‘What doctrine call you this?’
An Inquiry into Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus and Hermetic Thought
1583-1593

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...olgast nun das dritte Geist von Doctor Faust. Aber, denn was er mit seiner \textit{Nigromantia} zu bekannt werden kann und gewiss ist...
# Contents

Abstract iii
Declaration v
Acknowledgements vi
A Note on the Texts vii
A Note on Hermetism and Hermeticism viii

Introduction
- The Background 1
- The Study 5

Chapter One: About Christopher Marlowe
- The Cambridge years 9
- The London years 10
- A good poet with a bad reputation 11
- Religion and politics in Marlowe’s England 14
- Is he really ‘like Dr. Faustus’? 21

Chapter Two: Origins of the Faust Legend, and Marlowe’s Sources
- Part I The legend of Faustus:
  - Faustus in antiquity 23
  - Faustus in history and legend 26
  - A real Faustus 28
- Part II Marlowe’s Sources:
  - The First German *Faustbuch* 29
  - *The English Faust Book* 31

Chapter Three: *Doctor Faustus* and some problems of natural and religious philosophy
- Part I Reason, faith and doubt 39
- Part II Competing religious beliefs:
  - The Egyptians 45
  - The Jews 46
  - The Greeks 47
  - The early Christians 48
  - Western Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church 49
  - Gnostic beliefs 52
  - Valentinian Gnosticism 53
  - Philo of Alexandria: an Hellenic Jew in Egypt 53
Plotinus: an Alexandrian Greek in Rome 54
Hermes Trismegistus 55

Part III  Renaissance Hermeticism and the Reformation: contested theologies:
The *Hermetica* in 15th century Europe 56
Christianity in England in the sixteenth century 64
Hermeticism in England 68

Chapter Four: *The Tragicall History of Doctor Faustus*
The Play 75
The Playwright 77
The Playhouse Audience 78
Marlowe’s conscious artistry 80
The Protagonist in Marlowe’s hands 86
*Vide!* Morality or tragedy? 89
*Audi!* Calvinist or Arminian? 91
*Tace!* An alchemical Hermetic allegory 95

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions 109

Figures:
Figure 1 Typical Pre-Copernican Diagram of the Universe 40
Figure 2 Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus as depicted on the floor of the Siena Cathedral 56
Figure 3 Title page of *Monas Hieroglyphica* by John Dee 1564 69
Figure 4 Title page of *The Tragicall History of D. Faustus* 1604 76
Figure 5 Woodcut of Dr Faustus’s dismembered body 92
Figure 6 Title page of *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* 1619 99
Figure 7 Title page of Dr Dee’s letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, written from Mortlake, 1595 113
Figure 8 A Christian Philosopher 114

Appendices:
Appendix I  The scholarly debate about texts, authorship and dates 117
Appendix II  The Dutch Church Libel 119
Appendix III  Excerpt from *The Fal of the Late Arrian* 122
Appendix IV  Remembrances of Marlowe from Cholmeley 123
Appendix V  A sample of errors revealing ‘P.F’s’ unfamiliarity with German 124
Appendix VI  Shakespeare, Bruno and Hermetic thought 127

Bibliography 131
Abstract

This study examines Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* for evidence of the playwright’s familiarity with the Hermetic thought circulating in Europe during the Renaissance.

I begin with a discussion of Marlowe’s life, the origins of the Faust legend, and the sources of the play. Comparison of the conflicting and inadequate answers provided in the sources and the play to contemporary questions about creation and cosmology reveals the choice between faith and reason which Christians faced when God’s word, revealed in the book of Scriptures, conflicted with God’s work revealed in the book of Nature. The Hermetic texts offered both a heliocentric cosmos that was compatible with the new cosmology and a new path to salvation. The study asks if Marlowe’s alleged ‘Atheism’ could more accurately be termed Hermeticism.

To explicate Hermeticism I outline the several religions which influenced early Christianity and trace the beliefs which ‘Hermes Trismegistus’ syncretised in the *Hermetica* in the first centuries of the common era. I note the interest in the Hermetic texts in Europe following the fifteenth century Latin translation made by Marsilio Ficino, and his harmonising of Platonism with Christianity. I provide an overview of the subsequent philosophical attempts to assimilate Jewish Kabbalah to Christianity and both to the Hermetic philosophy, culminating in Giordano Bruno’s idiosyncratic Hermetic-Cabalism. In order to establish the complex religious context in which Marlowe was writing, I outline the disputes within the Church of England after Elizabethan Settlement and find evidence in *Doctor Faustus* of Marlowe’s familiarity with those disputes, with the Hermetic texts, and with the London works of Giordano Bruno.

My contention is that Marlowe, in dramatising his prose sources, is deliberately catering for the spectrum of religious beliefs held by the diverse audiences to be found in the Elizabethan playhouse. What modern critics have interpreted as ambivalent and conflicting doctrines in *Doctor Faustus* reflects a conscious strategy on Marlowe’s part to stimulate debate about the various contested doctrines of salvation, including those of the *Hermetica*. I argue that a Kabbalistic hermeneutic enables an interpretation of the play as a gnostic ascent from the literal to the allegorical and mystical. Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* thus simultaneously invites the spectator to an entertaining visual feast, the auditor to a thought-provoking debate of disputed doctrines, and the reader to a silent recognition of the spiritual possibilities and occult mysteries of Hermeticism.
**Declaration**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Marion Jane Nelson and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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To my good friend Jürgen Kracht I record my thanks for help with German. To my cousin John Croker my thanks for taking photographs of Hermes Trismegistus while in Siena.

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To friendly scholars who have taken time to read this thesis and offer sage advice I record my heartfelt thanks, especially to Dr Virginia Kenny, and to Dr David Hilliard who saved me from many blunders.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge my profound gratitude to my two supervisors, Dr Heather Kerr and Dr Lucy Potter, for their perspicacity and patience, for their invaluable help and advice, and for their encouragement and time generously given over several years.

Whatever flaws remain I must acknowledge as my own.
A Note on the Texts


The play survives in two quite different texts: *The Tragicall History of D. Faustus*, known as the A-Text and published in 1604, and the considerably longer B-Text, *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus With new Additions*, published in 1616. The debates pertaining to the authenticity of the two texts, to the possibility of collaborative authorship and to the dates are summarised in Appendix I. Sources are discussed in Chapter Two. For a time editors conflated the two texts, and current scholarship argues for the authenticity and superiority of the A-text. In this study I will cite from both A-and B-Texts using the 1993 Revels edition. I refer to the A-text for the purposes of comparison with the B-Text or when a particular line is omitted from the B-Text. Some scenes and lines relevant to my inquiry occur only in the B-Text: they introduce the schismatic Pope Saxon Bruno (III i; III ii; IV i 48-70[B]).


The 1592 text is the earliest extant edition of the English translation and was undertaken by a gentleman known only as ‘P.F.’. Usually known as *The English Faust Book (EFB)*, its full title is *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*. According to the title page, it was ‘Imprinted at London by Thomas Orwin’, ‘to be sold by Edward White, dwelling at the little North doore of Paules, at the signe of the Gun’. It was translated from a German chapbook – *Historia von D. Johann Fausten dem weitbeschreyten Zauberer und Schwartzkünstler* – which was published in Frankfort by Johann Spies in September 1587. Sometimes called the *Faustbuch*, the Spies *Historia* is referred to here and elsewhere as (SH), to distinguish it from another similar MS discovered in the nineteenth century in the Herzog August Bibliothek (HAB) in Wolfenbüttel, which is referred to as (WH).
A Note on Hermetism and Hermeticism

Both ‘Hermetism’ and ‘Hermeticism’ derive from the name ‘Hermes’ which denotes both the mythical Greek God, Hermes (Thoth to the Egyptians and Mercurius to the Romans), and also an historical figure, Hermes Trismegistus believed for centuries to have been the author of numbers of ancient treatises, both magical and philosophical. A body of seventeen of the philosophical texts, known as the Corpus Hermeticum, and a book addressed to Asclepius are known collectively as the Hermetica. As Roelof van den Broek observes, it is the ‘teachings and doctrines found in the so-called philosophical Hermetica’ that the term ‘Hermetism’ usually calls to mind; he notes, however, that ‘the central concern of these writings is not philosophical but religious’ (van den Broek, 5). Antoine Faivre points out that the term ‘Hermetism’ also refers to the literature inspired by [the Hermetica] during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and even thereafter’ (1998, 109).

Faivre notes ‘a welcome tendency’ since the 1960s ‘to distinguish “Hermetism” in this [religious] sense from “Hermeticism” ’, a term ‘which has come to designate other traditions as well’ (1998, 109). These traditions stem from that other Hermes, Hermes-Mercurius. Not only is he ‘the god who stands at the crossroads . . . the interpreter of signs, of texts’, he also ‘makes transmutations possible, which is why he frequently appears in alchemical texts under the name Mercurius’ (Faivre, 1998, 110). Throughout the sixteenth century, ‘a variety of teachings and traditions that official theology had ignored, namely Hermetism, alchemy, Kabbalah and magia’ were gradually brought together in Europe (Faivre, 1998, 111). It is this ensemble of traditions, termed ‘Hermeticism’, which Faivre identifies as the origin of modern Western esotericism.

In this paper I employ the term ‘Hermetism’ when the notion of the religious philosophy contained in the Hermetica is uppermost, and ‘Hermeticism’ when that notion connects with other traditions such as astrology, Cabala, alchemy and magia (or natural philosophy), as happened during the Renaissance.
Introduction

The Background

The historian Christopher Haigh has called the sixteenth century ‘an age of religion’ where ‘God mattered’ (285). In truth it was an age of contested religious ideologies, the prima lux of the rational enlightenment and the dawn of the freedoms of worship and speech that we enjoy today. Above all it was an age of doubt and controversy, scepticism and anxiety. In Christopher Marlowe’s time nothing concerned Christians so much as the salvation of one’s immortal soul. Hence, when Marlowe brought to the London stage a dramatisation of the German tale of the legendary Doctor Faustus, Schwartzkünstler; the black magician who sold his soul to the Devil, the audiences filled the theatre, and for that matter, continue to do so whenever it is staged.1

In Marlowe’s time, indeed throughout the sixteenth century, the old certainties were being eroded. Self-evident truths that the earth stood still and the sun travelled across the heavens, faith in the Bible’s explanation of creation, belief in the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church that acts of penance would purge one’s sins, that prayer would release souls from Purgatory and that good works alone would secure the salvation of one’s immortal soul were all being challenged. The mathematical calculations of Copernicus (1473-1543) could not support geocentric Ptolemaic theory, and in 1583 the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1549-1600) told a sceptical Oxford audience that the earth moved, that the stars were fires and that space was infinite (Rowland, 146).2 Martin Luther, unable to tolerate the practice of buying indulgences to expedite souls from Purgatory, had protested in 1517 and tried to reform the Roman Catholic Church, asserting the sovereignty of God, the irrelevance of good works to salvation, and justification by faith alone. Jean Calvin went further, emphasising the helplessness of Man either to alter his predestined fate, which God had determined before Adam fell,

1 In November 2009 in Brno I saw Marlowe’s play performed in Czech. In 2011, John Bell’s company staged the play in three capital cities in Australia, and in London in July both The Rose and The Globe staged separate productions to sell-out crowds.
2 Bruno explains his theory in La Cena de le Ceneri, Ash Wednesday Supper, 1584.
or to resist the grace which He offered to those whom he had elected to salvation. Both taught that the Scriptures, as the word of God, should be made accessible to the people in their own language, and undertook translations of the Bible, continuing a tradition begun by John Wycliffe (1330-1384) in England and Jan Huss (1372-1415) in Bohemia, and continued by William Tyndale (1494-1536). All of them wanted to see the church reformed: Wycliffe for instance had argued that there was no scriptural justification for the Papacy and that the doctrine of transubstantiation was both philosophically unsound and encouraged ‘a superstitious attitude to the Eucharist’ (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1770).

After Luther’s split from Rome, his teachings were adopted, either in their original form or, as subsequently developed by Philip Melanchthon, by several German dukes and princes who were only too willing to cease paying homage and annates to Rome. Under the principle later described as cuius regio, eius religio, Luther’s teaching spread to the general populace. Similarly Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich and the Frenchman Jean Cauvin (Calvin) in Geneva, through preaching and writing, won the approval of their cities’ Fathers and attracted large followings. Calvinism spread to some German states, notably the Heidelberg Palatinate, and also to Navarre in southern France, the Netherlands, and Scotland under the tutelage of John Knox.

Those English Protestants who had been involved in the process of reform in the brief reign of Edward VI, and who could afford to go into exile when Mary Tudor came to the throne, settled in Emden, and Frankfort, in Zurich, and Geneva, where they came under the influence of Zwingli and of Calvin (Haigh, 228). After Queen Mary’s premature death and the accession of Elizabeth in 1558, they returned, many of them to positions of influence, as committed Calvinists (Solt, 63). At that stage they were in a minority, and it took a series of compromises before the bills establishing the Royal Supremacy and an English language liturgy passed through both houses of parliament (1559) and the Thirty-nine Articles stating the doctrinal position of the Church of England were legalised (1563) (Haigh, 239-242). All clergy and all undergraduates of both universities, including of course, Christopher Marlowe, were required to swear to uphold the Act of Supremacy and the Thirty-nine Articles. The Act of Supremacy made the Queen the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and finalised the separation from Rome. The Act of Uniformity obliged all clergy to use the Book of Common Prayer. Haigh describes this as a Political Reformation because it was imposed from above, and observes that although ‘the ministers were creating a Protestant nation, [England was] not a nation of Protestants’ (280).

Protestantism is a religion of the Word; it demands study and discussion of the Scriptures. To convert a country used to the doctrinal certainties, worship and rituals of Roman Catholicism required Protestant bishops and clergy and the training and

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3 *cuius regio, eius religio* means essentially that a ruler decided the religion of his subjects.
dissemination of large numbers of preachers and teachers – a task which fell naturally to
the universities, and which was to take several decades.

The act of separation from Rome had divided English Catholics into those who
wished still to acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope, and were therefore potential
traitors, and those who remained loyal to England and the Queen. A third group,
recusants, refused to conform to the state church and, in 1568 to provide them with
priests, Bishop William Allen set up a college, later a seminary, for English Catholics
at Douai, which was later moved to Rheims (Haigh, 254, 261, 263). This was not
the only division, however, as within the Church of England, Protestants themselves
were divided amongst moderates like Archbishop Matthew Parker and his successor
John Whitgift, radicals, referred to disparagingly as Puritans, some of whom wanted
dismantle the episcopate in favour of ‘a Presbyterian form of church order’, and
the extremist Puritans or ‘precisians’, who objected to a common liturgy, vestments,
candles, kneeling, and all other idolatrous practices and reminders of popery (Sheils,
61-7). During the 1580s there emerged small groups of Separatists who wanted to form
autonomous congregations not connected to the state. Furthermore, during the 1580s
some English Calvinists came increasingly under the influence of a new generation of
Continental Calvinists. The Geneva Calvinists, persuaded by Théodore de Bèze (Beza)
(1519-1605), had hardened Calvin’s doctrine of double predestination which taught that
God had arbitrarily elected some to salvation while others he had elected to damnation
(Collinson, 101). Not surprisingly this harsh doctrine attracted opposition, most notably
from Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), who argued for Man’s autonomy or the place of free
will in the determination of his fate (Collinson, 102).

Beza turned ‘Calvin’s Christian humanism’ into ‘a new kind of scholasticism, a system
of propositions to be asserted, attacked and defended with the weapons of dialectic’
(Collinson, 101). In Marlowe’s time at Cambridge, William Perkins, a Fellow of
Christ’s College, whose sermons were famed for their combination of incisive logic
and powerful rhetoric, vigorously preached the hard-line Calvinist doctrine (Cressy
& Ferrell, 114). But the doctrine of Arminius, who had returned to Amsterdam from
Geneva in 1587, was also well-known in England (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian
Church, 107). Clearly, the opposed doctrines concerning predestination and free-will
with which Marlowe seeds the Faustus play were highly contentious. They continued to
be so well into the seventeenth century.

While Protestantism was encouraging people to listen to or read the Scriptures for
themselves, and preaching that only faith conferred by the grace of God could save the
sinner from damnation, the new Philosophy, cosmology, ‘call[ed] all in doubt’ in John
Donne’s words. In Marlowe’s time, natural philosophers such as Thomas Digges, the
astronomer and protégé of Dr John Dee, as well as Tycho Brahe in Denmark, offered

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4 *An Anatomy of the World, the first Anniversary* (l.205).
variations on Copernicus’ heliocentric universe, where it was the earth that moved. Giordano Bruno, who spent nearly three years in London, espoused an even bolder vision of stars that were fiery suns and space that stretched into infinity.

Marlowe’s protagonist, Doctor Faustus, articulated the curiosity of people who longed to know about the planets and the existence of heaven and hell, as well as about the creation of the world and life, and the age of the earth. When Walter Ralegh encountered North American Indians for the first time in the New World (1585), Thomas Hariot’s record of the voyage and the meeting raised doubts about the date of creation, set by the Church at 6000 years earlier. On all these matters the Catholic Church had an official position, restated at the mid-century Council of Trent, which was to affirm the authority of the Bible and declare all other opinions heretical (Latourette, 868-872).

Doubting the Biblical account of creation or the Catholic Church’s teaching on salvation by good works were far from being the only heresies. Doubting the full divinity of Christ, a denial of the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity, the position first argued by Bishop Arius in the fourth century, was regarded as the heresy of Atheism. Men who held Arian or anti-Trinitarian beliefs, subsequently known as Unitarians, included Juan de Valdés (1490-1541), Miguel Serveto (1511-1553), who was burned alive for the heresy, and Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604), whose followers were known pejoratively as Socinians. In 1578, Sozzini settled in Transylvania under the patronage of its anti-Trinitarian ruler, John Sigismund, before moving to Cracow where he lived until 1598 when he was driven out 'by a crowd of unsympathetic students' (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1513). Clearly, ‘God mattered’ to them.

If it was an age of religion, it was also an era with a passion for alchemy. Many, possibly most, noblemen in Germany, Poland and Bohemia employed alchemists. Rudolph of Bohemia, whom Dee and Bruno visited, and scholars from an earlier time such as Albertus Magnus (d.1279), Roger Bacon (1215-1292), Abbot Trithemius (1462-1516), and noblemen like Count Anhalt (1568-1630), who appears as a character in Marlowe’s play, were all alchemists. Lyndy Abraham claims that ‘some of the most famous names of the day in England pursued the art’, and she names Sir Philip Sidney, Ralegh, Hariot and Dee amongst others (xv). While the practice of alchemy may have attracted charlatans, the theory of alchemy had a spiritual dimension which made it a metaphor for gnosis and Hermeticism. This religious philosophy, contained in seventeen fragments of Greek texts, became known in Europe in the latter part of the

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6 ‘Arius appears to have held that the Son of God was . . . created by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world; He was therefore not God by nature but a creature’ (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 99).
7 For Valdés see MacCulloch, (2004, 215); for Serveto (Michael Servetus) see MacCulloch, (2004, 244-5); for Sozzini see Latourette, (793-4).
fifteenth century and, thanks to the invention of printing, was widely read throughout Europe for the next century. Possibly brought to England by Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1536), the philosophy was pivotal in Dee’s *Monas Hieroglyphica* (1564) and, as the seminal work of Frances Yates has established, in the thinking of Bruno. The spread of Hermeticism coincided with the accretion of stories around the legendary and historic Faustus figure, and Michael Keefer argues that there are ‘solid textual grounds for linking Faustus with the Hermetic-Cabalist tradition’ (1989, 91n.).

The Study

This study brings together the poet Christopher Marlowe, his play *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* and the esoteric religious philosophy known as Hermeticism. The poet, the play and the philosophy are all problematic, all controversial, and all connected with Giordano Bruno. The study principally concerns the years between 1583 when Bruno arrived in London and 1593 when Marlowe allegedly met his end.

Christopher Marlowe, despite a Cambridge education designed to prepare him for holy orders, had a contemporary reputation for atheism (Downie, 2010, 42), and for persuading other men to atheism (Kuriyama, 2002, 228). Nor was he alone in his allegedly radical opinions. Sir Walter Raleigh was accused of conducting a ‘School of Atheism’ by a Jesuit exile, Robert Persons, who included Lord Burghley, Admiral Charles Howard and other Privy Councillors in his calumny (Riggs, 295). It seems unlikely that all the men so accused were atheists in the modern sense of that word, and Lukas Erne has observed that ‘[f]ar from denoting a disbelief in the existence of God, the term “atheist” was applied rather loosely to anyone who disagreed with accepted religious beliefs’ (36). He reminds us that ‘T.S. Eliot called Marlowe “the most thoughtful, the most blasphemous (and therefore, probably, the most Christian)” of Elizabethan dramatists’, and implies an ‘intense engagement with, rather than indifference toward, religion’ on Marlowe’s part (36).

A key aim of this study is to investigate those allegations of atheism which coloured Marlowe’s reputation then and still cling to his name today. Could the heresy of ‘atheism’ of which they were all accused be more accurately termed Hermeticism?

8 *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 1964.
9 B L Harleian MS 6853 f. 308. All Harleian MS listed in the Bibliography were seen in October 2008.
In order to shed some light on Marlowe’s reputation for heretical opinions, I begin the study with Christopher Marlowe himself. Chapter One introduces Marlowe and Giordano Bruno, and defines Atheism; it outlines the religio/political climate in the decade preceding Marlowe’s supposedly violent death in 1593 and discusses the Arian tract and anti-Trinitarianism. I argue that Marlowe’s allegedly blasphemous opinions of the Bible may be justified on reasonable or scholarly grounds. I review the critical literature comparing Marlowe to Doctor Faustus and attributing features of his protagonist to Marlowe’s own character in this chapter.

In Chapter Two I address the Faustus legend, partly to explore the perceived similarities between Marlowe, the Cambridge graduate and Faustus, the Wittenberg scholar, and partly to inform later discussion evaluating Marlowe’s artistry in adapting his prose source. The first part of the chapter outlines the origins of the Faust legend, which had its roots in antiquity and surfaced with the Reformation, embellished with outrageous exploits, and connected with an actual person. The second part of the chapter discusses Marlowe’s sources: the German novella, *Historia von D. Johann Fausten dem weitbeschreyten Zauberer und Schwartzkünstler*, and its lively and not altogether accurate English translation, *The Historie of the damnable life, and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus*.

Marlowe’s play about Doctor Faustus, the man who sold his soul for knowledge, was identified by David Wootton as ‘the last play on the Elizabethan stage to deal directly with religion’ (xiv), and A.D. Nuttall described it as ‘frankly, thunderously theological’ (23). Precisely which theology informs the play has been the subject of much critical debate and an important dimension of this study is the investigation of *Doctor Faustus* for evidence of Marlowe’s knowledge of contemporary contested religious philosophies, both orthodox and unorthodox, including the occult Hermetic philosophy.

The Hermetic texts, which put the sun at the centre of the cosmos (XVI [7]), were brought to Europe in the latter part of the fifteenth century, translated by Marsilio Ficino, and circulating in print at about the same time as Copernicus (1486-1536) was formulating his theory of a heliocentric universe. The texts seemed to be offering support for the new cosmology which the Catholic Church was later to deem heretical and which most people viewed with caution if not scepticism. Chapter Three Part I addresses the doubts engendered by the new cosmology. I argue that the struggle to reconcile faith with reason, and the avoidance of heresy are reflected in the disparate accounts amongst the German source, the English translation and Marlowe’s play.

The Hermetic texts also offered an explanation of the creation of Man and the cosmos, and a theory of salvation which stressed the importance of knowledge in Man’s gnostic ascent towards God: (‘the virtue of soul is knowledge’ (X [9])). The Hermetic

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10 All references to the *Hermetica* are to Copenhaver’s translation, by chapter and paragraph.
philosophy was pivotal in the work of Dr John Dee, mathematician and astrologer to the Queen and, as Yates has established, in the thinking of Giordano Bruno. The texts were believed to be of great antiquity and contemporaneous with Moses. In fact, they date from the early centuries of the common era and are a syncretisation of many religious philosophies including early Christianity. Part II of Chapter Three summarises the philosophies which were brought together in the Hermetic texts in the centuries after the birth of Christ.

Precisely because the Hermetic philosophy contained so many strands of religious thinking, yet was free of the doctrines, rituals and imposed beliefs that divided Western Christianity in the sixteenth century, it seemed to offer the possibility of uniting Christendom. In Part III of Chapter Three I discuss the dissemination of the Hermetica in fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe and acknowledge the contribution of Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin, Francesco Giorgio, Cornelius Agrippa and Bruno to Hermetic thought. The doctrinal divisions which split the Western Christian Church were principally concerned with the salvation of the immortal soul, and the issue was hotly contested amongst the Protestant confessions throughout the sixteenth century. Part III of Chapter Three includes a summary of the position in England after Elizabethan Settlement and outlines those aspects of the contested doctrines which are relevant to the plight of Faustus in Marlowe’s play.

In Chapter Four I discuss Marlowe’s play, long criticised for its ambivalence, as a vehicle for the doctrinal disputes in Marlowe’s day. In this chapter I review the critical opinions that the ambivalence which some find in the play is a reflection of Marlowe’s own personal confusion. To the established opinion that the play embodies conflicting theologies dramatised in incompatible genres, I add the dimension of Hermetic thought, and the possibility of influence from Giordano Bruno. I find evidence to support the thesis that Marlowe is in control of his ambivalent material, and draw attention to Marlowe’s conscious artistry in dramatising his sources, particularly through the addition of some characters, and his characterisation of the Doctor.

I argue that Doctor Faustus yields an interpretation that both reveals and conceals different religious philosophies, making several equally valid and coherent responses available to different members of the diverse audience. To accommodate this complexity I employ a Kabbalistic hermeneutic which permits an exegesis of the play as a gnostic ascent by degrees, first of spectacle: *Vide!*, second as a precursor to debate for the attentive listener: *Audi!*, and third as an Hermetic allegory for the initiated reader to contemplate in silence: *Tace!*
Chapter One

About Christopher Marlowe

Biographies of Marlowe typically depict a talented but reckless young man involved in the dark political games of espionage, a danger to society, a scoffer who was unafraid to voice dangerously heretical religious opinions and even to give them to his protagonists. The evidence for that widely-held view is reviewed in this chapter in order to contextualise an alternative view which I explore in Chapter Four: that of a talented and serious intellectual who, in the company of like-minded men, was persuaded to a new religion with the power to bring peace to the world.

The Cambridge years

In 1580, the fifteen year old Christopher Marlowe, student at the King’s School Canterbury, was awarded a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The late Archbishop Parker had endowed the scholarship at a time when there was an acute shortage of preachers and a huge need for an educated Protestant ministry to teach Protestant doctrines (Haigh, 268, 269). David Riggs outlines the university curriculum on offer in Marlowe’s day: Greek and Latin studies introduced students to the philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, and the poets such as Virgil and Ovid (73-5). Through Ovid, students learnt of Pythagoras and through Lucretius they met Epicurus, the ‘primary sources’ for atheism (Riggs, 170). University, says Riggs, ‘prepared graduates for careers in the Church but taught them little about Christianity’ (90). Riggs’ droll comment may amuse but it is certainly untrue. Christopher Haigh records that in 1579, ‘a new university statute prescribed Reformed theological instruction for all students’ who were to be examined each term on the three catechisms, Calvin’s Institutes and the
Thirty-nine Articles (270).\textsuperscript{11} After 1581 all matriculants to Oxford had to ‘subscribe to the royal supremacy’ by taking the oath of loyalty to the Queen as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and to the Thirty-nine Articles (Haigh, 270). As this meant denying both the supremacy of the Pope and the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, effectively no Roman Catholic could graduate. Indeed suspected Catholics had been refused degrees at Oxford since 1573, and there is no reason to suppose Cambridge was any different (Haigh, 270). It seems likely that it is on those grounds that Marlowe’s supplicat for admission to the degree of Master of Arts, approved by the Master of his College, was refused by the University authorities. This follows from an extant letter from the Privy Council, categorically denying that ‘Christopher Morley [had] gone beyond the seas to Reames’ (that is, the Catholic seminary at Rheims), advising that he had ‘been employed . . . in matters touching the benefit of his countrie’ and instructing the authority to confer the degree (Kuriyama, 2002, 202).\textsuperscript{12} If not unprecedented, such a letter, signed by five councillors including the Lord Treasurer Burghley, who was also the chancellor of Cambridge University, the Lord Chamberlain Hunsdon, and Archbishop Whitgift, was unusual.\textsuperscript{13} It seems that Marlowe was known to men in high places.

\textit{The London years}

Constance Kuriyama argues convincingly from Marlowe’s documented contact with Thomas Watson, the poet, that Marlowe would also have known Watson’s friends and patrons such as Henry Percy earl of Northumberland, the ‘wizard earl’ who was keenly interested in science (88).\textsuperscript{14} A Note on Marlowe’s ‘blasphemous opinions’, made just before his fearful end, to the effect ‘that Moyses was but a Jugler & that one Heriotes being Sir W Raleighs man can do more than he’, implies knowledge of Hariot, the mathematician who had accompanied Ralegh to Virginia, and a member of Ralegh’s rumoured ‘School of Night’.\textsuperscript{15} Like other Renaissance courtiers Ralegh wrote poetry, including a well-known response to Marlowe’s \textit{The Passionate Shepherd to his Love}.  

\textsuperscript{11} The catechisms were from Calvin, Alexander Nowell and the Heidelberg theologians. Calvin’s \textit{The Institutes of the Christian Religion} in four volumes ‘set forth the entire cosmic drama of creation, sin and redemption under the sovereign will of God as Calvin believed that it was taught in the scriptures’ (Latourette, 752).

\textsuperscript{12} It is possible that ‘to go to Rheims’ was a euphemism for turning Catholic. Much effort has been expended on Marlowe’s absences from College and his likely destinations, but it is very unlikely that the Privy Council would put Marlowe’s real activities on the public record as in this letter, if he were being employed by them as an agent in ‘matters touching the benefit of his countrie’.

\textsuperscript{13} The five councillors are listed in the margin of the document (see Kuriyama, 2002, 202).

\textsuperscript{14} See also Hilary Gatti’s study of the Northumberland texts, the Northumberland Circle and Hariot’s papers, 1989, 35-73.

\textsuperscript{15} B L Harleian MS 6848 f.185.
His ‘school’ included George Peele and Matthew Roydon, also poets, Thomas Digges and Dr Dee, author of the strange Hermetic *Monas Hieroglyphica*. In 1592 Marlowe himself claimed to be known to Northumberland and also to Ferdinando, Lord Strange (Kuriyama, 209, 210). It is highly probable that Marlowe would have known Charles Howard, patron of the Admiral’s Men who performed his plays. And it is generally agreed that Marlowe was employed as an intelligencer by Sir Francis Walsingham, father-in-law of Sir Philip Sidney who had been instrumental in bringing Giordano Bruno to London in the spring of 1583. Marlowe was also one of those up-and-coming young men about town, the University Wits, poets and playwrights. In addition to Watson and Peele, they numbered John Lyly, secretary to the earl of Oxford, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nashe and Robert Greene.

In short, Marlowe, having been trained in disputation at Cambridge where he was exposed to powerful exponents of the current doctrinal controversies, in London found himself sharing in the overlapping discourses of politics, theology, soteriology, magic and natural philosophy and in conversation with highly-educated and travelled men who moved through the worlds of the Court, the parliament, espionage and the theatre.

*A good poet with a bad reputation*

Marlowe’s early success with *Tamburlaine Part I* and *Part II* may have won him acclaim on the London stage, but it did not impress his fellow University Wit, Robert Greene. In his letter ‘to the gentlemen readers’ prefacing *Perimedes the Blacksmith*, Greene defends himself against two gentlemen poets who have derided his poetry:

> for that I could not make my verses jet upon the stage in tragicall buskins, everie word filling the mouth like the Faburden of Bo-Bell, daring God out of heaven with that Atheist *Tamburlan*, or blaspheming with the mad preest of the sonne: but let me rather openly pocket up the Ass at *Diogenes* hand: then wantonlie set out such impious instances of intollerable poetrie, such mad and scoffing poets, that have propheticall spirits as bred of *Merlins* race. (in Boas, 70)

All Marlowe’s biographers, from Frederick Boas in 1940 to David Riggs in 2004, agree that one of the ‘scoffing poets’ is Christopher Marlowe, the author of *Tamburlaine*. Hence Greene’s attack not only associates Marlowe, the poet, with his Atheist protagonist (Bevington & Rasmussen, 1993, 1), but it also references ‘the mad preest of the sun’, identified by Charles Nicholl (246) and Riggs (223) as the former Dominican priest and neo-Hermeticist, Giordano Bruno. Greene is apparently conflating Bruno with that blasphemous reprobate, the fictional Doctor Johannes Faustus. *\(^{16}\)* There seems

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*\(^{16}\)* David Wootton disputes that Greene’s pamphlet implies familiarity with Marlowe’s play (2005, n.xxvi).
no other good reason to hint at Bruno, who had left London nearly three years before Greene’s attack. In March 1588, after two productive years at Faustus’ university in Wittenberg in Upper Saxony, Bruno was departing for the court of Rudolf II in Prague (Rowland, 203). The fact that Greene’s pamphlet was entered in the Stationers’ Register on 29 March 1588 (Bakeless, 1942, I: 95) has clear implications for the date of the earliest performances of Marlowe’s play. Furthermore, Greene’s use of an alternative spelling of Marlowe’s name, Merlin, raises echoes of the magician of Arthurian legend and of the contemporary Magus, John Dee, also of Welsh origin, and assumes, as Sara Munson Deats suggests, a nexus between magic and the theatre that was characteristic of the times (2008, 3).

Since Greene’s scorn is directed at the two poets’ use of blank verse and his fears for the ‘end of scholarism’, the ‘Atheist’ epithet is superfluous. It is clearly introduced as a derogatory slur to denigrate the playwright by association with his protagonists and, by extension, with the ‘mad preest’, the flamboyant and excitable Bruno. As intended, the published diatribe publicly associated Marlowe’s name with Atheism. That Greene and Marlowe may both have been persuaded to Atheism by the same ‘brocher’ is made clear from the well-known death-bed pamphlet, penned in 1592, Greene’s Groatsworth of Witte. Brought to an early grave by a life of reckless debauchery, Greene admits to having said, like his friend, Marlowe, to whom he refers as a ‘famous gracer of Tragedians’, that ‘there is no God’ and urges him to repent and ‘give glorie unto his greatness’ (1592). Greene returns to his fears for his friend and continues:

The brocher of this Diabolicall Atheisme is dead and in his life had never the felicitiie he aymed at: but as he began in craft, lived in feare and ended in despaire Quam inscrutabilia sunt Dei iudicia? . . . this Apostata perished as ill as Julian: and wilt thou my friend be his Disciple? Looke unto me, by him perswaded to that libertie, and thou shalt find it an infernall bondage . . . Defer not (with me) till this last point of extremetie; for little knowest thou how in the end thou shalt be visited. (Greene, 1592)

17 The oblique reference to Diogenes may be sourced to one of Bruno’s Italian works, published in London, where he describes Diogenes the Cynic’s claim that ‘the highest good may be obtained by holding in contempt the ignoble things in this very transitory life . . .’(A General Account of Bonding in Cause, Principle and Unity, 1585, 1998, 147).

18 For discussion of the date of the earliest performance of Doctor Faustus see Appendix I.

19 This is one of the spellings of Marlowe’s name used at Cambridge (see Riggs, 80) so it is reasonable to assume that it would be a spelling known to Greene. The spelling of Marlowe’s name thus connotes Merlin the magician while not losing the pronunciation of Marlowe’s name, since ‘er’ is often pronounced ‘ar’ as in /kla:k/ for ‘clerk’.

20 The OED gives ‘to introduce’ as the current (1579) meaning for ‘Broach’[5]. ‘Occult’ or ‘magic’ are given as old (1483) meanings for ‘craft’[2]. The mention of ‘despaire’ followed by a comment on the inscrutability of God is redolent of Calvin and Greene’s Cambridge years.

