to attend Sunday services a crime punishable by imprisonment.¹⁵

In 1553 Edward VI died and his sister Mary became the first female monarch of England. The restoration of Roman Catholicism was Mary's main goal after becoming queen. The Act of Uniformity was repealed, the Book of Common Prayer was withdrawn, and the heresy laws were reinstated as a sign of courtesy to the new Queen by parliament. Protestant clergymen were expelled; some chose exile to the Protestant hubs of Frankfurt and Geneva, while others faced considerably worse fates than either imprisonment in the Tower or exile. Queen Mary I's efforts to restore Catholicism in England were ruthless and resulted in the execution of nearly 300 Protestants, earning her the nickname "Bloody Mary." Queen Mary tried to revive the ancient faith, but she was unsuccessful. The beliefs that underpinned Catholicism had vanished, even though its outward symbols –such as statues, crucifixes, and stained-glass windows –could be restored alongside its traditional modes of worship. Having no heir, Mary recognized Elizabeth as her successor. The Queen died in 1558. The Elizabethan era was about to begin.¹⁶

Elizabeth ascended the throne when the crown was deeply in debt and the population was traumatized by the violent gyrations over religion since Henry VIII separated from Rome. Once again, the question of marriage was inseparable from foreign policy concerns, and those concerns in turn overlapped with the war between Catholicism and Protestantism. Elizabeth was young, smart, and well educated, and possessed extremely good political skills. However, her gender did not pose as great an obstacle as one might imagine. Elizabeth portrayed herself as divinely elected while deferring to the ultimate male authority figure, God. During her coronation, the Queen signaled her will for England to return to Protestantism by kissing a Bible translated into English. Since many of her subjects were Catholic, she set up authorities in charge of controlling adherence to the definitive

¹⁴ Bucholz and Newton, *Early Modern England*, pp.124-5.

¹⁵ Hiscock and Wilcox, *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 40-54.

¹⁶ Bucholz and Newton, *Early Modern England 1485-1714*, pp. 172-5.

Protestant settlement. Elizabeth came up with a compromise that her government hoped would placate the more radical Protestants and not antagonize the remaining Catholics¹⁷.

On one hand, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith, which were published by Elizabeth's government in 1563, were firmly Protestant and even Calvinist in their acceptance of predestination and salvation by faith while rejecting Purgatory. On the other hand, the Queen also permitted clergy members to wear colorful vestments, a decision that might seem unimportant today but at the time caused a great deal of controversy because it muddled the lines between competing Christian sects as it was a Catholic custom. With prudence, the new Elizabethan administration set out once more to construct a Protestant country. Elizabeth also had to make room for the most rigid Puritans, who opposed any accommodation with Catholicism and were among the most adamant Protestants.¹⁸ Another Act of Uniformity, mandating that everyone attend church on Sundays and those services be conducted in accordance with the second Book of Common Prayer (the more radical Protestant prayer book) was also passed by parliament in 1563.¹⁹

On May 16, 1568, Mary, Queen of Scots, unexpectedly and uninvitedly arrived in England, and a general air of dread grew across the court since she was Catholic. In 1570 Pope Pius V issued a bull excommunicating Elizabeth, forcing English Catholics to choose between their religion and their country as the killing of the Queen, as a heretic, would not be deemed a deadly sin. The Queen was becoming the target of Catholic plots that a group of trusted spies had to prevent. This prompted Parliament to impose additional restrictions on Catholics, such as declaring it a traitorous offense to be a Catholic priest in 1585. Mary, Queen of Scots' execution in 1587 provided Philip II of Spain with the motivation to invade England and oust Elizabeth in favor of a Catholic king. A fleet of ships and troops set off in May 1588 on a mission to conquer England and reestablish Catholicism. The Armada's demise marked not only England's feeling of divine purpose but also

¹⁷ Greenblatt and Abrams, *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 492-493.

¹⁸ Carlson, Eric J., *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*, ed. by David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ Herman, *A Short History of Early Modern England*, p. 119.

national success.²⁰ The Protestant faith became firmly rooted in English culture as a result of the perception of England as a nation that could stand on its own and exercise its power in Europe; possibly God had chosen England to be the home of Protestantism. The Church of England became a symbol of English sovereignty and independence, and its teachings were intertwined with the values and traditions of English society.²¹ While Elizabeth's Protestantism was moderate and not extremist in taking decisions for her reign, it still caused tension and conflict with Catholic factions in England and abroad. Radical Protestants argued that Elizabeth's position of authority in clerical matters was unwarranted and invalid, which prompted the government to enact stricter legislation to suppress religious dissent. King James VI of Scotland received the throne after Elizabeth I's death on March 24, 1603. Her death marked the end of the Tudor era and the beginning of the Stuart era with the ascension of King James VI of Scotland to the throne.²²

To conclude, the religious instability that England suffered over just fifty years had a significant impact on the country's political, social, and cultural landscape, as well as its relationship with other European powers. This highlights the complexity and contradictions of religious beliefs and practices during this period. It also underscores the far-reaching consequences of religious conflicts on a national scale.

1.2 The Elizabethan World

What a piece of work is a man: how noble in reason; how infinite in faculty; in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel; in apprehension how like a god; the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! (2. 2.285-90).²³

Hamlet's statements encapsulate the complex view of society and the place of man in the universe during the Renaissance and Elizabethan era. Marlowe's play reflects human limits and the desire to transcend them but warns against the dangers of arrogance and overreaching. The

²⁰ Bucholz and Newton, *Early Modern England*, pp. 210-1.

²¹ Margo Todd (ed.), *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 179-202.

²² Herman, *A short history of early modern England*, pp. 136-139.

²³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Robert Hapgood (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

character's struggle with these conflicting impulses highlights the complex nature of human ambition. This subchapter will explore how the universe was thought to be organized and its relationship to the work under discussion.

The Elizabethan era was a phase of progress; there was a growing interest in the natural world and a desire to understand it through empirical observation. The advancements in science and philosophy during the Elizabethan era further fueled the debate on human nature. While some claimed that people could become better versions of themselves through reason and education, others held that human behavior was predetermined by God or nature. On the other hand, the population felt a sense of uncertainty and anxiety due to the political and religious turmoil of the time, which may have influenced their views on human nature and the role of individuals in society. The Great Chain of Being, inherited from medieval times, satiated the need for stability and order that society felt the universe lacked. This notion had a pervasive influence during the European Renaissance and shaped not only religious and philosophical thought but also the social and political structures of the time. Though the underlying concepts of the Chain of Being were derived from Plato and Aristotle, the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus first systematized the idea.²⁴ The Great Chain of Being was a hierarchy that placed God at the top and ranked all other life forms under Him, from the simplest to the most complex. Within this divinely ordained hierarchy, everything had its place. This worldview was based on the three universal qualities of variety, interconnection, and order.²⁵ According to the principle of variety, the universe displays the greatest diversity of existences, yet they are not infinite. According to the principle of interconnection, the universe is divided into a finite number of spheres, each of which has at least one quality in common with a nearby form.²⁶ This series progresses in hierarchical order from the most basic form of existence, for instance, inanimate objects, to the most complex and perfect, i.e., God. The supreme being was the head of all things, the king, and his representative on Earth. This

²⁴ E. M. W. Tillyard (ed.), *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Routledge, 2017; originally publ. 1942), pp. 31-2.

²⁵ Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 18.

²⁶ Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 22.

hierarchical structure was employed to rationalize social and political inequality with the notion that those in authority were chosen by God and thus had a divine right to rule. Indeed, in this system, royalty occupied a place of utmost importance: they were located just below the heavenly creatures and stood above all common men. God had chosen the queen to rule the kingdom by giving her this perfection, and any opposition to her was opposition to God's choice.²⁷ This belief in the divine right of rulers reinforced the idea that questioning or going against the queen's authority was seen as a direct challenge to God's will.

Items that occupied similar positions in different hierarchies were related by analogy: thus a monarch was like God, and he was also like a father, the head of the family, or like a lion, most majestic of beasts, or like the sun, the most excellent of heavenly bodies.²⁸

The human being's role within the cosmic order was no less important, as 'he was the nodal point, and his double nature, though the source of internal conflict, had the unique function of binding together all creation, of bridging the greatest cosmic chasm, that between matter and spirit'.²⁹ Indeed, man was gifted free will like angels and the hope of redemption, but divine reason was beyond human understanding. The Chain of Being also provided a justification for the existence of sin and evil. It was believed that the universe held an almost infinite variety of things, including wickedness. Other than God, all living things are in some way flawed or evil, in accordance with their position below God in the chain. Sin comes from chaos and rebellion against the natural order of the universe.³⁰ The notion of overcoming constraints imposed by the Chain of Being intrigued some Renaissance authors. A good example is the lead character in Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus*. As we will see, the play's portrayal of Faustus shows both the ambitious spirit of human aspiration and the more questionable hunger for supernatural abilities. He seems to be both exalted and punished. In this regard, Marlowe's drama has frequently been cited as

²⁷ Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 55.

²⁸ Greenblatt, and Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Norton Anthology*, p. 1242.

²⁹ Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 72.

