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# Devils on Stage: Dramatic Representations of the Supernatural in *Doctor Faustus*

Kilian Schindler

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* powerfully epitomises the uncertainties and contradictions of the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. Obsession with the Devil reached a high-water mark with the large-scale witchcraft persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the same time, however, representatives of the Radical Reformation, such as Anabaptists, Libertines, or the Family of Love, began to question the existence of the Devil as part of a spiritualising reformation of Christianity, which privileged the internal struggle of the soul over external and material forces, such as angels and demons, and their visual manifestation. Elizabethan drama in general, and *Doctor Faustus* in particular, likewise entertained a fraught relationship with its own, visual mode of representation. This essay argues that by putting devils centre stage, Marlowe exposes them to widespread anxieties concerning the visual representation of the supernatural, which further highlights the play's heterodox, spiritualising tendencies. However, while the devils' role in Faustus's downfall is consistently undermined in the A-text, the B-text is at pains to restore their credibility. Finally, such a revision of demonic agency in the play also holds important clues for a new assessment of the play's treatment of predestination and how it relates to contemporary orthodoxy.

## I. Theatre and Idolatry

The relationship between the early modern theatre and Protestantism was notoriously fraught with problems that can perhaps best be sum-

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marised as a conflict between word and image.<sup>1</sup> As Michael O'Connell points out, what made plays so offensive to anti-theatrical writers was their reliance on visual representation (34). Even hardliners such as William Prynne found no fault with plays as long as they were merely read (929-31). However, the antagonism between the theatre and opponents of the stage should not be overstated. O'Connell suggests that "the drama that emerged in the latter half of the reign of Elizabeth assumed something of the character it did, not in spite of but because of, the attack upon it" (18). Similarly, Jonathan Crewe criticises "the erroneous belief that Elizabethan pamphleteers and playwrights lived in worlds apart, each speaking a language alien to the other" and that anti-theatricalism was "an attitude wholly external or alien to the Elizabethan theatre itself" (96). Finally, Huston Diehl argues that the early modern English theatre was not "hostile to Protestantism or particularly sympathetic to the old religion," on the contrary, plays were generally "likely to expose both magic and older forms of theatricality as fraudulent. And although they sometimes mourn the loss of beloved images and familiar rituals, many also endorse and even engage in acts of iconoclasm" (5). Diehl sees the theatre not only as a victim of "iconoclastic" scorn and condemnation, but also as a willing collaborator. Notably, Diehl detects such a deep-seated distrust of visual representation also in the plays of Christopher Marlowe:

His theater interrogates its own theatricality, creating spectacles that dazzle and seduce his audiences while dramatizing the fall of a protagonist who is bedazzled by demonic shows and seduced by his own power to manipulate images . . . Faustus is depicted in this play as a man who at crucial moments chooses images, shows, pageants, and spectacles, all explicitly the craft of the devil, over a God he cannot see. (77-78)

By associating the devil with the theatre, Marlowe taps into a rich tradition going back to antiquity which considered the theatre in terms of idolatry and Devil-worship. Already Tertullian had asserted that it was the Devil who "introduced into the world artificers of statues and of images, and of every kind of likenesses" ("On Idolatry" chap. 3), and this also holds true for the theatre. If the making of similitudes as such is already tainted with idolatry ("On Idolatry" chap. 5), the theatre obvi-

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<sup>1</sup> Funding to support the research for this essay was provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation with a Doc.CH grant.

ously cannot escape Tertullian's vehement censure: "The man who counterfeits voice, sex or age, who makes show of false love and hate, false sighs and tears, [God] will not approve, for He condemns all hypocrisy" (*De spectaculis* chap. 24). As all idolatrous practices that deal in mere "likenesses," spectacles "were instituted for the devil's sake, and equipped from the devil's store" (*De spectaculis* chap. 24). The pagan deities to whom the theatres were dedicated, Bacchus and Venus, were in fact demons, who "among the other pollutions of idolatry devised those of the spectacles for the purpose of turning man from his Lord and binding him to their own glorification, and so inspired these ingenious arts" (*De spectaculis* chap. 10).<sup>2</sup>

Elizabethan critics of the theatre eagerly recycled the arguments of the church fathers and were equally, if not more, at pains to stress the demonic nature and origin of the theatre (O'Connell 19). Thus, "[p]layers are the inuentions of the deuill, offrings of Idolatrie" (Gosson G8v), whose plays are "sucked out of the Deuilles teates, to nourishe vs in Idolatrie, Heathenrie, and sinne" (Stubbes 88v). They are "feends that are crept into the worlde by stealth, and holde possession by subtile inuasion" (Rankins 2r), and they are "sent from their great captaine Sathan . . . to deceiue the world, to lead the people with intising shewes to the diuell" (Rankins 2v). This is exactly what Marlowe's devil-actors, who are literally "feends sent from their great captaine Sathan," do when they stage the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins in order to distract Faustus from his impending doom. Apparently, Marlowe takes the anti-theatrical claim that plays are the invention of the devil seriously and lays bare the stratagems by which the Devil ensnares his victims with images, shows, and illusions. As Michael O'Connell argues, it was "the illusion of presence" that accounted for "opposition to theatrical representation" (9) and which critics of the theatre considered as "the very essence of idolatry" (20). In Marlowe's play, however, the Devil and his minions are no longer merely the source of idolatry but take centre stage and are turned into a dazzling spectacle themselves. But if images are not to be trusted and dramatic spectacles only distract from spiritual realities, could the dramatic presentation of the Devil not also undermine his metaphysical status and credibility?

