

Marlowe and Company in Barnfield's *Greene's Funeralls* (1594)

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Abstract

The accomplished and daring but minor poet Richard Barnfield (1574-1620) was among the first poets to engage creatively with the works of Greene, Marlowe, and Shakespeare. This article argues that Sonnet 9 in Barnfield's *Greene's Funeralls* (1594) reveals not only his admiration for these literary innovators, but also his difficult manoeuvres on the fringes of the group of poetic rivals. Barnfield's often-quoted, but not fully understood "sonnet" reflects the young poet's attempts to accost his more famous contemporaries and also sheds light on the date of composition of *Doctor Faustus* (B) and the early circulation of Shakespeare's "sugred sonnets".

Marlowe, Greene and Peele had got under the shades of a very large vine, laughing to see Nashe, that was but newly come to their college. (Dekker 1969 [1607]: 168)

These lines from Thomas Dekker's *A Knight's Conjuring* (1607) give a vivid picture of the literary relationships between his former companions in London 10-15 years earlier, one that is more convivial than what we have been led to believe. For in spite of the well-known rivalries between them, the poets are nevertheless said to belong to the same "college." One young daring, but accomplished, poet who was attracted to the group was Richard Barnfield (1574-1620), among the first to engage creatively with the poetic and dramatic works of Marlowe and Shakespeare in the 1590s. Stanley Wells reminds us in *Shakespeare and Company* that "Barnfield echoes both *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* in poems published within a year or two of Shakespeare's" (Wells 2007: 95) and that he takes a line from Marlowe's *Edward II* (1.1. 62) and inserts it into his "The Complaint of Daphnis for the Love of Ganymede" (1594) (Wells 2007: 95). In *The Affectionate Shepherd*, too, Barnfield reveals that he was well read in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.¹

¹ More than a hundred years ago Charles Crawford observed that "it is remarkable that whole passages of *The Affectionate Shepherd* are written in

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Barnfield was well tuned in to the literary fashions of his day and was like his more famous contemporary Samuel Daniel well-versed in the stylistic models proposed by Hermogenes and those who revived, propagated, and practiced his poetics.² Although he never rose to fame Barnfield is a sophisticated poet who like many of his better known contemporaries is steeped in Italian literary culture and today he has acquired some distinction because he appears to be an intermediary and a link between Marlowe and Shakespeare: Some of his poems were printed together with the poetry of Marlowe and Shakespeare in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599) and his poetry tellingly reveals knowledge about *Hero and Leander*, *Venus and Adonis*, as well as Shakespeare's "sugred sonnets." Can a poet thus strategically positioned and with first-hand knowledge of Marlowe's oeuvre also shed light in the vexed problem of the dating of Marlowe's plays? I believe so. This brief article argues that Barnfield's *Greene's Funeralls* (entered in Stationers' Register on 1 February, 1594), being evidence of his friendship with and admiration for Robert Greene, allows us to get a fuller view of Barnfield's acquaintance with other works of Marlowe, notably with *The Jew of Malta* and *Doctor Faustus*, and the role of Barnfield himself as potential mediator in the disputes among his more established elders.

Moreover, I propose that Barnfield's deliberate and repeated references to Marlowe and especially to *Doctor Faustus* prove that the scenes particular to the B Text were available to Barnfield no later than January 1594, thus undermining the current orthodoxy that the A Text is closer to Marlowe's original.³ The play is now believed to have been penned shortly after the Tamburlaine plays. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacInnis argue that "the references to Marlowe make it apparent that *Doctor Faustus* was on the stage well before *The troublesome Reign of King John* (1591)" (1998: 158).

seeming imitation of isolated passages of Marlowe's tragedy of *Dido*" (Crawford 1906: 1).

² For Barnfield's use of Hermogenes see Patterson 1970: 95 and 168. For Daniel's use of the ideas of style, see eg Patterson 1970: 73, 17, 293-95.

³ The most representative work defending the current orthodoxy that the A-text, printed in 1604, best preserves the play as Marlowe penned it is Bevington and Rasmussen (1993).

