

THE FAUSTIAN MOTIF IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *DR. FAUSTUS*

UDC 821.111-2.09

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Abstract. *Anthony Burgess, in his study Shakespeare (1970), describes Marlowe's characters as liberated, free and independent from the constraints of medieval Christian dogmas, finally willing and ready to realize their enormous creative potentials and achieve their goals. However, Burgess also poses the question – what is this freedom for?- and quotes Eliot: 'this philosophy seems to raise man to a heroic level never before seen in literature, but actually reduces him to a status of a monster with great ingenuity, but no soul'. Marlowe's overreachers, as Harry Levin calls them, use this long-awaited freedom for destructive purposes: for the sake of obtaining military, political and monetary power, each of them intimately bound up with the power of the infinite and infinitely irresponsible knowledge embodied in Dr. Faustus's diabolic magic, which is the theme of this paper.¹*

Key words: *the Faustian legend, Hell, forbidden knowledge, soul*

Marlowe's play has been the subject of almost as many controversial interpretations as the Faustian legend itself. Embellished and retold in many ways, the legend appears to have its origin in a historical person, a man who called himself Dr. Johann Faust (1480? – 1540?), living in Heidelberg and employed as a calendar-maker. The contemporary response to this person and the legend that began to surround him was mostly unfavourable.

Thus on August, 20, 1507, the learned physicist Johannes Trithem (who was himself reputed to be a magician in league with Satan) wrote to his colleague Johannes Virdung, a professor of astrology at the University of Heidelberg, about this dr. Johann Faust: "The man of whom you wrote me, who has presumed to call himself the prince of necromancers, is a vagabond, a babbler and a rogue." Philipp Begardi, another contemporary, in his *Index Sanitatis* (published in Worms, 1539), talks about Faustus as a "wicked, cheating, unlearned" doctor: "Since several years he has gone through several regions, provinces

Received January 14, 2009

¹ This paper is an excerpt from the author's M.A. thesis – *The Faustian Motif in the Tragedies by Christopher Marlowe*, defended in March 2009, and supervised by Lena Petrovic, a full professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, Niš.

and kingdoms, made his name known to everybody, and is highly renowned for his great skill, not alone in medicine, but also in chiromancy, necromancy, physiognomy, visions in crystal, and the like other arts. And also not only renowned, but written down and known as an experienced master. Himself admitted, nor denied that it was so, and that his name was Faustus, and called himself *philosophum philosophorum*. But how many have complained to me that they were deceived by him – verily a great number!"²

Rogue he may have been, but it is not clear how Faustus came to be feared as a necromancer or black magician³. Later accounts offer some explanation. There is a story attributed to Faustus wherein he threatened a clergyman by vowing that he could cause all the pots in the kitchen to fly up through the chimney. Another account retells how Faustus was able to treat all his friends in a tavern to endless rounds of drinks by drilling holes in a table and causing fine wines to bubble up through them. With such tales preceding him, it is hardly surprising that many believed that Faustus had gained his powers through a pact with the Devil. Johann Gast (d. 1572), a Protestant pastor in Basel, is thought to be the first to accuse Faustus of being possessed with supernatural gifts derived from the Devil, by whom he was ultimately carried off.

The legend set going by Pastor Gast soon gained in all Protestant lands almost infinite popularity. Pacts with the Devil were all too common knowledge in magical folklore of the mid 16th to mid 17th century. During this period, several infamous tomes that gave detailed accounts of how to summon the devil and how to sell your soul to him were published. Apparently even Martin Luther, the contemporary of Faustus, believed that Faustus derived his power from a diabolical pact. And Faustus did not deny it, although it is more likely that Faustus circulated the tale himself for some personal gain.

More importantly, the hostile response to Faustus, on the part of the Renaissance philosophers such as Ficino and Mirandola, who had magic in common with Faustus, points to the crucial difference in the motives behind their use of magic, of which I will have to say more later.⁴ For the time being, it is sufficient to quote Ian Watt's observation that "the early history of magic (as practiced by Ficino) is very relevant to a fuller understanding of the Faust myth...but Faust does not belong to the same tradition."⁵

Infamous as he Johan Faust was, his life soon inspired ballads, dramas, and puppet plays, as well as a proliferation of Faust books. They were assembled after his death into a biography which was put forth by Johann Spies and published in Frankfurt in 1587. The book was translated into English and became an immediate success under the following descriptive title: *History of Dr. Johann Faust, the notorious sorcerer and black artist: How he bound himself to the Devil for a certain time: What singular adventures befell*

² Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, p. 597

³ Since Faustus was usually referred to as a 'necromancer' or 'conjurer' in the popular legend surrounding him, these terms need an additional explanation here. Ian Watt offers an exhaustive definition of all the skills that these terms cover: a 'necromancer' is a practitioner of black magic who foretells the future by communing with the spirits of the dead; a 'conjurer' is an alleged sorcerer whose skills extend from producing rabbits out of hats to summoning devils out of Hell. It is not surprising then that the contemporary response to Faustus was so negative – Faustus himself never denied that he belonged to a rather "dangerous and heretical tradition". (Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism*, CUP, 1996, p. 4)

⁴ Despite the difference in intention, the practitioners of the so called 'white magic' were also frowned upon by the Church because they too, like necromancers and conjurers, sought to control the spiritual realm, hitherto the exclusive right of the Church. Hence people like Ficino and Mirandola fought to detach themselves from Faustus and other practitioners of black magic: their position was precarious enough without being further compromised through association with necromancers and conjurers.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4

him therein: What he did and carried on until finally he received his well-deserved pay. Mostly from his own posthumous writings; for all presumptuous, rash and godless men, as a terrible example, abominable instance and well-meant warning, collected and put in print. "Submit yourselves therefore to God: resist the Devil and he will flee from you"

The action of Marlowe's play closely follows the incidents of this first Faust book. For a considerable number of contemporary critics it is not only the circumstances of Marlowe's play, but also its moral that coincides with the first Faust book. Marlowe the dramatist, according to them, was a thoroughgoing conservative, despite the substantial evidence that Marlowe, the man, looked at the world from the height of the Renaissance and that his orientation was notoriously secular. In the Elizabethan times, when Church attendance was strictly enforced by law, Marlowe was an atheist and thought that the goal of every religion was "to keep man in awe". Like Faustus, he scoffed openly at established beliefs. He called the biblical Moses "a juggler", or second rate magician, and referred to Christ as a not-so-pious fraud. He was also said to have claimed that Jesus and the apostle John were homosexual lovers.

Yet for this group of critics Marlowe, the author of *Dr. Faustus*, whatever blasphemous remarks Marlowe, the man, may have let fall, is a Christian writer. He is an orthodox moralist and his play, *Dr. Faustus*, is a morality play ending in damnation, the final chorus enunciating the lesson in the way of a morality epilogue. The closer we are brought to the hero's plight, the more terrible is the picture of Divine Wrath and the more precious is the Divine Mercy that Faustus rejected. Leo Kirschbaum, for example, stated that the Christian, and not the pagan, view of the world informs *Dr. Faustus* throughout; in fact, he claimed that "there is no more obvious Christian document in all Elizabethan drama than *Dr. Faustus*."⁶

At the opposite extreme are the critics who see in Marlowe a perfect embodiment of the Renaissance spirit, a great modern individualist, and in Marlowe's heroes, including Faustus, spokesmen for his own aspirations and energies. This defiant individualism, both of the author and his protagonists, has been either romanticized or more recently accepted with moral neutrality and postmodern aestheticized cynicism. Thus Campbell, for example, speaks with admiration of the individualistic Faustian Western culture and quotes Lessing as the first to recognize that the end of Faust should have been not damnation but salvation; and Goethe, who when Marlowe's play was mentioned, burst into exclamation "How greatly it is all planned!" Though in the end Faustus is destroyed, Goethe's argument runs, "throughout his life we are with him in his joys – which, after all, are innocent enough: in science, in wealth, in world travel, in love, and with a reach of soul and desire beyond anything Satan could appease"⁷. Even those critics, like C. L. Barber, who register the cruelty, tyranny, sacrilege and self-idolatry involved in the aspirations of Marlowe's heroes, still interpret them as projections of Marlowe's own affinities, which he presented, in the plays of very limited moral framework, as unqualifiedly heroic⁸.

Although more sophisticated and immensely useful for its insights, Stephen Greenblatt's reading of *Dr. Faustus* and other plays by Marlowe ends up as a version of this limited individualistic interpretation. According to Greenblatt, and New Historicists in general, Marlowe's protagonists are failed rebels against orthodoxy, individuals who seek

⁶ John Jump, ed., *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus*, The Macmillan Press LTD, London, 1969, p.42

⁷ Joseph Campbell, *Creative Mythology*, p. 607

⁸ See C. L. Barber, "Reading Faustus's God", in *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, eds. J.A. Downie and J.T. Parnell, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.77

to fashion themselves from within, but in the end turn out to be merely subjects fashioned by the very ideology they try to escape. This more or less coincides with my own view, but Greenblatt's conclusion, in keeping with postmodern exaltation of freeplay, seems to me problematic. The sole mode of Marlowe's heroes' freedom, writes Greenblatt, consists in the will to play, to continue the game that will increasingly implicate them in the culture they want to transcend, yet which yields an aesthetic pleasure which is itself a kind of an exit⁹.

In what follows, some of Greenblatt's insights will be used, but for the moment, the questions that can stimulate a more fruitful approach to *Dr. Faustus* than most listed above, will be considered. Such seemingly simple but useful questions were asked by the critics who perceived the apparent contradiction in Marlowe's plays, particularly *Dr. Faustus*, and, rather than resolve them by one-sided explanations, whether romantic or conservative, paused at it.

