CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S INFLUENCE ON THE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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Often regarded as one of the most functionally innovative periods in history, the English Renaissance saw continual evolution in all areas of artistic expression, including theatre. Of the areas that saw dynamic growth during this time, playwriting underwent a transformation that would eventually lead to the production of some of the most recognizable works of English literature. Two authors, in particular, contributed to such growth: William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. While both are well known and widely respected in their field, William Shakespeare's name appears far more often when discussing great literary pioneers. However, the influence Christopher Marlowe had on Shakespeare is seldom noted. The fact that Marlowe was, for a time, as respected as Shakespeare and exhibited the same potential is almost forgotten among today's English literature studies. This is partly due to the lack of proper exploration of the contention that Marlowe was as talented and innovative as Shakespeare. **Therefore, by examining the literary mechanics of *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest*, Christopher Marlowe's influence on William Shakespeare supports the concept that, had Shakespeare not come along, Marlowe would be considered the foremost playwright of the English Renaissance.**

Throughout both of their careers, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare found themselves ranked as the leading playwrights of England. Marlowe found considerable acclaim during the Elizabethan age of theatre, whereas William Shakespeare found national favor during the Jacobean age of theatre. Writing among the University Wits, Christopher Marlowe continually wrote intricate, chronicle plays until his death in 1593. Described in *History of the Theatre*, Marlowe "demonstrated how to rearrange, telescope, and alter diverse historical events to create a sense of casual relationships and thus a coherent story."[1] His plays were easily a product of the

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[1] Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin L. Hildy, "English Theatre to 1642" in *History of the Theatre*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2008) 108.

time in which they were written. Focusing on themes of humanism and predestination, Marlowe's plays are distinctive Elizabethan pieces because of their attitude towards society. Jeffrey Scott adds further context to this notion by describing, in depth, two themes found in Marlowe's work that could be attributed to the time. Firstly, he describes Marlowe's narratives as anti-Catholic, stating, "In looking at English history, the battle between Catholics and Protestants was not simply a religious one. In many ways, it was also a political struggle." [2] He goes onto to argue, "There are two significant reasons why Marlowe would have chosen to express anti-Catholic sentiments in his writing," listing England's own personal agenda against Catholicism and Marlowe's work as a member of the secret service as predominant reasons for Marlowe to desecrate the Catholic belief system. [3] The second theme Scott mentions is the idea of social mobility, mentioning the following:

> *Doctor Faustus* is a prime example of this social mobility. The opening chorus describes Faustus as a man who came from parents base of stock. He studied at Wittenberg and became a doctor, which by Elizabethan standards would give him the social rank of a gentleman.[4]

William Shakespeare also wrote plays that attributed to the time in which he lived. However, his plays were constructed with themes, ideas, and – in some cases – plots from previous playwrights. *History of the Theatre* perfectly describes Shakespeare's methods, stating "Shakespeare borrowed from many sources (history, mythology, legend, fiction, other plays) but reworked them until they became distinctively his own." [5] This knowledge, abounded by the fact that Marlowe and Shakespeare wrote both concurrently and consecutively, causes one to consider

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[2] Jeffry Scott, *The Influences of Elizabethan Society on the Writings of Christopher Marlowe*, (*The Marlowe Society*, 2008) 3.
[3] Ibid, 3-4.
[4] Ibid, 4.
[5] Brockett and Hildy, "English Theatre to 1642", 109.

the level of influence Marlowe had on Shakespeare. From a critical viewpoint, Marlowe was, at a time, considered the better of the two authors. According to *History of the Theatre*, "When he was killed in 1593, he and Shakespeare had written about the same number of plays, but many critics believe that Marlowe had better command of blank verse."[6] Shakespeare's utilization of themes and plotlines similar to that of Marlowe's only further illustrates his influence on Shakespeare. Looking at two plays, in particular, one can see Shakespeare's use of Marlovian literary methods.

While many of Shakespeare's plays appear to borrow from historical, literary, and folklore source material, their application of Marlovian themes and concepts, particularly those of *Doctor Faustus*, is especially seen in *The Tempest*. The similarities between the two protagonists far exceed the fact that they both can be considered great literary magicians. Firstly, each protagonist has a clear moral objective at the beginning of the play. For Doctor Faustus, the objective is simply to become the world's greatest scholarly mind. For Prospero, the objective is simply to regain power he had lost in order to provide a secure life for him and his daughter. Both objectives are accomplished by the use of sorcery. Professor Robert A. Logan examines this theory in his book *Shakespeare's Marlowe*. At the start of chapter eight, appropriately titled "Glutted with Conceit: Imprints of *Doctor Faustus* on *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*", Logan briefly introduces the concept of magic that connects both plays. He writes, "Each play expresses a strong interest in magic and the magician as representations of the imagination, and each play features a protagonist who is a magician, and, from a metadramatic perspective, also a playwright."[7]