³⁰ Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, pp. 27-33.

the apex of Renaissance ambiguity, indicating both the period's acceptance of the men's position in the Chain and its fascination with pushing beyond the limits of human possibility.³¹

1.3 Before, during, and after the Protestant Reformation

Before delving into the subject of religion, it is critical to define the Protestant Reformation in England and its consequences. The development of Protestantism was the result of the Reformation process. It was a series of smaller changes initiated in the 1530s that included abandoning Roman obedience, asserting secular authority over the Church, suppressing Catholic institutions like monasteries and chantries, forbidding Catholic worship, and Protestantizing the clergy and laypeople. The Reformation probably happened at different rates in different places. Either through official coercion or widespread conversion, the English Reformation was a painfully slow process. People were encouraged to conform through a campaign of preaching and printed propaganda and by a sharpening of the treason laws. Evidence for a 'rapid reformation' was usually based on areas with favorable social and political conditions, while evidence for a 'slow reformation' tended to be based on counties with poor communications and less effective government. The English Reformation was not an inevitable process; rather, it was the result of several disputes and crises as well as the interaction of regionally specific social, geographic, and political elements. A Protestant England was acknowledged in 1559; the medieval church was in decline; the laity was anticlerical; Lutheran principles were accepted; a centralizing state promoted reform; and the medieval church was in decline. Yet the English Reformation was not inescapable. It took the Elizabethan episcopate about fifteen years to require clergy and parishioners in the country to observe the Prayer Book in a decent manner. The aims and accomplishments of Mary's reign also demonstrated that the Catholic Church's eventual demise was not inevitable.³²

³¹ Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p. 29.

³² Todd, *Reformation to Revolution*, pp. 13-26.

The pre-reformation scene was dominated by the Catholic Church, which held a monopoly on religious authority and controlled the dissemination of knowledge through its control of education. Laity played a passive and submissive role in the church's traditional view of the clergy as the primary conduit of divine grace. Late medieval Christianity was marked by reformism, which sought to safeguard clerical power by idealizing a stable past of doctrinal and liturgical continuity. This was due to the loss of faith in sacerdotal authority among the aristocracy and lay people. To re-engage common people in the life of the church, the right to preach in the vernacular and to include laypeople in religious rituals was established. Christians searched for alternative religious practices must have been fueled by their parish priests' questionable abilities, and mendicants' widespread corruption. There had long been tensions between clergy and their king, tensions that eventually led to the Henrician Reformation. In fact, it could be said that Henry IV prepared the way for Henry Tudor to claim ecclesiastical power for himself.³³ It was the beginning of the English Reformation. The purported unity of the Catholic Church was split into opposing forms of Christianity, with Catholicism being the main division in England and Protestantism itself continuing to subdivide.³⁴

Catholicism did not disappear entirely, however; in the second half of the Queen's reign, a movement of Catholic missionaries, the Jesuits, rose that sought to restore the old religion to its former glory. The Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, was founded in 1540 as a result of the Church's ambition to reinvent itself. Ignatius of Loyola's (1491–1556) military-style priestly order was well-prepared to engage in doctrinal debate, preaching, missionary activity, and pastoral work in order to oppose what Catholics perceived as Protestant heresy. Most of Luther's structural and doctrinal objections to Catholicism were rejected, and they reiterated the validity of the seven sacraments, good deeds, transubstantiation, purgatory, and indulgences. They agreed with Luther's

³³ Hiscock and Wilcox, *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 4-26.

³⁴ Herman, *A Short History of Early Modern England*, pp. 8-15.

assertion that some clergy were dishonest and demanded adjustments to the education and behavior of priests.³⁵

A small minority of Protestants, given the toned-down survival of Catholicism, felt that the reforms were not sufficiently rigid and were dissatisfied with this halfway position between Catholicism and Protestantism. During Elizabeth's reign, the phenomenon of 'Puritanism' arose. Within the Church of England, Puritans promoted an increasingly aggressive agenda of criticism, personal reformation, and renewal. The Puritans' preoccupation was to find and eradicate the papal presence that tainted the Book of Common Prayer, i.e., the ring in marriage and the sign of the cross. Their opposition to these symbols was based on their belief that they were remnants of Catholicism and therefore, impure.³⁶ The Puritans aimed to purify the Church of England by removing any elements that they deemed to be associated with Catholicism. They did not want to break from Protestantism but wanted it to move away from profanity and thus purify itself. Indeed, they declared that their believers could accept the liturgy of the Church of England and attend Mass, but still conform to the creed of the Puritan movement. Puritanism was not a foreign religion, nor was it even separate from Protestantism; rather, Puritanism was the natural outgrowth of Protestantism, or its complete absorption.³⁷

Henry VIII's initial detachment from the Catholic Church did not only result in the conversion of the whole nation from Catholicism to Protestantism but also in the loss of a point of reference in the lives of individuals and communities: the pope's power, the ultimate authority in religion, was weakened.

³⁵ Bucholz and Newton, *Early Modern England*, pp. 202-6.

³⁶ Todd, *Reformation to Revolution*, pp. 179-202.

³⁷ Todd, *Reformation to Revolution*, pp. 33-50.

1.4 Protestantism and Catholicism and their impact on society

It is also necessary to lay out some of the distinctions between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, as the spread of Lutheranism in England in the 1520s challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and its beliefs. The Catholic Church and Protestantism were fundamentally different in how they saw salvation, church government, and religious authority. According to the Catholic Church God's will was to be found in the Bible; indeed, the clergy reserved for themselves the right to interpret the Bible for laymen. The truth was contained in the Bible. All non-scriptural doctrine and practice, all non-scriptural art, amounted to lies and false religion. Hierarchy in the Catholic Church was equally strict: the Pope at the top, followed by the bishops, and so on until the individual believer. Catholicism held that one could reach heaven through a variety of means: belief in God, participation in the seven sacraments, and the performance of good works.

Protestantism took very different approaches to each of these issues. First of all, the Scriptures alone were the exclusive basis of religious truth. They suggested a minimal or nonexistent hierarchy in place of a hierarchical structure.³⁸ Faith alone was sufficient to get the believer to salvation and Heaven rather than through a combination of faith and good works; John Calvin later developed the concepts of 'predestination' and divine determinism. The Bible was also translated into vernacular languages by Protestants who held the view that believers could achieve salvation on their own. Purgatory was the final resting place for individuals whose crimes were great enough to prevent them from entering paradise but not great enough to condemn them to eternal damnation, according to the centuries-old teaching of the Catholic Church. The idea was that one endured punishment for a period of time until their soul was sufficiently cleansed to join heaven. Yet, the Church began offering 'indulgences' in the Middle Ages that offered forgiveness for a predetermined period of time in exchange for a predetermined sum of money. Indulgences, in Luther's opinion, were nothing more than extortion and corruption. The primary thing to remember

³⁸ Bucholz and Newton, *Early Modern England*, pp. 148-150.

is that early Protestantism was worried about pre-Reformation religious cultural media in England because they could be used as vehicles for false religion rather than because they were intrinsically false or deceitful. Mendacious art was the target of hate, but not art itself. All in all, the period of acute iconophobia was rather brief, lasting no longer than one generation.³⁹

Earlier, life was dictated by the sacraments, prayer, and religious teachings that priests had the duty to explain to believers during the Latin mass. For example, during the medieval period, the Catholic Church had immense power and influence over people's lives. Priests would interpret the Bible and dictate what actions were considered sinful or righteous, and how individuals should conduct themselves in society. Suddenly, believers who felt bewildered were now seeking 'a faith that convinced the intellect, and [...] a religion that satisfied the heart'⁴⁰. Protestantism was born as a response to this need.

Society saw an increase in both male and female literacy, mainly due to the fact that now believers could have direct access to the Scriptures without the need for someone to mediate for them. This direct access to the Scriptures led to a questioning of traditional religious authority and a rise in individual interpretation, ultimately contributing to the Protestant Reformation and the fragmentation of Christianity into different denominations. During the Elizabethan period, there was also an increase in attendance at universities, as education was seen as vital in understanding and interpreting Scripture. This led to the growth of universities and the spread of knowledge beyond the clergy to the broader population. For example, in Elizabethan England, it was common for people to attend university in order to gain a deeper understanding of religious texts and teachings. As a consequence, there was a rise in intellectuals who were able to challenge traditional religious authority and contribute to the Reformation movement.⁴¹

³⁹ Herman, *A Short History of Early Modern England*, pp. 72-74.

⁴⁰ Carlson, Eric J., *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*, ed. by David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

⁴¹ Greenblatt and Abrams, *The Norton Anthology*, pp.486-7.

Religion even influenced hygiene. This shows how religion played a significant role in shaping not only people's beliefs but also their daily lives and practices. It highlights the impact of religious ideas on various aspects of society, including hygiene and personal hygiene practices. Unlike Catholics, Protestants, particularly Puritans, felt that a cleaner body was more suited to serve God since in this way the filth of the body did not corrupt the soul. Bathing before church was a sign of respect, reverence, and good manners since it prepared the soul and wiped away sin. This etiquette was to be followed in encounters with the king or queen, as they were elected by God himself: disrespecting one meant a lack of respect for the other. Puritans considered using soap or cosmetics as an indication of vanity and a lack of attention to important issues such as keeping the soul clean. This belief was rooted in the Puritans' strict religious views and their focus on living a simple and humble life. They believed that one's outward appearance should not be a priority, but rather, their inner spiritual state should be the focus. Taking too much care of the body meant neglecting the soul, which was seen as a dangerous path toward sin and damnation. Therefore, they practiced self-discipline and avoided indulging in materialistic pleasures.⁴²

Whether religion had a positive or a negative effect is difficult to say since it affected the entire society. Religion provided a sense of purpose and comfort for individuals during difficult times. Furthermore, it played a crucial role in shaping societal norms and values, which helped to maintain social order and stability. The strict moral codes and guidelines provided by religion helped to regulate behavior and prevent chaos, ensuring that everyone played their part in the Great Chain of Being. Those who adhered to these codes were rewarded with a sense of belonging and acceptance within the community, while those who strayed from them were ostracized and punished. Ultimately, religion played a vital role in shaping both individual and societal identity, reminding us that we are all connected and dependent on each other in the grand scheme of things. Without these guidelines, individuals may be more likely to act in their own self-interest, leading to

⁴² Keith Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness in Early Modern England', in *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 56–83.

a breakdown in societal norms. Overall, while religion may have its flaws, it has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping human history and culture.

