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Belief and Spectacle at Early Performances of Doctor Faustus

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The story of Faustus has inspired many authors, artists and even scientists since Christopher Marlowe's *Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*:¹ indeed, the German scholar's insatiable desire for infinite knowledge finds a modern expression in insatiable scientific inquiry, while his attempt to free himself from the shackles of our human condition is of perennial interest. If I have chosen to focus on what was probably Marlowe's last play, it is, however, because this first dramatization of the German prose narrative entitled in its English translation, *The historie of the damnable life, and deserued death of Doctor Iohn Faustus*,² is undoubtedly about seeing and believing, and Faustus himself a seer. My approach is stage - and audience-oriented, and limited to aspects of the play which, apart from David Zucker's *Stage and Image in the Plays Of Christopher Marlowe*, William Tydeman's *Doctor Faustus: Text and Performance* and Michael Hattaway's *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*,³ few studies have taken into full consideration,

- 1 Such is the full title of the 1616 London edition of the play printed by John Wright, who attributes it to "Ch. Mar".
- 2 The original was published in Frankfurt in 1587, its English translation by one "P. F." in 1592—hence, the tendency to regard *Doctor Faustus* as Marlowe's last play, written just before he was stabbed to death in 1593.
- 3 Zucker's main interest is the recognition of well-known emblems in stage productions. Tydeman's more general approach addresses students of the play and describes the main features of some modern performances. Hattaway's chapter, "Doctor Faustus: Ritual Shows" (pp. 160-85), mainly

namely the visual elements. My own speculative venture concentrates, not only on the plausible response of spectators to these visual elements in *Doctor Faustus*, during the early performances of Marlowe's drama in London playhouses and on other stages in the provinces, but also on the interaction of stage audiences and general audiences, an aspect which has been neglected so far.

Given the facts that naturalistic staging was not attempted on Elizabethan stages and that all play-goers have always remained aware of being confronted with a mere representation of reality during a performance, I use "belief" in the restricted sense of "a willing suspension of disbelief". I do not minimise the effect of "hearing" the words of a play, especially a Marlovian play, but I feel sure that, as is the case today, what was visible on the stage influenced the spectators' susceptibility to illusion one way or another, even if their viewing range was limited.

To answer the question, "How much was seeing believing?" in *Doctor Faustus*, a manifold and multilayered play which purported to dramatise the true story of a real man, I find it more useful to deal with instances of similar material than to follow scenic divisions. I distinguish four levels of showing and believing in what was seen. I shall start with the simplest and most conventional visual "gags", involving hardly any suspension of disbelief, which are found mostly in subplots. My second layer consists of Faustus' display of his magic powers for the benefit of both intra-dramatic and extra-dramatic audiences, among whom there must have been disbelievers as well as believers. At the third level, I analyse the inset shows engineered by the forces of Good or Evil to persuade Faustus, and the relationship between his response and those of spectators. My fourth layer is composed of the elements of the main plot, which I presume to have caused the highest degree of willing belief among the latter.

For each level or layer, I intend to begin with known stage practices in Medieval and Renaissance drama,⁴ and with what I presume to be constant in audience response. Then, helped by others' intuitions, I shall make my own conjectures about the inevitably unstable balance between what spectators, both intradiegetic and extradiegetic, would have seen and what they are likely to have momentarily believed. In so doing, I shall take into account the old and the new

focuses on the nature of the play and on how it "revealed the creative powers of ritual through all the spectacular devices the playhouses had to offer" (p. 160). I am indebted to all three authors for information and suggestions, although my concern in the present article is restricted by comparison.

4 See notably Chambers, Wickham, Axton, Bethell, Bevington, Campbell, Dessen, Gurr, and Greg, ed., *Dramatic Documents*.

forms Marlowe was using while meeting and sometimes moving beyond his audience's expectations; and I shall describe some of the ways in which the scenes I consider may have been performed on Tudor stages. My necessarily tentative investigation cannot completely leave out the words that must have challenged the hearers' senses, as well as their intellect and imagination. I hope to reach a conclusion about the effects of the blending of various forms of seeing and believing in what was from the start a very popular spectacle.

Doctor Faustus was written at a time when astronomical and other scientific inquiry was challenging old beliefs; a time when England, developing as a nation, took part in and benefited from the discovery of the New World, while new ways to wealth and honour were opening for the middle classes; a time when permanent playhouses built in London were catalysts in the spectacular success of drama, which was becoming the ultimate public entertainment. It was also written at a time when religious convictions were constantly under the pressure of political choices, and free will was a widely debated question; a time when most people believed in the power of the devil and all the forces of darkness, as is proved by the often-quoted account of an Exeter performance of the play, during which the actors, hence the spectators, were panic-stricken because "they were all persuaded, there was one devil too many amongst them";⁵ a time when alchemy and black magic were said to contaminate the most learned circles (John Dee and Kelly in the eighties, Raleigh and the School of Night in the nineties). *Doctor Faustus* was performed shortly after the violent death of Marlowe, seen by some as a just punishment for his blasphemous life, works and sayings.

In order to concentrate on the theatrical effects in question, I have chosen to adopt as a working edition Roma Gill's text of the play, in the 1971 Oxford edition⁶ and to refer to Marlowe as its author, whether or not the "adicyons in

- 5 Certain players at Exeter acting upon the stage the tragical story of Dr. Faustus the conjurer; as a certain number of Devils kept everyone his circle there, and as Faustus was busy in his magical invocations, on a sudden they all dashed, everyone harkening other in the ear, for they were all persuaded, there was one devil too many amongst them; and so after a little pause desired the people to pardon them, they could go no further with this matter; the people also understanding the thing as it was, every man hastened to be out of doors. The players (as I heard it) contrary to their custom spending the night in reading and in prayer got them out of the town the next morning. For this undated account by "J. G. R." and other telling anecdotes about *Doctor Faustus*, see Hattaway, pp. 166-67.
- 6 See the parallel texts edited by Greg, *Doctor Faustus*, p. vii. Of the two texts we have, Greg thinks that Quarto A, first printed in 1604, 1,517 lines in length, "shows signs of having been reconstructed from memory by an actor", while Quarto B, appearing in 1616, 2,121 lines in length, contains extensions and stage directions which point to a basis in a theatrical promptbook. Gill bases her edition on

doctor fostes” paid for by Henslowe in 1602 were extensive.⁷ Many critics think that they concerned the comic scenes in Acts Three and Four, for which there seems to have been a strong demand. If I start with them, however, thus deconstructing a well-known play, it is in order to focus on seeing and believing both in the onstage audience(s) and in the general audience, at four levels, as I have said, of sight and belief ranging, in my opinion, from minimal to maximal adherence to what was seen on stage.

