

## Sources for Doctor Faustus

The original story of Johannes Faust, was first translated into English by PF (an unknown author) in 1592.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0001>

As it is known that Marlowe studied with English Catholics at Rheims (possibly spying on them), references are to the Latin Vulgate (also called St Jerome, after its original translator in the fifth century) and the Catholic Douay-Rheims version. It is also possible that he used the Protestant Geneva Bible, but all the references he makes are to Jerome.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/>

It is also suggested that Marlowe based Faustus on the story of Simon Magus, originally told in the Biblical Acts of the Apostles (8: 12-25), a man who tried to buy his way into Heaven.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=5&c=8>

Simon was later credited as being the founder of a Gnostic Christian sect called the Simonians, who worshipped Helen of Troy as a human embodiment of God's mind (the *Ennoia*).

Attitudes to Necromancy: While Marlowe would not have known *Daemonologie* (by James VI of Scotland), a lot of the attitudes within the book would have been known to him.

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/kjd/index.htm>

---

This study resource is brought to you by Stage on Screen, the UK company staging classic stage plays of set texts for schools, students and theatre lovers everywhere. All productions are filmed and distributed on multi-region DVD, and are available in the UK and all over the world. For details, please see [www.stageonscreen.com](http://www.stageonscreen.com)

---

A lot of his Classical mythology would have come from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was a version of the ancient Greek myths written in the first century BC, and translated in 1567 by Arthur Golding. Most grammar school-boys, of which Marlowe had been one, would have learnt from Golding's translation, though Marlowe would almost certainly have studied it in the original Latin at Cambridge.

<http://www.elizabethanauthors.com/ovid00.htm>

Marlowe's first big success was the play *Tamburlaine The Great, Parts 1 & 2*.

<http://www2.prestel.co.uk/rej/tam1.htm>

Marlowe was already pushing back the boundaries in this play. In traditional "tyrant plays", the tyrant would overthrow the rightful King, become a tyrant, challenge the Gods, behave badly for four acts and be punished in Act Five. *Tamburlaine*, however, wins at the end of Act Five, and goes into the second play to do even more bad things.

There is no sense of divine judgement or moral ceiling. Like Faustus, *Tamburlaine* is "climbing after knowledge infinite", and, like Faustus, he is in love with the power of language. Ben Jonson praised "Marlowe's mighty line", and in both *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus*, Marlowe explores the power of the iambic pentameter to its utmost.

A lot of the ideas in *Doctor Faustus* have echoes of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales*, written about 1400. These include the questions of (a) whether a sinner can be pardoned; (b) attitudes to mortality and the desire to die to escape the hell of existence; (c) being aware of sin and damnation while not really understanding its importance; (d) the format and form of the old moral tale in a clever modern framework; (e) the comparison of rhetoric and silence with the power and limits of language; (f) the strange character of The Old Man, who pops up unexplained in both texts; (g) sacrificing to the Devil in the Devil's temple; (h) a suggestion of sexual deviancy; (i) the seven deadly sins, and particularly the sin of Pride.

Dr Fred Parker from the University of Cambridge has suggested additional links between the two texts, but it is not clear how well Marlowe knew the Chaucer text. Elsewhere he seems to quote from Chaucer's *General Prologue*, but that could be a literary commonplace.

While obviously not a source of *Doctor Faustus* (being written about 80-90 years later), John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (and indeed *Paradise Regained*) explores similar ideas as Marlowe – the fallen angels cast out of Heaven, and the whole idea of the devil as a tragic figure. While not necessarily seeing Satan as a being in search of knowledge, Milton is equally in love with language as Marlowe is, and there is a similar sense of wonder at the glories of the devil as there is in Marlowe.

One of the best recent biographies of Marlowe is *The Reckoning* (Charles Nicholl), which looks at his involvement with the world of spies in sixteenth century England.

Walter Greg's *The Damnation of Faustus* (1946) was one article that kick-started interesting questions about the relationship between Marlowe and the demonology of the sixteenth century.

