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# Faustus' England: Marlowe's Representation of Individualism and Spiritual Authority in Elizabethan England in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus

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FAUSTUS' ENGLAND

Marlowe's Representation of Individualism and Spiritual Authority in Elizabethan England in  
*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus.*

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Professor McGlynn

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The first performances of *Doctor Faustus* are dated to 1588, which indicates that Marlowe wrote this piece during a period of intense religious turmoil in England.<sup>1</sup> *Doctor Faustus* is a subversive commentary on the repressive religious climate of Marlowe's England which, at the core of its narrative, exposes the fears of the devout during this period through the central ideological struggle between individual agency and spiritual affairs. This ideological struggle manifests in Faustus' "crisis of conscience" which represents the spiritual anxiety experienced by Marlowe's devout peers. Marlowe explores the ethical issues of the leading doctrine of predestination—the Calvinist doctrine—by presenting Faustus' fear of predestined damnation as the catalyst for the central spiritual conflict of the piece. The diabolical pact marks the start of Faustus' crisis and is analogous to the Oath of Supremacy, which enables Marlowe to expose the fear of the devout—through Faustus—that loyalty to the Queen was at the expense of their salvation. Faustus' chief aim is to subvert his predestined fate by exercising control over his spiritual destiny, and Marlowe uses this to explore the widespread concern of English Protestants over whether an individual's actions impacted their spiritual destiny. Marlowe's depiction of Faustus' navigation of his crisis raises questions about whether Faustus' actions are the result of his individual choices or, rather, a manifestation of his predestined fate. This exploration of theological principles, through Faustus' narrative, enables Marlowe to challenge the purpose of repentance in the doctrine of predestination. Regardless of the doctrine of predestination, Marlowe employs the familiar dramatic convention of a "fall from grace" to demonstrate that Faustus' actions have immediate moral repercussions. Marlowe presents Faustus as the embodiment of the Elizabethan notions of "faithless men" and his struggle is representative of the popular theological conceptions of the devil's temptation. *Doctor Faustus* adapts the standard

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Keefer, ed., *Doctor Faustus: A 1604-Version Edition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Broadview Editions Series (Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2007), 60.

morality play format in order to present the narrative in a manner which was both familiar to the Elizabethan audience while also spared from censorship. This stylistic choice enabled Marlowe to examine and freely criticize the religious beliefs and institutions of his time, through Faustus' crisis and other narrative devices. The narrative elements of *Doctor Faustus*—Faustus' ultimate fate, the consequences of his choices, and the possibility for his redemption—all come second to Marlowe's subversive commentary on the religious climate of Elizabethan England.

The notion of a “crisis of conscience” is central to the tensions of both Marlovian England and *Doctor Faustus*. Marlowe's depiction of Faustus' crisis of faith is inspired by the spiritual crises experienced by devout Elizabethans resulting from their submission to the religious authority of the Crown. Under Elizabeth I, the Crown implemented measures to ensure religious unity which increasingly subverted the notion that an individual's conscience dictated to whom they owed religious allegiance. In Marlowe's England, loyalty to the Crown became increasingly tied to the recognition of “the Queen's supremacy in spiritual matters” as the leader of the Church of England.<sup>2</sup> Thus, religious dissent was seen not only as a spiritual matter, but also as an act of political disloyalty. In the period of the 1580s-90s, parliament issued a number of measures which targeted religious dissenters, such as Catholics and radical Protestant reformers.<sup>3</sup> These acts signal a period of intense repression of religious beliefs, which in turn inspired a “crisis of conscience” in the Elizabethan public. The measure at the center of this crisis was the creation of the Elizabethan Oath of Supremacy. Williams argues that, by having subjects swear an oath which recognized the Queen's “supremacy in temporal and spiritual matters,” the “conscience, and the eternal damnation that accompanied not obeying [the oath's]

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<sup>2</sup> Edwin Owen Williams, “Trials of Conscience: Criminalizing Religious Dissidence in Elizabeth England,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Davidson, “Christopher Marlowe and Atheism,” in *Christopher Marlowe and English Renaissance Culture*, edited Darryll Grantley and Peter Roberts (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1996): 129-47.