I. Seeing was disbelieving—or was it?

My exploration of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* will first focus on those scenes which were obviously designed to meet the spectator’s expectation of a substantial adjunction of mirth to edification or pathos. From what we know,⁸ I assume that, in performance, the comic parts of Marlowe’s dramatic scripts were, like those of his rivals, open to additions, elisions, permutations and manipulations, according to the nature of the audience, but also to the more or less popular comic actors the company could hire for the occasion, and to the range of their talents: juggling, fencing, singing, dancing.

The clowning scenes in *Doctor Faustus* are first and foremost I.iv, II.iii, III.iii and IV.iv. Although they more or less follow the German narrative which was Marlowe’s source,⁹ they have received little critical attention and are often dismissed as not being by Marlowe himself. In these scenes, Faustus is out of our sight, though he remains at the centre of all conversations and is imitated by various protagonists. Whatever their names on the page nowadays,¹⁰ these protagonists are stereotypically characterised as clowns.

There are two lines of action in these scenes which often combine and—this is at least my contention—reflect the main plot of *Doctor Faustus*. The minor one we may describe as social comedy or farce. It has a comic ancestry and relates to both popular and more sophisticated dramatic traditions: spring rituals, Mysteries, Morality Plays, Mummers’ plays, Tudor Interludes, Latin Comedy and Italian *commedia dell’arte*. Its main theme is temptation. A human desire to feed one’s body’s appetite for food, drink and sex vies with and soon supersedes

the B text, but adopts readings from the A text whenever she considers them justified.

7 See Henslowe, p. 206.

8 See Wiles.

9 See Thomas and Tydeman, eds., pp. 171–248.

10 In the A text and some editions, Robin’s partner is called Rafe instead of Dick.

a Christian desire to secure one's soul's salvation. As in many cases, temptation in *Doctor Faustus* is associated with social climbing and being revenged for humiliations, not necessarily on those who have inflicted them. Wagner, Faustus' half-servant, half-disciple, lords it over Robin and addresses him as "sirrah boy" (I.iv.1), using the same demeaning terms he had resented coming from Faustus' scholars. Pointing at Robin's "air-conditioned" clothes, he says, "Alas, poor slave, see how poverty jests in his nakedness" (6), expecting and already bragging of his instant submission. Getting some recognition at both intra-dramatic and extra-dramatic levels is part of the game for both victimiser and victim. Being a clown, Robin exhibits his (probably fake) "pick adevant" beard and his empty pockets to the audience (3-5). He resists temptation, however, with irreverence, jesting logic and a wink at the same audience (6ff.), until he is frightened into Wagner's serv-ice by what he *sees* (35). Two acts later, following Wagner's practice, Robin, in his turn, tempts Dick, a poorer slave than he, into free wine drinking and juggling a silver goblet out of the sight of its owner, a vintner, but in full sight of the audi-ence, of course (III.iii.1-20). Robin and Dick are sure to win the connivance of this audience and their admiration for their inebriated dexterity, but not a belief that they are genuine drunken robbers. The visible gap between actor and character is bound to deflate the illusion of reality.

Indeed, the actors impersonating Wagner, Robin and Dick do not so much play "in character" as "in role". Clowning is their main function, as is indicated by their coarse language and probably rustic pronunciation, even if Wagner is better educated than the others. Their difference is visible as well as audible. Ludicrous appearance and demeanour, louse-shaking (I.iv.21) and belly-filling alacrity ("I'll give thee wine . . . and whipping crust, Hold, belly, hold" [II.iii.26-27]), convulsive quaking and splitting laughter ("the clown runs up and down crying" [I.iv.31 SD], as Wagner laughs uproariously), funny acrobatics and slapstick advertise their buffoonery. Like many clowns, they do not only exaggerate all affects and effects but generally work in duos. Traditional clowning routines, such as the dominant character's threatening to belabour the posterior of his victim, the brisk, vigor-ous evasions of the latter, his falling heavily on his buttocks and his pretending to be brave while behaving like a coward (I.iv.29ff.), are bound to induce hearty laughter from the audience, the more so as they suspect that padding reduces the pain inflicted. Yet, in *Doctor Faustus*, the expectations concerning comic scenes are both met and somewhat defeated. Generally, clowns fail at everything they endeavour. Here, they succeed in their main ambition, conjuring devils. Most of

the time, they resent their final defeat. Here, Dick and Robin willingly submit to their punishment, transforming their exit as an ape riding a dog into a mock triumph, while Mephostophilis, the angry author of their metamorphosis, fronting, as seems probable, the audience in the pit, expostulates against the “princely legions of infernal rule” before being literally uplifted (III.iii.26-45). The spectators must have been amused, but also surprised and led to expect more surprises.

The main line of action in these clowning scenes consists in using magic, thanks to Faustus’ borrowed or stolen books, in order to force the socially inferior creature into one’s service. This is what Wagner does in I.iv, what his victim, Robin, does in II.iii, and what Robin and Dick do in III.iii. The sequence in itself is good spectacle. The audience watch the devolution and degeneration of Faustus’ magic practices. My guess is that the magic circle drawn by the would-be conjurer—Wagner, in I.iv, his new apprentice, Robin, in II.iii, Dick in III.iii.22—gets less and less round, and less sacred as it is stepped into: “Keep out of the circle, I say” (II.iii.11). The conjurer’s gestures are less assured and his costume less flamboyant than his model’s. At first, he elicits impertinent incredulity in his victim (I.iv.29; II.iii.29-30) and probably part of the general audience, before the curious magic works and devils actually appear on stage (I.iv.31; III.iii.24). Seeing them would have caused not only the victim’s fright, but that of the uncontrolling conjurer onstage—“Will it please you to . . . go back again? . . . we called you but in jest” (III.iii.30-33)—and of the most gullible spectators in the theatre.

