

2017

## **Faustus Revisited: A Cultural, Historical, and Artistic Study**

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Faustus Revisited: A Cultural, Historical, and Artistic Study

By

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Bachelor of Arts,  
University of South Carolina, 2015

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

Theatre

College of Arts And Sciences

University of South Carolina

2017

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## Abstract

This study examines plays by Christopher Marlowe, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and David Mamet about Faustian figures. All three authors use the idea of a “deal with the devil” as an inspiration to examine human nature and hubris, but did so in distinct ways shaped by their personal styles, historical eras, and personal philosophies. By examining the common ground, and the areas of deviation, in these three plays separated by hundreds of years, this study will isolate and identify the key aspects of a Faustian Pact. Whereas Marlowe views Faustus as a rebel, whose fall from salvation comes due to his ego and pride, Goethe views these same qualities as indicative of true worthiness, and rewards Faust with salvation at the play’s end. Mamet, however, is less concerned with Faustus willingly giving up his soul and prefers to examine how Faustus’ pride blinded him to his situation, rather than leading him to any misadventures. Finally, this study will conclude with notes on the composition of a new Faustian play and use the research and information gleaned from the three preceding Faustus plays to justify its existence, its continuation of established tropes, and its subversion of others.

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## Chapter One:

### Introduction

The myth of Faustus, and the notion of a Faustian pact, a ‘deal with the devil,’ is a narrative archetype and an enduring metaphor for people making deals that benefit them in the short term and punish them mercilessly in the long run. The ‘deal with a devil’ cliché comes from the Bible itself only by its absence—the Good Book advises against any fraternization with Satan. Yet the notion of striking a bargain with a great evil, whatever the consequences, feels universal. It is a sensation of wondering how much we are willing to give up for the things we want—a testing of the market of one’s soul (or our integrity or pride, in more secular terms) will bear. Deals with the Devil are the ultimate ‘What Would You Do?’ narrative, because they explicitly engage in the manner of exchange between personal wellbeing and outward advancement.

Faustus, then, is the most extreme example of these ill-fated bargains, as, in most versions of his story, the scholar goes from gaining everything to accomplishing nothing, and losing everything including, most importantly to the religious side of the story, his immortal soul. What motivates an individual

to make such a deal? What type of psychology leads one to exchange eternal pain for immediate validation? Is it a product of any human intellect, or is Faustus, in all his forms, no more than an allegory for that chestnut of Scripture, “The wages of sin is death?”

The very existence of the phrase “a deal with the devil” seems to denote the Devil, in any metaphorical or literal sense, is something that one can negotiate with. To make a pact, a verbal discussion of said contract must be possible. That a Devil would be capable of, or interested in, bargaining with mortals seems contradictory to their purely sinister natures as depicted by scripture, and perhaps that’s the exact point: there is no actual negotiation when the price is so hefty as an eternity of pain. But for the nature of a Faustian Pact to even have an image of a fairly-negotiated deal, humanity and the infernal have to come to some sort of level of equal footing. When does this happen? The very notion of our mortal souls having something worthy of negotiation with the Devil and his kind is a fairly flattering notion, and one that continues to be a prominent theme and narrative device in modern fiction.

The economic root of the Faustian bargain, an exchange of one thing for another thing, is a familiar concept. The concept of ‘Equivalent Exchange’ is also often grafted onto capitalistic notions of market prices being determined by how much people are *willing* to pay—thus determining a commodity’s worth.

Whether this same Equivalent Exchange applies to immaterial capital like knowledge, power, or a soul, is one of the key questions of the Faustus myth.

The purpose of this study is to trace the origins of Faust as a character archetype. I will examine historical sources for the German legend, trace these factors through the lens of Elizabethan England and Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus*, and proceed from there to Goethe's canonized *Faust*, and then through the modern day as seen in David Mamet's 2004 re-envisioning of the work, *Faustus*. Each of these case studies will examine the textual depiction of the Faustian figure, his psychology for striking the deal, its specifics and fallout, and how each play's action relates to the cultural, historical, and political factors of its time.

The final objective of this study is to distill the higher relations among these disparate images of Faust the Figure. It is my intention to come to a suitable profile for the ideal conditions to drive one to strike a deal with the devil, and a set of recurring story beats inherent to the form of a Faustian story in a way that can be summarized in an overall "Faustian Story Structure." While one might suggest the Faust structure can be summarized as:

1. Faust sells his soul
2. Faust gets knowledge, but makes nothing of it
3. Faust goes to Hell

The above reduction omits the crux of the character, the insight into Faust's psychology and any whiff of theological content. From this Three-Point guide, one can extrapolate outward into the plot of any Faustian piece and examine the links between these three tent pole moments. By exploring the intricacies, tropes, and similarities and disparities between these visions of Faustus, I hope to arrive at a comprehensive schematic of the Faustus archetype and, having done so, I intend to repurpose the character into the modern context, of an American Faustus in 2017, with its particularly fraught political and social climate. This new play will be the final product of this thesis, and its construction and arrangement in conjunction with the preceding research will serve as the final case study that this paper will analyze in conjunction with the three preceding plays.



## Chapter Two:

### The Origins of Faust

The source legend of Faust comes from German folklore, and establishes the general structure that Marlowe, Goethe, and others have followed in their subsequent versions: Faust, a scholar disillusioned and depressed at the limit of knowledge he can attain on earth, calls upon Satan to help him find fulfillment and greater knowledge. A demon from hell called Mephistopheles comes and strikes a bargain with Faust: Mephistopheles will serve Faust and use his considerable magic talents at Faust's command for the rest of Faust's life (though many versions have the additional stipulation that Faust will only live for 24 years after the deal is struck—a year for every hour in the day), at the end of which, Faust will die and Mephistopheles will take his soul to hell. Faust strikes the bargain and gains Mephistopheles' insight into the nature of the universe and his considerable supernatural powers.

From here, Faust's story splinters into various misadventures, many of which are consistent across different versions of the legend: he harasses the Pope,

impresses the Duke of Vanholt by charming antlers onto a sleeping soldier, conjures up Alexander the Great and his paramour for the Emperor, and also conjures Helen of Troy and, in some versions of the story, keeps her for his own and fathers a child with her (both Helen and child disappear upon Faust's death). These misadventures occur in some manner or other in most theatrical renditions of Faust, with one overarching consistency for this second act of the legend: Faust wastes his time on earth. In all iterations of the Faust myth, the time spent between striking the deal and Faust's ultimate death produces nothing of any worth or goodness (though Goethe's invention of the Gretchen figure adds a great blot to Faustus' post-pact deeds). In these middle episodes we also find early concepts of the character of Wagner, Faust's servant, and the low-status clowns and the horse trader that Marlowe incorporates to great effect in his version. Faust's years of squandering his unholy gifts culminate in Faust, on the eve of his death, being visited by an old man who wishes him to repent, even at the eve of his damnation. Faust invariably refuses, and, when the hour comes, he is taken down to Hell. Whereas subsequent writers repurpose and re-contextualize many of the specific story elements of this basic structure, they all follow through the core of the story as laid out by the original German folk legend. And they have no reason to deviate from this core structure, as it paints a

perfect tragic arc: Faustus wants more, Faustus gets exactly what he wanted for a terrible price, Faustus pays said terrible price.

Throughout all versions of the Faustus myth, one key detail that sometimes gets missed, but is remembered and preserved in the original story and the three cases we'll be covering in this study, is this: Faustus is not tricked. The scholar and Mephistopheles do very little haggling, and Mephistopheles, in accordance to ancient notions of the demons, literally cannot lie to his master. Though Satan in Marlowe's *Faustus* does promise Faustus '*delights*' in a key moment of worry, one could make the case that the '*delights*' the devil speaks of are for himself, and not for Faustus. The pure, bald honesty of Faustus and Mephistopheles making arrangements for the exchange of Faustus' immortal soul is key to understanding the moral lesson as presented in these tales: Human ambition, not supernatural devilish trickery, is what sends Faustus to hell.

Consistently, in the Legend, in Marlowe, and in Goethe, Faustus walks right into his demonic benefactor's arms with no outward prodding, and only his own ambition and thirst for knowledge pushing him on. Mamet's atypical structure preserves this key detail of Faust being the initiator, but in a less overt delivery, as we will discuss.

So we now know where Marlowe's Doctor Faustus came from, but from what sources did the first Deal with the Devil come? Many details of the folk

legend Faust seem to come from several sources, both historical and apocryphal. One of the most prominent sources seems to be the Biblical figure Simon Magus, a magician who dazzled people of Samaria but, upon seeing the Disciples of Jesus lay hands and bestow the holy spirit to their converts, tries to buy his way into being a Disciple:

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God.  
Acts 8: 18 -21

Like Faust/Faustus, Simon tries to barter his way into greater power and prestige, and like our German scholar, Simon is met with resistance. Both seek to become greater in power than God allows man to be, and both suffer for their desire (in one apocryphal story, Simon attempts to show his power by levitating and falls to his death, breaking his legs apart like splinters, when Peter prays to God to stop Simon's flight).

Another potential influence for the character of Faust is Theophilus of Adana, a Sixth Century Cleric in the Eastern Roman Empire (Cilicia, modern day Turkey) who, it was said, made a deal with Satan to obtain his Clerical position. According to his legend, Theophilus was an archdeacon who, when unanimously elected to become a bishop, turned the promotion down out of

humility. However, when his replacement removed Theophilus from his position as Archdeacon, Theophilus sought the devil out to give him back what he'd lost. Theophilus struck the deal with Satan for his soul in exchange for regaining the office of Bishop, and the devil delivered.

However, as Theophilus grew older, he began to regret his decision and pray for forgiveness. After Theophilus fasted and prayed for an extended period (which fluctuates from version to version), the Virgin Mary appeared to him and scolded him for his actions. Theophilus continued to fast in repentance and the spirit of Mary promised to take his case to God. Three days later, the Devil's contract appeared on Theophilus' chest, as apparently the Devil was reluctant to let Theophilus out of their deal. Theophilus hurried with the contract to another bishop and confessed his sins, wherein the other bishop absolved him and burned the document and Theophilus became so ecstatic at his liberation from Satan that he falls over dead at that very moment.

