Given the obviously legendary or mythic quality both of Marlowe's play and of its principal source, the prose Historie of the damnable life, and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus, the fact that there was a historical Doctor Faustus may come as a surprise. Like Christopher Marlowe, this man was a transgressor both of sexual and of ideological codes.

Until quite recently, research into the traces of this historical figure was bedeviled by several puzzling facts. Sixteenth-century accounts give the man two different names, Georgius and Johannes, leading some scholars to suppose that there might have been two distinct magicians named Faust (a common German surname) or Faustus. Faustus appears to have claimed the academic titles of Magister, or of Doctor—but while a Magister Georgius Faustus was practising various arts of divination in Gelnhausen, Würzburg, and Kreuznach in 1506 and 1507 (Palmer and More 1978: 84-86), the records of German universities mention only a single Johannes Faust or Fust who entered Heidelberg in December 1505, and received a bachelor's degree in January 1509 (Palmer and More 1978: 86-87).

However, as Frank Baron showed in Doctor Faustus from History to Legend (1978), the early accounts of Faustus divide under critical analysis into two groups: those written between 1507 and the mid 1530s as immediate responses to his activities, and those composed during the half-century between his death (c. 1537) and the publication in 1587 of the German Faustbook. In the former texts, which have documentary value, his first name, when it is mentioned, is Georgius; in the latter, which show unmistakable marks of legend-formation, the name has become Johannes. Baron also sorted out the puzzle of the university records: in brief, there are no records of the magician Faustus for the very good reason that that was not his name—at least until some time after his graduation.

In January 1483 a young man from the nearby village of Helmstadt enrolled at the University of Heidelberg in the nominalist via moderna of the arts faculty; his name appears variously in the university records as Georgius Helmstetter, Georio de Helmstadt, or some variant thereof. He received his bachelor's degree within less than the prescribed minimum of a year and a half of study, but took longer than most students to earn the master's degree, which he was granted only in 1487—having been held back, most probably, by a requirement that a magister artium be at least twenty or twenty-one years old. The fact that he was one of only two students in a class of sixty-seven who gave no indication of a family name or patronymic suggests that he may, like Erasmus, have been illegitimate. If, as the university statutes required, he taught for two years in the faculty of arts as a Master of Arts, he would have remained at Heidelberg until at least the summer of 1489 (Baron 1978: 16-18).

In addition to the scholastic learning of the nominalist via moderna to which he was exposed in his formal course of studies, Georgius Helmstetter would also have encountered at Heidelberg both the speculative (which is to say occultist) and the philological sides of the new humanist learning. During the 1480s the city was home to a number of distinguished humanists, who tended to ally themselves with the exponents of the via moderna. According to Heiko Oberman, one consequence of the modernists' rejection of the universal terms deployed by Aquinas and the other theologians of the via antiqua was "a craving to experience and apprehend the world free from the tutelage of faith"—a craving, however, which soon "proved irreconcilable with the platonically inspired humanist propensity for a sancta philosophia" (Oberman 38). In the interim, though, there seems to have been a period in the late fifteenth century during which young German scholars, perhaps especially those trained in the via moderna, were able to find a substitute for the theological speculations challenged by nominalism in that syncretic compendium of Hermetic theosophy, Neoplatonic theurgy and Christian Cabala which interested speculative humanists.

An exchange of letters whose significance was first recognized by Frank Baron makes it clear that this Heidelberg graduate

1 The arts faculties in northern European universities in the fifteenth century were commonly divided between exponents of the via antiqua, a philosophy of metaphysical realism developed in the thirteenth century by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas and their successor Duns Scotus, who thought of universal metaphysical categories and the relationships among them as existing independently of our experience or knowledge of them; and exponents of the via moderna, a critical and sometimes corrosively sceptical nominalism, developed in the fourteenth century by William of Ockham, Nicholas of Autrecourt and Jean Buridan.

1 Important studies of this then-emergent tradition include those of Garin, Walker 1972 and 1973, Yates 1964 and 1979, Couliano, Tomlinson, and Grafton.
practised some at least of the arts of divination which commonly interested speculative humanists. In October 1534, Dr. Petrus Seuter, a lawyer living in the city of Kempten, enclosed two documents in a letter he sent to his friend Nicolaus Ellenbog, a monk with humanist interests in the monastery of Ottobeuren. One of these, an academic oration delivered by a Heidelberg professor to the Emperor Maximilian (who reigned from April, 1487 to January, 1519), may date from the period of Seuter's own studies at Heidelberg, which began in March, 1490. The other, a horoscope prepared for Seuter by "magister Georgius Helmstetter" according to the judgment of the astrological, physiognomic and chiromantic art (Baron 1989: 298), may also date from the same period: if Helmstetter remained at Heidelberg beyond the statutory two years after his graduation, he could have been one of Seuter's teachers in the Faculty of Arts.