*The Queen's Conjuror* (Benjamin Woolley, Flamingo 0-00-655202-1) is the best recent life of Dr John Dee, putting attitudes to magic, science and religion in the sixteenth century in their proper context.

To see how another renaissance playwright dealt (slightly more happily) with the idea of magic and magicians, see Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The names of both Faustus and Prospero (Shakespeare's protagonist) mean (in one form or another, "Lucky" or "Happy", so it is likely that Shakespeare was deliberately doing an anti-*Faustus*.

**PROLOGUE:**

The Fall of Lucifer is first mentioned in the Bible, Isaiah 14:3-20:

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=27&c=14>

Icarus: The story of Icarus is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 8, lines 260-310:

<http://www.elizabethanauthors.com/ovid08.htm>

**SCENE 1:**

Aristotle's *Analytics* were the first attempt at scientific, logical thought, where you could work things out from first principles.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/posterior.html>

Medicine is represented by Galen, and Faustus' attitudes to Doctors are similar to those represented in Chaucer's picture of the Man of Physick, written about 200 years earlier: *General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*, lines 413-446.

<http://www.librarius.com/cantales.htm>

The Law is represented by Justinian's *Institutes*.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/535institutes.html>

Faustus quotes two incomplete verses of the Bible,

Romans 6:23 <http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=6&c=6>

And 1 John 1:8 <http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=23>

Most of his audience would have known that his reading of these Biblical verses is incomplete. His version, which he claims is Jerome, is also an inaccurate rendering of the verses. Would his audience have known this?

Faustus' plan to wrap Germany in brass echoes Friar Bacon's to do the same to England in Greene's slightly earlier play *Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay*.

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/greene2.html>

There is a sense during this scene that anything that Faustus imagines can come true. "Magic" is the same as "art", which is the same as the "imagination".

Musaeus is a pre-Homeric poet of great skill, mentioned in the Aeneid Book 6, lines 667-8.  
<http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.6.vi.html>

The names Valdes and Cornelius may have been meant to evoke Peter Waldo (1140-1214, founder of the Waldensian sect, thought to be practitioners of Gnosticism) and Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), a noted alchemist and Necromancer.

Probably Faustus would have needed Psalms 22 and 51 and the opening of John's gospel for his incantation:

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=21&c=22>

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=21&c=51>

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=4&c=1>

## SCENE 2:

Many scholars think that the prose comedy scenes are by another playwright, possibly Thomas Nashe. In a sense they are parodies of the main scenes that have come before; in another way, they point out how banal life is without the power of Faustus' language.

The B text (probably rewritten in 1602, and maybe thereafter as well) contained many more of these types of scenes, added by (among others) William Burde and Samuel Rowle. The B text was also shorn of anything approaching blasphemy, after the 1606 Act of Abuses, which disallowed the appearance of any characters from the Bible onstage, among other strict censorships.

**SCENE 3:**

A lot of Faustus' description of the night seems to come from Spenser's unfinished Elizabethan epic *The Faerie Queene*, Book 3, Canto X, verse 46.

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/queene3.html#Cant.%20X>.

But his cosmology (including references to Orion being steamy in winter) reflects the Ptolemaic (geocentric) understanding of the universe.

For the origin of the name Belzebub (Lord of the Flies), see Mark 3:22

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=2&c=3>

Demogorgon is a supposedly classical primeval god, terrible in attitude, but the first reference is in a Christian annotation from about the Fourth Century to Statius' *Thebaid* (written in about 90AD).

<http://www.theoi.com/Text/StatiusThebaid1.html>

It is possible that the name is a reference to the Demiurges (false or self-deluding Gods) of Gnosticism, or simply a conflation of Demon and Gorgon.

In the PF translation of *The Faust Book* (chapter 5), Mephistophilis is spelt *Mephostophiles*, but Marlowe prefers his own spelling. Apart from the Faust legend, this name for the Devil is unknown.