One may safely conjecture from contemporary reports that the appearance of the devils was grotesquely horrifying and the body-shaking panic they inspired, with their traditional horns, tails, fangs and fire-works (Dessen, p. 169) both eye-catching and theatrically effective. Yet, coming after Faustus’ prior successful conjuring, they were bound to deflate, not only his achievement, but its effects of surprise and terror, while the undignified names of Belcher and Banio, and the unprecedented loss of composure of Mephostophilis, would have generated some disbelief in the reality of these spirits. When the latter’s discontent at being “swiftly brought from Constantinople by these villains’ charms” (III.iii.4) climaxed in his vengeful transformation of Dick and Robin before he “wing[ed] himself with the flames of eternal fire” (44-45), the power of words must have been directly challenged by what was seen on stage and recognised by many as skill on the part of the actors putting on large animal heads, or vociferating to cover the

noise of the hoisting pulleys. Pure delight in the visual and great awareness of the play as performance must have been very strong for spectators at this first level, that of clowning and farce. Disbelief, however, and desire to be distracted from worrisome thoughts were probably tinged with anxiety concerning evil powers at work in the world at large, and in Marlowe's personal associations.¹¹

II. Faustus' magic feats: belief and disbelief

The second level I shall consider for many critics still involves low comedy only loosely linked with the main action of the play. How do these scenes, found mostly in the second part of the play, set at the Emperor's court (IV.i, IV.ii, IV.iv, IV.v, IV.vi. and V.iv), or at the Vatican (III.i, III.ii), differ from the clowning scenes? First, it is now Faustus himself who uses his expertise as conjurer, either to take revenge on offenders and disbelievers in his magic or to impress his aristocratic audience. Secondly, these scenes generally involve more than two characters, sometimes in "split scenes", and these characters have a higher social position, as would have been made clear to an Elizabethan audience, alert to visual codes, by costumes, gait, weapons and emblems of power. Thirdly, in spite of some overlapping, they constitute independent episodes and are more complex, as far as plot, use of space and time-scheme are concerned, than clowning scenes, hence in their protagonists' relationships with onstage and general audiences. The question of belief becomes more complex too.

Although Mephostophilis is present, he does not intervene in the horse-courser sequence (IV.iv.1-36, IV.v, IV.vi), which opposes Faustus and a horse-trader and provides a variation on the theme of "the engineer hoist with his own petard". The would-be cheater is cheated of the little money he has offered for the Doctor's horse when this horse becomes a bundle of hay in water, which, as is well known, breaks the spell. Most of the spectacular action in this subplot is not seen but narrated, and so left to the imagination of the audience. However, there are some striking reality effects. In IV.iv.21-33, when the horse-trader returns furious, soaking wet (23 SD) and covered with hay ("I had nothing under me but a little straw ... your horse is turned to a bottle of hay" [26-29]), and tugs at one of Faustus' legs to wake him up, the leg comes off (31), and he flees holding it tight, while Faustus yells, "The villain hath murdered me" (32). The next scene,

11 Cf. Baines's and Kyd's accusations, quoted in Gill, ed., pp. viii-ix.

in which narration predominates over action, brings back Robin and Dick, this time as stage audience, while they wait for a tavern hostess to serve drinks and are entertained by two tales concerning Faustus. After a carter has complained that an entire load of his hay has been swallowed by Faustus, who had paid him only the low price he had asked for, failing to believe the doctor could eat a great deal of hay (IV.v.20-26), the horse-courser brags of his pulling the cozening doctor's "leg quite off" (43). Belief and disbelief must have alternated on the faces of the hearers onstage, but the general audience knew better. They had seen Faustus laugh heartily and stand on two legs the minute the panicked horse dealer had left with his fake leg (IV.iv.33-34). Moreover, many would have been accustomed to the dismemberment routine in Mummers' plays. If some had been tricked into believing in the reality of the dismembering, the others might well have wondered at their credulity.

Things may well have been different when a worthy Emperor's seeing was shown to be believing. In the central episodes of the play, which take place at Charles V's court, the dumb-show with which Faustus impresses his host is so believable that the Emperor, at the sight of Alexander, his ancestor, and the latter's paramour, forgets himself and "leaving his state, offers to embrace them" (IV.i.97 SD). He has to be stopped by Faustus and reminded that "these are but shadows, not substantial" (98-99). He begs, however, to be allowed to see the "little wart or mole" on the neck of the "fair lady" in order to "prove that saying to be true" (107-9), then profusely thanks the magician:

Faustus, I see it plain,
And in this sight thou better pleasest me
Than if I gained a monarchy. (110-12)

For the Elizabethan audience, this scene and the following ones are bound to have been a feast of theatricality and reality effects. They successively watched two magnificent pageants introduced by trumpeters: the entrance of the German Emperor, Bruno, the duke of Saxony, Faustus, Mephostophilis and numerous courtiers and attendants in various splendid, bejewelled costumes, then that of spirits in the shape of Alexander the Great at one door and Darius at the other, "both in armour" (IV.i 97 SD). The show went on to present their fight and the killing of Darius by his rival, who set his crown upon the head of his newly arrived and embraced paramour. Both saluted the Emperor. During the dumb-show, the spectators' proximity to the dramatic action, and more particularly to the

fighting, would have enhanced their sense of reality, especially since many actors were excellent fencers. Conversely, if there was a slow motion or choreographic effect, the illusionary status of the inset show would have been highlighted, and would have tended to lend more authenticity to the extra-dramatic spectacle, Faustus' display of his magic. So would the courtly costumes the actors wore. So would the lavish Elizabethan pageants to which they were accustomed.

Onstage spectatorship is made even more complex by the fact that, while Faustus and Mephostophilis, acting as Masters of Revels, in academic gowns, with "smooth faces and small ruffs" (IV.i.156-57), watch the Emperor and his court watching the dumb-show, they also watch other watchers, Martino and Frederick. Earlier, these two knights at the Emperor's court, entering "at several doors" (IV.i.1 SD), had paved the way for "His majesty's coming to the hall" (4) with "The Wonder of the world for magic art" (11), Faustus, and had roused from his drunken sleep a third knight, Benvolio, who finally appears "above at a window in his nightcap, buttoning" (23 SD), content to thrust his head out:

See, see, his window's ope . . .
Come, leave thy chamber first, and thou shalt see
This conjurer perform such rare exploits . . .
As never yet was seen in Germany.
.....
Wilt thou come and see this sport?
.....
Wilt thou stand in thy window and see it? (IV.i.22, 30-33, 38, 40)

Repeatedly invited, like the general audience, to see and believe, Benvolio provides a comic counterpoint to all believers. He greets Faustus' emphatic promise

To cast his magic charms that shall pierce through
The Ebon gates of ever burning hell
And hale the stubborn furies from their caves (67-69)

with a less than reticent scepticism: "Blood, he speaks terribly! But for all that, I do not greatly believe him; he looks as like a conjurer as the Pope to a costermonger" (IV.i.71-72). The split scene thus contrasts two extreme positions regarding our theme: excess of belief, exemplified by the Emperor's response, and stubborn disbelief. Even if they were aware that seeing is an illusion both in the fiction and

in the theatre—for the Emperor sees but shadows, his ancestor’s fair lady is but a disguised male actor, and the early dawn and city house suggested by Benvolio’s sleepy, unbuttoned appearance “above” are but theatrical make-believe—the spectators may well, at the sight of an enthusiastic imperial acceptance of illusion as reality, have suspended their disbelief for more than a split second.

