

The Faustus Legacy

Christopher Marlowe in Hidden Allusions

An area of research on Marlowe and Shakespeare which has been largely ignored by scholars is in the profusion of epigrams and satire that blossomed in the 1590s. It is not difficult to see why. All these writers were inspired by the great Latin satirists and epigrammatists such as Martial, Horace, and Juvenal, whom they set out to imitate and emulate. So when they use a Latin name for the subject of their verse we can be sure that they expected their audience to know both the original in the Roman poets as well as the contemporary figure whom they were intending to satirise, or more rarely, eulogise. It is the cleverness of the analogy rather than the quality of the verse that aroused the admiration of the readership. For us, who have no certain knowledge of the hundreds of men and women who are mentioned or attacked in these works, and in most cases have no knowledge of Latin, or the Roman poetic originals, this world is totally inaccessible. In this essay I hope to open a window into a neglected and extraordinarily profitable treasure of information.

It is almost certain that in the 1590s both Marlowe and Shakespeare were cruelly and spitefully satirised by writers such as Davies, Hall, Marston, Guilpin, Harington, Weever, and Bastard, as well as by others whose names are virtually unknown, or whose works are lost. There are so many possible sightings that a whole book would be necessary to tabulate them all, and then explore the allusion and its background. For that reason I intend to explore a small group of poems that are addressed to FAUSTUS and its near relation FUSCUS, though I should draw attention to the fact that in the early 1590s Marlowe was known as TAMBERLINE or TAMERLANE in such literature, as is apparent from the libel that was pinned on the Dutch Church.

Any writer addressing a work to Faustus can hardly have been unaware of Marlowe's play, *Doctor Faustus*, which was either written in 1589 or in 1592, and was regularly performed throughout the 1590s. However, we must first look at the name Faustus in its Roman context, for though it came to Marlowe from the Faustbuch, albeit probably in translation, Faustus itself is a Roman name, meaning fortunate, favourable, lucky, auspicious. This is in itself an ironic comment on the Faustus of the translation and the play, that I have not seen commented on. Faustus Sulla was the son of the famous dictator, Sulla, whose daughter was known as Fausta. Lucius Cornelius Sulla, to give him his full names, is mentioned by Cicero and Caesar amongst others.

What picture do we get of Faustus Sulla? In Cicero's *Pro Sulla*, for instance, Cicero defends him at the time of the Catiline Conspiracy, stating that the gladiators involved had not been hired by him. In *In Vatinius* he calls him a brilliant young noble. However, in the conflict between Pompey and Caesar, Cicero in his Letters to Atticus mentions Faustus Sulla repeatedly and accuses him of dishonourable conduct, even likening him to his father. The references are far from conclusive, showing both good and bad traits. This

needs to be borne in mind if the Faustus is a contemporary other than Marlowe, a noble perhaps supporting a Pompey-like figure.

However, there is another Faustus, mentioned by Juvenal, a poor tragedian, whose works are likely to end up in the auction-room, especially his *Thebas and Terea*. These tragedies are likely to have been horrific, detailing the monstrous story of the Theban dynasty, and the horror of the rape of Philomel by Tereus, and the horrifying revenge meted out to him. Juvenal was a much-admired satirist and this Faustus may well be the model for the references that follow. In that case Faustus is much more likely to be Marlowe than any other figure copied from Roman times. He is unlikely to be any other figure connected with the play, such as Alleyn, who is satirised regularly as Roscius. Nor is the Faustus of the satires and epigrams likely to be any other contemporary figure who dabbled in sorcery or blasphemous tricks, as one might have initially supposed. What clues, then, emerge about Marlowe through the distorted mirror of the satirists?

In *Virgidemiarum* I, III Joseph Hall characterised Tamberlaine as a drink-drowned sprite. No clue of this addiction to drink on the part of Marlowe emerges from the Faustus or Fuscus references. Hall's work was stayed in 1599.

Skialetheia by Everard Guilpin was one of the seven books banned and burned in June 1599 by Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Bancroft. His Epigram No.19 is addressed *To Faustus* and consists merely of two lines:

*Faustus in steede of grace, saith Fuscus rimes,
Oh gracelesse manners! Oh unhallowed times!*

This is the link to the Fuscus poems, but at first sight the reference is otherwise unintelligible. However, the word grace is highly significant in the play e.g. line 17 of the Prologue . . . *That shortly he was grac'd with doctor's name*. This is thought to be the phraseology of Marlowe's own university . . . the grace awarded to the successful candidate to allow him to proceed to a further degree. Both Marlowe and Faustus had been aiming at *profit in divinity* (l.15) and to *dispute in heavenly matters of theology* (l.19); *waxen wings did mount above his reach* (l.21) might also be applicable, implying one possible meaning of the word steed. We then have (l.23) *falling to a devilish exercise*. But, of course, grace also means heavenly grace and *Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast* symbolises this other meaning.