For example, Anthony Burgess is puzzled by what he calls Marlowian inconsistency. If Marlowe was a genuine atheist who believed that 'hell is a fable', Burgess wonders, "why did he expend such eloquence on demonstrating that hell was real? If, as some say, he was a true man of the Renaissance and an exponent of the unfettered human soul, why does he go to such trouble to justify the ways of God to man, thumping out almost sermonically the limitations of human ambition under the divine law? *Doctor Faustus* could have been written by a practicing Catholic."¹⁰

Similarly, Harry Levin in his influential study of Marlowe *The Overreacher* (1952) registers pervasive contradictions in Marlowe's drama. He notes that this tragedy seems to be framed by fundamental dogmas of Christian morality since the workings of 'heavenly power' are discerned in the 'hellish fall' of Dr Faustus; however, he also poses the question: "How far should they be taken literally? How far do they merely furnish Marlowe with expressionistic scenery? How far was he utilizing theology as a modern playwright might utilize psychology?"¹¹

To answer the questions Burgess and Levin pose, the major motif of Marlowe's play, Hell, will be discussed first. As already stated, Faustus, the first modern mind, believes that Hell or Heaven, God's punishment or reward, are mere 'old wives' tales'. Yet, somewhat incongruously, he is extremely curious about Hell's master, the Prince of darkness, whose name once proclaimed him 'the Bearer of Light'. Mephistophilis informs Faustus that Lucifer was once "an angel most dearly loved of God", but was expelled from Heaven for his "aspiring pride". Having himself lost that bliss, Mephistophilis warns Faustus that the outcome of the Miltonic struggle, the fall of the angels, will be Faustus's destiny, too; but, Faustus, unheeding the warning, persists in his scepticism about Hell:

Faustus:	Where are you damned?
Mephistophilis:	In hell.
Faustus:	How comes it then that thou art out of Hell?
Mephistophilis:	Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it. Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,

⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 220

¹⁰ Anthony Burgess, *Shakespeare*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, p.103

¹¹ Harry Levin, "Science without Conscience", in *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus*, ed. John Jump, p. 159

Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
 In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
 O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,
 Which strikes a terror to my fainting soul. (1.4.74-83)

At this point Faustus cannot grasp the full meaning of "this is Hell"—perhaps because its new metaphorical sense is entangled in traditional theological imagery (God, joys of Heaven, everlasting bliss), which seems to be invoked in a quite literal sense. The same is true of the answer Mephistophilis gives Faustus in the next scene, when Faustus, having just signed the contract, again repeats his question:

Faustus: Tell me, where is the place that men call Hell?
 Mephistophilis: Under the Heaven.
 Faustus: Ay, so are things else, but whereabouts?
 Mephistophilis: Within the bowels of these elements,
 Where we are tortured and remain forever.
 Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
 In one self place, but where we are is Hell,
 and where Hell is, there must we ever be.
 And to be short, when all the world dissolves
 And every creature shall be purified,
 All places shall be Hell that is not Heaven.
 Faustus: I think Hell's a fable.
 Mephistophilis: Ay, think so still, till experience changes thy mind. (1.5.115-127)

References to Hell will remain ambiguous till the very end, but despite the obvious orthodox level of meaning, on which Hell and Heaven are still parts of the medieval cosmos, there is also a level at which Hell becomes "a genuine, but unlocalized phenomenon", as Levin puts it.¹² In his attempt to warn Faustus, Mephistophilis denies the existence of any local Hell, and defines it instead as a state of mind. Thus he anticipates Milton's Lucifer, whose famous statement - "the mind is always in its own place/ And can make a Hell of Heaven, a Heaven of Hell"- was claimed by M. H. Abrams as the first modern reinterpretation of the Biblical fall.¹³ Even more radically than the Protestant Milton was to do, the atheist Marlowe is here using the Christian iconography as 'expressionistic scenery', he is "utilizing theology as a modern playwright might utilize psychology". In fact, Marlowe utilizes theology in order to convey psychological facts.

This psychological use of theology explains Mephistophilis's surprising eloquence on the side of the good angels and his description of himself and all other angels that live with Lucifer as 'unhappy spirits', forever punished for committing a sin of 'aspiring pride and insolence'. This is again Christian eloquence on the part of Mephistophilis and would be indeed strange if it did not serve a psychological purpose. As Cleanth Brooks noted, the unhappy spirits, like Good and Bad Angels later, are projections of the character's

¹² Harry Levin, *Science Without Conscience*, p. 160. Greenblatt's formulation is also apposite. "Marlowe", writes Greenblatt, "depicts his characters as homeless people who carry the uncircumscribed Hell within them". (Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, p. 197)

¹³ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, Norton and Company INC, New York, 1971, p.35

emotional state, or at least mirrors of the inner condition of the person to whom they appear. At this point, the very beginning of the play, Faustus is fascinated by new possibilities that he can explore by practicing magic and seems quite naive in his self-confidence, pride, even arrogance; Mephistophilis's Christian point of view serves to emphasize Faustus's ignorance and absence of moral awareness, which will come only at the very end when he is fully involved with the agents of evil. With this inner change Mephistophilis's discourse will correspondingly alter.