The specifics of the story vary: sometimes it's simple jealousy that motivates Theophilus, sometimes he is assisted by a magician in summoning Satan, and sometimes Mary does not appear to him at all, but the contract still does after Theophilus prays. What does not change is Theophilus' soul-saving change of heart, an event which *does not* happen in the Faustian legend, as it is thwarted by Faust's inability to let himself ask for forgiveness. Theophilus then

is, in many ways, a more religiously aligned vision of Faustus, or, conversely, Faustus a more faith-ambiguous Theophilus. The Faustus figure's universal profession as a scholar, a man of earthly learning, contrasts with the Theophilus figure's profession as a man of the cloth, a man of God. Both are counter to the Simon Magus figure's vocation as a false conjuror. The Theophilus figure is allowed salvation from God because he and he alone can come to ask for forgiveness sincerely, or so the legends seem to go. The Simon Magus figure exists as a direct adversary to Jesus and his apostles—his death is always depicted as occurring during an act of hubris, a trick meant to sway people away from God. Faustus, then exists between these two extremes: Neither a true adversary of God, nor a man able to admit his mistakes before it's too late, Faustus borrows the brazen antagonism of Simon and the slow-creeping self-doubt of Theophilus in his formation as a man caught between ambition and its cost.

Another strong historical influence on the literary figure of John Faustus is the literal John Faustus, or his German name: Johann Georg Faust. Records differ on the specifics, but Johann is believed to have been born between 1466 and 1480, and died in approximately 1541. An alchemist, magician, and astrologer by trade, Johann Georg Faust seems to have lived quite a life of showmanship and glory if the historical anecdotes about him are to be believed. He was born in Knittlingen,

Roda, or Helmstadt, near Heidelberg, depending on the source. Ingolstadt's City Archives have letters referencing a young Faustus as hailing from Roda and also from Helmstadt. From these letters we also learn that this Faustus achieved a Bachelor's degree in 1484 and a Master's in 1487 (which would, one assumes, lend credence to him being born in 1466, lest he achieve collegiate education at age 7).

Records exist of this Faustus touring Germany in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, working as a magician and even telling the horoscope of the town and Bishop of Bamberg in 1520. During this time period, there also exist many accounts of Faustus bragging about the devil having blessed him with his gifts, and the Church decrying his activities as blasphemous.

Faust is believed to have died in an explosion (likely from a failed alchemy experiment) in 1540 or 1541. The gruesomeness of the explosion led many to spread the notion that Faustus had been torn limb from limb by the Devil for giving away his soul, a gristly final note that Marlowe borrows for the ending of the B-Text version of his play, and a final twist of the karmic knife that often comes in many adaptations of the Faustus story. These and other apocryphal exploits of Johann Georg Faust come from a chapbook called *Faustbuch*, compiled by an anonymous German author, which Marlowe consulted while composing his play.

The exact nature and life of this real flesh and blood doctor named Faustus is difficult to determine. Some even believe the exploits were done by two separate men, later combined by history: Johann Faustus and Georg Faustus. Nonetheless, the physical, historical existence of a man bearing the name that would come to stretch across the centuries as one whose ambition and hubris eclipse his immortal soul speaks to the persistence of the scholar dealing with a devil as a meaningful, relatable, and enthralling narrative.

We might wonder why this particular man became the subject of Marlowe's, Goethe's, and countless other plays, as opposed to, say, *Doctor Theophilus* or *Magus I and II*. But Faustus, real or fictionalized, represents a very specific set of conditions that determine its longevity: The Doctor's educated background, proclivity for parlor tricks (astrology, magic, short scams that could be called 'witchcraft' in the 16<sup>th</sup> century), and position between total blasphemy and repentance, all combine to provide a more dynamic character, a more vivid vision of he who deals with the devil than the devout Theophilus or the brazen Simon Magus. The success of the old Faust legends hinge on this split, this unending pull of whether or not Faustus, for all his posturing, chasing of ultimate knowledge, and susceptibility to his own ego, can be saved. The Faustus legend is one based on the potential for salvation. It is this potential, this notion of how far exactly a soul can stray before it is well and fully "lost," and what can



be worth such a wager/transaction be it power, pride, or knowledge. Pondering this question spurred Marlowe, Goethe, Mamet, and others to tell and re-tell the story of the dissatisfied German doctor and his quest for higher standing.

### Chapter Three:

#### Thinking on Sin: The Psychological Purgatory of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is the major theatrical manifestation of the Faust legend and the introspective analysis of Faustus' reasoning for making his deal with the devil. The play was ludicrously popular for the playwright when it first premiered in 1592, catapulting an already popular Marlowe to stardom so bright that Marlowe in his day was as popular as Shakespeare currently is today. Despite its rampant popularity, *Doctor Faustus* was controversial among critics and members of the Church and the Elizabethan state—some found it satanic, some found it too Catholic. Marlowe's focus on Faustus' psychology, and the unwavering clarity of the damnation Faustus faces, exacerbated by his own passivity in stopping it, create a striking narrative that seems to differ in its message from audience to audience, but consistently led members of its audience to feel persecuted, shamed, or targeted in some way, often in contradictory interpretations.

The culture of Elizabethan England, in which *Doctor Faustus* was first published, held specific reservations and fear for matters of the supernatural,

particularly the devil. Queen Elizabeth had already struck down the performance of Passion Plays because she found the performance of Biblical events by human actors to set a dangerous precedent on the artificiality of power—and the divisive nature of such performances. Marlowe's *Faustus* deliberately strikes upon these reservations in his examination of man's response to infernal assistance. Taking into consideration that both versions of the play weren't published until the reign of King James, a ruler notably paranoid about the paranormal, one can appreciate the lasting supernatural reverberations Marlowe struck and the way his shadow stretches across theatre and literature for five hundred years.

Before proceeding any further into the analysis of *Doctor Faustus*, let us first address the elephant in the room of *Doctor Faustus* scholarship: the two texts. This analysis will examine both texts under one umbrella, differentiating only when regarding scenes not extant in both versions. Such textual specificities will be addressed in citations (for example, A.II.22-30). At first glance, the main differences of the two texts is the length: The B-text is padded with some additional comic scenes, and an elongated episode regarding the knight Faustus cursed with horns, who tries to get revenge on the doctor. The instance with Faustus boxing the Pope's ear also gets more development, as we see the Pope as a wicked character deserving of his torture rather than the hapless fool that His

Holiness is in the A-text. The B-text also, more interestingly for our purposes, makes the pain and fate of Faustus more physical, whereas the A-Text's torment is largely psychological, with the agony being in the pull between heaven and hell inside the doctor's soul. The B-text makes the subtext text by having Mephistopheles and Lucifer literally threaten Faustus with physical agony—a threat made good in the B-text's ending, which is analyzed below.

Faustus' road to damnation begins in the simplest way possible in Marlowe's *Faustuses*: with our hero sitting, bored, reading in his study. There is nothing else to this set-up; Faustus is literally just sitting around, glancing through books on philosophy, science, rhetoric, and ethics, and deciding they have nothing for him. Faustus' brazen declaration that these worldly pursuits aren't for him economically illustrates to the audience that the reasons for his displeasure with his current state come entirely from within—his earthly knowledge leaves no room for any external force to lead him to seek the devil—his knowledge is purely a product of his idle mind. He even balks when reading scripture pertaining to his situation: "The wage of sin is death! That's hard." (A.I.1.40) When he seeks out the magicians Valdes and Cornelius, they lead him to his goal of summoning a demon, and the two characters who delivered him his power never appear again in either the A- or B-text, their sole purpose to Faustus fulfilled. Faustus' exploitation regarding his 'friends,' using them as a

gateway into the magical realm and then never seeing them again, reveals how he discards anyone not of use to him—hardly a person we'd expect to show restraint or humility when faced with a pact with demons.

Faustus' motivation to court the forces of the devil may seem difficult to believe for the religious-minded audiences of Marlowe's time, but the way Marlowe depicts their understanding of Christian doctrine in the play covers a lot of ground appealing to the subversives and the moralists at once. Claude Summers, writing on the politics in many of Marlowe's plays, notes the way *Doctor Faustus* plays by the Christian rules even while subverting the archetype of the Christian hero:

The comparison which the play forces between the freedom and generosity of Faustus' fantasy and the limits and legalism of the Christian universe does not redound to the favor of the Christian system. We do not doubt the power of that system to limit the aspirations of men, but we are disappointed that it does.

(Summers, 131)

In other words, the Christian system in *Doctor Faustus* shows the tremendous freedom of congress with the devil, but also the far greater cost. The system allows the passive wish fulfillment of turning one's back against God while still providing a moralizing ending wherein the bad man goes to Hell. The play, on the surface, is downright prescriptive in its plea to honest and humble living. But the way Faustus pursues his goal, and pursues his distractions and pleasures and fancies, comes across in such a fashion that we cannot help but root for him even

with his sin-stained soul. Whatever his reasoning for selling his soul, Faustus, in Marlowe's hands, remains appealing as a character, and remains someone we want to see win, because he remains a being of profound principle, albeit principle carried beyond the realm of reason.

Faustus' reasoning behind courting black magic, and what he stands to gain through doing so, indicate the true flawed nature of his character in Marlowe's hands. His head fills with visions of servants at his disposal, finest silks, gold, pearls, boundless knowledge, power, and hedonism. In short, Faustus' mind goes immediately from enlightenment to bacchanal wish fulfillment the moment he has the smallest toehold in black magic. His idealistic aspirations and his all too human yearning for *more* give way to another all too human impulse, the desire for pure sensory pleasures. It's not a twist that no one could see coming, though. Faustus' famous opening soliloquy, in which he decries every form of earthly learning and culminates in dismissing theology, functions both as a lamentation and a confessional—a moment for the audience to see his perspective of feeling stifled by mortal limitations *and at the same time* deduce Faustus' nature as one who only ever pursues what's best for him. For if Faustus is a doctor of such acumen, why doesn't he devote himself to saving lives, or to the research of medicine? Because that way has no promise of vain gratification.

But Faustus's flight of fancy, his imagination carrying him from a Promethean to a Dionysian figure, does not invalidate the meager redemptive qualities of his initial desire; Faustus functions on another simultaneous axis: both as someone whose goals the audience can appreciate and simultaneously wish he might see the error of his ways. For Elizabethan England, Faustus' belief that he himself could rise above the means afforded to him by God and Country (seen as one-and-the-same in the Elizabethan era) was both admirable and condemnable—thus the scholarly debate about whether or not *Doctor Faustus* is anti-Christian or Morality Play; Marlowe's Faustus is, at once, both subversive and cautionary in his regard to Christianity and the Self.