Greene is referring to that ‘libertinism’ or antinomianism which allowed those who believed that they were helpless to escape God’s decision to elect them to reprobation or who denied the existence of heaven and hell, to live as they wished.
Greene died on 3 September 1592 and, while it is generally agreed that it is Marlowe whom he has in mind at the last (Boas, 1940, 238; Kuriyama, 2002, 113), the identity of the unhappy ‘brocher of this Diabolicall Atheisme’ who had persuaded Greene to the life of a libertine is by no means clear. Riggs suggested that Greene’s earlier reference to Machiavelli carries over to this part of the diatribe (294). Katherine Duncan-Jones has argued that the passage refers to Marlowe’s friend, Watson (450). There are several difficulties with this interpretation. Not only was Watson still alive in London when the passage was written, but there is little fit between the description and the known facts of Watson’s life. On the other hand, the description closely fits the known facts of the life of Giordano Bruno, an adherent of Arius’ anti-Trinitarian opinions. It is possible that Greene is referring here to Bruno as the man who introduced him, Marlowe and many others to Arianism, and to his own version of Hermeticism, through the Italian works he published while in London. Certainly Bruno ‘had never the felicitie he aymed at’, wrote about the craft of magic and was often in danger because of his beliefs. Three months before Greene’s death, Bruno had been arrested as a heretic in Venice. Frances Yates has argued that Greene’s play *Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay* (c.1589) is evidence that Greene knew of Bruno and was aware of Bruno’s ill-received visit to Oxford University in 1583 (1964, 1991, 210 n.2). Everyone who knew Bruno knew that he had left his religious order because of his unorthodox Arian opinions. Learning that ‘in his third deposition before the [Venetian] inquisitors on 2 June, 1592 he admitted that he “in effect . . . harbored doubts” about his Lord already as a novice friar’, all who knew him would have feared for his life (Rowland, 241). On 30 July 1592, after Bruno threw himself on the mercy of his Venetian inquisitors, making an abject, penitent and expedient confession, the diplomatic process that would extradite him to Rome was begun (Rowland, 242, 245). This news would easily have reached England in a month. Bruno was as good as dead. In those years few men apprehended in London for the Atheist heresy lasted long.21

Whatever the truth of the matter, Greene’s preface and his deathbed pamphlet connect Marlowe with Faustus, Faustus with Bruno, all of them with Arianism and, as I will argue, also with Hermeticism.

21 Many arrested for disobedience, subversion or treason, which were the legal charges used to mask religious non-conformity or heresy, were never seen again. Donna Hamilton cites a letter written to Burghley in March 1592 by nine ministers telling him that several of them were dangerously sick (Scott Pearson in Hamilton, 54). She quotes another petition on behalf of ‘some sixty separatists still alive and ten who have died’, which complains that they were ‘shut up close prisoners from all comfort; many of us the space of two years and a half upon the bishop’s sole commandment’ (54).
Less than a year after Greene’s death, Marlowe found himself in the Court of Star Chamber suspected of Atheism; the charge may be inferred from a tenuous connection with Tamburlaine as well as from certain Notes and Reports and a letter which came to light after his disappearance ten days later.\(^{22}\)

As the term ‘Atheism’ is crucial to my argument, it demands some explanation.\(^{23}\) Riggs says the term was coined by Sir John Cheke in the 1540s to refer to people who do not ‘care whether there be a God or no’ (30). Nevertheless, it is very unlikely that even those denounced, as George Gascoigne was, as ‘an Atheist and godlesse personne’ (Boas, 1940, 109), had completely rejected belief in God as the Creator of Man and the universe.\(^{24}\) It is much more likely that the term was used of those who, while believing in God, denied the divinity of Christ and, as a corollary, the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice to redeem the sins of mankind. These Atheists, followers of the teachings of Arius which had been declared heretical in the fourth century, were described as Arian (MacCulloch, 2004, 187). Some, but not all, Atheists questioned the existence of hell and the immortality of the soul. Marlowe’s friend, Thomas Nashe, made a distinction between those men whom he described as ‘careless atheists’ and others, ‘intellectual atheists’ who reach their conclusions about Christ by reason.\(^{25}\) Boas saw it as ‘a useful slogan with which to denounce doctrines or actions that challenged constitutional, ecclesiastical or secular authority’ (1940, 109). Diarmaid MacCulloch observes that the word was used as a blanket term for religious doubt of any kind (2004, 693). Kuriyama agrees with MacCulloch that ‘Atheist’ was ‘a loose term for all those whose beliefs were heterodox’, but argues that Atheists ‘posed only an abstract threat to divinely ordained authority’ (2002, 122). Spiritually, an Atheist was a danger primarily to himself because he risked the salvation of his own immortal soul, but in Tudor England, Atheists were also regarded as a danger to others, and, because they might be ‘turned’ to Catholicism and support for England’s enemy, Spain, they were seen as a danger to the State.\(^{27}\)

Heterodoxy was seen as undermining the authority of Church and State and leading ultimately to the disintegration of society. It was tantamount to sedition and posed the same threat to the Church of England as the Catholics and the militant Puritans. For this reason, in response to a series of pamphlets attacking the episcopate by an elusive,  

\(^{22}\) Baines’ Note B L Harleian MS 6848 ff 185-6; Agent’s report on Cholmeley B L Harleian MS 6848 f.190; Kyd’s letter to Puckering B L Harleian MS 6848 f.154.

\(^{23}\) ‘Atheism’ is capitalised throughout in the manner of the 16th century.

\(^{24}\) Lucian Febvre suggests that in Marlowe’s pre-Cartesian world, ‘intellectual unbelief . . . was actually impossible’; he argues that in Marlowe’s time the terms ‘Atheist’ and ‘Atheism’ had no precise intellectual connotation and were used mainly as terms of abuse (in Davidson, 132).

\(^{25}\) Thos. Nashe, Christ’s Teares over Jerusalem, 1593, (in Davidson, 135).

\(^{26}\) The Atheist slur was also used of Separatists, Presbyterians and other nonconformists.

\(^{27}\) ‘There is no doubt but that they [the Atheists] will join with the Papists against the Protestants when any stir happeneth.’ Quoted from Anwick His Meditation (in Riggs, 326).
pseudonymous *Martin Marprelate*, Archbishop Whitgift had turned his attention from the pursuit of recusants to hunting down and silencing Separatists and other religious dissidents. In his capacity as a Privy Councillor, Whitgift was head of the Conciliar Court of High Commission, originally set up to try recusant Catholics. It is likely that in hounding nonconformists, Whitgift exceeded his powers; it is certain that what became a virtual inquisition was soon stopped following a letter from the Lord Treasurer, Burghley.

The events which led to Marlowe’s arrest, ostensibly for Atheism, began in October 1591 when the Queen issued a proclamation against the Jesuits declaring that they were ‘working treason under a false pretence of religion’ (in Trevelyan, 191). A Jesuit priest in exile, Robert Persons, was stung to respond in terms that were swift, abusive and possibly true.28 He accused Burghley and most of the Privy Council of Atheism. He claimed, on the basis of intelligence received from his spies, that members of the Privy Council ‘live as mere Atheists, and [were] laughing at other men’s simplicity in that behalf’. He alleged that Sir Walter Ralegh conducted a ‘school of Atheism’ in Durham House and employed a ‘conjuror that is the M[aster] thereof’ (Riggs, 295).29 He called Burghley a ‘malignant worm’ and accused him of encouraging Atheism in the universities (Trevelyan, 191).30

Matters came to a head when Parliament was recalled in November 1592. Ralegh pleased Her Majesty by speaking persuasively in favour of increasing taxation for war. After the defeat of the Armada in 1588, the Spaniards were reported to be looking for harbours from which to launch an invasion of England. Ralegh advocated openly declaring war on Spain and in that context spoke passionately against the Dutch and Huguenot immigrant traders who were pouring into the city, complaining that ‘they are the people who maintain the King of Spain in his greatness’ through their trading policies (Trevelyan, 194). Xenophobic Londoners blamed the city’s economic problems, exacerbated by plague, poor harvests and inflation, on the rising tide of Protestant refugees. Officially, however, the government welcomed the refugees who increased the Protestant population and helped the economy (Nicholl, 2002, 45). When on 21 March 1593 Ralegh opposed a bill to extend the privileges of resident aliens, he found no support in the Parliament.

Meanwhile, pursuing his own agenda, on 4 March, Archbishop Whitgift had ordered the arrest of twenty-six sectarians. On 22 March Whitgift presented a bill proposing some

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28 *Responsio ad Edictum Elizabethae* translated as *Advertisement Written to a Secretary of My L. Treasurer*, 1592.

29 The ‘Conjuror’ is presumed to be Thomas Hariot but may possibly refer to Dr John Dee. While charges are recorded against some known members of Ralegh’s household for denying, for example, the resurrection of the body and therefore the divinity of Christ, Ralegh makes his belief in God quite clear in his *History of the World*.

30 Persons clearly did not share Anwick’s view that Atheists were closet Papists.
draconian measures to penalize both Protestant extremists and Catholic recusants.\textsuperscript{31} Ralegh’s eloquence against it on the grounds that ‘legislation against an individual’s beliefs was extremely dangerous’ forced the Archbishop to revise his bill (in Trevelyan, 195). Whitgift’s reply was swift. The very next day he ordered the execution of Henry Barrow, a devout man and a Protestant Separatist, on the grounds of sedition. A fortnight later on 6 April, both Barrow and John Greenwood, a contemporary of Marlowe at Cambridge, were hanged. On 10 April, Whitgift’s bill treating as ‘seditious sectaries’ anyone ‘promulgating a conspicuously nonconformist platform’ was passed into law and parliament was dissolved (Hamilton, 8). Ralegh had retreated to Sherbourne, but within the month and in apparent support of the position he had taken in the parliament, posters began appearing on walls in the city attacking immigrant traders. It was the pursuit of the authors of one of these posters in particular that led the Privy Council to investigate Marlowe and to issue a warrant for his arrest (Kuriyama, 2002, 123).

On 5 May 1593, a libel against immigrants, written in iambic pentameter by a poet with a better than passing knowledge of the \textit{Tamburlaine} plays and \textit{Massacre at Paris} was posted on the wall of the Dutch Church. The poster was signed ‘Tamburlaine’ (see Appendix II). Kuriyama suggests that this may have been ‘less an attack on Marlowe than a crude attempt to tap the same [patriotic] emotions aroused by his plays and channel them into political unrest’ (131). Within the week, the City of London had posted a reward of 100 crowns for the identity of the libeller, and Lord Burghley apprised the Royal Commissioners of Her Majesty’s displeasure. The culprit was to be found and punished.

For no easily explicable reason, the rooms occupied by the playwright Thomas Kyd were searched.\textsuperscript{32} In the course of the search an anti-Trinitarian tract entitled \textit{The Fal of the Late Arrian} was discovered written in a neat italic scrivener’s hand (see Appendix III), and Kyd was arrested. He denied owning the tract but claimed, under torture, that it could have belonged to Marlowe, who for a time had shared the rooms with him. The original is lodged now in the British Library\textsuperscript{33}.

The document is endorsed \textit{verso}:

\begin{center}
12 May 1593/
vile hereticall conceiptes denyinge the/ deity of Jhesus
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{31} Whitgift was proposing three months in gaol for a first offence, loss of an ear for a second, and banishment for a third. Ralegh made an exaggerated claim that implementing the law would result in the banishing of some 20,000 men, women and children in the followers of Robert Browne, the Congregationalist, alone (Trevelyan, 194).

\textsuperscript{32} Kyd apparently believed he was suspected of involvement in the libel and denied all knowledge of it (B L Harleian MS 6848 f.154).

\textsuperscript{33} B L Harleian MS 6848 ff.187-9.
It was not apparently a crime to own or read the tract, since Marlowe’s King’s School master, John Gresshop owned a copy, as recorded in the 1580 inventory of his estate (Kuriyama, 2002, 185). But if the owner were to be suspected of using the paper to ‘promulgate a non-conformist platform’ he would be liable to prosecution under the new Act. In fact it may have been no more than part of Marlowe’s research for his character Faustus, but its discovery raises the possibility that Marlowe, like Faustus, shared the heretical Arian beliefs that had brought Bruno before the Roman inquisition.

The three manuscript pages which survive in the British Library are excerpts from a longer document written by one John Proctour to ‘your Lordship’, presumably a bishop, outlining the Arian heresy and answering it, but in no sense promoting it. Bishop Arius had argued that Jesus was ‘not God at all but a human prophet of God’ (MacCulloch, 2004, 187). Proctour’s argument claimed that since:

we therfor call God which onlie is worthie this name & appellation

And yf Jhesus Christ even he which was borne of Marie was God so
shall he be a visible God comprehensible & [since he died on the cross],
mortall.34

Hence, according to Arian belief, ‘the whole doctrine of the Trinity was an unbiblical sham’ (MacCulloch, 2004, 187). At the Council of Nicaea, in 325 C.E., Arius’ opinion was hotly opposed by Athanasius who won the argument, and Arius himself was condemned.35

Biblical scholarship can clearly justify the anti-Trinitarian position. A comparison of Jerome’s early translation of the first epistle of John, chapter 5 verses 7-8 with later Greek and Latin versions (all of which were available in sixteenth century England), reveals the clause referring to the Trinity to have been a later addition.36 John Painter concludes that not only are ‘the trinitarian interpretations [of the clause] an anachronism’ but possibly also the sacramental interpretations used to justify Baptism

34 B L Harleian MS 6848 f.188.
35 The Athanasian creed and the Nicene creed, both still used in the Catholic and Anglican churches, were composed specifically in order to refute Arius’ argument.
36 Because there are three who bear witness in heaven: Father, Word and Holy Spirit; and these three are one; and there are three who bear witness on earth: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three are into one. 1 John 5: 7-8. The italicised clause, the so-called Johannine Comma, is the addition in question. John Painter argues that the original text was ‘enigmatic and suggestive’ and that ‘the pressures of trinitarian controversy, especially in North Africa, led to the addition’ (2002, 308). As evidence that the words were not authentic, Painter lists numbers of MSS where the clause does not occur. He asserts the words are absent from the Vulgate before 750 and that ‘no Greek ms. prior to 1400 contains the addition’ (301).
by water, and the Eucharist (308-9). The controversy is of relevance and interest to this study because it shows that Marlowe and his fellow travellers in the ‘School of Atheism’, as Persons mocked, had serious scholarly justification for what the world has condemned as idle scoffing and blasphemy.

The official interest in Marlowe, consequent upon the discovery of the Arian document alleged to belong to him, has provided us with documentary evidence of Marlowe’s alleged beliefs, independent of his plays. The documents take the form of written reports provided by one Richard Baines to Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst and the Lord Keeper Sir John Puckering who took charge of the inquiry into Marlowe for the Privy Council. Baines’ Note confirms an earlier report made by an unnamed agent, two months before the libellous poster appeared on the Dutch church, about a certain Richard Cholmeley who had alleged:

That . . . one Marlowe is able to shewe more sound reasons for Atheisme than any devine in Englane is able to geve to prove divinity & that Marloe tolde him that hee hath read the Atheist lecture to Sir Walter Raliegh & others.

The agent reported:

That hee [Cholmeley] speaketh in generall all evill of the Counsell; sayenge that they are all Atheistes & Machievellians, especially my Lord Admirall.37

A second report on Cholmeley in March 1593 quotes him as saying that there would shortly be ‘by his & his felowes persuasions as many of their opynion as of any other religion’ (see Appendix IV).38 It is noteworthy that Cholmeley seems to be implying here that the Atheism to which Marlowe seeks to persuade other men is itself a religion.

That Marlowe was the instrument of Cholmeley’s conversion to Atheism is confirmed in Baines’ Note: ‘That on Ric Cholmley hath confessd that he was perswaded by Marloes reasons to become an Atheist’. According to Baines, Marlowe not only held these opinions but ‘almost into every company he cometh he perswades men to Atheism, willing them not to be afeard of bugbears and hobgoblins’.39 The Note concludes with Baines’ opinion that ‘all men in Christianity ought to indenvor that the mouth of so dangerous a member be stopped’.40 Years of practice in disputation, in the arts of logic and rhetoric for his degree had made Marlowe a formidable and persuasive advocate, but not apparently for orthodox Christianity.

37 B L Harleian MS 6848 f.190. Admiral Charles Howard, patron of the theatre company which played Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus in London and on the Continent.
38 B L Harleian MS 6848 f.191; a fair copy in the same hand as f.190.
39 B L Harleian MS 6848 ff.185-6. See also copy of this document with deletions: MS 6853 ff. 307,8
40 B L Harleian MS 6848 ff. 185-6.
There is a suggestion here that Marlowe’s enthusiasm for ‘Atheism’ is putting himself and others in danger. Despite a warrant having been issued for his arrest, Cholmeley was still at large and capable of spreading opinions which could damage the Privy Council. If Cholmeley’s claims and Persons’ accusations that the Privy Councillors and Charles Howard, the Lord Admiral were all ‘Atheists’ had any substance, Sackville and Puckering, by putting themselves in charge of the inquiry, were well-placed to learn the extent of the damage and to contain it.

Baines’ Note to Puckering is a comprehensive list of Marlowe’s ‘damnable Judgment of Religion, and scorn of Godes word’. It is a report of opinions which Marlowe is alleged to have affirmed, and it is useful in the present argument because it links Marlowe with two men, both eccentric, but not previously connected, who were said to have voiced very similar views. In places, Marlowe’s opinions, as recorded by Baines, are almost identical to the charges laid against Bruno in Venice the year before and also, as Riggs points out, to the allegations of Atheism made against the earl of Oxford a decade earlier (113). It was alleged of all three that they refused to accept the Bible as God’s word. The earl was accused by his enemies of holding shocking opinions:

the glorious Trinitie was an old wives tale and voyde of reason / that he [Oxford] cold make a better and more orderlie scripture in [six] dayes warninge . . . that the rest [of scripture] was deviseid but to make us afraid – like babes and childerne – of owr shadowes. (in Nelson, 209, 210)

Baines reported that Marlowe claimed ‘[t]hat if he were put to write a new religion, he would undertake both a more Exellent and Admirable methode and that all the new testament is filthily written’, and ‘[t]hat the first beginning of Religioun was only to keep men in awe’.42

Concerning the immortality of the soul and the consequences of sin, the opinions of the earl and Bruno are consonant with those which Marlowe gives to Faustus, although there is no documented evidence that Marlowe held them himself. It was said of the earl in 1580, that he claimed that ‘he wuld prove by scripture that after this life we shuld be as if we had never ben’ (in Nelson, 210).43

One agent reported that Cholmeley was spreading the slanders (as he thought) that ‘the Lord Threasorer the Lord Chamberleyyn the Lord Adimiral [and] Sir Robert Cecill . . . bee sounde Atheistes & their lives & deedes showe that they thinke their soules doe ende vanishe & perishe with their bodies’.44 Those who gave evidence against Bruno

41 ibid.
42 B L Harleian MS 6848 f.185.
43 Such a belief was deemed heretical by the Catholic Church who at the Lateran Council of 1513 had decreed that the soul was immortal.
44 B L Harleian MS 6848 f.191.
at the Venetian inquisition, in 1592, reported that Bruno had said ‘that there is no punishment of sins’ (Rowland, 228). It was also recorded that he claimed:

That there is no hell, that no one is damned to eternal punishment but in time everyone shall be saved, citing the prophet: Shall God be angry forever? That when bodies die their souls transmigrate from one world to the other, in the many worlds and from one body to another. (Rowland, 247)

Bruno also told his inquisitors that in his opinion it was a great blasphemy to say that bread transmutes into flesh. Bruno’s uncompromising stance echoes Faustus’ bold if unconvincing claims: ‘hell’s a fable’ (II i 130[B]), or ‘this word “damnation” terrifies not me’ (I iii 57[B]), or Mephistopheles’ advice to Faustus to ‘abjure the Trinity’ (I iii 54[A]), which appears in the B-Text as ‘Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ’ (I iii 46[B]).

It is not at all clear who instigated the posting of the ‘Tamburlaine’ libel. In the event, it served the interests of the Council. Because it set off events which led to Marlowe’s being arrested and released on his own recognisance to report daily to the Council, it had the effect of keeping him close. What is known is that at the inquest held on 1 June, 1593, the Coroner found that Christopher Marlowe had met his death at Deptford on the evening of 30 May, at the hands of a man acting in self-defence.

The God-fearing saw in Marlowe’s untimely and allegedly violent death nothing less than divine retribution. Thomas Beard could not resist drawing the moral in The Theatre of God’s Judgements: ‘He denied God and his Sonne Christ and . . . blasphemed the Trinity’, wrote Beard in 1597, and cautioned ‘that all the Atheists in this realm . . . by consideration of this example, either forsake their horrible impiety, or that they might in like manner come to destruction’ (in Riggs, 343). Marlowe’s friends mourned the passing of the man who had been ‘the Muses’ darling’, as Peele put it in a poem addressed to Percy, earl of Northumberland. Others remembered him as ‘that pure Elemental wit’ or as ‘a diviner Muse’ than Musaeus himself. Years later, Michael Drayton wrote of ‘those brave translunary things /That the first poets had’ and ‘that fine madness . . . which rightly should possess a Poet’s brain’. When the coroner was called to examine the body of a man with a face disfigured by a dagger thrust through his eye socket, the three who had spent the day with him testified that it was the body of Christopher Marlowe.

In Marlowe’s own words, ‘Cut [was] the branch that should have grown full straight’ (Doctor Faustus, Epilogue). The controversial poet was gone.

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45 The Honour of the Garter, June 1593
46 Thomas Thorpe, the dedication to Marlowe’s translation of Lucan’s Pharsalia.
47 Michael Drayton, Of Poets and Poesie, 1627.
Is he really ‘like Dr Faustus’? 48

It was John Bakeless who perceived a similarity between Marlowe and his protagonist Faustus when he titled his biography The Tragicall Historie of Christopher Marlowe (1942). Harry Levin also thought that ‘Faustus was like Marlowe himself, that impenitent and wilful miscreant whom Elizabethan preachers call a scoffer’ (156), and A.L. Rowse followed suit by declaring ‘Faustus is Marlowe’ (150). Paul Kocher was more moderate when he described Marlowe as a ‘highly subjective’ playwright whose plays are ‘projections of some of his more particular ideas and passions’ (1946, 4). Even though he believed that Marlowe seizes the opportunity to express heretical ideas through the speeches of Faustus and the devils, he noted Marlowe’s knowledge of orthodoxy, and a mocking ironic tone in his anti-Christian bias (1946, 118-9).

Two decades later, Wilbur Sanders contended that ‘to a dangerous degree Faustus is Marlowe’ (225), and Una Ellis-Fermor saw the play as ‘rich in autobiographical suggestion’ (70-1). She claimed that when the story of Faustus ‘fell into Marlowe’s hands, it must have come with startling significance as the symbol of the conflict in progress in his own mind’ (69). Brandt feels that Ellis-Fermor interpreted the play ‘primarily as a means of insight into Marlowe’s own rebellious mind’ (2010, 25).

Those early psychological approaches have not entirely disappeared. In 1980 Stephen Greenblatt suggested that Marlowe was ‘deeply implicated in his heroes’ (220), and fifteen years later, Bevington and Rasmussen, while unwilling to interpret the plays as ‘straightforward autobiography’, admitted that ‘the plays seem to us intensely personal’ (1995, vii). More recently Patrick Cheney expressed the view that Marlowe invents characters ‘written through with his own personality’, feeling that in the opening scenes of Doctor Faustus ‘Marlowe’s authorial imagination merges with his own autobiographical imagination’ (2006, 184).

Generally speaking, critics are divided about the extent to which Marlowe uses Faustus to voice his own views and the extent to which he is in control of his material. Richard Dutton warns of the necessity ‘to discriminate . . . vigilantly between the man and his writings’ (1), and Nicholas Davidson sounds a similar note when he cautions against the temptation ‘to assume that a writer’s work must reflect his life, and that Marlowe’s beliefs can therefore be identified among the statements he gave to his characters on stage’ (130). Similarly, Riggs holds that the scepticism in the play indicates Marlowe’s decision to present ‘the story that came down to him via P.F.’s Damnable Life from a sceptical point of view’ and that, instead of following his source, Marlowe has chosen to interrogate it (236). Riggs is not suggesting that the conflicts in Faustus mirror some moral or spiritual ambivalence in Marlowe, but rather, as John Mebane argues, that these are the product of Marlowe’s ‘controlled artistry’ (Mebane, 119).

48 ‘He is like Dr Faustus’ (Riggs, 232).
Attempts to see Marlowe’s dramatisation of Faustus as a manifestation of Marlowe’s own character are inevitably complicated by the problems associated with ‘serious textual corruption’ and with the putative ‘collaborative authorship’, as Mebane cautions (119). Nevertheless, in some quarters, Marlowe’s reported opinions have been conflated with those of his protagonist and earned the poet the lasting reputation of being a dangerous and transgressive radical. It seems important to heed Lukas Erne’s caution that modern critics have created ‘a vicious hermeneutic circle within which the play’s protagonists are read into Marlowe’s biography’ thereby constructing a ‘mythographic creature’ called Marlowe (28).

Whatever the similarities between the few facts known about Marlowe and Doctor Faustus, it is worth remembering that the fictional German scholar/magician was not Marlowe’s creation. Even so, it must be acknowledged that Marlowe and Faustus were both base-born, both studied at Protestant Universities, both turned their backs on Divinity, and were both doubters or sceptics: one ‘abjur’d the Trinity’, the other read a paper about it. There, in my view, the similarities end.
Chapter Two

The Origins of the Faust Legend, and Marlowe’s Sources: the *Faustbuch* and its English translation *The English Faust Book*

In order both to explore the perceived similarities between Marlowe and Doctor Faustus and to inform later discussion of Marlowe’s artistry in adapting his prose source, I turn now to the story of the German doctor, which is generally believed to be the source of Marlowe’s play, and find that the legend stretches back to the earliest years of the Christian era.

Part I The Legend of Faustus

*Faustus in antiquity*

Oh unfortunate Faustus! The exploits and adventures of the fearless man with a fascination for the forbidden, a prankster possessed of magical powers who respected the laws of neither God nor Nature, have their deep roots in ancient, philosophic, magico/religious texts. Bevington and Rasmussen go even further and trace the character of Faustus to Adam in the Hebrew Bible, whom he resembles in his disobedience; to Prometheus and Icarus from pagan Greek myths, whom he resembles in daring; to Moses, Zoroaster and Solomon whose magical powers he shares, and to Simon Magus of Samaria (7-8). Simon is mentioned briefly as a self-aggrandizing magician in the Acts of the Apostles (8: 9-23) and he figures in the *Clementine Recognitions* and *Homilies*. Anecdotes about the sorcerer and necromancer are also to be found in the legends concerning Cyprian of Antioch and Theophilus of Adana. In the twelfth century the popular stories were gathered into the *Kaiserchronik* and later
incorporated into the *Legenda Aurea*, one of the earliest printed books, which went into seventy-four Latin editions and numerous translations (Palmer & More, 11, 12). It is reasonable to assume that they were known in England as well as in Germany and the rest of Europe.

In their comprehensive documentation of the sources of the Faust tradition in 1936, Palmer and More noted the gradual accretion of legendary material around Simon, dating from the second century (10). In the *Recognitions*, Clement Romanus describes Simon as a magician who boasted that he was an exalted power, the Christ, and above God the Creator – that is, in Gnostic terms, the demiurge; and in Hermetic terms, ‘a craftsman’ (12). Simon Magus was certainly known to the author of the German novella who introduces an Old Man, a Protestant ‘lover of the Holy Scriptures’, who begs Faustus to repent and cites Simon in Samaria as an example (Jones l.2451, l.2471-2474). In the German novella, Mephistopheles dazzles Faustus with promises of the exciting feats claimed for Simon in the *Recognitions*: that he could make himself invisible at will; that he could ‘ascend by flight into the air’; that he could ‘dig through the mountains and pass through rocks as if they were clay’; that he could throw himself ‘headlong from a lofty mountain’ and be ‘borne unhurt to the earth’, and that he could deceive his enemies by changing his countenance so that he could not be recognized (Palmer & More, 13, 14). Marlowe draws on these supernatural abilities too when Faustus asks Mephistopheles to make him invisible (III ii 12[B]). Marlowe also incorporates Simon’s ability to ‘dig through mountains’ into his play complete with the English translator’s attribution of this feat to Virgil (III i 13[B]). In the *Recognitions*, this Simon Magus fell in love with a woman called Luna (who in the *Homilies* is called Helena), and went about with her claiming she was Wisdom (that is Sophia), the mother of all things. In the German novella, Faustus marries Helen and has a son by her, while the episode is reduced to two brief encounters in Act V of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (V i S.D.27; V i S.D. 93 et seq.[B]).

In Book VII of the *Recognitions*, there is another anecdote involving Simon. Clement, who assumes the authorial voice, is telling the apostle Peter how, twenty years earlier, his father Faustinianus was tricked into sending his wife and twin sons, Clement’s older brothers, Faustinus and Faustus, on a dangerous sea voyage to Athens; how the ship was wrecked and the children lost; how his father set off to find them and was also lost at sea. At the time of telling the story, Clement is visiting the island of Aradus in the company of two young men, whom he has recently met, Niceta and Aquila. Peter happens upon an ancient woman and asks her story. Although suspicious, she admits to having had a son called Clement. Eventually they are reunited and to everyone’s

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49 *Hermetica* (I [9]) ‘The mind who is god . . . by speaking gave birth to a second mind, a craftsman . . .’
joy, Niceta and Aquila reveal themselves as the brothers, Faustinus and Faustus.50 They fall into a discussion of doctrinal matters with an old man whom they then recognise as their long lost father. Afterwards, Faustinianus is tricked by Simon Magus, who is evading pursuers and punishment, into taking on Simon’s appearance. In later chapters I will discuss Michael Keefer’s use of this conflation of identities in his explication of Cornelius Agrippa’s dilemma, where he suggests that for Agrippa, Simon Magus and Hermes Trismegistus ‘become different names for the same thing’ (1988, 650). As we shall see, in Marlowe’s play the German Emperor similarly identifies Faustus calling him both ‘renowned magician’ and ‘Thrice-learned’ (IV i 48-49[B]).

Ioan Couliano who sees the Faust *Volksbuch* as a ‘typical piece of evangelical propaganda’, argues that the legends of Cyprian of Antioch and Theophilus of Adana are even more significant than the Simon stories (262). In the first of these, a nobleman appeals to Cyprian, a magician, to help him win the heart of a young Christian woman, Justina, by magic. Cyprian summons a demon who causes her to desire the young man. She, however, appeals to Christ to help her conquer the demon of lust, which he does. The demon returns defeated to Cyprian and warns him that:

> whatsoever mistakes we make or whatsoever things we bring to pass here we shall receive our reward in the world to come. For there is a brazen fork and it is heated and placed on the neck of (the sinner . . .) man.

(Palmer & More, 49)

Similar torments await Faustus in the novellas (Jones, ch.15) and the play (V ii 123-127[B]).

Unlike the poltroon in the novella and the play when threatened by Lucifer (II iii 96-97[B]), Cyprian loses no time in changing his allegiance, despite the demon’s protest that he is breaking his oath. In this version of the story, Cyprian burns his books, seeks forgiveness and becomes a bishop. By contrast, Faustus, terrified by Lucifer’s threat ‘to tear [him] in pieces’ (V ii 76[B]) and the Bad Angel’s description of the ‘ever-burning chair’ (V ii 126[B]), offers to burn his books as a very last resort and all too late (V ii 191[B]).

The most popular and wide-spread of all the Magus legends, the legend of Theophilus, originated sometime after 650 C.E. and exists in numerous translations including English. The legend concerns one Theophilus who, having refused an invitation to become a bishop, regretted his decision and enlisted the help of ‘a certain wicked Jew, a practicer of all sorts of diabolical arts’ (Palmer & More, 62). The Jew leads him by

50 Clement’s story is a plausible source for the parted Antipholus twins from Syracuse and Ephesus, reunited after many years with their mother, the Abbess, that is *The Comedy of Errors*. Not hitherto considered by Shakespeare scholars, it becomes an even more likely source for Shakespeare’s comedy when the false tale of their mother having fled with a slave suggests the addition of the Dromio brothers.
night to his master the prince who is none other than the devil. The prince offers to help Theophilus so long as he is willing to be his servant. He is instructed to deny the son of Mary and obliged to make a written contract to that effect. One thirteenth century version alleges that the pact was written in his blood. However, he bitterly repents and with a contrite heart seeks forgiveness from the Virgin Mary. After three days, Mary returns his bond to him, still sealed just as he had given it to the devil. He presents it to his bishop, confesses all, gives his possessions to the poor and receives forgiveness. Once again the story is mirrored in that of Marlowe’s Faustus who, having abjured the Trinity (I iii 54[A]), conjures Mephistopheles, whose master, Lucifer, demands from him a contract signed in blood (II i 35[B]). Unlike Theophilus, however, Faustus can neither repent nor retract his bond.

**Faustus in history and legend**

Even a cursory examination of the 1587 German *Faustbuch* and its English translation reveals how familiar were the writer and the translator with these Magus stories of antiquity. But the unknown author of the *Faustbuch* had an additional source of inspiration and information in a man or men who emerge in the documentary record after 1507. This is the historical Faustus whose life and playful jests and wicked exploits may be deduced from references to him in the letters of men such as Johannes Trithemius, Conrad Mutianus, Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon, as well as in civic and matriculation records, sermons and chronicles. Palmer and More cite no fewer than twenty-four such references to a man living in Germany in the years between 1507 and 1540 (83-126).

The earliest of these references occurs in a letter of Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), ridiculing the presumption of a man calling himself ‘Master George Sabellicus, the younger Faust, fons necromanticorum, astrologus, magus secundus,’ and so on (Palmer & More, 84). The young man claimed to be learned in alchemy and to be able to perform any of the miracles that Christ performed ‘as often and whenever he wished’ (85). Trithemius dismisses him as a rash and ignorant fool, but does not mention that George Sabellicus Faustus had appropriated the name of Sabellius, a Libyan priest of the third century who, like his namesake Faustus, was also an anti-Trinitarian.

In 1509, Heidelberg University recorded the enrolment of one Johann Faust who may or may not be the George Faust referred to by Konrad Muth (1471-1526) as ‘a certain Chiromancer by the name of Georgius Faustus, Helmitheus Hedebergensis, a mere braggart and fool’ (1513) (Palmer & More, 87). The unintelligible Latin was later

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51 . . . quidam Chiromanticus Ephurdiam nomine Georgius Faustus, Helmitheus Hedebergensis, merus ostentator et fatuus (Palmer & More, 87, 88).
amended to *Hemitheus Hdelbergensis* or the demi-god of Heidelberg (Palmer & More, 87 n.13). The name Faustus, preceded by George, Johann or Doctor appears at intervals in the published record until at least 1569. Martin Luther (1483-1546) himself mentioned the sorcerer Faustus in his *Tischreden*, claiming: ‘The devil does not make use of the services of sorcerers against me. If he had been able to do me any harm he would have done it long since. To be sure he has often had me by the head but he had to let me go again’ (in Palmer & More, 93). Lutherans in Marlowe’s audience may have recalled his words when Mephistopheles is unable to touch the good Old Man because ‘His faith is great’ (V i 82[B]).

Ludvig Lavater (1527-1586), head of the Protestant church in Zurich after Zwingli, in *Von Gespansten* (1569), cited Faustus as an example of ‘sorcerers who boast they can saddle a horse on which they can in short time make great journeys’ (Palmer & More, 107). The Erfurt Chronicle, which probably dates from the mid-sixteenth century, elaborated the feat, telling how Faustus once flew from Prague to Erfurt on his magic horse in response to a joke from friends at an inn. While there, his horse ate bushels of oats before rising and flying him back to Prague (Palmer & More, 113-4). The Erfurt Chronicle also refers to Faustus’ having made ‘a blood compact with the devil’ (in Palmer & More, 117). In this version too, Doctor Faustus, ‘[a]lthough he lived at Wittenberg . . . came to the university at Erfurt . . . and through his boasting . . . was allowed to lecture publicly . . . [on] Homer’ (Palmer & More, 108). There he delighted and terrified his students by calling up heroes from the field of Troy – Ajax, Ulysses, Agamemnon and others – to illustrate his lecture (Palmer & More, 108-9).

Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), Luther’s friend and follower, who clearly knew the pseudo-Clementine literature referred to earlier, observed that in Venice Faustus tried to emulate Simon Magus’ flight but was ‘sorely dashed to the ground’. Many writers reported that Doctor Faustus died violently. Johannes Gast (d.1572), a Protestant pastor at Basle, tells how Faustus was strangled by the devil and that after death the corpse ‘kept turning face downward’. Johannes Manlius, quoting from the ‘lectures of Philipp Melanchthon and other most learned men’ reported that Faustus studied the black art at Cracow and told how the house shook on the night that Faustus was found dead, ‘his face turned towards his back’.

The early stories about the historical Doctor Faust tend to have strong associations with Lutheranism. They cluster round the Duchy of Württemberg near the border of the Palatinate in the south, where he was believed to have been born in Knittlingen,

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52 From the *Explicationes Melanchthoniae*, published in 1594 (Palmer & More, 99).
53 From *Sermones Convivales* (ibid.98).
54 From the *Locorum Communium Collectanea* of Johannes Manlius,1563 (Palmer & More,102). Repeated by Augustin Lercheimer in *Christlich bedencken und Erinnerung von Zauberei*, Heidelberg, 1585 (ibid. 120-1).
close to the birthplace of Melanchthon, while the later stories situate him in Erfurt and Wittenberg in the north, places associated with Luther.\textsuperscript{55}

The legendary Doctor Faustus was a peripatetic magician, sorcerer, alchemist, philosopher, necromancer and soothsayer.\textsuperscript{56} A litany of unsavoury details fleshed out the legend: Faustus was a parasite, a drunkard, a gourmand, a sodomite, a vagabond and a quack. These are the stories which provided the German author with a rich mine of amusing material.

\textit{A real Faustus}

It seems that the name Faustus was not uncommon. It also belonged to an Italian who questioned the divinity of Jesus, Fausto Paolo Sozzini (1539-1604). He was the nephew of Lelio Sozini of Siena, scion of a family of bankers and a free thinker, ‘who represented that generation of radicals who had matured their doubts about the full divinity of Christ . . . in Italy in the 1540s’ (MacCulloch, 2004, 360). He travelled much and was in amicable contact with Melanchthon in Germany and with Jean Calvin in Geneva. However, Calvin’s appalling treatment of Michael Servetus, an Arian and radical thinker from Navarre, convinced Sozini similarly to reject the Trinity.\textsuperscript{57} It was left to Fausto Sozzini, known as Faustus Socinus to develop his uncle’s anti-Trinitarian teachings.

At the end of 1575, after twelve years at the court of Isabella de’Medici in Siena, Sozzini left Italy. By 1579, he and his followers, anti-Trinitarians (or, pejoratively, Socinians), had established themselves at Cracow in Poland, under the tolerant protection of John Sigismund. There they flourished, led by Sozzini, and became one of the strongest of the anti-Trinitarian sects in Europe.

If the real Faustus Socinus was a serious, intellectual anti-Trinitarian, the legendary and historic Faustus was exciting, fun and dangerous to know. What was the impetus that brought the stories together in the first German \textit{Faustbuch}?

\textsuperscript{55} Also known as Kundling (ibid. 101 n.55).
\textsuperscript{56} From the account book of the Bishop of Bamberg. 1519-1520: ‘10 gulden given to Doctor Faustus the philosopher who made for my master a horoscope or prognostication’. The Ingoldstadt Archiv records a soothsayer ‘one . . . Dr George Faust of Heidelberg was banished from the city (ibid. 89-90).
\textsuperscript{57} Servetus was burnt at the stake in 1553 with the full approbation of the Genevan City Fathers.
Part II  Marlowe’s Sources

The First German Faustbuch

*Historia von D. Johann Fausten dem weitbeschreyten Zauberer und Schwartzkünstler* was published by Johann Spies at Frankfurt-am-Main in September 1587 in time for the Autumn Book Fair. The title page announced:

The Life of Dr Johann Faustus, the renowned sorcerer and black magician: how he sold himself to the devil for a specified term, what curious exploits he devised and practised during that time, until he finally received his well-deserved reward.

For the most part gathered from his own posthumous papers and published as a terrible and horrific example and a sincere warning to all the overweening, inquisitive and ungodly.

Owen Davies sees the publication as part of a wave of *Teufelsbücher* that was swamping German popular culture at the time (50). Jones suggests ‘two major factors which may have triggered the writing and shaped the inner theme of the work’ (5). One was Augustin Lercheimer’s *Christlich Erinnerung von Zauberer* published at Heidelberg in 1585, protesting at the cruelty of burning women convicted of witchcraft, but nevertheless acknowledging ‘the ability of an adept magician . . . to conjure the devil and make a pact with him’ (4). The other factor was ‘the late flowering in Northern Europe of Renaissance hermetism and the presence in Saxony of the two most famous and most suspect magicians of the age, John Dee and Giordano Bruno’ (Jones, 5-6). Jones thinks the novella was ‘probably written in 1586 or later’ (5). This would have coincided with Bruno’s arrival in Wittenberg to lecture, a time to which he later referred as the happiest of his life.

In England, trials of women for witchcraft had prompted Reginald Scot to expose the folly of the accusations in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, published in 1584 and dedicated to ‘The Honourable . . . good Lord S. Roger Manwood. Scot defends the ‘poor old women convented before you for working of Miracles otherwise called witchcraft,’ and cites Agrippa’s pleading on their behalf (Book 2, Chapter X).62

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58 The History of Dr John Faust Famed Sorcerer and Master of the Black Arts.
59 All other translations from the German are taken from John Henry Jones, 1994.
60 Christian Commentary on Magic. Lercheimer is the pseudonym of Hermann Witekind (1522-1603).
61 Manwood died, disgraced, in December 1592. He was on the bench when Marlowe appeared before him and was cleared of the death of William Bradley in 1589. It is not known why Marlowe wrote a brief Latin obituary.
62 ‘Forreign Authors used in this book’ included Hermes Trismegistus, Cornelius Agrippa, Calvinus, Lutherus, Ovidus, Plato, Proclus, Ptolomeus, Pythagoras, eight Rabbi and Roger Bacon.
The German Doctor’s astonishing gifts for flight, transmutation and necromancy, which date back to the pseudo-Clementine literature, also feature in Scot:

Some say they can . . . flie in the aire and dance with devils . . . Some say they can transubstantiate themselves and others, and take the formes and shapes of asses, wolves, ferrets, cows, apes, horses, dogs and . . . some say they can bring soules out of their graves. (Book 1, Chapter IV)

Similarly, Faustus’ denial of his faith and signing a pact in blood may be sourced to antiquity and also to Scot:

Sometimes their homage with their oath and bargain be received for a certain terme of years, sometimes for ever. Sometimes it consisteth in the denial of the whole faith, sometimes in part . . . and this is done either by oath . . . or by obligation in writing sometimes sealed with wax, sometimes signed with blood. (Book 3, Chapter II)

More amusing adventures such as Faustus and the flying horse (Jones, l.1235) or Faustus eating a load of hay (Jones, 154), or finding fruit out of season (Jones, l.2150) are all versions of the anecdotes circulating in Germany. Other tricks are detailed by Scot in the chapter on legerdemain, juggling and conjuring. Here we learn how ‘to thrust a knife through your arme and to cut half your nose asunder’ and ‘to cut off one’s head and lay it in a platter which the jugglers call the decollation of John the Baptist’, tricks which appear in both the Historia and the EFB (Jones, 164).

The Montagetechnik so characteristic of the Faust story can be attributed to this wealth of disparate sources which have resulted in a curiously uneven literary style and an oddly ambivalent reprobate, scholar hero. One early critic, Wilhelm Scherer, takes the author to task for:

repeated contradictions and repetitions, disturbing interpolations, awkward transitions and almost nowhere a larger unifying conception.
The writer seems to have jotted down tales as he came across them and then perfunctorily connected his collection.63 (in Haile, 350)

More recently, Christa Knellwolf King has commented on the ‘blatantly uneven literary merit of the different parts of the [Spies] book’ (29). She notes the ambivalent depiction of Doctor Faustus and comments on the contrast between the ‘superior quality of the passages that portray a sympathetic figure and the cautionary tale’s bland condemnation of everything creative, imaginative and passionate’ (29). Knellwolf King concludes that the German Faustbuch ‘originated in an intellectual context – probably in a circle of students’ (30).

A discovery made over a century ago may shed some light on the provenance of the Spies manuscript. In 1892, Dr G. Milchsack discovered in the Herzog August

63 Das älteste Faust-Buch (Berlin, 1884), pp.iii f.
Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, a manuscript entitled *Historia und Geschichte des Doktor Johannes Fausti*. It may have come from the Academia Julia of Helmstedt near Wittenberg where Giordano Bruno held a position in 1589, as the HAB at Wolfenbüttel became the repository for much of the Academy’s collection (Rowland, 211).

Palmer and More, who share Knellwolf King’s low opinion of the quality of the Spies text, note that the Wolfenbüttel manuscript is ‘in large part identical’ to the Spies text and that the two texts are ‘variants of the same basic version’ (130). However there are some differences – the Wolfenbüttel *Historia* (*WH*) has about five more chapters than the Spies publication (*SH*) and the latter has attracted criticism also because of interpolations in the form of pious asides and frequent admonitions to the reader. No manuscript survives of the printed *SH*, but the *WH* manuscript is written in the same hand throughout, leading Jones to suggest that it was dictated to a scribe close to the publication date of the Spies book (5).

The English Faust Book and some problems of translation

The German novella was translated into numerous languages; the earliest extant English translation appeared in 1592, attributed on the title page to one styling himself ‘P.F.’ *Gent*, and published by Thomas Orwin. For many years it was generally agreed that this translation, the *English Faust Book* (*EFB*), was Marlowe’s only source for *Doctor Faustus*, and for many years the 1592 publication date was taken as an indication that *Doctor Faustus* was one of Marlowe’s last plays. W.W. Greg in particular argued for this and, despite conceding that Marlowe may have had access to an earlier translation, he dated Marlowe’s play to 1592 (1950, 2-4).

It was the title page, given below, read in the context of a publisher’s dispute entered in the Stationers’ Register, which led Greg to assume that ‘P.F.’s translation was not ready before early 1592, while Jones has argued for several editions now lost that preceded Orwin’s publication by as much as four years (Jones, 1).

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64  HAB Extrav.92, seen at Wolfenbüttel in November, 2008.
65  Rowland’s comment is made in the context of a discussion relating to a student of Bruno’s, Hieronymus Besler, and Bruno’s book *On Mathematical Magic*.
66  It is written on hand laid foolscap size paper, and looseleaf. I think it may have been intended as a presentation copy for Prince Julius of Braunschweig and Lüneburg, Lutheran ruler of Helmstedt near Wittenberg, or for his son Heinrich Julius of Wolfenbüttel. Haile, who translated the manuscript in 1963, noted that it still contained quantities of blotting sand, indicating that it had hardly been read.
67  See Appendix I for discussion concerning the date of Marlowe’s play.
The reference to the ‘imperfect matter amended’ led scholars to assume a previous edition in English. However, another interpretation is possible – namely that the translator is not vouching that he has corrected his earlier publication but that he has altered the original (SH) where he found it ‘imperfect’. Such an interpretation does not detract from the argument for an early date either for the translation or for the play, but, importantly, it is an interpretation which accounts for the omissions, substitutions and additions made by ‘P.F.’ to the original Historia (SH) (see below).

If there is dispute about the date of the EFB, there is none about the admirable quality of the translation which, despite some errors, Jones describes as having ‘three qualities notably lacking in the German author: a flair for pungent expression, a vivid visual imagination and a taste for ironic humour’ (12).68 ‘P.F. Gent.’ also has a feel for the dramatic and often transposes reported speech to direct speech. Jones is confident that ‘P.F.’ is translating from the first SH and not a later edition, a recension or the WH; he does, however, acknowledge that ‘P.F.’ omits some, though not all, of those passages which are present in the SH but absent from the WH, ‘and in numerous places his translation accords more closely’ with WH than with SH (12). This is difficult to explain, and Jones says somewhat wryly ‘either he must have been gifted with an exceptionally fine editorial eye and subbed out Spies’ pietistic additions, or he was working from an edition no longer extant closer to [WH] than all surviving editions’

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68 It is to Jones we are indebted for an accurate translation of all relevant parts of SH as commentary in an edition of The English Faust Book which clearly shows in bold all the material which is in the EFB but not in SH.
From this, Jones tentatively suggests, in his introduction to William Empson’s book, the possibility that the first prose Historia von D. Fausten was written in Latin, but offers no further explanation (1987, 31).

Harold Jantz, drawing on earlier work of Richard Rohde and Robert Petsch and, arguing from the little known Second Report of Doctor Faustus (1594), makes a convincing case for the existence of a Latin original. ‘[P]robably’, he says ‘a witty erudite and allusive novel intended for the more daring and radical student circles’ from which ‘the slavishly literal’, ‘flat and moralistic’ translation was made (1952, 143). Now The Second Report (‘Written by a gentleman student in Wittenberg, an University of Germany in Saxony’) on the face of it appears to have been published too late to have any interest for the present discussion. However, when it was published in 1594, it carried three prefaces. One, dated July 1589 and written in Latin, claimed that the author had received the manuscript from a friend in Germany who had taken on the thankless task of collating and translating numerous scattered papers which he had received from some students in Wittenberg; another was dated Leipzig in Saxony, May 1590. The third preface, ‘Unto them which wold know the trueth’, begins:

It is plaine that many thinges in the first book are meere lies, for prooffe marke this: it is said that it is translated, so it is, & where it is word for word. But I have talked with the man that first wrote them, having them from Wagners very friend, wherein he saith manie things are corrupted, some added de novo, some canceld and taken awaie, & many were augmented . . . (Jantz, 138)

Of course this may be merely a clever ploy on the part of the author to convince the reader, who has already read ‘P.F.’s translation, to buy The Second Report . . . containing the deedes of Wagner by discrediting the previous book. That explanation does not exclude the possibility that the objections of ‘the man that first wrote them’ to the ‘things corrupted’, and so on, are objections to the ‘amendments’ which ‘P.F.’ admits having made to ‘imperfect matter’. Jantz argues that ‘the gentleman student in Wittenberg’ is referring to a corrupt German translation of some Latin original (147); but he may be thinking of a very free English translation of an imperfect German translation of a Latin original.

Rohde’s suggestion that ‘the man that first wrote them’, to whom the author spoke in Germany, may have been John Dee, has attracted no support, largely because there is nothing in Dee’s other writings and interests to suggest he could have written the

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70 Misi ego ad vos (mei amici) Faustinas res, quas ego docui linguan Anglicanam, ingratum vereor opus: Accepi ego has chartulas sparsim a studiosis Wittenbergenibus . . .
71 The Second Report of Doctor John Faustus is in no sense another version of the EFB. It is more in the nature of a sequel. It even gives Faust’s birthplace as Kundling (i.e. Knittlingen), not Rhode as in the EFB.
novella. Nevertheless, it is true that both Dee and Bruno were in Northern Germany in 1589. Dee stayed in Bremen on his way back to England from Bohemia, while Bruno was heading for Helmstedt, after his disappointing sojourn at the court of Rudolf II of Bohemia. It is certainly feasible that both men sailed up the Elbe and passed through Wittenberg, which leaves open the question of their knowledge of the controversial German chapbook and the nature of Bruno’s connection with its authors.

Jantz supports his argument in favour of a Latin original from the long preface to the WH manuscript (147), which I quote below:

Gunstiger Lieber Freundt unnd Brueder/My very dear friend and brother

This translation of Doctor Faustus and his godless ideas is the result of your repeated request to put the Latin into German, which, so far as I am aware, has not been done. The reason it has not been printed or written in German is clear: so that no wicked and uneducated persons will use it as a model on which to build their fantasies and attempt to do as he did. (Bibliotheca Augustana)

Dr Milchsack, who unearthed the manuscript, gave no credence to the Latin theory, believing it to be a device of the author to disown the material. It was Robert Petsch who hypothesised that a much shorter original work had been written in Latin ‘by a Wittenberg theology student, who most likely had before him certain student writings concerning the sorcerer’ (in Haile, 351).

It is arguable that an original Latin version was translated into German enhanced with popular anecdotes, and that this augmented story was the common exemplar for both the Spies Historia (SH) and the Wolfenbüttel (WH) texts. If the disclaimer in the WH Preface is to be believed, then it supports the view that the material in the book was not intended for the eyes of the uneducated. The German author, or perhaps the publisher, consequently felt it necessary to insert frequent pietistic warnings to the reader not to try Faustian magic at home. ‘P.F.’, translating from the SH but with an eye on the WH manuscript or a Latin original has, as Jones observed, simply subbed those warnings out. A closer comparison of the two texts reveals that ‘P.F.’ was no master of written German (although he may have spoken it well), and supports the notion that he had recourse to a Latin original. Sometimes the difference between the EFB and the SH occurs because they offer a different but correct translation of the same Latin word, the German translator tending to the literal and the English toward the whimsical (see Appendix V).

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72 ‘Ashmole states that on 27 June 1589, when at Bremen, Dee was visited by “that famous Hermetique Philosopher, Dr Henricus Khunrath of Hamburgh”’ (Yates 1972, 2000, 38).
Jones’ meticulous edition of the *EFB* and his translation of those passages of the German *SH* that have been omitted or in some way altered greatly simplifies the comparison of the two texts. It is clear that in addition to numerous small embellishments and omissions, ‘P.F.’s translation does indeed contain material that augments or substitutes for the German or is added *de novo*, as ‘the man that first wrote them’ complained.

Evidence of entirely new material is to be found in a long passage reminiscent of the boasts of Simon Magus in the *Clementine Recognitions* (Jones, 22). The *EFB* Mephistopheles makes Faustus a series of tempting and exciting promises which foreshadow some of Faustus’ later exploits and which Marlowe uses. Mephistopheles will teach Faustus ‘to make thunder, lightning, hail, snow and rain; the clouds to rent, the earth and craggy rocks to split in sunder’ (Jones, l.797-9). Marlowe’s Mephistopheles tells Faustus:

\[
\text{The framing of this circle on the ground}
\]
\[
\text{Brings thunder, whirlwinds, storm and lightning (II i 160, 161[B])}
\]
\[
\text{and}
\]
\[
\text{Emperors and kings}
\]
\[
\text{Are but obeyed in their several provinces,}
\]
\[
\text{Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds; (I i 59-61[A])}^{74}
\]

He continues in the *EFB*: ‘Learn, Faustus to fly like myself, as swift as thought from one kingdom to another, to sit at princes’ tables, to eat their daintiest fare, to have thy pleasure of their fair ladies . . . Learn of me, Faustus, to run through walls, doors and gates of stone and iron . . . to fly in the air like a bird’ (l.806-8, 810-2). ‘Come on my Faustus . . . I will learn of thee to go invisible, to find out the mines of gold and silver’ (l.828-830). Then the English Mephistopheles dazzles Faustus with bright-coloured jewels: ‘precious stones, the carbuncle, the diamond, sapphire, emerald, ruby, topaz, jacinth, garnet, jasper, amethyst’ (l.830-2).

Another addition makes a lively and up-to-date travelogue out of the German’s tedious account of Faustus’ flight over the known world and *Terra Incognita* (Jones, l.1242). ‘P.F.’ knows a lot about Naples and Prague and is able to add some interesting and accurate details; he is also familiar with Venice, Rome, Basle and Cracow in a way which bespeaks the knowledge of a traveller (Jones, l.1237-1602). Marlowe uses a little of this in Act III where he embellishes the town of Trier with ‘airy mountain tops’ and ‘walls of flint’ (III i 3-4[B]), departing sufficiently from the *EFB* for Jones to suggest that Marlowe was working from an early lost version which gives that town as Trent (Jones, 43).

\[74\] The relevant line, 61, is absent from the B-Text for no easily explicable reason.
These additions seem motivated by no more than a desire to enliven the original. However, when Faustus, wanting answers that nobody knows to questions that everybody asks, demands: ‘Mephistopheles, tell me how and after what sort God made the world and all the creatures in them, and why man was made after the image of God’ (1.859-861), the German author writes:

The spirit answered with an unholy lie, saying, ‘The world, my Faustus, was never born and neither will it die. Likewise the human race has existed for ever and had no first beginning . . .’ On consideration, Doctor Faustus refused to entertain these notions but held to what he had read in the first chapter of Genesis where Moses gives a different account: there Faustus found little to contradict. (Jones, n.861-9)

Mephistopheles’ answer, which the German author is careful to disclaim because it is unbiblical and therefore heretical, comes straight from the Hermetica:

All things . . . come to be from things-that-are, not from those that are not. Things-that-are-not do not have a nature that enables them to come to be; their nature is such that they cannot come to be anything. Things-that-are, on the other hand, do not have a nature that prevents them from ever existing. (II [13])

By contrast, ‘P.F’ s Mephistopheles in the EFB fobs Faustus off, but kindly, answering: ‘Faustus thou knowest that all this is in vain for thee to ask’ (Jones, l.862). When Marlowe’s Faustus orders Mephistopheles to ‘tell me who made the world’, he flatly refuses (II ii 66-68[B]). Thus Marlowe avoids the heresy and ‘P.F.’ neatly sidesteps it by leaving it out, but later adds a lengthy and conflicting orthodox explanation of creation prefacing it with these words:

Yea Christian Reader, to the glory of God and the profit of my soul, I will open unto thee the divine opinion touching the ruling of this confused chaos, far more than any rude German author, being possessed with the devil was able to utter. (Jones, l.1177-1181)

Because there seems no good reason for the German author to introduce a heresy only to repudiate it so comprehensively, it seems likely that he himself was translating from an original, possibly one written in Latin.

The problem of whether God made the world from existing matter or whether it was created ex nihilo had been around for centuries and the Church officially adopted the latter position. A related matter of great topical interest to Marlowe’s audience was the new cosmology. Commonsense as much as faith taught that the earth was motionless and the sun and moon moved across the heavens, but Copernicus’ theory that the earth revolved around the sun which lay at the centre of the universe, supported as it was

75 That is: Things-that-are have a nature that allows them to have existed always.
by mathematical reasoning, was beginning to raise doubts in some quarters. Even so, Giordano Bruno, that ‘mad preest of the sun’, had been resoundingly mocked when he took the theory to Oxford in June 1583.

In the next chapter I describe the contested views of the cosmos contained in the German book, the English translation and Marlowe’s play.
Chapter Three

*Doctor Faustus* and some problems of natural and religious philosophy

The doubts engendered by the new cosmology and the struggle to reconcile the Book of Scriptures with the Book of Nature are reflected in the disparate accounts given in the two prose versions and Marlowe’s dramatisation of the tale. They are reviewed here because they have received scant attention in the recent critical literature; they are important to my argument because the Hermetic texts appear to validate Copernican theory. Similarly, the esoteric, gnostic-Hermetic philosophy, only recently admitted to the Academy, is described here in order to explain how Hermeticism could be seen by some as the eirenic solution to the world’s problems, while to others it posed a dangerous heresy.76

**Part I  Reason, Faith and Doubt**

In their comprehensive study of the Faust tradition, Palmer and More observed that the Faust story is the ‘vehicle of certain fundamental religious and philosophical problems which have ever fascinated and tormented mankind’ (3). Faustus’ demands for knowledge about the heavenly spheres may appear to us to be more scientific than religious, and to embody truths reached by reason, not by faith. However, few among Marlowe’s sixteenth century audiences and readers would have distinguished between the observable celestial heavens, bounded, as they thought, by the starry firmament, and

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76  A Chair for “History of Christian Esotericism”, now “History of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe” was first dedicated in 1964 at the Sorbonne; the University of Amsterdam has had a chair for “History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents” since 1999. Western Esotericism may also be studied at the University of Exeter.
the imagined supercelestial empyrean heaven beyond, the *coelum empyreum* inhabited by God and the Elect. The ninth and tenth hypothesised spheres marked the boundary between the observable reality of the terrestrial and celestial worlds and the illusory world of the abode of God, that is to say, between the corruptible, transient world of Man and the perfect and eternal world of God. The stars in the eighth orb, which are observable astronomical reality, were assigned zodiac signs and endowed with supernatural astrological and prophetic powers (see figure 1).

The natural and celestial worlds yielded their secrets to reason and scientific observation, while the supernatural or supercelestial world was believed to yield its secrets to the manipulation of numbers or words, that is, numerology or incantations. While the mathematician/astrologer, Dr Dee, who was at the cutting edge, experimented with scientific methods to conjure angels over the threshold of their world to reveal the secrets of the Book of Nature, Dr Faustus employed magical incantations or spells to contact the devil for similar ends.77

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**Fig. 1** Typical pre-Copernican Diagram of the Universe.
From the 1539 edition of Peter Apian’s *Cosmographia*78

Figure 1, as Francis Johnson explained, illustrates the conventional or traditional view of the cosmos given in sixteenth century textbooks used in England when Marlowe was at Cambridge (1946, 243-5). It shows the motionless earth at the centre of the

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77  B L Sloane MS ff.3188, 3189, 3191. All Sloane MS listed in Bibliography were seen in July 2011.
78  From Johnson, 1937, 46
universe surrounded by the elements of water, air and the \textit{coelum igneum} (the fiery sphere). Encompassing the earth are seven circling ‘planets’, the eighth sphere of fixed stars and zodiacs, the ninth or crystalline sphere, and the tenth or \textit{primum mobile}. The ten moving spheres are surrounded by the immovable empyrean heaven inhabited by God and the Elect, which made an eleventh orb. The number of spheres had been progressively increased since Ptolemy’s time to account for observed celestial movements. One of these phenomena, the precession of the equinoxes is real, while the other, trepidation, was imaginary.\footnote{Precession is the gradual westward shift of the equinoctial points; the rate of precession is about one degree in 72 years or 50 seconds a year (Johnson, 1946, n.244).} But it was to account for trepidation that astronomers added the \textit{coelum crystallinum} or crystalline sphere.

Such was the conventional view. But when Marlowe’s Faustus asks: ‘How many heavens or spheres are there?’ (II iii 57[B]), Mephistopheles tells him that there are nine spheres made up of seven planets, the starry firmament and the empyreal heaven. In response to Faustus’ question about the \textit{coelum igneum} and the \textit{coelum crystallinum}, Mephistopheles answers that ‘they be but fables’ (II iii 61[B]).\footnote{Faustus’ question about the \textit{coelum igneum} and \textit{coelum crystallinum} is absent from the A-Text.} In other words, as Johnson points out, Marlowe has Mephistopheles give the sceptical or empirical answer based on what is observable in the heavens, but apparently accepts the imagined empyrean heaven as an article of faith (1946, 247).

The sceptics also questioned the \textit{primum mobile} as the cause of diurnal rotation and postulated that each of the eight spheres is individually moved by its own proper intelligence. But when Faustus asks Mephistopheles: ‘hath every sphere a dominion or \textit{intelligentia}?’ Mephistopheles brushes the question aside with a perfunctory ‘Ay’ (II iii 54-56[B]). The answer contrasts oddly with the Chorus telling us a few minutes later that ‘Faustus to find the secrets of astronomy . . . did mount . . . even to the height of \textit{Primum Mobile}’ (III Chorus l. 2-10 [B]). The proposition that each sphere was moved by its own intelligence came from Augustinus Ricius, a friend of Cornelius Agrippa who disseminated his ideas. Bruno took Ricius’/Agrippa’s theory as affirmation of his own belief in an animated universe where ‘such motion necessarily derives from an internal principle as if from its proper nature and soul’ (1585, 1995, 71).\footnote{\textit{La Cena de le Ceneri} (\textit{Ash Wednesday Supper}), Prefatory Epistle.}

The two prose novellas, the \textit{SH} and the \textit{EFB}, themselves differ markedly on the view of the cosmos which each ascribes to Mephistopheles. The unknown author of the \textit{SH} gives a purely Ptolemaic view:

The movement of the firmament [\textit{das Gewülcke}] in the heavens is so forceful that it always moves from East to West, carrying the stars, sun and moon along with it, causing them to move, as we see, from their rising to their setting. (Jones, n.1156-1158)
His bolder translator, ‘P.F.’, derides him and offers his own confused version of Copernican theory:

And we think that the sun runneth his course and that the heavens stand still; no, it is the heavens that move his course and the sun abideth perpetually in his place . . . and although we see him beginning to ascend in the orient . . . setting in the occident . . . yet he moveth not. (Jones l.1163-9)

Whereas, as we saw earlier, ‘P.F.’ had avoided the creation heresy in the German original, here he rejects the orthodox geocentric universe and offers an explanation derived from Copernicus or from the Hermetica itself. However he spoils the effect immediately by offering an explanation of his own for the movement of the heavens, justifying his position from the Book of Genesis:

It is the axle of the heavens that moveth the whole firmament . . . and like a bubble made of water and soap . . . is in form of a confused mass or chaos, and being in this form, is moved at pleasure of the wind . . . turned and carried at the pleasure of the spirit of God, which is wind. (Jones, l.1169-1177)

Ptolemy’s theory of a motionless spherical earth at the centre of a finite spherical universe had been based on Aristotle. According to this ancient theory, the five planets, the Moon and the Sun circled the earth in seven perfect circular orbits, surrounded by the fixed stars which occupied the eighth sphere, the primum mobile (Johnson, 1946, 244). Even before Ptolemy, Hipparchus had discovered the phenomenon of precession which required Ptolemy to add a ninth sphere. The theory had been further complicated over the centuries by the additions of a hypothetical eccentric centre and planetary epicycles which were needed to explain the naked eye observations of the planets’ behaviour, such as retrograde motion. Nicolaus Copernicus found that a more elegant solution was to put the Sun at the centre of the finite universe and regard the earth as one of the orbiting planets, which itself was circled by the moon. In this he was supported by mathematical measurement and also by metaphysics, referencing both Greek myth and the Hermetica. Next to his diagram, Copernicus wrote:

In the midst of all resides the Sun. For who could place this great light in any better position in this most beautiful temple [of the world] than that from whence it may illumine all at once? So that it is called by some the lamp of the world; by others the Mind; by others the ruler. And Trismegistus calls it the visible god.82

82 Quoted by Frances Yates in a BBC Radio 3 talk, published in The Listener and in Ideas and Ideals in the North European Renaissance vol 3, 256.
Copernicus is clearly referring to the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

> For the sun is situated at the centre of the cosmos, wearing it like a crown. Like a good driver, it steadies the chariot of the cosmos and fastens the reins to itself to prevent the cosmos going out of control. (XVI [6])

Like Copernicus, the Hermetic text keeps to the Ptolemaic cosmos but substituting ‘sun’ for ‘earth’: ‘Around the sun are the eight spheres that depend from it’ (XVI [17]). The *Corpus Hermeticum* does not suggest that all the stars are suns in an infinite universe, as Bruno was later to argue. Copernicus confirmed for Bruno and like-minded Hermeticists their belief that in the *Hermetica* they had found the *prisca theologia* and God’s plan for the universe. In other words they had found a religious text which, unlike the Bible, was consistent with what science and reason were revealing about God’s world.

It is curious, even disappointing to some, that Marlowe did not espouse and disseminate the Copernican theory in his play (Bakeless, 1937, 58). Thomas Digges, the protégé of Dr Dee, had published his diagram of a Copernican sun-centred universe in 1576. As a friend of Hariot, Marlowe would certainly have had the opportunity to hear and read about it. Digges’ theory showed the sun surrounded by six concentric spheres and an outer ‘orbe of starres fixed infinitely up’ (Johnson, 1937, 165). Nearly forty years later, using a superior telescope, Galileo was able to demonstrate by observation that the moon orbited the earth and the earth orbited the sun. Galileo not only challenged Aristotle but, in daring to interpret the Sacred Scriptures ‘contrary to the sense which Holy Mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge their true sense and meaning, has held and does hold’ laid himself open to the charge of heresy (Dixon, 27). Given that the matter was both dangerous and unresolved in 1588, Marlowe’s decision in Act II scene iii to present ‘an unorthodox sixteenth century modification of the current Ptolemaic astronomy’ seems appropriately cautious (Johnson, 1946, 242).

It is unlikely that Marlowe had not heard about Bruno’s debacle in Oxford, where he caused an uproar with his lectures on the sun-centred universe, a moving earth, and his theory of infinite space. In the play, Faustus is impatient with Mephistopheles’ answers to his questions about the movement of the spheres:

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83 Thomas Digges was the son of Leonard Digges, the astronomer who had been Dee’s great friend; he was a member of the Durham House set, or School of Night so-called and well known to Ralegh, Hariot and the other members, generally believed to have included Marlowe.

84 In Denmark, Tycho Brahe was offering a compromise theory where the sun orbited the earth but the planets orbited the sun. His pupil, Kepler, showed that the planets’ orbit was not circular but ellipsoidal, challenging the notion of perfection in the universe; but the matter did not become a live issue until 1610.
These slender questions Wagner can decide.

Hath Mephistopheles no greater skill?

Who knows not the double motion of the planets?

These
are freshmen’s questions. (II iii 47-49; 54[B])

Hilary Gatti sheds some light on Marlowe’s handling of Faustus’ reaction in the scene, when she demonstrates that the debate between Faustus and Mephistopheles echoes an incident in Bruno’s La Cena de le Ceneri (1989, 102). In the Fourth Dialogue of Cena, Teofilo (Bruno, the Nolan) is debating astronomy with Torquato (a recalcitrant Aristotelian pedant from Oxford). Torquato draws a picture of the eight sphere Ptolemaic universe and tells Teofilo: ‘*Vide, tace et disce: ego docebo te Ptolemaeum et Copernicum*’. The disgusted Teofilo who is telling the story goes on: ‘The Nolan asked him what he meant to do with something known even to children’ (190).

At a time when the Bible was believed to be God’s word and the repository of all Truth, the new philosophy was calling all in doubt, as Donne was later to observe (*An Anatomy of the World*, l.205). The Catholic Church claimed the authority to interpret the (Latin) Bible for all Catholics but, as we shall see, Protestants asserted the right of individuals to read and interpret the scriptures for themselves. Men, such as Luther’s follower Melanchthon teaching at Wittenberg, and his pupils, struggled to reconcile Ptolemy and Genesis with Copernicus (Westman, 173). People were torn between using their reason and doubting their faith.

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85 ‘Look, be quiet and learn. I’m going to teach you something about Ptolemy and Copernicus.’

It is not clear whether the childish Latin is meant to indicate Torquato’s ignorance or his condescending tone.

86 In particular, beginning students were exposed to arguments against the motion of the earth – that it is contrary to Holy Scripture and the Aristotelian laws of simple motion. (Westman, 179).
Part II      Competing religious beliefs

The various strands of religious thought which were syncretised in the texts collectively known as the *Hermetica* are summarised here, as well as some beliefs that were later assimilated to the Christian Gospel story. The Hermetic texts were believed to date from Egypt in the time of the Jewish prophet, Moses, and to be prophetic of events in the Christian Gospels. They show knowledge of pagan philosophy as well as Gnosticism. Even in the fragmented form that survives, they construct a particular view of a loving creator God, a sun-centred universe and a world where nothing is destroyed, but life and death are part of a continuous process of change and renewal. The philosophy was obliterated or possibly driven underground at the time of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). It is evidence of this Hermetic thought which I am arguing has lain in Marlowe’s play, virtually unrecognised by post-seventeenth century audiences and most modern critics.

*The Egyptians*

The Egyptians, one of the most ancient civilisations on the planet, worshipped the Sun god, Re. They had a pantheon of gods which included Thoth, god of moon and messages and writing, who showed himself in the sacred ibis, and the ape or baboon. This Thoth, who was also the guide of dead souls, was known to the Greeks as Hermēs, and to the Romans as Mercury. The Egyptian god of healing, Imhotep, the Greeks called *Asklēpios* (Copenhaver, xiii). This translation of divine names was typical of the Greeks who saw the gods as ‘supranational and intercultural’ (Assmann, 396).87

The Egyptians had an account of creation by Ptah, the creator god, who through his teeth and lips pronounced the identity of everything and brought it into being. George Hart has pointed out the similarity between this account and that in St John’s Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . All things were made by him . . .’ (St John: 1, 3). Hart goes on to emphasise the link between the perception of a supreme deity who as ‘both artisan of the human race and commander of order in the universe’ had planned all future events, and the later doctrine of predestination (19).