Since a doctoral degree was obtainable only in the disciplines of law, medicine, and theology, Georgius Helmstetter's proper academic title was the one used by Seuter: magister. But by the convention of the time he would have been able, outside academic circles, to call himself Doctor (Baron 1982: 17). It seems likely that he did so—and that this was the same man whose public career as a diviner and magician, beginning in the early years of the sixteenth century, made the name of Doctor Faustus notorious throughout Germany.

In August 1507, the humanist Johannes Trithemius, himself a graduate of Heidelberg, and an occult philosopher and magician as well as a Benedictine abbot, wrote a long letter to his friend Johannes Virdung von Hassfurt, an astrologer at Heidelberg who had an active interest in magic and divination. In this letter Trithemius described the activities over the preceding year of a man who announced himself in what was probably a printed sheet of self-advertisement as "Magister Georgius Sabellicus, the younger Faustus, chief of necromancers, astrologer, the second magus, palmist, diviner by earth and fire, second in the art of divination by water" (Baron 1978: 96; cf. Tille 2, Palmer and More 84). "Sabellicus" is probably a humanist cognomen incorporating a learned allusion to Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, whose origins were among the Sabines or Sabellici, and who as the supposed inventor of divination by water could be regarded as a pagan prophet (Baron 1978: 32). "Faustus" seems also to be a humanist cognomen, chosen for its meaning ("auspicious"), and as alluding to one or more of the earlier bearers of the name—most probably the Manichaean bishop with whom St. Augustine debated, or the Faustus who in a widely-read patristic text, the pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, is briefly a disciple of the Gnostic heresiarch and magician Simon Magus (Wentersdorf; Richardson). "The second magus" may be a bow in the direction of Zoroaster, whom Renaissance genealogies of wisdom commonly list as the first inventor of magic. But Faustus is not being modest: this admission of secondariness puts him ahead of Hermes or Mercurius Trismegistus, the usual number two in accounts of the magical priscan theologia or "ancient theology" (see Walker 1975: 23, 93, and Yates 1964: 15, 131). Moreover, "magus secundus," in conjunction with claims to astrological competence and primacy in necromancy, might reinforce the suggestion of an affiliation with Simon Magus—who in the Recognitions is denounced as a necromancer, and is closely associated with belief in astrology (Recognitions II. 13-15, IX. 12 ff., X. 7 ff.).

The man, as Trithemius describes him, was clearly transgressive: a braggart, a blasphemer, and a pederast. He apparently boasted that if the writings and doctrines of Plato and Aristotle were wholly lost and forgotten, he "would be able to restore them all with increased beauty," just as the prophet Ezra had restored the lost books of the Law (cf. 2 Esdras 14: 20-26). He claimed "that the miracles of Christ the Saviour were not so wonderful, that he himself could do all the things that Christ had done, as often and whenever he wished." And when in 1507 Faustus was appointed schoolmaster in Kreuznach, he promptly indulged "in the most abominable kind of fornication with the boys," and fled to escape punishment (Baron 1978: 96-97; Tille 1-3; Palmer and More 83-86).

In 1513 another distinguished humanist, Conrad Mutianus Rufus, wrote of the recent arrival in Erfurt of a chiromancer named "Georgius Faustus, Helmitheus Hedebergensis, merus ostentator et fatuus"—"a mere braggart and fool," who babbled at an inn and was marvelled at by the ignorant. But his claims, "like
those of all diviners, are idle, and such physiognomy has no more weight than a water spider” (Palmer and More 87-88).1

Later notices support the identification of the Heidelberg graduate Georgius of Helmstadt with the magician Doctor Faustus. In July 1528 Kilian Leib, prior of Rebendorf (near Eichstätt) in Bavaria, recorded that on the fifth of June “Georgius faustus helmstetensis” had said “that when the sun and Jupiter are in the same constellation prophets are born (presumably such as he)”; and on June 17 of the same year, a soothsayer who called himself “Dr. Jörg Faustus von Heidelberg” was banished by the council of the nearby city of Ingolstadt, and being invited “to spend his penny elsewhere, ... he pledged himself not to take vengeance on or make fools of the authorities for this order” (Palmer and More 89-90).