Marlowe complicates things by allowing Faustus to bring together the two onstage audiences. The magician calls the Emperor’s attention to his punishment of Benvolio for disbelieving his art:

See, see, my gracious lord, what strange beast is yon,
That thrusts his head out at window?
O, wondrous sight! See, Duke of Saxony,
Two spreading horns most strangely fastened
Upon the head of young Benvolio! (IV.i.114-18)

Laughter is raised onstage and in the playhouse. The episode escalates, and retaliation follows retaliation. Readers may be bored, but spectators were, and are, given much to see and to hear, especially when Benvolio and his attendants, having ambushed and savagely beheaded Faustus, brandish and mock his severed head, as is indicated by the gestic terms they use:

Was this that stern aspect . . . ?
Was this that damned head . . . ?
Ay, that’s the head, and here the body lies . . .
(IV.ii.45, 49, 51)

Then the knights’ plan to sell Faustus’ beard to a chimney-sweeper (59-60), and to put out his eyes to “serve for buttons to his lips” (54), is defeated by Faustus’ very spectacularly standing up with a new head and commanding his attendant fiend, among other things, to “break the villain’s bones / As he intended to dismember” him (90-91). At this stage, the eyes of some of the spectators, both intradramatic, (“Give him his head, for God’s sake!” [68]) and extradramatic, might be popping out. It seems that Marlowe is himself constantly playing with the power of illusion, and strives to inflate and deflate belief at will. At the end of the episode, horns appear on the heads of the three knights, but I doubt that many in the general audience believed they were irremovable, as threatened by Faustus. Like the detachable leg and head, they must have been identified as magically contrived fakes in the fiction which the dramatist presents, and artfully contrived

fakes in the playhouse.¹² The same would apply to the “trees removed” at Faustus’ command (101) in the same scene, and later to the ripe grapes fetched from the other side of the world to satisfy the pregnant Duchess of Vanholt’s craving in the middle of winter (IV.vi.1-28), if the performance took place in winter.

The Benvolio episode ends with several very spectacular moves, the formidable entrance of “Asteroth, Belimoth, Mephostophilis” and other devils, at their master’s call (78), their forceful exit “with the Knights” (94 SD), immediately followed by the probably disorderly entrance of “the ambushed Soldiers” making ready to “dispatch and kill” the magician (98). These helpers of the knights are soon set upon and driven out by the awesome army Faustus instantly conjures up: “Faustus strikes the door, and enter a Devil playing on a drum; after him another bearing an ensign; and divers with weapons; Mephostophilis with fireworks” (105 SD). The directions tell us nothing about the nature of the weapons used by the combatants once the stage-trees establishing the place of the fight have been removed to “stand as bulwarks” to shield Faustus from his enemies (102-3). Yet Faustus’ words of intimidation, “base peasants” whose “weak attempt” is to be countered by his “army”, suggest that they might have been odd sorts, forks, cudgels, on the one side, swords on the other. The symbolic impact of the forces of hell brandishing weapons traditionally allotted to angels, as well as the resemblance of their march to victory to that of Elizabeth’s armies, would have enriched spectacle with thought.

At the beginning of Act Four, the spectators are given a vivid description of “all that is fair to the eye” (III.i.10), what Faustus, “sitting in a chariot burning bright” (5), sees from the sky. When he reaches “the goodly palace of the Pope ... for to delight his eyes” (26, 32), Henslowe’s “sittie of Rome” property (p. 319) and the frequent use of “see”, “view”, “behold”, “eyes”, “sight”, and of the present tense, may contribute to making the audience *see* what is described with their minds’ eye. Soon, however, like Faustus, they view the highly ritualised “triumphs” of Cardinals and Bishops entering and probably crossing over the stage, some bearing crosiers, some the pillars, followed by Monks and Friars singing in their procession. Then the Pope and Raymond King of Hungary enter, with Bruno (the would-be pope) led in chains and made to serve as a stool for the Pope to ascend “Saint Peter’s chair and state pontifical” (III.i.92 and preceding SD). Even if metonymy, in this case two or three actors standing for several

12 Cf. the property heads and limbs in Henslowe’s inventory (p. 319).

people, is the rule, this ceremonial procession, the excommunication ritual and the banquet which is solemnly “brought in” (III.ii.SD) give ample opportunity for colourful, spectacular visual effects and would feed the Elizabethan distaste for “the Antichrist”, whose arrogance, extravagant pomp and humiliating proceedings had long been stigmatised by the reformers. The relatively recent excommunication of their own queen must have engaged the audience’s attention, and increased their readiness to watch and believe:

Behold this silver belt, whereto is fix’d
Seven golden keys fast seal’d with seven seals,
In token of our seven-fold power from heaven,
To bind or loose, lock fast, condemn or judge,
Resign or seal, or whatso pleaseth us. (III.i.153-57)

Faustus’ response is to deflate this popish self-importance by disrupting the feast and the ceremony with beatings, fireworks and other diversions. Such old stage devices as going invisible, which allows Faustus to snatch away the best dishes or wine, and to hit the Pope “a box of the ear” (III.ii.5) without being seen, causing the Pope to cross himself and to set into motion dirge, “bell, book and candle” in order to exorcise the “troublesome ghost” (84)—or such as using disguises, those of cardinals, to rescue Bruno while the true cardinals are dozing under a spell—may well have “released the emotions of forbidden joys in kicking the until so recently supreme Man, the head of the Catholic Church”, as Nicholas Brooke suggests (p. 126). Belief, however, is another matter, whether a magic girdle (“wear this girdle, then appear / Invisible to all are here” [III.ii.17-18]) or a cloak to make himself invisible supplements the apparent blindness of all but Mephostophilis to Faustus’ presence onstage. Once more, Marlowe strains the audience’s credulity after having fostered it. He even makes Mephostophilis an opponent of Roman Catholicism. Yet many among the spectators were probably willing to follow Shakespeare’s advice and “Sit and see; / Minding true things by what their mockeries be” (*Henry V*, IV.Cho.52-53).