dictates” ensured the obedience of her subjects. He elaborates, however, that the act of requiring subjects to swear an oath to demonstrate their obedience was at risk of being an act of “dissimulation due to the coercion imposed by its requirement.”<sup>4</sup> In the play, Faustus’ pact with the devil does not fully extirpate his faith, and Marlowe portrays Faustus’ wavering allegiance to the devil as symptomatic of these uneasy religious convictions in Elizabethan England. Just as Faustus was torn between his desire for salvation and his pact to the devil, the “crisis of conscience” experienced by many Elizabethan subjects left them torn between the doctrine that they believed would lead to their salvation and their loyalty to their monarch. This repressive climate shaped Marlowe’s attitude toward religion, and he explores the theological beliefs and issues of the Elizabethan period through Faustus’ own “crisis of conscience.”

The first component of Faustus’ “crisis of conscience” is his fear of eternal damnation. Marlowe disguises the debates of his time surrounding the correct Protestant doctrine of predestination in Faustus’ lamentations over the possibility of his salvation. Marlowe uses Faustus’ crisis to explore the ethical issues of salvation according to Lutheran and Calvinist theologies. In the early period of the English Reformation, Lutheran theology was the dominant Protestant doctrine.<sup>5</sup> Luther’s doctrine of salvation relied on his interpretation of Romans 3:28. He determined that “justification by faith” (“*sola fide*”) would lead to salvation, and not by way of any of man’s works.<sup>6</sup> However, Swiss Protestantism quickly emerged as the dominant theology during the Reformation. Archbishop Cranmer, who was instrumental in the shaping of the Church of England, countered the Lutheran stance.<sup>7</sup> He argued that if man is justified by

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<sup>4</sup> Williams, “Trials of Conscience,” 17, 18.

<sup>5</sup> John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith and Time: Christian Humanism and Renaissance Literature*, McGill-Queen’s Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), electronic edition, 139.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Sir Geoffrey R. Elton, ed., “Thomas Cranmer,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica Academic*.

simply having faith, then this fundamentally undermined Christ's role in salvation.<sup>8</sup> Cranmer's counter-argument reflects the Calvinist stance that "[j]ustification is not the office of man, but of God; for man cannot justify himself by his own works." Calvinism continued to flourish in England and, by Marlowe's time, "there was hardly one of the Elizabethan bishops who was not a Calvinist."<sup>9</sup> Calvinist doctrine dictated that salvation was predestined for some, and the rest (the "reprobate") were left to fall as a result of the inherent sinfulness of man's nature.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the English Calvinist "could never be sure that he was actually in the 'estate of grace.'"<sup>11</sup> In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe adapted the German Faust legend to reflect these religious anxieties of the English. Faustus' greatest fear reflects the "most intimate fear of sixteenth-century Protestants: that of predestined damnation to eternal torment."<sup>12</sup> Marlowe explores the ethical issues surrounding the Calvinist doctrine of salvation through Faustus' narrative and questions the possibility of individual agency in regard to destiny.

The second component of Faustus' "crisis of conscience" is his obligation to uphold his pact with Lucifer. The intention and execution of the act of Faustus' pact with the devil is similar to the act of taking the Oath of Supremacy, and Marlowe uses this association to imply Faustus' spiritual fate. As previously stated, the Oath of Supremacy was required by all English subjects in order to demonstrate their recognition of the temporal and spiritual supremacy of Elizabeth.<sup>13</sup> The ritual required that the individual took the oath while making physical contact with a sacred object, such as "upon the Evangelist" (i.e. the object which contained the doctrine of salvation). This corporal oath forced many individuals to compromise their salvation in a demonstration of

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<sup>8</sup> Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time*, 139.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Debra K. Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), electronic edition, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Keefer, ed., *Doctor Faustus*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, "Trials of Conscience," 16-7.

