

## South Atlantic Modern Language Association

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Source: *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (May, 1988), pp. 25-45

Published by: [South Atlantic Modern Language Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3199911>

Accessed: 27-08-2015 19:01 UTC

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*Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination  
in Dr. Faustus and The Tempest*

JOHN S. MEBANE

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CENTRAL TO THE RENAISSANCE is the intensified fascination with “art,” in the broad sense of “human skill or creative activity.” Although there was considerable diversity of opinion concerning the nature and the status of human knowledge and abilities, many Renaissance humanists, artists, poets, and philosophers sought to attribute magnificent creative powers to humankind, while at the same time reconciling their faith in humanity with their faith in God by asserting that divine grace grants power to human art. Marsilio Ficino, in his widely influential *Theologia Platonica*, asserts that those who purify the soul not only imitate God through their creative endeavors, they actually become God’s agents, and are at times granted the power to assist Him in restoring aspects of the fallen world to their prelapsarian purity. In his discussion of the arts of government, technology, painting, sculpture, and poetry, Ficino asserts that “human arts make by themselves whatever nature herself makes, as if we were not the servants of nature, but her rivals. . . . Humankind imitates all the works of divine nature, and the works of lower nature we perfect, reform, and amend.”<sup>1</sup> The culmination of Ficino’s proof of the immortality and divinity of the soul is his treatment of how the magician, as the supreme artist, becomes one with God and receives the power to perform such feats as the alchemical transformation of species, the control of tempests, and the attainment of prophetic visions (2: 223-45). The works of Ficino and his successors in the occult tradition—Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Cornelius Agrippa, John Dee, Giordano Bruno, and others—were respected by numerous influential thinkers in Renaissance England, but they were condemned by those who argued that the occultists had fallen prey to the temptation to forget the limitations imposed upon human nature through original sin. The belief that

the individual could attain occult knowledge and power was often seen as an illusion stimulated by excessive pride and manipulated by the Father of Lies. Whereas those who accepted magic tended to believe that the limitations of human nature could be substantially overcome and that human beings had the right—indeed, the responsibility—to re-shape the world around them, influential treatises by Henry Holland, Jean Bodin, James VI and I, and others condemned the occult arts as damnable. The magicians themselves proclaimed that they were motivated by piety and love, and that their purposes were consonant with those of the natural order itself; their adversaries accused them of a simple lust for power.<sup>2</sup>

Because Neoplatonism and the occult philosophy often associated with it had carried to its logical extreme the Renaissance glorification of human creative activity, it should not surprise us that in plays about magic we find both Marlowe's and Shakespeare's most extended dramatic treatment of the power and the moral status of art. Both dramatists treat magic on both the literal and the symbolic levels: they are aware that Hermetic/Cabalist magic was, historically, one of the most powerful manifestations of the growing conviction that human beings should act out their potential in the free exercise of their powers on the world around them; at the same time, they suggest that poetic drama, because it exerts a potent influence upon the audience's thoughts and perceptions, is a form of magic. Both playwrights utilize metadramatic techniques—plays-within-the-play, masques, and other devices through which a play comments upon itself, or upon theater in general—in order to lead us to reflect upon the work of the theatrical artist as a specific instance of the attempt to control the world by influencing the human mind and imagination.<sup>3</sup> *Dr. Faustus* initially seems to suggest that the dramatist's art, like that of the evil conjurer, may lead us into a realm of illusion; in contrast, *The Tempest* implies that Prospero's magical art provides genuine revelations, making us aware of our place within a harmonious cosmic order. Despite these and other differences, however, both *Dr. Faustus* and *The Tempest* lead us to question the affirmation of human power symbolized by Renaissance magic.

The parallel between spiritual or daemonic magic and literary art is a natural one, partly because occult philosophers and poets both laid claim to divine inspiration—which could be conveyed by spirits—and also because both arts were of dubious moral status: poets, like magicians, were at times accused of irrationality and excessive passion, of creating and/or being deceived by illusions. Occult philosophers asserted that the imagination could become

connected with the intuitive powers of the soul and thus become the bearer of visionary or prophetic truths, and there is considerable evidence that their doctrines had some influence upon poets. Traditional theologians, in contrast, generally claimed that even those magicians who sincerely believed that their visions and powers came from God had been deceived by Satan.<sup>4</sup> The word “spirit” could mean either “angel” or “devil,” and Renaissance demonologists frequently pointed out that devils could disguise themselves as benevolent angels in order to play upon the magicians’ pride and lure them to damnation.