Georgius Faustus’s expulsion from Ingolstadt may suggest that he enjoyed a somewhat dubious reputation. However, transgressions and indiscretions of the kind reported by Trithemius, Mutianus and Leib did not prevent him from being hired in February 1520 to cast the horoscope of Georg Schenk von Limburg, the Prince-Bishop of Bamberg (Palmer and More 88-89), or from being consulted in 1536 by a close associate of Erasmus’s to predict the fortunes of a colonizing expedition to Venezuela (Palmer and More 92, 95-96, Baron 1978: 48-66). One may wonder whether Faustus guessed that Georg Schenk had little more than two years to live (he died in May 1522, aged fifty-two), or whether he would have been indiscreet enough to share such a guess. But he did foretell disaster for the Venezuela expedition—a prognostication borne out by events, much to the discomfiture of the Nuremberg humanist Joachim Camerarius, who had prophesied “an entirely propitious outcome” (Baron 1978: 59).

The only other records of Faustus’s activities are negative in tone. In May 1532 the city council of Nuremberg refused a safe-conduct to “Doctor Faustus, the great sodomite and necromancer” (Palmer and More 90). And in 1539, not long after his death, a contemporary wrote that “The number of those who complained to me that they were cheated by him was very great.... his deeds, as I hear, were very petty and fraudulent” (Palmer and More 94-95).

The Legend of Faustus

Conspicuously absent from the accounts of Georgius Faustus written during his lifetime is any suggestion that he had a pact with the devil, an attendant spirit, powers of flight, the ability to devour a cartload of hay, detachable legs, or an affair with Helen of Troy. Yet some fifty years after his death a legend which included all of these features, and which in addition recounted in lurid detail the lamentations and terrors of his final hours, was in print as the Historia von D. Johann Fausten (1587). This German Faustbook is evidently Lutheran in inspiration: its demonology, some of its episodes and many of its turns of phrase are lifted from Martin Luther’s writings and table-talk (Baron 1978: 70-82; 1982: 67-74).

The notoriety of Georgius Faustus made him an apt candidate for demonization by the orthodox. The first cue for this development was given in 1537 by Martin Luther himself. Prompted, it may be, by news of Faustus’s death, or possibly by the publication in the previous year of a collection of Johannes Trithemius’s letters which included his 1507 account of Faustus, a conversation at Luther’s dinner table on the subject of scoffers (ludificatores) and the magic art turned to “Faustus, who called the devil his brother-in-law” (Palmer and More 93; WATr no. 3601)—and who must therefore, it is implied, have cohabited with a succubus demon. Luther made this the occasion for a string of carnivalesque anecdotes—about a sorcerer who devoured a peasant, together with his horse and wagon, a monk who offered another peasant a penny for all the hay he could eat and then consumed half a wagon-load before being beaten off, and a man who frightened away his Jewish creditor by making it seem he had pulled off the debtor’s leg (WATr no. 3601). These stories reappear in the Historia as exploits of Faustus himself; so also does Luther’s tale of a magician (identified in one report of the conversation as the

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1 This odd title “Helmitheus Hedebargensis” may be a mistranscription of “Hemitheus Hedelbergensis” (“the demi-god of Heidelberg”), or possibly of “Helmesten[sis] Hedelbergensis” (“from Helmstadt near Heidelberg”). But “Helmitheus” appears rather to be a literary allusion to a patristic text that we have already seen Faustus may have known: in the pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, as first printed in 1504, a statement to the effect that Pyrrha and Erymtheus were the parents of Helen and Prometheus is garbled through scribal error into the claim that Pyrrha and Prometheus were the parents of “Helmitheus” (Richardson 141-42).
abbot Trithemius) who entertained the Emperor Maximilian by having demons take on the forms of Alexander the Great and other monarchs (WATr no. 4450).

Luther’s belief that all magicians have a pact with the devil was confirmed for him in 1537 by a Wittenberg student who confessed to have foresworn his faith in Christ and promised himself to “another master” (WATr no. 3618A-B, 3739). Fifteen years later, recounting this same incident, Philipp Melanchthon added the detail of a written pact with the devil; and in 1585 Augustin Lercheimer (a pen name for Hermann Witekind, who had studied under Melanchthon) combined this story in his Christian Synopsis of Magic (an important source for the 1587 Historia) with the first published reference to Faustus’s demonic pact (Baron 1985: 535-36).