The Egyptians had a deep cultural preoccupation with the underworld and life after death as evidenced in the resurrection story of Osiris. The story of the Egyptian gods, Isis and Osiris, was told by the Greek, Plutarch (c.40-c.120 C.E.) whose work was itself a ‘rich amalgam of Egyptian traditions’ combining Greek speculations from Pythagoras

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87 Plato in *Timaeus* tells of the Egyptian goddess Neith, foundress of Sais in the Nile Delta, who ‘is asserted by them [the Egyptians] to be the same whom the Hellenes call Athene’ (444).
(fl. c. 530 B.C.E.), Plato (429-347 B.C.E.), the Stoics (fl. c. 300 B.C.E.) and Gnostics (fl. c. 200 C.E.) (Hart, 40).

While their polytheism and belief in shared gods brought Egyptians, Greeks and Romans together, despite their political hostilities, it was a quite different set of religious practices which led to ‘a kind of religious solidarity’ between the Zoroastrian Persians and the monotheistic Jews and united them against the Egyptians (Assmann, 397).

The Jews

The story of the exodus of the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt is told in the second book of the Torah. Possibly derived from oral sources, these five books were traditionally attributed to the great prophet Moses, who led the Israelites across the Red Sea to settle in new lands between Egypt and Mesopotamia. The people in both those lands worshipped multiple gods, but the Jewish people alone recognised one God whose unspeakable name was represented by the Tetragrammaton YHVH (Jahweh or Jehovah).

The first book of the Torah explains the creation of the world, the cosmos and humankind. According to the Book of Genesis, God, having made Adam and Eve and placed them in Eden, forbid them to taste knowledge lest they ‘will be like God, knowing good and evil’, an edict which Adam disobeyed and for which he was punished. The creator God of the Old Testament was usually depicted as an implacable, often harsh, majestic judge capable of wreaking punishment on a people who failed to keep the commandments which he had given to Moses.

Although it appears to be simply the exoteric history of the Jewish people, the Torah also has an esoteric dimension known as Kabbalah, imparted by revelation and transmitted orally. Kabbalists use a variety of interpretative methods, ‘literal, allegorical or metaphysical’, to open what they call the ‘seven gates of comprehension’ leading from everyday action, through inner awakening and eventually to the Divine Presence (ben Shimon Halevi, 51). For the Kabbalist the same Biblical text, such as

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88 The catalogue of manuscripts belonging to John Dee Librorum Bibliotheca Mortlacengis dated ‘6 Septb 1583’, possibly in his own hand, lists Plutarch’s vita graci as well as the opuscalia moralia. Seen at the Warburg Institute, October, 2008.

89 Originally Canaan, or the Promised Land, now known as Israel or Palestine to Jews or as the Holy Land to Christians. The once capital of Israel, Jerusalem or Zion, is known to Christians as the Holy City. The terms Jew and Judaism come from the tribes in the southern part of Israel, Judah or Greek Judea (MacCulloch, 2009, 47).

90 The Torah, or Pentateuch, comprises the first five books of the Hebrew Tanakh, known to Christians as the Old Testament. The Tanakh, which contains the history of the Jewish people, was probably written by multiple authors over a period of hundreds of years, self-evidently for a people who could read and write.
the story of Adam and Eve in Eden, may construct different levels of reality – physical, psychological and spiritual.\footnote{Practical Kabbalah, by assigning a numerical value to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet and following the rules of gematria, claims to be able to reveal deeper, concealed and mystical meanings in the \textit{Torah}.} In Chapter Four, I will show how the use of Kabbalah as a hermeneutic similarly reveals ascending levels of meaning in \textit{Doctor Faustus}.

As we shall see below, Pico della Mirandola was later struck by correspondences between Hebraic Kabbalah descended from Moses, and Hermetic wisdom in the Greek writings of Hermes Trismegistus. Since both explained creation by the Word of God, they appeared to corroborate one another. Yates claims that it was Pico who found a way of assimilating Kabbalah to Hermetism, essentially Christianising Cabala and ‘unit[ing] Hermetic and Cabalist types of magic’ (1964, 1991, 86).\footnote{I follow Yates in using the spelling \textit{Kabbalah} for the Jewish tradition and \textit{Cabala} for the Renaissance Christianised Cabala.}

As for the concept of soul, so crucial to Faustus’ fate, the Jewish \textit{Tanakh}, contains only one brief mention, and that is to be found in the Book of Daniel (Chapter 12: 2-3), which was written as late as the second century, well after Jewish contact with the Hellenic world (MacCulloch, 2009, 70-1).

\textit{The Greeks}

The Greeks, unlike the Jews, postulated a pantheon of gods, immortalised in myth. Chief among them is Jove whose name bears an uncanny resemblance to YHVH. Some pagan Greek stories tell of a union between a god and a mortal woman as for example, Zeus with Danae whose union produced the god Perseus, or Cupid with Psyche; others, apparently symbolic of the rebirth of life in spring after the death of winter, tell of a resurrection such as that of Adonis.

Concerning the soul, the Platonic works which have most clearly influenced later thinking, Christian as well as Jewish and Gnostic, are \textit{Phaedo} and \textit{Timaeus}. In the former, Simmias and Socrates discuss the nature of death and the separation of soul and body (Plato, \textit{Phaedo} [64]) and Socrates tells Simmias and Cebes that ‘Noone who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of the Gods, but the lover of knowledge only’ ([82]). In the latter, \textit{Timaeus}, Plato introduces the notion of a demiurge, a craftsman or Creator God responsible for the cosmos, who ‘out of disorder . . . brought order’. ‘He put intelligence in soul and soul in body . . . and the world became a living creature endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God’ ([30]).
The Greeks had their own answers to questions about the origins of the universe.\(^{93}\) A prolonged and abstruse metaphysical argument regarding what Plato and Aristotle had said about the nature of God and his role as creator exercised the minds of Christian theologians for centuries. One aspect of the debate concerned the interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* and whether in the first proposition Plato distinguished between the One who is superior to and beyond Being, or whether he was merely stating a premise from which the dialectic could proceed (see Miller on Pico, xviii).\(^{94}\) Plato appears to have said that the One, identified with the Good, is not itself Being, but the source of all Being. However, Plato’s pupil Aristotle argued that the One is the same thing as Being or existence.

The point divided the Academy from the scholastics. The former interpreted Plato as having held the view that the One is separate from and the cause of Being, while the latter followed Aristotle.\(^{95}\) In his introduction to the late fifteenth century works of Pico della Mirandola, Paul Miller explains how St Thomas Aquinas resolved the debate by resort to scripture, and how Pico followed him. This profound philosophical argument, which defied both exegesis and Aristotelian logic, was developed at length by Pico in *On Being and the One*. By logical means it can be shown that One and Being are not the same, since the opposite of One is Many while the opposite of Being is not-Being. Aquinas consulted *Exodus* Chapter 3 where God reveals to Moses that his name is ‘I am who am’; he, and later Pico, interpreted this to mean ‘that God discloses himself as Being itself’ (Miller, xxii). It is this profound metaphysical argument about the nature of God to which Faustus airily waves goodbye immediately after rejecting Aristotle’s works, crying: ‘Bid *on kae me on* farewell’ (I i 12[A]).\(^{96}\)

Egyptian myths, Greek myths and Platonic philosophy all arguably play a part in the Judeo-Christian story.

*The early Christians*

According to the Gospel narratives, Jesus, the prophesied Jewish Messiah, known to the Greeks as the Christ, was born to a maiden named Mary, miraculously impregnated by God. He rose to prominence in Roman-occupied Palestine around his thirtieth year. His reputation as a spiritual teacher and physician and the perception that he could perform miracles, as much as his humble and exemplary life, won him many devoted

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\(^{93}\) Marlowe and his contemporaries at university would all have known the Platonic dialogues, which were translated into Latin by Ficino after 1460.

\(^{94}\) Paul J.W. Miller wrote the introduction to and also translated Pico’s book listed in the Bibliography.

\(^{95}\) As part of the effort to synthesise Greek philosophy with Christianity, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, identified Plato’s ‘One’ with the monotheistic Jewish God.

\(^{96}\) Faustus: Say goodbye to Being and not-Being.
disciples and thousands of followers. Fearful of civil unrest and with the connivance of the Jewish leaders, who objected to his being called ‘King of the Jews’, the Roman governor of the province had Jesus arrested and, as was the law, crucified. Speared in the side, bleeding from his wounds, he was given up for dead. His friends cut him down from the cross, took his body, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a rock tomb. Three days later the tomb was found to be empty. In the following months on separate occasions, his disciples claimed to have seen and spoken with him. Those who loved him and followed his teachings believed him to have been the Son of God made flesh, come to earth in fulfilment of prophecies. His disciples, the ‘Christians’, banded together and met secretly. They came to believe that Christ’s suffering and death had redeemed them from Adam’s original sin. In the New Testament His story represents God as a merciful father who forgives the sins of all those who are truly penitent. Hence when Faustus cries, ‘Contrition, prayer, repentance, what of these?’ his Good Angel replies: ‘They are the means to bring thee unto heaven’ (II i 16,17[B]).

**Western Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church**

In the fourth century C.E., what had begun as a small breakaway Jewish sect comprising the faithful followers of Jesus, was strengthened by the authority of the newly converted Roman Emperor, Constantine; Roman authority brought the power to enforce obedience to that authority. The fathers of the early Christian Church accepted the Jewish *Torah* as the principal authority on the creation of the universe, the world and mankind as well as on the nature and origin of good and evil. The Book of Genesis explains how God created the world and all that is in it in six days and warns that to seek to know more (allegorised as eating from the Tree of Knowledge), is forbidden. 97 About life after death and the existence of soul, as mentioned earlier, the *Tanakh* has virtually nothing to say.

Partly for the benefit of Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, and partly, as Jaroslav Pelikan explains, ‘to defend the [Jewish] faith to Gentile outsiders who were also Greek-speaking’, Greek-speaking Hebrew scholars were employed to translate the *Tanakh* into Greek (56). Known as the Septuagint, the translation was available to St Jerome, when in the fourth century, he translated both testaments of the Bible into Latin, the language of the Roman Empire. It is Jerome’s Bible which Faustus tosses aside in Act I (i 36-48[B]), and it is Jerome in his study whom Marlowe evokes for his audience when Faustus is discovered in his study in the opening scene. 98 It is clear now that Jerome’s mistranslations of the Greek, already translated from the Hebrew of the

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97 Despite the scientific empirical evidence for Darwin’s theory of evolution, some people, ‘Creationists’, still have faith in the explanation of the origins of the species which inhabit the earth given in *Genesis*.

98 Dürer’s 1516 engraving of ‘St Jerome in his Study’ was well-known and circulated throughout Europe and England.
Old Testament, and his choice of words in his translation of the New Testament ‘formed rather shaky foundations for very considerable theological constructions by the later Western Church’, which were subsequently exposed by the humanist translator Erasmus (MacCulloch, 2009, 581).

Since Erasmus was well-known in England his commentaries may well be the basis of Marlowe’s allegedly blasphemous opinions of the way the Bible was written. For example, from the Hebrew ‘Look, the young woman is with child and about to give birth to a son’ (sic), ‘young woman’ was translated in the Septuagint as *parthenos* ‘a virgin’. Pelikan explains that the Greek Gospels then quote this ‘with the formula “All this happened in order to fulfil what the Lord declared through the prophet”’ (59). Similarly, the sacrament of penance was exposed as a mistranslation of Jerome’s for John the Baptist’s cry to sinners to repent. The concept of souls suffering in Purgatory for a time which could be reduced for prayers or good works was likewise revealed as a tradition which had no justification in scripture (MacCulloch, 2004, 99-101).

In the same period, concerning the good news that God’s Son lived on earth as a man called Jesus, the Church Fathers determined which versions of the Gospel story would be included in a New Testament. Books which gave a different or Gnostic version from the authorised one were hidden. In 325 C.E. the Council of Nicaea agreed upon the statement of beliefs which all Christians must profess, specifically to counter, point by point, heresies doubting the divinity of Christ. It was those so-called heretical, anti-Trinitarian beliefs, articulated by Bishop Arius, which convinced Bruno to question the teachings of the church, which interested Marlowe, and which he ascribed to Doctor Faustus after the visit from Valdes (I iii 51-54[B]).

The Council of Nicaea was categorical that Christians must believe:

\[
\text{in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his father before all worlds . . . begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made. Who, for us for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made human; . . . he suffered and was buried [here the Apostles’ Creed inserts: he descended to the dead] and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven . . . (my emphases)}^{100}
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Notwithstanding the absence of an explicit reference to the Trinity in the earliest accounts of Jesus’ life, the Council decreed that all Christians must believe in a triune

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99 Some of those books survived, but the majority of the Gnostic or apocryphal gospels have only been accessible to modern scholars since their discovery at Nag Hammadi in 1945. Translated from the Coptic they are now widely available.

100 The echo of Christ’s descent into Hell and subsequent ascent to the Heavens in Faustus’ story (Chapters 20 and 21 of the *EFB*) has not gone unremarked; Ormerod and Wortham have likened Faustus’ adventure to the ‘epic hero’s traditional journey to the underworld’ (xix).
Godhead, a child born of a union between a virgin and God, and a man resurrected after death. Earlier the Church Fathers had instituted the ceremony of the Mass to re-enact Christ’s sacrifice and bring the faithful into a state of grace. There when the priest intoned the words *Hoc est corpus meum*, ‘God became literally, physically present, the bread and wine ceasing to be earthly foodstuffs and becoming the body and blood of Christ’ (Marshall, 54). This miracle, affirmed by the Catholic Church at the mid-sixteenth century Council of Trent, and reiterated in 2010, was known as ‘transubstantiation’. It is a doctrine which drove a permanent wedge between Catholics and all Protestants after Luther.

The lack of scriptural evidence for the Trinity, for penance and for Purgatory is clear now as it would have been to Marlowe and other scholars who studied the scriptures with a sceptical eye; these practices can be justified by tradition but not by Scripture. Added to the translation errors mentioned earlier, compounded by a lack of agreement amongst the Synoptic Gospels, there is sufficient evidence to justify the objections to the way the Bible was written, which were attributed to Marlowe and to the earl of Oxford, on reasonable grounds.

Possibly the most influential theologian of the early Western Christian church was Augustine of Hippo (350-430 C.E.) in Roman North Africa. Augustine was convinced that Adam’s sin in disobeying God was inherited by all humanity who are, as a consequence, born sinners and unable to save themselves. Furthermore, God’s decision about whom He will save and who is to be damned is entirely arbitrary and mysterious. Not only that, His decision is made before any kind of deed has been committed, perhaps before birth, and once made cannot be revoked (MacCulloch, 2009, 308). Original sin and predestination, the doctrine of grace, and obedience to the Catholic Church are central to Augustine’s beliefs. Salvation is the gift of God to the chosen, conferred by His grace alone. Although Pelagius argued that salvation could be achieved by good living (MacCulloch, 2004, 107), the fathers of the Western Christian Church followed Augustine, and taught that one day we will all face a Day of Judgement when the souls of sinners will be damned to the everlasting flames of Hell, while others will be granted forgiveness and saved to live in Heaven in eternal joy. The problems inherent in the message are obvious: if one’s fate is predetermined, how will either living purely or repenting of one’s sins alter that fate? As Faustus flippantly concludes: ‘Che ferà, serà’ (I i 47[B]).

Two pictures of God emerge. Is He an implacable judge or a merciful father? Graphic depictions of sharp-toothed devils and flames provided a constant reminder to churchgoers of the terrible fate that awaited non-believers. The art of Hieronymus

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101 Aristotle in his pronouncements on Being and Change distinguished between the ‘accident’ or appearance of a thing and its ‘substance’ or true nature; mediaeval theologians termed this transformation of the elements during the Mass, ‘transubstantiation’.
Bosch (1450-1516) such as *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and *Ship of Fools* which now hang in the Prado in Madrid exemplify the horrors that Marlowe’s audiences believed awaited them if they turned away from God. In England, few of the bright multi-coloured frescoes which were painted above the rood screens facing the congregation survived the Reformation. Those that do, in Westminster Abbey, Lincoln Cathedral and, recently discovered, in Coventry, illustrate the Apocalypse, the Day of Judgement and the Seven Deadly Sins in ghastly, terrifying detail.

**Gnostic beliefs**

Alongside Judaism, Hellenic philosophy and orthodox Christianity, there developed a cluster of belief systems referred to in later times as Gnosticism. The term refers to the belief that salvation is by knowledge (Dodd, 97). Usually regarded as a heretical branch of Christianity, Gnosticism both influenced and was influenced by Judaism, orthodox Christianity and Hellenic philosophy (see the quotation from *Phaedo*, above), and may possibly predate the Christian era (MacCulloch, 2009, 122). What the various Gnostic systems have in common is a belief that human beings are divine souls trapped in a material world created by a demiurge (a term from Plato’s *Timaeus*), a creator God who must also take responsibility for the creation of evil. This demiurge is believed by some to be the Abrahamic god of the Old Testament and is contrasted with the Pleroma or ‘Fullness of God’ whose powers or *aeons* constituted levels of being in the supreme world (van den Broek, 8).

The term Gnosticism covers a movement which arose in Persia with Zoroaster, and includes later followers of the prophet Mani, who created ‘a new synthesis of all the religions which bordered his homeland’: Buddhist, Hindu, Gnostic and Christian (MacCulloch, 2009, 170). His followers, known as Manichaeans, adopted an extreme form of pessimistic dualism, yet Mani saw himself as an Apostle of Jesus and very recent discoveries of papyri ‘have suddenly revealed Manichees in a new light . . . as a variant on Christianity’ (MacCulloch, 2009, 171). Nevertheless, Augustine wrote a lengthy polemic against Manichaeism, in the form of a dialogue with an African follower of Mani named Faustus, which may have been known to the German author of the novella. Although the dualist belief in ‘the eternal struggle between equally balanced forces of good and evil’ is a possible source for Marlowe’s addition of a Good and an Evil Angel, there is no sense in Marlowe’s play of the pessimistic Manichaean view that the Creator God is responsible for human suffering. The God implied in Marlowe’s play is more like the good God whom Plato describes in the *Timaeus*.

Both pessimist and optimist *gnōsis* are present in the writings of the *Hermetica*, as Festugière pointed out. In her discussion of Renaissance Gnosticism, Yates rejects Manichean dualism (1964, 1991, 129) in favour of the optimist *gnōsis*, such as that which she finds in the *Corpus Hermeticum* XI where ‘the material world is full of the
Valentinian Gnosticism

Valentinian Gnostics have less contempt for the imperfections of a material world and a more monistic view of the universe. This esoteric knowledge of the mysteries involved knowing (as opposed to ‘knowing that’), or going deep within oneself to find self-knowledge or the god within, and ascending, free from the taint of matter, to the heavenly realm as pure spirit. The process of systematically ridding oneself of the dross of the material world in the pursuit of the purification of soul and ultimate union with God was later likened to the alchemical process. There in the alembic, corrupt matter is heated, changed, distilled and purified; base metals are transformed into gold. Practical alchemy with its goal of producing pure gold thus became a metaphor for spiritual alchemy with its goal of the purification of the soul.

For the Gnostic, the goal of living was not forgiveness of sin and the salvation of the soul, but the systematic purification of the soul which would lead to enlightenment and bring one ever closer to the mind of God. It was in no sense a catholic or universal faith but a knowledge available by degrees only to the Adept.

Philo of Alexandria: an Hellenic Jew in Egypt

The philosopher Philo (c.20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.), an Hellenic Jew born in Alexandria, and a proto-gnostic, is another who illustrated how ideas merge and converge. Philo found a synthesis between his Jewish religion and his Greek culture and language. He was equally familiar with the Greek poets, the philosophers such as Pythagoras and Plato and the Hebrew Bible, which he probably read in the Greek Septuagint. He applied the Stoic practice of allegorical interpretation of the Iliad to the Old Testament and produced a philosophic allegorical exegesis which fuses Greek philosophy and Judaism. While MacCulloch does not suggest that Philo was a Kabbalist, he does note that an allegorical reading of the scriptures revealed layers of meaning of which the ‘innermost meanings were not only the most profound but also only available to those with eyes to see’ (2009, 152).

Philo’s concept of the Word, or Logos, as God’s act of creation had a profound influence on early Christology. As we saw earlier it is an idea derived from Egyptian creation mythology, which not only informs St John’s Gospel, but also appears in the Hermetica, discussed below. Dodd finds ‘a real affinity between [John and Philo] in their use of symbolism’, particularly in a way that connects them with the Hermetica, since they...
all ‘use light as a symbol for the Deity’ (55). But it is not only the archetypal light that they have in common; God is symbolised in all three as ‘the Fountain from which life-giving water streams’. Philo ‘exhorts the swift runner to hasten breathlessly to the most divine Logos, which is the fountain of Wisdom, in order that . . . he may find as a prize everlasting life instead of death’ (Dodd, 56).

Philo emphasises the moral and ethical development of mankind and the need for the soul, once aroused by sensual pleasures, to replace those pleasures with things of the spirit, or risk moral death. Viewed in this way, Faustus’ fate may be attributed less to his dalliance with the devil and more to his failure to know and develop his spiritual self. For Philo, goodness is the fundamental virtue underlying ethical conduct: prudence, self-mastery, courage and justice, none of which, arguably, is demonstrably present in Faustus. Religion, argued Philo, underlies ethics and helps man to attain virtue, hence man should aspire to ‘the ecstatic contemplation of God and the disembodiment of souls after death’. Clearly this is a different view of how one should live from that proposed by the Christian Fathers.

**Plotinus: an Alexandrian Greek in Rome**

Plotinus (205-270 C.E.), born and educated in Alexandria, eventually made his way to Rome in 245 C.E. where he taught philosophy. He attempted to preserve the teachings of Plato by interpreting and clarifying them, and found a way to reconcile Plato’s concept of the One with Aristotle. For Plotinus, the One cannot be any existing thing and is beyond all categories of being and non-being. Evil, he held, is simply the absence of good and cannot exist independently. His teachings were recorded by his pupil Porphyry in six Enneads. In the Second Ennead he attacks both Epicurus for denying Providence and the dualist Gnostics for despising the mundane gods and the world (IX, 15), but in the Fourth Ennead he discusses at length the essence and problems of soul before explicating his theory of the immortality of the soul (VII). For Plotinus, the ideal after-life is the return of the soul to the Source or the One or the Monad.

To the extent that they developed and modified ideas first found in Plato, the followers of Plotinus have become known as neo-Platonists. Early Christians, even St Augustine for a time, were influenced by their thinking and by the fifth century, Plato’s concept of the One had become synonymous with the Absolute, the Good, the Monad and the Jewish Jehovah or God.

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102 Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation I*, XVII, XIX.
Hermes Trismegistus

In the centuries after Philo, a body of texts comprising the Corpus Hermeticum and the Asclepius, was assembled, ascribed to one ‘Hermes Trismegistus’. As with Philo, the texts also syncretise borrowings from a number of sources: Egyptian magico/religion, Plato’s philosophy, Philo’s writings, Valentinian Gnosticism, the Book of Genesis from the Hebrew Old Testament, as well as some of the Christian Greek New Testament, particularly St John’s Gospel. Still more answers to the great questions about the creation of the universe and Man, the immortality of the soul, and about sin and salvation, which so tantalised Faustus and Marlowe’s audiences, are to be found in these writings.

The texts take the form of dialogues between Hermes Trismegistus and Poimandres, who is ‘the light you saw, mind, your god’ (I [6]), between Hermes and his disciple Asclepius, and between Hermes and his son Tat. Copenhaver explains that the numerous texts were either popular and technical, or religious and philosophical. The former deals with occult practices such as magic, astrology and alchemy, the latter, the religious texts, ‘instead of a theory of magic present a theory of salvation [of the soul] through knowledge or gnōsis’ (Copenhaver, xxxvii). In the Corpus Hermeticum, Poimandres tells us that ‘the body’s senses rise up and flow back to their particular sources’, ascending through the seven concentric spheres of the cosmic framework escaping through the planetary heavens by degrees ever closer to the Ogdoad or eighth level, counting from the earth, in order to approach the mind of God. ‘This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god’ (I [26]). There is a clear connection between the theology of Valentinian gnōsis and Hermetic cosmology, later unified in the shared trope of (spiritual) alchemy.

Despite there being no reference to the Hermetic texts in Plato, even Lactantius and Augustine referred to them as texts of antiquity before Plato. In the fourth century, however, Augustine made a scathing attack on Hermes, after which the works were largely neglected in the Latin West until the twelfth century, and it was left to the Moslems of late antiquity to preserve and extend the Hermetic tradition (Copenhaver, xlv). A thousand years later they emerged in Western Europe.
Part III  Renaissance Hermeticism and the Reformation: contested theologies

The Hermetica in fifteenth century Europe

After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Greek texts began to be traded in Europe. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke tells how in 1460 Leonardo da Pistoia, a monk from Macedonia, brought the Florentine merchant prince, Cosimo de’Medici, a collection of seventeen fragmentary texts: the Corpus Hermeticum and the Asclepius, collectively known as the Hermetica (36). De’Medici purchased the texts along with some hitherto unknown dialogues of Plato, and so anxious was he to read the Hermetic texts that he urged his translator, Marsilio Ficino to attend to them at once.103

When the Hermetic documents arrived in Italy they were seen as ‘revelation of most ancient Egyptian wisdom by a writer who lived long before Plato and even longer before Christ’ (Yates, 1964, 1991, 21). Translated into Latin and aided by the invention of printing, the texts spread rapidly throughout Europe going into twenty editions over the next century and a half.

In Europe, the Hermetica were venerated as Gentile texts at least as old as Moses’ Torah. In Siena in the 1480s, a mosaic of Hermes Trismegistus was incorporated into the floor of the cathedral. It is there to this day (see figure 2). It was not until 1614 that the philologist Isaac Casaubon showed the true provenance of the Hermetica. The Greek texts ascribed to ‘Hermes Trismegistus’ had been written during the first three centuries C.E. by several authors and, far from prophesying the coming of Christ, they in fact syncretised a range of existing religious beliefs including Christianity, as outlined above.

Photographs courtesy John Croker, 2012

Fig. 2  Hermes Trismegistus as depicted on the floor of the Cathedral in Siena.

103 Dr Dee lists Hermes Trismegistus 1555 (p. 29) and Mercurii Trismegisti Poemander 1554 (p. 30) in his library catalogue.
None of the Hermetic dialogues purchased by de’Medici deals with alchemy or with demonic magic; they are all philosophical or theoretical treatises which discuss the creation of the world and of Man, cosmology and, inevitably, soteriology. As Copenhaver explains:

[They] present a theory of salvation through knowledge or gnosis . . . this theory was the product of a [Egypto-Hellenic] culture that made no clear rigid distinction between religion as the province of such lofty concerns as the soul and magic as a merely instrumental device . . . Salvation in the largest sense – the resolution of man’s fate wherever it finds him – was a common concern of theoretical and technical *Hermetica* alike, though . . . the former offered a grander view of salvation through knowledge of God, the other and the self. (xxxvii) (emphasis given)

Hermes makes this clear when he tells Asclepius: ‘For mankind this is the only deliverance, the knowledge of god. It is ascent to Olympus’ (X [15]). The *Hermetica* teaches that salvation (*soteria*) and knowledge (*gnosis*) are identical (119, n.I. 26-7; 161, n.X.15). Thus the Hermetic texts share with St Augustine, and later with Luther and Calvin, a concern for the salvation of the individual soul, but they differ on the means by which salvation is to be achieved.

The *Hermetica* also offered a theory of the creation of the world which was not unlike that of Genesis, but which differed, nonetheless, in some significant ways. The Hermetic account of the creation of Man reveals him as god-like, and has come to define the Renaissance humanist view of Man. When Hermes tells Poimandres, ‘I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god’, Poimandres answers, ‘I am the light you saw, mind, your god who existed before the watery nature that appeared out of the darkness. The light-giving Word who comes from mind is the son of god’ (I [3], [6]). The exchange reveals the links with the Christian Gospel of John 1:i.104  He continues:

> Mind, the father of all, who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child. . . . The man . . . stooped to look through the cosmic framework, thus displaying to lower nature the fair form of god. Nature smiled for love when she saw him . . . took hold of her beloved . . . and embraced him . . . Because of this, unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold – in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man’. (I [12-15])

About death, the soul and the body, Hermes tells his son:

> Now, my son, we must speak about soul and body and say in what way the soul is immortal and whence comes the energy that composes

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104  In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
and dissolves the body. Death actually has nothing to do with this . . .
Death has to do with destruction, yet none of the things in the cosmos is
destroyed. (VIII [1])

Later, in Book XI, Mind tells Hermes, ‘Death is not the destruction of things that have
been combined but the dissolution of their union’ ([15]).

Again in Book XVI Asclepius explains:

the permanence of every body is change: in an immortal body the change
is without dissolution: in a mortal body there is dissolution. And this is
what distinguishes immortal from mortal. ([9])

Then Hermes tells Asclepius, ‘Every human soul is immortal, Asclepius, but not all
in the same way; some differ in manner and time from others’ (Asclepius [2])). He
continues:

A human being is a great wonder, a living thing to be worshipped and
honored: for he changes his nature into a god’s as if he were a god. ([6])

This new view of Man was to echo down the ages. It was picked up by Pico (see
below), who refers to it in the opening lines of the Oratio de hominis dignitate. Agrippa
too proclaimed ‘A great miracle indeed is Christian man . . .’ (in Keefer, 1988, 623),
and we recognise it when Hamlet exclaims ‘What piece of work is a man . . . how like a
god’ (Hamlet II ii 303).

Central to Hermetism is the notion that human beings sprang from god and separated
from the One, not from disobedience, but by their own desire to create. They fell like
Narcissus, in love with their own (god-like) image, but retained within them a divine
core. The fall can be reversed by recognising and knowing the god deep within and,
systematically casting off the dross of the material world, the soul can ascend to the
stars where those who have achieved gnosis become one with the One. There, from the
macrocosm, Hermes taught, the stars rain down their influence upon the earth and the
lives of men, the microcosm.

The theory of correspondences between the macrocosm and the microcosm, ‘That which
is above is like to that which is below’, is to be found on the Tabula Smaragdina or
The Emerald Tablet. This is one of the technical Hermetic texts, believed to date from
the eighth century and to outline the secret of making the philosopher’s stone. It was
translated into Latin from the Arabic in the twelfth century (Linden, 28).

It is significant that the appearance of the Hermetica in Europe post 1470 coincided with
the emergence of Copernicus’ theory of a sun-centred universe. The Hermetica claims:

the sun shines all around the cosmos with the utmost brilliance . . . for
the sun is situated in the centre of the cosmos wearing it like a crown . . .
it steadies the chariot of the cosmos and fastens the reins [which are] life and soul and spirit and immortality and becoming. (XVI [6])

Thus, as we saw, when Copernicus arrived at a mathematical proof for a heliocentric universe, science seemed to be endorsing the *Hermetica*. Giordano Bruno, later famed for defending Copernicus’ theory, was in fact less convinced by Copernican mathematics than by metaphysics: that is to say by the conjunction of scientific truth reached by reason and religious truth reached by faith.

In the years following the introduction of the *Hermetica* to Europe, its esoteric ideas were taken up by other thinkers who augmented and refined the philosophy, establishing explicit links with Jewish Kabbalah, with Christianity and with Pythagoras. These philosophers included Marsilio Ficino himself, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin and Francesco Giorgio.

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), philosopher, ordained priest, physician, metaphysician and translator of the *Hermetica*, of numerous Platonic dialogues, and also of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, observed the consonance between Plato and Christianity. As Paul Oskar Kristeller explains, Ficino took a historical view of philosophy and religion:

> On the one hand, there was the Hebrew and Christian religious tradition which had its basis in Scripture and faith and which for him was true beyond any shadow of doubt. On the other hand there was the tradition of Platonic philosophy which was equally true . . . but had its basis in reason and in the authority of the ancient philosophers. (1961, 155-6)

What was exciting to Ficino was his (misguided, but nonetheless persuasive) belief that Socrates and Plato were part of a long line of pagan philosophers stretching back through Pythagoras, Orpheus, Hermes Trismegistus and Zoroaster to antiquity and a source in ancient Egypt possibly shared with Moses, a *prisca theologia* in fact. Ficino saw that ‘a metaphysical Platonism based on reason’, which opposed neither the Christian religion nor Aristotelian scholasticism, could bridge that gap by complementing them with a doctrine that ‘advocated harmony and tolerance’ (Kristeller, 1961, 148-9).

Ficino went on to write commentaries on the works of Plato and became the centre of an informal Platonic Academy in Florence. He developed a theory of Platonic love from Plato’s *Phaedrus* by which he meant ‘a spiritual bond between two persons who both participate in the contemplative life’ (Kristeller, 1961, 154); he also developed a theory of the immortality of the soul. Through his published commentaries on Plato’s dialogues, and his personal letters, Ficino’s mysticism and optimism were carried into northern Europe and England. In order to attain *gnōsis*, Ficino advocated contemplation where, as Kristeller explains:
the soul withdraws from the body and from all external things into its own self, that is into its own substance and there it discovers not only its own divinity but in a gradual ascent, the intelligible world, the transcendent ideas, and God himself their common source and essence. (1961, 152)

Ficino was always careful to distinguish natural, white or spiritual magic from bad, black or demonic magic. The *Asclepius*, with the famous passage on making statues ‘ensouled and conscious . . . that foreknow the future and predict it by lots, by prophecy, by dreams’ ([24]) was explained away as an aberration or the work of another, such as Apuleius, author of The Golden Ass.

Ficino’s influence flowed to his younger contemporary, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), who had learned the techniques of Kabbalah from Spanish Jews. It was Pico who was able to assimilate Kabbalah with its elements of Gnosticism to Hermeticism. Furthermore, Pico believed that Jewish Kabbalah actually confirmed the truth of Christianity. In his *Conclusions*, Pico asserted that ‘no knowledge gives us more certainty about Christ’s divinity than magic and Kabbalah’ (*Dictionary of Gnosis*, 951). The *Conclusions* consisted of nine hundred theses drawn from a vast range of religious sources, including magic, which Pico intended to demonstrate were all reconcilable. Silenced and forced to apologise by the Catholic Church, he published instead his *Oratio* (1487) which has become a virtual manifesto of the Renaissance view of Man (Yates, 1979, 1999, 21). Together, Ficino and Pico were largely responsible for bringing the synthesis of Platonism and Christianity known as neo-Platonism to the western world.

In Germany, these neo-Platonic, gnostic-Hermetic ideas flowing from the Florentine academy were developed further by Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522). As the first Christian scholar of Hebrew, he added to Pico’s thinking about the Kabbalah in *De arte cabalistica*, which is regarded as the central text of Christian Cabala. He had already established in *De verbo mirifico* (1494) that God’s name as given to Moses and revealed in the tetragrammaton YHVH can be shown to contain the pentagrammaton JESUS by the insertion of a medial shin, resulting in YHSVH. This, he argued, confirmed the truth of Christianity, namely that Jesus is God. Despite coming under attack by anti-Semites then making their presence felt in Europe, Reuchlin argued for ‘the basic identity of all religious systems, which in their roots are united in one secret sublime truth, the supreme esoteric truth of Christianity’ (*Dictionary of Gnosis*, 992). Keefer emphasises that Reuchlin’s study of Cabala was ‘deeply indebted to Hermetic sources’ and also that it was Reuchlin who suggested a ‘possible fusion of magic with religion’ (1988, 622n.).

In Venice, where many Spanish Jews had settled, Jewish thought inevitably enriched Christianity. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in Francesco Giorgio (1466-1540), a Christian Cabalist and Franciscan friar. Giorgio easily integrated his Christian
Cabalism into gnostic-Hermetism and the whole philosophy of Pythagorean number and harmony. The Hermetic doctrine of correspondences between the macrocosm and the microcosm showed him that ‘the heavens and the stars have been made by the “perfect artisan” in such a way as to move with the greatest harmony and diffuse their good influences on all inferior things’ (Dictionary of Gnosis, 397). For Giorgio, God and the Hermetic Monas are identical. He composed a musical poem, De Harmonia Mundi, composed of three “songs”... in which the continuous references to Platonic, neo-Platonic and Hermetic texts are intertwined with astronomical doctrines and alchemical allusions’ (Dictionary of Gnosis, 396). Whether it is the practical alchemy of the laboratory or the spiritual alchemy of the oratory, the alchemical process achieves purity by the marriage or reconciliation of elements. Yates called it ‘the Hermetic science par excellence’ (1964, 1991, 150). In its allegorical sense, alchemy is also the trope which is common to Gnosticism and Hermeticism. It is becoming clear that Hermeticism with its core of Gnosticism was, in the Renaissance, a powerful force unifying Christianity with Judaism through the Cabala, and assimilating Plato, neo-Platonism, Pythagorean numerology and Orphic musical harmonies.

