Marlowe's Literary Double
Agency: *Doctor Faustus*
as a Subversive
Comedy of Error

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Résumé : *Le présent article se veut une réévaluation des éléments comiques du 1616 ("B") texte de Doctor Faustus de Marlowe, lesquels ont été régulièrement sous-estimés ou trop hâtivement catégorisés comme frivoles, falsifiés, ou nuisibles à l'unité de la pièce. Au lieu de les intégrer dans la tradition homilétique, donc celle du théâtre moralisateur du Moyen Âge, cette étude les trouve parodiques et subversifs. Le traitement de Marlowe annonce une nouvelle sensibilité littéraire d'indéterminisme ludique et ambiguïté morale.*

The better they were at their jobs, the harder it was to distinguish them from "genuine" subversives. . . . In a sense they did not even know which side they were really working for. . . . The spy kept a foot in both camps, and was ready to jump either way.¹

The Gull gets on a surplis
With a crosse upon his breast,
Like Allen playing Faustus,
In that manner he was drest.²

. . . the first time as tragedy, the second as farce . . .³

The comic material in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* has long been a source of critical controversy and consternation, and seen as a major "problem" within the traditionally conceived "tragic" or "moral" structure of the play. I would like to suggest, however, that it is not the comic elements but the attempt to impose a generically consistent tragic or moral reading of the play that is the "problem." Accepting and indeed relishing the

comical and farcical aspects of the play can lead to provocative insights into the play's effects and meanings as a whole. In focusing on the comic elements as integral and important to the text overall, I have come to see the play as containing an unabashedly comic sensibility and as essentially parodic rather than primarily tragic or moralistic in tone. By "parody" I mean, not the traditionally conceived mocking of evil to be found in conventional morality plays, but a subversion of that very convention, creating a turnabout in the ideology expected of a typical morality play. This is particularly true of the ending. The final scenes, despite their "mighty" tragic lines and hellish spectacle, insistently evoke comic imagery from the middle of the play, undermining the tragic or moralistic potential of the ending, parodying the inherent didacticism of these genres in general, and playing with the orthodox and conventional codes of both religious and poetic doctrine.

The "problem" of *Doctor Faustus* is exacerbated by the existence of two distinctly different texts that differ most significantly in the comic episodes. The increasing importance given to textual problems in the last few decades mandates a brief confrontation of the issue — and justification of the choice of text — before launching into a discussion of the subversively parodic effects of the comic material. Indeed, the first question a reader of such a study would rightly ask is "Which *Doctor Faustus*?" I have chosen the B-text, for the obvious reason that it contains a great deal more comic material than the A-text, and because I find the effects of these comic episodes to have important implications that have not been sufficiently acknowledged in *Faustus* criticism.⁴

While the 1604 A-text is now and has for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries been considered by most critics to be the "authoritative" and preferred version of the play, the 1616 B-text has had its proponents and a brief flirtation with authority.⁵ Historically, the preference for the A-text was due in large part to the aesthetic aversion to the crude and burlesque comedy that abounds in the B-text, but also to a small but significant entry in Henslowe's *Diary* recording payment to William Bird and Samuel Rowley for their 1602 "adicyones in doctor fostes," a phrase that has almost become a trope in *Faustus* criticism signalling the presence of non-authorial revisions.⁶ These additions were generally assumed to be the comic material found in the B- but not the A-text. W. W. Greg, long considered the Father of New Bibliography, argued that the comic material in the B-text was, however regrettably, mostly Marlovian and based on Marlowe's *English Faust Book* source.⁷ This, and his assertion that the A-text was largely a memorial reconstruction of a much abridged touring version of the play,

helped give the B-text new authoritative currency for a time.⁸ Nevertheless, Greg's overturning of the supposition that the comedy unique to the B-text was spurious did little to effect a reevaluation of the humorous passages as having any significant literary value. A recent shift has again demonstrated a preference for the A-text, again based on critical contempt for the farcical episodes.

The comic material in the B-text has historically been given very short shrift. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics almost universally condemned the comic sequences as trivial and inappropriate to the elevated tragic themes of the play, as mere filler and comic relief for the groundlings, and, most damningly, as non-authorial, spurious additions to Marlowe's "original" text. Modern critics seem largely to share this contempt, and, in some cases, have over-hastily discounted the potential heterodoxy of the B-text. Roma Gill, once a disciple of Greg, but recently a convert to the A-text camp, claims that "most of the additions in the B text are trivial."⁹ Constance Brown Kuriyama similarly maintains that "acceptance of the B-text as 'original' or authoritative leaves us with a work that is, to put it plainly, an aesthetic monstrosity and a critical nightmare."¹⁰ She laments the "author's fatal attraction to the coarser episodes of the Faustbook," which "reduces Faustus' struggle to terms that I find hopelessly lurid and vulgar" and confuses the theology.¹¹ Michael Keefer finds the additional comic material in the B-text to be "for the most part unskilful and tedious," and a return to the "homiletic style of the English Faust Book."¹² He claims that the B-text was obviously censored and made more orthodox. This view is shared by critics such as David Bevington, Eric Rasmussen, and Stephen Greenblatt, who see the A-text as more radically challenging the orthodox beliefs that the B-text tends to uphold.¹³ The ceremonious spectacles in particular are often cited as invoking an orthodox attitude towards contemporary religious doctrine.¹⁴ However, most of these arguments rest on an unduly dismissive attitude towards the power and effect of the comic material. What Kuriyama finds theologically confused and calls an "aesthetic monstrosity" one could just as easily label generically subversive or dialogic. The comic material seems to me to have a distinctly carnivalesque sensibility rather a straightforward homiletic one. Reducing Faustus's struggle to the "lurid and vulgar" is an excellent strategy for parody, and the use of the homiletic style allows for broad travestying of not only orthodox religious dogma but orthodox poetics as well. That the B-text shows evidence of censorship suggests that the subversive elements in the play might be more subtly embedded. Indeed, I believe the B-text more than the A-text effectively demonstrates how Marlowe reshaped the ideology of the moral-

ity play and of conventional tragedy by giving them a comic sensibility, creating an essentially questioning and subversive form of drama.