Apart from objectives, both characters exhibit continuous desire to play God. Using their magic as leverage, each protagonist outwits fate, for a time, by manipulating earthly elements to

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[6] Ibid, 108.
[7] Robert A. Logan, "Glutted with Conceit: Imprints of Doctor Faustus on Macbeth and The Tempest" in *Shakespeare's Marlowe* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007) 198.

their favor. A literary connection that adds further context to this relationship is the comedic elements that stem from several situations in both plays. Logan gives one particularly compelling example, stating, "The most significant parallel is the snatching of food at the 'banquet' of each play."[8] Marlowe has Faustus steal food from the Pope's banquet, whereas Prospero creates a banquet for his traitors, only to have it vanish before they can consume it. This illustrates both characters' continual use of magic as a manipulative tool. Each character doctors a situation to their liking, only to take further joy in using it to toy with other people. Their attitudes toward mortal men are significantly pompous, and partially out of place, considering they both lose their powers at the end of each play.

However, both characters are not the actual ones carrying out the deeds. Yet another connection between the two plays comes in the form of the supernatural companions both characters have. In *Doctor Faustus*, the sympathetic and complex Mephistopheles carries out his master's tasks. In *The Tempest*, the ambiguous, illustrious Ariel serves Prospero until he is released. Both companions are depicted as loyal, powerful beings that only serve a purpose of fulfilling their masters' supernatural needs. However, both companions also provide much of the action of each play, arguably moving each storyline further than any other character. Mephistopheles not only carries out the tasks Faustus gives him, he also provides much needed exposition about the nature of hell, the payment for Faustus' deeds. In addition to serving Prospero in a supernatural manner, Ariel often operates as a confidant for the magician. In several instances, Prospero's life is saved by secret knowledge Ariel obtains. These actions connect both characters in a manner that suggests Shakespeare must have been somewhat inspired by Marlowe's play.

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[8] Ibid, 213.

Similarities between the characters is not the only connection between the two plays, *The Tempest* also utilizes similar themes from *Doctor Faustus*. Apart from magic and superstition, both plays deal heavily with the idea of time and fate. While *Doctor Faustus* may be a bit more direct with its approach, *The Tempest* concludes with Prospero accepting his fate and giving away his powers. There is a recurring motif of time within each play. Faustus only has 24 years with Mephistopheles; Prospero has waited 12 years on his island. Both entertain the idea that time and fate always win against superstition. Logan discusses this idea, stating the following:

> Prospero's eventual abandonment of his magic and his departure from the island not only suggest that his intentions are honorable and have always been so, but that, like Faustus, he is forced to succumb to the 'strong necessity of time' and to renounce the pleasures that his imaginative engrossment with magic brings.[9]

Looking at such similarities, one must come to the conclusion that both plays feature extensive similarities in their craft. Therefore, one can only assume that Shakespeare gained inspiration from Marlowe when writing *The Tempest*. However, literary connections between Marlowe and Shakespeare exist outside of *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest*. Discussing additional influence Doctor Faustus has on Macbeth, Logan continues to argue, "Critics and students of Renaissance drama have been quick to point out that the similarities between Doctor Faustus and Macbeth begin with the consideration of the plays as studies in damnation."[10] The parallels between the main characters (both being anti-heroes) is also noted. Logan also looks at the connection *Faustus* and *Macbeth* have to *The Tempest*, stating that, "In dramatizing the relationship between magical powers and the superior force of fate, *The Tempest* can be seen as a

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[9] Ibid, 214.
[10] Ibid, 108.

logical outgrowth of both earlier plays."[11] He finalizes his arguments by noting similarities between two quotes, one being from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, the other being from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. His states his main argument in the following:

> Shakespeare's sensitivity to language cannot be overestimated. It would be just like him to remember a play on words and to play on that play on words, not because he is one-upping Marlowe, but for the sheer joy of indulging in a playful paradox that, at the same time, serves two important dramatic functions.[12]

Other scholars noting the connections between Shakespeare and Marlowe include Laurence Danson, who writes, "Marlowe's Edward and Shakespeare's Kate are both placed in a world that will tolerate them." [13]This comparison between *Edward the Second* and *The Taming of the Shrew* only alludes to both authors using similar situations with similar characters. Additional areas of influence are explored by Eric C. Brown, who discusses similarities between the actual texts of Marlowe's *Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*. He notes, "Both works, then, start with a nearly identical question, but Berowne condemns and recasts Faustus's solution – the dark pages of dark books." [14] Expanding on this, Dorothea Kehler provides the following argument:

> "It has long been recognized that Phoebe's lines from *As You Like It* allude to Marlowe and his Hero and Leander. Critics also note a probable borrowing from Marlowe's Dido,

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[11] Ibid, 120.
[12] Ibid, 205-206.
[13] Lawrence Danson "Continuity and Character in Shakespeare and Marlowe." (*Studies In English Literature*, 1986.) 223.
[14] Eric C. Brown, "Shakespeare's Anxious Epistemology: *Love's Labor's Lost* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*", (Texas Studies in Literature & Language, 2003) 23.