Luther may also have contributed more directly to the launching of the legend through the stories he helped to spread when his former Wittenberg colleague and later radical opponent, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, died in Basel on Christmas Eve, 1541. In early 1542, Luther and his correspondents in Basel and elsewhere claimed successively that Karlstadt had left behind him a noisome spirit, and that his death had been caused, not by the plague—Karlstadt was himself a plague to God’s church—but by his terror when the devil materialized to carry him off (WABr ix, 621-22, x, 12-14, 24-30, 49). Johannes Gast, a Protestant clergyman of Basel, appropriated these same motifs of a noisome spirit and of a death at the devil’s hands as organizing features of the first clearly legendary account of Doctor Faustus, which he published in his Tomus secundus convivialium sermonum (Basel, 1548). Paolo Giovio had claimed in his Elogia doctorum virorum (1546) that the humanist and occult philosopher Henricus Cornelius Agrippa had a black dog who was actually a devil.¹ Not to be outdone, Gast declared that the necromancer Faustus’s dog, and his horse as well, were both devils. And Faustus did not simply die in despair: “he was strangled by the devil and his body on its bier kept turning face downward even though it was five times turned on its back. God preserve us lest we become slaves of the devil” (Palmer and More 98).

Further elaborations of the legend were produced by a succession of Lutheran writers, among whom the most influential was Philipp Melanchthon. His references to Faustus in lectures delivered at Wittenberg during the 1550s are of particular interest for what they suggest about the legend’s antecedents and ideological motivation. Linking Faustus with the first-century magician and heresiarch Simon Magus (both attempted to fly up to heaven), he reminds his auditors that in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul Simon is represented as the apostles’ great opponent (Palmer and More 99). He makes a point of claiming that he himself knew “Ioannes” Faustus, whose birthplace he identifies as Kundling (now Knittlingen—a village some half-hour’s walk from Melanchthon’s home town of Bretten); and he states that Faustus studied magic in Cracow.¹ He gives a circumstantial account of Faustus’s death at the devil’s hands in a village in the Duchy of Württemberg, and as though to confirm that the man was a servant of Satan, he adds that during his life he “had with him a dog which was a devil, just as that scoundrel who wrote De vanitate artium”—the humanist Henricus Cornelius Agrippa—“likewise had a dog that ran about with him and was a devil.” After telling how Faustus twice escaped arrest, presumably by demonic means, Melanchthon concludes by refuting the boast of this same “Faustus magus, a most filthy beast and a sewer of many devils,” that all of the Emperor Charles V’s victories in Italy had been won by his magic (Palmer and More 102-03).

Like several of his first-century contemporaries, Simon Magus, the magician and Gnostic heresiarch to whom Melanchthon likened Faustus, professed to be God. Simon makes a cameo appearance in the canonical Acts of the Apostles: acclaimed by his followers as “the power of God that is called great” (Acts 8: 10), this Samaritan magician is converted by the apostle Philip, and then, after seeking to buy the power of the Holy Spirit, cursed

¹ This detail is suggestive. In his youth Melanchthon was acquainted with a Johannes who was deeply interested in magic, who practised physiognomic and astrological divination, who had studied at Cracow, and who was associated both with Heidelberg and also with Georgius Faustus. The man in question was Johannes Virdung von Hasfurt, the recipient of Trithemius’s 1507 letter about Faustus; he taught at Heidelberg and was court astrologer to the Elector Palatine—and had also cast the young Melanchthon’s horoscope.

¹ See Nauert 327. James Sanford, who in 1569 translated Agrippa’s De vanitate into English, repeats the story in his preface (Agrippa 1974: 4).
by the apostle Peter (Acts 8: 15-24). But he appears to have been a more substantial figure than the polemical narrative in Acts would suggest. The doctrines of Simon and the sect he founded are refuted at length by patristic writers, including Hippolytus and Irenaeus—according to whom this apostate, antichrist and agent of the devil gave visible form to his heresies by cohabiting with a woman whom his followers knew variously as Helena, Minerva, or Luna. Appropriating a motif from the apocryphal Wisdom literature, which he conflated with the Greek myth of the birth of Athena, goddess of wisdom, from the head of Zeus, Simon described this woman as his own divine First Thought. The evil archons whom she had absent-mindedly engendered, and who then created the world, imprisoned her within it in a series of human forms, among them that of Helen of Troy; but Simon, the originary God, had now descended to save her and all who believed in him (Irenaeus I. 23).