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<sup>2</sup> For a similar argument, see Augustine 1.32 and 2.25. On patristic arguments against the theatre in general, see Barish 43-65.



## II. The Devil in the Radical Reformation

As Richard Waswo has shown, English Protestantism had a tendency “to envision hell less as a place than as a state of mind” (71) and to emphasise “that even the present state of the unredeemed is condemnation” (72). Whereas *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* (1566) still upheld both the spiritual torments (*poena damni*) and physical torments (*poena sensus*) of hell (1.7), a strong emphasis on the former was common currency in Elizabethan England. In addition to Waswo, a number critics have noted that Marlowe, too, stresses primarily the spiritual aspect of damnation as, for instance, in Mephistoles’s declaration that “Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed / in one self place, for where we are is hell, / And where hell is must we ever be” (2.1.121-123).<sup>3</sup> The idea that physical hellfire is actually nothing but a metaphor can be traced back to the allegorising Scriptural exegesis of Origen and, in the sixteenth century, most notably to Erasmus, one of Origen’s most avid early modern readers. However, it received the orthodox seal of approval by Calvin and thus acquired independence from its originally more extravagant doctrinal context in Origen’s theology.<sup>4</sup> Scepticism or otherwise heterodox opinions concerning the Devil, which might well have been gleaned from Origen, were by no means an inevitable consequence of metaphorical interpretations of hellfire. Hence I will not further discuss the question of hell but limit my argument to the Devil and his fallen angels.

In survey histories, the existence of the Devil is usually said to be questioned no earlier than the mid-seventeenth century and to lose intellectual credibility not before the eighteenth century (Russell 26; Almond, *The Devil* 196). However, one need not wait for seventeenth-century radicals such as the Ranters, Diggers, or Grindletonians to learn that man is devil to himself, or for Spinoza and Descartes, in order to find

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<sup>3</sup> See Sanders 200-05; Keiper; Streete. All references to the play are to *Doctor Faustus and other Plays*, ed. Bevington and Rasmussen. References are to the A-text unless indicated otherwise. References to the B-text are likewise to the edition by Bevington and Rasmussen.

<sup>4</sup> Origen, *De principiis* 2.10.4-5; Erasmus, *Enchiridion militis Christiani* CWE 66, 113, *Hyperaspistes I* CWE 76, 132; for discussions of Calvin’s view on hell and its repercussions in early modern drama, see Streete and Pope. Among the magisterial reformers, only Zwingli seems to have been seriously interested in Origen’s maligned heresies such as the doctrine of apocatastasis, the universal restoration not only of humanity but also the Devil and his fallen angels, to an extent that worried his correspondents such as Urbanus Rhegius (CR 94: 128; CR 95: 726-27; CR 95: 738). Eventually, however, also Zwingli finally distanced himself clearly from the doctrine when it came to be associated with the Anabaptists in the second half of the 1520s (*In catabaptistarum strophas elenchus* 186-87).

more philosophical refutations of diabolical activity in this world.<sup>5</sup> As Euan Cameron puts it, already “the Reformation inflicted what one might term collateral damage on beliefs about the spirit realm” (18). Scepticism was waiting in the wings in the sixteenth century, especially among the representatives of the so-called Radical Reformation. Importantly, this scepticism can be characterised as a symptom of changing attitudes in the Reformation towards the understanding of material and particularly visual aspects of religious worship and doctrine.

Despite a long history of conflict between Radical Protestants on the one side and Calvinists and Zwinglians on the other, there were a number of theological areas in which they shared similar views, such as their critical attitude towards ceremonial and external aspects of worship. Future Anabaptists had been at the forefront of iconoclastic activities in Zurich in the early 1520s (Gordon 192), and a strain of iconoclasm also runs through many branches of the Radical Reformation that emphasised internal spirituality and devalued external ceremonies (Williams 367). However, radicals and orthodox reformers disagreed substantially on how far one should go in internalising and/or spiritualising various practices of worship, sacramental rites, and elements of traditional Christian cosmology. While the most notorious area of disagreement was arguably the sacrament of baptism, radicals also began to question fundamentally the ontological status and agency of angels and demons.