their loyalty to the Queen.<sup>14</sup> Further, if the individual was caught disobeying the terms of this oath (i.e. practicing an unsanctioned religion), they faced charges of treason, and even execution.<sup>15</sup> The diabolical pact in *Doctor Faustus* replicates the procedure of this oath. Faustus pledges his allegiance to Lucifer, the “king” of hell, by writing him a “deed” in his own blood (II. i. 54-60). The pact is significant as it is at this point in the narrative that Faustus appears to have sealed his fate. By entering into a pact with the devil, Faustus entrusted his soul to the devil and compromises his chance for salvation. According to Elizabethan Christian belief, the only possible fate for Faustus’ soul now is damnation.<sup>16</sup> The language of this scene is equally significant in regard to Faustus’ spiritual future. Faustus calls on his blood to be “propitious for [his] wish” (II. i. 58). The use of the word “propitious” alludes to Christ’s own sacrifice in propitiation for man’s sins; thus, the allusion between Christ’s sacrifice and the blood in this scene establishes the latter as a physical embodiment of God’s grace.<sup>17</sup> While the English subjects swore their loyalty on the doctrine of their salvation (“*sola scriptura*”), Faustus’ actions symbolically abjure this divine grace. This realization, as well as the fear of the alternative unknown predestined fate, contributes to Faustus’ “crisis of conscience.” Unlike the English subjects who risked punishment for recanting their oaths, Marlowe leaves the interpretation of both the diabolical and divine consequences of Faustus’ recantation open, with the implication that Faustus’ sense of obligation to uphold this pact is purely psychological.<sup>18</sup> The act of making the pact enables Marlowe to comment on the religious climate of his time, and Marlowe

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<sup>14</sup> Williams, “Trials of Conscience,” 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 201.

<sup>17</sup> Keefer, ed., *Doctor Faustus*, 107.

<sup>18</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 201, 210.

examines the ongoing spiritual consequences of this event in relation to the fear and beliefs of his devout peers.

Faustus' fear of damnation inspires him to try to subvert his unknown predestined fate. The purpose of Faustus's pact with the devil and acquisition of supernatural powers is to allow him to take control of his destiny. Marlowe continues to address the popular notion of predestination and, through Faustus' narrative, reflects upon the possibility for individual agency over one's spiritual destiny. The piece opens with Faustus' reflection on all the branches of scholastic study that he has mastered, and this leads to his criticism of the Scriptures. Paul Kocher states that this monologue presents the moment where Faustus "cast[s] off scholastic shackles" and becomes a true renaissance thinker. This speech demonstrates Faustus' belief that "man's nature has been warped by original sin," and thus, he is critical of "a dogma which consigns all men inevitably to damnation."<sup>19</sup> In an effort to liberate himself from the doctrine of predestination, Faustus rejects the Scriptures and turns instead to necromantic works (I. i. 71-4). Faustus believes that the mastery of magical knowledge will make him as powerful as God, thereby freeing him from his predestined fate.<sup>20</sup> Marlowe explores the "essential irony of sin" in this monologue. In his desire to become as powerful as God, Faustus turns to the antithesis of God—the devil.<sup>21</sup> The irony here is that Faustus' efforts to liberate himself from his fear of predestined damnation cause him to entrust his soul to the devil; however, Marlowe leaves no indication of the impact of this decision on Faustus' ultimate spiritual fate. In the same manner that he is ambiguous about the possible outcome of Faustus' penitence, Marlowe is equally

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<sup>19</sup> Kocher is referencing Faustus' speech in I. i. 39-49; Paul Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc.), 105-6.

<sup>20</sup> This act of hubris will be explored more in-depth in the context of the Elizabethan attitudes toward and perceived spiritual implications of this action in a later paragraph—I mention it here to set up the analysis of Marlowe's commentary.

<sup>21</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 201.



ambiguous regarding Faustus' fate, both predestined or otherwise, in order to explore the moral and theological implications of his actions.

Marlowe explores not only the amount of control that Faustus is able to exhibit over his destiny, but also, conversely, whether Faustus' actions are truly the result of his individual choices. Marlowe is ambiguous about Faustus' ultimate fate in order to question the purpose of repentance in regard to predestination. Marlowe does not indicate that Faustus' fate is decided prior to the final scene. This is intentional as it allows Marlowe to invert the fear of sixteenth century English Protestants; rather than present Faustus as a virtuous man who has been predestined to damnation, Marlowe explores the implications of repentance and predestination for a sinful man, in order to question the purpose of repentance in general. The diabolical pact is the moment when Faustus abjures the grace of God; however, the ongoing intervention of the Good Angel suggests that Faustus's fate has not been sealed by this deed, but rather that the opportunity to repent remains (II. iii. 80). Whether this repentance will result in salvation, or simply forgiveness, is not entirely clear.<sup>22</sup> By leaving this ambiguous, Marlowe can explore two possible fates for Faustus, as well as the role he had in deciding his fate, in relation to the theological concerns of his time. The first option is that the possibility for salvation is ever present—all Faustus must do is repent and be saved. This is indicated by the exchange between Faustus and the angels after the pact has been signed where Faustus questions whether he is beyond saving. The Bad Angel threatens Faustus with an attack by the devils if he repents, but the Good Angel counters this by telling him to “[r]epent, and [the devils] shall never raze thy skin” (II. iii. 82). The significance of this line is that it suggests that Faustus is not predestined to encounter the devils again. In this scenario, Marlowe implies that if Faustus made the decision to