The reappearance of Helen in the German Faustbook of 1587 is one sign of the Faustus legend’s affiliation to the patristic accounts of Simon. But Simon Magus and “Faustus magus” (as Melanchthon called him) have more in common than this. Both could be described (to borrow a phrase from Hart Crane’s poem “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen”) as “bent axle[s] of devotion” (Crane 29)—in the sense that their transgressions against orthodoxy were recuperated by the legends which formed around them in such a way as to legitimize that orthodoxy.

The role of Simon Magus in the legitimation of orthodoxy is evident in the pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, where St. Peter, who defeats Simon Magus in a series of public debates, explains human history in terms of a sequence of pairs appointed by God: the first of each pair to manifest himself is an emissary of evil, the second an emissary of the true prophecy (III. 59). Thus Cain was followed by Abel, Esau by Jacob, Pharaoh’s magicians by Moses, “the tempter” by the Son of Man, and Simon Magus by Peter himself (III. 61).

During the 1530s, Martin Luther developed a view of his own function which is clearly indebted to this pseudo-Clementine master-narrative. In his Annotations on Matthew (1538), Luther speaks of Satan’s perpetual invention of new calumnies, and (although to his own radical opponents), of those “cunning and pestilential men” among his contemporaries who have served Satan in this respect, but who are confuted by the Holy Spirit. He promptly identifies the same pattern in the age of Jesus and the apostles: “Thus Christ always conquered the cleverest contrivances of the Pharisees, Peter those of his magician Simon, and Paul those of his Pseudoapostles” (WA xxxviii, 501).

Melanchthon’s construction of a parallel between “Faustus magus” and Simon Magus, who by his very presence testified to the apostolic mission of St. Peter and St. Paul, may thus lead one to suspect that he is hinting, with all due modesty, at a similar guarantee through demonic opposition of his own and Luther’s quasi-apostolic role. Such a suspicion is strengthened by Melanchthon’s claim to have known Faustus, not just by reputation but in person—and also by a story about an encounter between them which appeared in Augustin Lercheimer’s Christian Synopsis of Magic (1585).

Lercheimer tells us that when Faust, as he calls him, was in Wittenberg, “he came at times to the house of Philipp [Melanchthon],” of all people, where he received both hospitality and admonitions. Resenting the latter, he told his host one day as they descended to dinner that he would make all the pots in his kitchen fly up through the chimney. To which Melanchthon replied, with less than his usual eloquence, “Dass solt wol lassen, ich sch[e]isse dir in deine kunst” (Baron 1985: 532)—“You’d better lay off; I shit on your art!” The sorcerer did indeed lay off. For, as Lercheimer added in 1597, in the third edition of his Christian Synopsis, “the devil was unable to rob the kitchen of this holy man” (Palmer and More 122).

There is perhaps an echo of Luther’s and Melanchthon’s logic of legitimation in the Historia as well. Lercheimer followed his story about Melanchthon’s ability to resist Faust’s devilish tricks with one about an elderly neighbor’s attempt to convert the sorcerer. The two together seem to have inspired the story of the Old Man’s intervention with Faustus in chapters 52 and 53 of the Historia—where, although Philipp Melanchthon has disappeared, a trace of him remains in the Old Man’s exhortation to remember how St. Philip’s preaching converted Simon the supposed God to faith in Christ (EFB 102 [ch. 52]). It is left to the reader to
remember how promptly Simon Magus lapsed from his faith—as Faustus likewise does in this same chapter.

If Faustus could in this peculiar sense be at once a precursor, an enemy and a guarantor of the Lutheran faith, so also could the celebrated humanist and occult philosopher Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, that "scoundrel" to whom Melanchthon likened him. In 1522 the reformer Wolfgang Capito wrote to Agrippa, and in an attempt to persuade him to commit himself openly to the Reformation, reported a conversation with an admirer who had declared that “what Luther sees now, Agrippa saw long ago” (Agrippa 1970: ii. 729-30). There is some truth to this: Agrippa had been involved in bitter controversies with the theologians of the Franciscan and Dominican orders since 1509.