For Marlowe, rewriting the legend of Doctor Faustus as a play must have presented several challenges, despite its great potential for larger-than-life spectacle and magnificent poetry. First, how does one make a fundamentally medieval, moralistic plot of religious transgression and subsequent damnation relevant to the newly emerging Renaissance ethos, obsessed with new learning and human potential? Second, and even more significant, how does a playwright immersed in new theatrical concepts of mimetic and naturalistic representation portray the sublime — both the forbidden knowledge that Faustus acquires and the supernatural with which he deals — on stage? Holding a “mirror up to nature” is one thing; holding a mirror up to the supernatural is quite another. Literally, it cannot be done, at least, not in a serious way. A natural solution then, is to combine the contradictory impulses of medieval allegory and morality with Renaissance “psychology” and naturalism in order to parody the medieval morality play and to write a comic send-up of damnation. By literalizing the metaphor and allegory of the medieval morality tradition in a modern context and creating a distinctively modern protagonist with humanist aspirations relevant to contemporary intellectuals, Marlowe writes a subversively interrogative morality play that questions the very ideals that the morality genre is intended to inculcate.

The solution, however, is not quite that simple. If the play were a straightforward parody, it would not have been canonized as a tragedy for several centuries; indeed, it doubtless would not have survived the original censors. *Doctor Faustus* is obviously more than a simple parody of a morality play, at least in the modern sense of the word “parody.” The play contains many aspects of tragedy and morality that are compelling and moving. Marlowe’s style of parody is, paradoxically, consistent to some degree with the medieval tradition that he is parodying. Medieval parody, as Bakhtin describes it, is inherently dialogic, incorporating the voices and ideologies of both the original and its alternatives, without allowing one a polemical advantage over the other. Every “direct discourse,” Bakhtin notes (religion, philosophy, tragedy, and so on), had its parody, not necessarily in the modern sense of the word, which Bakhtin describes as “impoverished” because parody is often equated with satire and seen as strictly critical, mocking, or disparaging, but in a rich and varied style that stood both beside and against its precursors, providing an indispensable alternate point of view. Where satire creates a feeling of superiority and contempt, parody elicits a much warmer emotion associated with humour. In medieval parody, according to Bakhtin, “the genre itself, the style, the language [of the

parodied original] are all put in cheerfully irreverent quotation marks. . . . The direct and serious word was revealed, in all its limitations and insufficiency, only after it had become the laughing image of that word — but it was by no means discredited in the process.”¹⁵

In addition to genre, style and language, one should specify didactic intent, as the genres of morality play and tragedy with which Marlowe is playing, according to contemporary poetics, have distinctly instructional purposes. It is in this latter sense, in particular, that Marlowe’s parodic travesty in *Doctor Faustus* complements, burlesques and transcends its precursors.¹⁶ Such parody simultaneously ridicules and reifies, flatters and falsifies. He takes popular ingredients from earlier didactic traditions, but transforms them into something radically different, helping to usher in a new dramatic sensibility of ambiguity, indeterminacy and heterodoxy to the Elizabethan stage — a kind of literary atheism or crisis of faith in the power or even relevance of overtly didactic literature.

Since this kind of parodic treatment, particularly of religious doctrine, was extremely dangerous in Reformation England, Marlowe would have had to disguise his subversive parody with a mask of orthodoxy. The problem of censors clamping down on such a subversive treatment of religious belief solved itself: Marlowe’s use of the structure and devices of the morality play is the perfect vehicle for both send-up and cover-up. The very technique that interrogates is also the built-in defense mechanism against charges of subversion. On the surface, the play conforms well enough to the traditional conventions, particularly in the use of the Chorus, that the subversive questioning of orthodoxies might be overlooked. The over-the-top spectacle could be interpreted merely as religious zeal. Indeed, many well-respected and relatively recent critics have made convincing arguments for the play as upholding an orthodox moral lesson in the style of a traditional morality play.¹⁷ *Doctor Faustus* may contain all the hallmarks of a typical morality play, but the manner in which they are presented is anything but *contained*. Surrounding the text’s morality structure and intermeshed with its allegorical devices is a comic sensibility that casts a parodic and subversive light over the entire play. Marlowe’s use of the comic material makes the play work simultaneously for and against the didacticism of both morality and tragedy, creating more of a dialogic exploration of dramatic style and intent than a monological thematic lesson in propriety. Marlowe’s techniques seem to have been effective, judging from many respected critical interpretations of the play that diverge in fairly equal measure to see it as a tragedy, as a homiletic or moral play, or as iconoclastic and subversive.¹⁸ This neat division is, perhaps, statistical proof supporting the idea that the play is

basically constructed of contradictory impulses, each simultaneously reifying and undermining an orthodox worldview. Critics searching for a coherent, unified set of themes have certainly found them in *Doctor Faustus*, but they have found them in contradictory and multiple forms.

Part of the subversive potential can be found in Marlowe's main source, *The English Faust Book*.¹⁹ It contains a great deal of farcical humour within its morality structure and implicitly sympathizes, to some extent, with the hero's humanist aspirations. Marlowe lifted many of the comic episodes directly from this source, and added several more original comic scenes, integrating them into a traditional morality-play structure, complete with the traditional stage properties, subtly turning this supposed morality play into a burlesque of the medieval notion of damnation.²⁰ Marlowe took the old-fashioned, hackneyed techniques of the morality play — the heavenly throne, hell mouth, allegorical figures such as the seven deadly sins, the good and bad angels, and the devils — which would have been still familiar to and perhaps still frightening for an Elizabethan audience, and meshed them with subversive British folk humour. He fused them in a brilliantly innovative way to work against the conventionally didactic and monologic themes of tragedy and morality and work for a much more complex and even contradictory humanistic worldview. He effectively overturned the traditional function of comedy in the morality, which is a foil for the serious plot or theme, so that comedy, in a sense, becomes the main plot and tragedy the parodied sub-plot. It is not sin and evil that are parodied so much as the attitudes towards sin and evil within social and literary conventions of orthodox morality and tragedy.