Chapter 2

Christopher Marlowe

2.1 The controversial life of Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)

It is crucial to examine the ever evolving and varied environment in which Marlowe lived. As a writer, he absorbed every facet of the world around him, going beyond merely viewing its physical reality, and developing a personal critical viewpoint, investigating the endless capabilities of human beings. Christopher Marlowe's life and death are shrouded in mystery, with his reputation as a spy, blasphemer, streetfighter, and homosexual adding to the intrigue. As one of the most scandalous Elizabethan playwrights, Marlowe made a significant impact on literature in a remarkably short time. The importance of his life and works in literature cannot be overstated, as he influenced countless writers after him.⁴³ Controversies surrounding his life and death have only added to the mystique of his persona, making him a figure of fascination and intrigue both for his contemporaries and for later generations. Ultimately, while the question of Marlowe's homosexuality remains speculative, it has undeniably contributed to discussions surrounding his personal life and artistic expression. His life has something to tell us about living with faults and contradictions deeply rooted in Elizabethan society, as well as about gaiety, audacity, and elated persistence in showing courage to pursue one's dreams despite societal norms and expectations. Marlowe's legacy continues to inspire and challenge us, reminding us that true greatness lies in daring to be different and pursuing our passions with unbridled enthusiasm.⁴⁴

Marlowe's personal life demonstrates his disobedience to social conventions and expectations. The purpose of the following brief paragraph is to allude to Marlowe's sexual orientation since it is an issue that is closely related to his legendary reputation and cannot be

⁴³ David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Macmillan, 2005), pp. 11-2.

⁴⁴ Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe: Poet & Spy* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1-6.

ignored. Christopher Marlowe's alleged homosexuality has been a subject of much debate among scholars and historians. While concrete evidence regarding his sexual orientation is scarce, there are various historical accounts and literary interpretations that suggest the possibility of Marlowe's same-sex attractions. Some biographers point to his close relationships with other men, such as his patron Thomas Walsingham and fellow playwright Thomas Kyd, as indicators of his potential homosexuality. Additionally, the content of Marlowe's works, particularly his exploration of themes related to homoeroticism and same-sex desire, has been analyzed for possible personal reflections. References to same-sex relationships and expressions of love between male characters in plays like *Edward II* have further fueled speculation about Marlowe's own sexual preferences. However, it is important to approach these assertions with caution, as the societal context of Elizabethan England, where same-sex relationships were stigmatized and even criminalized, complicates the interpretation of historical evidence.⁴⁵

However, Christopher Marlowe's life is a fascinating subject that extends beyond the speculation surrounding his alleged homosexuality.

The first erroneous assumption about Marlowe concerns the profession of his father, John Marlowe: it has been hypothesized that he was a shoemaker. Although his origins remain humble, this has been proven to be inaccurate. Indeed, John Marlowe was born around 1536 in Ospringe, near Canterbury. John Marlowe first went to Canterbury when he was about twenty years old and soon started working as an apprentice for the cobbler Gerard Richardson. Once settled, John Marlowe proposed to marry Katherine Arthur, a woman from Dover. They married in Canterbury in 1561. In February 1564, Katherine gave birth to a boy, Christopher.⁴⁶

The Marlowe family lived in a house on the sloping High Street. The street was malodorous, as there was a cattle market on one side of the parish and a butcher's waste on the other; there was dripping blood or pieces of bloody flesh all over the pavement, and there were constant noises.

⁴⁵ Lukas Erne, 'Biography, Mythography, and Criticism: The Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe', *Modern Philology*, 103 (2005), pp. 30-2.

⁴⁶ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 20-4.

Marlowe absorbed with curiosity the city around him.⁴⁷ Marlowe was a poor boy on scholarship throughout his education. Observant and alert, he was to prosper as a scholar, and at an early age.⁴⁸ He was likely enrolled in a free grammar school around 1572. Despite facing financial difficulties, he obtained a scholarship at the King's School, Canterbury in 1579. There, he studied grammar, Latin and Greek, translation, and poetry other than ritual, singing, and devotion.⁴⁹

In 1581, he matriculated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He studied classical literature and rhetoric extensively, developing a thorough comprehension of the writings of renowned ancient authors like Ovid, Seneca, and Virgil. Marlowe's exposure to the Renaissance intellectual and cultural fervor throughout his studies had a significant impact on his own literary works. At the same time, he befriended a cousin of the spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham's, the secretary of state, in charge of the biggest and most efficient intelligence service in the world. By the middle of the 1580s, the Queen's Council was in need of secret agents at Cambridge, and it had not been difficult to recruit students as temporary help. It is likely that Nicholas Faunt, an officer of Walsingham's that had attended Cambridge and the King's School in Canterbury, played a part in Marlowe's hiring. Marlowe had many skills, including intelligence, academic excellence, a fascination with travel, and the ability to make friends. Evidence shown by Corpus Christi records suggests he was spending more than his grant because he had extra money on hand and starting from this moment his presence at Cambridge stopped being continuous. As much as secrecy, danger, and travel may have fascinated him, he was in need of money. It is important to consider Marlowe's dedication to his studies and writings while evaluating his success as a spy. Forgetting that his focus on poems, language, and the theater kept him busy at Corpus Christi would be to underestimate him. He used espionage to avoid misery. In some ways, the intellectual

⁴⁷ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 49-65.

incorruptibility and consistency of the behavior of Tamburlaine and Faustus is a reaction to the compromises of his work as an agent.⁵⁰

Marlowe completed his bachelor's degree in 1584. During the first year of his MA course, Marlowe's disappearances became more assiduous.⁵¹ He may have traveled to France and the Netherlands at that time, according to clues. In *Doctor Faustus* he makes several allusions to events that occurred in the Netherlands in 1585, including the Dutch attempt to deploy a fireship on the Scheldt River to burn a bridge during the Spanish siege of Antwerp. Despite the similarities, Faustus and Marlowe are indeed very different. Marlowe's motivation stemmed from external pressures, obligations, and the need for economic sustenance, whereas Faustus' predicament arises from an internal struggle for self-expression and intellectual fulfillment. Despite their differing circumstances, both Marlowe and Faustus face obstacles that hinder their ability to pursue their true desires, albeit in distinct ways. Marlowe's commitment to and focus on his plays kept him from acting in ostentatious or showy ways that could have led to his arrest or even death. He remained detached and impartial throughout his spying operations.⁵²

The poet's inability to justify his extended absence from Cambridge and his alleged visit to the catholic Université de Rheims had initially prevented Marlowe from obtaining his MA degree. The English seminary at Rheims was a prime destination for Catholic students in exile; it housed many of Queen Elizabeth's enemies. In order to allow the poet to get his degree, The Privy Council had to intervene addressing a letter to Cambridge University officials. In addition to praising the poet's intelligence and knowledge, the letter underlined his devotion to the queen and the services he rendered. Ultimately, the request was granted, and the poet received his degree in 1587.⁵³ Despite the fact that they did not specify when his services began, what they entailed, or whether he was indeed operating in the French seminary, the Councilors' letter implied that Marlowe had performed covert operations for the Council.

⁵⁰ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 116–30.

⁵¹ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, p. 120.

⁵² Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 148-153.

⁵³ Erne, *Biography, Mythography, and Criticism*, pp. 30-1.

After receiving his MA degree Marlowe moved to London, embarking on his career as a playwright, allowing the city to fascinate him and be a source of inspiration for the plays to come. However, the reality of his financial situation was always looming over him. Despite his education, Marlowe struggled to find steady employment and often had to rely on patronage from wealthy individuals to support himself. This constant struggle for financial stability likely influenced the themes and characters in his plays. As the Council was involved in helping him earn his degree, Marlowe had been exposed; he had no guarantee that he would ever be employed again.⁵⁴ Except from dramatist Thomas Kyd, with whom he was sharing a working space, a writing room, out of necessity, the primary people in Marlowe's post-graduate life all worked for the Elizabethan secret service. The group of intelligence agents that kept an eye on the seminarians at Rheims and their English friends included the spy Richard Baines, the poet Thomas Watson, a circle of intellectuals and writers known for their unconventional views, which attracted scrutiny from authorities. Before introducing *Tamburlaine the Great* to a cast of players in the summer of 1587, he polished the play he had written in college. By the fall, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* was a part of the Lord Admiral's Men's repertoire.⁵⁵

In 1589, the poet Thomas Watson interfered in the fight between Marlowe and an innkeeper named William Bradley, killing Bradley. Both poets were held captive, but Watson was released after acknowledging that he had acted in self-defense.⁵⁶ Marlowe was also released. The government stepped in to save him, not out of allegiance, but as he may still be helpful. There was a shortage of couriers, especially educated ones who knew the Lowlands and France. After being praised in 1587 by the Privy Council, Marlowe was still being exploited by the authorities.⁵⁷ The drafting of *Doctor Faustus* took place in the late 1580s. The play is believed to have been finished

⁵⁴ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 154-6.

⁵⁵ David Riggs, 'Marlowe's Life', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 29-30.

⁵⁶ Stephen Jay Greenblatt and Meyer Howard Abrams, 'Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)' in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 1: The Middle Ages through the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. By Stephen Jay Greenblatt and Meyer Howard Abrams (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 1001-57 (p. 1003).