The comparison between magic and poetry in *Dr. Faustus* is initially signalled by the verbal parallel between Faustus’s reference to “heavenly” necromancy (e.g. 77) and the chorus’s reference to the poet’s “heavenly verse” (7); it soon becomes apparent that the two arts are similar because both are based upon fantasy and consequently have the power to create intoxicating delusions.<sup>5</sup> Although Faustus initially believes that his “heavenly words” (255) possess genuine power to command spirits and control the forces of nature, the play continually suggests that Faustus’s language merely embodies various forms of self-deception. Consider, for example, Faustus’s response to Mephostophilis’s chilling revelation that the magician has no real control over the devil, and that Faustus must worship Lucifer in order to obtain magical powers:

So *Faustus* hath already done, and holds this principle,  
There is no chiefe but onely *Beelzebub*:  
To whom *Faustus* doth dedicate himselfe.  
This word Damnation, terrifies not me,  
For I confound hell in *Elizium*:  
My Ghost be with the old Phylosophers. (281-86)

To “confound hell in *Elizium*” is to persuade oneself that one can change the nature of things-in-themselves merely by manipulating their names; the alteration takes place in the mind of the magician, not in reality.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the play reminds us that “heavenly words” may influence the perceptions of the audience as well as the fantasy of the protagonist: at times we may be led to share Faustus’s vision of warfare as noble rather than brutal, the delights of the flesh as heavenly rather than base. The power of language to effect such transvaluations is nowhere manifested more powerfully than in the apostrophe to Helen:

I will be *Paris*, and for loue of thee,  
 In stead of *Troy* shall *Wittenberg* be sack't,  
 And I will combat with weake *Menelaus*,  
 And weare thy colours on my plumed crest.  
 Yea, I will wound *Achilles* in the heele,  
 And then returne to *Hellen* for a kisse.  
 O thou art fairer then the euenings aire,  
 Clad in the beauty of a thousand starres:  
 Brighter art thou then flaming *Iupiter*,  
 When he appear'd to haplesse *Semele*:  
 More louely then the Monarch of the sky,  
 In wanton *Arethusa's* azure armes,  
 And none but thou shalt be my Paramour. (1881-93)

The passage brings us to exult with Faustus in his imaginary triumphs, and we feel with him the allurements of Helen's beauty; and yet, as Lucifer and Mephostophilis arise from Hell to oversee the scene immediately following these lines, we are reminded that the image Faustus worships is not even the actual ghost of Helen of Troy, but merely a devil in a fair disguise. The play continually provides reminders that Faustus's flights of poetic inspiration are "idle fantasies" (1909); the poetry creates in the minds of the audience the same illusions that have ravished Faustus, yet we never forget for more than a brief moment the tragic context which identifies these grandiose dreams as damnable. Although Harry Levin articulated a fundamental insight when he observed that Marlowe's hyperbolic style may reflect the desire to transcend limitations (viii-xii, 2-27, 108-35), it is impossible to prove, even when the weight of biographical evidence is thrown into the balance, that Marlowe identified in a straightforward way with his protagonist, or that he intended his audiences to feel either unambivalent admiration or unqualified condemnation of Faustus and his art. Instead, the evidence of the text itself suggests that Marlowe summons all of his poetic gifts in order to lead us to share Faustus's experience of ravishment, evidently relishing in a self-conscious manner his own artistic powers, and yet simultaneously contemplating the potentially seductive and dangerous nature of art.

Faustus's magical art is eminently theatrical as well as poetic. In numerous scenes the magician and/or the devils perform "shows" that dramatize the appeal of earthly power and pleasure, and, at the same time, make us aware of the insubstantiality of the worldly goals which Faustus has chosen to pursue. The play achieves this effect through scenes in which sensual delight, worldly ambition, and magic are,

despite the appeal of the magician's verse, identified as shadowy theatrical spectacles. The first of these scenes occurs when Faustus wavers in his resolution after signing the infernal contract, and Mephostophilis decides to "fetch him somewhat to delight his minde." Stage directions for a miniature play-within-the-play follow:

*Enter Devils, giving Crownes and rich apparell to*

*Faustus: they dance, and then depart.*

*Enter Mephostophilis.*

*Faust.* What meanes this shew? speake *Mephostophilis*.

*Meph.* Nothing *Faustus* but to delight thy mind,

And let thee see what Magicke can performe. (472-77)

The judgment that earthly crowns, delight, and wealth mean "nothing" is subsequently reinforced by the presentation of the Pope's proud triumph over Bruno as another theatrical "show." The formal, artistic nature of the Pope's worldly power is emphasized in the stage direction that introduces the scene:

*Enter the Cardinals and Bishops, some bearing Crosiers, some*

*the Pillars, Monkes and Friers, singing their Procession:*

*Then the Pope, and Raymond King of Hungary,*

*with Bruno led in chaines. (891-94)*

A few lines prior to the procession, Faustus refers to the affairs of this world as a "show" in which he himself has chosen to become an "Actor" (877). In act 4 control over the things of this world is once again associated with theatrical illusion when Faustus apparently raises the shades of Alexander and his paramour:

*Senit. Enter at one the Emperour Alexander, at the other Darius; they meete, Dauius is throwne down, Alexander kils him; takes off his Crowne, and offering to goe out, his Paramour meetes him, he embraceth her, and sets Darius Crowne upon her head; and commi[n]g backe, both salute the Emperour, who leauing his State, offers to embrace them, which Faustus seeing, suddenly staies him.*

*Then trumpets cease, and Musicke sounds.*

[*Faust.*] My gracious Lord, you doe forget your selfe,  
These are but shadowes, not substantiall.