The burlesque humour overshadows the play from beginning to end. Wagner's rhetorical antics in the opening scenes set up the ludic linguistic treatment within the play, making rhetoric a thematic issue. Faustus's reasoning at the beginning of the play contains several logical fallacies, as many critics have painstakingly pointed out, that diminish his status as a grand tragic figure. He twists logic and interpretation wilfully in rejecting philosophy, medicine, law and theology. The final argument against divinity is the most obviously fallacious, based, as Michael Hattaway observes, on the "notorious devil's syllogism exposed by Luther and incorporated into the homilies, those officially sanctioned sermons which had to be read every week in Elizabethan church services."²¹ His reasoning, therefore, would have been obviously problematic to anyone who was listening in church, and would scarcely allow him to be seen as a "Titanic figure" of learning.²² Such an obvious rhetorical error, based on the dubious short-cut logic of Ramus, which was much maligned in Marlowe's Cambridge circle, has led

Jonathan Dollimore to speculate that Faustus's argument may be "half-serious, half facetious," possibly parodying the figure of the learned scholar.²³ The "tragic" Faustus is further undermined by the fact that at his height of power in the middle of the play he is paradoxically too ridiculous and yet not "fallen" enough to be truly tragic. His anti-papal antics conform too nicely to the contemporary anti-Catholic prejudices to be part of a tragic vision, and the farcical folk humour of his comical gulling of the rustics, as critics have insisted for centuries, has no "appropriate" function in a truly tragic setting.

Despite the fact that modern reevaluations of this material have added some interesting insights into its possible significance,²⁴ even relatively recent scholars tend to see the comic passages as trivial in relation to the play's "tragic" themes, a reaction suggesting the forcefulness of the tragic coding within the play. C. L. Barber, for example, sees the play as more tragic than moralistic because "the alternatives are not simply good or evil . . . there is the further heroic alternative."²⁵ There is a compelling sympathy created through Faustus's poetry at the beginning and the end of the play, yet it seems to me that the tragic/heroic mode is too incongruously accompanied by the farcical to be uncomplicated or straightforwardly tragic. I suggest that the "further alternative" within the play is more than heroic: it is parodic. Of the play's comic elements, Barber notes that "there is certainly much that lets us down, or is irrelevant—much more in the 1616 version than in the 1604."²⁶ He adds, "most of the additional matter in the 1616 version seems to me to lack imaginative and stylistic relation to the core of the play."²⁷ John Gassner, too, dismisses the problems presented by the "crude passages of clowning humor," maintaining that the play is "rightly designated as a tragedy" and the comic passages are likely unauthorial.²⁸ Such brusque dismissals, however, fail to erase the existence of these passages and the "problem" they present for interpretation based on convention.

On the other hand, Hattaway notes that "if we side with the Romantics," equating Faustus with the noble Promethean searcher, or Goethean tragic hero, Faustus will be found lacking in a Byronic grandeur of soul, and the comic scenes will be mere bathos, unfortunate slapstick interludes inserted for "comic relief" or at best to satisfy the prejudices of a chauvinist or anti-Catholic audience.²⁹ Modern critical inheritors of the Romantic view of Faustus as a Renaissance hero often equate the protagonist with Marlowe himself, also destroyed by the indifferent or malevolent powers that be. Such readings usually find in the comic sequences either a direct anti-Catholic or more subversive anti-Calvinist statement, or dismiss them altogether as

un-Marlovian. For example, Nicholas Brooke maintains that while “all statements of the ‘good’ moral remain flat, vague and meaningless,” the comic aspects of the play effectively invert and satirize morality play elements in protest against the nature of a monstrous God.³⁰ These arguments, it seems to me, while providing insight into the potentially subversive effects of the text, work at the opposite extreme to the moralistic readings, presenting a stronger argument for intentional and consistent subversion of a particular doctrine than the contradictory impulses within the play allow.

Following up on T. S. Eliot’s observation of Marlowe’s affinities with the “old English humour” of the morality plays, David Bevington placed *Doctor Faustus* in the tradition of homiletic tragedy, in which the hero’s vices are comically parodied and displaced onto other characters to counteract audience identification with the sins of the hero. Bevington’s moralistic reading became more or less canonical for quite some time. Seeing the play as simply homiletic, however, disregards the palpable humanistic sensibility within the play. While the play evokes a Romantic sense of admiration for Faustus’s audacious revolt, his striving after knowledge is condemned only because of the extreme to which he goes. The comedy, if read in this context, “fails” to counteract our sympathy with Faustus as tragic hero. Moralistic readings tend either to dismiss much of the comic material as no longer relevant or to ignore its tendency not simply to imitate but also to parody the typical humour of the morality tradition from which it derives. Such criticism diminishes the subversive potential of the comedy by relegating it to the “tradition” without perceiving the humour’s ironic divergence from that which it imitates.³¹ Hattaway notes that “the humour here is the cockiness of the condemned criminal, laughing that he might not weep,” holding onto his heterodoxy to the end.³² Dollimore, too, notes Faustus’s insistence on transgressing the limits, fully aware of the consequences, in order, perhaps, to question and subvert the authority of those limits.³³ For example, the unabashedly comic use of the allegorical figures of the Seven Deadly Sins fails to evoke the typically fearful response in the morality protagonist, but rather elicits sarcasm. Faustus mocks them, boldly — and perhaps even facetiously — stating, “O, how this sight doth delight my soul!” (2.3.163), as if self-consciously playing his “vicious” role to the hilt in an attempt to explode the stereotype he has become.

The conventional morality structure of the text is further eroded by the uncharacteristic moral meekness of the taciturn Chorus. The Chorus, traditionally a strong interpretive voice, pointing the audience towards the moral lessons of the play, is unusually reticent in *Doctor Faustus*. At the beginning of Act 3, just after Lucifer himself has appeared to Faustus and presented

the pageant of Sins, the Chorus presents a simple travelogue of Faustus's eight-day journey on the dragon's back, with no interpretive guidance for the preceding scenes and no moral judgments of Faustus's transgressions. Similarly, the Chorus's presentation of the prologue and epilogue is unusually mild and lacking in specific religious conviction by comparison with the choruses of conventional morality plays. The Prologue announces the intention to "perform / The form of Faustus' fortunes, *good or bad*, / And now to patient judgments we appeal" (7-9, my italics), leaving interpretation uncharacteristically open. The brevity of the moral lesson of the epilogue hides a complexity in perspective:

Faustus is gone. Regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
Only to wonder at unlawful things,
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
To practise more than heavenly power permits. (4-8)

Clifford Leech notes a slightly burlesque tone in the alliteration of "hellish fall" and "fiendful fortune."³⁴ Indeed, the lines resound with alliteration — wise/wonder; deepness/doth; forward wits; practice/power permits — to a point verging on euphuistic parody. Furthermore, given the chance to fully appreciate this epilogue, an audience might begin to question and even resent the earthly-defined limits of "heavenly power," which do not permit exploration of the great depths of "unlawful" knowledge, as wondrous and enticing as it might be. One might suspect that in these sections Marlowe has the Chorus merely mouth what *ought* to be said, or what is expected, and not necessarily what the play actually presents, while suggesting within its slightly ludic tone and with what is left unsaid a potentially contradictory moral that parodies the convention.