⁵⁷ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 227-9.

by 1589 at the latest, as an early performance of it took place at the Bel Savage theater around that time.⁵⁸

Marlowe departed for Flushing or Vlissingen in the southern Netherlands maybe at the end of 1591 or the beginning of 1592. This ‘cautionary town’ was given by the English queen in exchange for her assistance in repelling Spanish invaders from the Lowlands.⁵⁹ Marlowe found lodgings in Flushing with Richard Baines and Gifford Gilbert, an English goldsmith. When and how this trio came together is unknown, but they soon arrived at a mutual understanding. Taking advantage of the goldsmith’s expertise, the three men began to make counterfeit money. Under the English law, counterfeiting was high treason, punishable by death.⁶⁰ After the first coin was put in circulation, Baines, concerned about its potential success went to Sir Robert Sidney, the head of the English garrison there, and informed on his partners. Marlowe’s own counterfeiting scheme coincided with the formation of the ‘Stanley plot’. The ‘Stanley plot’ referred to a conspiracy led by Ferdinando Stanley, the Earl of Derby, who sought to overthrow Queen Elizabeth I and place Mary, Queen of Scots, on the English throne. Although there is no concrete evidence linking Marlowe directly to the ‘Stanley plot,’ his association with underground activities and his proximity to Flushing during this time have fueled speculation about his potential involvement. There are, then, multiple explanations for Marlowe’s criminal behavior in Flushing. He wanted the money – the stereotypical figure of the poor scholar recurs in Marlowe’s life throughout his later work. He wanted to penetrate the Stanley plot and gather intelligence for the Privy Council. If these explanations are contradictory, they also represent options that remained open for an entrepreneurial double agent. There is no indication that Marlowe underwent any punishment.⁶¹

After Marlowe left the city of Flushing to return to London, his life took a tragic turn that ultimately led to his untimely death. *Doctor Faustus*’ provocative representation prompted the Privy Council to issue a warrant for his arrest on 18 May 1593, shortly after fellow playwright Thomas

⁵⁸ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, p. 272.

⁵⁹ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 266.

⁶⁰ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, p. 322.

⁶¹ Riggs, *Marlowe’s Life*, pp. 32-5.

Kyd confessed the existence of a document purportedly belonging to Marlowe and containing evidence of atheism and blasphemy.⁶²

Marlowe passed away on 30 May 1593, the same year. The incident occurred at Eleanor Bull's house, in Deptford, London, which may have been a licensed tavern. The coroner's inquisition claimed that Marlowe assaulted Frizer, a businessman connected to the Walsingham family, after losing his temper over the paying a debt. Marlowe was instantaneously killed when Frizer, as he himself reported, defended himself by stabbing Marlowe in the eye. However, Sheffield surgeon J. Thompson Rowling is skeptical of this hypothesis, as the dagger that wounded Marlowe apparently penetrated two inches over the eyeball. The stab caused intracranial bleeding from a significant artery, such as the carotid, which had been recently penetrated by the weapon would have been the most likely reason for death. Marlowe would perhaps have been awake for five to six minutes after that.⁶³ Moreover, according to the coroner, Marlowe struck Frizer in the scalp with the hilt of his blade. This was a typical tactic used in Elizabethan brawls, and it had a clear meaning. Pummeling was a threat that implied you wanted to harm but not kill your opponent. Marlowe may have lost his temper and was not new to violence but had no intention to kill. Given his involvement in espionage activities, it is possible to argue that Marlowe's death was not the result of a plain tavern fight but rather a political assassination. Further supporting this theory are Frizer's ties to the Walsingham family.⁶⁴ However, the biographers quickly cast suspicion on the accuracy of this story, due to the excessive number of conspiracy theories that arose regarding Marlowe's demise, including speculations about his involvement in espionage, faking his death, or being assassinated by political enemies. These fictional interpretations represent, in a sense, the logical development of a biographical or legendary tradition that has rarely given much thought to which elements of the tale appear to be historically justified.⁶⁵

⁶² Paul Whitfield White, 'Marlowe and the Politics of Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 70-89 (p. 81).

⁶³ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 345.

⁶⁴ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 389-90.

⁶⁵ Erne, *Biography, Mythography, and Criticism*, pp. 32-34.

Riggs claims that:

Despite his lengthy criminal record, Marlowe never went to trial, apart from two brief hearings. He was never convicted of anything. All the evidence about his mutinous cast of mind sits at one remove from his own voice. It consists of reported speech transcribed by informants, observations by unfriendly witnesses, and passages drawn from his plays. Sceptics rightly insist that the atheist, sodomite, spy, and insurrectionist exists only in these documents. He is an irretrievably textual being.⁶⁶

This statement highlights the peculiar nature of Christopher Marlowe's criminal record, which, despite its length, lacked any noteworthy legal proceedings or convictions against him. Instead, the evidence that depicts Marlowe as a controversial figure is derived from sources including reported speeches transcribed by informants and excerpts from his own plays. Critics argue that the portrayal of Marlowe as an atheist, sodomite, spy, and insurrectionist exists solely within these documents, making him an essentially textual being. For instance, one such source is Kyd's accusation, which provides an insight into Marlowe's supposed blasphemous statements and views. Additionally, the observations of unfriendly witnesses, such as the accounts of Marlowe's supposed involvement in the 'Stanley plot,' further contribute to the understanding of his alleged rebellious tendencies. Furthermore, passages from Marlowe's own plays, like *Doctor Faustus*, have been scrutinized for potential autobiographical elements, leading to speculation about Marlowe's own mindset and inclinations. His identity as a provocative figure might be constructed solely through the lens of these texts, emphasizing the need for careful interpretation and critical analysis of the available historical sources.

2.2 Marlowe's relationship with religion

Academics and literary critics differ on the question of Marlowe's relationship with religion. Marlowe's works show a profound engagement with religious themes, challenging conventional wisdom and examining the limits of religion. Marlowe might have adopted more unusual views, such as those related to the occult or atheism, according to some researchers who claim that his

⁶⁶ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, p. 17.

writings show skepticism toward Christian concepts. Regardless of the inquiries concerning his alleged atheism, the issue in Marlowe's case was not atheism per se, but rather a questioning of religious dogmas, power, capabilities, and authority. If Marlowe was an atheist, Marlowe 'was a God-haunted atheist'⁶⁷, which suggests a passionate identification with the experiences of regret, fear of damnation, repentance, and worship.⁶⁸ Despite the ambiguity surrounding Marlowe's personal beliefs, his examination of religious topics in his plays and poems has never failed to captivate audiences and spark intellectual discussion.

Rather than directly attacking ideologies, Marlowe probes underneath them to show the mind in its contradictions. He maintains his distance, making it impossible to categorize him as an 'atheist,' 'a hidden Catholic,' or 'a Protestant in disguise.' As a playwright, one of Marlowe's strengths lies in his deep and urgent concern with religion, as he seeks to investigate truths about emotions, attitudes, motivation, and behavior.⁶⁹

Christopher Marlowe conceived of religion as a source of contention and contradictions rather than as the bearer of truth. His plays portray conflicts between Muslims, Jews, Protestants, and Catholics, highlighting the complexity of religious beliefs and their impact on society. Marlowe's characters often question the validity of religious doctrines and challenge the authority of religious leaders, reflecting his own skepticism towards organized religion.⁷⁰ Marlowe quotes Ovid, Lucretius, Polybius, and Livy, weaving their philosophies into his works and intertwining them with contemporary matters. This demonstrates Marlowe's deep understanding and appreciation of classical literature, which he skillfully incorporates into his own writing. Additionally, Marlowe's use of these sources highlights the enduring relevance of ancient ideas and their continued influence on modern thought. He challenges traditional religious beliefs and spreads provocative concepts,

⁶⁷ Hunter, G. K., 'The Theology of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27 (1964), 211–40 (p. 240).

⁶⁸ White, Marlowe and the Politics of Religion, p. 86.

⁶⁹ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 181.

⁷⁰ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 26-7.

delving into the power and potential destructiveness of religion as a tool in the hands of political leaders.⁷¹

Marlowe's portrayal of religion Catholicism reflects the complex relationship between religion and politics while challenging societal assumptions.⁷² In *Doctor Faustus*, while he does not advocate for Catholicism as a desirable or effective religion or link it to the devil, he exposes the corruption and exploitation within religious organizations. This highlights the tension between religious institutions and their supposed moral authority, as well as the potential for individuals to question and challenge these institutions.⁷³ He opposes institutionalized Catholicism and Judaism and paints them as fake religions in the other masterpieces *The Massacre at Paris* and *The Jew of Malta*. In the latter, Marlowe does in fact make fun of all forms of organized religion, portraying the main character Barabas as a greedy and manipulative Jew who uses religion to further his own interests. However, Marlowe's critique of organized religion should not be interpreted as an attack on faith itself, but rather as a call for individuals to question the institutions that claim to represent it.⁷⁴ His play *Tamburlaine* questions if events are cynically exploited by politicians for their personal gain, challenging providential readings of them.⁷⁵ Leading characters of these plays, the Guise, Ferneze, and Tamburlaine all serve as examples of the senseless acts of cruelty, greed, selfishness, and injustice that can be committed in the name of God and true religion; in the cases of the Guise and Ferneze, the exploitation appears self-aware, whereas it is less obvious with Tamburlaine. Marlowe successfully poses the question of why God permits awful things to happen to good people, at least in the sad case of Barabas's sincerely religious daughter Abigail. Marlowe seems to imply that dishonesty and discrepancy between religious ideals and deeds are inevitable

⁷¹ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, p. 110.