The specific circumstances of Faustus summoning Mephistopheles don't always carry over into other versions of the Faustus myth, but the specificity that Mephistopheles gives Faustus is crucial: "That was the cause, but yet *Per Accident* / For when we hear one rack the name of God, / Abjure the Scripture and his Savior Christ, / We fly in hope to get his glorious soul" (A.I.3. 46 – 49) Faustus talks a big game and considers himself a natural at black magic for having summoned a demon so expertly, but Mephistopheles' setting the record straight shows us not only how separated Faustus' ego is from his actual ability. It also shows that Faustus' *intention*, more than any incantation, is what brought Mephistopheles to his doorstep. Faustus can still be proud of his summoning; his

will to exceed God's limitations were so great, they perked the ears of a demon and brought it right to him. The greatness of Faustus' ambition, rather than his aptitude, is a theme Marlowe pushes repeatedly in the play. Faustus may be a gifted doctor, scholar, or magician, but all of these are pale in comparison to how greatly Faustus *wants to be* these things.

Marlowe continues to stoke Faustus' pride and ambition as the root for all his coming toils when Faustus gleefully accepts Mephistopheles' terms and declares that Hell can't be all that bad compared to the living world he already inhabits. Faustus, having in his mind courted a demon, decides damnation doesn't intimidate him, so impenetrable is he that he'll surely rest after life with all the greatest minds, Hell or no hell:

So Faustus hath already done and holds this principle:  
There is no chief and only Beelzebub  
To whom Faustus doth dedicate himself.  
This word 'damnation' terrifies not him,  
For he confounds hell in Elysium.  
His ghost be with the old philosophers.

(A.I.3. 55 -60)

These are the words of a man not particularly interested in reason, or in reading fine print. In a modern story depicting a deal with the devil, the Mephistopheles figure might capitalize on Faustus' deluded victorious air and work him into a greater frenzy. This Mephistopheles, however, does no such thing. Marlowe's Mephistopheles, on being asked about what Hell is like, responds in honest



terms. He is a bit circumspect about the physical specifics of Hell (a detail we'll analyze further on about the mental/physical permutations of Faustus' agony), but Mephistopheles does not deny the simple truth that Hell is bad. He even gets so emotionally wrought (quite a thing for an immortal demon who does his best to be aloof for most of the play) that he asks Faustus to drop the subject, so painful are the memories of the Heaven he lost and the Hell he has now:

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Thinks thou that I, who saw the face of Heaven  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?  
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul!

(A.I.3.76-82)

Mephistopheles' admission that Hell exists wherever Heaven is not, in other words, that for a damned being like Mephistopheles and soon-to-be-Faustus, Hell exists all the time, and everywhere, is significant if only because it is not particularly good business sense to tell someone that working with you will result in unending misery at all your partnership will deprive them. But, Faustus is so entranced by all that Mephistopheles does offer that he stays interested even after that. Mephistopheles' blunt honesty, which continues whenever Faustus asks him of or doubts the existence of Hell, speaks to the confidence Mephistopheles must have in offering Faustus their deal: Faustus' precious soul must never for a moment seem out of Mephistopheles' grasp.

Mephistopheles' confidence, then, only makes his anguished outbursts when asked to speak of Heaven all the more significant. Repeatedly, Faustus asks about Heaven itself and is rebuked. Mephistopheles' inability to speak of anything Holy (Faustus also cannot get a wife from Mephistopheles as marriage is a holy sacrament) is a source of frustration for both Faustus and Mephistopheles. The sudden, heretofore unmentioned limit to the demon's influence comes as a stronger surprise when one considers Mephistopheles' other major comments on the nature of hell: "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd / In one self place; for where we are is hell, / And where hell is there must we ever be: / ...All places shall be hell that is not heaven." (A.II.1.117-119) If Hell indeed *has no limits*, then why can't Mephistopheles speak of Heaven?

The contradiction of "Hell is everywhere/ Hell is everywhere that *is not Heaven*" has wider ramifications than just an asterisk on Faustus and Mephistopheles' deal. Mephistopheles uses the collective "we" when he says "where *we* are is hell," and one could argue he speaks only of himself and Faustus in the present moment, since Faustus has summoned a demon after all, and one could argue doing so automatically invalidates any hope Faustus might have of going to heaven. However, one might also make the case, when view the lines in the context of the play as a whole, the "we" Mephistopheles uses is in

fact a reference to all mortal subjects currently alive. Heaven as an abstract place, beyond any reach by mortal minds, seems to be the driving message behind Mephistopheles, and later Lucifer himself. When Mephistopheles claims he can speak on any subject, by this logic he really does mean it. Hell and Earth are much more closely aligned in Marlowe's world than Heaven is to either— in fact, Heaven may as well be a fantasy world in its own right. By this logic, Faustus asking Mephistopheles about Heaven is indeed beyond the demon's claim; Faustus might as well have asked Mephistopheles about Narnia. Having lost his seat in Heaven, Mephistopheles no longer has any frame of reference or knowledge about the divine place, only that it was much better than Earth or Hell—and in unifying these two planes by virtue of their shared not-being-heaven, Mephistopheles (and by extension Marlowe) argues that the affairs of God and man are, in the eyes of God, in no way intertwined. Only human arrogance, the human idea that they are deserving of proximity to heaven, makes them think so. In other words, Mephistopheles' stopped tongue on the subject of the Heavenly Spheres can, in the right light, seem like a plea for separation of Heaven and Earth.

Marlowe's claim then must have been quite incendiary in Elizabethan/Jacobean England, where the Divine legitimacy of the monarchy essentially governed all governmental infrastructures. "The orthodox Tudor

concept of the state was essentially theocratic: society was believed to be an expression of Divine Will. Not surprisingly, then, political principles were almost universally couched in theological terms.” (Summers, iii) The Church was the State, for the Monarch came from God’s choice—to suggest the affairs of Heaven and the affairs of Earth were separated beyond bridging implied that the Monarchy was an arbitrary office determined by no more than money and established power—God had nothing to do with it. In separating the Monarchy from the Church, then, Faustus, *Faustus*, and Marlowe do damage to both institutions—suggesting neither has as much divine and state heft as they would appear.

Faustus’ episode where he pranks the Pope, though divergent in the two texts, supports the above theory: The scene is treated as a fleeting act of comedy in the A-Text, but in the B-Text, a much longer scene, the Pope is seen torturing a Germany-appointed Cardinal, and Faustus and Mephistopheles intervene and save the political prisoner. In neither scene is the Pope’s Holiness, or the office as one of God, really the issue. In the A-Text, Faustus jovially punching the Pope in the ear does little more than scandalize those who see the act—the Pope is not mortally wounded, and the audience merely sees Faustus acting like a child. In the B-Text, Faustus remains consistent in seeming to all-too-quickly get carried away with his new freedom—but in doing so he simultaneously furthers the

German state, and possibly Protestantism—more so than any campaign between Heaven and Hell. The deal Faustus struck seems to have profited Hell nothing but a single soul—Mephistopheles does not push Faustus to further attack the Pope, he merely assists. Marlowe, even in depicting the assault of the highest-ranked religious figure in the world, keeps his focus solely on the mortal world and the immortal peril toward Faustus continues to grow.

Casting an eye on the political and religious factors hidden more subversively in *Doctor Faustus*, one comes across a particular peculiar word in Faustus' Latinate incantation that first summons Mephistopheles: 'demogorgon.' The etymology of the word breaks it into two greek fragments: the first of which, 'demo-', could be derived to 'demon,' or, more intriguingly, 'demos,' meaning people, as in *democracy*. 'Gorgon' itself can mean 'fast' or 'quick' (*gorga*), but more likely here means a monster or some dreadful (*gorgos* in greek), often female, creature (Gorgons). Should this etymology come together, what might Marlowe intend by having Faustus entreat a *monster of the people*, a *demon of the populace*? Assuming then that Marlowe's conjoining of the demonic and public is intentional, one can extrapolate that pairing into a larger binary: On one side is the demogorgon, the monstrous and the democratic. On the other, then, is the angelic, and the ruling class, in other words, the monarchy. Such a pat bisection would suggest the divine right of kings, but to the audience of Elizabethan

England, likening the commoner to the devil's ranks, and then showing the power and enlightenment offered by Mephistopheles, however damning it ultimately ends up, might also suggest the power one can attain by turning away from the monarchy. However, this interpretation flounders under further scrutiny—the demon maybe of the people, but, as seen in Faustus' case, it only ever helps a *person* at a time—the downfall of the Renaissance Man being his faith in his own all-encompassing nature keeps him from working with others. Mephistopheles the demogorgon may fill Faustus' head with notions of revolution in Heaven and Earth, but in the end his sights are only ever set on Faustus, and Faustus only ever on himself. The demonic power to the people never makes it to the people—it catches on person and drags him down.

The endings of the two texts are the final pieces needed to appraise the real cost of Faustus' fateful pact. Faustus is, of course, dragged down to Hell in both A- and B-Texts, but in the B-Text, an additional scene occurs: the next morning scholars enter Faustus' study to find his torn and bloodied body. This final tableau encapsulates the main difference between the two texts and how they depict the manner by which Mephistopheles and the forces of damnation destroy Faustus: Torments of the psyche (The A-Text) vs. torments of the body (B-Text).

The more flesh-and-bone agony of the B-Text suggests all of Faustus' suffering occurred in the mortal world—he put himself in mortal, physical peril by aligning himself with Mephistopheles, and his mortal, physical body suffers greatly for it. Conversely, the A-Text's more paranoid and brainsick Faustus suffers in the world of his mind, or in a state of unease that has no limit, nor is circumscribed to any geographical location—the metaphysical Hell that Mephistopheles alludes. Whether one prefers the physical or the mental avenue, both versions leave a fairly large question unexplored: Neither torment comes solely from Hell. Even at the true climax of the play, when the mouth of Hell opens and Faustus is literally dragged away, the immortal world of Hell and its unending afterlife of flames is confined to the mortal playing field—be it mental or physical, Faustus story-wide torture before arriving at his death is one of his own mortal making. His suffering comes from the literal, tangible world around him more than it comes from any demon, fire, or instrument of torture. Faustus' big talk and big dreams, in the end, do nothing to elevate him beyond his mortal peers.

The true tragedy of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, then, isn't of a man turning his back on God and going to Hell, but of a man unable to escape his own mortality, unable to turn his back on the lot God had given him at the moment of creation. His body fails him and he suffers for his frailty. His mind cannot allow

him to escape his fears and suspicions and guilt about his ultimate fate. Despite renouncing God, Faustus cannot renounce his Christian awareness of the limits of his Earthly form. The pact Faustus makes is one explicitly meant to get Faustus out from under the yoke of mediocrity thrust on him, to allow him to escape the fruitless rat race of never being a King, and never being God. The banality of commoner life in Elizabethan England was, to Faustus (and, by extension, the espionage-minded Marlowe) so crushing in anonymity, that the chance to escape it was worth one's immortal soul. Unfortunately, the powers granted by Mephistopheles, all the power of Hell, and limitless knowledge don't seem to be enough for Faustus to escape the snare of his own mind.