Barbara Howard Traister is one of the many critics to articulate the basic contradiction within the play: "the play's words and actions do not match."³⁵ She is specifically alluding to the disparity between Faustus's aspirations, as he expresses them poetically in the opening passages of the play, and his accomplishments as we see them unfold comically on stage. I think, however, that this observation can be taken much further. The contradiction between word and action is not limited to the main character, but is expressed in the very fabric of the play itself. *Fabula* and *sujet* are at odds; mimesis resists diegesis; the visual spectacle of the play consistently undermines its own narrative plot, poetic tone, and moral structure. Within this contradiction, Dollimore asserts, the morality structure negates "what the play experientially affirms—the heroic aspirations of 'Renaissance man.'"³⁶ Neither the morality plot structure nor the romantic or tragic "experience" of the play

dominates or consistently overwhelms the other; the comedy intrudes, helping to create a constant dissonance throughout the play between what one sees and what one hears—or, perhaps, what one can say.

To recount the basic plot or *fabula* of *Doctor Faustus* is to present a simple morality tale straight from the medieval imagination. A man sells his soul to the devil for absolute knowledge and twenty-four year of unlimited power, at the end of which the devil takes him off to hell for his deserved punishment. If one adds descriptions of the force of the poetry, and takes into account the historical cultural importance of striving after knowledge, the play might become a Renaissance tragedy. If one adds the complication of the comic and parodic material, however, in both its physical and rhetorical aspects, generic codification becomes hopelessly muddled. The comedy, particularly the comic middle, weakens the pretensions to seriousness in the opening and, most importantly, in the closing scenes, undermining a consistent and straightforward tragic or moralistic theme.

The comic middle is rife with sophomoric pranks and sleight-of-hand that one would hesitate to dignify with the adjective “juvenile.” Throwing fireworks at the cardinals, confounding the Pope by stealing his food and wine and boxing his ears while invisible, gulling the horse-courser, giving horns to Benvolio, and playing tricks on drunken clowns — these are hardly the results one expects from the transcendent ambitions to which Faustus aspires in the opening of the play. It is easy to understand why critics would rather simply dismiss these bits of farce as spurious than try to fit them into a coherent argument. I suspect that witnessing these spectacles on stage would have an even greater undermining effect on the heroic Faustus than does merely reading them in the text, as the potential for physical humour is enormous. J. T. McNeely, citing several directors who discuss the stagecraft of the play, notes that the comic episodes “are much more effective on the stage than one would imagine from even the closest study of the printed play. . . . In performance they are entertaining far beyond expectation.”³⁷ This kind of comedy lends itself perfectly to improvisation and extemporaneous *ad libs* of the kind that Hamlet disparages in his famous speech to the players. Marlowe, however, demonstrates how Hamlet’s pet peeve (or more likely Shakespeare’s jab at the bombastic acting style of Edward Allen and the antics of clown-actor Will Kemp), can actually be turned to the playwright’s advantage. Marlowe, it seems, did not fear that the spectacle would detract from “some necessary question of the play” set forth in his poetry; he may indeed have *counted* on such detraction.

The play presents an awesome array of spectacles, calling upon all the technical ingenuity that Elizabethan stagecraft had at its disposal. This

insistent exhibitionism suggests that these spectacles may have been designed to work self-consciously to highlight the nature and power of spectacle itself. The play's insistence on its own theatricality can be seen early on with Faustus's first conjuration of Mephistopheles. The shape of the dragon in which Mephistopheles first appears surprises and displeases Faustus, so he orders him to assume the shape of a Franciscan friar — a much more appropriate image for a devil on the Elizabethan stage, and a potentially humorous moment for the audience. This scene calls attention to the spectacle and self-conscious choice of stage imagery. It also provides an odd pause in a highly dramatic moment of the action, in which shrewd audience members might reflect on how religious imagery can be manipulated *outside* of the theatre for political purposes. From here on, the play presents pageants, dumb shows, and an amazing display of stage tricks to represent the supernatural powers of the devil. Among these, Hattaway notes, are "spectacles which are as memorable as the play's mightiest lines."³⁸

The self-consciousness of this process highlights the awareness that the supposed magic on the stage is, of course, only stage magic, mere trickery, subtly suggesting that the miraculous and the demonic in "reality" may also be mere stagecraft. Mephistopheles alludes to this paradox when he informs Faustus that it was not magical power that brought him; Faustus has no more conjuring ability than Wagner or Robin:

FAUSTUS: Did not my conjuring raise thee? Speak.

MEPHISTOPHELES: That was the cause, but yet *per accidens*.

For when we hear one rack the name of God,
Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ,
We fly in hope to get his glorious soul,
Nor will we come unless he use such means,
Whereby he is in danger to be damned. (1.3.43-49)

These lines create an interesting paradox surrounding the idea of magic. There is no magic *per se*, at least none over which Faustus has any real power. The words he speaks have no special power to conjure the devil, except that by blaspheming he literally damns himself. Mephistopheles *does* theoretically have supernatural power, yet he is, of course, an actor; all the conjuring is done by actors and therefore is only stage magic. His admission undermines an entire system of beliefs in human access to magic and the magical power of words, indicating that such beliefs are based on either illusion or delusion. The abundance of stage magic within the play undermines itself, eventually condemning itself to reveal its nature as illusion and trickery.³⁹ This is not necessarily to deny the existence of the supernatural

or divine but only to question its doctrinal representations and the idea of conventionally-conceived human interaction with it.