*Emp.* O pardon me, my thoughts are so rauished  
With sight of this renowned Emperour,  
That in mine armes I would haue compast him.  
(1292-1307)

The identification of worldly power and pleasure with theatrical spectacle and hence with illusion is perhaps epitomized in the *Masque of the Seven Deadly Sins* that Lucifer presents to Faustus in act 2. The stage, which represents the world and which is, at the same time, a place where deceptive imagination reigns, is identified with the realm of privation that is Satan's domain.

The metadramatic aspects of *Dr. Faustus* thus underscore the power of art to influence our perceptions and our values. Simultaneously, they confirm in a subtle and dramatically satisfying manner the belief of many Renaissance demonologists and theologians that the devil's servants occupy prominent positions of power in this world. William Perkins, who began his career as a popular and influential preacher and professor of theology at Cambridge while Marlowe was a student there, proclaimed that "the Devill hath a kingdome, called in Scripture the kingdome of darknes, whereof himselfe is the head and governour, for which cause he is tearmed *the Prince of darknes, the God of this world*, ruling and effectually working in the hearts of the children of disobedience" (5); the most faithful of Satan's idolaters are granted the powers of witchcraft, Perkins continues, including the ability to create striking illusions that will win them a following among foolish worldlings. Vivid descriptions of the struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness are common in late sixteenth-century demonological treatises,<sup>7</sup> and *Dr. Faustus* draws extensively upon the concept of Satan as a monarch who captures souls because he wishes to "Enlarge his Kingdome" (428). Mephostophilis calls upon Lucifer as "Monarch of hel[l], vnder whose blacke suruey / Great Potentates do kneele with awful feare" (A-text, 1023-24), and when Lucifer himself appears in act 5 he says he has come "To view the subjects of our Monarchy / Those soules which sinne, seales the blacke sonnes of hell" (1896-97). Satan is thus linked explicitly with ambitious earthly rulers (including the Pope, whom Bruno addresses as "Proud *Lucifer*" [899]), and we are brought to realize that the self-aggrandizement which the desire for earthly conquest manifests is the essence of evil. In fact Marlowe seems to go beyond Perkins, Holland, and others in the extent to which he represents the earth itself as Satan's monarchy: he suggests that a world in which the lust for power and for sensual delight is dominant is nothing other than Hell itself. Mephostophilis endeavors to explain to Faustus that Hell exists wherever evil spirits are present, but the magician responds with the remark that has frequently been attributed to Marlowe himself: "I thinke Hel's a fable" (519). One can imagine Mephostophilis's consternation as he protests, "I tell thee I

am damn'd, and now in hell" (529); and the actor who plays Faustus might well gesture toward the stage as *theatrum mundi* when he replies:

Nay, and this be hell, I'll willingly be damned.  
 What sleeping, eating, walking, and disputing?  
 But leauing this, let me haue a wife, the fairest Maid in  
*Germany*, for I am wanton and lasciuious. . . . (530-33)

When the Old Man tells Faustus he must check his body to amend his soul, and when Mephostophilis says that because the Old Man's faith is strong, "I cannot touch his soule; / But what I may afflict his body with, / I will attempt" (1860-62), we might well infer that the flesh, as well as the world, is under the devil's control.

I do not intend to say, however, that Marlowe's critique of magic and all that it symbolizes is necessarily straightforward or ingenuous. If we accept the arguments for 1592 as the date of *Dr. Faustus* (e. g., Bowers 2: 123-24) we might see the play as a response to the accusations of atheism that were levelled against Sir Walter Raleigh and his circle in Robert Parsons's pamphlets, which were published in early 1592 and which precipitated the Cerne Abbas hearing concerning Raleigh's religious views, as well as those of the scientists and artists whom he patronized.<sup>8</sup> It is quite possible, of course, that Marlowe had changed his values and beliefs by the time that he wrote *Dr. Faustus*, and by revealing the deceptive potential of theatrical art he may be suggesting that his own previous plays had dramatized in a captivating fashion the allurements which *Dr. Faustus* explicitly labels as damnable. Alternatively, Marlowe may be presenting *Dr. Faustus* as a protective device that apparently affirms an orthodox theology while at the same time continuing to express Marlowe's true sympathies through certain speeches of Faustus, Mephostophilis, or the Bad Angel. A third possibility is that *Dr. Faustus* expresses the dramatist's own psychological conflicts, or those that he had observed among his contemporaries. Although this question can never be settled definitively, it seems likely that *Dr. Faustus* embodies some combination of the second and third alternatives. But I would add that, although Marlowe's treatment of theology is ambivalent, whereas Shakespeare affirms certain aspects of traditional belief, the morality of *Dr. Faustus*, insofar as it questions the desire to use practical magic purely for self-aggrandizement, parallels that of *The Tempest*. Regardless of the motivation behind Marlowe's modification of his previous dramatic strategies, the tragedy gains much of its power from the manner in which its dramatizations of the hellish character



of voluptuousness and of worldly ambition are continually counterpoised against Faustus's magnificent poetic visions of magical power and worldly pursuits as "heavenly." The intensified ambivalence of *Dr. Faustus* gives it a form of vitality that differs from that of *Tamburlaine* or Marlowe's other earlier plays.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 86, which has frequently been cited as evidence that Marlowe is the Rival Poet (e.g., Charney 33-34; Wilson 131), develops as a major theme the question of whether the rival's inspiration is divine or diabolical:

Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write  
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?  
No, neither he, nor his compeers by night  
Giving him aid, my verse astonished.  
He, nor that affable familiar ghost  
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,  
As victors of my silence cannot boast. . . .

The effect of the word "gulls" is to retract the preceding concession to the "proud full sail of his great verse" (1) and to reinforce the suggestions of Sonnets 82-85 that the exaggerated rhetoric of the Rival Poet's style is, after all, deceptive. If it is true, as Charney has suggested, that Shakespeare was laboring under Marlowe's shadow during the early 1590s, it seems reasonable to suggest that he had *Dr. Faustus* in mind when he wrote his sonnets and that he noted the association in the play between the conjurer's art and the art of the poetic dramatist. Although roughly eighteen years elapsed before Shakespeare composed *The Tempest*, David Young is probably correct in his argument that in Shakespeare's final, consummate dramatic statement on the nature and purposes of art he chose to return to the subject of the occult in part because both Marlowe and Jonson, Shakespeare's two great rivals, had previously made use of the same metaphor. Although many recent students of the play have concluded that Shakespeare's attitude toward art and magic in *The Tempest* is as ambivalent as Marlowe's in *Dr. Faustus*, considerable evidence indicates that the later play is designed to respond affirmatively to questions that *Dr. Faustus* leaves unanswered. *Dr. Faustus* ostensibly denies the possibility of benevolent magic, while on another level it questions the entire system of beliefs in terms of which much of the debate concerning art and magic had been cast; *The Tempest* suggests that magic — and, by implication, other forms of art — can become a vehicle of divine creative power.

Those who believe that Shakespeare's response to magical art is ambivalent often argue that Prospero suffers from excessive pride and vengefulness in the beginning of the play and that he undergoes a "sea-change" in act 5, scene 1, when he tells Ariel that he will feel compassion for all of those—even his enemies—who are now in his power. Prospero's subsequent renunciation of his art has often been interpreted as a sign that his magic is in some way corrupt, or at least morally ambiguous. Robert Egan (90-119), who emphasizes quite properly that Prospero's magic is, on one level, a metaphor for theatrical artistry, has suggested that because Prospero himself cannot initially accept human imperfections, his art, throughout most of the play, is too highly idealized to withstand the intrusions of reality.<sup>9</sup> There is little or no motivation, however, for a major change of heart in Prospero at the outset of act 5, nor do the magician's plots assume a radically new direction at this point. The dramatic climax of the main action occurs not when Prospero converses with Ariel, but in act 3, scene 3, when Alonso's repentance makes it possible for the magician to free Milan from its subjugation to Naples and to reassume his position as Duke. If Prospero had initially planned vengeance, he could easily have annihilated his enemies in the initial storm scene; instead, he endeavors to bring the wrongdoers to repentance. Moreover, Shakespeare consistently contrasts Prospero's benevolent art with the witchcraft of Sycorax, and at the outset of the play he takes pains to demonstrate that the magician intends to harm no one:

Wipe thou thine eyes, have comfort.  
 The direful spectacle of the wrack, which touch'd  
 The very virtue of compassion in thee,  
 I have with such provision in mine art  
 So safely ordered that there is no soul—  
 No, not so much perdition as an hair  
 Betid to any creature in the vessel. . . . (1.2.25-31)<sup>10</sup>

*The Tempest* is an intricate elaboration upon the central symbol named in the play's title, the storm that is associated with tragic experience and that can, if we perceive events appropriately, become a blessing in disguise. Prospero's initial shows of severity are mere pretenses, and they provide a specific instance of the general principle that events which appear threatening can, if we respond properly, lead to spiritual rebirth. Prospero's magical theater assumes a central role in effecting the changes from discord to harmony, tragedy to comedy in

*The Tempest*, and Shakespeare offers us in the play a qualified acceptance of the Renaissance conception of art — both magical and theatrical — as possessing redemptive power.