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<sup>22</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 219.

repent, he would not only be forgiven for his sins, but also saved by God. For the English Protestants, this demonstrates the “ideal case”: Faustus’ decision to have faith will lead him to salvation. Marlowe, however, presents a second possibility which more closely reflects the theology of late renaissance England.

The second possibility is in contrast to this idea of individual agency in spiritual affairs. Marlowe reflects the Calvinist theology of his day by presenting the possibility that Faustus was predestined to damnation and that his repeated inability to repent is the result of the impossibility of his salvation. Even in the case of predestined damnation, God wants the reprobate to repent, but he does not will it; therefore, since the reprobate has not received God’s grace, he cannot repent.<sup>23</sup> In Faustus’ case, the interventions of the Good Angel and the Old Man represent this divine call to repent, and Faustus’ inability to do so reflects the fact that he is not a recipient of God’s grace.<sup>24</sup> Further, according to Calvinist theology,<sup>24</sup> the damning actions of the reprobate are both the result of their inherently sinful nature, as well as the manifestation of their predestined damnation.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Faustus’ decision to abjure God’s grace by signing a pact with the devil is presented not as an exhibition of his spiritual agency, but rather as consequence for never having been subject to God’s grace. Faustus’ path in life inverts the notion of living a virtuous life in spite of one’s destiny, and this narrative choice allows Marlowe to explore the theological implications of predestination in order to question the purpose of repentance. Through Faustus’ crisis of faith, Marlowe challenges the theological conventions of his time by questioning whether an individual’s actions can truly impact their destiny, or if their actions are simply the manifestation of said destiny.

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<sup>23</sup> Keefer, ed., *Doctor Faustus*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 212, 219.

<sup>25</sup> Keefer, ed., *Doctor Faustus*, 47.

The ambiguity regarding whether Faustus' fate is predestined or whether he has complete spiritual agency is cleverly exploited by Marlowe through his use of the "fall." Marlowe adapts this familiar religious convention to challenge the doctrine of predestination by depicting the immediate spiritual implications of Faustus' actions in regard to his fall. Faustus seeks to have knowledge of all things which, to the Elizabethan audience, was regarded as an act of sin. Faustus' desire reflects the inherent sinful nature of man, as the great sin of Adam and Eve was the pursuit of the "knowledge of nature" (i.e. of all things) in defiance of God's will.<sup>26</sup> Further, the devout Elizabethans believed that "[t]o seek out the secrets of nature was to seek the devil." Marlowe reflects this popular belief in the decision to have Faustus summon the devil's agent and willingly negotiate the transfer of his soul for the fulfilment of his aspiration.<sup>27</sup> The biblical allusion that Marlowe makes ties Faustus to "the mythic pattern of the forbidden quest for superhuman knowledge and power," and thus, his decision to enter into a pact with the devil will be his undoing (I. i. 63).<sup>28</sup> While the diabolical pact is the root of Faustus' fall and central to the conflicts of the narrative, Faustus' ongoing decision to uphold his pact with Lucifer (i.e. to continue to sin) "does not become irrevocable until his death."<sup>29</sup> This "open-endedness" allows the remainder of the narrative to be defined by Faustus' handling of his ongoing crisis. Marlowe imbued the narrative of *Doctor Faustus* with a cyclical pattern in order to explore the moral implications of Faustus' choices, regardless of whether his fate has been predestined. The conflicts of *Doctor Faustus* are defined by the pattern of Faustus' lack of faith, and the "hook" of

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<sup>26</sup> William Zunder, *Elizabethan Marlowe: Writing and Culture in the English Renaissance* (Cottingham, England: Unity Press Ltd., 1994), 68.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 233.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

the devil which psychologically pulls him back from repentance: two notions which Marlowe adapted from popular Elizabethan beliefs.