Faustus continues his burlesque catechism, asking Mephistopheles, “where is the place that men call hell?” (2.1.119). In answer, the devil makes a similar conundrum of hell as a place that exists and yet does not exist:

MEPHISTOPHELES: Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place, but where we are is hell,
And where hell is there must we ever be.
And, to be short, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be hell that is not heaven.
FAUSTUS: I think hell’s a fable.
MEPHISTOPHELES: Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind.
FAUSTUS: Why, dost thou think that Faustus shall be damned?
MEPHISTOPHELES: Ay, of necessity, for here’s the scroll
In which thou has given thy soul to Lucifer.
FAUSTUS: Ay, and body too, but what of that?
Think’st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine
That after this life there is any pain?
No, these are trifles and mere old wives’ tales.
MEPHISTOPHELES: But I am an instance to prove the contrary,
For I tell thee I am damned and now in hell.
FAUSTUS: Nay an this be hell, I’ll willingly be damned. (2.1.124–41)

Mephistopheles argues that hell is a state of mind, not the physical place of literal fire and torment that held popular imagination for so long; this is an argument that Faustus simply cannot fathom. Faustus cannot grasp that his and Mephistopheles’s experiences of the present moment are vastly different, and that for Mephistopheles, the loss of heaven and God means eternal torment in itself without needing fire and brimstone to make it a physical reality. Although he argues passionately that hell exists and is torture, Mephistopheles’s description of it here proleptically undermines the simplistic visual portrayal of hell presented at the end of the play, hence the spectacle’s traditional power to evoke terror and compliance. Although he serves the “prince of lies,” Mephistopheles, for the audience, can be seen as a kind of truth-telling character, as sincere and reliable a presenter in his own paradoxical way as Faustus is self-deceiving. He makes no attempt to deceive Faustus regarding the existence and nature of hell. Indeed, his more sophisticated depiction of hell is far more compelling and terrifying in its own way than the one presented by relics of the medieval stage such as the hell mouth, no matter how spectacular they might be. The grand spectacle of damnation at the end of the play parodies itself, in part because of

Mephistopheles's more psychologically realistic characterization of hell. Once again word and spectacle are at odds, but this time, Mephistopheles's poetic image has more power than the self-parodic visual one, which undermines any attempt to take it seriously. The church-sanctioned visual portrayal of hell has become far less compelling than the devil's own verbal description.

Indeed, the power of words, particularly in relation to action or spectacle, is explored in *Doctor Faustus*, as it is in most of Marlowe's plays, with ambivalent and equivocal results.⁴⁰ The pervasive contradiction between words and spectacles within the play is disorienting, since at different moments, the two are given the power to undermine each other. When Faustus charms the clowns dumb, he is, in a sense, trying to quell the power of words, and, in particular, the subversive potential of humour. Faustus plays word games with the clowns, particularly the horse-courser on the topic of his leg, but charms them all dumb just as they are about to reveal the various ridiculous tricks he has played on them. Perhaps Faustus would be embarrassed to have his foolish pastimes revealed to his worthy host. Or perhaps the gaping but silent mouths of the clowns simply provide a merry spectacle for the party. In either case, the scene suggests the comic potential and subversive dangers that exist within the clowning, whether expressed linguistically or visually.

Faustus again hints at the potential "danger" of words when he asks that his audience not speak during his spectral "dumb shows":

My lord, I must forewarn your majesty
That when my spirits present the royal shapes
Of Alexander and his paramour,
Your grace demand no questions of the king,
But in dumb silence let them come and go. (4.1.91-96)

Before the presentation of Helen to the scholars, Faustus similarly warns them, "Be silent then, for danger is in words" (5.1.26). In each case, there is a suggestion that words might somehow disturb the conjuration. Placing the emphasis on words also suggests their power to dispel illusions created by trickery rather than "real" magic. However, the Emperor's attempt to embrace the ghost of Alexander is similarly proscribed, suggesting the equal power of action and word to dispel the illusion. Whether through word or deed, questioning the doctrines surrounding the supernatural is not permitted either by Mephistopheles or by the power structures of Elizabethan society. Such questioning would subvert their "unquestionable" authority.

Several critics have made the argument that the play contains a purposeful atheistic statement, either against the contemporary idea of a "monstrous

God” or against the harshness of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. However, I see the “atheism” in the play, if one can call it that, as more sceptical of religious dogma than of religious faith, a questioning more of structured belief systems than of belief itself. It is a parodic travestying of the belief in or fear of the conventional images of supernatural intrusion into the worldly in general, and the manner in which man-made doctrines and rituals surrounding that fear have the power to hold people in thrall. Faustus, in a sense, propels himself irrevocably towards his own damnation because he is unable to believe in any other possibility. Despite his bold, atheistic aspirations, he cannot escape the doctrines of his society, which say that he must be damned.

The comic passages work against this tendency to accept orthodoxy without question by celebrating the human over the supposed divine and by burlesquing doctrine. Robin’s pact with Wagner in Act 1, Scene 4, for instance, is more than a simple comic parody of Faustus’s pact; it ridicules the whole idea of a pact with the devil, reducing it from the terrible reality of the previous scene to matter for a comic retort:

WAGNER: Alas, poor slave, see how poverty jests in his Nakedness! I know the villain’s out of service, and so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood raw.

ROBIN: Not so, neither. I had need to have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear, I can tell you. (7–12)

Robin parodies Faustus’s negotiations with Mephistopheles, and his hedonism, but also burlesques the very idea of damnation at the same time, trivializing the horrifying notion of selling one’s soul to the devil. We have, on the one hand, the serious Word, laying down religious doctrine and law as ultimate, and, on the other, the clowns providing a parody of that Word, burlesquing sacred doctrine and turning it into a laughing matter.

Bakhtin refers to this kind of parody as providing a “healing” or “corrective laughter” to the “one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word.”⁴¹ It provides an alternative way of perceiving reality, more complex than the language of religion, limited to a single worldview or belief system, allows. This kind of parody, then, is essentially subversive and heterodox, but covertly so, in that it can also be seen, on a more superficial level — as it has been for centuries — as reinforcing orthodoxy through ridicule of sin and evil. Throughout the play, the clown continues to display his sarcastic wit and blasphemous disregard for his social and spiritual superiors. Despite conjuring Banio and Belcher, Wagner never quite succeeds in putting the fear of the devil into Robin. After stealing Faustus’s book and performing a mock conjuration, Robin and Dick decide that drinking in a tavern is a much

more diverting pastime than magic. The comic antics of the clowns emphasize the body and its physical nature over some artificially separated or transcendent notion of mind and spirit.