Prospero's magic is based upon love and faith, and it is contrasted throughout the play with self-aggrandizement, vengefulness, and cynicism. Shakespeare draws a close parallel between faith in providence, which enables us to envision a benevolent order beneath the apparent meaninglessness and disorder of earthly events, and interpersonal faith, an ability to see the potential for goodness, as well as evil, in human nature. Only those who possess a capacity for this kind of vision can respond to Prospero's magical art or participate in the harmonious order that it helps to establish. As in all of the romances, Shakespeare's dramatization of the importance of faith takes much of its form from the Renaissance occult tradition. Occult philosophers had asserted that through a process of education, self-discipline, and spiritual purification, the magus becomes aware of the innate ideas within the *Mens*, the intuitive, suprarational faculty within the soul, and once this occurs, the magician possesses the power to connect, in contemplation and/or transitive magic, the things of this world with the archetypal forms that govern them. Alchemy, in particular, is an attempt to purify the fallen world by bringing earthly creatures into more perfect unity with their governing Ideas, and Shakespeare may well have been aware of the alchemical meaning of the term "tempest": it is a boiling process which removes impurities from base metal and facilitates its transmutation into gold (Shumaker 191). Because the human *Mens* is a part of the series of minds that constitutes the order of providence, the magus gains intimate knowledge of God's providential purposes and consequently becomes an agent of the divine Creator. Through assent to providence the magus could then liberate himself from the control of the stars and of Fortune, gaining the true freedom which comes from aligning oneself with the will of God (Ficino 2: 206, 243-45; Curry 177 ff.). The magus possesses the power to manipulate stellar influences and to contribute to the course of earthly events, but the power of the benevolent magician consists solely of the ability to help fulfill providence, never to thwart it: Ariel's assertion that he and his fellows are "ministers of Fate" (3.3.61) is literally true. An evil magician, such as Faustus or Sycorax, might obtain rudimentary powers, but never anything approaching Prospero's. In fact many Renaissance occultists agreed with orthodox theologians that an evil magician's powers are entirely illusory.<sup>11</sup>

Prospero's art, acting in concert with the cosmic order, provides ex-

periences through which various characters are granted an opportunity to acknowledge their mortality and, consequently, learn that the human community must be based on mutual forgiveness. Through the storm, which is itself an instance of magical/dramatic art conceived by Prospero and enacted by spirits whom he subsequently terms his "actors," they are confronted with events that impress upon them the limitations of human power. Prospero himself, despite his impressive magical abilities, had learned of his mortal limitations years prior to the opening of the play, when he, like King Lear, was deprived of his throne and began his own tempestuous, redemptive voyage. An example of his awareness of the subordinate status of his art within the cosmic order occurs when he informs Miranda that his success

doth depend upon  
A most auspicious star, whose influence  
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes  
Will ever after droop. (1.2.181-84)

Although the entire plot of *The Tempest* is in a sense a product of Prospero's magic, there are brief theatrical performances within the larger play that assist the characters in interpreting the events of their own lives and that consequently exert a potentially redemptive influence. One of these is the broken feast in act 3 which symbolizes the communion from which Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio have exiled themselves. Obviously this spectacle, along with the admonitions composed by Prospero and spoken by Ariel, is intended not merely to torment Prospero's enemies, but to teach self-knowledge and evoke repentance. In Alonso's case the scene has the desired effect:

O, it is monstrous! monstrous!  
Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;  
The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,  
That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounc'd  
The name of Prosper; it did base my trespass. (3.3.95-99)

At the moment when Alonso feels remorse, his perception of events begins to change. In his imagination the discordant sounds of the tempest are miraculously transformed into music (cf. Brower 116-17). The storm is a mysterious song that whispers to Alonso the secret of his own soul.

Awareness of our mortality and our capacity for evil is only one

component of the self-knowledge that Prospero's art endeavors to convey to us. The other is an awareness of the spark of the divine that Antonio correctly associates with the moral conscience, but refuses to acknowledge as his own. When asked by Sebastian how his "conscience" could permit him to supplant Prospero, Antonio reveals his thoroughly materialistic conception of human nature:

Ay, sir; where lies that? If 'twere a kibe,  
'Twould put me to my slipper; but I feel not  
This deity in my bosom. (2.1.276-78)

Much of *The Tempest* is a dramatic debate over the question of whether humanity is bestial or godlike, Caliban or Ariel; the implied answer is that we are both, and that our lower faculties must be guided and disciplined by the mind and spirit. One of the central symbolic scenes of the play is the masque of Juno, Ceres, and Iris, which reveals to us that the power of heaven both stimulates creativity and, at the same time, restrains nature within its proper boundaries. The symbolic union of earth and heaven suggests, among many other things, that the marriage between higher and lower faculties within the human personality can create a harmonious and properly ordered life.<sup>12</sup> In spite of Prospero's reference to it as a "vanity of mine art" (4.1.41), the masque reveals to us an essential aspect of the vision of *The Tempest* as a whole.

The fact that the concluding dance of the masque is disrupted by Prospero's remembrance of the rebellious plot of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo does not entirely invalidate the scene's symbolic vision. Quite recently A. Lynne Magnusson has argued that the interruptions of various scenes and speeches in *The Tempest* suggest that Shakespeare is confessing that art expresses the need of the human mind to create more order and coherence than exists in external reality. Many modern critics feel that *The Tempest* dramatizes relativism rather than revelation.<sup>13</sup> I would suggest, however, that the masque embodies a harmonious vision that can be fully realized in the lives of those who choose to align themselves—as Prospero has done—with the order of providence. The interruption of the masque does remind us that in the fallen world not all mortals will assume their rightful places within the natural order, and consequently the scene concedes that the power of art to reform life is limited. As both Egan and Kernan have emphasized, Shakespeare is intensely aware that the artist has no power over the minds and souls of members of the audience who do not respond with a sympathetic imagination.