⁷² White, *Marlowe and the politics of religion*, p. 70.

⁷³ Thomas Healy, *Doctor Faustus*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 185.

⁷⁴ Riggs, *Marlowe's Life*, pp. 38-9.

⁷⁵ White, *Marlowe and the Politics of Religion*, pp. 77-9.

results of the corrupt organizations they serve, and the unrealistic vows believers are forced to uphold.⁷⁶

Yet, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* raises the question of whether providential interpretations of events are simply human inventions that are cynically appropriated and spread by shrewd politicians to strengthen their position and quell criticism. In the early scenes of *Tamburlaine*, Tamburlaine's life demonstrates how someone may socially ascend through tremendous willpower, charisma, physical strength, and military acumen. This legitimizes radical social mobility, which was discouraged, if not condemned, by the Chain of Being.⁷⁷

Marlowe was deeply curious about human nature and behavior, but also pessimistic about the prospects of change.⁷⁸ He believed that corruption was inevitable within society's dominant religion or moral code, and that individuals were ultimately driven by their own self-interest. Marlowe's plays often explore these themes through flawed and morally ambiguous characters, challenging the traditional ideas of morality and virtue in Elizabethan society.⁷⁹

While Marlowe's attitudes towards religion were complex and not exclusively negative, he recognized the power of social reality in shaping individuals and exacting punishments for failure to fulfill one's duty to others. His exploration of politics, religion, trade, and sexuality in his works displayed his unconventional and in-depth thoughts.⁸⁰

In conclusion, Marlowe aimed to challenge societal beliefs and provide a glimpse into hidden realities and the specifics of power and control, highlighting his unconventional and in-depth thoughts. Marlowe was captivated not by the power of religion to transform and elevate the soul from mere possessions, but by the power of financial and political assets to turn religion into

⁷⁶ White, Marlowe and the Politics of Religion, pp. 86.

⁷⁷ White, Marlowe and the Politics of Religion, pp. 71-2.

⁷⁸ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 306.

⁷⁹ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 257.

⁸⁰ Russ McDonald, Marlowe and Style, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 57-8.

nothing but a tool.⁸¹ Marlowe's works continue to inspire the intellectual discourse and to captivate audiences, making his personal beliefs a subject of ongoing debate among scholars.

⁸¹ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 311-2.

Chapter 3

Doctor Faustus

3.1 *Doctor Faustus*: an introduction

Doctor Faustus continues to captivate audiences and scholars alike, thanks to its profound exploration of human desires and the relentless pursuit of ultimate power. This iconic play stands out among Marlowe's works for its unique ability to seamlessly shift between comic and tragic scenes, creating a captivating and dynamic theatrical experience.⁸² The play *Doctor Faustus* explores both heroic aspiration and psychic torment, with the latter perhaps being the most memorable theme. Marlowe captures the hero's suffering in a way that moves readers and audiences in every century and culture.⁸³ As the story unfolds, it delves into the depths of ambition, knowledge, and the consequences of striving for power at the cost of spiritual and moral values. *Doctor Faustus* is a timeless masterpiece that has a profound impact on everyone who reads it owing to its deep themes, nuanced characters, and dramatic tension. Feelings of regret, hopelessness, complete entrapment, repentance that comes too late in life, and utter terror are universally relatable.

The playwright's inspiration came from a wide range of sources, including the historical and cultural setting in which Marlowe grew up as well as the life of Georgius of Helmstadt (c. 1480-1540) and the legend of Faust. The former was a German astrologer and alchemist who was rumored to have made a pact with the devil. Georgius was known for his occult practices and his involvement in the dark arts. The latter is the *Faustbook*, a popular story that circulated in Germany in the 16th century. In the German Faust legend, Faust is a scholar who becomes dissatisfied with his earthly knowledge and makes a deal with the devil. Faust is offered worldly pleasures and experiences in exchange for his soul. Marlowe turned these stories into a prime example of the

⁸² Sarah Dewar-Watson, 'Marlowe's Dramatic Form', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 49-56 (p. 51).

⁸³ Thomas McAlindon, 'Doctor Faustus: The Predestination Theory', *English Studies*, 76 (1995), pp. 215-220 (p. 215).

making of an anti-saint, mixing the seriousness of the themes and moral issues raised by the hero with comic scenes to relieve the dramatic tension.⁸⁴

Marlowe's play revolves around the central character, Doctor Faustus, a highly talented but dissatisfied scholar in sixteenth-century Germany. In the first scene, Faustus turns away from the traditional subjects taught in schools – rhetoric, physics, law, and theology – and throws out volumes of works by Aristotle, Galen, and Justinian before turning to a more sinister book, an illegal book of necromancy.⁸⁵ Declaring hell a myth, Faustus makes an inauspicious pact with Lucifer, the fallen angel. In exchange for his soul, the hero is granted twenty-four years of magical powers and the services of Mephistopheles, a devil who becomes his constant companion. Faustus embarks on a journey of indulgence and knowledge, performing miraculous feats and engaging in various misadventures.⁸⁶ In the time frame in which the story takes place, Faustus travels from Germany to the rest of the world to heaven itself. Faustus begins and ends his twenty-four years of servitude to the devil in his Wittenberg home, which is associated with Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.⁸⁷ In the closing scene, the devils come to visit Faustus and take his soul. Faustus is ultimately sent to hell despite his fervent cries for mercy and his attempt to make one final deal with the devil – never to find salvation.⁸⁸

Doctor Faustus exists in two very distinct versions: the A-text (1604) and the longer B-text (1616), which likely contains additions by other authors and was also revised to comply with the strict censorship laws of 1606.⁸⁹ Overall, the A-text of 1604 more accurately captures Faustus's nuanced psychological profile as well as the poet's ambivalent attitude toward religion.⁹⁰ The B-text introduces a rival German pope named Bruno as a counterpoint to the Italian pope, and has Faustus

⁸⁴ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, pp. 198-9.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Spiller, 'Marlowe's Libraries: A History of Reading', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context* (Cambridge University Press: 2013), pp. 101-9 (p. 101).

⁸⁶ Riggs, *Marlowe's Life*, p. 39

⁸⁷ Barbara L. Parker, 'Cursèd Necromancy': Marlowe's *Faustus* as Anti-Catholic Satire', *Marlowe Studies*, 1 (2011), pp. 59-77 (p. 60).

⁸⁸ Spiller, *Marlowe's Libraries*, p. 102.

⁸⁹ Greenblatt and Abrams, 'Christopher Marlowe', in *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 1001-57 (p. 1024).

⁹⁰ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 209.

commit additional pranks while posing as a cardinal in order to highlight the more repulsive aspects of the *Faustbook*. In contrast to the Calvinist interpretation of the A-text, which contends that it may be impossible to repent because of God's withholding of grace, the Lutheran influence in the B-text implies that Faustus could choose to pursue repentance. This slight modification highlights the difficulty in selecting the best text.⁹¹ The two texts of the play have varying degrees of quality and authority, according to the editors.⁹² The graveness of the A-comparative text has been favored by more recent critics, whereas the fuller representation of comic performances in the B-text was preferred by older editors.⁹³

In conclusion, *Doctor Faustus'* exploration of sin and religion holds a special place of focus within the play, as it delves into the moral and spiritual consequences of the protagonist's choices. Marlowe's vivid portrayal of the human condition, the temptations that allure us, and the limits of our mortal existence continue to resonate with audiences. As we delve deeper into the chapters that follow, we will uncover the profound themes of sin and religion, further unraveling the complex layers of this enduring work.

3.2 The Christian doctrine in *Doctor Faustus*

Within the more intimate depths of a man's soul, Marlowe encapsulates the mysteries of salvation in *Doctor Faustus*. The covered topics include: the complexities of redemption, providence, and free will; the creation and perdition of mankind; and Lucifer's rebellion.⁹⁴ Even though criticism on religious issues of the play is very contradictory, it has largely been centered on the issue of whether *Doctor Faustus* endorses or challenges religious orthodoxy. Prior to the

⁹¹Lisa Hopkins, 'Christopher Marlowe and Religion', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, (Oxford University Press: 2017), pp. 309-323 (p. 8).

⁹² Leah S. Marcus, 'Marlowe's Magic Books: The Material Text', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context* (Cambridge University Press: 2013), pp. 15-26 (p. 21).

⁹³ Robert Ornstein, 'Marlowe and God: The Tragic Theology of *Dr. Faustus*', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 83 (1968), pp. 1378-85 (p. 1378).

⁹⁴ Margaret Ann O'Brien, 'Christian Belief in *Doctor Faustus*', *ELH*, 37 (1970), pp. 1-11 (p. 2).

1950s, criticism frequently highlighted the play's Christian implications. It is possible to read the play as either an orthodox Christian allegory or as a story exalting hell while God. The play's theology has received more attention in later criticism, frequently in relation to predestination and free will. Does Faustus represent the desperation of the sinner or is salvation dependent upon confession and pleading for mercy?⁹⁵ It should not be said that *Doctor Faustus'* view of Christianity is the only one that is explicitly expressed in the play, despite the fact that, superficially, he is portrayed as a man who has abandoned his Christian faith.⁹⁶ A range of Christian beliefs are presented in the play, including the Calvinist understanding of God's mercy as a blessing and the Protestant concept of receiving salvation, which are essential to the discussions about salvation, free will, and predestination. . The character of Faustus serves as a vehicle for exploring the tensions between these competing Christian theologies.⁹⁷

The predestinarian thesis is perhaps most strongly contested as it reduces the remarkably complex vision of the play. It cannot be reduced to either of two opposing perceptions: that the hero suffers as a result of his own decisions and failings or that he is the victim of a cruel fate.⁹⁸ This paradox would have been easily resolved for those in Marlowe's audience who adhered to the Calvinist doctrine of condemnation: since Faustus is ultimately condemned to hell, all of his transgressions and his failures to repent were just the outward manifestation of his fate, and he was predestined to be a punished sinner.⁹⁹

In Act 2, scene 3, the fact that Faustus's first request for divine intervention is immediately answered by the appearance of Mephistopheles supports the predestinarian thesis. While a moderate Anglican or Catholic might have viewed this incident as a test of faith, a strict Calvinist would undoubtedly have read this as a confirmation that God had surrendered him to the devils.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ B. Parker, *Cursèd Necromancy*, pp. 59-60.