There are several ways in which these ideas could have been transmitted to England, including direct contact. Giorgio, for example, had been consulted around 1529 in the matter of the legitimacy of the marriage of Henry VIII. The Court of Elizabeth may well have been sympathetic to the ideas of one who had favoured the divorce which permitted the King’s marriage to the Queen’s mother, Anne Boleyn.

The great peripatetic, philosopher, magician, Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) is another who had connections with England. Around 1511, he visited England where he met John Colet, Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus. In his youth, Agrippa had served the Emperor Maximilian for a time, along with Dee’s father. Keefer calls Agrippa ‘a nodal figure in the transmission of the Hermetic-Cabalistic tradition of the Renaissance’, and notes his debt to Ficino, Pico and Reuchlin and his subsequent influence on the thinking of Dee and Bruno, as well as on Sidney, Greville and Nashe (1988, 614-6). He goes further and notes that posthumous attacks on Agrippa, as a black magician, inevitably linked him to Faustus (616).

As a young man, Agrippa was in contact with Abbot Trithemius to whom he sent the early draft of his De Occulta Philosophia libri tres. Donald Tyson claims that ‘Trithemius was Agrippa’s mystical master and teacher, particularly in the branch of

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105 Agrippa met Giorgio briefly and he also favoured the King’s divorce, an opinion which earned him the disapproval of his Emperor Charles V who was nephew to Catherine of Aragon the first wife of Henry VIII.

106 Dee’s library catalogue shows that he owned all Agrippa’s works.

107 Also in 1509 Agrippa wrote De nobilitate et praecellentia faeminei sexus (The nobility of the female sex and the superiority of women over men) and a treatise On the Preeminence of Women, not published until 1532 (Tyson, xviii, xix).
magic dealing with spirit evocation’ (xviii). Gareth Roberts shows that Agrippa’s works were known in England and even owned by Archbishop Cranmer and Archbishop Parker, whose personal library was left to Corpus Christi College where Marlowe studied (1999, 149). Roberts makes a strong case for Marlowe’s having consulted Agrippa to obtain the ‘technically precise’ knowledge of magic which he displays in Doctor Faustus (1999, 154).

There is no doubt that Agrippa’s *De Occulta Philosophia* is the definitive work on Renaissance magic and Cabala. The title page announces him as ‘Counsellor to Charles V Emperor of Germany’, the very same who was Faustus’ emperor. In his three volumes, Agrippa conceptualises three worlds: an elemental or terrestrial world of natural magic, which is influenced from above by the stars in the celestial world of mathematical magic; this world in turn receives influences from God and the angels in their supercelestial world of ceremonial magic, either religious or superstitious.

Yates described the work as a summary of Ficinian Hermetic magic and Pico’s Cabalist magic (1979, 1999, 53). However, D.P. Walker points out that any discussion of Agrippa’s views on magic is complicated by the fact that between completing the works in 1510, that is at the time of his visit to England, and publishing them in 1533, he published an apparent retraction of magic in *De Vanitate Scientiarum* (90). Walker sees this as a ‘rhetorical set piece’ and claims that ‘by no means all of its destructive criticism is meant to be taken in earnest’, for two reasons: first because even the chapters on magic in *De Vanitate* defend natural magic, and second because the fact of his later publishing the *De Occulta Philosophia* ‘show[s] clearly that he continued to believe in the value of magic even of the most dangerous kind’ (91). Nevertheless, there is one chapter in *De Vanitate* where Agrippa unequivocally repudiates magic, and that is chapter 48 dealing with legerdemain, juggling or delusions (what we would call ‘illusions’) ‘by which magicians show phantasms, play many miracles by . . . frauds and cause dreams’ (Agrippa, 705). He mentions books of the ‘legerdemain of Hermes’ and describes feats such as making a banquet disappear before the astonished guests and others, such as men being transmuted to animals, which he connects with the very same Simon Magus who, as we have seen, was for many the model for Faustus. He concludes the chapter with these words:

But of magic I wrote whilst I was very young three large books, which I called Of Occult Philosophy, in which what was then through the curiosity of my youth erroneous, I now being more advised, am willing to have retracted by this recantation; I formerly spent much time and cost in these vanities. At last I grew so wise as to be able to dissuade others from this destruction.

For whosoever . . . practising through magical vanities, exorcisms, incantations and other demoniacal works . . . boasting of delusions,
and phantasms . . . brag that they can do miracles, I say all these shall with . . . Simon Magus, be designated to the torments of eternal fire.  
(Agrippa, 706)

Yates believes Agrippa saw himself as a Christian Cabalist, and intended his occult Hermetic philosophy to be a ‘very white magic’, really a religion in fact, ‘claiming access to the highest powers, and Christian since it accepts the name of Jesus as the chief of the wonder-working names’ (1979, 1999, 55).

In De Occulta Book III Chapter 44, Of the Degrees of Souls, and their destruction, or immortality, in a discussion on Hermetic rebirth, Agrippa quotes from Hermes, from St Augustine, and from St Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and concludes with a brief reference to ‘the magicians’ which, as Keefer points out, leads to some words of none other than that arch-heretic, Gnostic, Simon Magus (Keefer, 1988, 647).  Keefer makes a perceptive and coherent case for the apparent contradictions between Agrippa’s piety and his attacks on scholastic theology in De Vanitate.  He sees Agrippa as a Christian Hermetist who is able to interpret ‘the Christian mystery of spiritual rebirth or regeneration’ as Hermetism (1988, 620).  In Keefer’s view, Agrippa fuses ‘the highest form of magic and of Christian faith . . . with the most dangerous variety of demonic heresy’.  In parenthesis Keefer comments that, for Agrippa, magic and Christian faith are one; in this, Agrippa would be following Reuchlin.  It is this ‘unstable confounding of opposites’ which Keefer perceives as underlying both of Agrippa’s works (1988, 620).

In a later section of his paper, Keefer’s argument brings together two concerns of the present study when he argues that the doctrine of spiritual rebirth, whether it be seen as ‘the highest form of [Hermetic] magic or as the true interpretation of Christianity’, involves ‘a syncretic breaking down of oppositions’ that reconciles pagans (Plato and also Aristotle) with St Paul, and as Keefer holds, also reconciles ‘[r]eason and faith’ (1988, 650).  Keefer sees Agrippa as a man ‘whose ideology led him into a hopeless entanglement of the sacred and demonic’ – that is, Agrippa had landed himself in a position where ‘Hermetic rebirth and the ideas of Simon Magus are indistinguishable’ (650).  He concludes, ‘[t]he priest-magician takes on the face of the sorcerer and arch-heretic; Hermes Trismegistus and Simon Magus become different names for the same thing’; they bring to mind the trick which Simon played on Clement’s father, Faustinianus (650) (see above).  Keefer’s insight has led him to the same position as Marlowe (or the author of the Bruno scene) when a grateful Emperor hails that ‘Wonder of men, renowned magician/Thrice-learnèd Faustus’ (IV i 49[B]).  Like Agrippa who reconciled Simon Magus with Hermes Trismegistus, the Emperor identifies Faustus, that wicked magician, the wonder-working magus, with that same thrice-learned Hermes.  Despite his Christian piety, his sympathy with Erasmian humanism and with the Reformist theology of his contemporary countryman Martin Luther, Agrippa was for many years associated with magic of the blackest kind.
Christianity in England in the sixteenth century: disputed doctrines

The sixteenth century was an era of Reformations described in several magisterial books most recently by Diarmaid MacCulloch (2004 and 2009). It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal in any depth with the changes that occurred, so I will first sketch the big picture from the English perspective and then highlight only what pertains to the Church in England after Elizabethan Settlement insofar as is relevant to Marlowe’s play.

The practice of selling Papal indulgences to remit sins and spring souls from Purgatory had been satirised in the fourteenth century in Chaucer’s *Pardoner’s Tale*, and the calls for a vernacular Bible, and criticism of the doctrine of transubstantiation date at least from the time of John Wycliffe and the pious Lollards in the fifteenth century, when they were condemned as heresies (Sheils, 8-9). Calls to reform the Catholic Church from within were not new, in England or in Europe; in 1511 John Colet, Dean of St Paul’s in London, was not the first to speak out against the pride, greed and worldliness of the clergy (Sheils, 79). Hence, news of Luther’s stand against the selling of indulgences in 1517, his excommunication in 1520, and the subsequent split of Saxony and other German principalities from the Church of Rome met with some sympathetic interest in England, especially when some years later King Henry VIII was also looking for ways to free himself from Papal supremacy. Nevertheless, in 1520 Luther’s books were publicly burned in Cambridge as heretical (Sheils, 9). Luther spoke for many when he objected to the Catholic doctrine that good works, which included giving money to the Church, would save souls, and the implication that salvation was a marketable commodity. His compelling argument arising from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans was that faith alone was sufficient to save the sinner, and that faith is freely conferred on all believers by the grace of God. Furthermore, he argued, ‘it is the right and duty of each Christian to interpret the Scriptures’ (Latourette, 715). While the views of Luther on justification by faith and the importance of each Christian’s reading or hearing the Scriptures, have become the mainstay of Protestantism, his views on predestination, derived from St Augustine, and on free will alienated him from humanists such as Erasmus. His insistence on the real or corporeal presence of Christ at the Eucharist was rejected outright by Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), a Reformist pastor in Zurich. Regarding predestination, Luther maintained that God’s inscrutable justice, ‘is inaccessible to human reason’ and moreover that ‘Man does not have free will’.

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108 The doctrine of the Eucharist proved a defining and divisive feature of the Christian confessions. The Roman Catholic Church insisted that ‘when the priest repeated the words of institution at the altar, God became literally physically present’ (Marshall, 54). Luther held that Christ was really present at the sacrament of the Eucharist, beside, but not actually in the bread and wine; Zwingli held that Christ was really absent at the Eucharist, while between those extremes, Calvin held that Christ is spiritually present at the Lord’s Supper in the souls of the elect, and the Church of England, in Article 28 of the Thirty-nine Articles offered a masterpiece of ambiguity which half satisfied Catholics and Calvinists (Marshall, 53-6).
his will is directed, as Luther knew from experience, ‘either by God or by the Devil’ (Latourette, 724). By contrast, both Erasmus and the Catholic Church affirmed the place of free will. In a public breach with Luther (1525), Erasmus explained that he believed freedom of the will to be entirely ‘compatible with God’s foreknowledge of future events’ (Marshall, 45).

Twenty years later at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church ‘solidified the principal doctrinal division of the Reformation’ (Marshall, 45), holding that ‘while we are justified by faith and grace and not by works, it could not be asserted that anyone is justified by faith alone’ and that ‘while by his grace God moves men to turn to Him and that one cannot of his own free will . . . take the initiative towards being just in God’s sight, men are free to reject God’s grace and also free to cooperate with it’ (Latourette, 868). The Council of Trent also asserted the authenticity and authority of Jerome’s Latin Bible and ‘ordered that noone should presume to interpret the Bible contrary to the sense authorized by the Church’ (Latourette, 868). The Council, in declaring that all seven sacraments were necessary for salvation, reaffirmed the sacrament of penance, the Mass as a reenactment of Christ’s sacrifice and the Catholic belief in the miracle of transubstantiation.

From even this cursory account it is possible to show how Marlowe has touched on these matters: Faustus, torn between the Good and Evil Angels, as Luther himself admitted his struggles (Anfechtungen) with his conscience and Satan; Faustus’ reading from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate contrasts now with the Good Angel’s begging him to ‘Read, read the Scriptures’, like a Protestant (I i 72[B]); the Old Man protected by faith alone; the vial of grace ready to save Faustus (V i 58[B]), even Faustus’ desire for marriage, valued by Luther, but a sacrament refused to the clergy by the Church, and scorned by Mephistopheles as ‘a ceremonial toy’ (II i 150[B]), all activate the controversies between Luther and Catholicism.

Zwingli’s was not the only Reformist movement to arise independently and almost simultaneously with Luther. The Reformer who had most influence on the Church of England was Jean Calvin. His Institutes of the Christian Religion containing ‘almost the whole sum of piety and whatever it is necessary to know in the doctrine of salvation’; was published in French and Latin in Geneva, and read in England after 1536 (Marshall, 25, 27). When the English refugees from the Marian regime arrived in Geneva after 1553, they found what John Knox called ‘the most perfect school of Christ that ever was’ (Collinson, 88). Calvin, like Luther, believed in the sovereignty of God, in the Holy Trinity, in justification by faith, and that Man’s destiny had been ordained by God at the time of Adam’s Fall; he also emphasised the importance of reading and discussing the Scriptures. Unlike Luther, he came to believe that Christ was spiritually but not really present at the Lord’s Supper. Calvin taught that Man’s free will was conferred by God’s grace which, once offered to one elected to salvation, could not be
resisted. This doctrine directly opposed both the Catholic teaching on free will affirmed at Trent and the later opinions of Jacob Arminius. We shall see in the next chapter how these doctrinal points are raised in *Doctor Faustus*.

When Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558, the English had been oscillating between Catholicism and Protestant reforms for almost thirty years. Sheils describes what happened next as a "delicate operation to balance a variety of forces" (53).

The Act of Supremacy (1559) finalised the separation from Rome and established the Queen as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The issue of Royal versus Papal supremacy, which persisted in England as long as there were Catholics who desired a return to Rome, is echoed in Act III of *Doctor Faustus*, when the Pope recalls how his progenitor ‘Trod on the neck of German Frederick’(III i 137[B]).

The Act of Uniformity provided that the Book of Common Prayer in English be used throughout the realm and that the population be required to attend church once a week or pay a fine of 12 pence. When Faustus reads the sentences from Matins in Latin (‘*Si peccasse negamus, fallimur*’ and so on (I i 40[B]), he gives the impression that he is reading from the Catholic Missal, still beloved of some in the audience;109 his quotation from the English liturgy, (‘If we say that we have no sin,/We deceive ourselves . . .’ (I i 42-3[B])) which, as every critic notes, he leaves unfinished, could have been completed from memory by every Englishman in the audience: ‘if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:8, 9).

The Thirty-nine Articles (1563, 1571) consolidated the settlement and set out the basic beliefs of the reformed Church of England. Sometimes described as loosely Calvinist, they are, as Cressy and Ferrell observe ‘anything but definitive’ and ‘resist restrictive interpretation’ (59). The sacrament of penance had been removed and ‘Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, pardons and invocation of saints’ was now categorically denied. The Articles assert faith in the Holy Trinity (Article 1), that the ‘Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation’ (Article 6) and that ‘we are justified by faith’ (Article 11). The Articles on Free Will (10) and on Predestination and election (17) are moderately and ambiguously expressed, emphasising that ‘predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God’, and acknowledging that ‘we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing that we may have a good will’. Concerning the Lord’s Supper, transubstantiation is described as repugnant and the ‘occasion of many superstitions’

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109 Keefer comments that ‘the Latin appears to be Marlowe’s back translation from the English Book of Common Prayer’ (2007, n.79), which suggests that Marlowe did not have access to a Catholic Missal at the time.
(Article 28) (in Cressy & Ferrell, 60-6). The skilful wording of the Communion in the Prayer Book shows how the balancing act was achieved. The Eucharist is now a memorial, the bread and wine symbolic, and the contentious words, ‘This is my body’, are understood as metaphorical.\textsuperscript{110}

However, this moderate approach did not satisfy the Reformers; the ‘precisians’—mocked by Wagner in Act I ii 24[B]—continued to press for abolition of all ornaments, vestments and other signs of popery. In 1576, Archbishop Grindal, Parker’s successor, who had spent the Marian years in Geneva, pushed for an increase in the number and training of preachers to spread God’s word, but the Queen ordered that the number of preachers be reduced, apparently feeling that reading the approved Homilies was safer. She also objected to the practice of ‘prophesyings’ or bringing clergy and laity together to discuss the scriptures. Grindal, whom she eventually sequestered, was not at all concerned that ‘different men found different “senses” of one sentence of Scripture just as long as “all senses be good and agreeable to the analogy and proportion of faith”’ (Solt, 95).\textsuperscript{111}

In the decade of interest to this study, while some Catholics continued their plans to restore England to Rome, and their plots to free the Catholic Queen of Scots, the radical Puritans, inspired by Beza in Geneva and Perkins in Cambridge were beginning to push for bishops to be replaced by a Presbyterian system and also for changes to doctrine. The unyielding Calvinist doctrine of double predestination being preached at Cambridge by men like Perkins was a cause for concern to Whitgift and to moderate preachers like Peter Baro (see Chapter Four) and William Barrett, who all held views closer to those in the Thirty-nine Articles (Solt, 124). Whitgift, in an effort to steer a course between these extremes, began rounding up extremists of both persuasions, recusants on the one hand, and Separatists and other nonconformists on the other. This was the net in which Marlowe was caught in May 1593, as we saw in Chapter One.

The moderates in the Church of England were alarmed by the antinomian possibilities of the hardened doctrine (witness Faustus’ airy, \textit{Che serà serà} (I i 47[B])) and asserted that Christ had died for all Men. Barrett, who eventually left England and became a Roman Catholic, entertained views on human free will close to those held by the Dutch humanist scholar and playwright Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert who had first raised doubts about Calvinism in 1578. Coornhert, a Libertine, was particularly concerned for freedom of conscience and personal responsibility for one’s actions, both of which were threatened by Calvinistic determinism. The idea was taken up by Jakob Arminius,\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{110} ‘take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee and feed on Him in thy heart with thanksgiving’ (Sheils, 94).

\textsuperscript{111} Forty years later, King James was still trying to suppress free thought and forbad ‘any minister under the rank of bishop or dean to preach about “the deep points of predestination, election, reprobation . . . or the irresistibility of God’s grace”’ (Solt, 166).
a Dutch Calvinist himself, who never denied the doctrine of predestination, ‘but with
the significant modification that those damned suffered by “their own fault” as well as
by the judgement of God’ (MacCulloch, 2004, 375). Furthermore, Arminius denied
Calvinist’s doctrine of irresistible grace holding, as MacCulloch explains, that:

alongside those whom God has eternally decreed to be elect to salvation,
there are those who choose to reject the offer of God’s grace, and fall
away into damnation. In their case God foresees their act of will leading
to their own damnation rather than himself decreeing it. (2004, 376)

This delicate theological argument about predestination and free will which lies at the
heart of Marlowe’s play was further complicated by sensitive political implications,
since any attack on Calvinism was an attack on the religion for which the Dutch had
fought and died in their struggle to free themselves from Spanish domination. It was a
war which the English had supported and in which Sidney too had lost his life.112

It is clear that when Doctor Faustus came to the stage, England, particularly London
and Cambridge, although officially Protestant, was a hot-bed of unresolved religious
controversy. Throughout the sixteenth century, although the lines were drawn between
orthodoxy and heresy, there was widespread disagreement about which was which.
Religious toleration, practised in Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, where Arianism
(Socinianism/ anti-Trinitarianism/ Unitarianism) was allowed to flourish, was seen as a
source of mischief in England.113 In the same century, the fact of some twenty editions
of the Hermetica attests to the widespread clandestine interest in an ancient religious
philosophy, free of the beliefs, rituals and practices which divided the Christian
confessions, and with the potential to unite them all.

**Hermeticism in England**

Although not translated into English until the mid-seventeenth century, the Hermetica
was available in the sixteenth century in several personal libraries including that of Dr
Dee (1527-1608), where ‘the Hermetic corpus occupied . . . a prominent corner in his
arsenal of universal learning’ (Sherman, xiv). Widely travelled and universally admired,
Dee was unquestionably the greatest and most influential proponent of Hermetic thought

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112 Free will was still a hot topic in 1618 when it was taken to the Synod of Dort and rejected
by those who saw the doctrine as too Catholic and those at the other extreme who suspected it
of Arianism. Free will did not become part of Anglican doctrine until well into the seventeenth
century.

113 Religious intoleration still prevailed a century later. William Saywell, chaplain to the
Bishop of Ely, warned in 1680 that ‘the State ought not to grant Toleration of Hereticks and
Schismaticks’.
in England. In his letter of dedication of the *Monas Hieroglyphica* to Maximilian II Dee stated that ‘he had devoted twenty years’ hard work to the “hermetic” science’ (Clulee, 1988, 79). Dee’s biographer, Nicholas Clulee, describes the *Monas* as ‘a daring and inventive proposal for a symbolic language that had the power to reveal the divine plan of creation, to explain the workings of the material world in the principles of alchemy and to assist the mystic ascent of the soul’ (2005, 197). Clulee refers to the work of van Dorsten and Yewbrey who suggest ‘that the *Monas*, with its dedication to Maximilian Habsburg may be Dee’s proposal for a cosmopolitan, non-sectarian, tolerant religion based on Hermetic occultism or even part of a system of magical government designed to prepare mankind for salvation’ (1988, 78). The title page showed the strange Monas hieroglyph which, Dee explained, included the symbols of all the planets as it ‘absorbs into itself the zodiacal sign Aries representing fire and therefore alchemical processes . . . the symbols for sun, [the circle with a dot which is the sign for gold] and the [crescent] moon [which is the sign for silver] represent the elements . . . ’ (Yates, 1972, 2000, 46) (see figure 3).

![Title page of the Monas Hieroglyphica by John Dee 1564.](image)

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Below the hieroglyph, the pediment bears a quotation in Latin from Genesis 17: ‘de rore caeli et pingedine terrae, det tibi Deus’ (God give thee of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the land).

The Hermetica itself is unequivocal about the significance of the Monad:

The monad, because it is the beginning and root of all things, is in them all as a root and a beginning. Without a beginning there is nothing, and a beginning comes from nothing except itself if it is the beginning of other things. (IV [10])

Hermetic thinking was also known and admired in England in the work of Philippe du Plessis Mornay.115 His Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne, dedicated to the Huguenot prince, Henri of Navarre, was published in 1581, and a year later the English translation was begun by his friend, Philip Sidney. Sidney’s enthusiasm was shared by Fulke Greville, by Ralegh, whose later History of the World (1614) shows strong Hermetic sympathies, and by Ralegh’s friends. In 1583, Sidney welcomed Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) to England and, as Bruno later told the Roman Inquisition, Fulke Greville hosted a dinner for him.

The English Hermeticists were also politically motivated by their longing for a peaceful world where the Christian confessions were reconciled and Judaism and even Islam would be accommodated. This desire to reform the whole world had been present from the very beginning of the century, from Agrippa’s praise of women and his criticism of the nobility and inherited rank in De Vanitate, More’s Utopia and, informed by Hermetic thinking, a century later, in Valentin Andreae’s Chymicall Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz, and Christianopolis, Tommaso Campanella’s City of the Sun, and Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis.

Hermetic thought had undergone some modification at the hands of Ficino, Pico, Reuchlin, Giorgio and Agrippa but always in the direction of unifying faith and reason, reconciling the two great works of God: His holy word as revealed in the Book of the Scriptures and His created world as revealed in the Book of Nature. For Renaissance Hermeticists, Augustine’s view of Man as sinful and corruptible, a view shared by Luther and Calvin, was replaced by a belief, akin to Erasmian humanism, in the dignity and perfectibility of Man: one who through contemplation and knowledge of self could aspire to godlike status.

Bruno, however, had moved away from the Christian Hermetists and adopted a more pantheist belief. As Yates points out ‘Hermes is accepted as having foreseen the Trinity’ (1964, 1991, 250), but Bruno, who had already renounced belief in the Trinity in favour of Arianism, was embracing a view of an immanent God. In the treatise On Magic he wrote ‘in the order of the universe one can recognise that there is one

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115 For Mornay’s interest in Hermetism see Yates (1964, 1991,176-7) and Copenhaver (xlix-l).
spirit which is diffused everywhere and in all things’ (1590, 1998, 111). Influenced by Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597), another Hermetic neo-Platonist, Bruno rejected the idea of faith as the ‘irrational acceptance of certain doctrines on the basis of the authority of the Church’, and came to see faith as the assensio to divine truth reached by a process of rational cognition (Dictionary of Gnosis, 844). Both men admired Plato and mistrusted his pupil, Aristotle. However, while Patrizi saw Hermetism as of equal status to Christian revelation, Bruno’s eclectic philosophy was almost devoid of Christian truth and oscillated between sometimes holding God to be transcendent and at others, immanent. Bruno looked back to the pre-Socratic philosophers, particularly Pythagoras. His belief in the transmigration of souls or metempsychosis comes from Pythagoras, while his ground-breaking idea that the physical world extends into infinite space, and his speculation that the soul ascends ‘through the different grades of reality . . . to the divine intelligence’ are neo-Platonist in origin (Dictionary of Gnosis, 844).

According to Michele Ciliberto, Bruno felt that the continual political and religious crises that troubled Europe had their origin in ‘the reversal of values produced by Christianity, which put civil virtues in second place and exalted as supreme values humility, ignorance, and the passive obedience to the divine law’; for Bruno, the doctrine of predestination upheld by Luther and Calvin ‘severed every tie between divine justice and human justice’ (Dictionary of Gnosis, 209). In Chapter Four we shall see how these ideas are exploited in Doctor Faustus, and Faustus’ apparent folly in flouting humility, ignorance and obedience is cast in a new light.

Yates speaks of Bruno’s preference for the ‘magical religion of the Egyptians’, which he sees as the earliest and best religion (1964, 1991, 212). Karen Silvia de León-Jones is unwilling to go so far, but calls Bruno’s Christianity ‘a syncretic cult bound up in his theory and practice of magic’ (11) to which ‘Kabbalistic ideas, based on Reuchlin’s concept of “Cabala divine revelationis” were integral’ (8). For Bruno, ‘religion and science share a common goal, and magic is the tool for achieving that goal’ (de León-Jones, 9).

In the treatise On Magic, Bruno defines ten distinct types of magic, several of which we can identify in Doctor Faustus. Defining a ‘magician’ as first and foremost a wise man, he expands the meaning to include someone ‘who does wondrous things . . . by manipulating active and passive powers, as occurs in chemistry, medicine and such fields’; he goes on to ‘prestidigitation’, and more ‘natural magic’ such as magnetism (1584, 1998, 105). Another kind of magic uses ‘words, chants . . . figures, symbols

116  Essays on Magic are bound with De la causa, principio e uno, 1584, 1998.
117  The same equivocation is discernible in the Corpus Hermeticum; Book V in particular is cited as an example of the ‘contradictions between conceptions of transcendent and immanent divinity’ and a ‘leading example of the eclecticism and incoherence’ of the Hermetica as a whole (Copenhaver, 140).
characters or letters’ (105); he proceeds to ‘the invocation of the intelligences and external or higher forces by means of prayers, incensings, sacrifices, resolutions and ceremonies directed to the gods, demons and heroes . . . properly called “theurgy”’ (105-6). Next he lists ‘the petition or invocation not of the demons themselves, but through them, to call upon the souls of dead humans . . . a type of magic known as “necromancy”’ (106). All these kinds of magic may be turned either to good or to evil ends by the magician. But the kind of magician, the ‘foolish evil-doer’, who enters into a pact with ‘a foul devil’ (107), Bruno disapproves of and excludes from his list of meanings. Thus, the word ‘magician’ may be used pejoratively, or it may denote ‘a wise man with the power to act’.

During his years in England, Bruno was the guest of Count Mauvissière at the French embassy, where John Florio was tutor to the count’s daughter. Florio also tutored members of the Court in Italian, and several men close to the Court had spent considerable time in Italy – men such as Burghley’s nephews, Anthony and Francis Bacon, his son-in-law, the earl of Oxford, and Philip Sidney. The Queen herself was fluent in Italian and frequently spoke it with her Court. For that reason Bruno’s decision to write his London works in Italian suggests that he wrote with the Court of Elizabeth in mind.

The six London works comprise three which deal with cosmology: *La Cena de le ceneri, De l’infinito universe et mondi* and *De la causa, principio e uno*; and three ethical works: *Lo Spaccio de la Bestia Trionfante, Cabala del cavallo Pegaseo* and *De gli eroici furori*. It is the latter trilogy which prompted de León-Jones’ insight that Bruno is actually applying Kabbalah as an exegetical method to his own thought (21). Each book in the trilogy, she explains, builds on the previous one and is ‘shaped by a particular school of thought: *Spaccio* adopts the Egyptian-Greek-Hermetic school, *Cabala* argues for the Judeo-Christian-Kabbalistic school and *Eroici* defends the Neoplatonic school’ (89).

Given his Hermetic view of the world, Bruno’s logic is impeccable: if the terrestrial world is to undergo the necessary transformation to peace and the untrammelled pursuit of truth, it is the celestial world, which influences it, which must be reformed. The constellations in the heavens must be replaced with virtues, ‘which, in turn, eliminate the vices that had crept into heaven’ (de León-Jones, 93). ‘Where formerly was the horse Pegasus [between the Swan and Andromeda] behold Divine Fervor, Enthusiasm, Rapture, Prophecy, and Contemplation which move about in the areas of Inspiration; whence escape afar Ferine Fury, Mania, Irrational Impetuosity, Dissolution of the Spirit, and Dispersion of the Inner Sense, found in the area of Intemperate Melancholy.

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118 *On Magic* was written in Latin and not published until 1590. Hence, while it may not have influenced the German author, it does invite reflection on Faustus, who even though he entered into a pact with the devil, seems to have harmed no one but himself.
which is the Cavern of Perverse Genius’ (*Spaccio*, 83). All these qualities are essential to the human being who is preparing for a ‘mystical union of the intellect with the Divine Intellect’, and also for the Magus to attain enlightenment about metempsychosis (de León-Jones, 93). When Faustus in his last agonies yearns for Pythagoras’ metempsychosis to be true (V ii 175[B]), he would have reminded some of the audience, at least, of Bruno’s belief.

In Bruno we see a man with a mind of his own, possessed of an eclectic philosophy and unafraid to pursue truth wherever that will o’the wisp may lead. With the courage of his convictions he challenged pedantry wherever he found it, whether in scholastics or humanists; he disagreed with both Aristotle and Ramus; he had been excommunicated by the Catholic Church which he loved, but at the same time he loathed the Reformers, none more than the Calvinists. For all that, he was not a hard-headed agent of change, but a passionate mystic who saw that of faith, hope and love the greatest of these is love, the thesis of his *Eroici furori*.

One aspect of Hermeticism that did not change over the more than a century since Ficino translated the *Hermetica* was the stress placed on the need for secrecy, lest the vulgar and unlearned be privy to the knowledge that belonged to the initiate who by degrees achieved the status of Adept or even Magus: ‘We must write . . . by ambiguities and Aenigmas, that if the book happen to be cast away by sea or by land, he who should read might not understand it.’\(^{119}\) Only a select few amongst Marlowe’s audience and readers would have heard of or read the *Hermetica*, Ficino’s advice on the contemplative life and Pico’s optimistic oration on the worth and dignity of Man. Those few knew another way to salvation through gnôsis and contemplation. *Nosce Teipsum!*

This was Marlowe’s world and the world of the diverse audiences which flocked to see his play *Doctor Faustus*.

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\(^{119}\) B L Sloane MS 3638 Item 7 ch 17. Purported to be a translation of *Liber de Arte Chemica* by Marsilius Ficinus, (Ficino) printed in the *Theatrum Chemicum*. 
Chapter Four

The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus Written by Ch. Mar.

The focus of this chapter is twofold: the play itself and the consummate artistry of the playwright. I review the critical opinions that find both the play and the playwright to be conflicted and ambiguous, and I discuss the play in relation to its diverse audiences and their knowledge of the controversial issues of the age, including of the occult. My exegesis reveals a text that ascends by degrees from the literal to the allegorical and mystical, making different but equally valid and coherent responses available to different readers and members of the audience.

The Play

Few would disagree with Nuttall’s assessment that Marlowe’s play Doctor Faustus is ‘thunderously theological’ (23), but critics cannot agree on just which theology informs Doctor Faustus. The play is widely perceived as incoherent and a site of conflict. Some critics say it reflects a playwright who unconsciously projects his own language, thought and values, learned in the world outside the play, onto the world inside the play. Max Bluestone for example observes that ‘conflict and contradiction inhere everywhere in the world of this play’ (55), Lisa Hopkins calls it ‘a play which elevates ambiguity to an art form’ (66-7) and Wilbur Sanders linked the ‘textual confusion’ to the ‘critical discord’ which is so salient a feature of the many interpretations of the play (207).

Dutton argues that the debate about the play underpins the ambivalence of the poet himself: the ‘demonized rebel’ (21), who was also an admired gentleman ‘scholar poet’ (3). In Dutton’s view, critical opinion of Doctor Faustus is ‘polarized between those
who saw [the play] was orthodoxly Christian and its ending poetically “closed”, and those who saw it as an embodiment of Renaissance humanist aspiration and the ending provocatively indeterminate’ (3).

Sara Munson Deats agrees that ‘few works of literature have evoked such violent critical controversy as Doctor Faustus’ and notes the complicating factor of apparently incompatible genres (2002, 117). At one extreme she places the ‘Christian apologists’, such as Leo Kirschbaum, who saw the play as a Catholic morality, and at the other, Una Ellis-Fermor, who saw in Faustus ‘the most nearly Satanic tragedy that can be found’ (2002, 117). Between these extremes are those like Martha Tuck Rozett who sees the play as a Christian tragedy and argues for a necessary correlation between Elizabethan tragedy in general and the predestinarian doctrine of Calvinism (3). John Stachniewski also makes the case that Dr Faustus ‘dramatizes specific and exclusive Calvinist dogmas’, and, unlike Rozett, he is fully aware of the implications of the Arminian position for the play (10, 293). In Renaissance Magic, John Mebane disputes the view that Doctor Faustus is either ‘a morality play [or] an unambivalent celebration of radical humanism’, and argues that the play is ‘a tragedy which dramatizes a conflict between two irreconcilable systems of value, each of which . . . has at least partial validity’ (118).

The title page of the 1604 edition underlines this ambiguity, calling the play a ‘Tragicall History’ and inviting us to anticipate the fall of a hero, while the emblem shows aspiring man reaching for the heavens with one winged arm, but weighted to the earth with the other (see figure 4).

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Fig. 4 Title page of The Tragicall History of D. Faustus, 1604
The emblem also serves to illustrate a sonnet in Bruno’s *Eroici Furori* which develops the theme through a series of oppositions:

That I may gain my love, I lose myself,

Through bitter joy, and through sweet pain

Weighted with lead, I rise towards the sky.  (Sonnet 48, l.9-11)

*The Playwright*

In Mebane’s opinion, the ambiguity in the play is a deliberate strategy on Marlowe’s part (119). In support of this view he cites Annabel Patterson, who had advanced the notion of a ‘functional ambiguity’ in the context of responses to the Elizabethan censorship laws, arguing for ‘a highly sophisticated system of oblique communication’ (Patterson, 53). Patterson argues that playwrights were ‘constrained . . . to obscure the subversive material . . . and to craft plays . . . to be experienced differently by diverse audiences’ (in Deats, 2002, 108). Donna Hamilton, also citing Patterson, refers to ‘rhetorical styles that [can] accommodate both the censor and the desire to speak out on certain issues’ (2). The identification of those ‘certain issues’, that ‘subversive material’ as well as the ‘diverse audiences’ for whom they were intended is central to my argument. I suggest that the ‘subversive ideas’ which the playwright has sown in the play were related to the Hermetic philosophy at a time when any heterodoxy was perceived as Atheistic and therefore dangerous, and that the ‘diverse audiences’ included those who were familiar with Hermetic thought and understood the injunction to secrecy.