But Agrippa was a well-known exponent of what Frances Yates termed the Hermetic-Cabalistic tradition—a current of thought to which Georgius Faustus was also, if more peripherally, attached. This tradition, while encouraging purported restorations of originary discourses in a manner that in some ways anticipated the Reformers' project of returning to the forms of early Christianity, differed from the latter in its wholesale syncretism, its willingness to believe in the underlying congruity of all originary discourses, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or pagan, and also in its view of human empowerment through magical practices understood as a common element of these discourses. Moreover, while this Hermetic-Cabalistic tradition preceded the Reformation by at least a generation, it also encouraged radical evangelical opposition to Luther's doctrines.

During the decades immediately preceding the Reformation the newly available and supposedly ancient texts of Hermes Trismegistus and the Kabbalists, which it was thought could contribute to a restoration of the pristine verities of Christianity, aroused considerable excitement. However, the occultist tradition’s emphasis on spiritual autonomy and on a deification achieved through spiritual rebirth was diametrically opposed to Luther’s biblical exclusivism and his rejection of free-will; while this tradition undoubtedly helped to create a favorable climate for the reception of his early writings, it subsequently contributed to radical reforming tendencies which outflanked or subverted the positions of the magisterial reformers.

The Hermetic-Cabalistic tradition encouraged more extreme forms of prophetic and magical delusion as well. Georgius Faustus, whose blasphemies Johannes Trithemius reported in 1507, was still claiming two decades later to be a prophet (Palmer and More 89). Trithemius also wrote about the visit of a similarly boastful Italian magician, Joannes Mercurius de Corigio, to the court of Louis XII of France in 1501. From other sources (among them his own writings) it is clear that this magician announced himself as a wonder-working Hermetic-Christian redeemer; Trithemius's suppression of this aspect of his claims raises the interesting possibility that he also knew more about Georgius Faustus's Hermetic-Cabalistic affiliations than he was willing to reveal (Keefer 1989: 85-86).

In the course of the Faustus legend’s narrative exfoliation, the anti-Catholic overtones which had been present in its earliest forms became more pronounced, and the legend acquired, in inverse form, many of the features of the popular genre of saints’ lives—a genre which it also helped to displace (Allen 13-41). At the same time, the carnivalesque elements evident in Luther’s anecdotes about magicians were taken up and amplified.

But whatever it contained of anti-Catholic polemic or of folklore, the legend remained a repressive narrative—one which sought to legitimize Protestant orthodoxy through a terrifying representation of the wages of transgression. It is no coincidence that the period between 1560 and the late 1580s, during which the Faustus legend received its full narrative elaboration, also saw the first major outbreak of witch-hunts in Western Europe—an outbreak in which, with the vehement approval of orthodox intellectuals, thousands of people, most of them women, were imprisoned, tortured, and judicially murdered.1

1 In those parts of Germany where records of the witch-persecutions have received the most detailed study (present-day Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), there was a sharp increase of witchcraft trials after 1560, peaking in the 1580s, and a further wave of persecutions between 1585 and 1593 (Behringer 11, 13). Monnier notes that a "rapid intensification of persecution" in the territories, both Catholic and Protestant, from Geneva and Savoy north to Alsace and Lorraine began "sometime between the 1560's and the 1580's" (Monier 35). A similar pattern is evident in south-eastern England, where witchcraft indictments on the Home Circuit Assizes rose from less than 40 in the 1560s to 109 in the 1570s and 166 in the 1580s (Sharpe 108-09). Across Western Europe, the number of witch trials increased greatly “after about 1550” (Klaitz 48).
DRAMA TIS PERSONAE

(in the order of their appearance, including "mutes")

CHORUS.

JOHN FAUSTUS, doctor of theology.

WAGNER, a student, and Faustus's servant; also speaks the part of CHORUS.

GOOD ANGEL.

EVIL ANGEL.

VALDES and CORNELIUS, magicians.

FIRST and SECOND SCHOLARS, colleagues of Faustus at Wittenberg.

MEPHASTOPHEILIS.

CLOWN (ROBIN).

RAFE, a second clown.

LUCIFER.

BELZEBUB.

SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

POPE.

CARDINAL OF LORRAINE.

FRIARS.

VINTNER.

CAROLUS (CHARLES) THE FIFTH, Emperor.

KNIGHT.

*ATTENDANTS OF THE EMPEROR.

*ALEXANDER AND HIS *PARAMOUR.

HORSE-COURSER.

DUKE OF VANHOLT and his DUCHESS.

THIRD SCHOLAR.

HELEN OF GREECE.