⁹⁶ O'Brien, *Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus*, p. 10.

⁹⁷ B. Parker, *Cursèd Necromancy*, p. 61

⁹⁸ McAlindon, *Doctor Faustus: The Predestination Theory*, p. 219.

⁹⁹ McAlindon, *Doctor Faustus: The Predestination Theory*, pp. 215-6.

¹⁰⁰ McAlindon, *Doctor Faustus: The Predestination Theory*, pp. 217-8.

Marlowe is just as severe in his criticism of Catholic doctrine. This scrutiny adds to the overall theme of questioning traditional beliefs and seeking personal enlightenment in *Doctor Faustus*. Faustus's pact is a blasphemous parody of Christ's sacrifice for mankind, as critics have frequently pointed out. Robert Ornstein writes that, as he passes away, the hero paraphrases Christ's final words:

Unlike the God who became man, Faustus is a man who would be God ... and who deliberately seeks the satanic temptations which Christ rejected... Deliberately parodying the Sacrifice, he sells what Christ died to purchase; he signs the Devil's pact with his own blood and with Christ's words on his lips.¹⁰¹

The Catholic doctrine formally encouraged adherents to confess their sins to a priest out of genuine contrition, but the outward manifestation of false repentance could be staged. According to Luther, the act of confession had always run the risk of turning the faithful into a group of actors. Additionally, when priests absolved believers of their faults pretended to have powers that no mortal could have. Therefore, only the foolish found solace in the farce of confession. In the play, Faustus confessing his sin and obtaining forgiveness are not a possibility.¹⁰²

Faustus performs a ritual before sacrificing his soul (1.3.7-14) which is strongly associated with the Roman Catholic Mass. In act 1, scene 3, to summon the devil, Faustus concludes his sacrifice with a prayer in Latin that contains a series of devilish names:

FAUSTUS
Sint mihi dei Acherontis propitii! Valeat numen triplex
Jehovae! Ignei, aërii, aquatici, spiritus, salvete! Orientis
princeps, Beelzebub, inferni ardentis monarcha, et
Demogorgon, propitiamus vos, ut appareat et surgat
Mephistopheles. Quid tu moraris? Per Jehovam, Gehennam,
et consecratam aquam quam nunc spargo, signumque crucis
quod nunc facio, et per vota nostra, ipse nunc surgat nobis
dicatis Mephistopheles!(1.3.16-23)

Marlowe provides evidence that some of these practices were used by both witchcraft and the occult. Faustus' ritual perfectly embodies the polemical conception of the Mass, with its altar, sorcery, and blood sacrifice to the devil. It succeeds in equating the Mass with diabolism and

¹⁰¹ Ornstein, Marlowe and God, p. 1384.

¹⁰² John Parker, 'Faustus, confession, and the sins of omission', *ELH*, 80 (2013), pp. 29–59, (pp. 40-2).

exposing the pompous rituals of the Mass as frauds. Prayers often included the recitation of the name of God, the sign of the cross repeatedly, the benediction of saints, and a request for protection from the devil.¹⁰³

Faustus is a Lutheran work because it adopts the reformer's confrontation with mortality, which was a key inspiration for religious theology. Its irrational mood swings are interpreted as a Lutheran reaction to the confrontation with death.¹⁰⁴ The reformer acknowledges that death is frightening but insists that our relationship with God demands that we fully endorse it. We must love death and trust God, but we are unable to do so due to its foreignness to our experience. Luther's claims offer perplexity, not shelter.¹⁰⁵ The struggle of Faustus is to escape the limitations of the human condition and find the afterlife. His quest to discover knowledge and power beyond the limitations of mankind is what makes him more alluring than his particular goals of obtaining power, riches, or wisdom.

In conclusion, *Doctor Faustus* serves as a powerful critique of the Christian concept of eternal damnation and the harshness of theological beliefs prevalent during the Reformation era. While the play raises questions about predestination and the risks of despair, it deliberately leaves the ultimate fate of the lost souls ambiguous, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. Marlowe exposes the horror of eternal damnation through Faustus's futile attempts to obtain God's mercy, presenting a relentless and cruel fate that reflects the human frailty and corruption emphasized by Christian theology. Additionally, there is a possibility that Marlowe incorporates his own sentiments about the brutality of the government and its persecution of those who deviated from its prescribed form of moderate Christianity.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ B. Parker, *Cursèd Necromancy*, pp. 63-5.

¹⁰⁴ Angus Fletcher, 'Doctor Faustus and the Lutheran Aesthetic', *English Literary Renaissance*, 35 (2005), pp. 187-209 (p. 188).

¹⁰⁵ Fletcher, *Doctor Faustus and the Lutheran Aesthetic*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁶ McAlindon, *Doctor Faustus: The Predestination Theory*, pp. 218-9.

3.3 Condemnation and redemption

The issue of Faustus's condemnation and salvation is complicated and contentious, and it may be examined from a variety of religious and moral approaches without necessarily having to arrive at an unambiguous and definitive answer. Some contend that Faustus's impending damnation prevents him from being saved, while others claim that his rushed repentance gives rise to hope for his salvation.

Marlowe's portrayal of the ambiguity surrounding Faustus's condemnation and salvation invites readers to question the nature of sin, redemption, and the limits of divine mercy. Ultimately, Marlowe's exploration of these themes challenges us to confront our own beliefs and grapple with the complexities of faith and morality.

In accordance with the Christian doctrine, it seems that what Faustus does or dares to do seems irrelevant because all he needs to do to be saved is repent and have faith. He appears to be just another manifestation of the religious despair of a writhing sinner. The uniqueness of Faustus's fate as someone pursued by an unrelenting God because he committed the unforgivable sin of bravery is highlighted in his proclamation. Scholars, however, maintain that Faustus is mistaken; they consider him to be a victim of his own delusions rather than a victim of a higher power that is hostile to human greatness. In the end, everyone could be pardoned for their selfishness, pride, greed, and sexual promiscuity. However, Doctor Faustus' fatal flaw is his rejection of God's mercy, which ultimately leads to his tragic downfall and eternal damnation.¹⁰⁷ Analyzing Faustus' sins and their effects would not be necessary if he was unquestionably damned. There would be no ambiguity surrounding Faustus' fate and no complexity to the interpretation.

¹⁰⁷ J. Parker, *Faustus, Confession, and the Sins of Omission*, p. 44.

The only reason the justification for Faustus' damnation needs to be clarified is because he appears to be so much more deserving of grace in the fifth act, when he is alone waiting for the devils to take his soul, than in the first.¹⁰⁸

It appears that Faustus himself prepares his own damnation not believing that he may be deserving of salvation. He is not innocent, but if he begs God's forgiveness, he might be saved. We can infer that Faustus's despair was brought on by his erroneous understanding of God that emerges in the Prologue.¹⁰⁹

FAUSTUS

Stipendium peccati mors est.(1.1.39)

There he learns that there is a possibility that man should sin, and sin leads men to death. Yet what Faustus goes further: Faustus has sinned, just as all men have, and he is already at fault for death. As a result, he commits the sin of hubris: the play has started and, in the literal meaning of the temporal metaphor, finished simultaneously.¹¹⁰ Faustus is a man who is completely hypnotized by the idea of his own damnation, rendered helpless by the allure of his own doom. His religious despair has this as its true meaning.¹¹¹ The following lines demonstrate that already in the Prologue of the play, without having committed any sin, Faustus considered himself a sinner waiting for punishment:

FAUSTUS

The reward of sin is death? That's hard.

Si peccasse negamus, fallimur, et nulla est in nobis veritas.

If we say that we have no sin,

We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.

¹⁰⁸ Ornstein, Marlowe and God, pp. 1380-2.

¹⁰⁹ Ornstein, Marlowe and God, p. 1384.

¹¹⁰ James Smith, 'Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1939)', in *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus: A Casebook*, (London: Aurora Publishers, 1969), pp. 49-70 (p. 64).

¹¹¹ Sachs, *The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus*, p. 647.

Why then belike we must sin,

And so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death. (1.1.40-50)

Claiming that he was compelled to sin since it was in his nature, he couldn't help himself. And with his conscience so pure, he does not need to be modest, notwithstanding what the Bible says. And from this comes another inference: if any man has sinned, it is because he was compelled to do so; if all men have sinned, it is because their nature has made them destined for eternal damnation.¹¹²

A venial sin does not condemn one to hell. Sin must be serious and involve a conscious turn away from God in order to be fatal. If Faustus is to commit a mortal sin, so many conditions must be met. He must understand the seriousness of the sin, its repercussions, and his freedom to choose between right and wrong. Mephistopheles' exact descriptions of hell are an essential prerequisite to damn Faustus but are not decisive of his damnation. Doctor Faustus knows he is choosing between good and evil; he is oblivious to the prospect of his grace.¹¹³ By vividly depicting the horrors and torments awaiting Faustus in hell, Mephistopheles instills fear and serves as a constant reminder of the price he will ultimately pay for his pursuit of knowledge and power. Without these descriptions, Faustus may not fully comprehend the gravity of his decision. Faustus has read the Scriptures, but he is able to misinterpret them in order to discover the inevitable condemnation rather than the generosity of God's mercy.¹¹⁴ The remarkable misdeeds of Faustus cannot by themselves justify the tragedy of the hero's descent into damnation.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Smith, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, p. 65.