The two levels of suspension of disbelief I have considered up to now consist mainly of shows within the show engineered by Faustus’ imitators or by himself. My last example in this section will serve as a transition to the next one. At the end of his life, Faustus, to please some friendly scholars he has just treated with an exceptionally plentiful banquet offstage, agrees to make them behold Helen of Troy,

that peerless dame of Greece,
No otherways for pomp and majesty,
Than when Paris crossed the seas with her. (V.i.21-23)

The young male actor impersonating the shadow of beauty in person crosses the stage in complete silence. All eyes are riveted on his majestic, sensuous figure adorned with appropriate headgear and attire. As the three scholars express their delight at the sight of this “paragon of excellence”, “whose heavenly beauty passeth all compare”, and bless Faustus for “this glorious deed” (V.i.32, 30), the attention of the audience is divided between them, Helen of course, Mephostophilis and, judging from what follows, the ravished conjurer he observes. The fulgurance of the apparition was probably enhanced by Faustus’ momentary silence, the accompanying music and some light near the actor. If the actor was expert, all would have been likely to suspend their disbelief and admire this second Venus. Beauty, in this case, as in the case of Juliet and Cleopatra, is not merely in the eye of the beholder, but in that of the beholder’s beholder. Conversely, if the actor’s face-painting and his female gait were overdone, there must have been a wide gap between the onstage audience’s admiration and the general audience’s perception of corrupt harlotry and of Faustus’ delusion.

Inset spectacles are often claimed to further the belief in the reality of the main action. My opinion is that they also shift the spectators’ attention to other levels of reality, and of performance, including the craft of the actors and that of the playwright, who distances, enlarges, refocuses, and diversifies their vision, inviting them to distance themselves at times from his story and its protagonists, to be as flexible as his own art and participate in its achievement.

III. “Mark the show”

The third level I shall consider is that of the shows directed towards Faustus himself, by either the agents of Good or those of Evil, to make him change or not change his mind. Those engineered by Mephostophilis, Lucifer and Belzebub, separately or not, are among the most memorable in the play. But the visible machinery of psychomachia, in a play structured like a morality play and integrating various homiletic elements drawn from its source, also includes an old man, a good angel, a celestial throne and some other heavenly appeals.

The Old Man, coming just before the denouement, although human, appears to be the last of God’s envoys because he is unconnected to any other protagonist

and speaks godly words. His intervention is short but very striking. Described by Faustus as “base and crooked”, he must vividly contrast with the young scholars and glorious Helen of Troy, who have just left the stage. His low condition and his old age probably show through his clothes, his bent back and tremulous gait. This Senex is above all, however, an emblem of humility, staunch faith and disinterested humanity. A gentle, compassionate individual, he tries to save Faustus from damnation, which, for him as for Mephostophilis, much earlier, means being “banish’d from the sight of heaven” (V.i.44). He moves the magician deeply; yet despair, not repentance, follows. Offered a dagger by Mephostophilis, Faustus is on the verge of committing suicide, but the old man stays his “desperate steps” (58) and exclaims,

I see an angel hovers o’er thy head,
And with a vial full of precious grace,
Offers to pour the same into thy soul. (59-61)

Emotion and suspense would probably have been very high in the audience. Some probably looked up to verify the truth of this vision. Or they may even have been tempted, identifying with the truly Christian man, to add their own exhortations to his. But all hope of a denouement conforming to the triumphing *deus ex machina* of traditional Morality plays is soon dashed. Not only does Faustus immediately give in to Mephostophilis’ threat of torture, but he asks the devil to torment the Old Man he has sent away “With greatest torments that our hell affords” (V.i.84). When the Old Man returns, Faustus’ second wish is being granted. Helen is back, “Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clear / Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow” (92-93).

While the amorous couple exit, several devils take charge of the torture of the Old Man, whose staunch faith triumphs over them, at least morally:

Ambitious fiends, see how the heavens smiles
At your repulse, and laughs your state to scorn.
Hence, hell, for hence I fly unto my God. (123-25)

The flames of a furnace may be produced. It does not seem, however, that real flying is part of the show at this point. Spirituality has taken over. This short episode is full of dramatic tension. The cruelty of Faustus may have distanced the audience from him and prepared them for his deserved doom. It may have led them to accept the unusual tragic end of the hero. Yet their curiosity about and

fascination for the couple could have tempted them to suspend their Christian belief in favour of the more pleasant aesthetic “willing suspension of disbelief” to which all spectators agree for the time of the performance.

A Good and Bad Angel appear together once in the first scene of Act One, three times in the first two scenes of Act Two, which take place in Faustus’ study. Since their entrance follows dialogic speeches by Faustus voicing his divided aspirations, they are visual emblems of his moral dilemma, although special distance and appearance designate them as emissaries of transcendent powers from outside himself. No stage directions are given, but, judging from medieval practices in liturgical drama, I can imagine that, whether or not they are fitted with a pair of angel wings “with iren in the ends”, as in York’s “Last Judgement”,¹³ one is probably almost motionless, white and hieratic, the other black or colourful, pungent and lively. Their voices too could differ—solemn and awe-inspiring, brisk and enticing, respectively.¹⁴ In the first three cases, the Good Angel speaks first, the Bad Angel last, confirming Faustus’ adherence to wealth and power through black magic. In the final instance, it is the Bad Angel who speaks first, and the Good Angel succeeds in persuading Faustus to repent. The first entrance of the Angels follows Faustus’ decision to turn to necromancy. Probably gesturing to “that damned book” he is holding, they either prescribe it or warn him against it, directing his gaze towards the other book, the scriptures (I.i.68, 71). As David H. Zucker writes, “the complex psychological process of Faustus’ opening soliloquy is thus made visually simple and schematic” (p. 152). Marlowe masterfully orchestrates the outer tensions which reflect the inner ones. Incensed by Faustus’ asking Christ for help, in the third instance (II.ii.83-84), Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephostophilis, the Infernal Trinity, appear together for the first time and terrify him into immediate submission. To reward him, and keep his mind from Paradise, they make a very spectacular demonstration of their illusionistic powers, and of those of the actors of the play.