I here wish to draw attention to a poem by Barnfield in *Greene's Funeralls*, his Sonnet 9, which is not technically a sonnet,⁴ but shows him to be tuned in to literary fashions of the day. He associates Greene's poetry to painting (3) and uses the popular *architectura poesis* metaphor (4). In the poem he resumes Greene's critique, though in milder form, of "all that wrote upon him" (4). I quote three of the poem's five sixains in full:

Greene, is the pleasing Object of an eie:
Greene, pleasde the eies of all that lookt upon him.
Greene, is the ground of everie Painters die:
Greene, gaue the ground, to all that wrote upon him;
 Nay more the men, that so Eclipst his fame:
 Purloynde his Plumes, can they deny the same?

Ah could my Muse, old Maltaes Poet passe
 (If any Muse could passe, old Maltaes Poet),⁵
 Then should his name be set in shining brasse,
 In shining brasse for all the world to show it.
 That little children, not as yet begotten
 Might royallize his fame when he is rotten.

But since my Muse begins to vaile hir wings
 And flutter low vpon the lowly Earth:
 As one that sugred Sonnets, seldome sings.
 Except the sound of sadnes, more than mirth,
 To tell the worth of such a worthy man.
 Ile leave it unto those, that better can. (1-18)⁶

So far Sonnet 9 has attracted attention mainly because of the likely allusion to Shakespeare by means of the accusation of plagiarism ("Purloyned his plumes"), which seems to rehearse Greene's attack in 1592 on Shakespeare in *A Groatsworth of Wit* (Wells 2007: 66, 251). Barnfield's work was entered 1 February 1594 and it must have been

⁴ Although the sonnet is an established form with fourteen rhymed verses arranged in Italian in blocks of eight *versus* six verses, "the word *sonet* simply means a poem" (Spiller 1992: 15). Spiller notes that if a "poem is structurally a variant of the basic sonnet, we can rest happy in calling it a sonnet, too" (4). Here, however, Barnfield's "sonnet" of five sixains is only tenuously related to the proportions of the basic sonnet.

⁵ Eriksen 2007: 127-28.

⁶ Klawitter (ed) 2005: 9-10.

written after the publication of Greene's pamphlet and his death in September 1592, because he is referred to rather disrespectfully as "rotten". The intervening year is also a likely period in which Shakespeare began composing and circulating his "sugred Sonnets among his friends," so the likely allusion to *The Sonnets* in Barnfield's description of "his Muse" "[a]s one that sugred Sonnets, seldome sings" (15) would also offer information about the early manuscript circulation of some of Shakespeare's sonnets in the group of *letterati*. It is most likely that Francis Meres in *Palladia Tamis* (1597) remembered Barnfield's phrase on the poet who wrote "sugred sonnets" and circulated them among members of the "college" of fellow poets. However, this glimpse into the early activities and status of Shakespeare should not prevent us from focusing on the obvious, that is, the other poet that is foregrounded in Sonnet 9: "old *Maltaes* Poet" (9. 7; 8). For Barnfield sets out a hierarchy among the poets who "wrote upon" Greene. Due to the fame of Shakespeare critics tend to focus solely on him, but Barnfield first draws attention to another and exceptional poet, possibly unsurpassable in his opinion, and moreover a poet that is associated with "old *Malta*": Christopher Marlowe. The identification of the poet and the island that he chose for the setting of one of his popular plays seem obvious: Malta, that in addition to being given a paragraph in what was a standard Latin schoolboy's text, Cicero's *In Verrem*, where it is singled out as a place of plunder, piracy and sacrilege, would also be known to Barnfield and his contemporaries through Marlowe's courageous urban comedy, *The Jew of Malta*. No other English poet or indeed European would be associated with Malta. Besides, the chiasmic structuring of the verses on "old *Maltaes* Poet" and the use of *gradatio* in the ensuing two verses may possibly be interpreted as an allusion to Marlowe's compositional style (Eriksen 1996: 111-126).⁷

The identification of Marlowe in Sonnet 9 is interesting in itself, because it constitutes one of the first references on record to the play as by Marlowe, but internally in the "sonnet", it immediately follows upon Barnfield's criticism of "all the men that wrote upon" Greene. *The Jew of Malta* is not in itself singled out for attack, but another Marlowe play, *Doctor Faustus*, may have been intended. That play has been said to owe

⁷ For Marlowe's preference for chiasmus in global speech construction, see esp. Eriksen 1987: 192-226.