¹¹³ Ceri Sullivan, 'Faustus and the Apple', *The Review of English Studies*, XLVII (1996), pp. 47–50, (p. 49-50).

¹¹⁴ O'Brien, *Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus*, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Ornstein, *Marlowe and God*, pp. 1378-9.

However, the rejected and abbreviated Biblical verses also announced an inevitable, essential damnation. The selection of those specific passages and Faustus's failure to see the following line from St. John's gospel is not a coincidence:

But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That is the theory of grace held by Christians, and that is not what Faustus understands. Therefore, it was obvious to him that if there was any truth to theology, he must be damned. He has acted as though he has accomplished more than that, dismissing Divinity with a gesture. However, he hasn't completely erased it from his thoughts. Throughout the play he believes that he is undeserving of God's love.¹¹⁶

The theme of the play is undoubtedly that Faustus thinks of himself as a sinner, and as such he does not deserve God's love or salvation. Faustus' persistent belief that God despises him explains why he has lost faith in self-salvation. Ironically, it is this conviction that does in fact cause God to disdain him.¹¹⁷

Another indication that the hero can still turn to God and hope for salvation is Mephistopheles' solicitation to Faustus to 'leave these frivolous demands'(1.3.81). The issue of redemptive grace is made more pressing by the devil's honesty in contrast to Faustus's self-deception and cruelty.¹¹⁸ Faustus must therefore hold out hope that God has indeed decided to save him because he can only be saved if God has chosen to do so. However, the hero's response is:

FAUSTUS

Damned are thou, Faustus, damn'd; despair and die!

Hell calls for right.(5.2.48-9)

¹¹⁶ J. B. Steane, 'The Instability of Faustus (1964)', in *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus: A Casebook*, (London: Aurora Publishers, 1969), pp. 177-187 (pp. 181-2).

¹¹⁷ Sachs, *The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus*, p. 626.

¹¹⁸ O'Brien, *Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus*, p. 5.

He can only hear the premise of Sin, not the implication of Redemption; he is inherently unable to hear both sides of the paradox of faith.¹¹⁹

In conclusion, the condemnation and redemption of Faustus present a profound exploration of human nature. Despite his repeated opportunities for redemption, Faustus remains stubbornly committed to his pact with the devil, ultimately sealing his own damnation. The ambiguous ending allows for individual interpretation, leaving room for the possibility of grace and forgiveness. Through Faustus's journey, Marlowe delves into complex themes of sin, repentance, and the human capacity for redemption, reminding us of the eternal struggle between good and evil within ourselves.

3.4 Faustus and Sin

From presumption to despair, from doubting the existence of hell to believing that nothing else exists; from a desire to be more than man to realizing that he has precluded himself from the possibility of redemption for all mankind in Christ; from hurrying to sign the bond to desiring to delay when the time comes to honor it; and from aspiration to deity and omnipotence to longing for extinction. There is a great reversal from the first scene of *Doctor Faustus* to the last scene. Although Faustus's initial goal was to rise above humanity, he ultimately fell beneath it.¹²⁰

The sins of Faustus serve as a primary theme, driving the narrative and exploring the darker aspects of human nature. As the play unfolds, Faustus succumbs to the allure of the seven deadly sins: pride, covetousness, wrath, envy, gluttony, sloth, and lust. Through the exploration of these sins, Marlowe delves into the complexities of human desires and the frailty of the human soul. In

¹¹⁹ Sachs, *The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus*, p. 641.

¹²⁰ Helen Gardner, 'The Theme of Damnation in *Doctor Faustus* (1948)', in *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus: A Casebook*, (London: Aurora Publishers, 1969), pp. 95-100 (p. 96).

this analysis, we will examine Faustus's sins and their significance in shaping his tragic fate. *Faustus* examines human destiny from the vantage points of time and eternity, beginning, in a sense, with man's conception in sin. Because Faustus is Everyman, his transgression is a mirror image of Adam's original sin. Faustus wanted limitless power within his grasp, just as Adam and Eve did when they longed for the apple beyond their reach and were punished. This is made quite clear in the chorus.¹²¹

CHORUS
Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes
In heavenly matters of theology,
Till, swoll'n with cunning of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And melting heavens conspired his overthrow. (1.1.17-21)

This the framework of the play offered by the Chorus in the prologue and, according to it, Faustus's ultimate sin of demoniality, committing sexual intercourse with a demon, is not as significant as trying to grasp knowledge and power out of his reach. It is only one feature of the original sin, which was an intellectual sin as opposed to a physical one.¹²²

What has Faustus done to deserve eternal damnation? His crime was difficult for critics to reveal. It was tough for his critics to expose his wrongdoing. It should come as no surprise that reviews of Marlowe's writings usually contain contradicting opinions. John Addington Symonds, the most penetrating of Marlowe's nineteenth-century critics, argued that Faustus' sin is that of rejecting God without denying him, deserving the terrible fate to which he goes. Inversely, according to *Christopher Marlowe's* Una M. Ellis-Fermor (1927), Faustus is ultimately given a terrifying punishment that he does not appear to have earned.¹²³ The sin for which Faustus receives punishment is frequently hinted at rather than explicitly stated. Although foolish, frivolous, and provocative, Faustus has never committed a lawbreaking crime.¹²⁴

¹²¹ David Kaula, 'Time and the Timeless in Everyman and Dr. Faustus', in *College English*, vol. 22, no. 1, (1960), pp. 9–14 (p. 13).

¹²² J. C. Maxwell, 'The Sin of Faustus (1947)', in *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus: A Casebook*, (London: Aurora Publishers, 1969), pp. 89-94 (p. 90).

¹²³ John Davies Jump, *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus: A Casebook*, (London: Aurora Publishers, 1969), p. 14.

¹²⁴ Sachs, *The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus*, p. 625.

However, many contemporary critics contend that pride is not the cause of Faustus' damnation. In *The Theology of Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus'* (1970), Michael Hattaway suggests that if Faustus had already been damned from the start of the play, or if there was no chance for him to repent, then the characters of Old Man and Good Angel's would be superfluous. It is not his turning to the devil for power that condemns him. Furthermore, since he receives the vision of Christ's blood during his final suffering, there is no reason to think that this loss of grace has rendered salvation unattainable. Faustus is damned not for his mischievous deeds but for his loss of faith. From a Lutheran perspective, the hero's despair would be a sign of redemption, a sign of rejecting the evil to which he had originally turned. Faustus's rejection of the thought of his own redemption was what prevented him from finding his own salvation.¹²⁵

Theologians claim that pride is the sin leading to Faustus' damnation. Should Faustus have had any justifications to absolve him of accountability for his deeds, they would have been ignorance or passion. However, Faustus presents himself in his opening lines devoid of any indication of either. He is free from the lusts of riches and does not speak about the lusts of the body. He yearns for something better and no longer enjoys them, viewing them as a vanity.¹²⁶ He has sinned gravely and thoroughly, not carelessly or impulsively. He has not only disobeyed God, but he has also skillfully mocked and defied him. Even if Faustus doesn't openly ridicule God, his deeds reveal haughty disobedience and a willingness to question the divine order. He is acutely aware of the depth of his sin, so it follows that his faith in the prospect of pardon is flimsy. His continued sin weakens his faith even more. His repeated acceptance of the devil's claim that the pact he stipulated is a legally binding agreement from which he cannot back out and which even Christ must abide by is just rationalized desperation, and it is unquestionably false.¹²⁷

The driving force behind Faustus' conduct is curiosity. As a result of his unquenchable curiosity, Faustus strikes a pact with the devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge and

¹²⁵ Michael Hattaway, 'The Theology of Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus'', in *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 3, 1970, pp. 51–78 (pp. 76-7).

¹²⁶ Smith, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. pp. 63-4.

¹²⁷ McAlindon, *Doctor Faustus: The Predestination Theory*, p. 215.

power. The frivolous arts of medicine, law, religion, and philosophy are not enough to satisfy Faustus's insatiable thirst for knowledge. He seeks a higher understanding of the universe and believes that by harnessing the dark arts, he can unlock its secrets. In any event, there appears to be a clear difference between the appropriate use of the intellect and the idle curiosity of an undisciplined mind that will not even dedicate itself to addressing its own issues. Faustus is not the only character in the drama who is consumed by curiosity. The emperor questioning Faustus about his powers and requiring a demonstration (scene 19), the Duke of Anholt showing interest as he witnesses the hero's trick (scene 17), and even Faustus's fellow academics eager to see Faustus' magical power (scene 18) all exhibit it to varied degrees as a defining fault. Marlowe subtly draws attention to the distinction between the application of intelligence and unbridled curiosity.¹²⁸

Here, Faustus's sin is presumption, striving to be greater than the position reserved to him in the Chain of Being, or disobeying the law that governs his creation.¹²⁹ By rejecting his rightful place in the hierarchy and seeking to become a god through magic, Faustus is committing a sin against the natural order of the universe. This goes against the moral laws that govern humanity's place in the grand scheme of things.