Mebane’s assertion that the conflicts of the play are ‘the consequences of controlled artistry’ on Marlowe’s part allows him both to reject presumptions of the poet’s subconscious ‘moral and spiritual confusion’ driving the action (119), and also to reconcile Marlowe’s alleged heterodoxy with the perceived orthodoxy in the play (80). Significantly, Mebane finds in *Doctor Faustus* ‘systematic allusion to the heretical philosophies of scientists and occult philosophers such as Bruno and Harriot’ and he compares the conclusion of Faustus’ opening soliloquy with a passage from the *Corpus Hermeticum* (123).120 The link between the Hermetic tradition and Giordano Bruno was first established in the seminal research of Yates in 1964. She later argued that the popular association of the Hermetic philosopher and learned magus, Agrippa, with Doctor Faustus ‘is central to Marlowe’s play and part of its general denigration of Renaissance magic’ (1979, 1999, 137). Keefer, who described Agrippa as a Christian

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120 Mebane is comparing Faustus’ words: ‘A sound magician is a demigod’ (I i 61[B]) with ‘Thus, unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like’ (XI [20]). Copenhaver’s translation.

Keefer’s nuanced approach permits the observation that the ambiguity in *Doctor Faustus* is like Agrippa’s oscillation between religion and magic, reconciled in the doctrine of spiritual or ‘Hermetic’ rebirth. Hilary Gatti suggested that in Bruno Marlowe found ‘the philosophical framework in which to create a new image of man unsuccoured by theological dogma [and] committed to acquiring ever-increasing dominion over nature’ (1989, 75). As we saw, that image of Man aspiring to reach the stars had its roots in the *Hermetica* and flowered in Pico and again in Agrippa.

Roberts has mounted a cogent argument that Marlowe’s knowledge of Agrippa’s works on the occult was detailed and precise, alleging that ‘there is no part of Faustus’ conjuration that does not have explicit sanction, as it were, for its details, formulations and rituals in some chapter of Agrippa’ (1996, 1999, 156). Even Nuttall, who noted the powerful theology of the play, did so in the context of a discussion of the contradictory view of Man provided by the Calvinists who saw him as depraved and damned, as opposed to the ‘magicians, Platonists, and Hermetists’ who held that ‘man could ascend into the firmament of knowledge and become divine’ (25).

*The Playhouse Audience*

It was only in the latter part of last century that critical interest shifted from the text of a play to its reception in the playhouse. It is my contention that a culturally and socially diverse playhouse audience would have constructed diverse meanings from this play, because in addition to the debate embedded in the dialogue, there is, as Robert Weimann observes, an interdependent dialectic between ‘the sensibilities and receptivity of the audience and the consciousness and artistry of the drama’ (xii). Part of the reason for the lasting popularity of this play is its capacity to play upon those sensibilities, provoking the audience simultaneously, as Larry Champion argues, to the ‘double vision’ of ‘participation in the protagonist’s spiritual anguish and to judgement on the decisions and actions that destroy him’ (3). Both Rozett (31) and Deats (2002, 109) have commented on dialogue which promoted the simultaneous ‘engagement and detachment’ of the audience.

I go further and suggest what certain members of the audience might have recognised or understood by the play so artfully constructed. I am not implying that any in the audience would be aware of departures from the prose source, as we might judge a film by its depiction of a novel; rather, I am recognising that the amphitheatre audiences in Marlowe’s London were drawn from all strata of society. Not only were
they socially, culturally and ethnically diverse, the audiences also held a diversity of religious beliefs. Thus any playhouse audience would have been drawn from: the uneducated, the semi-literate, gentlemen from the Inns of Court, university men, visitors to London, Protestant refugees from the Netherlands, Huguenots from France, immigrant Germans, as well as courtiers, and men who also went to the private theatre where the Children of Paul’s performed Lyly’s plays for the Queen and a Court audience. Such a mix of citizens would have included men and women who remembered the Roman Catholic traditions, recusants and ‘church papists’, Protestants of every persuasion: moderates from the loosely Calvinist Church of England, radical Puritans or ‘precisians’, Presbyterians, Separatists and a scattering of Lutherans, anti-Trinitarians or Socinians, anti-Calvinists, Arminians, and men familiar with the *Hermetica.*

The audiences who flocked to see Edward Alleyn play Doctor Faustus at the old Bel Savage Inn, as much as subsequent audiences in England and Germany in the following decades, were used to interpreting parables and symbolism and, as Patterson suggests, to decoding ‘open secrets obliquely communicated’ (53). Playhouse audiences brought up on morality plays were well-accustomed to interpreting allegory such as the psychomachy, personified in the two Angels, which lies at the heart of *Doctor Faustus.* And Court audiences, as we know from Lyly’s plays, such as *Gallathea* which was performed only months before *Doctor Faustus,* delighted in exercising their wits to solve the perplexities of allegory. ‘Allegory not infrequently results in enigma’ quotes Joel Altman from Erasmus who continues, ‘Nor will that be unfortunate if you are speaking to the learned or if you are writing. For things should not be so written that everyone perceives everything, but rather so that they are compelled to investigate certain things, and learn’ (206).

Michael Hattaway observed that the plays of Marlowe ‘work in large part by irony, by invoking traditional ideas’ which result in a ‘continual interplay . . . in the minds of the audience’ between what they know and what they are watching (51). Robert Miola also has suggested that in performance actors and audience participate in what Cesar Segre termed ‘interdiscursivity’ (23). In the present context, Miola’s position suggests an ongoing two-way process of interaction between exoteric (theological and soteriological), and esoteric (occult) discourses which the audience and readers brought to *Doctor Faustus,* and the interior discourses of the play itself which showcase the playwright’s artistry on stage. Altman’s argument complements Miola’s. His contention that the humanist practice of examining a question *in utramque partem,* exemplified in the balanced Euphuistic language beloved of the Elizabethan court,

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121 Precisians, who are mocked by Wagner (I ii 24[B]), disapproved of dancing, maypoles and theatre and were unlikely to have visited a playhouse for pleasure. Roman Catholics included those who harboured missionary priests from Rheims, those who refused to go to Church and ‘church papists’ who went to church occasionally to avoid being fined.
suggests that the interior discourses of some plays (and he was referring to Lyly’s), will contain an ‘hypothesized question’ or ‘speculative thesis’ which the audience is invited to explore (198). In Gallathea, for example, the question is to know whether a mortal can prevent, circumvent or only defer the destiny ordained by the gods (Altman, 211). It is arguable that Marlowe similarly presents the diverse audience with the means to interrogate the play: Can Faustus repent? Will Faustus repent? What will happen to Faustus’ soul? Will God forgive Faustus? Should God forgive Faustus? Has God already decided Faustus’ fate? Will his body be tortured forever? Should Faustus be saved?

Ruth Lunney, in articulating an active role for the engaged playhouse audience suggests that in his portrayal of Faustus, specifically in the familiar battle for the hero’s soul where the Angels personify the Voice of God and Vice as in the old morality plays, Marlowe has constructed a new kind of ‘debatable’ hero who obliges the audience to replace the usual religious and ethical questions suggested above with psychological ones such as: Why doesn’t Faustus hear the Good Angel’s message? (141-2, 184). To those I could add: Why didn’t / couldn’t / wouldn’t Faustus repent? Why did Faustus resist the vial of grace offered to him? and so on.

Marlowe’s conscious artistry

Marlowe has long been admired as the poet of the ‘mighty line’; now I examine his talent as a playwright for evidence of his conscious artistry in dramatising the prose source. Comparison with the prose sources introduced in Chapter Two reveals Marlowe’s skill in writing for the stage. It is evident in what he changes and embellishes, in what he omits and what he adds. Some examples have already been mentioned, but nowhere is his artistry more evident than in his lengthy exposition of Faustus’ character.

First, some changes and embellishments. In Marlowe’s hands, the spirit Mephistopheles, intent on getting Faustus’ soul for his master, Lucifer, is much kinder than the German devil (in SH) who admonishes Faustus, telling him: ‘give none the blame but thine own self-will, thy proud and aspiring mind, which hath brought thee into the wrath of God and utter damnation’ (Jones, l.736-7). By contrast, Marlowe’s English Mephistopheles gives Faustus good advice and warns him ‘O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,/ Which strike a terror to my fainting soul!’ (I iii 80-81[B]). Faustus’ response is to scorn the spirit’s lack of ‘manly fortitude’ (I iii 84[B]) and reaffirm his commitment to Lucifer, demonstrating ‘how the heart becommeth wicked and perverse’ just as Perkins said (Cressy & Ferrell, 118).

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122 The German Mephistopheles is clearly a Catholic devil, not Lutheran, since he believes Faustus’ ‘own self-will’ has brought about his damnation. By contrast, the will of the English Faustus is ridden by the devil as Luther feared; later we shall see that Mephistopheles admitted to guiding Faustus’ hand and eye as he turned the pages.
As for Marlowe’s additions to the source material, neither the Good and Evil Angels nor the pageant of the Seven Sins occurs in the prose chapbooks. Both may be found in the fifteenth century morality play, *Castle of Perseverance*, but, as Douglas Cole points out, in sixteenth century drama the appearance of angels contending for the soul of Man is unique (236). In Marlowe’s hands, the Angels do more than personify Good and Evil – they buzz in Faustus’ ears like the voice of Luther’s conscience and offer him conflicting advice. Similarly, the Seven Deadly Sins are not presented to Faustus as an awful warning of their consequences as they are in *Castle* (l.29-39), but ironically as examples of the delights that await him in Hell (II iii 164[B]).

There is nothing to suggest that Marlowe’s audience would have known this Catholic morality play from Essex, but Marlowe may well have read it and been drawn to some lines in the Herald’s prologue which suggest the role of free will in Man’s salvation:

The Good Angel covets ever the more Man’s salvation
And the Bad attacks him ever to his damnation
And God hath given Man freedom of volition
Whether he will save himself or his soul destroy.

*The Castle of Perseverance*, (l.23-6)\(^{123}\)

By the addition of the Good and Evil Angels, the one urging Faustus to resist, the other tempting him to succumb, Marlowe suggests that Faustus can choose his fate (I i 69-76[B]). Indeed, the sense of expectation in the audience and our hope that at the end Faustus will repent and be forgiven seems to escalate as the Good Angel, the Old Man and even Mephistopheles repeatedly offer Faustus the chance to repent, which he resolutely and repeatedly refuses to do.

Having just dismissed all learning, Faustus picks up a book of magic and fantasises on the ‘world of profit and delight . . . promised to the studious artisan’, meaning to devote himself to the practice of necromancy (I i 55[B]). But he has no intention of studying and immediately summons two magicians who promise him a short cut to the life of sensory indulgence: ‘Their conference will be a greater help to me/ Than all my labours, plod I ne’er so fast’ (I i 67-8[B]). This pair of magicians, Valdes and Cornelius, whose words have already persuaded Faustus ‘to practise magic and concealèd arts’(I i 101[B]) is another of Marlowe’s additions to the prose source. Cornelius is usually accepted as a reference to Cornelius Agrippa, but about Valdes the critics have been silent. Knellwolf King claims that ‘Valdes cannot be identified with any historical figure’ (92).

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\(^{123}\) From *The Castle of Perseverance* a modernization by Alexandra F. Johnston, University of Toronto, 1999.
I suggest that he is Juan de Valdés (1490-1541), twin brother of Alfonso, adviser to the Emperor Charles V, who also figures in the play. As a Christian, Valdés, a translator and commentator of the Bible, believed in ‘the central role of grace by faith in the Christian life’. However, according to MacCulloch, Valdés was ‘noticeably reticent in what he said about the Trinity’, possibly because his opinions were dangerous ‘which led some later Unitarians to regard him as one of their intellectual ancestors’ (2004, 215).

Faustus’ mentors in magic, Valdes and Cornelius, together represent an anti-Trinitarian, and a Hermetic Magus. For some in the audience, the name of Valdes possibly provided a context for Mephisto’s advice to ‘abjure the Trinity’ (I iii 54[A]), which Faustus assures him he has already done. It also lends significance to Faustus’ desire for ‘the seigniory of Emden’ (II i 23[B]) where, in 1540, Hendrik Niclaes (1502-1580) had founded the sect known as ‘The Family of Love’. Moreover, Jan Łaski, friend of Erasmus, had been principal pastor in Emden also in 1540. In his native Poland, Łaski was sympathetic to a group of Protestant reformers who were followers of Faustus Socinus. He was known in England where he lived during Edward’s brief reign. His kinsman was the Count Łaski, who visited England in 1583, who was at Oxford University when Bruno gave his ill-received address and who invited Dr Dee to accompany him home to Poland in September 1583. Hence names that mean little to us now may have resonated with some in Marlowe’s audience and set up expectations of a Socinian fate for Faustus.

Robin the Clown and Rafe, (or Dick in the B-Text), have no part in the prose chapbooks, but in the play they offer bawdy comic relief and parody Faustus’ elaborate rituals and incantations to ‘try if devils will obey [his] hest’ (I iii 6[B]). Those who had seen Lyly’s Gallathea, with the Court at Greenwich (on New Year’s Day at night in 1588), would recognise that the two servants are named after the three shipwrecked servant brothers, Robin, Rafe and Dick. In that play, separated from his brothers and wandering around, Rafe meets up with an Alchemist’s sooty apprentice, Peter, who proceeds to bamboozle him with an outpouring of alchemical terms learnt from his master. In a parallel of the other plots, Peter deceives Rafe, offering to transform a

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124 Valdés was a Spaniard of Jewish descent who settled in Spanish-dominated Naples where ‘he developed a circle of friends and admirers who shared his passion for humanist learning and his deep commitment to promoting a vital, engaged, Christian faith’ (MacCulloch, 2004, 214).
125 In conjuring the devil Faustus calls Valeat numen triplices Jehovae (I iii 16[A]); Bevington and Rasmussen translate this as Let the threefold power of Jehovah be strong (1993, 126 n.16-23), but Keefer suggests that the translation, Away with the threefold divinity of Jehovah is now accepted by most scholars (2007, 91 n.16-17).
126 Niclaes ‘was convinced he would heal the schisms in Christendom and lead mankind to salvation’ (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1151). His sect, the Familists, was sympathetic to the Hermeticists.
127 The Socinians held that there is no hell and that the soul is not immortal and perishes with the body at the end of life; the wicked are simply annihilated (Catholic Encyclopaedia, 2).
silver thimble, which he has stolen, into ‘a whole cupboard full of plate’, and tempting him into taking his place as the Alchemist’s apprentice (*Gallathea*, II iii).

In *Doctor Faustus* Marlowe has altered the source and made the German scholar, ‘an unhappy wag called Christopher Wagner’, into Faustus’ servant, Wagner (Jones, l. 323). Following *Gallathea*, where the sorcerer’s apprentice baffles Rafe with alchemical terms, Faustus’ servant Wagner impresses the simple Robin with a Latin phrase learned from his master (I iv 14[B]), frightens him by conjuring up two Devils and, deceiving him with promises of being able to transform himself into ‘a dog or a cat or a mouse or a rat or anything’, persuades the Clown to follow him as his servant (I iv 45[B]). In the next Act Lucifer makes a similar offer to Faustus, presenting him with a book which will show him how to ‘turn thyself into what shape thou wilt’ (II iii 169[B]). When he next appears, Robin and Dick play a trick on the Vintner with a stolen silver cup (III iii 12[B]) and, again in a parody of Faustus, draw a circle on the ground before accidentally conjuring Mephistopheles from Constantinople, who promptly turns them into an ape and a dog to their evident delight and the great amusement of the audience (III iii 29-53[B]). The audience is left to ponder why the devil is not interested in getting their glorious souls for Lucifer. Some critics have doubted whether these bawdy, farcical scenes came from Marlowe’s pen. Nevertheless, the clear and obvious connections between these scenes and Lyly’s, where they serve a similar parodic function, use identical names and each mention a piece of stolen silver, arouse the suspicion that they may be hinting obliquely at alchemical content to those who, as guests of the Queen, had seen Lyly’s *Gallathea* in the private theatre at Greenwich.

Perhaps the most intriguing of all the additions to the prose source, is Act III scene i in the B-Text which introduces a rival Pope named Saxon Bruno. In these scenes, Faustus and Mephistopheles stand to one side while the Pope and the King of Hungary process, followed by Pope Bruno in chains; the Pope humbles Bruno, forcing him to grovel ‘before the papal dignity’ (III i 95[B]), before sending two cardinals to examine the statutes from the Council of Trent and inform him of the penalty decreed for one ‘That doth assume the papal government without election and a true consent’ (III i

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128 In the A-Text, Robin meets up with Rafe and, in a parody of the Faustus/Mephistopheles plot, they proceed to consult a conjuring book and intone meaningless gibberish until, happening to utter the name, ‘Mephistopheles’, they are confronted by an irritated spirit who has been transported from Constantinople and transforms them into an ape and a dog.

129 In both the *SH* and the *EFB*, Faustus and Mephistopheles make themselves invisible, enter the Pope’s court where they witness lordly extravagance, sumptuous living, greed and venality (Jones, l.1330-1342); the German version tells how Faustus, invisible, snatched away the Pope’s meat and wine and blew in the Pope’s face, while the *EFB* has Faustus strike the Pope and ‘let fall his plate, dishes and cup . . . in the midst of an order of barefoot friars as they were going through the market place called Campa de Fiore’. In the A-Text all this occurs in Act III scene i, but in the B-Text, it is relegated to scene ii, and the action around the character Saxon Bruno takes its place in scene i at line 88.
When Bruno protests that he was elected by the Emperor, the Pope threatens to depose the Emperor. Faustus and Mephistopheles seize the opportunity to disguise themselves as the cardinals and return with the decree that both Pope Bruno and the Emperor are Lollards and schismatics and Bruno ‘shall be straight condemned of heresy/ And on a pile of faggots burnt to death’ (III i 183-184[B]), which was precisely the fate of Giordano Bruno in 1600. The Pope instructs the cardinals to take Bruno and his triple papal crown and lock him up. Of course they help him escape back to Germany and the Emperor. ‘[P]osted thence on a proud-paced steed, as swift as thought’ he ‘[f]lies o’er the Alps to fruitful Germany’ (III ii 4-5[B]). The next Act opens with a discussion between two Gentlemen of the German Emperor’s court referring to ‘Bruno, our elected pope,/ That on a Fury’s back came post from Rome’ (IV i 6-7[B]). Bruno enters in the company of the German Emperor Charles, the Duke of Saxon, and Faustus and Mephistopheles, and Faustus receives the Emperor’s thanks.

It is not clear when the scene was added, nor who wrote it. Thomas and Tydeman thought the scene was derived from Foxe’s account of the hostility between a Pope and an Emperor in the twelfth century, possibly because Foxe includes a woodcut illustration of the Pope treading on the Emperor’s neck (1994, 239). Bevington and Rasmussen make no mention of Giordano Bruno in their note, merely describing Raymond of Hungary as an ‘invented’ character (236n.). However it was the King of Hungary, Zsigismond, (1387-1437) who convened the Council of Constance (1414-1418) which ended the Great Schism which had split the papacy between Avignon and Rome. The character may be anachronistic but the reason for his presence is clearly to draw the analogy.

Those, such as Levin (142), who connect Pope Saxon Bruno with the Nolan, argue, like Greg (1950, 11), that the scene is part of ‘ther adicyones in Docter Fostes’ for which Henslowe paid Birde and Rowley in November 1602 (Henslowe, 228), or in other words added after Bruno’s death in the Campo de Fiore in 1600. No play by Birde is extant and, as Catherine Minshull argues, the single play attributed to Rowley ‘compares poorly with the Bruno scenes’ (194). Minshull agrees here with Roy Eriksen, who first advanced the proposition in 1985, that the scene bears the unmistakable ring of Marlowe and could therefore have been written by Marlowe after Bruno’s extradition in 1592 to face the Roman Inquisition (Rowland, 244).

I agree that the scenes involving Saxon Bruno are very skilfully written: they are seamlessly spliced into Act III scene i, and Act IV, dispensing with the Chorus of the A-Text allows the dialogue to carry the exposition. There are some touches which

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130 In a recent, July 2011, production at The Globe in London, Pope Bruno was led in, naked, bleeding and bearing all the signs of having been recently tortured.
131 To give the King of Hungary the name of Sigismond may have been to risk confusing the historic King with John Sigismund the tolerant Polish king mentioned earlier.
call Shakespeare himself to mind: Martino’s use of the phrase ‘He took his rouse’ (IV i 19[B]) which occurs only in *Hamlet*, and the dumb show which is also used effectively in *Hamlet, Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.[132] Faustus’ confident boast (IV ii 73[B]) that he cannot be harmed because he has been promised twenty-four years on earth is reminiscent of Macbeth’s conviction that none of woman born can harm him; the trees which move at Faustus’ command to come between him and the Soldiers (IV ii 101[B]) create the same illusion as did Great Birnam Wood, and Martino’s punishment in IV iii, being dragged through a lake of mud and dirt, is echoed in Stephano and Trinculo’s plight in *The Tempest*.[133] The whole sequence of three scenes ends with a rhymed couplet worthy of Shakespeare: ‘Sith black disgrace hath thus eclipsed our fame/We’ll rather die with grief than live with shame.’ *Exeunt omnes* (IV iii 25-26[B]).

Be that as it may, there is no gainsaying Eriksen’s convincing mapping of a web of connections and allusions to the Italian philosopher in *Doctor Faustus*. For example, Eriksen sees an allusion to Giordano Bruno, who spent two years in Wittenberg, Saxony, in the epithet ‘Saxon’; similarly, the fact that Bruno was said to have been transported ‘on a Fury’s back’ Eriksen believes ‘is an obvious allusion to the notorious author of *De gli eroici furori*’ (463). He could also have connected the ‘proud-paced steed’ which the Chorus told us flew Pope Bruno to Germany, with Bruno’s *Cabala del cavallo Pegaseo*, published in the same year.

Certainly the scene illustrates the corruption that follows when absolute power is given to a religious leader who believes himself to be infallible: ‘though we would, we cannot err’ (III i 152[B]). It was an issue of great interest and relevance in England where the Act of Supremacy had made Elizabeth Supreme Governor of the Church of England. In early 1588 the threat of invasion by the Spanish Armada was real and the Prince of Parma was poised in the Netherlands in support. Marlowe’s audience would have been reminded of the fate that awaited them if the Church of Rome prevailed and the English Church had once again to acknowledge the supremacy of a foreign head. However, the haughty pride and cruelty of the Pope, whom many in Marlowe’s audience called the Anti-Christ, was amply established in the A-Text without the Saxon Bruno scene; it follows that the later addition of the scene served some other purpose. If the scene had indeed been written in 1597, it would have served the purpose of offering hope to those in the audience who remembered the unforgettable Bruno, that he might yet be extricated from the Castel Sant’Angelo where he, like ‘Pope Saxon Bruno’, languished.[134] If that were the case, the scene would be an excellent example

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132 ‘The King doth wake tonight and takes his rouse’ *Hamlet* I iv 8. The dumb shows are in *Hamlet* III ii see S.D. foll. 134; *Macbeth* IV i S.D. foll. 126; *The Tempest* III iii S.D. foll. 18.

133 The Birnam wood incident in *Macbeth* (V iv 3) derives from Holinshed (1587, 2012, 96) where the wood is named Birnane. In *The Tempest* Ariel reports that he has left Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo ‘I’th’filthy-mantled pool’ (IV i 181-184).

134 That is, if it were the scene for which Dickers (Dekker) was paid (see Appendix I).
of Patterson’s theory of purposeful ambiguity that functions by historical analogy to deceive the censors and reveal certain information only to those in the know (53).

Quite apart from this scene, whether Marlowe penned it or not, there is evidence throughout the play that Marlowe was familiar with Bruno’s London works and with Hermetic thought, as the following examination of his characterisation of Doctor Faustus will show.

The Protagonist in Marlowe’s hands

For many years the critical field was dominated by a view advanced by John Bakeless that Doctor Faustus was a great scholar who having ‘exhausted all legitimate learning’ was obliged to turn to ‘the black art’ to satisfy his desire for knowledge (1937, 104). Riggs, however, in 2004, was not the first to notice that ‘Faustus makes a number of curious mistakes’, before examining that portion of Faustus’ long soliloquy where he quotes the Scriptures selectively (239). Riggs cites Marlowe’s obvious knowledge of Article 15 of the Thirty-nine Articles as evidence of Marlowe’s erudition when he allows Faustus to abbreviate the Gospel verse from John 1:8 (the so-called ‘devil’s syllogism’). Riggs concludes that Marlowe, whom he terms an Atheist, is using Faustus to unveil ‘the ecclesiastical basis for his own unbelief’ (241). However, even though I have argued that Marlowe’s reported dissatisfaction with the Scriptures may be justified on scholarly grounds, I dispute the opinion that Marlowe is using Faustus as his mouthpiece here.

As long ago as 1956, Joseph T. McCullen had questioned the view of Marlowe as a subjective dramatist and argued that Marlowe is consciously presenting a ‘morally unsound character’ in Faustus, whose learning has given him no moral compass to guide his actions and whose failure to know himself is the cause of his downfall (6). McCullen ties this to the Renaissance interest in Socrates’ dictum to ‘Know thyself’, being unaware at the time that the dictum was central to the gnostic-Hermetic philosophy, and of the interest in that philosophy in Marlowe’s day.

That Faustus’ errors are a deliberate feature of Marlowe’s exposition of his character is clear from the original chapbook where we are told that while Faustus was being kept at university in Wittenberg by his rich uncle for the purpose of studying divinity, ‘being of a naughty mind and otherwise addicted . . . he took himself to other exercises . . . [and] gave himself secretly to study necromancy and conjuration . . .’(Jones, l.25-7, 36-7). Despite this neglect of his studies he excelled in argument, and the degree of Doctor was conferred. Soon after, he threw the Scriptures from him and ‘began a very ungodly life’ (Jones, l.47). He ‘studied day and night’ (Jones, l.56) and had the ‘Chaldean, Persian, Hebrew, Arabian and Greek tongues’ using ‘figures, characters, conjurations, incantations’ (l.51-3) until, as Marlowe tells us in the Prologue, ‘glutted now with
learning’s golden gifts. He surfeits upon cursed necromancy’ (Chorus, 23-24[B]). He ‘named himself an astrologian and a mathematician and . . . a physician . . .’ (Jones, 1.57-59). Thus, Marlowe’s challenge is to construct a character whose reputation for wisdom rests on very shaky scholarship achieved by short cuts and the ability to dispute well (associated with Ramism), but who is sated with knowledge of necromancy.

The result is a character who convinces those in the audience unfamiliar with Aristotle and Galen, Justinian and Jerome, but impressed by their names and the odd Latin and Greek phrase, that Faustus is a learned man. At the same time the educated and those familiar with some of Bruno’s writings would have recognised how flawed Faustus’ learning really is. For those who admire Faustus for his knowledge, his twenty-four year long journey from the scholar in his study in Act I to the terrified and helpless wretch in Act V, periodically marked by the *hamartia* of each failure to repent, must look like the tragic fall of a hero. For others who recognise how shallow is his learning, how morally unsound his character, how much his frantic and pointless activity resembles the sin of Sloth, ‘the wellspring of intellectual and spiritual blindness’, his end may seem inevitable (McCullen, 6). For them Faustus’ failure is not his superficial grasp of philosophy, nor his deep knowledge of the occult, but his failure to choose the contemplative life and acquire self-knowledge.

Marlowe’s achievement is to depict a deeply conflicted man as a coherent character. The first Act opens on Faustus in his study at that point in his life when, having graduated, he must decide on a career. The irony is immediately evident; here is a man who wants to ‘look like a divine in show’ (I i 3[B]), while at the same time challenging every discipline. His offer to ‘live and die in Aristotle’s works’ has been recognised by some (Eriksen, 464; Keefer, 2007, 76n.) as a line from the First Dialogue in Bruno’s *La Cena de le Ceneri*: ‘voglion vivere e morire per Aristoteles’ where it is followed, as any in the audience who had read Bruno would know, by: ‘i quali non intendono ne anche quel che significano i titoli de’libri d’Aristotele’.135 (Bruno, 1585, 1995, 95). It is a criticism of the Peripatetics, who passionately defend Aristotle without knowing the first thing about him. Only those who had read the passage (and in Marlowe’s time that meant Italian speakers and by implication, the Court), would have known that it occurs in the context of a discussion extolling the merits of Hermeticists over Aristotelians. Later in that same scene, as Keefer points out (2007, 82), Faustus’ eager anticipation of how the spirits can be made to ‘resolve [him] of all ambiguities (I i 79[B]), echoes another line from the First Dialogue of *La Cena*, ‘the teaching . . . will purge all doubts and clear away all contradictions’ (Bruno, 1585, 1995, 97).

Faustus proceeds to read, not from Aristotle, but from Petrus Ramus (1515-1572), a philosopher notorious for his opposition to Aristotle. The quotation from Cicero, but frequently used by Ramus: ‘Is to dispute well logic’s chiefest end?’ (I i 8[B]),

135 Translation: ‘but they do not understand even the titles of the books of Aristotle.’
immediately pinpoints the then current controversy between the relative merits of logic and rhetoric.\textsuperscript{136} Disputing well, though not necessarily soundly, was the skill that earned the German Faustus his degree. Marlowe’s Faustus quotes again, not from Aristotle but from Gorgias: ‘\textit{On kai me on’} (I i 12[A]).\textsuperscript{137} Once again Marlowe puts his finger on a current philosophical debate, and one familiar to any who had read Pico. Thus, while Faustus demonstrates his scant knowledge of philosophy, Marlowe is vicariously demonstrating his own erudition. Next, Faustus turns to Jerome’s Bible and divinity. Here, as we saw, he reads only half the verse leaving the audience to supply the remainder which contains the assurance that ‘He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins’ (1 John 1: 8-9). Finally, Faustus mocks the half-read promise, ‘What doctrine call you this? \textit{Che serà, serà}’ in what Keefer calls ‘a parodic reduction’ of Calvinist teaching on predestination (2007, 47). Having established for much of the audience that he is a superficial, hypocritical and mercenary man, Faustus turns to magic, almost choking on the vision of omnipotence and the god-like status it will bring him. It is no surprise to the audience that such a man now sends for Valdes and Cornelius, to fast track his path to magic. Those who knew that a Magus must give himself first to deep study, contemplation and knowledge of self, before attempting magic, would recognise at once that Faustus was treading a dangerous path.

There are several precedents for a man who rejects the vanities of the world and turns to the religious life, but none for a man who does the opposite. The precedents include King Solomon in the \textit{Book of Ecclesiastes}, St Jerome, Rabelais’ character Panurge, Lyly’s character Euphuies and even Luther. Agrippa himself was equivocal in his rejection of all magic. Only in the chapter cited above, ‘\textit{Of juggling and legerdemain’}, does Agrippa unambiguously condemn demonic magic, yet it is this magic to which Faustus turns when he bids Divinity adieu (I i 48[B]), picks up a book of magic and resolves that very night to ‘conjure, though I die therefore’ (I i 160[B]).

Clearly \textit{Doctor Faustus} is not only a play about religion – it also models for and implicates the audience in some dangerous, black, demonic magic. Hitherto, critical opinions which stress the ambiguity of the play polarised between two genres or between two religious doctrines have tried to make a case for one extreme or the other (Deats, 2010, 6, 7), and largely ignored the magic. On the other hand, the few critical discussions of the influence of Agrippan magic or of Bruno on \textit{Doctor Faustus} have tended to neglect the religious controversies.

I propose now to employ a Kabbalistic hermeneutic that will provide a coherent structure to contain these competing and ambiguous discourses. I discuss Marlowe’s

\textsuperscript{136} The issue is said to have divided Harvey, who defended Ramism, from Nashe who was an Aristotelian.

\textsuperscript{137} Translation: ‘Being and not being’, see page 48 for discussion.
play as a gnostic-Hermetic ascent through three levels: first, as an entertainment for the moral instruction of the spectator, *Vide!*; second, as a vehicle for contested religious doctrines such as Calvinist predestination and Arminian free will, and the dangerously controversial anti-Trinitarianism, which provide the substance of theological debate for the educated listener, *Audi!*; and third, as signalling occult teachings to be interpreted by the initiated for those who hold the key to the mystic allegory of spiritual gnōsis or Hermeticism, *Tace!*

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*Vide! (See!)*

For the spectator, *Doctor Faustus* is a splendid visual theatrical entertainment. The action is full of noise and colour. Devils are frequently accompanied by squibs and fireworks (II i 152 SD[A]) and there are stage directions for thunder and lightning (V ii 117 SD[A]). Devils dance (II i 82 SD[B]) and put on a pageant of Seven Deadly Sins (II iii 108[B]). Mephistopheles appears as a dragon and Faustus may even have flown across the stage drawn by a dragon.\(^{138}\) Then there are pranks involving invisibility where the Pope is dealt a blow to the head (III iii 87 SD[B]), or conjuring illusions where Faustus loses his head (IV ii 37 SD[B]). Often the words are accompanied by action such as when Faustus draws a conjuring circle on the stage (I iii 7 SD[B]), or cuts his arm and writes the pact in blood (II i 54[B]), or when a knight is seen to have sprouted the horns of a hart (IV i 120 SD[B]). Costumes readily identify Mephistopheles, the Pope with his triple crown, and the cardinals in red. Even Faustus’ conscience is externalized and personified, as the Good and Evil Angels wrestle for his soul. The audience, whether English or foreign, would have had no trouble following the plot of the scholar who learns the art of conjuring the Devil, makes a blood pact, demands the knowledge of the cosmos and creation that all the audience longs to hear and, granted knowledge and power, uses it to lead a heedless and hedonistic life playing foolish pranks. Thus far the play follows the structure of the traditional morality play to the point where the protagonist, be he Everyman or Mankind, repents and is saved. But in Marlowe’s play, as in the source, Faustus, cursing and pleading as the clock strikes twelve and to the accompaniment of thunder, is carried off by devils to be torn to pieces [B-Text]. The moral was clear to all. The punishment for disobeying God and practising ‘more than heavenly power permits’ is eternal damnation (Epilogue, 8). Arguably Marlowe has structured the play on the early Catholic morality plays only to subvert that tradition. Those in the audience who remembered the Catholic *Everyman*,

\(^{138}\) Henslowe’s Diary lists ‘i dragon in fostes’ in his ‘Enventary tacken of all the properties for my Lord Admeralles men, the 10 of Marche, 1598’ (273).
would recall how, at the end, Knowledge left him and only Good Deeds accompanied him to meet Death (1.94-7).139

The debt to the structure of the mediaeval morality *Castle of Perseverance*, mentioned earlier, is often acknowledged, but Michael Hattaway also identifies orthodox doctrines from another old play *Wisdom who is Christ* (c.1460) in *Doctor Faustus* (71). This early Catholic play personifies ‘Will’, so important to Erasmian and later to Arminian thinking, ‘Mind’ which had Hermetic significance, and it also features self-knowledge as the way to know God. Subtitled “How Lucifer tempts the Mind, Will and Understanding of Man to Sin”, the play first identifies Wisdom and explains why the name is given to the Son. Hattaway explains that ‘when Anima asks how she may know God, He replies:

By knowynge of yowyr sylff . . .
The more knowynge of youwur self passyble
þhe more verily ye xall God knowe.’ (72).

Wisdom leaves and when he finally returns, Anima, now contrite, repents, turns to Christ and is forgiven (72).140 This is the expected ending of an orthodox morality play which, as we saw, Marlowe subverts. Unlike Anima, Faustus scorns ‘contrition, prayer, repentance’ (II i 16[B]), which Catholics in the audience would have recognised as three requirements of the sacrament of penance.141 Even though the Good Angel assures him that they are ‘means to bring thee unto heaven’ (II i 17[B]), Faustus prefers to believe the Bad Angel that they are ‘illusions, fruits of lunacy’ (II i 18[B]). Catholics in the audience would have agreed with the Good Angel and, viewing the play as an unorthodox Christian morality, seen Faustus’ damnation as deserved. (The theology of the Good Angel is far from clear, since in Act I he had exhorted Faustus to ‘Read, read the Scriptures’ (I i 72[B]) like a Protestant.) If the audience perceived Faustus as an historic character, contemporaneous with Charles V, his casual rejection of the

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139  S D Exit Knowledge. Epilogue: And forsake Pride, for he deceiveth you in the end./ And remember Beauty, Five Wits, Strength, and Discretion,/ They all at the last do Everyman forsake,/ Save his Good Deeds there doth he take. (*Everyman*, I.94-7 in Heilman, Robert B. *An Anthology of English Drama*).