The Northern Italian *Anabattisti*, for instance, determined at a clandestine synod in Venice in 1550 that Christ is not God, but a man, that there are no angels and no Devil other than human prudence, that the souls of the wicked are mortal, and consequently, that there is no hell (Williams 871-72). Similar developments can be observed north of the Alps, where the Dutch Anabaptist leader David Joris, who had been banished from Delft after encouraging acts of iconoclasm on Ascension Day in 1528, voiced heterodox opinions on the Devil in the strongest possible terms as early as the 1540s (Waite, “Man is a Devil”). While few may have been as explicit as Joris, similar attitudes were quite common in the Netherlands, where spiritualist movements such as the Family of Love were gaining a stronger foothold than anywhere else in Europe (Waite, “From David Joris”; “Where did the Devil Go?”). In 1545, Calvin himself published a treatise against one of these movements, the so-called Libertines or Spiritualizers (*Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des*

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<sup>5</sup> On the English seventeenth-century radicals and their attitude towards the Devil and witchcraft, see Clark 540-45; on Spinoza, see Almond, *The Devil* 211-13; on Descartes, see Russell 82-84.

*Libertins, qui se nomment spirituels*). Among other things, Calvin denounces their belief that the Devil and angels are mere imaginations:

By this they mean that whenever we think of the devil or of sin, these are only frivolous fantasies which we have conceived. And not only do they speak of devils as they do angels [sic] – taking them as inspirations without essence – but they think they are only vain thoughts which we ought to forget as dreams. (*Treatises* 234)

Importantly, Calvin ascribes such scepticism to a misguided conflation of the Devil with the idols rejected by the apostle Paul: “In brief, they speak of these things in the same manner that Saint Paul speaks of idols. For when he says that ‘an idol is nothing’ (I Cor. 8:4), he means that it exists only as a conception, without reason or foundation, in the minds of the ignorant” (235). Despite Calvin’s refutation, the idea that the Devil is merely an idol of the mind caught on, also in England. In 1550, Roger Hutchinson complains about the “many late Libertines, and late English Sadducees, which would teach out of scripture . . . that devils are evil thoughts, and good angels good thoughts” (138).<sup>6</sup> The charge occurs repeatedly during Elizabeth’s reign, up to the 1590s, and usually with the implication that latter-day Sadducees are indeed still swarming around.<sup>7</sup> The supposedly Libertine conviction that “[t]here is no deuill, but suche as the painters make” (Wilkinson 66r), suggests that the sect considered belief in the devil as an outgrowth of an unduly visual religious culture, which ought to be reformed in a thoroughly spiritualising manner. Admittedly, there is little to no evidence for a distinct Libertine movement in Elizabethan England, but their ideas were firmly anchored in the Elizabethan theological imagination since they were discussed and refuted in highly influential theological works such as Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* or Heinrich Bullinger’s *Decades*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Based on Acts 23:8, the Sadducees became a common reference point for the denial of the existence of angels or demons: “For the Sadduces say that there is no resurrection nether Angel, nor spirit: but the Pharises confessed bothe.”

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.19; Bullinger 732, 744, 747; Wilkinson 66r; Nashe 127; Perkins, *Exposition* 7.

<sup>8</sup> Major studies of Tudor Radical Protestantism such as Martin or Pearse mention them only a couple of times, without discussing them or distinguishing them from other radicals such as the Anabaptists, Familists, or Freewillers. Even George H. Williams’s comprehensive survey of the Radical Reformation traces no references to them in the Elizabethan period and merely suggests that “Familist Spiritualism” was “akin to and perhaps dependent upon the earlier Netherlandish Libertinism” (726).

Of particular interest for English scepticism, however, is Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), and especially its appendix, "A Discourse vpon diuels and spirits." At least on the surface, Scot sides with Calvin and opposes the Sadducees (540). However, he is equally repelled by the "witchmongers" and flatly denies that a witch or magician can ever be anything else but a fraud or a pathological case of madness. This argument rests on his insistence that the devils are purely spiritual beings and therefore cannot intervene in the physical world. Brushing aside Neoplatonic emanations and gradations, Scot insists in an almost proto-Cartesian fashion that "a bodie is no spirit, nor a spirit a bodie" (540). Consequently, "we find not that a spirit can make a bodie, more than a bodie can make a spirit" (541). Hence, Scot also denounces the Devil's supposed "corporall assaults, or his attempts vpon our bodies, his nightwalkings, his visible appearings, his dansing with witches, &c" (540). Physical interaction between humans and demons, even their visual appearance in the physical world, belong to the realm of superstition.