Gehenna is a valley near Jerusalem, often associated with Hell in translations of the New Testament, but possibly referring to either the garbage dump near Jerusalem, or to the supposed human sacrifice of children in the worship of the god Moloch. The used in the Vulgate (Latin) version of the Bible, but is normally translated as "Hell" or "Valley of Himnon" in English translations.

(In the Hebrew Bible, Joshua 15:8, Joshua 18:16, 2nd Kings 23:10, 2 Chronicles 28:3, 2nd Chronicles 33:6, Nehemiah 11:30, Jeremiah 7:31~32, Jeremiah 19:2, Jeremiah 19:6, Jeremiah 32:35. In the New Testament, Mark 9:43-8; Mark 9:43; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 23:33, James 3:6).

Marlowe has already (in his earlier play *The First Part of Tamburlaine the Great* Act 5 scene 2 lines 383-424) compared Heaven (he uses the Classical word Elysium) to Hell. Elysium, though, was a slightly faceless and listless afterlife compared to the Christian concept of Paradise. The use of the language suggests that Faustus may well be more of a Stoic, rather than a medieval or renaissance Christian.

Mephistophilis' description of Hell is similar to (almost translated from) the idea from St John Chrysostom, a fourth-century Christian preacher who said that Hell was the separation from God.

#### SCENE 5:

It is possible that Faustus' offer of worshipping Belzebug through the blood of new-born children is a reference to sacrificing children to the god Moloch (Leviticus 3:18)

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=3&c=18>

Alternatively, it could be a reference to the common medieval belief that Jews used Christian babies' blood as part of their religious ceremonies, for which many Jews were murdered. From the evidence of his play *The Jew of Malta*, it is clear that Marlowe did not share this belief.

"Consummatum Est" (It is Completed) are the last words of Jesus on the cross, according to John's Gospel 19:30.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=4&c=19>

Most of Marlowe's audience would have been aware of this blasphemous parody of the Gospels. In sixteenth century belief, blasphemy, once uttered, has power.

Penelope was the noble (and crafty) wife of Ulysses (Odysseus) who remained faithful to him for the twenty years he was away at the Trojan War. *Odyssey* by Homer, book 2.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D2%3Acard%3D39>

Saba was the beautiful and intelligent Queen of Sheba, who agreed to marry King Solomon for his wisdom, but led him astray into worshipping idols. 1 Kings 10.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=11&c=10>

Faustus becomes a spirit, and therefore, according to the medieval Doctor of the Church Thomas Aquinas, unable to repent. *Summa Theologica* 1:64.

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1064.htm>

Faustus claims he has raised Homer from the dead to sing to him the stories of Alexander (Homer's name for Prince Paris) and his former lover Oenone, and how Amphion's playing of the harp was so beautiful that Thebes rebuilt itself. There is no reference in Homer's two great poems to either of these events, so it is possible Marlowe is telling us the stories he would have liked Homer to tell.

All the astronomical knowledge Mephistophilis presents was part of the common educated belief of the time, well before Copernicus' heliocentric views on the shape of the universe were generally accepted. Because astronomers followed the Ptolemaic system of believing that the Earth was the centre of the universe, they had to account for the fact that the "fixed stars" (what we would call the stars) moved in a coherent pattern, whereas the "erring stars" (the planets, particularly Mars) moved in a seemingly random pattern. It was not until the discoveries of Johannes Kepler, and later Galileo Galilei, that the heliocentric position was shown to be the correct one.

The Seven Deadly Sins were a list of the sins for which there was no forgiveness. While Marlowe's list is the most common one, the actual list varied across time and across Europe. See, for instance, Giotto's Seven Vices in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua.

<http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/g/giotto/padova/decorati/7vices/index.html>

In the Morality Plays of the medieval period, Vices and Virtues would be personified and would come on stage. In the play *Everyman*, for instance, Death, Good Works, Confession, Discretion, Beauty etc are all characters who appear on stage and have an influence on the central character, Everyman.