Queen of Carthage in Hamlet, where the First Player, as Aeneas, recounts for Dido the slaying of Priam." [15]

While there is much speculation as to exactly how much influence Marlowe had on Shakespeare, no theory is more colorful than the Marlovian Theory. Defined by Rosalind Barber as "the idea that Christopher Marlowe faked his own death, fled to northern Italy, and wrote the works attributed to Shakespeare," the Marlovian theory is often discredited by many scholars, but still provides a significant connection between Shakespeare and Marlowe. [16] Barber discusses the premise's validity, giving the following statement:

> Disallowing a Marlovian interpretation of the Sonnets as evidence, there is no evidence that Marlowe survived after 1593. There is no evidence Shakespeare attended grammar school, either, yet biographers and scholars routinely assume it, because it is necessary to create a plausible narrative for the author of the works.[17]

She finalizes her opinion in a spate article, stating, "In these circumstances, it is my contention that to continue to resist the exploration of the Shakespeare authorship question goes against the spirit and purpose of academic enquiry." [18] While the contention that Shakespeare was Marlowe may seem a little dramatic for some, the influence and literary relationship between the two authors cannot be doubted. Logan finalizes his opinions of Marlowe by stating, "the most important Marlovian contribution to Shakespeare's artistry was an inventiveness with various

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[15] Dorothea Kehler, ""Shakespeare's Recollections of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*: Two Notes." (2001) 5.
[16] Rosalind Barber, ""Exploring biographical fictions: The role of imagination in writing and reading narrative." (*Rethinking History*, 2008) 167.
[17] Ibid, 180.
[18] Rosalind Barber, "Shakespeare Authorship Doubt in 1593." (Critical Survey, 2009) 167.

forms of dramaturgical ambiguities; and, like Mephistopheles, both of these playwrights resolutely refused to resolve these ambiguities."[19]

To conclude, having learned that the two playwrights wrote both concurrently and consecutively, the option for Shakespeare to influence Marlow and vice-versa clearly exists. It is not until one examines both authors' plays that Marlowe's impact is seen. Firstly, the literary similarities between *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest* adds particular context to the idea that Shakespeare greatly admired the late author. Secondly, after examining several other of Shakespeare's plays, there is distinctive evidence that Marlowe's style of writing was clearly reimagined by Shakespeare. Thus, had he not died, Marlowe could easily have been ranked higher than Shakespeare in the realm of great English Renaissance playwrights. Hypotheticals aside, Christopher Marlowe's clear influence on William Shakespeare at least causes one to conclude that both playwrights greatly contributed to the theatre. For that, all are indebted to them. To sum up the extent of this exploration, Robert Logan states, "That the natures of this relationship itself contains ambiguities only ensures our interest in it for all time." [20]

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[19] Logan, "Glutted with Conceit" 221.
[20] Ibid, 222

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THEATRE HISTORY
& LITERATURE I

THE TRAGICAL HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

HERMAN GOMEZ,
DIANA LOPEZ,
ROMANTI MATA,
JOSE ROSALES

27 OCTOBER 2015

HISTORY OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

CHRISTOPHER MARLOW

- Born in Canterbury *around* 1564
- Died in 1593
- Active from 1586 till 1593
- Seven Known Plays
    - *Dido, Queen of Carthage ; Tamburlaine, part 1 and 2 ; The Jew of Malta; Doctor Faustus; Edward II; The Massacre at Paris.*
- The most successful English playwright of the time, apart from Shakespeare.
    - *"The only writer with the proven ability to write poetry and dramatic verse at a "Shakespearean" level. For two centuries, scholars have proclaimed that Shakespeare learned how to write by studying Marlowe's style."* [1]
- Connections with Shakespeare
    - *Born during the same year*
    - *Shakespeare wrote near the end of Marlow's life*
    - *Both were pioneers of verse and prose.*
    - *Marlovian Theory: the idea that Christopher Marlowe faked his own death, fled to northern Italy and wrote the works attributed to Shakespeare* [2]

ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Doctor Faustus: *Tragic Hero or Anti-hero?*
    - *Ambitious: desires to gain knowledge in several fields of scholarship*
    - *Intelligent: renowned for his intellect and eloquence.*
    - *Egotistical: prideful, arrogant, and narcissistic.*
    - *Irreverent: continually petty, joking, and unserious.*
- Mephistopheles: *Sympathetic and Complex*
    - *Malevolent: continually stops Doctor Faustus from repenting.*
    - *Loyal: faithfully serves his master and their cause.*
    - *Honest: never lies about the horrors of hell.*

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[1] The International Marlowe-Shakespeare Society
[2] Exploring biographical fictions: The role of imagination in writing and reading narrative

THEMES, MOTIFS, & SYMBOLISM

- Themes
  - Sin
  - Redemption
  - Fate
  - Power
  - Human Nature
- Motifs
  - *Dark Humor:*
    Throughout the play, Doctor Faustus and Mephistopheles play practical jokes on several people, to humorous results.
  - *Supernatural:*
    Utilizing both necromancy (black magic) and biblical apparitions, the play is inherently supernatural.
- Symbolism
  - Blood
  - The Two Angels
  - The Seven Deadly Sins

SOCIETAL HISTORY
16TH and 17TH Century England

COURT AND THE CITY

- The court's tastes in music, dance, poetry, masque and theatre shaped the taste of the nation.

  - *Society was like a pyramid.*

    - *Kings, barons, or tenants-in-chief, and at the bottom were the peasants, or villagers.*

  - *There was more court influence after 1603. For example James I loved theatre, therefore invested a lot of money into theaters.*

    - *Shakespeare lived during his reign and well benefitted from this.*

- London was Europe's fastest growing city. It grew from 60,000 in 1520 to 375,000 in 1650

  - *Cities were growing, princes were gaining more power, and there was great challenge to church's dominance.* [3]

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[3] *History of the Theatre (10th Edition)*

- The 16th century saw a gradual transition from manuscripts to printed books.

  - *Printing did not spread as fast as one could have imagined, since many people were still illiterate, but it grew gradually since books were now available.*

  - *Literacy increased throughout the period reinforced by the protestant practice of ordinary laypersons reading the bible.*

THE REFORMATION

- England's official faith underwent rapid and radical change during this period.

- In the early 16th century, England's one and only religion was Catholicism

- The European reformation promoted two central ideas.
  1. Sola Scriptura: *Only the scriptures have religious authority, not the church clerics or traditions*[4]
  2. Sola Fide: *Only the faith of the individual can affect his or her salvation, not good works or rituals.* [5]

- King Henry VIII motivated England's reformation.

- England returned to Roman Catholicism under Henry VIII's daughter, Mary I.

ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

- Free- standing public theaters.

- Playing companies performed 'interludes'.

- By the late 16th century, churchmen, especially puritans, opposed theater.

- Christopher Marlowe's adoption of blank verse revolutionized theatrical expression.

- Elizabethans also enjoyed other forms of entertainment such as masques, jousts, tournaments, pageants, bear baiting, executions, etc.

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[4] Stephen Greenblatt, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*
[5] Ibid.

CONNECTIONS WITH SOCIETY

SOCIETY'S IMPACT:

- The play was easily a product of it's time, providing a clear representation of the English Renaissance.
- A desire for social mobility
  - *Social mobility was possible in Elizabethan times; however it could carry a price* [6]
- Contains a partial "anti-Catholic narrative"
  - *"In Act 3,Scene 3 of Doctor Faustus a scenario is set with Faustus, in an invisible form, attending a banquet for the Pope. Throughout the course of the scene, the invisible Faustus steals the meat and wine from the table, and finally punches the Pope on the ear, when he and his friars run off.* [7]

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

- The play was widely received, leading to its publication in 1604. [8]

- It was widely accepted for its combination of ideas from both Medieval drama and Renaissance drama

- Protestant church reformer John Calvin created predestination theory (for human salvation)

- Marlowe wrote in blank verse (unrhymed lines and iambic pentameter), which shaped the way other playwrights wrote

- Doctor Faustus created deep questions about morality, religion, and a person's relationship to both

- New ideas arose: if one rejected Christ, they could "sell" their soul to the devil in exchange for power

IMPACT ON MODERN SOCIETY

- Adapted and updated several times
- Strongly influenced the idea of moral objectivity
- Strongly influenced the nuance of religion
- Greatly influenced the anti-hero characteristics
- *Arguably* influenced Shakespeare

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[6] The Influences of Elizabethan Society on the Writings of Christopher Marlowe
[7] Ibid 3
[8] Doctor Faustus Study Guide

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