Marlowe uses the crisis of the narrative to explore the doctrinal issues of his time, and he uses Faustus' navigation of the conflicts to explore popular theological beliefs. Marlowe uses the conflicts surrounding Faustus' crisis to reflect upon Elizabethan attitudes toward the devil and the faithful. The original Faust book demonstrates the popularity of the devil literature in Germany in the sixteenth century, and Marlowe adapted this tale to reflect Elizabethan notions of the devil.<sup>30</sup> Popular catechists, such as Lancelot Andrews, a lecturer at Cambridge during Marlowe's studies, promoted the idea of the devil's "bait and hook" approach to attract sinners and violently dissuade repentance.<sup>31</sup> To the Elizabethan audience, the devil's promise of knowledge and power appealed to Faustus' deepest desires, and thus, the devil tempts (or "baits") him into turning away from God, leading to his crisis. Marlowe draws out Faustus' "crisis of conscience" by continually presenting the opportunity for Faustus to repent and restore his faith. Faustus' failure to repent and seek redemption is the product of his despair: he believes that his sins are unpardonable and that he has placed his soul beyond the mercy of God.<sup>32</sup> In the final act, Faustus says "I do repent, and yet I do despair" (V. i. 63) as he does not know, in that moment, if his act of repentance will be enough to spare his soul. This relation with penitence presents Faustus as the embodiment of Elizabethan religious thought regarding the two types of faithless men: those who believe that they are beyond God's mercy, and those who "gamble on his mercy, hoping for last-minute forgiveness."<sup>33</sup> Thus, Marlowe presents Faustus' faithlessness as a key component of his fall. Further, Faustus' ongoing despair presents the opportunity to

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<sup>30</sup> Keefer, ed., *Doctor Faustus*, 39; Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 214.

<sup>31</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 214.

<sup>32</sup> Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe*, 105.

<sup>33</sup> Cole, *Suffering and Evil*, 218.

demonstrate the bait and hook of the devil. The devil's initial approach to Faustus' wavering allegiance is to tempt him with distractions. Douglas Cole argues that at the beginning of the piece, temptations are enough to draw him from God's grace and reaffirm his allegiance to the devil.<sup>34</sup> As Faustus's despair worsens, however, the devil resorts to the "hook." In the final act when Faustus utters his repentance, the devil's agent appears and threatens Faustus with violence in order to restore his allegiance. The significance of the devil's "hook" is that it exposes Faustus' role in his fall. Elizabethan theologians believed that "no matter what the power of the devil's hook [was] ... man sinned of his own free will."<sup>35</sup> Marlowe employs the bait and hook formula to present Faustus with the opportunity to make better decisions over the course of the narrative. In spite of the doctrine of predestination, by refusing to repent and continuing to reaffirm his allegiance to the devil, Faustus is presented as being morally responsible for his fate.

There is an interesting contradiction present in the moral tone of the narrative of *Doctor Faustus* and the critical examination of theological beliefs undertaken by its atheist author. *Doctor Faustus* is a subversive commentary on religious beliefs and authority in Elizabethan England, concealed in the loosely-followed structure of a morality play. Traditionally, Elizabethan morality plays were structured so that the narrative moved from "the seduction of mankind by vice to the salvation of mankind by virtue and repentance." This formula personifies Vice and Virtue (evil and good) in order to frame the piece around the interactions of the characters.<sup>36</sup> *Doctor Faustus* does not follow this formula. In this piece, Faustus' fears and desires draw him toward the side of evil, and his choice to be resolute in his decision prevents him from achieving redemption. Lucifer is not the ever-present figure of Vice, nor God that of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 25.

Virtue; rather, the narrative is presented as a tragedy of spirit and the product of Faustus' choices.<sup>37</sup> In this manner, Marlowe challenges the swayed convictions of his peers by portraying their "crises of conscience" as entirely their own doing. Thus, despite deviating from the traditional structure, the piece does retain a strong moral theme. Cole argues that Marlowe "fashioned a play that is thoroughly Christian in conception and import," but inherently intellectual in tone, as it explores the "philosophical and theological concepts of evil."<sup>38</sup> The layering of these themes is significant as it reflects the climate in which Marlowe was writing. Marlowe wrote *Doctor Faustus* during a period of "extensive religious doubt and occasional orthodox investigation."<sup>39</sup> By emphasising the overt moral and Christian tone of the piece, and relegating the subversive elements to subtext, *Doctor Faustus* was able to avoid the sporadic (but punitive) censorship of the period, thus enabling him to share his views with the Elizabethan public.<sup>40</sup> Marlowe adapted Elizabethan dramatic conventions in order to publish a work that exposed the fears of the devout and criticized the religious climate of the period.