Even today, the stage climax reached in the allegorical parade of the Seven Deadly Sins remains very impressive. Once more, the spectators are offered an intra-dramatic show and two stage audiences: Faustus himself and the infernal devisers of the show, who watch those who enact it and, above all, its addressee, Faustus, who is given no choice:

13 Walker, ed., quotes the Mercers’ Indenture (1433) for *The Last Judgement* in the York pageants (p. 159, l. 20).

14 See Axton, pp. 95 and 115-16, for the contrast of voices and colours.

Belzebub. . . Sit down and thou shalt behold the Seven Deadly Sins appear to thee in their own proper shapes and likeness . . .
Lucifer. Talk not of Paradise or Creation, but mark the show.
(II.ii.103-4, 107)

The oxymoronic quality of the invitation (“likeness” contradicts “their own proper”) underlines the ambiguity of stage apparitions. The spectators would probably have been surprised and even frightened by the explosions of gunpowder accompanying the devils’ entrance, and by their appearances. I suppose that those of the Infernal Trinity would have been more terrifying with their “fiery ornaments”, whether or not they “roared”, had “squibs in their mouths”, tails, horny, monstrous shapes, or whether their cloaks were ragged, their hair shaggy, their nails and fangs very long and their eyes unnaturally prominent and bright or red.¹⁵ The smoke issuing from torches and explosions, its smell, colour and blinding effects would have made the conditions of hell vividly perceptible. The risks incurred in the wooden Theatre may have added to the thrill of spectators. During the procession of the Seven Deadly Sins, their various reactions would probably have included a nostalgic recognition of old plays and reminiscences of other forms of representation, written, painted, engraved or sculpted. One thinks of Bosch, Brueghel,¹⁶ and more particularly of Rabelais’ description in the *Quart livre*, chapter 13, of the devils’ accoutrement in a “diablerie” supposedly presented by François Villon, which underlines its bestiality, as well as the fire, smoke and terrific noise entailed:

Ses diables estoient tout capparassonnez de peaulx de loups, de veaulx, et de beliers, pasementées de testes de mouton, de cornes de boeufz, et de grands havetz de cuisine: ceinctz de grosses courraies es quelles pendoient grosses cymbales de vaches, et sonnettes de muletz à bruyt horrificque. Tenoient en main aucuns bastons noirs pleins de fuzées, aultres portoient longs tizons allumez, sus les quelz à chascun carrefou jectoient plenes poingnées de parasine en pouldre, dont sortoit feu et fumée terrible. (Rabelais, p. 569)

Gruesome dances to the tune of the piper (“On piper” [II.ii.15]), distorted faces and bodies, and expressionistic moves must have been part of the show. Earlier parodies of the Seven Deadly Sins, and Faustus’ delight at this spectacle, make me think that while the unholy Trinity aimed at maximum terror, the minor devils, disguised as Sins, played for laughter, establishing direct contact

15 See Gurr, pp. 168-69, quoting two contemporary descriptions “strongly coloured by memories of the play in performance”.

16 Cf. Bosch’s Hell in his *Garden of Delights*, Brueghel’s *Seven Deadly Sins*.

with Faustus and with the general audience. We know how heterogeneous stage-costumes were. In this ambiguous parade, we can imagine that they could at the same time have verged on the grotesque and satirised extravagant contemporary fashions. They may also have expanded the characteristics of each sin as suggested by its own words and emblematic traditions. Peacock strut in costly plumed costume, with a serpent as necklace and painted fingers blocking the stench of the precincts from a haughty nose, is my suggestion for Pride (“like a necklace ... like a fan of feathers ... fie, what a smell ... “ [II.ii.113-15]). Black leanness and quarrelsome attitude seem to suit Envy, who is “begotten of a chimney-sweeper ... lean”, and tries to dislodge those who sit in both intra-dramatic and extra-dramatic audiences: “must thou sit and I stand? Come down, with a vengeance!” (124-26). A lion’s mane, ireful brows, conspicuous scars, a chest sticking out and a heavy step obstructed by his several “cases of rapiers” would have been appropriate for Wrath, who vengefully threatens any mocker (“I leapt out of a lion’s mouth ... I was born in hell ... wounding myself ... look to it [128-31]) and so on. Many in the audience, while associating some of these sins with people they knew, may have had a sense of superior awareness, as they perceived Faustus’ blindness to his own pride, gluttony or lechery and resented both the lameness of his questions and the easy victory of playhouse shadows over fears founded on reality. Later, reactivations in the drama of the seven deadly sins, Pride in the Pope’s actions, Wrath in Benvolio’s vengefulness, Lechery in Helen, Gluttony in the Duchess, Sloth in the cardinals would, as Ernst Honigmann suggests, have made “theatrical sense if the Deadly Sins reappear[ed] as recognisable devils” (pp. 182-83). In this case, intellectual, moral and aesthetic distance would have prevailed over any emotional and sensual involvement experienced earlier.

The Good and Bad Angels reappear “at several doors” at the end of the play, just before the denouement (V.ii.91 SD). This time the Bad Angel speaks last and is given five lines more than the Good Angel. Music sounds, presumably divinely melodious, while a “throne descends” (98 SD) on stage in “resplendent glory” (104). Then, after the Good Angel has evoked “the celestial happiness” Faustus has lost (99), “the throne ascends”,¹⁷ and “Hell is discovered” (108 SD) for Faustus to let his eyes “with horror stare / Into that vast perpetual torture house” (109-10) whose contents are described with venomous spite by the Bad Angel (111-20). Throughout this scene, an onstage audience sit “above” (V.ii.1 SD). gloating

17 Unless the same throne is used for both Heaven and Hell, but Gill accepts Alexander Dyce’s editorial addition. Henslowe’s throne was stored in the heavens (Gurr, pp. 176-77).

in anticipation over Faustus' "wretched" (8) agony, as his "heart-blood dries with grief" (12) and his damnation is at hand. The magician, who has entered later with Wagner, seems unaware of this presence of the Infernal Trinity. Preceded once more by thunder, Lucifer, Belzebub and Mephostophilis now occupy a stage position which is usually reserved for God in Christian iconography and medieval plays. This apparent blasphemy may have shocked those in the audience who did not interpret it as the reflection of Faustus' misplaced new worship. Here again, the spectators were invited to adapt their vision and belief(s) and reconcile them with their superior awareness. Yet the widely shared belief in the reality of Heaven and Hell, supported by many sermons, would have made their representation in the play entirely convincing.

IV. A spectacle of damnation

This last part of my discussion will focus on those scenes, my fourth layer, which remain in every reader's mind and make the most lasting impression on the spectators of *Doctor Faustus*. The play begins and ends with Faustus alone on the stage, a striking visual image of solitude. So much has been written about the opening scene that I shall only pinpoint the obvious visual elements and the degree of belief they are likely to have generated. The scholarly, self-absorbed and impatient nature of the proud consumer of all knowledge is immediately apparent in the celestial globe, and the books he picks up and immediately rejects as no longer worthy his study.

The passions of Faustus, as we all know, were first acted out on the stage by a formidable actor, Edward Alleyn,¹⁸ who had already created Tamburlaine and the Jew of Malta for the Admiral's Men at Henslowe's Rose Theatre. Each time, if we may judge from contemporary reports, he did not *play* the part, he *was* the part.¹⁹ His tall stature, his "well-tuned audible voice",²⁰ and his forceful impersonations commanded the attention and emotion of all audiences, and secured their willing suspension of disbelief. Like all exceptional actors, he enhanced the

18 See Wraight.

19 See Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* (1592): "Not Roscius nor Aesope, those admyred tragedians that have lived ever since before Christ was borne, could ever performe more in action than famous Ned Allen" (quoted in Halliday, p. 27). Thomas Fuller (*The Worthies of England*, 1661) remembered Alleyn as "the Roscius of our age, so acting to the life, that he made any part . . . to become him" (quoted by Gurr, p. 88).