## Chapter Four:

### Who Holds The Devil, Hold Him Well: Aspiration and Romantic Self-Destruction in Goethe's *Faust*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, the mammoth masterwork (which takes 22 hours to perform in entirety in some productions) of the German poet and playwright, takes the familiar Faust myth and expands it into one of the veritable touchstones of all German literature. Goethe's treatment of the Faust character prioritized poetry and emotion over logic and action, to the point that the play seems less predisposed (though not altogether disinterested) to deal with blasphemy and the limits of the mind in favor of analyzing the limits of the soul—what we can and cannot perceive, rather than what we can and cannot achieve, as in the Marlowe. Goethe's Faust has a frequent penchant for spectacle, so much so that he willingly falls for spectacles, artifices, and lies even as he knows very well how artificial they are. *Faust* examines, acutely and broadly, the mechanism of human desire for wonder, and the way such enchantments can help us, hinder us, and blind us to our own manipulation.

*Faust* is also regarded as a play about identity—identity of its titular character, identity for its author, as Goethe spent most of his life composing the

exhaustingly long play, and identity for the German nation, which, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century still lacked any strong sense of national identity in its art and its people. As such, the stakes, in Goethe's mind, for the piece were much higher than a typical script. Whereas Marlowe only sought to elucidate one character's worldview, Goethe intended to declare a cultural figurehead, someone to champion and hold up as German excellence—which may have led to the changed ending Goethe supplies, with Faust finding sudden, untelegraphed salvation just after he collapses, dead.

The key distinction between the psychology of Marlowe's Faustus and Goethe's Faust is that for Goethe's character, the tragedy of life isn't the divine and earthly limits placed on what one can and cannot achieve, but the pervasive feeling of incompleteness that comes from mortal life. In Goethe's version, Faust is much more melancholy than his Elizabethan predecessor, lamenting what Hamlet would call a 'quintessence of dust' in his early lines:

And still you wonder why your heart  
Is anxious and your breast constricted  
Why a pain you can't account for  
Inhibits your vitality completely!  
You are surrounded, not by the living world  
In which God places mankind,  
But amid smoke and mustiness,  
Only by bones of beasts and of the dead

(I.410 – 417)

Goethe's use of the second person in this short diatribe against ennui puts the onus of the incompleteness not on Faust, but also on the reader—a bold declaration and a quick mechanism for conflating Faust's problems with humanity as a whole. Goethe starts internally, noting an 'anxious heart' and 'constricted breast,' moving out to 'total vitality' (the body as a whole). Zooming out even further, as it were, Faust now declares 'you,' meaning himself, the reader, the audience, and everyone, are 'surrounded'—a landscape now takes shape. He contrasts a 'living world in which God places mankind'—suggesting in the most minimalized terms not only life in the world—foliage, nature, the usual Romantic settings—but also the notion of Divine Design, something absent in the second reality Faust asserts: 'smoke and mustiness, / only by bones of beasts and the dead.' Life and nature are absent from this second world, as is God—suggesting the existential unmooring Faust feels at this early moment.

Faust continues to talk himself into what he believes—a rhetorical loop he catches himself in repeatedly over the course of the play—and eventually arrives at the decision to, in classic Faustian form, devote himself to his own imagination in favor of his natural place in the world:

The time has come to prove by deeds that a brave man  
Is not intimidated by celestial grandeur;  
To stand and not to quake before the pit  
In which imagination damns itself to torment;  
To strive on toward that passageway  
About whose narrow mouth all hell sprouts flame

And, even at the risk of total dissolution,  
To take this step with firm serenity.

(I.712 – 719)

Faust finds himself speaking with bravado after he works himself into the above frenzy, moralizing with a dramatic “The time has come” and fancying himself the “brave man”, not intimidated by the vastness of the universe. He also commits the primary Faustian sin of thinking himself not afraid of Hell or damnation, ‘to stand and not to quake before the pit / in which imagination damns itself to torment’ —the pit here being possibly both Hell and the pit of a meaningless existence, devoid of a God or a devil—a pit of pointlessness, where all one has is one’s imagination to drive oneself insane; a cosmic solitary confinement in a way, or a nihilistic universe system. In either case, Faust intends to abandon any notion of Judeo-Christian subservience. Faust explicitly acknowledges the dangers a moment later, however, seeming to contradict the agnostic notion of a universe as an empty pit, and justifies any and all struggles and pain as worth it in service of the pursuit of true knowledge. Faust also specifies the importance of taking ‘this step with *divine serenity*’ which seems to become more important than the goal of the step itself. Faust has overhyped how important it is for him to have the *resolve* to take the step and turn away from Godly living—with less attention being paid to the practical matters of doing so. Faust blinds himself to the implications of his choice with his own lofty idealism,

another link in the chain of instances wherein the scholar convinces *himself* more than anyone else.

Much has been written about the driving self-deception of Goethe's Faust. The majority of *Faust I's* action centers on Faust convincing himself, or idly letting Mephistopheles convince him with ease, that his actions have the right motivations behind them, fulfill the right emotional need, that his thoughts are in the right place to benefit himself as an individual. Rarely do matters of practicality, legality, and/or ethics come up—because A) to Faust and Mephistopheles these are watchwords of the limiting world of God and Man, and they have no use for them, and B) to look through Faust's actions here through those lenses would not only erode Faust's self-aggrandizing logic, but would also make clear that Faust's chicanery and Mephistopheles' power don't really amount to much—even in the more fanciful *Faust II*, the fantastical and magical creatures and characters exist independently of Faust, and even when he comes to command armies and lead demons, they don't seem to grant him much gravitas.

Kurt Weinberg notes on Faust's penchant for self-deception, "Goethe's Faust, unlike his author, seems forever incapable of differentiating between theory and its objects...Faust is the illusionist who, again and again, falls victim to the illusions he creates..." (Weinberg xiii) Whereas Goethe keeps each

spectacle, Romantic flourish, and theatrical set piece in focus, using them to gild the lily of his voluminous poetry, Faust's unending need to see himself as magnificent overcomes any opportunity for him to properly appreciate his own abilities. Faust's power, enlightenment, and philosophical heft only exist in his mind—he's not distracted and power-drunk like Marlowe's Faustus, willing away his time with parlor tricks and dazzling fawning fans, but rather, he's drunk on his own self-seriousness and sense of ego.

Faust's need to justify his sense of incompleteness as a call to higher power is one of the reasons he seems so receptive to Mephistopheles, and also is symptomatic of what God says of humans when He and Mephistopheles wager over Faust's soul—a major departure from previous Faustian texts, conflating the scholar now not only with one Biblical character, Simon Magus, but now also with another in Job. God's bet with Mephistopheles that Faustus will remain worthy of salvation in the end of his life, no matter what transpires in his living days, suggests a much more benevolent and forgiving deity than in Marlowe. God is willing to forgive—and he's willing to allow a soul into heaven after what might be a lifetime of demonic temptation—all in all, a very positive-sounding deity.

Goethe is clever enough not to present Heaven and Hell in such stark contrast though—God lets slip a few key phrases that, when examined, grant key

insight into what exactly the Almighty thinks of human nature. For example, when Mephistopheles promises that, if allowed access to Faust, he'll bring the man to Hell, the Lord replies: "So long as he is still alive on earth / Nothing shall prohibit your so doing— / Men err as long as they keep striving." (I. 315 -317)

The answer contains two statements: First, that as long as mortals are on earth, nothing can stop demonic influence or any other negative input from lulling human souls down the wrong path. God's agents on earth don't seem very active in the Lord's eyes if nothing can stop the demons' doings. Second, "Men err as long as they keep striving," a statement that could be a summary of every Faustian story, suggests that the fault is not squarely in the demons tempting humans, but more in humanity itself—as long as people keep trying to advance, keep desiring more out of their lives, keep wanting better of themselves, people will end up damned. As with Marlowe, Goethe places ambition and devotion at odds and establishes a unity between damnation and self-sufficiency. The Lord's statement evokes Original Sin, the act of Eve and Adam acquiring knowledge without being allowed to, and their subsequent expulsion from Eden because of their initiative, or, because they kept striving.

Goethe's addition of the divine wager over Faust's soul causes a pivot in the key relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles—in this version of the tale, they court each other in more equal terms. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*,

Faustus' decision to turn his back on God put his scent in the air for Mephistopheles to follow and appear to him. In Goethe's *Faust*, the doctor's turn to the occult comes after, and independently of, Mephistopheles' decision to target Faust for his wager with God. Mephistopheles no longer functions purely to gain Faust's soul—he still wants the soul, of course, but he's also working to prove God Almighty wrong at the same time. In Goethe, Faust and Mephistopheles both have personal agendas they use each other to pursue—a more codependent partnership than Marlowe, in which Mephistopheles' patient obsequiousness is in service of a single final goal and nothing more. The subtly different playing field between Faust and Mephistopheles gives a bit more of a sinister air to Mephistopheles' proceedings—whereas Mephistopheles is still quite honest to Faust throughout the voluminous work, their union is founded on a single false-truth, the Wager with God that Faust never comes to know about as he's courted by Mephistopheles.

Knowledge drives Faust to his pact, drives his ambition to ascend beyond the knowledge of man, and drives him to become the self-possessed, solipsistic man of limitless knowledge and powerless existence he ends up being. The notion that, for all his striving, Faust never realizes his own role as a plaything between Heaven and Hell, contributes to Goethe's thesis of Faust as a victim of his own dreaming—he lets himself become so enamored with his pursuit, that



his destination (possibly Hell) and starting point (as an arbitrary goal point between two opposing forces) become irrelevant from his perspective. Before striking the fateful deal with Mephistopheles, Faust summarizes his feelings on his own knowledge: "What we don't know is what we really need, / and what we known fulfills no need at all." (I.1066-1067) Indeed, what Faust doesn't know *is* what he needs; he might benefit to know his status as a ball in a celestial roulette wheel. What he *does* know indeed fulfills no earthly need—Faust's wealth of knowledge brings only unrest and ennui. Of course, over the course of the play Faust will continue to learn more and more, and continue to be unfulfilled, stifled, and troubled up until the play's very climax. In that sense, then, Goethe might be suggesting very strongly that the Known and the Unknown are fixed points: once the Unknown becomes Known, it becomes useless, "fulfilling no need at all." Such a Zero-Sum view of the pursuit of knowledge reduces Faust's voracious ambition to something of a Sisyphean task—for what is Faust then, to paraphrase the Marlowe, but a man condemned to learn, and learn, and learn, and always feel like he does not know enough, since only the *unknown* has any value?