The first Fuscus poem by Guilpin is No.8 *To Deloney*. It begins with a startling quotation:

*Like to the fatall ominous raven which tolls,
The sicke mans dirge within his hollow beake,*

Marlovians amongst you will immediately ask the question Where have I heard that before? Perhaps it was here . . .

*Thus like the sad presaging Raven that tolls
The sicke mans passeport in her hollow beake,*

for these are Barabas's words that open Act II of *The Jew of Malta*. Bullen discovered a similarity to lines in Peele's *David and Bathsheba*, which appears to date from 1594.

*Like as the fatal raven, that in his voice
Carries the dreadful summons of our death,*

lines that appear to come from Du Bartas's *L'Arche*, but plainly owe a debt to Marlowe as well.

Thomas Deloney was a famous ballad-poet and early novelist who had got into trouble and fallen on hard times. Guilpin compares him to Fuscus, whose rhymes (quoted above) are pinned or pasted on every paper-clothed post in Poules i.e. St. Paul's Churchyard, where the main booksellers had their shops. He says in conclusion:-

*At every street's end Fuscus rimes are read
And thine in silence must be buried.*

From what is known of Deloney's career these lines can be dated to no earlier than 1596. Here then we have an indication of the popularity of Marlowe's verse at a time when his name is supposed to have been in disgrace. Our earliest extant edition of *The Jew of Malta* dates from 1633, but there are clear indications here that it was in print by 1596!

Now that we have established that Fuscus is Christopher Marlowe we should turn to the poem *Of Fuscus* (No.24). This has been thought to be addressed to Nashe or Marston, principally on the grounds that we have none of Marlowe's verse which scolds in the manner of satire. That, of course, does not mean that Marlowe did not write satire, and I believe that at least one of the satires that fell foul of the authorities in 1598 is by him. In No.24 we read:

*When Fuscus first had taught his muse to scold
He gloried in her rugged vaine so much,
That every one came to him, heare her should*

Surely the rugged vaine refers to Tamburlaine's mighty line. Its immense popularity is referred to in line 3. The rest of this poem shows us that he allowed players and artificers to tamper with his darling. He did not realise that they were like lechers, for he thought the beauty and majesty of her face would discourage such dishonest handling. We must suppose from this that he had no power to prevent additions or adaptations to his plays, or even the theft of his lines or works. Guilpin blames him for his mercenary approach, and making money from whatever source he could:

*But how can he a bawds surname refuse,
Who to all sorts thus prostitutes his Muse?*

So who was the Roman Fuscus? Can we learn from him anything about Marlowe even from the distorted mirror of the satirist?

He was most likely Aristius Fuscus, the great friend of Horace. Horace speaks well of him in his *Odes and Satires*, and addresses a whole Epistle (X) to him, as a lover of city pleasures. Horace, a lover of the country, urges him to return to the simple pleasures of the country. Jonson paraded himself as Horace in some of his plays, but that was at a later date.

There are also several Fusci in Juvenal and Martial. Such models might appeal to Guilpin, but the most prominent of them, Cornelius Fuscus, was a military prefect killed in the Dacian Wars of the Emperor Domitian, and hardly fits the writer of Guilpin's poem.

We should not, however, omit to mention that fuscus as an adjective means swarthy, dark, dusky, tawny and can be metaphorically applied to the voice, hoarse, husky. Perhaps we might bear in mind that one of these characteristics might have applied to Christopher Marlowe. His alias, John Matthew, might have been described as swarthy.

I have spent some time on Everard Guilpin's satiric verse. Although *Skialetheia* was published in 1598 Guilpin may have been writing his poetry throughout the 1590s. The same may be true of John Davies (later Sir John) whose *Epigrams* appeared alongside Marlowe's Ovid Translations or *Elegies* in 1598. It was probably Davies's poems rather than Marlowe's Translations that caused the book to be banned and burned in 1599. I believe that as many as five of Davies's Epigrams are about Marlowe, but in this essay I am only going to concentrate on the two Faustus poems.

It is extremely unlikely that the Faustus Davies addresses can be any other than Marlowe, especially if we consider the book in which they appeared. In any case the Roman satirists seem to have had a tacit agreement that once an epithet had been applied to a particular figure they would not confuse the issue by applying it to anyone else. There is little to connect Davies's Faustus with Marlowe in the actual subject matter, so perhaps we are being granted an insight into Marlowe's daily habits.

In Faustum (7) is the first.

*Faustus not Lord nor knight, nor wise nor olde,
To every place about the town doth ride,
He rides into the fieldes, Playes to behold,
He rides to take boate at the water side.
He rides to Powles, he rides to th' ordinary,
He rides unto the house of bawdery too.
Thither his horse doth him so often carry,
That shortly he will quite forget to go.*

This is plainly a joke, and Faustus is not severely lampooned. If it were Marlowe we might be surprised that he goes everywhere on horseback, but the places he frequents might well suggest the playwright and poet. Could this Faustus have some physical defect?