something to Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (Greg 1950: 1-2, 65). Besides, Marlowe's play had been acted not only in the late 1580s, and prior to the composition of Shakespeare's *King John*, it had also been acted in the period immediately before *Greene's Funeralls* were written. W.W. Greg stated that it could have been acted at the Theatre "any time before the summer of 1594, during one of the brief intermissions of the plague" (1950: 9) or as Fredson Bowers suggested: "during January 1593" (1973: II.125). While bearing this in mind, we note that two of Barnfield's verses in Sonnet 9—

Then should his [Greene's] name be set in shining brasse,
In shining brasse for all the world to show it. (9-10)

recall a passage in *Doctor Faustus* that has already been firmly connected with Marlowe's reuse of an image also found in Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. Both instances involve the use of "brass". The passage in Greene is "Thou meanest before many daies be past,/To compass *England* with a wall of brasse." (2.203-204), which in Marlowe's version is adapted to setting in Germany, when his "spirits" are ordered to "wall all *Germany* with brasse,/And make swift *Rhine* circle faire *Wittenberge*" (115-116). The wonders performed by the magicians in Greene and Marlowe are closely enough phrased to support the claim of borrowing, and in his defence of Greene Barnfield uses it to pinpoint how Marlowe had learnt from Greene.

But Barnfield does not stop here: Before he refers more specifically to Marlowe's *Jew* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in lines 7-10 and 15, he draws attention to both poets in a couplet that prepares for his critique of them:

Nay more the men, that so Eclipst his fame:
Purloynde his Plumes, can they deny the same?

In the second of these lines the phrase "Purloynde his Plumes" quite obviously rehearses Greene's notorious attack on Shakespeare, but the first image and the rhyme seem specifically designed to pinpoint Marlowe, whom Greene had wanted to warn against the "vpstart Crow", Shakespeare. In fact, Barnfield's couplet recalls an emphatic point in the action of *Doctor Faustus*, the very end of the conflict between Faustus and the courtier Benvolio in the B-text. That conflict unfolds in the four

scenes set at or in the vicinity of the imperial court. Due to the sustained references in them to the Actaeon myth, commonly interpreted as a tale of forbidden knowledge, the conflict functions as a farcical play-within-the-play or a comic subplot patterned on Faustus's transgression in the main plot.⁸ Like Faustus in his last hour to live, Benvolio is defeated and "forced into belief", Leonard Barkan notes (1980: 352). The courtier's disbelief and pride are converted into despair and submission in his "curtain" couplet:

Sith black disgrace hath thus eclipsed our fame,
We'le rather die with grief than live with shame.

Barnfield's allusion to these lines in his couplet ("Nay more the men, that so Eclipse his fame:/Purloyned his Plumes, can they deny the same?") becomes clear enough, if we identify what Marlowe had lifted from Greene, a passage in Greene's popular novella *Pandosto. The Triumph of Time* (1588). The context is one of moral choice, when Fawnia the shepherdess reasons with herself as follows:

Cease then not only to say but to think to love Dorastus, and dissemble thy love,
Fawnia, for better it were to die with grief than to live with shame.⁹

Benvolio's curtain line "We'le rather die with grief than live with shame," quite obviously repeats Greene's prose at this crucial point in the novella. Then, too, the allusion is underpinned by the rhyme: fame–shame *versus* fame–same. The likelihood that the couplet coincided with the conclusion of the play's second period of uninterrupted acting in performance, i.e. before the intermission, would seem to enhance its role as a particular and memorable point of the action further.¹⁰ On a comic or farcical level the metamorphosis of the courtier and his two companions, who also receive "brutish shapes", i.e. antlers and are thrown by devils into "a lake of mud and dirt" (IV.iii.24), prepares the spectators for

⁸ See Barkan 1980: 317-59, and well-known versions in Alciati (1531), Whitney (1586), and the survey in Henkel and Schöne 1967; 1996: cols. 202-204.

⁹ Robert Greene, *Pandosto. The Triumph of Time*, in es. Paul Salzman, *An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; 1998, p. 182.

¹⁰ Marlowe's source is Ovid 1971: III, 138-258. The source is fully documented in Eriksen 1987: 145-49.