Faust continues puzzling over the value of the known vs. the unknown, when Mephistopheles visits him and offers his service in life in exchange for control over Faust in the 'beyond.' Faust responds:

With the Beyond I cannot be much bothered;  
Once you annihilate this world,  
The other can have its turn at existing.  
This earth's the source of all my joys,  
And this sun shines upon my sorrows;  
If ever I can be divorced from them,  
It cannot matter what then happens

(I.1660 – 1666)

Faust's response, in which he shrugs off the Beyond itself, seems counter to his earlier distinction about 'what we don't know' and 'what we know,' because surely Faust does not know what Hell will involve—so one would think he would prioritize that over Mephistopheles' help on Earth, the *known* realm, which, by Faust's above logic, should interest him less than the state of his immortal soul. However, from Faust's perspective, this is not the scenario he is seeing. To Faust, the afterlife *is the known scenario*—either endless boring Heaven, or a Hell that, to Faust in the depths of his malaise, can't be much worse than his current state. Both scenarios are *known*, if not fully appreciated or thought through. What isn't known, then, is the *potential* for what Faust can gain through Mephistopheles. In the above lines, Faust explicitly prioritizes the mortal world over the immortal ("Once you annihilate this world..."), because Earth has more variables. It is limited, yes, and has limits to what can and can't be done, but to Faust, Mephistopheles represents a way to bypass those limits—to get more from the mortal world while still living in it. Faust, viewed in this light, and leaving aside Mephistopheles' origins, represents a very Romantic protagonist—a man

against all of creation, determined to glean higher meaning out of life on his own terms, come what may.

The passion and zeal Goethe imbues Faust with are keys to understanding his dogged pursuit of higher understanding—and his quickness to strike the deal with Mephistopheles. Scholars have often highlighted this noble, if misguided, character flaw in many Faust incarnations, but whereas Marlowe’s Faustus was motivated by pride as much as self-betterment, Goethe’s Faust more concisely summarizes the purely exploratory nature of human self-improvement.

Faust embodies the human spirit residing solely in itself and claiming unconditional autonomy; the need for universal knowledge as deification of the self; the moral indifference –that ancient principal (in Mephisto’s cosmogony) of a highly modern devil; the limitless availability of the world, of its natural, human and cultural resources—even its history—to human activism; the futile striving for absolute joy, the joy of the absolute....

(Schulte, 3)

Faust’s “moral indifference,” married with his restless need for higher intellectual stimulation, combines to give his arc of exploration, discovery, and continued unrest its clear definition. Goethe drives home the point of Faust’s pre-existing existential anguish yet again, in a crucial moment right as Faust strikes the fateful bargain with Mephistopheles.

If on a bed of sloth I ever lie contented,  
May I be done for then and there!  
If ever you, with lies and flattery,  
Can lull me into self-complacency  
Or dupe me with a life of pleasure,

May that day be the last for me!  
This is my wager!

(I.1692 – 1698)

First, this is not just a deal Goethe's Faust strikes, but a wager, another one made with Mephistopheles—if Faust ever feels true happiness, even with all the knowledge and power soon to be at his disposal, Faust declares that should be his dying moment. Mephistopheles does not place any stipulation for the end of their contract on Faust in this play—no time limit, no definite day of Faust's end. But Faust, so certain of his own inability to be satisfied, suggests that his life end the very day he finds himself happy—suggesting that he doubts Mephistopheles can give him what he wants—but he still makes the deal.

For other Faustian figures, making the deal represents a goal—greater knowledge, greater power, satisfaction, ascension, etc. But for Goethe's Faust, it really is all about the journey. The destination—enlightenment, or happiness, or fulfillment, is synonymous with death and damnation. For Faust to voluntarily add that asterisk to his contract suggests Faust's dismal opinion about his satisfaction—or suggests that his satisfaction isn't what interests him, so much as its pursuit—a valuing of investigation, exploration, discovery, above all else.

If Goethe's *Faust* represents the endless pull to discover, the Tennyson-esque urge to strive, seek, find, etc., then Goethe's Mephistopheles, the maker of both significant wagers in the play, represents the darker forces that spurs one on

down the path of discovery for discovery's sake, the morbid curiosity and self-destructive need-to-know-ness in the mind of every young Faust. Put another way, Mephistopheles might be the endless experimental zeitgeist of art, one *-ism* one moment, another style the next, ever shifting, ever changing, and always urging the Faustian artist to follow this or that trend. On the notion of Mephistopheles as cultural evolution, Shulte says, "Mephisto is the agent of modernity (to say nothing of postmodern nihilism and virtual reality) driving Faust to dire consequences." (Shulte 9) Mephistopheles, who pushes Faust and prods him to continue his journey, to embracing his gifts—and has a fairly larger amount of information at his disposal in Goethe than in Marlowe—tempts Faust with the promise not only of knowledge and power, but of *being a pioneer*; through Mephistopheles, Faust might establish a new order, tear down some grand intellectual boundary, and lead a new movement of thought. Faust's unchecked ambition finds a trajectory, and a purpose in Mephistopheles. The pact they strike is not only an accumulation of resources for Faust, but also a calling, a purpose for the existential scholar to follow for his days. Mephistopheles exists both as a tempter, and as a savior, to Faust, in that while he pledges to take the man's soul, he likewise gives the man a new, energetic, lease on life—a sense of purpose often considered the practical goal of religion.

Faust's pact then may not invalidate Judeo-Christian doctrine or challenge divine power *as a concept*, though if this is the case then it does propose a rather sacrilegious pivot: Goethe seems depict Mephistopheles as a stand-in for God, in that he fulfills the same function of faith. Faustus will pray to a divine entity (God/Mephistopheles) and in exchange give this entity his immortal soul upon his death. Mephistopheles presents himself to Faust as an alternative choice of immortal benefactor. The choice between God and Mephistopheles is exactly that—a choice—and the fact that because of Mephistopheles (and God, who allows the wager), Faust now has the ability to make a choice, rather than assume himself chained to God, conjures the notion of how Free Will is afforded to humans in the hopes that we make the right choices, but retain the right to Choice. Mephistopheles gives Faust back his ambition, his efficacy, and his ability to choose. Their pact is, in Goethe, everything God should afford a soul—but packaged more specifically to Faust's particular tastes—instant gratification, delusions of grandeur, and the promise of his own excellence.

Goethe's depiction of the wager/deal/wager over Faust's soul establishes patterns of thought, information, and choice both influenced by and directly contradicting said information, which carries into the more wide-focused *Faust II*. The second section of Goethe's play, *Faust II*, embarks on a number of, shall we say, diversions as Faust, no longer harping on the deceased Gretchen, follows

his own fancy and, along with Mephistopheles, gets involved in misadventures that don't carry much causal linkage from any of *II's* five acts. However, these anecdotal episodes do, in some spots, contain valuable parallel insight into other beings making similar deals or sharing similar ideals that lead to Faust's deal. As such, *Faust II* can be read as a sort of casebook of parallel Faust scenarios/permutations of the general catalyst of the aforementioned Faustian pact.

The most interesting diversion Goethe embarks in his winding paths in *Faust II* is an episode where Mephistopheles convinces a German Emperor to convert his economy from Gold to paper money. Goethe depicts the Emperor as trapped and unable to find a way to keep his country economically viable—a monetary representation of the stagnation that drove Faust to seek out dark magic at the start of the play. The parallels between paper money and Faustian power, if not made explicit enough by Mephistopheles' role in both, has been analyzed and examined by many scholars over the years:

Mephisto's paper currency is a transposition of the theatre metaphor onto the abstract stage of economics: the banknote as "signifier" is vicariously identified with the "signified," the precious metal meant to cover it, but that so far is little more than a fiction.

(Weinberg, 156)

As Faust falls for his own illusions, Goethe depicts the German economy as being similarly charmed by its own self-created fiction in the turn from coin to paper

money. Paper money effectively makes something out of nothing—and its power is sustained by the shared belief of the people that it is worth anything at all. The fiction overcomes the reality. Goethe, who served on the privy council in Weimar, had strong opinions about the sustainability of paper money, and having the idea for it come from a literal demon suggests he did not care for it. Hans Christoph Binswanger's book, *Money and Magic; a Critique of the Modern Economy in the Light of Goethe's Faust*, is entirely devoted to unspooling Goethe's coverage on financial reform—and how it mirrors Faust's famous pact:

A close reading of *Faust* leaves us in no doubt that Goethe diagnoses precisely such an alchemical chore in the modern economy. This is what gives today's economy such a huge attractive pull that it is gradually sucking all areas of life into its vortex. It involves *the possibility of a continuous growth in production without a corresponding increase in effort to the expended.*

(Binswanger, 10)

Like the knowledge and power he peddles, Mephistopheles' money system thrives not on what is *is*, but what it *could be*. Faust agrees to sign away an eventual seat in Heaven in favor of what *could be* greater earthly success. To Goethe, coin currency, tangible, secure, possessing its worth instead of only signifying it, is the more sustainable choice—but not the one that can enchant the people. Paper money operates on imagination—the very instrument that led to Faust's discomfort. To bring the metaphor to the end of the play, then, one might interpret Faust's last minute salvation as a sign that, no matter how far an



economy may fall into the spell of paper currency, Goethe believes the old standards will remain.

Faust's death and salvation are significant departures from the previous versions of the tale that came before it. Faust doesn't repent so much as lament his fleeing life, and when he falls over dead and is buried by demons, there is no screaming or fear or great cosmic anguish, as in Marlowe or the Theophilus legend. Instead, this old Faust (a distinction rarely afforded to Faustian figures), gets to wax poetic about human nature and the process of life, before arriving at a place of what many critics have considered Sublime Awe, with his visions of eternity and his single moment of pure happiness, which of course yields him to death, as he wagered:

And so, beset by danger, here childhood's years,  
Maturity, and age will all be vigorous.  
If only I might see that people's teeming life,  
Share their autonomy on unencumbered soil;  
Then, to the moment, I could say:  
Tarry a while, you are so fair –  
The traces of my days on earth  
Will survive into eternity! –  
Envisioning those heights of happiness,  
I now enjoy my highest moment.

*(II.V.11,577 – 11,586)*

Faust's reflection speaks of living in danger in all three stages of life, childhood, adolescence and old age. He addresses it like a universal constant, a scientific principle, but then imagines an alternative, exclaiming, "If only I might see..."