But what exactly is the nature of this evil? If the punishment - hell – is not the traditional pit of sulphurous fires, could we say that his crime also is not what it traditionally has been said to be. Faustus's hubris, as the play tells us, is knowledge: Faustus is damned for seeking forbidden knowledge – but what kind of knowledge and in what sense forbidden? The prologue describes him as a transgressor, an Icarus, flying sunward

Till swol'n with cunning of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow.
For falling to a devilish exercise,
And glutton now with learning's golden gifts,
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy;
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him... (1.20-26)

The first part of the quotation is focused on the story of Icarus. According to the Greek myth, Daedalus made wings for himself and his son Icarus to fly from the tower on the isle of Crete, where they were imprisoned by the king Minos. But Icarus flew so close to the sun that the wax holding the feathers of the wings melted, and he fell into the sea and drowned. The myth had a well established moral – the perils of any aspiration that transgresses the boundaries that gods have established. Levin sees Icarus as the emblem of Faustus's tragic pride. According to him, Marlowe uses Icarus in order to show what happens to a man seeking illumination and finding more heat than light - Faustus's 'self-conceit' spurs him to 'mount above his reach' and the result is that heavens 'conspired his overthrow'. However, Levin also emphasizes that the desire for flight – soaring above external boundaries and cultural restraints- is quite a legitimate desire.

Indeed, even if necromancy, in opposition to the "gifts of sweet learning," is condemned in the Prologue, it is clear in the first scenes of the play that Faustus wants to use it as a means to a valid end – for the sake of the personal contact with and interpretation of the spiritual realm, that is to say, of the mysteries under the sole control of the Church.

As his initial inquiries suggest, Faustus is concerned with existential questions – questions about the nature of spiritual being. Translated into secular context, his curiosity about Heaven and Hell is, in fact, a need to reach answers about beginnings and ends, the origin and purpose of life. His flights to the uttermost end of the medieval universe, his visits to Heaven – the first services, after he signed the contract, he demands from the Devil - are undertaken in the eagerness to resolve the ambiguities, to find the solutions to the cosmic uncertainties that teem in his brain. These questions indicate a genuine desire for knowledge, and although sinful by orthodox criteria, we find this aspiration not only legitimate and admirable, but necessary – as long as it is unalloyed with any utilitarian motives. If Marlowe ultimately condemns Faustus to Hell, it is certainly not merely because he has transgressed the orthodox interdiction against *curiositas*.

But, if intellectual curiosity, as Faustus's major activating force, is not in itself the cause of his fall, what dooms him is the fact that he is an over-reacher in another, more problematic, ethical sense. His flight cannot be detached from the secondary motives that move him, just as they move all the other of Marlowe's tragic heroes - will to power and appetite for sensation.

Both 'power' and 'appetite for sensation' require further explanation. Thus, although Faustus and Italian humanist philosophers both practiced magic, the power they sought to obtain by it was of two different kinds. The Renaissance magi like Ficino or Bruno, used magic to achieve spiritual illumination, a supernatural wisdom inspiring acts of poetic creation and of love that did not supersede Christ but went beyond Christian asceticism and religious intolerance. The goal that Faustus wants to attain is quite different: it is what Francis Bacon pleads for in his *New Atlantis* and Bertrand Russell later calls "power knowledge"¹⁴, the knowledge that ensures power over nature and human beings, and results in material gain. That "the seeds of decay are in his character from first"¹⁵, as one critic remarks, is obvious in the monologue at the very beginning of the play, where Faustus explains that he chooses black magic because of

... a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,
[that] Is promised to the studious artisan!
All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces.
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds.
But this dominion that exceeds in this
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man:
A sound magician is a demi-god.
Here tire, my brains to beget a deity. (1.1.51-61)

Clearly, to beget this deity Faustus has to make his mind ('brains') impervious to the imperatives of his conscience, or his soul, or his feelings – i.e. the imperatives of that other, inner divinity which the Gnostics and their Renaissance followers, the Italian humanists, desired to reclaim.