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/everyman.html>

Pride makes reference to the *Song of the Flea* (*Carmen di Pulice*), attributed to Ovid but almost certainly a medieval piece.

In medieval morality plays (such as *Mankind*), the Seven Deadly Sins were presented as things of real terror, whereas here Marlowe presents them as an entertainment.

#### **SCENE 7:**

This scene at the Pope's Palace is based on a short section in chapter 22 of *The Faust Book*, though he has changed the Cardinal from being the Cardinal of Pavia to the Cardinal of Lorraine.

The Pope in the "historical" Faust's time would have been Paul III, a particularly corrupt Pope, who appointed two of his teenaged grandsons to Cardinalships. He was, however, important in the Counter-Reformation in that he was the Pope responsible for the Council of Trent, which got rid of a lot of abuses in the Catholic Church.

It is difficult to know which recent Pope Marlowe was satirising here, as there were a number of very short-lived ones in the late 1580s and early 1590s. He may well have been mocking Popes in general. Certainly their fear of ghosts and Purgatory suggest a mockery of Catholic beliefs.

Historically, the Cardinal of Lorraine was probably John, a member of the powerful Guise family. Another Cardinal of Lorraine, Charles is one of the bad guys in Marlowe's (unfinished?) play *The Massacre at Paris*.

<http://www.online-literature.com/marlowe/massacre-at-paris/>

He was painted by, among others, El Greco.

### **CHORUS 3:**

The Chorus tells us specifically that Faustus is at the court of Charles V at Innsbruck.

Nevertheless, the behaviour and attitudes he displays are much more like those of Rudolph II, whose court was in Prague. He was a big supporter of wizards, necromancers, alchemists and other people on the fringes of the occult.

### **SCENE 9:**

Alexander the Great was one of the greatest generals that ever lived. It is possible that his concubine is Roxana, a Persian Princess, though his concubine may mean Barsine, the mother of his only son.

The story of Actaeon being turned into a stag and being killed by his own dogs appears in Ovid book 3: lines 138-252.

Pictures of the story were common in Marlowe's day, such as this one by Titian.

The Knight calls Faustus a "conjurer". The most famous conjurer (magician, mage, mathematician or alchemist) of the time was John Dee, who did spend some time at the court of Rudolph II. The best recent book on Dee's life, which has a number of similarities with the life of Marlowe's Faustus, is *The Queen's Conjurer* (Benjamin Woolley, Flamingo 0-00-655202-1).

**SCENE 10:**

Faustus compares himself to the good thief crucified next to Jesus. Luke 23:40-43.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=3&c=23>

The horse-courser makes a joke comparing Dr Faustus to Roderigo Lopez, the Queen's physician, who was condemned and executed in 1594 for trying to poison the Queen, but was probably condemned simply for being a Spanish-born Jew. This took place in the year after Marlowe died, so this joke was almost certainly added after Marlowe's death.

**SCENE 11:**

The Duke of Vanholt here is probably supposed to represent Wolfgang of Anhalt, who was (historically) one of the first German Princes to make the Protestation at Speyer, and to make his Duchy a Protestant state, for which (eventually) Charles V was to deprive him of his Duchy. He was a great defender of Martin Luther (like Faustus, a lecturer at Wittenberg University), and one of the intellectual princes of the sixteenth century. Marlowe, on the other hand, makes him idle and controlled by his wife (the historical Duke of Anhalt was unmarried).

It is possible Marlowe is anachronistically using the more recent Joachim Ernest, Prince of Anhalt, as his source, who was known to be married twice. Even so, he was a generous (Protestant) Renaissance monarch, with keen support for the arts and culture (and so, possibly, magic).

Marlowe was often accused of being a Catholic sympathiser: this is a part of the play which might support that view.