Again, such a limited and spiritualising demonology takes its inspiration from contemporary fears of idolatry. Scot links witchcraft to other forms of idolatry that wrongly attribute supernatural power to physical objects or anyone other than God: "[H]e that attributeth to a witch, such diuine power, as dulle and onelie apperteineth vnto GOD (which all witchmongers doo) is in hart a blasphemmer, an idolater, and full of grosse impietie" (12). Conversely, Scot frequently associates Popish idolatry, such as the veneration of saints, with devils: "[N]ot onelie their saints, but the verie images of them were called Diui. Which though it signifie gods, and so by consequence idols or feends: yet put but an (ll) therevnto, and it is Diuill in English" (529). Additionally, Scot points out that the devils named in Scripture were originally pagan idols (518). He takes this observation from Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563), but whereas the Dutch physicist had still believed that the pagan idols were actually devils, Sydney Anglo (128) argues that Scot reverses the argument and concludes that devils are nothing else but idols, a view which we have already encountered in Calvin's treatise against the Libertines.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The question whether Scot actually believed in the Devil and demons is a difficult one, especially because of his explicit disavowal of Sadduceism. Sydney Anglo nonetheless argues that "Scot no more accepted the reality of spirits and demons than he accepted the reality of witches," and that demons are "either purely metaphorical expressions of mysteries beyond human comprehension or, more usually, of psychological disorders and physical diseases" (129). Moreover, Anglo concludes that "were it not for his leap of



Marlowe was quite probably familiar with the *Discoverie of Witchcraft*.<sup>10</sup> One could even say that Scot provides a rationale for Marlowe's theatrical experiment. Scot frames his scepticism concerning supernatural interventions frequently in theatrical terms, as when he declares that he "neuer could see anie diuels . . . except it were in a plaie" (443). What Scot has in mind here is clearly not the old religious drama which Anne Righter describes as "a glass held up towards the Absolute" (14) that stripped supernatural reality of the mists of illusion and deception. In the *Discoverie*, "playing" is synonymous with the dissembling, legerdemain, and the cozenage of petty magicians. Also Faustus's magic is remarkably insubstantial, that is, theatrical and literary. It is no coincidence that he describes his fantasy of magical omnipotence in Horatian terms as "a world of profit and delight" (1.1.55) and that he cannot conjure "true substantial bodies" (4.1.44) but merely "spirits as can lively resemble Alexander and his paramour" (4.1.48-49). In other words, Marlowe draws attention to the histrionic nature of magic and deliberately destroys the illusion of presence which had worried anti-theatrical writers so much. When Faustus wonders at the play's most sublime moment: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" (5.1.90-91), the audience is reminded that it is actually the face of a young boy actor. Just as Scot explains away all miracles as malevolent manipulation or pathological delusion, Marlowe, too, "exploits the power of the stage to enchant, paradoxically, in order to disenchant" (Diehl 79). But to what extent does Faustus, who is not only a magician but also a spectator of demonic shows, succumb to the power of images himself? Or to put it differently, to what extent does Marlowe also cast doubt on the Devil himself as the projection of an idolatrous imagination? Some scepticism is already apparent in *The Faustus Book*, such as when Faustus is not certain whether "it were true or false that he had seen hell, or whether he was blinded or not" (122). Mar-

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faith in proclaiming an unshakeable acceptance of the Word of God on the very basis of the miracles contained therein, his philosophical position might aptly, if anachronistically, be described as thoroughly positivist" (135). David Wootton, on the other hand, has claimed that the *Discoverie* is informed by the spiritualistic theology of the Family of Love, but agrees with Anglo that Scot did not believe in the independent existence of devils and spirits (120-24). Such claims deserve further discussion, but an appropriate treatment of the subject is beyond the scope of this essay. Therefore, I will not tease out any implications from the *Discoverie* that contradict Scot's explicit statements.

<sup>10</sup> In his edition of *Doctor Faustus*, David Wootton makes a substantial case for Marlowe's familiarity with Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, based on a number of shared linguistic and other idiosyncrasies and parallels that are missing from Marlowe's main source, *The Faustus Book* (cf. xix-xxii).

lowe's Faustus entertains no such doubts, but the play suggests at several points that he would have been well-advised to do so.

### III. Devils in *Doctor Faustus*

In his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) Robert Burton observes that religious despair, to which Faustus is certainly no stranger, could be the source of a great variety of delusions, including that "Thou hast given thy soule to the divell, as Witches and Conjurers doe, *explicitè* and *implicitè*, by compact, band, and obligation" (3: 431). With regard to Faustus, we have good reasons to be as sceptical as Burton. When Faustus writes the pact in his own blood, the blood congeals and a mysterious inscription appears on his arm:

But what is this inscription on mine arm?  
 "Homo, fuge!" Whither should I fly?  
 If unto God, he'll throw thee down to hell.—  
 My senses are deceived; here's nothing writ.—  
 I see it plain. Here in this place is writ  
 "Homo, fuge!" Yet shall not Faustus fly. (2.1.76-81)