Marlowe's criticisms of the religious establishment of England and the theology it promoted are what make up the subversive elements of this piece. The repressive climate of Marlowe's England contributed to his dissatisfaction with religious authority, and the narrative of *Doctor Faustus* reflects his attitude. Marlowe appropriates the "crises of conscience" experienced by his devout peers to form the central conflict of the narrative. He compares the Crown's forced compromising of individual beliefs as being akin to Faustus' diabolical pact, and Faustus' wavering allegiance to the devil is Marlowe's own criticism of those affected

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>39</sup> Davidson, "Christopher Marlowe and Atheism," 138.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Whitfield White, "Marlowe and the Politics of Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Patrick Cheney, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 82.

individuals for their failure to “abide by their own principles.”<sup>41</sup> Marlowe is equally critical of the authority of the Church. Marlowe challenges the “Church’s monopoly of God” and the moral implications of the “damnation with which the Church threatened heretics.”<sup>42</sup> He does this by providing the “faithless man” of Faustus with numerous opportunities to repent and receive God’s grace—this salvation is possible in the total absence of the intervention of an intermediary body. Marlowe recognized that the Church condemned the acquisition of knowledge as it undermined its efforts to maintain “its dominion over men’s minds.”<sup>43</sup> Further, Marlowe conceives Faustus as an embodiment of the “thinking man of the Renaissance” and demonstrates this through his navigation of his spiritual crisis.<sup>44</sup> Taken together, these points designate Marlowe’s exploration of theological beliefs throughout *Doctor Faustus* as representative of the “fight for intellectual freedom” and the casting off of the “bonds of ecclesiastical obscurantism.”<sup>45</sup> Through *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe explores and criticizes the religious beliefs and atmosphere of Elizabethan England.

The renaissance period introduced two beliefs to England: the supremacy of the individual, and Calvinist theology. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe, through his exploration of Faustus’ crisis caused by these contradictory notions, exposed the fears of the devout and challenged the religious authorities of England in the sixteenth century. Marlowe’s decision to advance the narrative by way of Faustus’ “crisis of conscience” enabled him to reflect upon the nature of the Crown’s religious authority and the spiritual beliefs of his time. He adapted the German Faust legend to reflect the theology of late renaissance England in order to contextualize

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<sup>41</sup> Philip Henderson, *And Morning in his Eyes: A Book about Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd.), 308.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 310, 329.

his critique. Faustus' "crisis of conscience" begins with the diabolical pact, and this narrative device stands in the place of the Oath of Supremacy to relate this experience to the "crisis" of the devout Elizabethans. The great fear of the Calvinists—that of predestined damnation—is explored through Faustus' efforts to subvert his destiny and take control of his spiritual journey. This enables Marlowe to criticize the futility of repentance in regard to the doctrine of predestination. Further, he is equally critical of Faustus' inability to take responsibility for the spiritual consequences of his actions. This criticism targets his peers whose "crises" stem from their failure to uphold their religious convictions under the threat of temporal punishment, and Marlowe uses common Elizabethan notions of faith and the devil to again contextualize this criticism. In order to share his views on religion and the religious establishments of the Elizabethan period, Marlowe conceals his criticisms in the acceptable dramatic format of a Christian morality play. However, he greatly adapts this format and imbues it with layers of philosophical questioning and theological exploration in order to preserve the subversive elements of his discourse. The ingenuity of Marlowe is on full-display in *Doctor Faustus*, as he successfully managed to share his critical views of doctrine, theology, and the religious establishments of England, while also exposing the spiritual anxieties of his peers, in a period of intense repression of divergent beliefs and opinions. The triumph of the individual in the struggle against the spiritual is not reflected in Faustus' journey, a figure who ultimately falls to the devil, but in Marlowe's triumph against the religious authorities of his time.



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