Indeed, the rest of the monologue quoted above already anticipates that Faustus's passion for metaphysical knowledge will soon give way to an exclusive lust for riches, pleasure and power over human beings. Talking of his diabolical servants he exclaims that he will "have them fly to India for gold/ ransack the ocean for orient pearl" (1.80-81). And he shows unequivocally what his ultimate interest is when he proclaims that he will force his servile spirits to invent "even stranger engines for the brunt of war" (1.92-93). Even if some of his goals sound revolutionary or patriotic at this point, ("I will chase the Prince of Parma from our land/ and reign the sole king of our provinces" (1.90-91)), in the further development of the play they will turn out to have been merely a veil for his ambition. As to appetite for sensation, the sensual vein in him is hardly seen at this stage, but is indicated in his subsequent demand to the Devil to enable him "to live in all

¹⁴ Harry Levin, "Science without Conscience", p. 141

¹⁵ W.W. Greg, "The Damnation of Faustus", in *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Clifford Leech ed., Prentice Hall Inc, New Jersey, 1964, p.96

voluptuousness". Later in the play, particularly in the Helen episode, it will become clear that his motive is not love but lust. In other words, both as a lover and as a knower, he anticipates modern self-divided man: the cynical, pleasure seeking Don Juan, the mad, narcissistic Frankenstein.

In his essay *The Unity of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus*, Cleanth Brooks also sees in *Doctor Faustus* a prophecy of divisions and separations that define the condition of modern man and his culture. Discussing the validity of the knowledge Faustus is after, Brooks sees it in terms of the relation of the knowledge of the world to the knowledge of oneself. The relationship is that of means and ends: the knowledge of the objective world, the technical or 'how'- knowledge, is only justified, according to Brooks, by its purpose, that is, if it is also treated as a means to one's knowledge of oneself.¹⁶ In *Faustus* they are separated, the fact which is reflected in the very structure of the play and is the reason why some critics have argued for the play's basic lack of unity. Marlowe, according to them, could be considered the author only of the introductory and the concluding parts, those 'mighty' lines that deal with Faustus's fearless tampering with tabooed knowledge and his final tragic realisation that he has been cheated both of ultimate metaphysical answers and of worldly power he hoped to attain. The middle, filled up as it is with frivolous episodes involving Faustus's tricks with the Pope or shows for the Emperor and ending up in the petty and degrading acts of revenge upon innocent or merely foolish bystanders, must be, according to these critics, the work of a lesser hand than Marlowe's.

Contrary to these critics, Cleanth Brooks argues for the unity of the play, in which the middle part is as thematically significant as the first and the last parts. It records Faustus' growing disappointment as he realises that the knowledge he attains by practicing necromancy is either insufficient or unsatisfactory. Instead of answering Faustus' questions about the first things - Heaven and the Creator - Mephistophilis provides him only with the elementary data of natural history and the unquestioned assumptions of Ptolemaic astronomy - mere "freshmen's suppositions" (6.55-6), as Faustus at one point cries impatiently. It is because he is cheated of the knowledge that might have become a means to his self-discovery that Faustus ends up as a court jester, a fool. Among his tricks, the most appealing is the episode involving an anti-pope named Bruno - possibly in honour of Giordano Bruno - condemned to the stake and rescued by Faustus and Mephistophilis, both disguised as cardinals. But beyond this deserved, if rather heavy-handed, satire at the expense of the Papal Court, Faustus's earlier fantasies of political influence, not to mention imperial conquest, have not materialized. He is still dependent on the patronage. The shows he stages for his coterie audience do not change the world, but merely allow him and others

¹⁶ Cleanth Brooks, "The Unity of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus", in Harold Bloom, ed. *Christopher Marlowe: Modern Critical Views*, p 99. The question Brooks poses is precisely this: if '*Doctor Faustus* is a play about the relation of one's knowledge of the world to his knowledge of himself - about knowledge of means and its relation to knowledge of ends - how does this knowledge of means relate to one's knowledge of ends?' The question of means and ends, Brooks insists, is very important because it reflects the interests of the Renaissance as well as those of the modern day. Sealed off from each other, technical knowledge and the knowledge of proper goals will in time, according to Brooks, lead to the 'two cultures' problem, the separation between science and arts (literature) described in C. P. Snow's pamphlet *Two Cultures and Scientific Revolution (1959)*. Snow's preference for science, because it is scientists, and not poets, that have the future in their bones, is, according to F.R. Leavis, a glaring example of spiritual blindness. To propose that 'more jam tomorrow' is the crowning purpose of human life, its final hope, betrays an inability to distinguish between wealth and well-being; it is a failure to engage fully with the equivalent of Brooks' ends and means question: what do people live for, what, ultimately, do they live by? (See F. R. Leavis, 'Two Cultures? The Significance of Lord Snow', in *Nor Shall my Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope*, Chatto and Windus Ltd., London, 1972, p. 39 -75).

to pass the time within it. Even in his greatest feat, the raising of the shapes of Alexander and his paramour, there is, he vaguely feels, something unsettling and unsatisfactory: like Faustus's own life, "these are but shadows, not substantial". (4.1.99)