Jennifer Waldron reads the scene in light of "Protestant claims that human bodies were God's own theatrical properties" (93) and interprets it as a manifestation of divine providence on the human body (94). Marlowe's version, however, is considerably more sceptical about such supernatural intervention than his source. *The Faust Book* may not mention the congealing blood, but we are given no reason to doubt the appearance of the inscription on his arm:

[H]e took a small penknife and pricked a vein in his left hand, and for certainty thereupon were seen on his hand these words written, as if they had been written with blood: *O homo fuge*; whereat the spirit vanished, but Faustus continued in his damnable mind and made his writing as followeth. (98)

In *The Faust Book*, the inscription appears "for certainty." By contrast, with the temporary disappearance of the inscription Marlowe suggests that Faustus's "senses are deceived." Moreover, this supposed manifestation of God's will remains quite inconsequential and does not dispel Mephistopheles as it does in *The Faust Book*. When proceeding from page to stage, the matter becomes even more dubious. Having an inscription appear and disappear on an actor's arm within seconds must



have been extremely difficult, probably even impossible, to stage. Either the actor adopts a posture which blocks the audience's view of the supposed inscription or acts the scene in such a manner that the audience can plainly see that "here's nothing writ." A performance can thus hardly confirm the intervention of divine providence. It can at best retain some ambiguity, but it might just as well disambiguate the playtext to the effect that Faustus's senses are indeed deceived.

Significantly, Faustus's perception seems to fail him just at the moment when he signs the pact, an action which both Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot had dismissed altogether as resulting from misguided delusion (Clark 201). Scot argues that since the Devil is a spirit, there is no way in which the bargain could be sealed and documented physically: "[T]he ioining of hands with the diuell, the kissing of his bare buttocks, and his scratching and biting of them, are absurd lies" (47). In fact, the impossibility of a pact that has been physically sealed with the Devil means that there is no way to prove it ever occurred: "What credible witnesse is there brought at anie time, of this their corporall, visible, and incredible bargaine; sauing the confession of some person diseased both in bodie and mind, wilfullie made, or iniuriouslie constrained?" (48)

In the sixteenth century, the pact had been of little importance in England to begin with. Witchcraft was rather considered as *maleficum* than heresy. Consequently, the witch's harmful acts were more important than her apostasy. However, the pact, sealed with a physical mark, was an integral part of Calvinist demonology. By 1548, the search for the mark had become part of Genevan witchcraft trials (Almond, *England's First Demonologist* 83). Through the mediation of John Knox, the same procedure was introduced in Scotland and imported to England under King James, who asserted the existence of the pact with the Devil as well as the Devil's mark in his *Daemonologie* (1597) (Almond, *The Devil* 135-40). The Witchcraft Act of 1604 (2 James I c. 12) prohibited a pact with the Devil under penalty of death, and by 1608, William Perkins could write that the pact "is so manifest in daiely experience, that it cannot well be called into question" (*A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft* 49). In accordance with his Calvinist heritage, he also listed the Devil's mark as one of seven forensic criteria for discerning a witch (203). However, when *Doctor Faustus* was first staged in the late 1580s, the pact had not yet become an integral part of English demonology, and we should not take its occurrence in *Doctor Faustus* for granted. The fact that in Marlowe's play, the pact is associated with hallucination and does not feature a physical mark makes it highly suspicious. Calvinist demonologies and witchcraft trials had closely linked the pact to a physical mark,

and sceptics such as Scot seized on this weak spot. Without a mark, there was no proof that a pact had ever been made. Any confession would prove nothing more than that the suspect is "diseased both in bodie and mind," as Faustus's possibly deceived senses suggest, too.

Similarly, the Good and the Evil Angel, absent in *The Faust Book*, are more troubling phenomena than is usually assumed. Tracing their pedigree to the morality play, as is frequently done (Bevington 248; Sinfield 118), is misleading and obscures Marlowe's originality. The pairing of a Good and an Evil Angel is not as common as one might think, and the only morality play that is ever explicitly mentioned in such comparisons is *The Castle of Perseverance* from the early fifteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Given that the play has survived in only one manuscript, it seems unlikely that Marlowe knew of it.

It is more rewarding to look for precedents for Marlowe's angels in theological sources. The guardian angel had been a well-respected concept in patristic and medieval theology (Keck 161-65), and the Evil Angel can be traced back to early Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Peter Lombard seems to take their existence for granted in the *Sentences* (2.11), and *The Golden Legend* is equally clear in the chapter on St Michael: "To every man two angels are given, one good and the other bad, the bad one to test him and the good one to protect him" (593). Although guardian angels did not fare as well after the Reformation and are often discussed without their evil counterpart, Protestant theologians did not unanimously discard the Evil Angel. Moreover, the two angels may still have been part of popular belief, which is plausible in light of their occurrence in the *Golden Legend*.<sup>13</sup>

However, Marlowe's Good and Evil Angel stand out because they are often, and for good reasons, read as merely spiritual impulses.<sup>14</sup> They are closely linked to Faustus's consciousness and seem to have no independent existence. They do not interact with anyone, and Faustus

<sup>11</sup> Stachniewski 296; Matalene 511; Potter 126.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Origen, *De principiis* 3.2.4 and homily 12 on Luke 2.8-11, 49-50; see also the apocryphal *Pastor of Hermas* 2.6.2 (first to second century CE).