Throughout Shakespeare's canon there are oracles, ghosts, and prophetic visions that are associated both with fantasy and with a genuine spiritual dimension of reality, and faith in providence in Shakespeare very often entails a willingness to trust these objects of imagination. In *The Tempest*, the plays enacted by Prospero and his spirits serve much the same function that dream-visions or other forms of prophecy and magic serve in *Julius Caesar*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and other plays (cf. Semon; Hartwig 137-62). Ferdinand and Alonso respond positively to Prospero's art and consequently learn profound truths from it; Antonio and Sebastian resist the power of Prospero's magic and remain unaffected by it.

Shakespeare emphasizes the subjective element in our perceptions of reality in the scene in which we first see Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and the others after their shipwreck. As the scene opens, Gonzalo and Adrian are attempting to persuade the other members of Alonso's party to count their blessings. Although they have been stranded on a mysterious island, Gonzalo says that they somehow have been miraculously preserved and therefore have cause to rejoice. "The air breathes upon us here most sweetly," Adrian comments, and Gonzalo points out that the isle contains "every thing advantageous to life." The other characters, however, see things quite differently. To Sebastian and Antonio the air breathes "As if it had lungs, and rotten ones" or "as 'twere perfumed by a fen" (2.1.47-49). Even the physical appearance of the island is subject to dispute:

*Gon.* How lush and lusty the grass looks! How Green!

*Ant.* The ground indeed is tawny.

*Seb.* With an eye of green in't.

*Ant.* He misses not much.

*Seb.* No, he doth but mistake the truth totally.

*Gon.* But the rariety of it is—which is indeed almost beyond credit—

*Seb.* As many vouch'd rarieties are.

*Gon.* That our garments, being (as they were) drench'd in the sea, hold notwithstanding their freshness and glosses, being rather new dy'd than stain'd with salt water.

*Ant.* If but one of his pockets could speak, would it not say he lies?

*Seb.* Ay, or very falsely pocket up his report. (2.1.53-68)

Shakespeare provides several hints that Gonzalo's view of things is the

correct one. In the scene just prior to this one, for example, Ariel has already assured Prospero that the travelers have been protected, and “On their sustaining garments not a blemish, / But fresher than before” (1.2.218-19). Another confirmation of Gonzalo’s perspective occurs as the conversation turns to the marriage of Alonso’s daughter, which has just taken place at Tunis, and Gonzalo remarks that the city has not had a comparable queen “since widow Dido’s time.” The remainder of the party are surprised by the mention of Dido, since she was queen of Carthage and not, they insist, of Tunis. Gonzalo replies, “This Tunis, sir, was Carthage,” but Sebastian and Antonio are incredulous:

*Ant.* His word is more than the miraculous harp.

*Seb.* He hath rais’d the wall, and houses too.

*Ant.* What impossible matter will he make easy next?

*Seb.* I think he will carry this island home in his pocket,  
and give it his son for an apple. (2.1.87-92)

The point here is that the site of Tunis actually is contiguous with the site of ancient Carthage, and in the Renaissance the two cities were often referred to as one and the same; many geographers used the term “Tunis” to refer to the entire region in which both cities were located. More importantly, historians such as Leo Africanus, whose account was incorporated into Richard Hakluyt’s *Voyages* and Richard Eden and Richard Willes’s *The History of Travayle in the West and East Indies* (from which Shakespeare apparently took the term “Setebos”) asserted that the survivors of the ruined Carthage founded Tunis, so that the latter city was, in a sense, Carthage reborn.<sup>14</sup> Gonzalo is correct, despite the incredulity and cynicism of Antonio and Sebastian, and the action of *The Tempest* as a whole confirms that he is correct, as well, in his optimism concerning the events of the shipwreck. *The Tempest* not only suggests that there are subjective elements in our perception of the world, but endeavors furthermore to persuade us that some interpretations of life are more valid than others: events that seem “impossible” or “miraculous” to some observers may eventually be proven literally true.