For this sense of illusion and futility, however, Faustus has to blame only himself. For even if the devil had provided him with all the answers he initially demanded, the knowledge thus obtained would have been compromised by his yearning for self-aggrandizement. It is this motivation, as basic as his yearning for the knowledge of ultimate things, that "ensures that the power he has gained will be used for what are finally frivolous purposes".¹⁷

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The middle part of the play has an additional importance because it serves to define Faustus's guilt from other perspectives than the knowledge obtained in exchange for his soul, or its uses. This other perspective is what Brooks refers to as Faustus's legalism. Although Faustus realizes that he was deceived, he still sees himself as the prisoner of the act he signed. He is too easily convinced that a bond is a bond and has to be honoured. Trapped in his own legalism, Faustus believes that his case is hopeless and despairs of repenting. Yet, in spite of the contract, the devils themselves do not seem to be sure of Faustus's soul. They argue with him, bully him, threaten him all the time, because this is a way of distracting Faustus from his thoughts of repentance. Even Lucifer himself is summoned to terrify Faustus into believing that God cannot pity him, against the good counsel of the Old Man and Good Angel who try to convince him otherwise.

Faustus's confusion of legal convention and moral condition can be related to Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of contemporary culture and its moral failures, in his study *Life in Fragments: Essays on Postmodern Reality*. Baumann argues there that (post)modern man is convention bound and incapable of commitment. Conventional decency is a response to a spoken demand; it is governed by the ethics of rules, laws and reason. All sentiments except loyalty to the norm and all commitment except commitment to the social rules are seen as potentially dangerous impostors. This ethics operates on fear – the fear of the world without laws and of the law's punishment for disobedience. It is precisely what Faustus is afraid of when he stubbornly obeys the contract with the Devil – he is terrified, in the scene I will presently analyse in some detail, of the immediate punishment should he prove disobedient. Commitment, on the other hand, writes Baumann, corresponds to an unspoken demand; it is a response springing from spontaneous morality, love and concern. All Marlowe's heroes break conventions: Faustus sins against the dogmatic ethics of the Church; however, he has to fall because he cannot commit himself to unwritten and unspoken moral laws and thus in the end betrays his humanity. In that sense Roma Gill is right when she defines the nature of Faustus's sin as the sin against the Holy Ghost, which she identifies with the violation of the laws of human nature. Hence, on the metaphorical level, Faustus's sin and punishment (Hell) are merged into each other, they can be seen as the versions of each other.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid, p.101

¹⁸ Roma Gill, *Introduction to the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, OUP, 1971, p xxii. Roma Gill does not herself draw this conclusion, but it follows from her very useful interpretation that the mere act signing a pact with demonic forces, for whatever reason, is in itself unpardonable, and constitutes the Sin against the Holy Ghost.

The view that Faustus ultimately sins against the Holy Ghost, i.e. against the divine principle embodied in the uncorrupted soul, can be supported by references to the two crucial scenes in the play. One is the scene of Faustus's bargain with the Devil. As the moment of signing the contract approaches, Faustus, hitherto resolute, begins to hesitate for the first time. It is true that he continues to mock Mephistophilis and his warning, but his own body seems to revolt against his decision – his blood congeals and he cannot sign the bond. Faustus himself comes very near the truth when he asks: "Is it unwilling I should write this bill?" (1.5.65). For indeed what speaks through his body is his deepest self; the refusal of his blood to stream for his damnation is the rebellion of his innermost human nature which refuses, in an instinctive horror, to betray itself. When Mephistophilis provides the chafer of fire and makes his blood 'clear' again so that Faustus eventually can sign the contract, he sums up, ironically, by echoing Christ's dying words on the cross - 'Consumatum est!' - convinced that he has cut himself off from all possibility of redemption.

But, as already noted, the mere signing of the bond, even if with his own blood, does not actually put Faustus's soul in the devils' possession. As the expiry of his contract draws near, he is even tempted, despite his legalism, by the Good Angel's and the Old Man's promise of salvation, should he repent. It is through his cruelty to the Old Man, in the crucial scene - XVII, that Faustus finally damns himself. In this scene Faustus, wavering between the Good and the Bad Angels, that is, between repentance and damnation, comes to the point of utter hopelessness – he is about to commit suicide. The Old Man, the human equivalent of the Good Angel, appears to spell out the terms by which Faustus still might be saved: he must break his heart (his will), and the blood from his heart, mingled with tears of repentance, may provoke divine forgiveness. To prevent this and make sure of his damnation, Mephistophilis hands Faustus a dagger. The Old Man persists in his faith in Faustus's salvation:

O stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate stops!
I see an angel hovers o'er thy head,
And with a vial full of precious grace,
Offers to pour some into thy soul.
Then call for mercy and avoid despair. (5.1. 58-62)