<sup>13</sup> Girolami Zanchi, for instance, allows guardian angels for the elect and rejects the Evil Angel (1.3.15). Calvin professes agnosticism concerning the guardian angel, but reports popular belief in a Good and an Evil Angel without denouncing it (*Institutes* 1.14.7). Pietro Martyre Vermigli could be interpreted to the effect that God has indeed appointed Good and Evil Angels although their number is not clear (cf. 1.13.21). As one might expect, Scot rejects them, but reports that papists, and even some Protestants, believe in them (505-06). On Protestant guardian angels in general, see also Peter Marshall 295-316.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Campbell 233-35; Matalene 515-16; and Sinfield 118.

appears not to see them when he wonders: "Who buzzeth in mine ears" (2.3.14)? In one case, Faustus seems to sense their presence even before they enter the stage: "O, something soundeth in mine ears" (2.1.7). At other times, there is no indication that Faustus even notices them (1.1.72-79, 2.3.77-80). Moreover, Faustus's angels tend to appear only after the fact and do little more than repeat Faustus's already disjointed soliloquies (2.1.1-21, 2.3.74-82). Hence they differ significantly from Sensual Suggestion and Conscience in Nathaniel Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience* (1581), to which David Bevington compares them (248). Woodes's advisors are the ones who prompt Philologus to explore the different aspects of his dilemma (4.3) whereas Faustus's angels for the most part merely externalise what is already happening in his mind. Woodes's Sensual Suggestion, even as an abstraction, is solidly real and hatches out plans with the Cardinal in order to overthrow Philologus, but Marlowe constantly raises doubts whether anyone, including Faustus, is aware of the angels' presence, or whether they are not merely a projection of his mind.

To conclude, the existence of personal Good and Evil Angels may have been subject to theological debate, but as metaphors for Faustus's conflicting spiritual impulses, Marlowe's angels can neither be connected to preceding dramatic nor to orthodox theological traditions. They were never stock figures of the morality play, and their ontological elusiveness and close connection to Faustus's consciousness are a far cry from the "Protestant patterning of angels as merely external protective agents" (Marshall 303). The closest parallel for Marlowe's dramatic design is therefore to be found in the Libertine tenet that "devils are evil thoughts, and good angels good thoughts" (Hutchinson 138). Calvin, Bullinger, and Perkins condemned this heresy again and again, but Marlowe seems to explore exactly this kind of radical spiritualism.

This tendency to undermine the agency of supernatural forces is perhaps most pronounced in Faustus's final meeting with the scholars in act 5 scene 2. On this occasion, Faustus babbles, seemingly incoherently: "Look, comes he not? Comes he not?" (5.2.4-5), to which one of the puzzled scholars replies: "What means Faustus?" (5.2.6). Another scholar conjectures that "[b]elike he is grown into some sickness by being over-solitary" (5.2.7-8), to which Scholar 1 replies: "If it be so, we'll have physicians to cure him" (5.2.9). We are thus alerted to the possibility that Faustus might be a pathological case and suffer from melancholia, one of the main sources for a disturbed imagination in early modern medical thought. As Scot observes, "[m]anie thorough melancholie doo imagine, that they see or heare visions, spirits, ghosts, strange noises,

&c” (461), and this is particularly the case with witches: “If anie man aduisedlie marke their words, actions, cogitations, and gestures, he shall perceiue that melancholie abounding in their head, and occupieng their braine, hath depriued or rather depraued their iudgements, and all their senses” (52). This is apparently also the conclusion which the scholars draw. Moreover, Woodes’s *Conflict of Conscience* provides a precedent which renders plausible the hypothesis that at this point, Faustus is indeed hallucinating. In act 5 scene 2, the despairing Philologus, like Faustus, is plagued by visions of devils: “And certainly euen at his [sic] time, I doo most plainly see, / The deuils to be about me rounde” (5.2.2981-82). To this, Theologus replies: “Your minde corrupted dooth present, to you, this false illusion, / But turne awhile, vnto the spirit of trueth, in your distresse, / And it shall cast out from your eies, all horror and confusion” (5.2.2189-91). As in Marlowe’s play, there is no indication that devils are actually present. Philologus’s mistaken trust in what his eyes “doo most plainly see,” and Theologus’s admonition to “cast out from your eies, all horror and confusion,” thus anticipate Marlowe’s distrust in vision as a reliable means of perceiving supernatural forces in *Doctor Faustus*.