The “teeming life,” Faust sees, of people living in happiness, and equality, and freedom (“autonomy”)—a world that would embrace Faust’s principles of self-discovery over all else, over all sense of duty to state or higher power (suggested by “unencumbered soil”)—is a vision strong enough to make Faust— old, wistful, in control of his demons, in possession of a great castle – beam with hypothetical pride. His imagined future is so enticing to him, that he feels the happiness he says he would feel if it were true—which it isn’t—but his happiness *is*. Yet again, and for one final time, Faust falls for his own trick—he buys into his own construct of a perfect world, and lets himself be absorbed in it. Faust’s death is arguably the most peaceful of any Faustian figure—and not only because of his eventual ascent. Faust’s delusions that led him to enlisting Mephistopheles are also what lead him to the grave—his Pact with the demon granted him greater power, but no greater self-control, and these delusions even spare him from any existential fear over his death—at last, the escape he wanted when he entreated Mephistopheles, achieved with his own mind.

Faust’s status as a consummate symbol of human expansion—at its most celebrated and its most futile—contribute to the metatextual interpretation of Faust as Goethe’s treatise on German identity. Like Faust, Germany’s literary culture in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century lacked advancement and direction. On the World Stage, in 1760 the Industrial Revolution had begun to unseat the established

order of everything from business practices to daily comforts. In the 1790's, the French monarchy crumbled and that nation fell into bloody revolution—leading to Napoleon, whose presence would give Germany discomfort for years down the line, and Germany, barely a unified country so much as a confederation of nation-states, was aware of how fast the world was changing—and their risk of being left behind.

Theatrically, Germany was split in two equally unviable mindsets: one side was trapped in the amber of the neoclassical assumption that only old plays were good ones, repeating the Greek, Roman, and Shakespearian works ad infinitum. On the other hand, popular stock characters like the perverse, scatological Hanswurst character's juvenile exploits were popular among the commoners of Germany, but hated by the learned intelligentsia of German thinkers who would consider themselves arbiters of taste for the nation's fledgling art identity. Between these two irreconcilable poles, what would come to be identified as the Romantic archetype was born: A focus on the individual, against a world that cannot understand him (as it was typically a 'him'), great emphasis on the natural world and its poetic potential, and, most uniquely, a growing fascination with the sublime—A tremendous state of euphoric emotional totality; something so transcendently attention-grabbing and emotionally fulfilling that it dominates one's mind entirely for any amount of

time. Complimenting the Sublime was the Grotesque—a sensation of pure morbid disgust, fear, revulsion, controversy—so intense that one could not look away. Musicians like Beethoven, artists like Caspar David Friedrich, and writers like Friedrich Schiller, and his older contemporary, Goethe, took this concept and pushed it to its limits, exploring their own worldviews through the cypher of Romanticism, gradually developing a sense of German artistic consciousness. “For aspiring German writers in the eighteenth century, there were two major obstacles blocking the production of a great epic. One...was the absence of a single national capital such as the French had in Paris...the other, equally pressing, was the lack of suitable material. All poets faced the same difficulty...German poets had particular difficulty in finding a suitable German hero.” (Bohm, 8) Art, then, for these up-and-coming German creatures, had a sense of divine creation about it—the right character, the right artistic statement, the right piece, could ignite a country and elevate its creator to a level of nigh-sainthood. The country needed an identity, needed figureheads, needed a folklore to mint into cultural capital.

Goethe’s *Faust*, though it wasn’t completed until 1831, a year before Goethe’s death, exemplified the nascent German sense of self-identity. Germany itself was a nation of tremendous learning, yearning for some greater purpose, no matter the source. And surely, like Goethe’s Faust character, no matter the

means, no matter the toil or journey, the German people's tireless pursuit would result in Salvation—and justification. *Faust* and Faust became accepted as the ideal German story, and German individual—a mascot of greater decorum than Hanswurst, but with enough edge, pathos, and upward ambition to make a whole nation feel, in a way, smarter than God (though the Germans would never be so boldly blasphemous, still being governed by the Holy Roman Empire at the time). Goethe was already a literary celebrity since his first novel, the tempestuous and downbeat *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, but *Faust* signaled him to be the German Homer, the cultural masthead the country needed, and Faust, the character, became the German Hamlet, or the German Achilles—a champion of a culture.

The Faustian archetype in Goethe's hands is a depiction at its best and worst—an ambition mirrored in the writer as well as the character. Goethe's Faust yearned to have more efficacy, meaning, and control of his station on earth, as did Goethe in penning such an intimidating, epic closet play. Faust, the dreamer who can't help but believe his dreams to be reality, who forsakes God and man and even earthly love in his quest for *something better*, who signs a deal with a demon and bets the demon that even this will not make him happy, wears his existentialism a bit more clearly than Marlowe's Faustus, but Goethe's Faust's agenda isn't against God, *per se*, so much as it is against himself. He makes the

deal with the devil because he believes he's beyond saving already, and/or believes he deserves more resources to fully actualize himself—and either way he seeks to prove himself right.

## Chapter Five:

### Stumbling in the Engine of the Universe: The Diminished Returns in David Mamet's *Faustus*

David Mamet's *Faustus*, written in 2004, significantly reinvents the Faustian figure in almost every way imaginable: Faustus is a family man, married with a son; he's a scholar of dubious renown, and he is not visited by any 'Mephistopheles' per se—though the figure still exists in the form of a character called 'Magus'. What Mamet attempts to do, in repurposing the context of Faustus from the external to the internal, in repurposing Faustus' Pact with only a Wager (and in doing so, attempting to unify his piece with both Marlowe and Goethe) is give the notion of '*dealing* with the devil' rather than a '*deal* with the devil.' His *Faustus*, in its focus on its protagonists' inability to abandon his pride, which leads him to neglect his loved ones and damning himself, lacks the stakes, the depth of worldbuilding, and the specific worldview of a truly Faustian character.

Mamet's *Faustus* also lacks a proper Pact, and the play suffers for it. In place of the archetypal deal with Mephistopheles, Faustus, whose authorship of

his life's work is questioned by a Satanic figure known only as the Magus. Faustus wagers the life of his wife and son that the book Magus holds is indeed all his own words—not noticing that the Magus has slipped in a short poem written by Faustus' son, invalidating Faustus' claim that the book is all his. Without a Pact to propel the plot, Mamet's *Faustus* is reduced to a simple morality tale about pride—something the previous retellings had, but without the former's grandiosity, universality, or vividness of thought.

To begin analyzing the ways in which Mamet's *Faustus* fails to justify its name, one can begin by looking at the titular character's beginning situation as compared to that of other Fausts/Faustuses. In this iteration, Faustus, the family man with a wife and son, is hard at work on his *magnum opus*, a paper claiming to have discovered the secret to the universe—a bold claim, and certainly the type of claim previous Faustus characters would have made. Older Faustuses find no fulfillment in their work, spurred ever onward and upward (or downward as the plot goes) by a need for more than what the average life can afford them, which drives them to make Pacts with a Demon in exchange for earthly advancement.

Mamet's Faustus character, however, finds tremendous fulfillment in his work—he chafes against his situation when not recognized for his self-proclaimed genius. Pride is a fundamental facet of the Faustian model, but for



Mamet's creation, the pride, and its fallout, are misplaced. This Faustus seeks recognition, not self-realization. He yearns for actualization in the minds of lesser men, not in the world of a limiting deity like his predecessors. When this Faustus says here, "Blasphemy and prayer are one. Both assert the existence of a superior power. The first, however, with conviction," (29) he flirts with the existential declaration against Christian doctrines that characterizes a Faust, but then abandons that avenue of thought. Mamet's Faustus does not possess the fundamental feeling of incompleteness that would spur him on to compact with darker powers—instead, his energy and focus are concentrated on a single objective, promoting his formula for the universe, the acceptance and championing of which would, in Faustus' mind, position him above God and grant him validity to his suggestion that blasphemy is as powerful as prayer. By giving Faustus a source of obsession, an anchor in the physical world, Mamet robs his protagonist of the usual metaphysical agency he possesses—this Faustus does not turn to the Devil for guidance, but rather just turns to himself—something Mamet seems to suggest is equally bold to do in the eyes of God and the Devil, since Faustus' doing so merits him a visit from the sinister Magus. Mamet's Faustus possesses the same Faustian sense of pride, but with a few key differences: for Goethe and Marlowe this pride might manifest in Faustus' inability to appraise his situation or let himself forgive himself (re: believe he can

be redeemed). Mamet's Faustus succumbs to pride not as a covert manifestation of fear and guilt (as in Marlowe, whose Faustus turns his existential anguish into self-aggrandizement, and Goethe, whose scholar believes his ennui and depression too steep for Mephistopheles to scale), but in sincere narcissism—he truly believes himself smarter than God *and* the devil—a height of delusion seldom expressed by the creations of Mamet's preceding Faust-makers.

Faustus' ego, existing solely as ego, is a prominent theme in the play, as one would expect in a *Faustus* story, but the fault in Mamet's execution is how little we see of this pride. In the second act, Faustus's friend Fabian, now grown old and blind, lambasts Faustus, who he thinks to be dead and gone, referring to him as, "Our petted philosopher—who burned with the thirst for truth. Who betrayed those who trusted him, parsing their love to tribute and then to oblivion. Our sick creation." (75) To hear Fabian tell it, Faustus had been surrounded by enablers who spurred him on in his quest for the mechanism of the universe—and in their "Creation" of the Faustus who wagers away his wife and child in the name of academic recognition, Fabian and Faustus' Wife and Child have been betrayed for their faith.

However, there's not much textual evidence to support Fabian's assertions—little shows us what he tells us. Faustus doesn't seem to burn for *truth* so much as for recognition, for validation. His paper on the engine of the

universe would be revolutionary, of course, were it accurate—something that is never addressed, though it needn't be, as all that matters is how much Faustus invests in his own mind—only to be outmatched by the Magus in a basic bout of semantics. For Faustus' pride to manifest in such a way, as matter of childish petulance at being miscredited, weakens the typical Faustian character by shrinking the scope of his ambition.

Even with all his permutations in Mamet's play, becoming a husband, becoming a father, Faustus remains predisposed to his own discoveries and his own prior achievements. Marlowe's Faustus similarly championed himself early in that play, but left the matter behind when literal demons appeared to humble his meager secular sport. Mamet's scholar, by contrast, continues to dote on his regard on earth—a specific pivot that sets this Faustus apart from his preceding selves. In Goethe and Marlowe, the Faustian figure's insecurity and feelings of incompleteness send him into seeking something greater to fix his imperfections. In Mamet, Faustus is unable to look elsewhere for satisfaction—he can only conceive of it in the context of public acceptance. Mamet on several occasions comes close to moving his Faustus forward in his ambitions, flirting with more cosmic awareness of his ego's stuck position, in one instance having Faustus proclaim:

Those with whom I contend, are phantoms. Those I instruct, fools, or e'er either to avoid, or e'er applaud the obvious. I fear failure, I sicken of

success, my sinews set in the mold in which work has stiffened them. I am unfitted even to unbend.