140  Anima means Breath of Life or Soul.

141  At the Council of Trent the Catholic Church affirmed the seven sacraments, including the sacrament of penance. The Ten Articles adopted by the English church during the early years of Reformation (1536) reduced the sacraments to three but maintained that ‘the sacrament of perfect penance which Christ requireth of such manner persons consisteth of three parts, that is to say, contrition, confession and the amendment of the former life . . . the fruits of penance are prayer, fasting and . . . good works . . .’ (in Cressy & Ferrell, 19). The Thirty-nine Articles, adopted as part of theElizabethan Settlement in 1563, reduced the sacraments to two and omitted the sacrament of penance.
sacrament which could have saved his soul would have been seen by Catholics as proof of his wickedness. If, however, he was perceived as a contemporary character *circa* 1588 for whom the sacrament of penance was no longer available in the Church of England, Catholics may have interpreted his response as further proof of the risks to the salvation of the soul posed by Protestantism.

*Audi! (Listen!)*

While Catholics in the audience could have interpreted Faustus’ story as a straightforward homiletic, Protestants listening carefully or reading the printed text had much to debate. For them the play dramatises the contemporary controversies amongst Calvinists, anti-Calvinists and Arminians, as many critics have observed, and on which the play’s reputation as both religious and ambiguous largely rests. This is the question of whether God is Sovereign and has already elected both who will be saved and who will be damned, or whether Man by the free exercise of his will controls, by his choices, the fate of his soul. As we saw earlier, the Church of England or moderate Calvinists, the radical Puritans, the anti-Calvinists and the Arminians could not agree. Calvin’s thinking had been hardened by his followers in Geneva. Man, the Calvinists held, was totally depraved; an inscrutable God had arbitrarily elected some to salvation and others to damnation, even before the Fall of Adam and independent of any action on their part; Christ’s atonement for Man’s sins was limited to those whom God had previously elected, and God’s grace, once offered could not be resisted. Anti-Calvinists protested this view of God as a tyrant; Arminius disagreed with the Calvinists on most points, but especially held that Man was an autonomous being who could freely exercise his will to save or damn himself. These are the seeds of the theological debate which Marlowe has planted in his dramatisation of *Doctor Faustus*.

In Cambridge, William Perkins, three years Marlowe’s senior and a Fellow of Christ’s College, renowned for his thunderously memorable preaching, was legendary for his influence over Cambridge students (Cressy & Ferrell, 114). It would be surprising indeed if Marlowe had not heard Perkins many times during his years at Cambridge and there is every indication in *Doctor Faustus* that he had.

In 1590 Perkins published some of his sermons and a treatise entitled *A Golden Chain*, which spelt out with intractable logic ‘*the order of the causes of salvation and damnation, according to God’s word*’ (114). The section of the tract titled *Concerning the execution of the decree of reprobation* refers to ‘a temporary faith, whereby the reprobate doth confusedly believe . . . that some shall be saved, but he believeth not that he himself particularly shall be saved’ (in Cressy & Ferrell, 117, 118). Compare: ‘But Faustus’ offence can ne’er be pardoned. The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved,
but not Faustus’ (V ii 44-45[B]).\footnote{Keefer suggests that Faustus’ offence is despair which Calvin held to be unforgivable (2007, 165 n.14)} Perkins numbered the degrees of reprobation. The second degree has five stages: ‘First, the reprobate is deceived by some sin. Secondly, his heart is hardened by the same sin. Thirdly, his heart being hardened, it becommeth wicked and perverse. Fourthly, then followeth his incredulity and unbelief . . . Fifthly, an apostacy, or falling away from faith in Christ.’ Then follows: ‘The third degree is damnation, whereby the reprobates are delivered up to eternal punishment . . .’ (in Cressy & Ferrell, 118).

Faustus’ damnation in Marlowe’s play follows virtually the same course: his first sin is to conjure the Devil to satisfy his curiosity; next follows incredulity: he tells the Devil that he doesn’t believe in hell and thinks nothing of giving himself, soul and body to Lucifer (II i 130; 135-137[B]); then he cries, ‘My heart is hardened’ (II iii 18[B]); next in despair, he perversely blames Mephistopheles, crying: ‘go, accursèd spirit, to ugly hell! ’Tis thou hast damned distressèd Faustus’ soul’ (II iii 76-77[B]). Finally after the Old Man tests his faith and it is found wanting, his mutilated body is found: ‘See, here are Faustus’ limbs/All torn asunder by the hand of death’(V iii 6-7[B]). (See figure 5.)

\begin{quote}
Fig. 5 ‘They found his body lying on the horse dung, most monstrously torn and fearful to behold, for his head and all his joints were dashed in pieces’. (Jones, I.2023-2)\footnote{Woodcut illustration, http://lettersfromthedustbowl.com/Fbk1.htm, accessed 06/01/2009.}
\end{quote}

The Church of England doctrine on predestination, as outlined in Article 17 of the Thirty-nine Articles, is considerably less harsh than the Calvinist theology that Perkins was preaching:

\begin{quote}
\footnote{Keefer suggests that Faustus’ offence is despair which Calvin held to be unforgivable (2007, 165 n.14)} \footnote{Woodcut illustration, http://lettersfromthedustbowl.com/Fbk1.htm, accessed 06/01/2009.}
\end{quote}
As the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons . . . because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation . . . So curious and carnal persons, lacking the spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them . . . into desperation . . . (in Cressy & Ferrell, 64)

G.M. Pinciss makes clear that men such as Peter Baro, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, who opposed Perkins' hard line Calvinism, actually held views much closer to those in the Thirty-nine Articles on predestination than did the Puritans (253). Baro, who was eventually ‘eased out of his position’, argued that ‘to each and every man God desires to give grace sufficient for salvation, for Christ died for each and every man’ (Pinciss, 258). There is the rub. Did Faustus despair of salvation because he had led a ‘curious and carnal’ life? Was he unable to accept the offered grace because he had lost faith that Christ’s sacrifice applied to him?

When Faustus’ despair leads him to attempt suicide, the Old Man stays his hand with these words:

I see an angel hover o’er thy head,
And with a vial full of precious grace
Offers to pour the same into thy soul.
Then call for mercy and avoid despair. (V i 57-60[B])

And Faustus struggles to repent. But he repents with despair in his heart: ‘I do repent, and yet I do despair’ (V i 66[B]). Here, for Calvinists in the audience, is the proof of his reprobation. His next words: ‘Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast’ (V i 67[B]) reveal his terrible internal struggle before he resists the offer of grace. Is Marlowe putting Calvin’s doctrine of irresistible grace to the test? When Mephistopheles calls him traitor and threatens to ‘in piecemeal tear thy flesh’ (V i 71[B]), Faustus, in a shocking volte-face, repents that he offended Lucifer (V i 72[B]).

As for Free Will, Article 10 essentially denies individual autonomy and asserts that our faith and our consequent desire to do good works come only from the grace of God (Cressy & Ferrell, 62). However, Faustus believes that he is acting on his own volition even as he blames Mephistopheles for depriving him of heaven’s joys (II iii 3[B]), because the spirit tells him to blame himself: ‘‘Twas thine own seeking’ (II iii 4[B]). This affirmation of free will was both anticipated and, as Deats points out (2002, 118), subverted, by the Prologue’s reference to conspiring heavens (21[B]). It was subsequently denied in Mephistopheles’ later boast that when Faustus took the book ‘[t]o view the Scriptures, then I turned the leaves /and led thine eye’ (V ii 100-101[B]).
Here is fuel for the debate about free will: just which one of Mephistopheles’ assertions is a lie? Has Faustus discovered, like Luther, that Man does not have free will?144

No single line better exposes the opposed theologies of Calvinism and Arminianism than the assurance of the Good Angel to Faustus in Act II. Faustus is enraged at Mephistopheles’ refusal to give him the knowledge for which he has bartered his soul. In despair, and clutching at straws, Faustus cries ‘Is’t not too late?’ (II iii 78[B]). In the A-Text, the Good Angel replies: ‘Never too late, if Faustus can repent’ (II iii 79[A]), while in the B-Text he replies: ‘Never too late, if Faustus will repent’ (II iii 80[B]) (my emphases). The A-Text implies, as Calvin taught, that God is sovereign and Faustus’ ability to repent depends on what He has decreed. The B-Text suggests that Faustus only has to choose – the matter is his to decide. Similarly, Calvin held that Man is totally depraved and the A-Text emphasises this depravity when the Old Man speaks to Faustus to deplore ‘thy most vile and loathsome filthiness’ (V i 42[A]), while the Arminians held that Man, when moved by the Holy Spirit, is capable of choosing Christ. It may be significant that the Calvinist A-Text was published in 1604 just after the Scots King, James, took the English throne and declared himself a Calvinist, while the B-Text entered the public domain in 1616 and again in 1618 at the time of the Synod of Dort, when the Arminian doctrine was on the agenda.

The foundation of Protestant doctrine is faith in God. The first of the Thirty-nine Articles specifies ‘Faith in the Trinity’ and Article 11 promises justification by faith as ‘a most wholesome doctrine . . . full of comfort’. It would have shocked the audience to hear Faustus dismiss the Trinity: ‘Valeat numen triplex Jehovae!’ (I iii 16[B]) and learn that when he ‘Abjure[d] the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ’ his words had brought Mephistopheles ‘in hope to get his glorious soul’ (I iii 46-47[B]). Later in that scene Faustus fantasises about all that he will be able to accomplish with Mephistopheles’ help: ‘I’ll join the hills that bind the Afric shore/ And make that land continent to Spain’ (I iii 106-107[B]). The irony would not be lost on an audience who recall St Paul’s letter to the Corinthians about faith, hope and love:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels . . . And though} \\
\text{I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all} \\
\text{knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,} \\
\text{and have not charity, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13: 1-2; my emphasis)}
\end{align*}
\]

Bereft of his faith in God, it follows that, not only could Faustus accomplish nothing, but, as all Protestants in the audience knew, his lack of faith compromised all hope of salvation. The good Old Man is sure, like Peter Baro, that Christ died for all mankind,
and departs for certain salvation saved by his faith alone. ‘His faith is great. I cannot touch his soul’, Mephistopheles tells Faustus (V i 82[B]).

Between Calvinist certainties and Arminian doubts, the play’s ending is arguably ambiguous and plunges the thinking audience into debate: Was Christ’s blood not shed for all Men? Why could not a drop of that blood have saved Faustus? Are there some sins too great for God to forgive? Did Faustus repent or not? Lucifer threatened to tear him in pieces if he turned to God in penitence. He was torn in pieces. Are we to conclude that Faustus repented? If he did repent, why did God in His mercy not save Faustus? Faustus’ body is in pieces but what has happened to his soul? The problems remain to tease the audience.

Catholics who recognise the play as a homiletic, hear it close with a last warning to the wise. But for Protestants, whether conformist or nonconformist, the play opens up these difficult theological questions to many interpretations. Faustus’ fate played out before them invites the audience to engage with those thorny issues more profoundly than any sermon could have done.146

_Tace! (Be silent!)_

‘Yet this one rule I advise you to observe – that you communicate vulgar secrets to vulgar friends, but higher and secret to higher and secret friends only’ (in Tyson, lvii). So wrote Trithemius in response to Agrippa’s dedication to him of his _De Occulta Philosophia_.147 How is this distinction possible in the playhouse? Clulee comments on the difficulties ‘common to occult writing’ of dividing ‘the potential audience into the vulgar, from whom the secrets of the text must be protected, and the wise and virtuous’ to whom the text reveals ‘through a discourse known only to initiates, mysteries and secrets the initiates already possess’ (80). To this extent, the initiates resemble Calvin’s elect who act virtuously in order to be seen to have been elected to salvation; initiates must be seen by other initiates to understand the oblique allusions in order not to be counted amongst the vulgar.

Several critics have recognised gnostic-Hermetic ideas concealed in Marlowe’s play. They include Keefer (1989, 91n.), Mebane (1989, 123), Nuttall (1998, 22) and most recently Andrew Duxfield (2010, 96). To discover allusions meant only for the eyes

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146 The same questions arise in relation to _Macbeth_ where they are dealt with elegantly and without the myriad complexities of _Faustus_. In _Macbeth_ the issue is whether the forces of evil personified in the witches are the cause of his downfall or whether his own choices led to his downfall. The complicating questions are extrinsic to the plot. For example: if Macbeth had been predestined to salvation would/ could /should his actions lead to his reprobation?

147 Trithemius himself contributed to the art of secret writing by the encryption of codes and ciphers but particularly to the art of _steganographia_ or concealing information in the open.
of the cognoscenti or those initiated into the mysteries, I have turned to the Hermetica itself, Agrippa’s famous tres libri, and some works written by Giordano Bruno in the years immediately preceding the premiere of Doctor Faustus.

At the end of his opening soliloquy, excited at the prospect of ‘power, of honour and omnipotence’ (I i 54[B]), Faustus sees that there is no limit to his dominion which ‘Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man./ A sound magician is a demigod.’ (I i 60, 61[B]). The power of the ‘incorporeal imagination’ or human thought is what gives man his god-like status and the idea comes directly from the Corpus Hermeticum Book XI:

\[\ldots\] nothing bounds the incorporeal \ldots nothing is quicker nor more powerful. Of all things, the incorporeal is the unbounded, the quickest and most powerful. Consider this for yourself: command your soul to travel to India, and it will be there faster than your command \ldots . Command it even to fly up to heaven, and it will not lack wings \ldots But if you wish to break through the universe itself and look upon the things outside (if, indeed, there is anything outside the cosmos), it is within your power. (Corpus Hermeticum XI [18, 19])

Moments later, Valdes and Cornelius enter and Cornelius’ very first words, ‘The miracles that magic will perform’, conflate miracles with magic, implying thereby that magic is a religion (I i 130[B]). He then outlines the necessary areas of study:

He that is grounded in astrology,

Enriched with tongues, well seen in minerals,

Hath all the principles magic doth require. (I i 132-134[B])

For those in the audience familiar with Hermetic thought, ‘astrology’, ‘tongues’ and ‘minerals’ map neatly onto Astrology, Cabala and Alchemy, the three elements of Renaissance Hermetic magic. To my knowledge, no critic has commented on this, yet the more familiar one becomes with Hermetic thought, the clearer is the connection.

Not only did Agrippa take Trithemius’ advice about secrecy, but Vittoria Perrone Compagni suggests that he did so by employing a literary technique ‘intended to spread knowledge in disguise and known particularly to writers in the alchemical tradition’, the dispersa intentio, which he reveals at the end of De Occulta (162):

You therefore sons of wisdom and learning, search diligently in this book, gathering together our dispersed intentions, which in divers places we have propounded, and what is hid in one place, we make manifest

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148 The idea originated in Lucretius: Nothing is done so swiftly as the mind/ Determines it to be done, and acts itself; /More quickly then the mind bestirs itself /Than anything else that comes before our eyes (De Rerum Natura, Book Three, l.182-4).
in another, that it may appear to you wise men... the secrets which are hid by many enigmas cannot be perceived but by a profound intellect, which when you shall obtain, the whole science of the invincible magical discipline will insinuate itself into you... which in times past Hermes... and the others who wrought miracles, obtained.

(Agrippa, 677, my emphases)

Has Marlowe scattered the seeds of Hermetic thought throughout his play? I now examine the play for knowledge of Astrology, Cabala and Alchemy. I search for more evidence of familiarity with the *Hermetica* itself, and finally I look at the use Marlowe has made of the conjurations and legerdemain against which Agrippa warned.

As we saw in Chapter Three, for men and women in the late sixteenth century, the stars in the night sky of the celestial world rotated in a sphere separating the observable celestial world from the supercelestial world of God and the Angels. For Hermeticists, the starry zodiac was endowed with supernatural powers with which it influenced the affairs of Men. In Act II of *Doctor Faustus*, scene iii opens on Faustus in his study pondering heaven, in the metaphysical sense, and cursing Mephistopheles for depriving him of its joys. Almost at once he asks to ‘dispute again/and reason of divine astrology’ (II iii 31-32[B]), and asks about ‘this centric earth’ and the movement of the planets, but Mephistopheles fobs him off when he asks ‘hath every sphere a dominion or intelligentia?’ (II iii 54-55[B]), or equivocates saying ‘*Per inaequalem motum respectu totius*’ (II iii 65[B]).

When Faustus demands to know who made the world, Mephistopheles flatly refuses to tell him: ‘I will not’ (II iii 66-68[B]). But the *Corpus Hermeticum* gives clear and unequivocal answers to these questions about the creation of the world and movement of the planets. Since I am investigating the possibility that Hermetic thought is to be found scattered throughout this play, I cannot escape the question: Why does Marlowe not build Poimandres’ and Asclepius’ answers into the dialogue? Is it because he harbours personal doubts about the sun’s being the centre of the universe, or are these some of the higher and secret things to be revealed only to Adepts? It is possible that the little piece of dialogue is there to provide a springboard for later discussion about the movement of the planets and the genesis of the earth (II iii 55-69[B]).

149 ‘On account of their unequal motion with respect to the whole... a masterpiece of saying nothing’ (Bevington & Rasmussen 1993, 154 n.65).

150 1. Concerning the creation of the world: ‘The elements of nature... have arisen... from the counsel of god which having taken in the word and having seen the beautiful cosmos, imitated it, having become a cosmos through its own elements and its progeny of souls’ I [8].

2. Concerning the movement of the planets: ‘This motion Asclepius is not conjoint but opposed, for the spheres are not moved in the same way; they move contrary to one another, and the contrariety keeps the motion balanced through opposition” II [6].

“Thus all motion is moved in immobility and by mobility. And it happens that the motion of the cosmos and of every living thing made of matter is produced not by things outside the body but by those within it acting on the outside, by intelligible entities either soul or spirit.” II [8].
When in his final hours Faustus appeals to the 'stars that reigned at my nativity/ Whose influence hath allotted death and hell' (V ii 160-161[B]), he seems to believe that his destiny has been decided, but he is certainly not appealing to Calvin’s God. His words relate directly to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the influence of the *macrocosm* upon the *microcosm* where, in a passage about the star demons, we are told:

> Thus deployed, [the star demons] follow the orders of a particular star, and they are good and evil according to their natures . . . . They have all been granted authority over the things of the earth and over the troubles of the earth, and they produce change and tumult . . . individually for each person. They reshape our souls to their own ends . . . The demons on duty at the exact moment of birth, arrayed under each of the stars, take possession of each of us as we come into being and receive a soul. (XVI [12, 14, 15])

The passage goes on to say that the demons can twist the soul about towards good or evil but that a single ray of sun, that is a single ray of god, will nullify the demons’ effect. ‘All others the demons carry off as spoils’ (61). Once again we find religious discourse (‘good and evil’, ‘soul’) threaded with magical discourse (‘demons’, ‘stars’, ‘take possession’).

Cabala, as we know, is not mentioned in the *Hermetica* but was later syncretised into Hermetic thinking by Pico and Reuchlin and employed extensively by Agrippa. In Book II Chapter XIX of *De Occulta*, ‘Of the notes of the Hebrews and Chaldeans, and certain other notes of magicians’, Agrippa explains the numerical value of Hebrew letters (*gematria*) and the uses made of this in Kabbalah (310-1), which itself has two branches: the mystical speculation on the nature of God which ‘seeks a transformation of the soul in accordance with the will of God’, and a practical Kabbalah which involves magical practices and ‘a transformation of the world in accordance with the will of man’ (762). Once again religion is yoked to science, and both to magic.\textsuperscript{151} The use of proper names in magical operations, stressed by Agrippa in Book I Chapter LXX, is important because, as de León-Jones explains, ‘for Bruno, Agrippa and his predecessors, the name retains the essence of the thing named’ (34).\textsuperscript{152} Faustus has no qualms about using proper names when, armed with the Hebrew Psalter and the ‘words of art’ from Valdes, at dead of night, he begins his incantations (I iii[B]). Beneath Lucifer and four Devils, and in front of the audience who are now passive participants in the magic, Faustus, book in hand, performs the Cabalistic ritual, drawing Jehovah’s name and the names of holy saints in a circle on the ground (I iii 7 SD[B]). Whereas the *EFB* passes

\textsuperscript{151} Agrippa describes the Hebrew practice of rendering the first syllable of Jehovah’s name, Jah, whose *gematria* value is 15, as 9+6, rather than 10+5 ‘lest it should happen that the sacred name should be attributed to profane things’ (310).

\textsuperscript{152} ‘According to Platonic principles, the vital property or the essence of things is contained in the vocalization – which is born first from the mind’ (de León-Jones, 34).
quickly over the details of Faustus’ magic, Marlowe dramatises it to the full. The title page of the 1619 B-Text illustrates Faustus in his study at just this point surrounded by Cabalistic signs. (See figure 6.)

Fig. 6  Title page of *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, 1619, the B-Text. The three books on the shelf may be Agrippa’s *tres libri.*

After a lengthy incantation, dismissing Jehovah and calling upon Lucifer, Prince of the Orient, and Mephistopheles, who is slow to appear (*Quid tu moraris?* What’s keeping you? he calls (I iii 20[B])), Faustus sprinkles holy water like a priest during the Mass and makes the sign of the cross. It was Reuchlin who saw that religion and white magic were conflated; here the rituals of the Mass have been subverted by the rituals of black magic.

Edward Alleyn is said to have worn a priestly surplice in this role. Is Marlowe parodying and debunking the Catholic ritual where the priest’s words miraculously transubstantiate the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ? Faustus’ words magically transform a devil, Mephistopheles, into a dragon. Unafraid, he immediately orders him to come back in the guise of a holy Franciscan friar, remarking cynically, ‘That holy shape becomes a devil best’ (I iii 27[B]). For the remainder of the play, (twenty-four years in Faust time), the devil is dressed to look like a man of God. Faustus’ magic is making a mockery of religion.

The whole scene is a reminder of the man who told others ‘not to be afeard of bugbears and hobgoblins’; it invites debate on the distinction between miracles and magic, between faith and superstition, between belief and credulity, and the significance of
naming, and using the correct words in both. Will it lead to a debate about magic itself, white magic and black? The transformation of Mephistopheles into a dragon and then a friar is imitated when Mephistopheles transforms Robin and Dick into an ape and a dog (III iii 45, 49[B]). I return to the issue of magical/miraculous transmutation (transubstantiation, metamorphosis and metempsychosis) in relation to the myth of Actaeon in the next section.

As I suggested earlier, Robin, who is recognisably the Alchemist’s apprentice from Gallathea, functions as an oblique signal to the presence of alchemy in Doctor Faustus. Alchemy is never explicitly mentioned either in the prose sources or in Marlowe’s play, but Lyndy Abraham’s A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery has helped to uncover a rich seam of alchemical allusion in the play (1988). As we saw, alchemy is the trope which unifies Gnosticism with Hermeticism, where the ascent of the contemplative soul towards the mind of God is by its nature a spiritual alchemy. Abraham explained that ‘alchemical ideas were expressed in coded language, in emblem, symbol and enigma’ because of the ‘desire of the Adept to hide alchemical truth from the “ungodly, foolish, sloutheful and unthankefull hypocrites”’ (xvi). She quotes Geber, who wrote ‘Wheresoever we have spoken plainly, there we have spoken nothing, but where we have used riddles and figures, there we have hidden the truth’ (xvi). According to Abraham:

Alchemical symbols are ambiguous, multi-dimensional and flexible with a tendency towards eluding any attempt to define them . . . a consequence of taking the mutable variety of the created world as a source of symbols for immutable and unitary truths. (xvii, xviii)

Stanton Linden clarifies the matter with his explanation of alchemy as both an exoteric process concerned with the transformation of base metals into gold and an analogous esoteric process applied to the perfection of man’s corrupt soul (5).153

In terms of the Hermetic spiritual rebirth of the soul, one starts in the turmoil and chaos of the dark material world and ascends by degrees through the planetary spheres, systematically ridding oneself of material dross at each level until one ascends at the last, purified and whole in the light to unite with the divine One. Armed with this knowledge, the reader may understand the original Faustus story as a gnostic allegory,
expressing the journey of Faustus’ soul as the stages of an (aborted) alchemical transformation. In Marlowe’s play the alchemical trope is evident in the structure, in the coded references to transformations and also in certain words which have symbolic significance in the alchemical process. Undoubtedly the use of everyday terms which double as symbols of the alchemical process has contributed to the sense of ambiguity which critics have always recognised in this play.

*Doctor Faustus* is studded with ambiguous alchemical terms and episodes such as the conjuring pranks involving the beheading (IV ii 43 SD[B]) and dismemberment of Faustus by the horse courser (IV iv[B]). These japes exemplify the very kind of illusion and legerdemain which Agrippa condemned as demonic, and Bruno as the work of a ‘foolish evil-doer’ (1590, 1998, 107). In alchemical terms the decapitation ‘metaphysically represents the freeing of the soul from the prison of the body’ (Abraham, 22). According to Abraham, it entails ‘sacrifice and suffering, the death of the old outmoded state of being’ and is accompanied, for the alchemist, by melancholia – witness Faustus’ depression and despair. Similarly, the pregnant Duchess of Vanholt’s apparently casual wish to have a dish of grapes out of season has significance for those versed in alchemy. Grapes symbolized the raw matter for the Stone, ‘the prima materia . . . from which the alchemist extracts mercury’ (Abraham, 89). The Duke and Duchess of Vanholt appear in the German prose version as the Duke and Duchess of Anholt whose name recalls the contemporary Christian of Anhalt, a German Protestant Prince from Saxony who was, according to Yates, ‘deeply involved in mystical and Paracelsist movements’ and close friends with Peter Wok of Rožmberk, that patron of alchemy and the occult who played host to Dee until 1589, coincidentally at the very time that the German *Faustus* was being written (1972, 2000, 37).

In Marlowe’s play, a reference to ‘negromancy’ in the Prologue l.25[A] is regularly corrected to ‘necromancy’. However, Jones, in a note in the *EFB*, explains ‘necromancer’ as synonymous with ‘nigromancer’ with its connotation of ‘black’ (186). When Faustus begins to conjure, he does so in ‘pitchy’ night (I iii 4[B]). In the middle of the play we are told Faustus has flown from Mount Olympus’ top whirling round the world drawn ‘by the strength of yokèd dragons’ necks’ (III 6[B]).154 The pair of dragons is Marlowe’s substitution for the *EFB*’s *Pegasus*.155

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154 In alchemical terms the yoked dragons are ‘philosophical sulphur and philosophical argent vive (mercury), one winged the other wingless’ (Abraham, 59); they quarrel and afterwards ‘are transformed into the harmonious serpents entwined around the caduceus of Mercury’. It is no accident that the printer’s emblem which adorns the title page of the 1592 *English Faust Book* is a caduceus.

155 ‘Nicholas Flamel wrote: Look well upon these two Dragons, for they are the true principles or beginnings of this Phylosophy . . . The first is called Sulphur . . . and the latter Argent-vive. They are the Sunne and Moone of the Mercurial source’ (Abraham, 59).
That stage in the alchemical process where volatile vapours fly around the alembic, is symbolized by Faustus’ flight over the countries of Europe with Mephistopheles, which in the novella he recounts in a letter to his friend Jonas Victor, telling him what he had experienced as he lay on his bed unable to sleep (Jones, l.1091). His flight is a realisation of Hermes telling Tat about god:

Would that you could grow wings and fly up into the air, lifted between earth and heaven to see the solid earth, the fluid seas, the streaming rivers, the pliant air, the piercing fire, the coursing stars and heaven speeding on its axis . . . (V [5])

In Book X, Hermes continues, ‘Those able to drink somewhat more deeply of the vision often fall asleep, moving out of the body toward a sight most fair . . .’ ([5]). In the play we hear about the adventure from the Chorus although there is no suggestion that it might have been a dream (III 1-25[B]).

In Act III Robin and Rafe enter with a cup, specified in the A-Text as a silver goblet. In the EFB, Faustus found two great sacks one full of gold the other full of silver (Jones, 293 ff.). Also in the EFB, we are told that Faustus ‘made the spirit of fair Helena of Greece his paramour and bedfellow’ and together they begat, in an alchemical marriage, Justus Faustus, the philosophical child, both of whom disappeared at the moment of Faustus’ end (Jones, l.2656-2672). Marlowe makes somewhat different use of this episode, reducing the affair to a kiss, but it is mors osculi, the kiss of death, as ‘Her lips suck forth my soul’ (V i 97[B]).

In the A-Text, as Faustus’ end is fast approaching, he sees ‘where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!’ (V ii 78[A]), but he is unable to leap up. ‘Who pulls me down?’ he cries (V ii 77[A]), as he tries in vain to unite his soul with the blood of Christ, symbolised in the pure red gold, the rubedo, the final stage of the work (Abraham, 28). Faustus’ frantic efforts to reach his Saviour, remind the reader of the emblem on the title page, shown earlier because it is ‘At this union, the supreme chemical wedding, the body is resurrected into eternal life’ (Abraham, 174). In the same way that the Emperor identified Faustus with thrice-learned Hermes (IV i 49[B]), the cognoscenti are invited to identify the redemptive blood of Christ with the Hermetic goal of the ascending soul, and Christianity becomes one with Hermetism. If Faustus’ soul failed to unite with the One, the Hermetica has an explanation – Faustus has failed to understand himself:

Poimandres: The one who recognized himself attained the chosen good, but the one who loved the body that came from the error of desire goes on in darkness, errant, suffering sensibly the effects of death.

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156 Nock and Festugière, early editors of the Corpus Hermeticum, identify the origin of this vision as the Dream of Scipio in Cicero’s On the Republic (n.V [5]).
Hermes: Those who lack knowledge, what great wrong have they done . . . that they should be deprived of immortality?

Poimandres: . . . tell me: why do they deserve death who are in death?

Hermes: Because what first gives rise to each person’s body is the hateful darkness, from which comes the watery nature, from which the body was constituted in the sensible cosmos, from which death drinks.

Poimandres: Truly you have understood . . . he who has understood himself advances towards god. (I [19], [20], [21]) (my emphasis)

In Faustus’ last hour, Marlowe expands the Hermetic notion of the soul rising as vapour to condense and descend as dew. When Faustus appeals to the stars that reigned at his nativity, he begs them:

Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
Into the entrails of yon labouring cloud
That when you vomit forth into the air,
My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths
But let my soul mount and ascend to heaven. (V ii 162-166[B])

Later in the same scene as the clock strikes twelve, Faustus cries:

It strikes! It strikes! Now body turn to air,
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell.
O soul be changed into small waterdrops,
And fall into the ocean, ne’er be found. (V ii 184-187[B])

These ‘small waterdrops’ immediately call to mind, for the initiate, the ros or alchemical ‘dew of heaven’ referenced in Dee’s Monas, and reiterate the Hermetic claim, mentioned earlier ‘[T]hat none of the things that are is destroyed, and they are mistaken who say that changes are deaths and destructions’ (VIII). Death is not destruction; it is only change.

If Marlowe discovered this passage in Ovid, he found it again, iterated and expanded in Bruno’s De la causa, principio e uno (46). There, in the Second Dialogue, Teofilo (Bruno) quotes Ovid:

\[ O\ genus\ attonitum\ gelidae\ formidine\ mortis, \]
\[ Quid\ Styga,\ quid\ tenebras\ et\ nomina\ vana\ timetis \]
You people dismayed by fear of icy death, why are you terrified by the
Styx, by shadows and empty names, the stuff of poets’ tales, by the
dangers of a world that doesn’t exist? Our bodies, whether destroyed by
the flames of the funeral pyre, or by slow decay, do not feel any suffering.
Our souls are immortal and are ever received into new homes, where
they live and dwell, when they have left their previous abode. *Omnia
mutantur, nihil interit.* All things change, but nothing dies. (46)\textsuperscript{157}

It is the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, to which Bruno also adhered, that
after death the human soul enters another animal. In Faustus’ last desperate attempts to
save himself, even metempsychosis, in which he does not believe, seems preferable to
the fate that awaits him:

\begin{quote}
O, Pythagoras’ *metempsychosis*, were that true,
This soul should fly from me and I be changed
Into some brutish beast. (V ii 175-177[B])\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

But metempsychosis is not Hermetic teaching. In Book X Hermes Trismegistus tells
Asclepius:

\begin{quote}
The human soul . . . is in a sense demonic and divine. Such a soul
becomes wholly mind after getting free of the body and fighting the fight
of reverence . . . Do you too believe what they all think, my son, that the
soul which has left the body becomes an animal? This is a great error. (X
[19, 20])

He continues:

For the human is a godlike living thing, not comparable to the other
living things of the earth but to those in heaven above, who are called
gods. (X [24])
\end{quote}

In Book I, after a long passage describing the passage of the human after death, rushing
up through the cosmic framework, Hermes tells Tat, ‘This is the final good for those
who have received knowledge: to be made god’ (I [26]).

Faustus’ desire for knowledge and to ‘get a deity’ (I i 62[B]), usually seen as Adam’s
sin or the desire for forbidden knowledge, looks different to the student of the *Corpus
Hermeticum*. For the Hermeticist, Faustus’ soul is at risk for two related reasons:

\textsuperscript{157} Translated by Robert de Lucca, 1998.
\textsuperscript{158} In the prose version Faustus’ end is very different . . . his dismembered corpse is found
on a heap of horse dung, which in alchemy is synonymous with the matter from which the
rejuvenating elixir of the Stone is made (see figure 5). Later ‘Doctor Faustus appeared unto his
servant lively . . . there were certain which saw Doctor Faustus look out of the window by night
as they passed the house’ (Jones, l.2945-9).
firstly, he wanted a short-cut to knowledge of the magic arts which would grant him omnipotence and honour and allow him to perform great feats, and secondly, he spent no time at all in contemplation through which he could achieve the self-knowledge which would put him in touch with the divine within himself and which was regarded as essential preparation for the learned Magus.

In the opening chorus of the play, Marlowe changes ‘the wings of an eagle’ in the EFB (Jones, 1.72) to ‘waxen wings’ which the ‘heavens conspired’ to melt, and references for the audience, the fall of Daedalus’ son, Icarus, who soared too near the sun which melted his wings. But the ‘eagle’ imagery was regularly used by alchemists to symbolize that stage in the alchemical process where the volatile vapours fly around the alembic. It is an image which Pico della Mirandola used in the Oratio de hominis dignitate and Bruno too in his dedication to Rudolf II: ‘we pursue knowledge with simplicity and purity of heart . . . she comes swiftly towards us, cleans our eyes, and as if we were the offspring of eagles, she trains us to gaze on the sun’ (Gatti, 1989, 82). In Book X of the Corpus Hermeticum where Hermes is explaining this to his son Tat, we read:

we are still too weak now for this sight; we are not yet strong enough to open our mind’s eyes and look on the incorruptible, incomprehensible beauty of that good . . . the knowledge of it is divine silence . . . Having illuminated all his mind, this beauty kindles his whole soul and by means of body draws it upward and beauty changes his whole person into essence. (X [5, 6])

But Marlowe’s Icarus image references a sonnet of Bruno’s countryman Tansillo, quoted by Bruno in De Gli Eroici Furori. The poem includes these lines:

Skywards I fly, leaving the world behind me in disdain,
Nor does the sad fate of Daedalus’ son induce me to turn back
But spurs me higher. Well I know that I shall plunge
Towards the earth and die: but what life is worth my death?
I hear my heart’s voice crying through the air . . . ‘Turn back
For too much courage is rarely without pain.’
Fear not such high disaster, I reply. Rend the clouds securely
And die content if heaven such a glorious death decrees.