Faustus's desire in the final soliloquy to be "changed into a brutish beast" and "be chang'd into small water drops,/And fall into the ocean" (V.i.76-77) when he faces the devils. The comic scene obviously made an impact on contemporary audiences as well as on Shakespeare, because he referred to it in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and it inspired a similar farcical scene in *The Tempest* as also several verbal parallels suggest.¹¹

There is, then, a cluster of allusions to Marlowe's work in Sonnet 9, in Barnfield's homage to Greene and record of how both Marlowe and Shakespeare had drawn on his deceased friend's work. Not only does the poem contain the first reference to Marlowe "as old Maltaes Poet" and an already noted allusion to Marlowe's borrowing from Greene in *Doctor Faustus*, it also contains a pun on the curtain couplet of the imperial sequence in the B-text, placing it and the B-text before 1 February 1594, not to say well before the Birde-Rowley "adicyons" of 1602.¹² The several references to Marlowe and *Doctor Faustus* constitute yet another piece of evidence that undermines the new orthodoxy that the A-text is based on "an authorial manuscript composed of interleaved scenes written by two dramatists" (Bevington and Rasmussen 1993: 64). The explanation offered by Bevington and Rasmussen is neat but does not square quite with the various pieces of evidence proving that significant parts the B-text, such as the fuller versions of the papal and the imperial scenes, existed prior to their shorter equivalents in the A-text, nor that certain stylistic features in scenes assumed to be by Samuel Rowley closely match that in undisputed scenes by Marlowe and also appear throughout the Marlowe canon.¹³ In actual fact, material shared by the A-

¹¹ In connection with the cozening of the Host in *Merry Wives*, Bardolph explains how three Germans "Threw me off from behind one of them, in a slough of mire; and set spurs and away, like three *German* devils, three *Doctor Faustasses*" (IV.v.63-65). See "Falstaff at Midnight: The Metamorphosis of Myth," pp. 124-47. As for *The Tempest*, the punishment of the three courtiers in *Doctor Faustus* is the template for Prospero's revenge on Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban for their attempt on Miranda, See Eriksen 1992: I. 285-305, and 1997: 130-31.

¹² Thomas Birde and Samuel Rowley were paid 4 pounds for writing additions to *Doctor Faustus* in 1602; these are apparently entirely lost. See Greg 1950: 11-12, and Bevington and Rasmussen 1993: 62

¹³ See the discussion and documentation in Eriksen 1987: 193-95.

and B-texts clearly shows the A-text to be memorially derived from the B-text, as convincingly demonstrated by Thomas Pettitt in “Marlowe’s Texts and Oral Transmission: Towards the *Zielform*” (2006: 213-42). The evidence shows, Pettitt succinctly summarizes,

that [the] A-version of *Doctor Faustus* reflects the impact of oral transmission (memorization and reproduction from memory) on a play whose original text, where they have material in common, is better represented by the B-text. (213)

Pettitt’s thoughtful and systematic analysis thus confirms the observation that the B-text preserves Marlowe’s style of speech construction better than the A-text,¹⁴ and thus is evidence that the scenes particular to the B-text existed prior to the Birde-Rowley additions of 1602.

In this context, however, “Sonnet 9” in *Greene’s Funeralls* documents Barnfield’s complex relationship to the leading figures of what Dekker appropriately dubbed “their college” as well as his sustained engagement with Marlowe’s works, thus corroborating existing data in support of an early date of the B-text. The allusions to and “quotes” from *Doctor Faustus* in Sonnet 9 strongly suggest that the young poet at some time at the end of 1593, and no later than January 1594, had access to or had seen a performance of a version of *Doctor Faustus* that contained the subplot involving the fate of the knight Benvolio. That subplot survives only in the version of the play printed in 1616 (the B-text), but is echoed both in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Tempest*.¹⁵ However, the nature of Barnfield’s critique of Marlowe, makes it clear that Marlowe was still alive when Sonnet 9 was written (“can they deny the same”), that is the “sonnet” was written prior to May 29, 1593, when Marlowe was murdered, as it would make no sense to challenge a poet who was already dead. When all is considered, Barnfield’s tribute to and defense of Greene’s work is an important source for understanding the relationship between the leading dramatists and poems around 1590, while it at the same time contains conclusive evidence for an early date of the B-text of *Doctor Faustus*.

¹⁴ Marlowe’s characteristic style of periodic speech construction is better and more consistently preserved in the B-text, also where it shares materials with the A-text (Eriksen 1987: 220-221), a fact that corroborates the findings of Pettitt (2006: 213-42).

¹⁵ See above at note 8.

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