If Faustus is merely hallucinating at this point, one crucial question at stake is his objective ability to repent. When he confesses that he has made a pact with the Devil, the scholars exhort him to “call on God” (5.2.25). Faustus, however, replies that the Devil keeps him from repentance: “I would weep, but the devil draws in my tears. Gush forth blood instead of tears, yea, life and soul. O, he stays my tongue! I would lift up my hands, but see, they hold them, they hold them” (5.2.27-30). The scholars, however, do not see anything. Apparently puzzled by Faustus’s frenzy, they merely ask: “Who, Faustus?” (5.2.31). Faustus replies: “Lucifer and Mephistopheles” (5.2.32), but according to the stage directions, neither of them is actually onstage. Quite possibly, no devils are holding down his arms and keeping him from repentance. Instead, Faustus might have become a prisoner of his own misguided imagination and his obsession with reprobation. The epilogue makes clear that Faustus is dead, but we cannot be entirely sure that he has actually been fetched by the devils. Unlike the *Faust Book*, the A-text does not show how an infernal thunderstorm nearly scares the scholars out of their wits and omits the grisly details of how they find the mortal remains of what



once was Faustus. All that the audience is left with at the end of the play is Faustus's subjective horror of damnation.<sup>15</sup>

The B-text of *Doctor Faustus*, however, is at pains to restore some credibility to demonic agency in the play, as is evident in its revision of Faustus's last meeting with the scholars. Here, the B-text goes to great lengths to make clear that Faustus is *not* hallucinating in his last encounter with the scholars. Unlike in the A-text, Lucifer, Beelzebub, and Mephistopheles are actually supposed to be on stage in the scene. At first glance, this seems odd since their presence does not serve any recognisable purpose. They do not speak during Faustus's last encounter with the scholars, and the latter are unable to see them. Critics have therefore characterised the B-text's tendency to increase the number of devils on stage as a pattern of redundancy (Beckerman). However, their presence in Act 5 Scene 2 is not redundant at all. On the contrary, their addition can be read as an attempt to forestall the suspicion raised by the A-text, namely, that they are merely figments of Faustus's disordered imagination. Moreover, the B-version of the scene is quite remarkable because it begins with Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephistopheles, who gleefully anticipate Faustus's terminal despair, before the latter enters with Wagner and the other scholars. It is the most substantial of four scenes in the B-text, as opposed to none in the A-text, in which devils are on stage without any human characters present.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the B-text is at pains to stress that they are not a projection of Faustus's imagination and that their appearance is independent of his presence. The B-text drives this point home by adding even further material to Act 5. After the scholars have left, the Good and the Bad Angel join forces in order to gloat over Faustus's imminent damnation. Faustus is granted a brief vision of both the throne of heaven and the "vast perpetual torture-house" (5.2.116) of hell. And if this were not enough, the B-text undoes another of Marlowe's deviations from his source in the

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<sup>15</sup> One might argue that the stage directions should resolve, if not for the audience, at least for the reader, the whole business of when devils are on stage and when they are not. However, a parallel in Faustus's own dealing in illusions questions such certainty. When Faustus is at the court of Charles V and conjures spirits in the likeness of Alexander and his paramour, the Emperor falls victim to the verisimilitude of Faustus's show: "Sure these are no spirits, but the true substantial bodies of those two deceased princes" (4.1.65-66). Apparently, we cannot rely on the technically misleading stage directions, which state: "Enter Mephistopheles with Alexander and his Paramour." Even though the stage directions indicate the entrance of devils at the end of the play, and even if they are staged like "true substantial bodies," the audience as well as the reader cannot therefore be sure that they actually are what they seem to be.

<sup>16</sup> The other three instances of "independent" devils are 1.3., 3.3., and 5.1 (B-text).

A-text by adding a final scene in which the scholars collect Faustus's mangled limbs, as they do in *The Faust Book*. There remains no doubt that the Devil is not only a spiritual but also a material force to be reckoned with.

#### IV. Predestination and the Devil

In the remainder of this essay, I will suggest that the differences between the A-text and the B-text with regard to demonic agency might shed some new light on the play's stance towards the doctrine of predestination and some of the problems which scholarship on this question has raised. One first problem comes with the frequent claim that the B-text emphasises free will and mutes predestination. As Michael Keefer argues in the copious introduction to his edition of the play, "passages that suggest Faustus's acts of choice may not have been free were systematically altered" (19) in the B-text.<sup>17</sup> Just to give one example, the A-text's line "Accursèd Faustus, where is mercy now?" (5.1.62), which foregrounds the importance of God's granting or withholding of mercy, is replaced with "Accursèd Faustus, wretch, what hast thou done?" (5.1.64), stressing Faustus's own agency and depravity. However, Keefer is also aware that an interpretation of the B-text's alterations as emphasising free will are inconsistent (93). Unlike in the A-text, Mephistopheles, too, now takes responsibility for Faustus's downfall: "'Twas I that, when thou wert i'the way to heaven, / Damned up thy passage" (5.2.92-93). One could even say that the B-text's thoroughgoing emphasis on demonic agency consistently undermines Faustus's autonomy.