Faustus's "I do repent, and yet I do despair" (63) is a wonderfully compact assessment of his spiritual condition. The battle that earlier was embodied in the Good and Bad Angel, and now in the Old Man and Mephistophilis, Faustus here locates within himself. "Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast" (64) he declares, whereupon Mephistophilis acts quickly to intervene, threatening that he will tear Faustus's flesh piecemeal unless he rededicates his soul to Lucifer. The threat is sufficient. Faustus promises to confirm with his blood again the former vow made to Lucifer. And then, governed with selfish fear for his life, he renounces his humanity, which is the crime that actually damns him. He suggests the only thing he believes will satisfy Mephistophilis and save him from torture:

Torment... that base and aged man,
That durst dissuade me from thy Lucifer,
With greatest torment that our hell affords. (5.1.70-72)

But, as Mephistophilis shortly explains, he has no power over the Old Man because his faith is so great that his soul cannot be touched.

It is here indeed that hell for Faustus becomes "our Hell": symbolically, his desire to see the Old Man suffer and his acceptance of Hell as a part of himself are, as Roma Gill would say, versions of each other, and point to the final stage of his deterioration.

* * *

After this critical point in Marlowe's play, Faustus, now irretrievably lost, needs more powerful distractions than ever before: he once again summons Helen of Troy, but now it is not enough for him to gaze at her and admire her beauty – he needs to possess her:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
 And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
 Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:
 Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies.
 Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
 Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
 And all is dross that is not Helena. (5.1.97- 103)

The lyrical love poetry of these lines acquires its full ironic significance only in connection to Faustus's desperate plight. The topless towers are symbols for illimitable aspirations, and Marlowe associates them to the all-consuming element of fire, reminding us once again of Icarus. Helen's beauty could command the allegiance of thousands but again it invokes the destructive fire that she caused (a long, terrible military campaign that ended in the sacking of the great city of Troy); in it, we see the hint of the hell-fire that awaits Faustus. Faustus claims that Helen's lips suck forth his soul, and then reclaim it with another kiss. However, underneath their amorous display runs a disturbing hint that she is a succuba, an evil spirit. There is the sense of hopelessness and doom in the next line; although Faustus implores Helen to make his soul immortal with a kiss, his soul is already immortal in another sense, since it is promised to Lucifer. Hence these lines, which might suggest the mystical love experience if read out of context, strike the reader as a hopeless attempt of a morally broken man to find oblivion in mindless voluptuousness – just as the XX century damned souls and hollow men in Eliot's "Unreal cities" might seek refuge in meaningless sex.

There is no escape, and Faustus, once again anticipating the inauthentic existence of modern man and his obsession with time, utters his last soliloquy:

Ah Faustus,
 Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
 And then thou must be damned perpetually.
 Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
 That time may cease and midnight never come.
 Fair nature's eye, rise again and make
 Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
 A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul.
O lente, lente, currite noctis equi! (5.2.126-135)

In this last scene, Faustus's obsession with the clock and the passage of time, moving so swiftly to the final event, is emphasized by the underlying contrast between eternity and transience. Words – 'ever', 'still', 'forever', 'everlasting' – abound throughout. But Faustus is not granted full insight yet. What he desperately tries to do is hold back the clock, not change his relation to God, that is, alter his vision of his own sin. He quotes Ovid's *Amores*: "O lente, lente, currite noctis equi". In Ovid these words are uttered by the lover to his mistress in his wish that the night of passion might be prolonged. Of course, Marlowe uses this quotation from Ovid quite ironically in this context – there is an enormous difference between the classical lover's plea to Aurora and Faustus's wish for the dawn to be postponed.

Suddenly, as he vainly tries to leap to his God but feels that something or somebody is pulling him down, he seems to have an epiphany:

See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
 One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ!
 Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
 Yet will I call on him. O spare me, Lucifer!
 Where is it now? 'Tis gone:
 And see where God stretcheth out his arm,
 And bends his ireful brows. (5.2. 136-145)

The line "See where Christ's blood streams in the firmament" echoes the situation when Faustus was preparing to sign the bond with Lucifer but could not do so at first because his blood congealed in an instinctive horror of the proposed bargain. Now, as then, the refusal of Faustus's blood to stream for his own damnation is paralleled by a momentary vision of Christ's blood streaming for man's salvation, but the brief evocation of this coincidence is just a poignant reminder of what might have been - Faustus's ultimate denial of his human nature finds its mirror image now in the denial of redemption as the vision of Christ vanishes and is replaced by God's 'ireful brows' from which there is no hiding:

Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,
 And hide from the heavy wrath of God.
 No, no!
 Then will I headlong run into the earth.
 Earth Gape! O no, it will not harbour me.
 You stars that reigned at my nativity,
 Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
 Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
 Into the entrails of yon labouring clouds,
 That when you vomit forth into the air,
 My limbs may issue from their smoky mouths,
 So that my soul may but ascend to heaven.
 Ah, half the hour is passed: 'twill be passed anon. (5.2.150-162)

But all appeals to nature, from which the megalomaniac Faustus has long estranged himself, must be in vain. So for one desperate moment, Faustus, true to his bargaining nature, considers a deal with God - to be damned for "a thousand years/a hundred thousand, and at last be saved", only to realize that "no end is limited to damned souls." What

Faustus cannot yet understand, and will never understand fully, is that he is already in hell and that the coming of the hour of twelve cannot bring him a greater torment than that which now possesses him.