The Duchess' reaction to the grapes is an echo of the congregation's response to Jesus' first Sign in John's Gospel, at the Wedding at Cana. John 2:10.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=4&c=2>

**SCENE 12:**

Helen of Troy was wife of Menelaus of Sparta, but ran away with Prince Paris (sometimes called Alexander) of Troy. Her actions started the 10-year-long Trojan War. The sister of the Heavenly twins, Castor and Pollux, and Agamemnon's Queen Clytemnaestra, she was the daughter of Leda and Zeus in the guise of a swan. She was reputed to be the most beautiful woman ever, and her adultery with Paris caused the destruction of his country.

She was worshipped by the Simonian cult as a human embodiment of the mind of God (the Ennoia).

The Old Man's speeches echo those of the character Mercy in the medieval (1466/1470) morality play *Mankind*.

<http://research.uvu.edu/mcdonald/3610/mankind.html>

In his speech before Helen, Faustus references other great classical deaths:

Menelaus was King of Sparta, and Helen's first husband, from whom she ran away with Paris.

Achilles was shot in the heel (the only place where he was vulnerable) by Paris, and his bones were mingled with those of his lover Patroclus, before being burnt.

Semele was the mother of Dionysus/Bacchus, the God of wine and parties, who demanded that she see the true face of her lover, Zeus/Jupiter. Seeing the beauty of the God, however, was too much for her, and she was burnt by the experience.

Arethusa was a nymph who was transformed into a fountain because of the River-God Alphaeus' passion for her.

None of these characters are exactly helped by their passion/love.

Faustus' speech to Helen is a direct quote from Lucian of Samosata's *Dialogues of the Dead*, where the god Hermes shows the Cynic Menippus the skull of Helen, and Menippus asks a similar question about the dead Helen.

<http://sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl1/wl163.htm>

The old man's last speech recalls Jesus' words to Simon Peter at the Last Supper in Luke 22:31.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=3&c=22>

### SCENE 13:

Faustus compares himself to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and says he is unluckier. Though in Genesis 3:1-14, God does not seem to offer much hope for the serpent, St Augustine said that, at the end of time, even Satan would be forgiven.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=1&c=3>

St Thomas Aquinas said that the problem with demons is that they were not able to repent (the situation Faustus finds himself in) therefore God would not forgive them.

Like the demons in James VI's *Daemonologie* (p81), Faustus cannot cry and cannot pray.

Faustus' inability to repent is echoed by King Claudius' desire to repent in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (normally given as Act 3 Scene 3) written probably about eight years later. Under Catholicism, it was easier for a suffering soul to do penance (a specific duty) than it was for a Lutheran to repent (both translations of the same Greek word *Metanoia* from the Bible), because a Lutheran would have to give up what it was that he had gained from his sin, and would have to change his lifestyle as a result of his repentance. For Calvinists, the problem was even worse: a sinful life meant that you were predestined to be damned, and that you were already condemned. There is a strong sense of this in Faustus' last speech.

Faustus' desire for time to slow down echoes Ovid's desire, in his *Amores*, for the night to slow down so that he can spend more of the night in his lover's arms.

[http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/AmoresBk1.htm#\\_Toc520535268](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/AmoresBk1.htm#_Toc520535268)

It also echoes Marlowe's own play *Edward II*, (Act 5, scene 1, lines 64-68) when the troubled King Edward wants time to slow so that he can remain King longer.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0007&query=act%3D%235>

Faustus' desire to escape the wrath of God by hiding in the earth echoes Biblical ideas from Hosea 10:8,

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=33&c=10>

and also Revelation 6:16.

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=27&c=6>

He also references the idea of metempsychosis from the ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras, who suggested that souls could be transferred from human beings to animals and back again, and was therefore a strict vegetarian.

Faustus' last line is echoed by Prospero towards the end of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (written about 20 years later) Act 5 scene 1 lines 56-57.

[http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23042/23042-h/23042-h.htm#sceneV\\_1](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23042/23042-h/23042-h.htm#sceneV_1)



Because plays are  
written to be seen.