A parallel to the human/divine dichotomy can be seen in the exploration of body versus head or mind in the play. The carnivalesque body, with its eternal hunger, thirst, lust, and laughter, is often at odds with the lofty theme of the aspiring mind, with neither one consistently holding the stronger position in the hierarchy. Many of the comic scenes foreground this dichotomy. Faustus's intellectual desire to be involved in great world events, expressed in typically elevated poetry, translates into the farcical scenes with the Pope and the burlesque excommunication by the chanting cardinals. In rescuing Bruno and stealing the diadem, Faustus may sever the figural head from the body of the church, but his comic antics overtake any serious political intent. Apart from subversively intermingling "dark magic" with "holy miracle," these scenes do little more than cater humorously to anti-papist sentiment. The farcical escapades of Robin and Dick parallel Faustus's comic actions more than they parody them. They use magic to get free drinks, and to elude the Vintner after stealing his goblet, much as Faustus steals the pope's food and wine. That their "conjuring" results in Mephistopheles's turning them into animals seems of little consequence to them. Indeed, they seem quite content that their new forms allow them freer access to food and drink. They revel in their lower state — a state of pure body — and trivialize the whole idea of damnation. The Benvolio and horse-courser episodes are also suggestive of the carnivalesque body, with its eternally regenerative and gross corporeality. Both the knight and the rustic seemingly dismember Faustus, only to have him regenerate his severed parts. While these two episodes in particular are generally considered the weakest and most "problematic" in the play, these grotesque spectacles provide an important comic backdrop against which to view the final scenes of the play.

The greatest terror in the last act comes from Faustus's poetry expressing his horror not simply of damnation, but of physical torment. Indeed, his fear of pain and dismemberment seems to outweigh his fear for his soul, causing him to renew his pact with Lucifer to avoid the destruction of his body. Just as Faustus's physical nature overtakes his spiritual peril, the physical, in the form of stage spectacle, contradicts the spiritual agony in Faustus's poetry. Faustus's final hour, with the unholy trinity of devils presiding over the stage from the balcony and the good and bad angels presenting their respective spectacles of heaven and hell, comes straight from the morality tradition. And yet, despite Faustus's highly tragic poetry, the comic treatment of morality that has pervaded the play to this point casts

its beams over these grim final moments. The grand spectacles presented by the good and bad angels would be simultaneously overwhelming in their immediacy and scope, and trite in their antiquated obsolescence, enhancing the sense of parody created in the comic material. That the rhetoric of the Old Man is much more powerful and persuasive than the thin voice of the Good Angel suggests the frailty of these morality play images in the more humanistic context of the Renaissance. The subversive power of these images, then, comes from their self-parodic, excessively spectacular quality, which serves to undermine their traditional moral purpose. Even Faustus's poetry becomes excessive. After fifty-four lines of ranting and pleading while the clock strikes its melodramatic countdown to damnation, Faustus's last lines, "I'll burn my books. O, Mephistopheles!" (5.2.191), are anti-climactic, to say the least. Indeed, for the audience, they mark a descent into bathos more than terror and pity.

The use of the old-fashioned hell-mouth and heavenly throne in the morality play context would lead the audience, still very familiar with the moral dramatic tradition, in a somewhat modernized form, to expect salvation as the climax of the play, not damnation, as salvation was the standard ending of morality plays without exception, at least in the medieval period.⁴² How could it be otherwise when the soul up for grabs was Everyman's? In the context of Calvinist predestination the *damnation* of Everyman is almost more appropriate. Faustus, however, is not exactly every man. Marlowe has chosen an individual — indeed an historical individual, although of legendary stature — to explore the morality of unlimited questing after knowledge. The audience's expectations, then, would be further complicated by their familiarity with the historical Faustus legend, and its inevitable ending. The multiple contradictory expectations are enhanced by the multiple generic coding — a mixing of historic (signalled by the name Faustus), tragic (suggested by the title and epilogue), moral (the basic premise, plot, and use of allegorical figures and props), romantic (heroic aspects), and comedic dramatic modes — that creates a potentially very complicated audience response.

Harold Bloom, in a statement that is perhaps less representative of a general response to the play than he seems to assume, asserts, "we are not much moved by [Faustus's] damnation."⁴³ Certainly many readers have been "moved" by Faustus's poetic pleas and moral confusion. Hattaway, for example, in praise of Faustus's final speech, claims that "no speech like this had been written before in England: no one had managed its distinctive mixture of inward terror and rhetorical argument."⁴⁴ Despite the power of the poetry, however, the comic material and outrageous spectacle are subtly

evoked in the final scenes and undermine either a feeling of moralistic righteousness or tragic sympathy with Faustus's final moments. While not exactly laugh-out-loud humorous, these elements undermine the expected tragic response: the play's climax "moves us not to pity and terror but to grinning horror and chuckling dismay."⁴⁵ This is particularly true of the last scene, in which the scholars find Faustus's dismembered limbs — limbs that are almost certainly the same property limbs used in the Benvolio and horse-courser scenes — strewn about the stage. The visual connection between the preceding comic scenes and the ending surely undermines the presumption of horror in finding Faustus's dismembered body parts. It draws the comic sensibility from the previous scenes into the final act and re-emphasizes their carnivalesque undermining of the status quo with subversive laughter. At the very least, the incongruity of the comic properties in this tragic context has the potential to confuse the audience rather than affirm a doctrine for them. The contradictory generic coding throughout the play enhances this confusion.