Norman Rabkin is correct when he points out that “Shakespeare reminds us in his last plays of the Renaissance commonplace that the artist is a second God creating a second nature . . . in order to share a more profound perception that God has created our universe as a work of art” (139). And yet Shakespeare also suggests that the human artist, working in concert with the divine, can help us to interpret life

correctly. Just as the drama of the broken feast revealed to Alonso the meaning of the previous events of his life, the art of *The Tempest* as a whole is intended to assist the audience in seeing beyond the literal level of the events of earthly history and apprehending their significance; the purpose of genuine art in *The Tempest* is neither to deceive us, nor to dramatize a modern form of relativism, but to reveal which interpretation of reality is genuine. In the epilogue, however, when the analogy between Prospero's art and Shakespeare's becomes most explicit, the playwright makes clear that he has no power without the audience's imaginative participation—our faith, as it were—in the work of art. It is our “gentle breath”—our higher faculties, associated with the airy spirit, Ariel—that will either confer a degree of reality upon the play, and hence send Prospero to Naples, or leave him confined upon the “bare island” of an empty stage. Prospero's closing lines draw attention to the very close similarity between participation in a community of grace and willing participation in a work of theatrical art:

Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue, 13-20)

One can argue that the values and the conceptions of art implied by *Dr. Faustus* and *The Tempest* are at all points diametrically opposed. Faustus's magical theater expresses the excessive desires for power and pleasure that lead the magician into a realm of illusion; Prospero's poetic drama embodies genuine revelations, and it endeavors to effect moral and spiritual reform. Yet perhaps we should beware of identifying Marlowe so closely with his protagonist that we forget that the vision of *Dr. Faustus* as a whole may transcend that of the magician/playwright who appears within it.<sup>15</sup> Although Faustus's self-deception is dramatized as a form of theatrical role-playing in which the genuine self becomes irretrievably lost, the larger purpose of Marlowe's play as a whole is continually to prompt the audience to ask whether the values affirmed in Faustus's poetic and theatrical visions are valid or illusory. On the one hand, Shakespeare seems to have adopted the romance genre that he perfected in *The Tempest*



because he had decided that the time had come to answer certain questions, especially concerning the relation between human action and providence, which many of his tragedies—notably *King Lear*—had left open. In Marlowe's *Tragedie of Doctor Faustus*, as the opening chorus suggests, the burden of the final judgment is left solely with the audience.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>My translation of 2:223: “. . . humanae artes fabricant per seipsas quaecumque fabricat ipsa natura, quasi non servi simus naturae, sed aemuli. . . . [H]omo omnia divinae naturae opera imitatur et naturae inferioris opera perficit, corrigit et emendat.” In addition to examples from painting, sculpture, and mechanical arts, Ficino mentions in this paragraph the animation of statues through sympathetic magic. As Kristeller demonstrates, in Renaissance usage the term “art” included not only what we now call “the fine arts,” but also the crafts and sciences. Kristeller points out the importance of Neoplatonism in emphasizing the theory of divine inspiration which contributed to the subsequent development of modern conceptions of genius. Cassirer also documents the importance of Neoplatonism in providing a theological basis for what he terms the “theodicy of art” (135).

<sup>2</sup>See also Raleigh 2: 181, 381-99, et passim; West's judicious discussion of a variety of primary sources in *The Invisible World*; and the studies by Walker, Yates, and French. Yates's interpretations of *Dr. Faustus* and *The Tempest* in *Shakespeare* (87-106) and *Occult* (115-21, 159-63) differ quite substantially from my own.

<sup>3</sup>Hart provides a convincing argument that *The Tempest* is a conscious response to *Dr. Faustus*. Hart furthermore asserts that Marlowe, an “aggressive and combative atheist” who admires Faustus's amoral self-assertiveness, is a typical “Renaissance man,” whereas Shakespeare, the English “Christian humanist,” is not (197-98, 206). Although I have profited from Hart's article, I feel that he exaggerates the extent to which the two plays are antithetical, and his conception of the Renaissance and its relation to “Christian humanism” must be substantially modified: as I argue in further detail in *Renaissance Magic*, the assertion of human power that was embodied in the occult tradition was in some respects the logical extension of Christian humanism, not its opposite. Young offers additional evidence that Shakespeare was responding consciously to Marlowe, but he limits his comparison to specific aspects of dramaturgy and literary theory that are not the central concerns of the present article (“Where”); neither Hart nor Young focuses upon the metadramatic techniques that I emphasize in this study. Very brief contrasts between *Dr. Faustus* and *The Tempest* also occur in Kernan (*Playwright* 52, 134, 157). On recent developments in metadramatic criticism, see Calderwood, Shapiro, Jones-Davies, Blanpied, and Hyde.

<sup>4</sup>Claims for the visionary status of imagination appear in Agrippa bk. 3, ch. 3 and chs. 43-49; Bruno; and Gian Francesco Pico della Mirandola. For evidence of the influence of Neoplatonism and occult philosophy on English Renaissance poets, playwrights, and literary theorists, as well as discussions of the conservative

counter-reaction, see French (126-59); Cope; O'Brien; Heninger; Yates (esp. *Giordano Bruno* 205-56, 275-90); Rossky; Perkins (53-55); James VI and I (4 et passim). Traister emphasizes the influence of medieval romances and Renaissance epics, in which magicians appeared as presenters of illusory "shows." Palmer also explores the connection between magic and poetry, but he does not emphasize the manner in which the occultists' theory of imagination makes the connection logical.