That is why he, whose soul is already lost, wishes he had no soul or at least that it were not immortal. This leads him to another association – Pythagoras – which brings Faustus as close as he ever gets to anagnorisis: a glimpse of that other, truly humanistic knowledge, as opposed to instrumental knowledge he has sought instead:

Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true
 This soul should fly from me and I be changed
 Unto some brutish beast: all beasts are happy,
 For when they die
 Their souls are soon dissolved in elements;
 But mine must live still to be plagued in hell.
 Cursed be the parents that engendered me!
 No Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer
 That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.

The clock strikes twelve.

It strikes, it strikes! Now body, turn to air,
 Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell!

Thunder and lighting.

O soul, be changed to little water drops
 And fall to the ocean never to be found. (5.2. 168-181)

The reference to Pythagoras at this point of the play is not a coincidence since Marlowe read Ovid and must have known that Pythagoras's belief in the transmigration of the soul, which moves, after a person's death, into other bodies, animal or human, was not merely a naïve fancy, but a serious theory of life. In making his Faustus wish that Pythagoras's theory of reincarnation were true so that he could be reborn as a plant or an animal, and even plead to turn into a drop of water so that he could reach the ocean and disappear, Marlowe is reminding the readers of the existential and moral advantages of the Pythagorean theory to the kind of instrumental knowledge that has been Faustus's aim. For in its view of knowledge as a sympathetic imaginative contemplation of nature and of nature as a single unified system, ethical, poetic and scientific at once, Pythagoras's philosophy offered man a sense of vitally partaking in larger unending cycles of being and hence a sense of immortality¹⁹.

As the clock strikes twelve and the demons enter to carry him off, Faustus makes his last offer - to burn his books and thus disown the futile knowledge that he has acquired at such a exorbitant price:

My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!
 Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while!
 Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer,
 I'll burn my books! – Ah, Mephostophilis! (5.2.182-185)

¹⁹ For a more detailed description of Pythagoras's philosophy see Lena Petrović's paper *Plato's Legacy: A Revision*, in *Facta Universitatis*, vol 7, No 1, 2009.

The fact that Faustus's last word is the shriek "Mephistophilis" may have symbolic significance in addition to the obvious one of announcing the Devil's dreaded arrival. Levin's claim, that if Marlowe is to be identified with any character, it is not Faustus, it is Mephistophilis, seems to me very plausible. Mephistophilis ensures that Faustus is punished, yet he forewarns him and suffers with him; he thus plays the cosmic ironist, powerful in his defeated rebellion and wise in his guilty knowledge. If already in the Prologue, and in his own first words, we recognize in Faustus "the scientific libertine who gained control over nature while losing control of himself"²⁰, in the rest of the play it is through Mephistophilis's agency that Marlowe warns us against "*science sans conscience* – science without conscience – or perhaps we should say without consciousness", which is "but the ruin of the soul."²¹

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MOTIV FAUSTA U TRAGEDIJI DR. FAUST KRISTOFERA MARLOA

Milena Kostić

Budući da su likovi iz drama Kristofera Marloa koncipirani kao ljudi koji su se konačno oslobodili srednjeevokovnih stega i postali nezavisni i slobodni da ostvare svoje ciljeve, Entoni Berdžis, u svojoj studiji o Šekspiru (1970.), postavlja pitanje - čemu služi ova novostečena sloboda? – i citira Eliota koji kaže da je "ova nova filozofija u isto vreme uzdigla čoveka na herojski nivo koji do tada nije viđen u književnosti, ali isto tako ga i pretvorila uobičajno domišljato čudovište bez duše". Zato ih Heri Levin, koji je posvetio celu studiju likovima iz drama Kristofera Marloa, i naziva overreachers. To su likovi koji sami postavljaju svoje obrasce ponašanja i pritom narušavaju sve pisane i nepisane ljudske zakone. Međutim, uzrok pada junaka ne leži u činjenici da su se oni ogrešili o moralne ili teološke norme, već u tome da su se ogrešili o celovitost ljudskog bića, što ću pokazati na primeru drame 'Dr. Faust'.

Ključne reči: *legenda o Faustu, pakao, zabranjeno znanje, duša*

²⁰ Harry Levin, *Science Without Conscience*, p. 163

²¹ Ibid, p. 134