(Book I, Third Dialogue, Sonnet 16, 1.4-14)159

159 Translated by Hilary Gatti, 1989.
Here, once again is evidence that Marlowe is familiar with Bruno’s thinking. For Ovid’s readers, Icarus’ tragic death is the result of *hubris*. But Gatti has shown that for the Hermeticist, Bruno, the flight is more important than the fall:

Bruno gives an entirely new dimension to the myth, presenting Icarus not in the tragedy of his fall but as the positive hero ready to risk failure and death for a glimpse of new and higher truths. (1989, 86)

Abraham’s research provides an insight into yet another dimension when she reveals that the alchemical process of transmutation of metals was seen as the ‘divine metamorphosis’ and that the fables of Ovid in the famed *Metamorphoses*, such as the story of Icarus ‘were appropriated by the alchemists to express that transmutation’ (129). She cites Ovid’s story of *Diana and Actaeon*, which is the source of one of Faustus’ pranks in the original, and which Marlowe adopts and embellishes in the play. According to Abraham, Diana, the virgin moon goddess of classical mythology was appropriated by the alchemists to symbolize matter cleansed of its blackness and corruption. She quotes from Ruland’s Lexicon:

The dominion of the Moon begins when the Matter changes its colour . . . into that of white . . . they call it *Diana Unveiled* and they say that “happy is the man who has beheld Diana naked, that is to say the Matter at the perfect white stone”. (54)

In the chapbook Faustus merely repays the knight’s scorn by causing the horns of a hart to grow from his forehead. In the A-Text Marlowe develops the incident allowing Faustus to utter the name, Actaeon (IV i 62-63[A]). In the B-Text the episode is fully expanded in the Saxon Bruno scene of doubtful attribution, as the knight is given a name, Benvolio, and Faustus repays his rash dare: ‘An thou bring Alexander . . . I’ll be Actaeon and turn myself to a stag’ (IV i 98-100[B]), by causing the horns of a stag to grow from the knight’s forehead. Abraham explains the alchemical significance of the deer as ‘one of the best known epithets of the alchemical *Mercurius*’ [who is, of course, Hermes]. *Cervus fugitivus*, the fleeing deer, symbolizes Mercurius in his role as the intermediary soul which mediates between spirit and body and unites the body and the spirit of the Stone (Abraham, 32).

The Actaeon myth serves to illustrate a salient point about Patterson’s ‘functional ambiguity’, which is that the same incident could be differently perceived by different members of the audience and some could see all at once. For the spectators, the sight of a man with horns growing out of his head, especially when everyone knew they stood for cuckoldry, is very funny; for the classically educated, the man turned into a stag is
a reminder of Ovid’s poems of metamorphoses.\textsuperscript{160} For those of ‘profound intellect’, referencing Actaeon stimulates discussion of the fate of the human soul. Arguably, as long as Actaeon is alive, he still has his human soul, as the metempsychosis can only occur after his death.

Bruno, however, takes the matter to a whole new level when he interprets Actaeon’s fate in Hermetic terms; the hunter has become the hunted. In \textit{De Gli Eroici Furori}, in the Fourth Dialogue, Tansillo explains:

Actaeon signifies the intellect, intent on the pursuit of divine wisdom and the comprehension of divine beauty;

So Actaeon with those thoughts – those dogs – which hunted outside themselves for goodness, wisdom and beauty, thus came into the presence of the same, and ravished out of himself by so much splendour, he became the prey . . . for having absorbed the divinity into himself it was not necessary to search outside himself for it. (1585, 1889, 66, 68)

As the only English translator of the work, L. Williams, points out, it is this love of the Divine which is for Bruno ‘the highest truth and the highest good’ (20), and it is reached through the intellect and rational thought, ‘not by means of blind faith or supernatural grace, not through irrational and mystical impulse, but by the strength of a reformed intellect’ (19).

When Bruno blamed the world’s political problems on Christianity it was because he felt that the values which the Catholic Church upheld were a perversion of human potential. The Church prized humility, ignorance and unquestioning obedience to the faith. Bruno’s view was that daring and courage, the passion to know and to question, to submit all to the scrutiny of reason in the relentless pursuit of truth were worth any outcome. Faustus is beginning to look, in some respects at least, like a Brunian hero.

\textsuperscript{160} In this respect Benvolio is like Lucius who was turned into \textit{The Golden Ass} in Apuleius’ book, and the reverse of Onorio who was Mercury’s ass turned into a man in Bruno’s \textit{Cabala del cavallo Pegaseo} (1585, 2002, 53). Actaeon and Lucius, like Bottom in \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, retain their human faculties even memory, and oddly, Onorio who was an ass also speaks and feels like a man while remembering his life as an ass.
Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

It is difficult for citizens of western secular democracies in the twenty-first century to imagine a time when ‘God mattered’ as much as He did in sixteenth century England, or to conceive of a people who were so preoccupied with the life to come, unless perhaps we look at a modern theocratic state. It may be salutary to ponder a world where freedom of speech, freedom of worship and freedom of the press were not tolerated because of the mischief they might do, for that was the state of affairs in England in the decade between 1583 and 1593. Seven years earlier, in the Parliament, Peter Wentworth had called for liberty of speech ‘as a safeguard against messages from the Queen prohibiting the discussion . . . of religious matters’ known as the ‘prophesyings’ (Solt, 94). Censorship laws already prevented all matter deemed seditious, blasphemous or obscene from being printed or performed and in 1606, Parliament was to enact more stringent censorship forbidding the use of ‘the holy name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghost, or of the Trinity’ on stage (Wootton, xiv).

I have asked whether Marlowe’s play, Doctor Faustus, might have been a vehicle for contested religious philosophies, and whether Marlowe was familiar with Hermetic thought. In adopting an interdisciplinary approach to this inquiry, I have attempted to give a Renaissance answer to what is essentially a Renaissance question, and place the play within its political, religious and philosophical contexts. This approach has enabled me to demonstrate the extent to which religion permeated every sphere of life in Renaissance England – personal, educational, political and scientific – and to suggest a reason for the frequently noted ambiguity (Hopkins, 67), ‘ideological disjunction’, ‘contrarieties’ (Deats, 2002, 119, 120), conflicting values (Mebane, 118), and general ambivalence in the play.
Patterson’s theory of functional or purposeful ambiguity is useful insofar as it explains how playwrights constructed apparently innocent scenes which could be interpreted by the audience in a way that shed light on a seemingly unrelated but analogous event, as I argued earlier with the Pope Bruno scene. However, the so-called ambiguity in the rest of *Doctor Faustus* is of a different order. Here the orthodox Calvinist theology is explicit and retrievable, and the text functions to reveal the rifts within the theology from different doctrinal points of view. Arnold Hunt’s recent research into how people listened to and remembered sermons reveals that although some sermons were ‘political’, most sermons were theological and preached the approved Calvinist doctrine of predestination, reminding people of the Day of Judgment and of the awful gulf between the elect and the reprobate (244-5). However, both the Queen and Whitgift discouraged the practice of free discussion of the sermon. The Queen particularly disliked the prophesyings ‘because they “schismatically divided” the “vulgar sort” into a variety of “dangerous opinions”’, and she wanted the laity excluded from discussion of Scriptures and disputed doctrinal matters (Solt, 94).161

We have also seen from Haigh’s research that all university students were regularly tested on the three catechisms, Calvin’s *Institutes* and the Thirty-nine Articles. In Chapter Four I found evidence of Marlowe’s close knowledge of the Thirty-nine Articles and his familiarity with Perkins’ memorable sermons. The apparent ‘contrary signals’ in *Doctor Faustus*, and the various critical opinions that Marlowe is trying ‘to subvert orthodoxy’ or the censorship laws, all suggest that Marlowe is presenting the contemporary theological argument *in utramque partem* as Altman has proposed (198). Altman suggests that plays of this type were ‘essentially questions’ and ‘functioned as media of intellectual and emotional exploration’ to move the audience toward ‘some fuller apprehension of truth’ (6). In Altman’s terms the strategy encouraged the leisured individual to explore the ideas in a play by generating the sorts of questions I have suggested earlier, with the aim of ‘intellectual and spiritual enrichment of the citizens of the polity’ (6). Mary Smith, in explicating Altman’s model, even sees ‘playwright and audience [collaborating] in the pursuit of truth’ (137).

However, this urbane and humanistic view does not quite fit *Doctor Faustus*, at least in respect of the great soteriological question of the age: What will happen to my soul and body after death? In answer, Marlowe presents the whole gamut of theological possibilities to his audience as Faustus goes desperately through his options: Will I be forfeit to the Devil? (V ii 7[B]); Will I be tossed by the Furies /On burning forks? (V ii 124[B]); Will I be damned perpetually? (V ii 140[B]); Has God elected me to salvation? If I do/can repent, will my soul be saved? (II iii 79[A]) (II iii 80[B]) (V ii 146[B]); Can Christ’s blood save me? (V ii 151[B]); Will I be changed /into some brutish beast? (V ii 176,177[B]); Will my body turn to air and my soul be changed into small waterdrops/

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161 Quoted from Cardwell, *Documentary Annals* I 430, 422-4
and fall into the ocean? (V ii 184–186[B]). It is here that Pythagoras via Ovid, Epicurus via Lucretius, and Socinius, Bruno and Hermes Trismegistus enter the formerly Christian conversation. I can only imagine that exploring this play in the way that Altman suggests might lead some individuals through the experience of guilt, terror and spiritual desolation to a very inconvenient truth.

In my view, Marlowe provides a different sort of explorative experience from the one Altman has proposed. In Doctor Faustus Marlowe has constructed a play that generates any number of propositions that may be argued or defended in the manner of a university disputation, and it is for this reason that evidence to support both sides of the argument is made available within the play. By definition, such a debate involves groups not individuals. At one level, as I explained earlier, the play pits the orthodox (Calvinist) Church of England doctrine of predestination against the nascent Arminian teaching of free-will. The quaestio is whether God is sovereign or whether the individual can act with autonomy. The arguable propositions generated by the play might include the following: that Man is not responsible for his fate; that faith alone can ensure salvation; that the grace of God is offered only to the elect; that the grace of God is irresistible; that Christ died for all Men; that God is the author of evil as well as good; that hell is a fable; that God will save the penitent sinner; that the soul dies with the body, and so on. The play has the potential to generate any number of debatable propositions and itself provides sufficient evidence for each side of the ensuing theological debates. The universities regularly set such theses for disputations, less in the pursuit of truth and more as an exhibition of logic and rhetoric. I suggest that Marlowe is consciously seeding his dramatisation of the German tale with ideas that will promote this kind of fruitful debate.

Not only does the play provide the cases for both sides of the debate, it also functions as a site that distances the arguer from the argument. Consequently, problematic issues such as Arminianism and the heresy of Arianism that were officially silenced, and other opinions deemed heretical and too dangerous to dispute in relation to a didactic sermon, could be hotly debated in relation to the play. If Marlowe is subverting anything, it is not orthodox theology; it is the official silencing of discussion of issues that affected the lives of men and women in an age where ‘God mattered’. I suggest that it was in the context of just such an academic intellectual debate that Cholmeley overheard the ‘most noble peeres & honorable Counsailors, as the Lord Threasorer the Lord Chamberlyn the Lord Admirall, Sir Robert Cecill’ say ‘that they thinke their soules doe ende vanishe & perishe with their bodies’.162

My appraisal of the early history of the Christian Church, and of some problems in the translation of the Bible, exposed by Erasmus, led me to the view that Marlowe and others with similar doubts about the Trinity, the Incarnation or Virgin birth, Scriptural

162 B L Harleian MS 6848 f.191.
anomalies, and the discrepancies between God’s word and His works in the natural world, were far from being mere ‘scorners’. My research has led me to concur with Lukas Erne and with T.S. Eliot that Marlowe was ‘the most thoughtful’, ‘the most Christian’, the most intensely religiously engaged of dramatists. In my view, based on the evidence, Marlowe’s allegedly blasphemous opinions and idle scoffing arose from a serious, reasoned, scholarly appraisal of Biblical translation. It is possible that an overheard discussion, even a heated discussion, of the flawed translation is the source of Baines’ report that Marlowe cited ‘a number of contraieties out of the Scripture’. Marlowe’s reported zeal for converting others to ‘Atheism’ may have been only a desire to share what he knew about those flaws in the biblical texts, but the reference to ‘any other religion’ in the agent’s report on Cholmeley suggests that it was something more.163

It is clear from the play that Marlowe had a very sound knowledge of the Hermetic treatises and some, possibly all, of the London works of Giordano Bruno who, as Yates’ research has shown, was an eccentric purveyor of his own version of Hermetic thought. By analogy with the introduction of Calvinist theology into the Faust story, it is possible that the allusions to Hermetic magic sourced to Agrippa and Bruno, and references to the Corpus Hermeticum itself which I have found in the play, were deliberate cues for discussion of the theoretical Hermetic treatises. Unlike the salient cues for debate of the current religious controversy, the allusions to Hermeticism were not readily apparent to those not-in-the-know. There were two reasons for secrecy: one is that in the prevailing religious climate, the Hermetic texts appeared to be heretical, but the principal reason in my view is that the teachings were not intended for the vulgar but meant only for initiates.

In the latter years of the sixteenth century the Hermetica was still believed to be an ancient Scripture consonant with what Natural Philosophy was revealing about the natural world. Ficino, Pico, Reuchlin, Giorgio and Agrippa had shown that the Hermetic philosophy was a purer older religion and entirely compatible with Christianity. Even so, Dee, acknowledged as the greatest living proponent of Hermeticism and respected throughout Europe, had difficulty finding a living in England. In 1592, he was hoping for the Mastership of St Cross which, according to Sherman, he was proposing to turn into a ‘scientific academy and think tank’ (18). But he had to defend himself against accusations that he was dabbling in the diabolical arts, which he did in a letter to Whitgift, where he made ‘fervent Protestation for the lawfull, sincere, very faithfull and Christian course of [his] Philosophical studies and exercises’ (see figures 7 & 8). I suggest that Dee’s ‘proposal for a cosmopolitan, non-sectarian, tolerant religion based on Hermetic occultism . . . designed to prepare

163 B L Harleian MS 6848 f.191: ‘their practise is after her Majesties decease to make a kinge among them selves & live accordinge to their own lawes, & this saieth Cholmeley wilbee done easily, because they bee & shortly wilbee by his & his felowes persuasions as many of their opinion as of any other religion.’
mankind for salvation’ (Clulee, 78) was a kind of Christian Hermetism, and arguably that ‘other religion’ mentioned in the report on Cholmeley.

From the evidence reviewed in this paper, it is not conclusive that Marlowe, Ralegh, the ‘School of Night (or Atheism)’ and some of the Privy Council were committed to the religious philosophy of Hermetism; it is risky to label them Hermeticists. Nevertheless, given the evidence of Marlowe’s familiarity with the Hermetic texts and Bruno’s London works, and given Baines’ recommendation to Puckering that ‘all men in Christianity ought to indevor that the mouth of so dangerous a member may be stopped’, I conclude that Marlowe’s allegedly Atheistic opinion, that ‘other religion’ to which he sought to persuade other men with such enthusiasm, was in fact derived from the *Hermetica*. Nor can we exclude the possibility that ‘some great men who in convenient time shalbe named’ were men close to the Court of Elizabeth, such as Ralegh and the earls of Oxford and Northumberland, members of the Privy Council, such as Burghley and Charles Howard the Lord Admiral, even Sackville Lord Buckhurst, and Sir John Puckering.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{164} B L Harleian MS 6848 f.185-186.
Juxtaposing *Doctor Faustus* and those extant documents pertaining to Marlowe where he is represented, or misrepresented, as a dangerous Atheist and an enthusiast for that ‘other religion’, tends to support the theory that the ‘other religion’ may be occult Hermetism, officially vilified as an Atheist heresy. In the *Hermetica* could be found an ancient religion teaching universal harmony and toleration which opened a prospect of a world where Man was free to discover the truth about God’s marvellous creation and all men could live together in peace and brotherly love as Christ had taught. Officially, the Catholic Church saw some of the teachings as heresy; officially, even in England, religious toleration was regarded with deep suspicion. Privately, secretly, men of influence, the rumoured School of Night, discussed Hermeticism, and found ways of spreading the knowledge, arguably by means of innocent-seeming plays, such as *Doctor Faustus*. Bruno’s visit may have proved the catalyst, but I suspect Dee’s knowledge and influence was more pervasive and lasting.

This investigation unexpectedly shed some light on the provenance of the Spies *Historia (SH)*. Firstly, my analysis of some mistranslations from the German to English tends to support the hypothesis of several scholars that some parts of the *Faustbuch* had been translated from a Latin version. Secondly, through its links to Bruno: by virtue of the

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165 Title page of *Generall Calendars* by George Hartgill, 1594, from Adam McLean’s Gallery of Alchemical Images AST05 www.alchemywebsite.com/amcl_astronomical_material01.html
Faustbuch’s having been written in Wittenberg at the time when Bruno was happily lecturing at the University of Wittenberg; by virtue of Greene’s association of Bruno, ‘the mad preest of the sun’ with Marlowe’s dramatisation of the novella; and by virtue of the fact that the B-Text of that dramatisation carries a scene with a character named Bruno who is sent to the very prison in Rome where Giordano Bruno spent his last years.

My examination of the sources of the Faustbuch and Marlowe’s play suggests that Shakespeare also made use of the Clementine Recognitions in The Comedy of Errors, and of a chapter (33) from the EFB in The Merchant of Venice (see Appendix VI). I have suggested that the Comedy of Errors may be interpreted allegorically as Bruno’s vision of the divided Christian Church reconciled after many misunderstandings in the mother church in Rome. As an alchemical or Hermetic allegory, Comedy proceeds from the problems caused by the violent storm that separated the twins as recounted by Egeon, to the ending that unites them all. Similarly, The Tempest may be seen as an alchemical or Hermetic allegory and Prospero, whose very name is a cognate of Faustus, first causes then transforms the roar and blackness of the storm into harmonious reconciliation. The task that lies ahead is to investigate the extent of Shakespeare’s knowledge of Hermetic thought and whether other plays and poems of the period conceal hints of alchemy, magic and knowledge of Cabala that may have served to spread or to prompt discussion of Hermeticism.

To conclude, even a small part of the available evidence pertaining to an interest in Hermeticism amongst the overlapping worlds of the Court, the Privy Council, the ‘School of Night’ so-called, and the theatre, suggests that a knowledge of Hermeticism and a better understanding of Bruno might, in the words of Frances Yates, ‘illuminate that core of darkness and mystery which lies at the heart of the Elizabethan period’ (c.1979, 110).

Terminat hora diem; terminat Author opus.

\[\text{From an unpublished typescript. I am indebted to Dr Claudia Wedepohl of the Warburg Institute London, for access to the WIA.}\]
Appendices

Appendix I

The scholarly debate about texts, authorship and dates

The first problem to acknowledge in any discussion of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* is that there are two plays: the A-text, which was published in 1604, and the longer B-text, published in 1616. Both texts are attributed to ‘Ch. Marl’ or ‘Mar’. Scholars have long debated the authenticity of the two extant texts, their authorship, and their dates. For nearly two hundred years scholars have favoured first one and then the other as the original.¹ Either the B-Text is the authentic original and the 1604 publication, the A-Text, is an abbreviated mutilated version of it – possibly a memorial reconstruction or even a pirated version (Boas, 1932; Kirschbaum, 1946; Greg, 1950, 29; John Jump, 1962) or the shorter A-Text is the original, to which some scenes were later added by others (Bowers, 1973; Kuriyama, 1975; Ormerod and Wortham, 1985; Wootton, 2005).² Michael Keefer found passages in the B-Text that were clearly superior to parallel passages in the A-Text and hypothesised an underlying manuscript which preceded the 1604 edition (2007, 68). For a time editors conflated the two texts, but they are now treated as separate plays. Current scholarship argues for the superiority, authenticity and primacy of the A-Text.

As a result, the Pope Saxon Bruno scenes in the B-Text, are usually explained as the ‘adicyones in Docter Frostes’ for which Rowley and Birde were paid £4 on 22 of November 1602 (Henslowe, 228). Another possibility is that they are the scenes for

¹ As early as 1814, Dilke and others preferred the B-text while in 1850 Dyce and others preferred the A-text as being closer to Marlowe’s own hand.

² ‘The A-text is certainly the text to use if we want to know what Marlowe expected to see and hear on the stage, but it is not the text that left the hands of Marlowe and his collaborators’ (Wootton, xxxii).
which Thomas Dickers (Dekker) was paid on ‘20 of Desembr 1597’ ‘for adycyons to Fostus twentie shellinges’ (Henslowe, 71). In 1597 the scene could have functioned to convey topical information about Bruno’s whereabouts and to offer some hope that he might yet be miraculously spirited out of Rome. The reference to Dekker is to be found in J. Payne Collier’s 1845 edition of Henslowe’s diary. W.W. Greg, who examined the original diary, was of the opinion that the entry was ‘a modern forgery’ (1904, I: 38), and Bakeless agreed with him (I: 194) that it had been ‘inserted [by Collier] in a conveniently blank space among the genuine entries’ (I: 196). In a note on the entry Greg commented ‘[t]he form desembr alone would make the entry suspicious. C [Collier] has Fostus for fostus’ (n.13, 222).3 Even though Greg noted that a number of different hands were used in the diary and that sometimes the same hand used more than one style, he nevertheless judged about ten entries to be forgeries or probable forgeries. Without access to the original papers it is not possible to confirm or disconfirm Greg’s opinion of the Dekker entry.

It is generally agreed that Marlowe found his material in an English translation of the Spies Historia – the German prose novella about a magician called Doctor Faustus. However, the earliest known English translation of the chapbook, by one ‘P.F.’ Gent, is dated to 1592, which led to the conclusion that Doctor Faustus was one of Marlowe’s later plays. Greg favoured this opinion and dated the play to 1592 (1950, 2-5). John Jump (1962, xii) and Irving Ribner (xxiii-iv) agreed with Greg. Kocher, however, has long argued for an earlier date, either 1588 or 1589 for both the English Faust Book (EFB) and Marlowe’s play (1943, 540). The opinion is now shared by Kuriyama (1975, 171; 2002, xvi), Bevington and Rasmussen (1993, 1) and, following the detailed translation and comparison by Jones (1994, 53), also by Thomas and Tydeman (1994, 172), Wootton (2005, xi) and Keefer (2007, 60). The debate over an earlier publication date for the EFB was satisfactorily answered in 2001 by R.J. Fehrenbach who found the book listed in the inventory of possessions of an Oxford scholar who died in 1589 (Wootton, xxvi). The early date for the play is further supported by oblique references to the play by Greene, and by Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Nashe and others which indicate that Marlowe’s play was on the boards at least as early as the beginning of 1588 (Wootton, xxvi-xxvii).

3 Even so, on page 29 of the Diary an apparently authentic entry lists: ‘R[ceived ] of Wmsley the 14 of desemb 1594 xijd’.
Appendix II

May 5, 1593: Dutch Church Libel

Ye strangers yt doe inhabite in this lande
Note this same writing doe it vnderstand
Conceit it well for savagard of your lyves
Your goods, your children, & your dearest wives
Your Machiavellian Marchant spoyles the state,
Your vsery doth leave vs all for deade
Your Artifex, & craftesman works our fate,
And like the Jewes, you eate us vp as bread
The Marchant doth ingross all kinde of wares
Forestall’s the markets, whereso’eere he goe’s
Sends forth his wares, by Pedlers to the faires,
Retayle’s at home, & with his horrible showes: Vndoeth thousands
In Baskets your wares trott up & downe
Carried the streets by the country nation, You are intelligencers to the state & crowne
And in your hartes doe wish an alteracion,
You transport goods, & bring vs gawds good store
Our Leade, our Vittaile, our Ordenance & what nott
That Egips plagues, vext not the Egyptians more
Then you doe vs; then death shall be your lotte
Noe prize comes in but you make claime therto
And every merchant hath three trades at least,
And Cuthrote like in selling you vndoe
vs all, & with our store continually you feast: We cannot suffer long.
Our pore artificers doe starve & dye
For yt they cannot now be sett on worke
And for your worke more curious to the ey[
In Chambers, twenty in one house will lurke,
Raysing of rents, was never knowne before
Living farre better then at native home
And our pore soules, are cleane thrust out of dore
And to the warres are sent abroade to rome,
To fight it out for Fraunce & Belgia,
And dy like dogges as sacrifice for you
Expect you therefore such a fatall day
Shortly on you, & yours for to ensewe: as never was seene.
Since words nor theates nor any other thinge
canne make you to avoyd this certaine ill
Weele cutte your throtes, in your temples praying
Not paris massacre so much blood did spill
As we will doe iust vengeance on you all
In counterfeitinge religion for your flight
When 't'is well knowne, you are loth, for to thrall
your coyne, & you as countryes cause to flight
With Spanish gold, you all are infected
And with yt gould our Nobles wink at feats
Nobles said I? nay men to be reiected,
Upstarts yt enioy the noblest seates
That wound their Countries brest, for lucre[s] sake
And wrong our gracious Queene & Subieccts good
By letting strangers make our harts to ake
For which our swords are whet, to shed their blood
And for a truth let it be understooed/Fly, Flye,& never returne.

per. Tamberlaine
Appendix III

Excerpt from *The Fall of the Late Arrian*, B L Harleian MS 6848, f.188 (emphasis added).
Appendix IV

*Remembrances of Marlowe from Cholmeley. The agent’s second report, B L Harleian MS 6848, f.191* (emphasis added).
Appendix V

A sample of errors revealing ‘P.F.’s’ unfamiliarity with German

Several scholars, notably Georg Witkowski and later Robert Petsch (in Haile, 351), Harold Jantz (143, 147) and John Henry Jones (in Empson, 1987, 31) have hypothesised that parts of the Spies Historia (SH) and the Wolfenbüttel Historia (WH) derive from a common Latin exemplar. Their opinion is based partly, but not entirely, on the preface to the Wolfenbüttel edition:

This translation of Doctor Faustus and his godless ideas is the result of your repeated request to put the Latin into German, which, so far as I am aware, has not been done.

The following examples, 1-3, provide some linguistic evidence to support the notion that a Latin source existed and was available to ‘P.F.’. The chapter and line references below are all from Jones’ 1994 edition of The English Faust Book.

1. Jones was amused by ‘P.F.’’s translation of die Sprosse, meaning the rung of a ladder as holly wand (in Empson, 205), noting that it also means a point or prong (234). ‘P.F.’ may of course have gone to the dictionary and misread die Sprosse as der Sproβ, a shoot or sprout. Or holly wand may be his translation of the Latin asser, asseris m. a stake or pole for carrying a litter. Since the sticks in question are each to carry a pair of students to the Bishop of Salzburg’s cellar, wand which suggests something long and flexible and has a connotation of magic is arguably more imaginative than die Sprosse (Chapter 41, l.2214).

2. Ich wolte gerne deß Himmels entberen, wann ich nur des ewigen strafe köndt entfliehen. I would readily dispense with heaven if only I might escape eternal punishment (Chapter 61, l.2783, 4).

‘P.F.’ translates this as Ah, that I could carry the heavens on my shoulders, so that there were time at last to quit me of this everlasting damnation!

Jones suggests that ‘P.F.’ has translated entberen as bear and then transposed it to carry. If however the German entberen, to do without, was a translation of the Latin carere, to be cut off from something, ‘P.F.’ may simply have mistranslated carere as carry and added on my shoulders to complete the sense. The implication is that the translator’s Latin is little better than his German.

3. By far the most intriguing mistranslation occurs in connection with a piece of stage-business between Faustus and the Pope.
The German text reads:  

. . . blieβ D. Faustus ihm in das Angesicht.

(he made the sign of the cross before him, and whenever he did this) Doctor Faustus blew in his face (Chapter 22, l.1353).

But ‘P.F.’ offers: Faustus could suffer it no longer but up with his fist and smote the Pope on the face (l.1353).

And Marlowe gives the following Stage Directions:

In Text A, _Faustus hits him a box of the ear_ (III i 82[A]).

In Text B, _Faustus gives the Pope a blow on the head_ (III ii 87[B]),

which is clearly more effective on stage than blowing a puff of air in the Pope’s face.

The translation of the German _blasen, to blow, as schlagen, to hit_ is so unlikely an error, requiring the translator to confuse _blies_ meaning ‘blew’ with _schlug_ meaning ‘smote’, that I offer the possibility that ‘P.F.’, the inept translator, was working from Latin and confused _afflaret, blow_ (from Lat. _afflare, to blow_) with _afflixit, struck_ (from Lat. _affligere, to strike_), while the German translator may have reached a different conclusion or been in a position to have his translation checked by the author.

In addition, Jones identified a number of ‘P.F.’s’ mistranslations, indicating the translator’s unfamiliarity with written German, including most of the following ‘howlers’ (Empson, 1987, 205-7).

4. Deutsch. German

_Lords and nobles of this our Dutch nation_ (Chapter 21, l.1082)

‘P.F’ translates _Deutsch_ as _Dutch_, which suggests a reason for Marlowe’s English Faustus promising to ‘chase the Prince of Parma from our land’ (I i 92[B]). The Prince was Spanish Governor of the Netherlands 1579-1592 and in 1588 was poised to support the invasion of England by the Armada.

5. _Wessen darf ich mich trösten? In whom may I place my trust?_ (Chapter 61, l.2789)

‘P.F.’ reads this as _Wissen darf ich nicht trösten_ and produces: _Knowledge dare I not trust_. This suggests that he does not recognise _wessen_ as the genitive case of the relative pronoun nor _durf_ as the irregular modal _dürfen_. He will not find either word in the dictionary in the form used here; looking up _wessen_ has led him to _wissen_. One must conclude that a translator with so slight a grasp of the grammar of the target language is over confident or desperate for money. Even so, in the context, the choice of ‘Knowledge’ makes good sense.
6. Vermeissenheit, presumptuousness ‘P.F.’ gives as forgetfulness, mistaking the word for Vergessenheit (Chapter 60, l.2751).

7. In other places ‘P.F.’ gets tangled up between the Sun and the Moon. This is because in Latin, Sun solus is masculine while Moon luna is feminine, as it is also in astrology; English follows suit. But in German die Sonne is feminine and referred to by the pronoun sie, while der Mond is masculine and referred to as er. ‘P.F.’, however, translates literally, for example, trying to explain the appearance of a comet: ‘then is the sun so strong that he taketh away all the light of the moon, in such sort that he [‘er ‘i.e. der Mond, the Moon, should be translated as ‘she’] is as red as blood’ (Chapter 24, l.1751-2) (Jones, n.1751).

From my examination of the EFB and the SH, I concur with Jones that ‘P.F.’ misread the text because he was working at speed and reading in a bad light, or from a bad font, or both, added to which his mastery of written German was so limited that he sometimes misread the German dictionary, guessing at an English cognate when in doubt. Sometimes the difference between the EFB and the SH occurs because they offer a different but correct translation of the same Latin word, the German translator tending to the literal and the English toward the whimsical. On the whole, the evidence here tends to support the theory that parts of the Faustbuch (SH) and (WH) derive from a common Latin source which was also available to the English translator.
Appendix VI

*Shakespeare, Bruno and Hermetic thought*

In the Introduction to his translation of *Lo Spaccio*, Arthur Imerti briefly examined Bruno’s only comedy *Il Candelao*, published in Paris in 1582. Imerti recorded that in his *Vita di Giordano Bruno* (1921), Vincenzo Spampanato had noted that the ‘themes, characters and situations of *Il Candelao* . . . had a significant influence upon such writers as Molière and Shakespeare’ (17). In addition to some ten plots in Molière’s plays, Spampanato found ‘character, scenes, speeches and ideas’ in *Il Candelao* and also in *Dialoghi metafisici e morali* (that is, the two volumes of Bruno’s six Italian works written in London) which ‘seem to remind us in some way’ of *Love’s Labour’s Lost, As You Like It, Cymbeline, King Lear, Macbeth, The Life and Death of King Richard II* and *Hamlet* (18). Hilary Gatti too has explored the influence of Bruno’s works on *Hamlet* as well as on *Doctor Faustus* (1989).

In an Appendix to his translation of *The English Faust Book*, John Henry Jones noted ‘Parallels with [the prose pamphlet] *The Most Famous History of the Learned Fryer Bacon*, both with *Doctor Faustus* and also with *The Tempest* (256-8). The implication is that Marlowe and Shakespeare consulted the same sources. Further evidence that they had access to the same books comes from the *Clementine Recognitions* where the story of the twins Faustinus and Faustus (aka Niceta and Aquila), reunited after many years with their mother in Ephesus, resonates with *The Comedy of Errors*. The latter play also yields a Brunian interpretation if the shipwrecked Antipholus twins, each the lover of the other, reunited with their mother the Abbess, are seen to symbolise the violent separation of Catholic and Protestant reunited at last in the arms of the mother church. When Bruno returned to Italy it was partly in the hope of persuading the Pope that Hermeticism could unite the Christian confessions within a greatly altered Catholic church reformed in accordance with Christ’s message of brotherly love.

Marlowe, as we know, made no use of that particular episode in the *Recognitions*. But there are several eminently stageable episodes in the prose novella which Marlowe chooses to omit, but which Shakespeare seems to know. One of these tells how Doctor Faustus, entertaining his friends at an Ash Wednesday banquet, tricked them

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4 As far as I know, Spampanato’s biography is not yet in English translation. The best and most recent translation of *Il Candelao* was done at the Australian National University by Gino Moliterno and published in Ottawa by Dovehouse Editions in 2000.

5 This prose pamphlet is also a source of Greene’s play *The Honorable History of Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay*. 
into believing they had lost their heads, then ‘made that everyone had an ass’s head
on with great and long ears’ (Jones, l.2308). Bottom is similarly metamorphosed
in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Chapter 33 of the EFB tells ‘How Doctor Faustus
borrowed money of a Jew and laid his own leg to pawn for it’.

Doctor Faustus . . . was minded to play some merry jest to deceive a Jew,
desiring one of them to lend him some money for a time. The Jew was
content and lent Faustus threescore dollars for a month, which time being
expired, the Jew came for his money and interest, but Doctor Faustus was
never minded to pay the Jew again [and] made him this answer: ‘Jew, I
have no money, nor know I how to pay thee but notwithstanding, to the
end that thou may be contented, I will cut off a limb of my body, be it
arm or leg, and the same shalt thou have in pawn for thy money yet with
this condition, that when I shall pay thee thy money again, then thou shalt
give me my limb.’(l.2031-2041)

Faustus’ conjuring tricks the Jew who is eventually obliged to give Faustus ‘60 dollars
more to be rid of him’ (l.2063-4). Despite the obvious differences, the story arguably
provides the seed of the episode between Antonio and Shylock where Antonio,
temporarily embarrassed, borrows three thousand ducats from Shylock who demands a
pound of his flesh as surety for the loan in The Merchant of Venice.

The influence of Marlowe on Shakespeare is often remarked (Riggs, 283), although it
must be acknowledged that the direction of that influence is not always clear (Riggs,
284). Robert Logan has devoted an entire book to that influence, discussing in detail
the ‘Imprints of Doctor Faustus on Macbeth and The Tempest’ (2007, 197-229). The
question remains whether and how much Shakespeare knew about magic, alchemy
and the vision of the Hermeticists of a peaceful reconciled world. Arthur Versluis,
in his book Shakespeare the Magus, noting that ‘students of hermetic knowledge
. . . often overlook the ways that this knowledge is embedded in literature’ claims
that ‘to understand the works of . . . Shakespeare truly . . . one must understand the
magic symbolism that infuses them’ (6). Yates declares that Shakespeare knew about
magic from his earliest plays: ‘magic as a moral and reforming movement, magic
as the instrument for uniting opposing religious opinions in a general movement of
Hermetic reform’ (1975, 87). Further, in an unpublished typescript of the preface to her
translation of The Ash Wednesday Supper, Frances Yates wrote:

I should say that it is because we have neglected Bruno that we
have failed to understand some of our greatest literature. He can
illuminate that core of darkness and mystery which lies at the heart
of the Elizabethan period, the cause of which is that a large section of
the population, including most of the great intellects of the day, was
profoundly dissatisfaction by those changes which are called ‘Renaissance’
and ‘Reformation’ and by the policy of wholesale destruction followed
by sustained tyranny with which they were carried out. Bruno gives
expression to the voice of the Catholic minded individual, the old Catholic mind of the old England and the old Oxford – a voice which, in spite of every effort made to stifle it, yet managed to express itself in mathematics and in symbolic poetry. Bruno can explain the symbols to us. The works – properly understood – of this original and amazing man are the key which will unlock Shakespeare. (c.1979, 110)

In this thesis I have attempted to discover evidence of Hermetic thinking in Marlowe’s play. The enticing prospect of discovering Hermetic knowledge in Shakespeare’s plays lies ahead.
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Ein Histori vom Kaiser Carolus Quinto.


Einsam wider das geplagt und von seiner Zeit.