<sup>5</sup>Except as noted, line references to *Dr. Faustus* are to the B-text as reproduced in Greg's edition. Obviously any discussion of Marlowe's intentions must confront the problem of which scenes may have been added by collaborators, a question that can never be definitively resolved. I can only say that my interpretation does not depend on any one scene that has consistently been regarded as non-Marlovian, and I would, furthermore, argue that the B-text is a largely coherent work in which the collaborators comprehended Marlowe's original purposes and sought to further them. Samuel Rowley, whose gift for creating comic subplots that reflect upon the themes of the main action is attested by *The Changeling*, quite possibly worked with Marlowe when *Faustus* was originally composed and subsequently added scenes that, in my judgment, are consonant with his and Marlowe's original conception of the play. For discussions of the evidence concerning authorship, see Greg (97-139); and Bowers (2: 123-59).

<sup>6</sup>Barber (115-16) makes a similar point; Barber's interpretation is primarily psychoanalytical, however, whereas my own interests are in Marlowe's responses to issues in Renaissance intellectual history.

<sup>7</sup>E.g., Holland (A2<sup>r</sup>); James VI and I (6); Macfarlane (140-55, esp. 148).

<sup>8</sup>The most recent and authoritative discussion of the associations among Raleigh, Harriot, and Marlowe, as well as the controversy stimulated by the Parsons pamphlets, appears in Shirley (esp. 67-68, 175-200). See also Kocher (3-68); and the documents collected in Brooke and in Harrison's edition of *Willobie his Avis*.

<sup>9</sup>Additional important discussions of Prospero's art as corrupt or ambiguous include Corfield; Grant (esp. 8-9); Mowat (*Dramaturgy* 30-31, and "Prospero"); Young (*Heart's* 146-91); and West (*Shakespeare* 25-31, 80-95, et passim). Complementary in some respects to my own interpretation of *The Tempest*, although different in others, are those of Traister (125-49); Cope (236-44); Hartwig (esp. 137-62); Kermode; and Traversi. Curry (141-99) contributed much to our understanding of the nature of Prospero's magic, but his book was written long before the important recent research on Renaissance occultism. Relying more heavily on ancient and Hellenistic philosophers than on Ficino, Pico, or Agrippa, for example, Curry asserts that the goal of the magician was to attain the impassive status of the gods (cf. Traister 140-43); more characteristic of Renaissance occultists—and of *The Tempest*—is the conviction that the magus imitates God by caring providentially for the lower world.

<sup>10</sup>See also 1.11.217. Prospero's concern extends not only to Ferdinand, whom he wishes to marry Miranda, but to every soul on the ship. Prospero renounces his magic only after he has accomplished his purposes and decided to reassume a station in society in which the practice of magic will be unnecessary and inappropriate. On Prospero's decision to abjure magic, see esp. Traister 141-43; Cope 239; and Kernan 143-45.

<sup>11</sup>E.g., Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (ed. Garin 148-54, trans. Wallis 26-29); Daneau (Fi-Gii<sup>r</sup> et passim); Perkins (157-59); and James VI and I (4 et passim).

<sup>12</sup>In the occult tradition, the metaphor of marriage refers both to the magician's ability to perfect nature by bringing earthly creatures into conformity with their

governing Ideas and to the union of higher and lower faculties within the individual personality. Cf. Giovanni Pico: "And as the farmer marries elm to vine, so the magician marries earth to heaven, that is, lower things to the qualities and virtues of higher things" (ed. Garin 152, trans. Wallis 28). Pico also refers to the human soul as the intermediary between the spiritual and material worlds, the "nuptial bond" that unites "the standstill of eternity and the flow of time" (ed. Garin 102, trans. Wallis 3).

<sup>13</sup>Among the most important and closely reasoned arguments in favor of the relativism and/or ambivalence of *The Tempest* are those of Mowat and Young. Carnicelli has argued that Shakespeare's art "stands closer to Pirandello and to Beckett and Ionesco and the Theatre of the Absurd than to the techniques we have come to expect of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama" (433).

<sup>14</sup>On the geography of the region, see, for example, Ortelius (106<sup>v</sup>-107<sup>r</sup>). I am also indebted to Carnicelli's thorough research (esp. 410-29), on historical and geographical works by Africanus, Hakluyt, and Eden and Willes. Carnicelli argues, however, that because there were various traditions concerning Dido's moral character and, to a lesser extent, the question of whether Tunis and Carthage were identical or merely contiguous, the scene suggests a form of relativism rather than an affirmation of Gonzalo's optimism. I find it difficult, however, to see how this conclusion follows from Carnicelli's research on Carthage and Tunis, especially in view of his own observation that among the texts available to the Elizabethans there was "an almost eerie unanimous willingness—almost an eagerness—to accept Carthage as a vivid example of the endless process of historical decay and renewal . . ." (432).

<sup>15</sup>Among the most interesting recent treatments of the manner in which Marlowe reveals that his own perspective is broader than that of his protagonists are those of Danson, Goldman, and Garber. For examples of the tendency to identify Marlowe with his protagonists—and arrive at a negative assessment of both—see Sanders; and Redner (186-95).

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