OLD MAN.

*DEVILS.

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PROLOGUE

Enter Chorus.

CHORUS.

Not marching now in fields of Thracimene
Where Mars did mate the Carthaginians,
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love
In courts of kings where state is overturn'd,
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds
Intends our muse to vaunt his heavenly verse.
Only this, gentlemen: we must perform
The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad.
To patient judgments we appeal our plaud,
And speak for Faustus in his infancy:
Now is he born, his parents base of stock,
In Germany, within a town call'd Rhodes;
Of riper years to Wittenberg he went,

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2. Mars did mate] Mars allied himself with or rivall ed. Hannibal's Carthaginian army inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Romans at the battle of Lake Trasummenus in 217 BCE. According to Livy's Historiae XXII. i. 8-12, the battle was preceded by terrifying portents in which the war-god Mars figured prominently.

3-5 These lines may refer to other plays by Marlowe: lines 3-4 to Dido, Queen of Carthage or (depending on the dating of Doctor Faustus) to Edward II, and line 5 to Tamburlaine.

4. *state] Though OED cites this line as an instance of "state" in the obsolete sense of "high rank, greatness, power" (OED "state", i.6.b), the word may also carry the modern meaning of "the supreme civil power and government" ("state", 29).


valllll) display proudly (OED 4). This B1 reading seems preferable to A1's "daunt" (meaning "quell" or "overcome"), which is probably a misprint (Greg 41).

7-8. perform / The form] a characteristically Marlovian jingle; compare II. iii. 42 ("whose termine is term'd"), 2 Tamburlaine III. v. 27 ("brandishing their brands") and V. iii. 7 ("pitch their pitchy tents"), and The Jew of Malta I.i. 17 ("Haply some hapless man...").

8. Faustus] pronounced as spelled by Henslowe in his Diary: "Fostes."

9. appeal our plaud] appeal for our applause.


13. Wittenberg] The University of Wittenberg was famous under Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon as a Protestant centre of learning. The A-text's "Wertenberg" is an error, prompted perhaps by a composer's awareness of the Duchy of
Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up.
So soon he profits in divinity,
The fruitful plot of scholarism grac’d,
That shortly he was grac’d with doctor’s name,
Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes
In heavenly matters of theology,
Till swoll’n with cunning of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach
And melting heavens conspir’d his overthrow:
For falling to a devilish exercise,
And glutted now with learning’s golden gifts,
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy;

Württemberg as a state allied to England, or by knowledge that Melanchthon and others had claimed that Faustus was born and died in Württemberg (see Palmer and More 101-02, 105-07, 119-21).


17. grac’d] Cambridge degrees were and still are conferred by the “grace” or decree of the university Senate; Marlowe’s name appears in the Grace Book in 1584 and in 1587 for the B.A. and M.A. degrees respectively.

18. whose sweet delight disputes] “Disputes” may be construed as a verb; more probably the expression is elliptical and means “whose sweet delight consists in disputes....” Bowers emends to “whose sweet delight’s dispute.” Bi’s “and sweetly can dispute” appears to be an attempt to clarify a difficult wording.

20. swoll’n with cunning of a self-conceit] The phrase implies that Faustus is “pregnant with self-engendered cleverness” (Hamlin 1996: 8). “Cunning” can mean knowledge or erudition, sometimes with negative connotations made explicit in Bacon’s essay “Of Cunning” (1612): “We take Cunning for a sinister or crooked wisdom” (Bacon 434).

21. waxen wings] an allusion to the story of Icarus (cf. Ovid, Metamorphoses VIII. 183-235): escaping with his father Daedalus from Minos’s island kingdom of Crete, Icarus ignored his father’s warning about the wings he had made for them and flew too close to the sun. The episode was a favourite of Renaissance moralists and emblem writers.

22. melting heavens conspir’d his overthrow] Compare 1 Tamburlaine IV. ii. 8-11, where the possibility of heaven conspiring refers to astrological causation as opposed to the will of “the chiefest god.” In B1, a comma after “melting” alters the sense: the melting ceases to be an aspect of the heavens’ active and conspiratorial power, and becomes instead a consequence of mounting above one’s reach.

23. falling to] These words link the metaphors of an Icarian (or Luciferian) fall and of gluttonous surfeit. A distant secondary overtone in line 23 (“falling to” in the sense of eating, as in the B-version III. ii. 59, 61) comes suddenly to the fore in line 24 with “glutted now.”