If Christ's sacrifice didn't offer the possibility of forgiveness and eternal life – something Faustus seems to overlook – it would be intolerably difficult to believe that everyone must die, given that no one is exempt from sin and that the penalty for sin is death.¹³⁰

In the intricate web of sins that entangle the character of Doctor Faustus, three vices emerge as particularly significant: pride, gluttony, and demoniality. Faustus's overwhelming pride, fueled by his thirst for knowledge and power, leads him to challenge the boundaries set by God and engage in forbidden pursuits. His insatiable gluttony for worldly pleasures drives him to indulge in the excessive pursuit of wealth, fame, and sensual delights. Additionally, Faustus's involvement in demoniality reveals his willingness to defy divine laws in his relentless pursuit of personal gain.

¹²⁸ Maxwell, *The Sin of Faustus*, p. 93.

¹²⁹ Gardner, *The Theme of Damnation*, p.95.

¹³⁰ Ornstein, *Marlowe and God*, p. 1384.

Pride stands as one of the most prominent sins that consume the character of Doctor Faustus. Driven by an overwhelming sense of self-importance, Faustus believes that he can surpass the limitations imposed by humanity and attain godlike status. As opposed to using the power of God within him, Faustus' sin was trying to become God through his own efforts.¹³¹ His pride blinds him to the consequences of his actions and fuels his arrogance. In *Faustus*, the devils unarguably think that the deed is not irreversible, and that Faustus can receive divine forgiveness; if this were not the case, they wouldn't frighten and divert him whenever he considers repenting. If Faustus truly believed in God's power to forgive him then he would have the strength to resist.¹³² Faustus's pride becomes his tragic flaw, preventing him from recognizing his own limitations and ultimately sealing his tragic fate. He cannot rejoice in the human self-sufficiency because he considers that which is merely human worthless.¹³³

The use of necromancy by Faustus is self-destructive and foolish. His quest for perfection causes him to disregard the constantly available alternative path of caution and acceptance. The heroic decision is between salvation, which requires self-abnegation and the rejection of heroic aspiration, and the self-destructiveness of mighty strive. Because man's attempts to achieve greatness must inevitably clash with the universal order that avoids the spread of chaos, humanity is required to choose between obedience and denial.¹³⁴

The primary motivation behind almost all of Faustus's actions and choices is gluttony. His mind is glutted with ideas of the wealth that magic will bring. This motif is reinforced by a recurring pattern of food-related imagery, which includes the play's numerous meals. His soul is fed by the Seven Deadly Sins show. A meal marks his entry into his new religion and his departure from it. He steals the pope's food and wine at the papal feast. Even his encounter with Helen is gastronomically construed:

¹³¹ O'Brien, *Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus*, pp. 8-9.

¹³² Nicolas Kiessling, 'Doctor Faustus and the Sin of Demoniality', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 15 (1975), pp. 205-11 (p. 205).

¹³³ Ornstein, *Marlowe and God*, p. 1381.

¹³⁴ Ornstein, *Marlowe and God*, p. 1380.

Her lips sucks forth my soul'. (5.1.94)¹³⁵

Many critics agreed that Faustus truly loses himself when he kisses Helen and commits the sin of demoniality. It implies that this is a sin that cannot be pardoned. Even though Faustus may have practiced demoniality, the following line suggests that this sin may still be forgiven.

SECOND SCHOLAR

Look up to heaven and remember God's mercy is infinite.(5.2.39-40).

His fellow scholars beseech Faustus to turn from his sins since they still believe he can be saved. Even though Faustus ignores the plea, Marlowe very obviously suggests that there is still a chance for redemption.¹³⁶

Despite the agreement, the demons are clearly not at all confident about Faustus's soul during the entire tragedy. They constantly feel the need to confront him, intimidate him, and make threats against him. Mephistopheles obviously thinks it is critically to try to divert Faustus's attention from his melancholy thoughts. The play makes the idea that the demons are nervous, and Mephistopheles goes to considerable lengths to maintain power over Faustus. The tie itself, sealed with Faustus's blood, is never taken to be sufficient to keep him safe from hell. To make sure Faustus won't escape, Lucifer himself must be summoned at least once.¹³⁷

The realization that Faustus is lost and inevitably doomed arrives only in scene 13. For his part, Faustus now appears to be a genuinely lost soul – possibly for the first time. That is because he suddenly turns to face the Old Man and begs Mephistopheles to subject him to the ‘greatest torments that our hell affords’ (5.2.76). Pronouns have important roles. Now that he views hell as ‘our hell,’ (5.2.76) Faustus has undoubtedly reached a new point in either his growth or decline. He now views it as a part of himself and has an unquenchable desire to see the Old Man suffer.¹³⁸

In the Reformed outlook, a man who had lost hope, who had consciously severed his connection to his source of existence, and who had placed himself outside the divine order of

¹³⁵ B. Parker, *Cursèd Necromancy*, p. 70.

¹³⁶ Kiessling, *Doctor Faustus and the Sin of Demoniality*, pp. 206-7.

¹³⁷ Jump, *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus*, p. 214.

¹³⁸ Jump, *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus*, p. 215.

obedience and self-effacement was no less a vicious criminal than a man who had committed actual crimes. Failure to see this can only be attributed to a lack of historical comprehension. It was the spiritual state that mattered because literal crime was perceived as an outcome – a behavioral culmination of what ultimately were purely spiritual states. Faustus' original sin is not in what he does; it is in how he thinks. His pride, as well as his desire for fame, power, and unrestricted sexual gratification, follow inevitably from his despair, leading to his pact with the devil and ultimate damnation. It would be completely inaccurate to interpret the play arguing that Faustus is a great hero who does not deserve to be punished because he does not seem to have broken any moral laws.¹³⁹

Faustus is not a hero at all. He sells his soul to the Devil and gives up heaven, but he never gains any advantage from his deal since he uses his agency for trivial purposes and fails to become an heir of the Spirit who has vowed to serve him. It may be argued that Faustus's search for supernatural knowledge is little more than a fabricated excuse to reject God and his contemporaries' uncomplicated faith; after posing a few inquiries concerning heaven, earth, and astronomy in general, he devotes himself to comical pursuits and juvenile hobbies.¹⁴⁰

Who but a fool – such a cunning fool as Faustus – would imagine that truth could be extracted from the father of lies, or that any power other than evil could be gained by a deal with evil? ‘All power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,’ Marlowe understood the nature of the authority he placed in the hands of his character and the unavoidable curse it entailed.¹⁴¹

While the sins of pride, gluttony, and demoniality are pivotal in Faustus's narrative, they are intricately interwoven with his descent into despair, the rejection of God, and the denial of salvation. Marlowe's exploration of Faustus's sins serves as a lens through which he examines human frailty and the perilous path of ambition devoid of moral restraint. The tragic flaws of the

¹³⁹ Sachs, *The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus*, p. 633.

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Marlowe, W. Wagner ed., *Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*, (Longmans, Green, 1877), pp. xxxii-xxxv.

¹⁴¹ W. W., Greg, ‘The Damnation of Faustus’, in *The Modern Language Review*, (vol. 41, 1946), pp. 97–107 (p. 76).

central character underscore the play's moral message, emphasizing the destructive consequences of unchecked human desires and the eternal damnation that awaits those who forsake divine redemption.

Ultimately, *Doctor Faustus* is a cautionary tale that delves into the complexities of human nature, ambition, and the eternal struggle between good and evil. Faustus's tragic journey highlights the enduring themes of temptation, morality, and the consequences of one's choices. It serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring relevance of Marlowe's work, where Faustus's sins and their consequences continue to resonate with audiences, provoking contemplation, and moral reflection.

Conclusion

In the intricate tapestry of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the theme of damnation emerges as a central thread woven into the fabric of Faustus's internal and external conflicts. While the play overtly engages with Faustus's explicit transgressions and unholy pacts, a deeper exploration reveals that his ultimate condemnation is rooted not just in his actions but, more significantly, in the hero's profound conviction that he stands beyond the reach of divine forgiveness.

Faustus's tragic flaw, a manifestation of his unbridled pride and arrogance, becomes evident in his resolute rejection of the prospect of redemption. This rejection, grounded in the belief that his sins are so grievous that forgiveness is unattainable, becomes his ultimate undoing. It is not merely the external acts of necromancy or engagement with demonic forces that lead to his damnation; rather, it is Faustus's internal strife that precludes him from the possibility of obtaining God's grace. It is not a given that he would surely have been saved by God; that is an option that can't be discussed, as Faustus's unwavering belief that his sins are beyond forgiveness blinds him to the chance of salvation. His internal struggle and refusal to believe in the power of God's grace ultimately seal his fate, leaving him trapped in a cycle of self-destruction and despair.

Marlowe, through the character of Faustus, crafts a profound commentary on the human condition—a reflection on the consequences of despair and the catastrophic implications of abandoning the possibility of redemption. Faustus, in his misguided confidence in being irredeemable, mirrors the broader human tendency to grapple with guilt and remorse in ways that sometimes preclude the acceptance of divine forgiveness.

As the narrative unfolds, the audience witnesses not only Faustus's explicit sins but, more movingly, the progressive destruction of his faith in divine mercy. In this sense, the play transcends a simplistic moralistic narrative, delving into an intricate interplay between human agency, divine grace, and the profound consequences of one's beliefs.

In the culmination of Faustus's journey, the tragic realization surfaces: it is not just the external forces or demonic entities that condemn him, but his internal struggle and his profound disbelief in the promise of redemption that seal his tragic fate. The play, therefore, serves as a profound meditation on the complexities of human nature, the consequences of despair, and the indispensable role of hope and faith in the face of moral failings. Faustus's damnation, then, is not merely a consequence of his deeds but a testament to the profound power of one's beliefs in shaping their destiny.

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