Paying close critical attention to the comic middle makes conventionally tragic and moralistic readings of the ending difficult to support. Faustus is ultimately denied the mythic grandeur of tragedy; his ending, in the light of what has come before, is too comical/farcical to inspire tragic awe or religious fear. Many critics seem to agree, although they see not the end but the comic middle as problematic and use creative arguments to justify dismissing the comic aspects as unimportant or unworthy of consideration in favour of a more coherent reading of the text. The comic middle exists and cannot be ignored in an ethical reading of the play. Nevertheless, I think it is also a stretch to see the comic middle as creating a consistently subversive satire of Christian dogma. Roma Gill rightly points out the "lack of homogeneity in the different comic episodes," possibly due to the different authors involved in creating them.⁴⁶ If some of the comedy was added by other hands, it is likely that these authors were extending what they saw as the traditional morality play humour in Marlowe's original, effectively, if unintentionally, enhancing the contradictory nature of the text. The playful generic coding undermines the standard aesthetic and didactic expectations of the various dramatic forms exploited in the text, while the interrogative treatment of the morality tradition is subversive of a general dogmatic sensibility rather than seriously iconoclastic and consistently anti-Christian. The comedy has the effect of simultaneously ridiculing and celebrating Faustus's lofty humanist aspirations, their farcical expression, and ultimate consummation. The metatheatrical aspects of the play call attention to the purposes and effects of the comic spectacles: to join "corrective" laughter

to monologic doctrine, and to undermine superstitious beliefs in general by revealing the power of stage magic to create “miracles.”

Any metatheatrical exploration that flirts so dangerously with religious and political unorthodoxy during the Renaissance must inherently acknowledge the ever-present problem of censorship. *Doctor Faustus* certainly presents itself as conscious of its theatrical techniques; and, I think, with its multiple coding, it acknowledges and attempts to thwart censorship. The heteroglossic possibilities for interpretation are a built-in defence mechanism against charges of atheism. The play works on many levels, appealing to a variety of intellectual and philosophical positions within its audience. The general morality play structure and spectacle of the play ensure that the majority of Marlowe’s contemporary audience would see it as reaffirming their orthodox religious beliefs, while the more discerning might pick up on the Goethean tragic aspects of the play, and the more radical intellectuals could recognize the subversive questioning of doctrines effected through the parodic travesty of sensibility.

For Bloom, such ideological debate is moot; he sees *Doctor Faustus* as an opportunity for Marlowe to display his “mighty line” and create an entertaining spectacle and nothing more. Marlowe, he asserts, was not a Spenser or a Milton.⁴⁷ His purpose was not to justify the ways of God to man, to teach a moral lesson, or to improve society in any way. Neither, one might add, was he a Sidney, attempting to justify his vocation. Indeed, the play is not polemical or didactic in the least, which is not to say that it has no “message” or ideology. If there *is* folly to be revealed in this motley historical/comical morality play full of tragical mirth, perhaps it is the folly of simplistic, convention-based interpretation. Whether the play’s contradictory hermeneutic coding is a result of different authors adding various comic material with different intentions, or whether it was Marlowe’s own intention to use this technique to thwart censors and to allow multiple and contradictory interpretations, is impossible to determine. However, the text allows us — indeed urges us — to read the comic passages as playfully atheistic (in the Renaissance sense of the word) and to see the ending as a parody of the graphically simplistic medieval notion of hell and damnation.

Such subversive or heterodox treatment of just about everything that doctrines of religion, politics, and poetics hold dear might be expected from a playwright of Marlowe’s political background. Criticism tends to divide itself into separate camps concerned with Marlowe the playwright and Marlowe the spy, a division implying that his undercover work for Walsingham in the English Secret Service was too incongruous with his profession as a poet to be discussed critically in the same breath. However, the

sensibilities developed as a “double agent” conform perfectly to Marlowe’s playwriting techniques. As a “double agent” turned writer, Marlowe can be seen as a kind of avatar for characters such as Magnus Pym in John Le Carré’s *A Perfect Spy*. Pym’s desire to please two warring masters and further two contradictory causes, coupled with his knowledge of the hypocrisies and limitations of both sides, erodes his sense of allegiance until he no longer has any sense of his own ideology. He simultaneously works for and against two opposing ideologies, using the same tools to uphold and subvert both at the same time, while trying not to get caught by either side. “So it is,” suggests Charles Nicholl, “with Marlowe. A wild young Catholic bound for Rheims turns out to be a faithful dealer for the government.”⁴⁸ Perhaps.

How then do we finally judge Marlowe’s enigmatic Faustus? As a religious transgressor who is justly punished for his sins? As a tragic hero destroyed because of his hubristic challenge to God’s ultimate authority? As a Promethean searcher slapped down by an indifferent or despotic deity? As a man given ultimate power and knowledge only to find himself unable to make any valid use of it? As a constructed subject unable to escape the doctrines that form his subjectivity? Depending on our own ideological biases, Faustus can be seen as each of these, and as a contradictory combination of them all. But he is also a parody of them, and therefore more than merely the sum of these parts, for parody creates a dialogue that includes the extratextual voice of the reader/audience. The text resists the critic’s impulse to pin down and confine with conventional interpretation. Marlowe writes both for and against the various contradictory impulses pertinent to his craft — aesthetics, poetics, morality, tragedy, romance, and so on — subverting them all in the eyes of some, while upholding them in the eyes of others. Le Carré calls espionage a “secret theatre”; perhaps Marlowe’s theatre is a secret and playful form of literary sabotage.

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Notes

1. Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. 113.
2. Samuel Rowlands, *The Knave of Clubbes* (1609), in *The Complete Works of Samuel Rowlands, 1598-1628*, 3 vols. (1880; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1966), 2: 29.
3. Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 594.
4. All quotations come from the B-text of *Doctor Faustus A- and B-Texts (1604, 1616): Christopher Marlowe and His Collaborator and Revisers*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