(54)

Faustus here speaks about how even those who appreciate him are of no value to him. 'Fearing failure' and 'sickening of success' are notions that wouldn't be out of place in Goethe, and Faustus' awareness even of his inability to change himself (being 'unfitted even to unbend') also speak to a deeper awareness of the limits of his earthly lot—but these threads go nowhere. The Magus and Faustus discard Faustus' admission and return to their linguistic games regarding Faustus' authorship and his family. Faustus admits his dissatisfaction with his current lifestyle, then goes back to doggedly defending it, with no lingering sense of what he himself brought up. Mamet's Faustus is less concerned with gaining greater power than with defending what he already perceives he has—rather than seeking out all the answers as Goethe's Faust and Marlowe's Faustus do, Mamet's man already has the answers, and the agent of the Devil comes only to humble him, not to offer any exchange of souls for service.

Faustus' status as a husband and father is possibly the most seismic of shifts that Mamet invents in his play. Giving Faustus a stable home and a family gives him the added stakes of having other people to hurt besides himself in his dealings with dark forces—an interesting and novel approach to the character's mythos. However, in Mamet's exploration of Faustus the family man, the device

begins to break down and seem more to limit than to expand the character. On the positive side, Faustus' absorption into his work on the day of his son's birthday party, and the way his wife repeatedly attempts to bring him out of his study to see the boy in Act 1 illustrate the manner in which this Faustus has turned his back on the rest of the world in favor of his own work—a quintessentially Faustian beginning point. However, aside from telling Faustus to come see his son over and over again, the Wife holds little narrative use otherwise. Mamet's storied trouble regarding female characters is not subverted here, with the Wife's essentialist association with the home and childbearing. In Act II, when we find she's died and gone to Hell, little happens to illustrate the depth of the loss. The world Faustus has turned his back on, personified by his family, is insufficiently effective—and as such, Faustus' absorption seems downplayed—less an obsession, more a preoccupation.

Faustus' child, whom we never see alive in Act I, and only see when he's dead and in Heaven in Act II, fares little better. For the majority of the play, the boy exists only in the audience's minds, and in Faustus' words. When Faustus does get a brief conversation with his son, and implores the boy to speak on Faustus' behalf for his salvation, he betrays his own claims of caring about the boy—he speaks only for his own salvation and begs the boy to speak for him—when the boy agrees to go, and goes, Faustus' immediate turn from penitent

father to gloating victor, mocking the Magus and crowing his success, Faustus invalidates himself as a caring father figure, and undoes his act of Faustian futile penitence.

Therein is one the most complex alterations of Mamet's Faustus: unlike the previous Faustuses, who die expecting to go to Hell (even in Goethe, the dying Faust didn't know of his coming deliverance), Mamet's Faustus has a very visible, very tangible, very real chance at escaping damnation. An Angel isn't goading him, nor does he have a proper change of heart, but all the same there exists a small window through which he might escape, sins and all. But he misses it, through his own need to bask in victory. One might call it pride, in many ways the same pride that kept Marlowe's Faustus from accepting the Good Angel's pleas, but it manifests here in a more straightforward way—this Faustus isn't plagued by doubt over his immortal soul. He's simply convinced of his own inalienable adaptability, having now, in his own mind, bested the devil Himself. He is, at the climax of the play, and really all before it, what one might call "cocky." This cockiness undoes him in the end, but it does so in such a straightforward way that it lacks any true sense of karmic depth, any sense that Faustus' "o'erweening pride" has satisfactorily undone him—he just talked too long and missed his chance. Whereas in Marlowe, demons carry Faustus to Hell, and in Goethe, Angels lift Faust out of the dirt into Heaven, in Mamet, no one

carries Faustus anywhere—he keeps himself from moving, and ends up going nowhere. This is a pat summary of the ending, but a fairly comprehensive summary of the script's construction as a whole.

Whereas other Faustuses begin the play swollen with pride, then spend their narrative arcs slowly bumping into the limits of their own minds and their faculties, Mamet inverts the trajectory: His Faustus begins benefitting from great insight, wisdom, and advancement, yet certain of his forthcoming perdition. He proceeds to recede into himself, shrinking in brilliance, esteem, and ability, until he loses his fateful argument with the Magus on a technicality so scant it may as well be a pun. Then, wandering in the ashes of his past life, Faustus again engages with the Magus and, bolstered by his own pride, declares himself superior to God at last, and distracts himself with his own rhetoric just as he misses his one chance at appealing for salvation. It's no surprise, then, when the Magus tells Faustus, "I was summoned by your o'erweening pride...and your impertinence." (100) Whereas Goethe and Mamet have their Faustus figures begin in states of pride and megalomania, Mamet chooses to end his Faustus in such a state. As a consequence, then, his Faustus lacks a sufficient resolution, as he spends the majority of the play either trying to defend his findings to his Friend, defend his academic integrity to the Magus, or to solve the word games set forth to him by the Magus following his family's death. Faustus himself gets

very little occasion to do anything besides masticate vaguely academic erratum. He has no journey, nor any exploration of the soul. Had he made a proper pact, and had his story extended into the manifestations of his Pride, its magnitude, and its fallout, This Faustus would stand equally to his brethren. As it exists, though Mamet's Faustus hinges on a single ironic pivot of fate, like a standard *The Twilight Zone* episode, and extends no further nor exists any longer in the imagination after his story is complete.

Not much scholarship exists for Mamet's play, most likely due to both its relatively recent publication and its brief premiere run. It may also be because Mamet's *Faustus*, as stated above, lacks the real depth and complexity of other Faustuses just as it lacks their magnitude and focus. Susan Weiss, of *Culture Vulture*, says of the script, "Although the Faust story is notable as a distinctly Christian tale, here Mamet, reportedly a religious Jew himself, gives it a Judaic spin, with frequent mention of gates that are closing, a deliberate echo of the Day of Atonement Yom Kippur liturgy." The shift to Judaic notions of limited salvation have strong potential for Faustus, whose time, in all iterations, is surely running out moment to moment, but Weiss perhaps gives Mamet too much credit in his implementation—the notion of the closing gate, the fast-slipping chance at Redemption, exists only in the play's very final pages, after a large amount of circuitous and labyrinthine rhetoric.



Faustus' Day of Atonement never comes because, like the Faustus character, the play itself is too easily distracted, caught up in its own lingual quirks. The Faustian figure lacks the ambition, and his pact is hardly a pact at all, but a minor etymological contest. With nothing to gain, this *Faustus* ends up giving nothing up as a consequence. The fates of Faustus' family are gristly, but lack staying power because their fates come from sudden reversals of fortune, rather than a stated exchange. With other Faustuses, foreknowledge of the play's conclusion, for the audience as well as the character, makes the journey to the final collection of debt (even when subverted as in Goethe) that much more thrilling and dreadful. With no such narrative build, Mamet's *Faustus* suffers from a lack of tension and narrative heft. In some ways then, perhaps Mamet is very much like his version of Faustus—so wrapped up in the production of his latest opus that he fails to notice the clear warning signs around him on how to salvage the situation until it is too late.

## Chapter Six:

### Notes and Methodology on the composition of *John Faustus*

The goal of researching, analyzing, and dissecting these different iterations of the Faust/Faustus myth came from my deep interest regarding the nature of Salvation and/or Damnation in personal, psychological terms. In analyzing Marlowe, Goethe, and Mamet, I've been able to gain a deeper understanding of what a Faustus figure must have, must want, and must do to fulfill his archetypal role of seeker of knowledge above all else. Efficacy is always Faustus' aim—but never his result. His plans and schemes and speeches all always come to nothing—beset by distractions, challenges to his ego, and the limitations of his own imagination, Faustus, whether damned or saved, only wields his power to its fullest extent in his mind.

The idea to compose a new vision of Faustus came from my interest in a character who would literally sell his soul and ensure his eternal torture, knowing cognitively the full extent of what 'damned to hell' means (or at least inasmuch as one can cognitively understand eternal pain), and still making the deal. What could be worth it? What could justify such a price tag—a question I

now understand must be posed with the stipulation that Faustus did not know the worth of his soul, something easily gotten by his being born a human and thus with a value he couldn't adequately estimate.

Having fairly Socialist political views and growing up in the South, I've often, in my personal life, felt the contradiction between wanting to have a broader worldview and being told such perspectives are against the will of God. Like many other millennials growing up in the Bible Belt, I have chafed against my dogmatic environment in the pursuit of something that might make me feel less incomplete. After the 2016 Presidential Election, and the increased visibility of the most undesirable portion of our country—the bigoted, the privileged, the selfish and oppressive and straight and white and male—I felt I finally understood why someone would trade away their soul for a chance at greater power on earth—when life on Earth feels like Hell already, nothing but endless dysphoria and frustration and gnashing of teeth, why might anyone fear Hell? Could it be any worse than having a racist rapist for President? At least in Hell the wicked are punished—on earth, the wicked get Cabinet positions.

Seeing the election results frustrated me, and many like me (most people, I'd guess, if the popular vote is any indication—but enough old wounds). It made me consider political radicalism, radical activism, anarchy and socialism and all sorts of similar modes of resisting the government that no longer fulfills

its purpose of protecting its people. Following the rabbit hole of radicalism, I came to understand the radical mindset as one in which one's own wellbeing is secondary to achieving a goal. Some might call it martyrdom, some extremism, but supplanting the ultimate good of the self in exchange for an immediate actualization of a want stood out as a resonantly *Faustian* ideal.

And then I remembered this tweet:



Figure 5.1. Dril Tweet, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012

This is a fairly well known joke image. I've probably seen it around the internet countless times, and laughed it away like nothing, just another humorous image in a sea of them. But the notion of "Facing God and walking backwards into Hell" is a very striking image, when divorced from the notion of "hollering" at zoo animals, and one that accurately sums up the feelings of someone willingly giving up on their current world in favor of something they

know, cognitively, is worse, but still find more appealing than their current, limited means. In other words, the above tweet felt like a summary of Faustus in less than 140 characters.