20 Armstrong, quoted by Hattaway, p. 91.

impact, both intellectual and emotional, of all speeches, and of Marlowe's powerful images and rhetoric. Faustus' dialogic soliloquy, when brought to life by the actor's moves, gestures, and facial expressions, reaches a climax in the opposition between two highly symbolic and easily recognisable books—the Bible and a book of necromancy, each looked at in turn and manipulated with painful qualms in one case, exultation in the other. The enthusiasm conveyed by Alleyn when Faustus decides to turn to “the metaphysics of magicians” (I.i.47) in order to find “a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honour, of omnipotence” (51–52) and become “a demi-god” (60), is bound to have stayed in the audience's minds and been contrasted with his later disillusionments.

In Faustus' ritual conjuring scene (I.iii), supervised from the gallery by Lucifer and four devils, whose first thundering entrance must have caused a frisson in the audience, Alleyn wears either the “cassock with the fur trimmed down of a doctor of divinity over it”²¹ evidenced in the 1616 woodcut and on the cover of most modern editions or, as the result of his own fright, the surplice with a large cross upon his breast described by contemporaries.²² Although I have found no supporting evidence, my conjecture is that, while he exhorts himself with sonorous words to proceed with his incantations, and describes the magic circle (I.iii.1–15), using charcoal, perhaps at the end of a magic wand, he underlines, and makes visible to the double audience, the “lines, circles, signs, letters and characters” (I.i.49) already drawn on the floor of the stage. This staging is easily feasible. It would take some time but enhance the spectacular dimension of the scene and the suspense. When his impressive Latin black-mass ritual is completed by his sprinkling of holy water and making the sign of the cross (“Signumque crucis quod nunc facio” [I.iii.20–22]), a dragon (19 SD)—probably “shooting fire”, as did Henslowe's “dragon in fostes” in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (III.ii)—appears on the stage.²³ It would be bound to cause more than a stir in the audience, as it does in Faustus, who immediately commands it to return in the shape of a Franciscan friar. This is probably the shape under which Mephostophilis appears throughout the play, except when he, like Faustus, disguises himself as a Cardinal at Rome or when he resumes a monstrous shape as part of the Infernal Trinity and at the end of the play. The element of antipapist satire would have been likely to

21 Hattaway, p. 169.

22 See Thomas and Tydeman, eds., p. 177.

23 See Campbell, chap. 4 (pp. 59–65), for the Greek, Latin and Italian heritage, as far as stage machines are concerned.

release the tension in the theatre, especially during the parody of the catechism that follows Mephostophilis' disillusioning of Faustus about his real power; the devil disguised as friar answers the pupil's questions:

Tell me what is that Lucifer, thy Lord?

.....

And what art thou that live with Lucifer? (I.iii.62-74)

Yet surprise and a new element of dramatic tension immediately check this release when Mephostophilis steps out of his role as a tempter sent by Lucifer and passionately evokes his being "tormented with ten thousand hells / In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss", as well as struck with terror by Faustus' "frivolous demands" (I.iii.79-83).

The signing of the bond with the devil, which follows the first intervention of the Angel, is another highly ritualised and dramatic scene. Faustus has no sooner stabbed his own arm than he asks that this sacrifice be witnessed by Mephostophilis and the audience: "View here this blood that trickles from mine arm" (II.i.57); then the blood stops trickling when he is about to write his deed of gift: "My blood congeals and I can write no more" (62). Many among the spectators would have provided the obvious answer to Faustus' question: "What might the staying of my blood portend?" (64). Time for heavy suspense is provided by Mephostophilis' going to fetch "a chafer of fire" (69) to dissolve the congealed and unwilling blood. Faustus' hesitations are vanquished; his blood starts running again, and the diabolic pact binding his soul for ever is signed, in spite of the alarming "*Homo Fuqe*" he sees on his arm and reads aloud (II.i.77). We know that bladders of blood were used on stage. Together with Alleyn's art and the legalistic apparatus used—scroll, deed of gift, covenants and articles (88-112)—such theatrical realism may have prompted the least sophisticated among the spectators to adhere to the "reality" of the representation. Most of them must have been aware of Faustus' failure, through lack of judgement and faith, to interpret these sights as God-sent warnings, or as hallucinations caused by his own sense of guilt.

The diversion Mephostophilis arranges to prevent Faustus' flight (81-82) arouses his curiosity: "What means this show?" (83). What delights his mind (82, 84) would presumably have delighted the spectators' eyes, while dramatically enacting both the triumph of the devils and "the widespread belief that witches gave garments to the devil who enchanted them and returned them to cement

the bond more fully”.²⁴ After having served tragic realism, artifice provides entertainment, but an entertainment fraught with dramatic irony:

Mephostophilis. I'll fetch him somewhat to delight his mind. *Exit.* *Enter Devils, giving crowns and rich apparel to Faustus; they dance and then depart.* (II.i.82)

Mirroring this sequence of serious matter and antic movements, the solemn, legalistic reading of all covenants and articles of the deed of gift by Mephostophilis is followed by his fetching Faustus the wife he has asked for (88-110). Laughter and growing disbelief in the magician's dearly bought power must have met Mephostophilis' entrance “with a Devil dressed like a woman, with fireworks”, the latter probably hung about her hips, as suggested by Hattaway (p. 175). Disillusioned at the sight of this “hot whore” (II.i.146), Faustus is deterred from marriage, but he does not seem to question the devil's practical joke.

The growing awareness of spectators makes them realise that the magician does not achieve much of what he desires, contrary to his disciples, Wagner, Robin and Dick, whose aspirations are much lower. While reflecting on Faustus' failures and foreshadowing his end, the long comic scenes in the middle of the play may, *a posteriori*, if we judge from our modern reactions, have given them the sense that their own expecting something important to happen and being given instead artificial shows to delight their eyes was an analogue of what happens to Faustus in the fiction. This would have created a delicate, but not necessarily unpleasant, balance between identifying with him and perceiving the overall meaning of the play.