5. For more complete discussions of history of the two text issue surrounding *Doctor Faustus*, see Leah S. Marcus's chapter on Marlowe in her astute study of problems of textual editing, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London: Routledge, 1996). Also, see the introduction to the Bevington and Rasmussen edition, which pays more attention to the issue of a possible collaborator and revisers. Finally, for a more specifically local analysis of the differing interpretations offered by the two texts on the role of the old man, see M. J. Warren, "Doctor Faustus: The Old Man and the Text," *English Literary Renaissance* 11 (1981): 111–47.
6. See Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Richert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 206.
7. W. W. Greg, ed., *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus 1604–1616: Parallel Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950), p. 63.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
9. Roma Gill, Introduction, *The Complete Works of Marlowe, Vol II: Dr. Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xv.
10. Constance Brown Kuriyama, "Dr. Greg and *Doctor Faustus*: The Supposed Originality of the 1616 Text," *English Literary Renaissance* 5 (1975): 177–80.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
12. Michael Keefer, Introduction, *Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: A 1604 Version Edition*, ed. Michael Keefer (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1991), p. xii.
13. Bevington and Rasmussen argue that the B-text shows signs of more extensive censorship and revision than the A-text, which, they argue, is closer to the author's (and his possible collaborator's) original (pp. 47–48, 75–77). Stephen Greenblatt, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), also asserts a preference for the A-text as more "authorial" (p. 290, n. 2). All implicitly assume that Marlowe's "authorial intentions" were subversive in nature.
14. It is interesting to note the almost opposite reasons that earlier and more recent critics have for condemning the same comic passages: earlier critics found them too incongruous for a unified tragic or moral theme, while the postmodern penchant for subversiveness finds them too "orthodox."
15. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1981), pp. 55–56.
16. Since the authorship of *Doctor Faustus* is a much-debated issue, I am using the name "Marlowe" as convenient shorthand rather than specifying all possible combinations of collaborators and/or revisers each time the author-function is mentioned. I do not mean to imply that Christopher Marlowe wrote every word of the play with a specifically subversive intent — or that he did not. "Marlowe," in this paper, is the implied author.
17. See David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), for the first of such readings.
18. See Max Bluestone, "Libido Speculandi: Doctrine and Dramaturgy in Contemporary Interpretations of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*," in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 33–88. Bluestone's study compared some 80 then-recent critical commentaries on *Doctor Faustus* and found them to be neatly split between heterodox and orthodox interpretations. The increase in

heterodox interpretations since 1969 likely balances the predominantly orthodox readings that predate Bluestone's study.

19. *The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* (1592; facsimile rpt. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum; New York: Da Capo, 1969).
20. Comic material that comes from the *The English Faust Book* includes Benvolio's humiliation and attempted revenge, the horse-courser episode, the duping of the drunken clowns, and Faustus's eating a load of hay, which is only recounted in the play. The narrative contains many more humorous episodes not used in the play: "How Faustus borrowed money of a Iewe," "How Faustus played a jest with twelue Students," "How Faustus sold five Swine," "How they robbed the Bishop of Salzburg his Cellar," "How he deceived the foure Iuglers," etc. See P. M. Palmer and R. P. More, eds., *Sources of the Faust Tradition* (New York: Haskell House, 1965). Original comic material added, whether by Marlowe or other writers, includes the typically British comic antics of Wagner, Robin and Dick, and the anti-Catholic episodes depicting the harrowing of the Pope and cardinals.
21. Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 169.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), p. 110.
24. For an excellent example see J. T. McNeely, "The Integrated Design of *Dr. Faustus*: An Essay in Iconoclasm," *Cahiers Élisabethains* 41 (1992): 1–16. McNeely persuasively argues that the comic elements allow for multiple levels of meaning in the play. However, he asserts a preference for the A-text, agreeing with Gill's point that "the additions in the B text are trivial" (p. xxii). His generally astute observations on the subversive effects of the comic spectacles are undermined by an extreme argument for seeing these passages as *intentionally* and wholly designed by Marlowe to undermine the seemingly orthodox words and images on the stage and convey a covert atheistic statement to his own intimate circle of radical intellectuals.
25. C. L. Barber, *Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd*, ed. with an introd. by Richard P. Wheeler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 123.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 94, n. 4.
28. John Gassner, ed., *Four Great Elizabethan Plays* (New York: Bantam, 1963), p. ix.
29. Hattaway, p. 167.
30. Nicholas Brooke, "The Moral Tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*," *Cambridge Journal* 5 (1952): 672.
31. Linda Hutcheon asserts that a crucial element of parody is not only the obvious similarities of the original and the copy but also important ironic differences that signal the ideological distance between the texts (*A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* [New York: Methuen, 1985], p. 31).
32. Hattaway, pp. 167–68.
33. Dollimore, p. 110. While Dollimore sees the play as essentially tragic, many of his insights are relevant to a comic view of the play as well. He argues that the play resists resolution between the contradictory impulses of humanist aspiration and affirmation of divine law, but subversively questions orthodoxies by confronting and transgressing limits in a consciously self-destructive manner.

34. Clifford Leech, *Christopher Marlowe: Poet for the Stage*, ed. Anne Lancashire (New York: AMS, 1986), p. 102.
35. Barbara Howard Traister, "Doctor Faustus: Master of Self-Delusion," in *Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), p. 77.
36. Dollimore, p. 109.
37. McNeely, p. 5.
38. Hattaway, p. 165.
39. This humanizing tendency was thwarted by the infamous rumour that an extra devil appeared on stage during the conjuring scene at a performance in Exeter, terrifying both performers and audience into fleeing the theatre (see Hattaway, p. 166). Of course, the company may have purposely fabricated the rumour in order to create more interest and draw in thrill-seekers. Nevertheless, the story indicates the current level of superstitious fear or belief.
40. In *Tamburlaine*, for example, Marlowe explores the ways in which the title character acquires power and control over others through rhetorical skill, but retains it semiotically, mostly through self-conscious and gory shows of strength and brutality.
41. Bakhtin, p. 55.
42. The one exception I am aware of is Elizabethan: *The Conflict of Conscience* (1581) by Nathaniel Woodes, in which the hero despairs over his coerced conversion to Catholicism, cannot repent, commits suicide and is damned. Its uniqueness perhaps derives from the fact that it is based on the history of a real person, Francesco Spiera, an Italian who was pressured to abandon Protestantism for the Catholic faith. Remorse over his apostasy made him attempt suicide, and he is reported to have died in despair. Interestingly, a second issue of the same edition of the play has the *nuntius* appear at the end to proclaim the "ioyfull newes" of the hero's last minute conversion and peaceful death. See Bernard Spivak, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 236–39. Also see M. A. Overell, "The Reformation of Death in Italy and England, circa 1550," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 23.4 (1999): 5–21.
43. Harold Bloom, ed., *Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus* (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), p. 8.
44. Hattaway, p. 183.
45. Gerald Morgan, "Harlequin Faustus: Marlowe's Comedy of Hell," *Humanities Association Review* 18.1 (1967): 24.
46. Roma Gill, "'Such Conceits as Clownage Keeps in Pay': Comedy and *Dr. Faustus*," in *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford*, ed. Paul V. A. Williams (Cambridge: Brewer, 1979), p. 56.
47. Bloom, p. 8.
48. Nicholl, p. 114.