It also gave me my ending. For if Faustus can be dragged screaming into Hell in Marlowe, somehow find redemption in death in Goethe, and swindle himself out of salvation in Mamet, why can't he willingly choose Hell over earth? In most iterations of Faustus, his final pull to Hell is played for fear, moralizing his ultimate damnation with a sort of finger-wag and a moral high ground to those of us watching his folly. Even in Marlowe's most sympathetic interpretations, Faustus' sheer panic at the climax can hardly be misinterpreted. For this new Faustus, I wanted to bring the character and his trajectory to Hell into a place where, ultimately, he chooses it—still knowing full well that Hell is Hell—but preferring the simultaneous symbolic victory and literal defeat of going to Hell in the face of a final grasp at redemption.

With an ending in mind, I turned to figuring how to begin the play. Marlowe's choral beginning has the sort of iconic staying power that must have captivated Elizabethan audiences enough for them to pay attention to his subversive piece, so a similar construction of an opening felt earned. Having the responsibility of the 'Chorus' as it were didn't feel natural to pin on any specific character, so spreading it across every actor except Faustus and Mephistopheles

felt like the more responsible way to begin the play. We show the population of the world of this *Faustus*, and the various bodies on stage of the people who make up the world—as if to say, Faustus may be the namesake of this play, but he is hardly the only person who exists here.

Faustus' entrance into the narrative, coming home from studying abroad in Germany over the course of the 2016 election, felt like the right choice because it dramatizes the feeling that I'm sure many idealistic Americans felt as the results poured in: feeling like you've woken up to an alien country that you no longer recognize. A feeling of alienation with the world around him is a crucial component of the Faustus character. He has to believe he cannot advance in his current world—thus, for this incarnation, a sense of being abandoned by the government, its people, and his own family.

Faustus' parents exist mainly to further this purpose. His mother belittles him, his brother, and his father—she embodies the factors Mamet described as 'o'erweening pride' and refuses to think of her actions in any context that might not paint her as the hero and the victim. Faustus' Father, though overtly less damaging, still favors staying out of difficult discussions and refuses to raise his voice to oppose anyone—in other words, the tired liberal who's too afraid of losing their comfort to take part in resistance. The Sophie Scholl quote that serves at the epigraph of the play deals with the type of people that are Faustus'

parents: People too afraid of risking personal loss to take part in anything larger—people too afraid to rock the boat, to make any noise, to be difficult, to make any effort. These quiet, passive citizens aren't the main antagonists of the play by any means, but the stultifying obedience they represent is surely just as threatening as the bigoted forces behind hate groups like the KKK, Steve Bannon's *Breitbart News*, and the like.

Faustus' friends, on the other hand, have roots in the magicians Faustus meets in Marlowe, Valdes and Cornelius, as well as Faustus' fellow scholars. They coax Faustus into the new world where he will soon become submerged. However, I wanted these other protesters to be more than just sounding boards for political ideology. Their roles and dynamics with Faustus needed to feel fleshed-out to justify their existence. Roy and Maria exist as the most politically independent of the group—Roy is the de facto leader, though he'd probably reject that label. He's focused primarily on the goals, methods, progress, and safety, of their protests and their message. Maria, very much a voice of reason, is the first to shrink from Faustus as his radicalization comes to the forefront—she and Roy are both able to see Faustus—an angry, frustrated person with skill but no clear purpose—for what a danger he really is.

Henry and Estelle, as the two protesters who become romantically involved with Faustus, represent a more 60's-esque 'free love' type of protest—

they certainly care about the issues as much as Roy and Maria, but they're also still young and virile and here to explore *themselves* as they try to better the world. Their arc with Faustus, and their ability to share him, came from an idea of Faustus as a figurehead—a figure of worship as much as a figure of fear in his time on earth. In Marlowe, the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt become quite charmed with him, and Goethe's Faust captivates Gretchen and gives himself a reputation of great renown. Seeing two people charmed by Faustus' natural charisma as much as his magical acumen appealed to me in my intention to tell a story of Faustus as an individual as much as Faustus as a Faustian Figure.

Jane, in particular, exists to fulfill several purposes: First, she exists as the closest thing this *Faustus* has to a Gretchen figure from the Goethe canon—a woman who becomes enchanted with the Faustian figure's charms and comes to die by being too close to him. This study, being focused more intently on the Faustian Pact, could not devote time to studying the Gretchen figure, but having a clear summation of the human cost of getting too close to the Faustian figure was a necessity, especially for a Faustus so predisposed to political dealings and civil disobedience, given the lethal manner in which the Powers-That-Be tend to respond to resistance of any kind. The main revision we have in this Gretchen Figure is her personality—Jane is hardly the studious and chaste German fraulein of Goethe's Faust's desire—and she doesn't fall for Faustus so much as



for what he brought into her world—namely, Mephistopheles. Jane’s arc of radicalization, from brusque, if obedient, protester to outright murderer, serves also as a cautionary parable for Faustus’ own radicalization and a parallel story in her own right. Jane and Mephistopheles’ courtship and her almost-Pact with the demon represents a path that could be taken by anyone feeling disenfranchised in this country, on either side of political lines. In fact, a similar air of allure is probably what attracted many Rust Belt citizens, Baby Boomers, and people who were raised to expect one world and looked around to see a different, more progressive world moving on without them, to vote for a Republican candidate that felt familiar.

The character of Simon, a naysayer and narrative stand-in for Marlowe’s fools Ralph and Robin, was purposely designed to mirror the thoughts and personality of Alt-Right (read: Nazi) Luminary Richard Spencer. I made the character of Simon John’s brother as a way to bring the conflict into the home and also have a reason why Simon would even be around so much—if he were just an acquaintance to our Protesters, he probably wouldn’t have such proximity to the plot. Simon’s attempts to hijack Faustus’ magic book and disrupt Maria, Estelle, and Jane’s Bake Sale are meant to represent the Alt-Right’s penchant for hijacking political arguments and resorting to cheap name-calling when they fail to express any salient points. Simon even calls John a

‘Cuck,’ a corruption of the derogatory ‘cuckold,’ that the alt right likes to throw around, operating under outdated notions of emasculation as the ultimate insult.

Simon’s death felt like the right narrative decision for several reasons: First, the clowns in Faustian stories rarely have much narrative use beyond comic relief. Second, having him just disappear from the story felt cheap. So, having Mephistopheles and Jane able to further their respective arcs while also cutting Simon’s off when he’d outlived his usefulness—and doing so in a way that could affect Faustus in a way that could carry forward his arc—made Simon’s execution at Jane’s hand all the more satisfying.

Going back to Roy and Estelle for a moment, I’d like to take a moment to address the portrayal of John Faustus as a bisexual. In Marlowe, Faustus clearly has eyes for Helen of Troy, and Goethe’s Faust had Helen and Gretchen. Likewise, the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles is often interpreted as homoerotic, in Marlowe *and* Goethe—something I definitely wanted to continue in my version. A Faustian figure is often pulled between two extremes: Heaven and Earth, Damnation and Salvation, Repentance and Commitment, etc. Externalizing this into Bisexuality, having Faustus comfortable with Male and Female partners, felt like an earned artistic choice—and an added dimension to Faustus, given his political enemies’ views on non-Heterosexual people. While this play isn’t *The Normal Heart*, and isn’t meant to be about

sexuality in the political sphere, such issues are not irrelevant, especially when dealing with a plot structure associated with a writer believed to be homosexual, as Marlowe (and, to a much lesser extent, Goethe) is believed to have been. In the year 2017, having a Faustus sexually attracted to both men and women hopefully will not be the most mystifying aspect of this play, but the notion of representation was on my back as I wrote a story of this particular moment in American history and culture, and, once I'd had the idea, it just felt right.

Given the importance of the Pact in the previous case studies, the circumstances of the Pact in this *Faustus* deserve a momentary explanation. When thinking about a Faustian story told in the year 2017, with all the events of the previous year present in the rearview, I felt that the state of America following the election was a strong place to start. Now, the easy comparison would have been to vilify a Trump supporter as the Faustian figure, who supports and follows the vile beliefs of their candidate until, following the election, they find themselves under the 'devil' figure's rule. The pattern inherent in how Conservatives had bonded themselves to a clear and transparent Devil seemed perhaps *too* clear, *too* easy, and I found it more stimulating creatively to ponder a Faustus who, like Marlowe's haunted Renaissance man, felt shorted by the world (or country) around him and sought a means of sticking it to the man, whether that man be God or Country. This Faustus makes his Pact less out of any

higher calling, or his own ambition—though his covert faith in himself above all others is certainly present—but more out a sheer feeling of rage against his surroundings. Faustus' righteous indignation fills the role of a motivating force that could lead one to exchange one's eternal soul for temporary power—though Faustus' trouble with efficacy, mirroring his literary forefathers, here comes as much from a lack of pragmatic planning as it does from inner narcissism.

Faustus' (and Jane's, and to lesser extents Henry and Estelle's) radicalization was an arc I wanted to keep attention on over the course of the play: how someone who's well-educated, has the right ideas, and the right heart, might still get caught up in their own rage and their own belief that they are right until they lose sight of what they were fighting for at the start—it's the self-satisfied downfall of neo-liberalism, where helping make a better world becomes second in priority to being seen as the One Who Is Right.

This Faustus makes his Pact in a haze of tunnel vision against a single enemy—an enemy of Ideology. Unfortunately, Ideologies cannot be pummeled in the stomach or set on fire. They have to be won in matters of public opinion, in moments and acts of Direct Action, something our Faustus misses time and again over the course of the play. Faustus as a young radical who fancies himself as already having nothing to lose, uses his perceived lack of options to justify his increasingly erratic actions. Being already consigned to Hell by his Pact allows

Faustus to justify making the deal in the first place—a looping, presupposed *ipso facto* that repeats in a lot of Faustus’ logic. Approaching Faustus as a person whose actions stem both from righteous indignation and a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy regarding his moral destruction helped motivate the Pact for the culture of 2017 America: Backed into a corner, vilified, angry, and with no worse fate to suffer nor better options on the table—or so he believes. Faustus’ inability to cop to Maria and Roy’s rules hopefully shows how this is not an anti-revolution or anti-direct action play. Rather, Faustus’ intentions, like the desire to escape the limits placed on them that previous Faustian figures have felt, are pure—where he stumbles is in his execution.

This script is not meant to be the Greatest of all Faustian stories ever told. It is meant to honor the groundwork laid out by all the Faustian figures of legend, Marlowe’s subversive dramatization, Goethe’s life’s work turning the character into a folk hero, and the long shadow of the Faustian Figure itself. It is a vision of a man who knowingly gives away his eternity for a chance at a better immediate future, but gets in his own way in realizing that simple dream—and doesn’t shrink from his comeuppance when it all collapses around him.

RS

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