The rhythm accelerates at the end of the play. Faustus, as we have seen, approaches death with revelling. The stage climax of his sensual indulgence is, of course, the kiss of Helen. On her second entrance, the two Cupids who accompany her establish her as a goddess of Love. The audience is invited to see the devastatingly pleasurable effect of her soul-sucking kiss:

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:
Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies.
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips. (VI.99-102)

24 Hattaway, p. 174

The suggestion of sexual intercourse with a succuba is followed by a terrifying sight, that of devouring hell. From the bad Angel's description (V.ii) and *The second Report of Doctor John Faustus*, quoted at length by Hattaway (pp. 162-64),²⁵ we can conjecture a Hellmouth "made like the broad mouth of a huge dragon, which with continual armies of smoke and flame breathed forth his angry stomach's rage; round about the eyes grew hairs, not so horrible as men call bristles, but more horrible, as long as stiff spears" (p. 162). Out of it could issue serpents, "huge burning forks" (V.ii.112) to toss damned souls (111), the flaming top of "an ever burning chair" (114), hissing and bubbling sounds to suggest the boiling lead in which bodies are plunged (112), and, of course, tortured yells and screeches. Supported by countless similar representations of hell²⁶ and Faustus' desperate "O, I have seen enough to torture me" (121), this sight must have enhanced the spectator's belief in the potential reality of this representation, while acknowledging its theatricality. The dichotomy of "false" and "true" would have yielded to an oxymoronic conjunction of opposites. Here again, however, there was a possibility of grotesque exaggeration, destroying all verisimilitude.

The dramatic and tragic impact of Faustus' last-hour speech has been experienced by all those who have read the play. How much would its early performances have enhanced this impact? Under the eyes of the Infernal Trinity, Faustus exerts his last forces against eternal damnation, but fails to make the act of will that would lead to true repentance and salvation. Though engrossed in his personal drama, the spectators would probably have been somewhat distracted from it by the devils' gloating expectation when depths of despair are reached. Suspense is at its highest, for until the last minute, according to the pattern of Morality Plays, the soul of the sinner can be saved. This suspense would have been increased if Faustus turned his back on a devouring hell that the audience could still see. They would have registered the magician's starts at every chime of the playhouse bell. The acceleration of time contrived by Marlowe must have intensified the nerve-racking sense of "now or never". The body of the actor torn between two contradictory desires, to reach up to God and to disappear

25 Hattaway, following his source, E. K. Chambers, thinks that the description given in the anonymous 1592 work, *The second Report of Doctor John Faustus, containing his Appearance, and the Deeds of Wagner of 1594*, is at least partially based on performances of the play in a London playhouse or at the Court. Dessen, pp. 59-60, proposes that hell could be represented by a tapestry or just a trap door in Tudor plays.

26 See Shewring, p. 223, fig. 2, for the scene of Judgement in the Valenciennes *Mystere de la Passion* (1547) depicted in a miniature by Hubert Cailleau and Jacques de Moëlles.

under the earth, and finally convulsed with terror, would have made the inward torment of the magician visible and almost tangible. At this point, however, it is impossible to dissociate the verbal imagery, so powerfully orchestrated by the dramatist, from the reality effect and the emotional involvement achieved. The mind of the spectator at the first performance of this scene must have harboured such a rich interplay of intellect and emotion, of metaphysical query and sensuous response, that his imaginative participation would have left little room for distance and disbelief.

O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see where Christ' blood streams in the firmament! (V.ii.138-39)

O spare me, Lucifer!
Where is it now? 'Tis gone:
And see where God stretcheth out his arm,
And bends his ireful brows. (142-45)

Convinced by the physical reality of the leading actor and swept away by his richly evocative language, Elizabethan spectators may have seen Christ's blood and God's stretched arm with their mind's eye. They may even have adhered to Faustus' final wishful thinking in spite of all contrary indications, and been shocked when the devils swarmed on stage to drag him away. Paradoxically, the greatest demands for empathetic identification are made when spectators cannot really see what the protagonist believes he sees. Earlier, he has complained to the three scholars: "I would lift up my hands, but see, they hold them" (V.iii.53-54). While their sympathy is wholly engaged, however, spectators are also made to perceive how much more dangerous than inflicted deception is Faustus' self-deceit. They are also offered dramatic irony "translated into visual and gestural terms. For, as he attempts to reach up to heaven in supplication, he also reaches out to the infernal trinity observing him from above" (Zucker, p. 172). Likewise, when he follows Helen to the "heaven" he finds in her lips, the actor who embodies her probably leads him in the direction of the hellmouth.

Conclusion

At none of the four levels that I have considered in *Doctor Faustus* is spectatorial disbelief or belief in the reality of what was presented on stage likely to have been unmitigated at early performances of the play. Even in comic episodes, disquiet-

ing elements linked to the devilish powers at work must have modulated laughter. Shows within the show must have drawn a variety of responses both onstage and in the general audience. The dramatisation of the supposedly true story of a man who had sold his soul for twenty-four years of unlimited power was probably what would have drawn the greatest empathy from all seers and hearers. Yet audience response had become a far more complex and ambiguous dramatic process than in Morality plays. Marlowe had, indeed, increased his blending of diverse sorts of seeing and believing—sights, visions, hallucinations, Christian beliefs and belief in the reality of what was shown—subtly altering the balance between them, and making ontological and metaphysical doubts part of the spectators' experience. This was the magic that he aimed at and achieved.

Doctor Faustus is undoubtedly a play to be seen as well as heard. In this phantasmagoria, Marlowe uses old forms but moves beyond his spectators' expectations with a fuller use of the potentialities of his medium. He contrives many inset spectacles, confronting various points of view and generating ironic discrepancies. He manages to distract the spectators, not only in the sense of amusing them or diverting them from what is important, but in the sense of surprising, unsettling and bewildering them. His play gives much to see and to disbelieve or believe, consecutively or simultaneously. Its brilliant theatricality complicates and sometimes compromises the plain didactic message of the choruses, which inscribes it in the Morality play tradition: if he dares "to practice more than heavenly power permits" (Epi.8), man is doomed to suffer a "hellish fall" (4). Marlowe's opening Chorus appeals to "patient judgements" (Pro.9). The phrase appears conventional, but the use of the plural implies personal, evolutionary responses, rather than clear-cut collective moral judgements, while the patience required is far from being passive. In the play, magic and artifice are both deflated and glorified. Adhesion to fictional reality is both invited and questioned. *Faustus* is not only a dramatisation of the conflicting aspirations of Renaissance Man; it is also a school of spectatorship. The enrichment of his perceptive possibilities makes the spectator an active partaker in the more and more ambiguous dramatic feast. He may be tempted to echo Faustus' words: "My senses are deceived . . . / O, yes, I see it plain" (II.i.79-80), and to add: "I shall never abjure the magic of the theatre."

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