In Faustum (16):

*That youth, saith Faustus, hath a Lyon scene,
Who from a dycing-house comes mony-lesse.
But when he lost his haire, where had he beene?
I doubt me he had seene a Lyonesse.*

This poem goes on in a similar vein. The loss of hair is common to another of the epigrams I believe to be about Marlowe. There appears to be a hint about the pox here, as well as a fondness for gambling.

In 1598 Thomas Bastard published *Chrestoleros*, Seven Bookes of Epigrames. His 24th Epigram is about Faustus.

*Faustus is sicke of care, the doctors say,
His cure and remedy must be delay.
While sicke consuming Faustus keeps his bedde.
An hundred whole men are consum'd and deade.
After all this Faustus recovereth;
I see care is a trick to cosin death.*

I haven't much idea what this is about, but it seems that Faustus is feigning sickness to escape death in some form. Others die in the meantime so perhaps it is the plague, or military service, or punishment?

The last of the Faustus epigrammatists that I am going to look at is Sir John Harington, Queen Elizabeth's godson. He wrote such a profusion of them that I can only select a handful. A very interesting example is Book I No. 38, called *Comparison of the Sonnet and the Epigram*, in neither of which verse-forms Marlowe has left us anything.

We are told two poets dispute about the merits of the Sonnet and the Epigram. Faustus, called upon to judge, at length gave judgment for the Sonnet:

*Now, for such censure, thise his chiefe censure is,
Their sugred taste best likes his likresse senses.*

Harington then says that though sugar may please the taste, he prefers salt to preserve his verse and make it last.

Nos. 55 & 56, *To Faustus* and *Against Faustus*, are inconsequential. The first tells us that Faustus finds fault with his epigrams because they are too short. He'll pay for that, the implication being that a long one will be directed at him. In No.56 we find that to be true, but the whole poem turns on a pun on pike

and pick. In Book III No.10 *Of Faustus the Fault-finder* he complains that Faustus still finds fault with his verse, and in No. 22 that Faustus finds long epigrams dull.

In Book II No.16 we find Faustus is a stealer of Harington's verse:

*I heard that Faustus oftentime rehearses,
To his chaste Mistris, certaine of my Verses:
In which with use so perfect is he growne,
That she poore foole, now thinkes they are his owne.
I would esteeme it (trust me)grace, not shame,
If DAVIS, or if DANIEL did the same.
For would I thanke, or would I quarrell pike,
I, when I list, could doe to them the like.
But who can wishe a man a fowler spight,
Then have a blind man take away his light.
A begging Theefe, is dangerous to my purse:
A baggage poet to my Verse is worse.*

Plagiarism is a common accusation among this group of poets, but we should note that both Davies and Daniel are likely to have known Marlowe personally.

Book II 31 *Against Faustus* tells us that Faustus claims:

Nought is now said, but hath been said of old.

Harington says that he is a gull who has taken up a false position. He himself now takes up a false position and says of Faustus the opposite of what he means:

*I say, thou art a man of fayre condition,
A man true of thy word, tall of thy hands,
Of high dissent, and left good store of lands,
Thou with false dice and cards hast never plaid,
Corrupted never Widdow, Wife nor Maid,
And as for swearing none in all this Reame,
Doth seldomer in speech curse or blaspheme.
In fine, your virtues are so rare and ample,
For all our sonnes thou maist be made a sample.*

Whether this has any resemblance to the Marlowe of the Baines Note I must leave you to judge.

In the last group of epigrams from Harington that I have selected Faustus is little better than a common criminal or cheat. In IV 66 Faustus is sent to the Sessions for stealing. He is called into the hall as an esquire, and the judge condemns the crier for so terming him. Among the *Additional Epigrams* we find Faustus lost his labour in an idle suit (381) and in *Of good Exhortation*

(403) we seem at last to come, if not to Marlowe, certainly back to Dr. Faustus:

*When Faustus is reprooved for his folly
And warnd how such misdeeds draw on damnation,
He vows in shows repentant seeming holly
Not lightly to regard good exhortation,
But in a trice, like to the bore and dogg,
To former filth and vomit he returns,
And from his conscience casts all care and clogg,
Still practising some lewd ungratious turns.*

If Marlowe is the Faustus of Harington's vitriolic attacks we obviously must treat the comments with considerable caution. We learn elsewhere that Faustus has made friends with the rich Paulus, who is an atheist, and may be Raleigh. The comments of Davies and Guilpin are worthy of more consideration, partly because they do not show the same obsessive hatred that Harington displays. Hidden amongst this plethora of epigrams are undoubtedly comments that are about Marlowe, and if we can sift the grain from the chaff they may give us some additional insight into his life. They represent only a fraction of the coded references to Marlowe both among the epigrams and elsewhere. The greatest problem, however, remains: to date the writing of epigrams that appeared in 1598 or later. One would have thought that for such wit to be valued it would have to be directed at a living and well-known target!

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