Although it is certainly true that the B-text highlights Faustus's volition and depravity, this does not mean that the B-text is anti-predestinarian or that its emphasis on demonic agency contradicts the emphasis on Faustus's will. Freedom of will and freedom of action should not be confused, and even if one is free to act as one wishes (i.e. freedom of action), it does not follow that the will has been free all along. That is to say, just because the B-text highlights Faustus's volition, his will is not necessarily free. By stressing Faustus's volition and the Devil's agency at the same time, the B-text is therefore not inconsistent, but forestalls the conclusion that God is the immediate and unapologetic author of the tragedy of reprobation, something which the Church of England felt very uneasy about.

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<sup>17</sup> See also Hunter, 64; Marcus 48.



Critics usually read *Doctor Faustus* through the lens of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, where the doctrine of double predestination is laid out in exemplary clarity, including reprobation. But clerics were well aware that reprobation was notoriously difficult to preach and to apply fruitfully in a pastoral context. As Erasmus had famously pointed out in *De libero arbitrio*: "Who will be able to bring himself to love wholeheartedly the God who has created a hell seething with everlasting tortures where he can punish his own evil deeds in wretched human beings, as though he delighted in their suffering?" (CWE 76: 13). Consequently, many Protestant theologians had qualms about openly preaching double predestination. Such pastoral uneasiness with reprobation is evident in the "rustic Pelagianism" encouraged by the Prayer Book, as in "the prayer which any Calvinist was bound to find objectionable, that all men might be saved" (Collinson, *The Elizabethan* 37).<sup>18</sup> Even Nicholas Tyacke, who argues that the Thirty-Nine Articles "favoured the Calvinists," notes that "the Elizabethan Prayer Book needed careful exposition in order not to contradict predestinarian theology" (3). Also the "Homilie of Repentaunce" in the *Book of Homilies* stresses that it is never too late to repent: "Doth not the Lorde hymselfe say by the prophete: I will not the death of the wicked, but that he turne from his wicked ways and liue?" (*The second Tome of Homilies* 511) Finally, pastoral concerns are also evident in the definitive dogmatic statement of the Church of England on predestination, Article 17 of the Elizabethan Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion:

[F]or curious and carnal persons, lacking the spirite of Christe, to haue continually before their eyes the sentence of Gods predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the deuyl doth thrust them either into desperation, or into rechelesnesse of most vncleane liuing, no lesse perilous then desperation. (391)

What is striking is the importance which the article attributes to the Devil in inducing despair. Likewise, Vermigli (3.1.33) and Bullinger (644-47) argue that to fall into suspicion of one's own reprobation is the Devil's work and that one simply cannot know for sure if one is reprobate or not.

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<sup>18</sup> For instance in the "Commination against sinners, with certaine prayers, to be used diuers times in the yere": "O moste mighty GOD, and mercyfull father which haste compassion of al men, and hatest nothing that thou haste made: whiche wouldest not the deathe of a synner, but that he should rather turne from synne, and be saved . . . Thy propertye is to have mercy" (181).

Critics often point out that Calvinism was fashionable during Marlowe's Cambridge days (Stachniewski 49; Keefer 53), but that does not warrant the postulation of a Calvinist hegemony. Patrick Collinson points out that "English theologians were as likely to lean on Bullinger of Zürich, Musculus of Berne, or Peter Martyr as on Calvin or Beza." In fact:

if we were to identify one author and one book which represented the centre of theological gravity of the Elizabethan Church it would not be Calvin's *Institutes* but the *Common Places* of Peter Martyr. . . . And at least equally influential was Bullinger. (Collinson, "England and International Calvinism" 214-15)

Also the characterisation of Article 17 as Calvinist is misleading. David Neelands has shown that "Vermigli more than any other individual, should be seen as the source, if not the author, of Article 17" (374). For Vermigli, predestination is not double predestination in Calvin's sense because reprobation is not so much a positive decree as an omission of grace. It is "the most wise purpose of God, whereby he hath before all eternitie, constantlie decreed without any iniustice, *not to haue mercie* on those whome he hath not loued, but hath overhipped them" (3.1.15; emphasis added). According to Vermigli, "[t]he elect onlie, and not the reprobate, are predestinate" (3.1.9), and Article 17 likewise only mentions "[p]redestination to lyfe." Notably, if reprobation is nothing else but "overhipping," this leaves some space for the Devil as tempter to despair.

Calvin, on the other hand, had no qualms about the positive decree of reprobation even in a pastoral context: "Whoever, then, heaps odium upon the doctrine of predestination openly reproaches God, as if he had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the church" (*Institutes* 3.21.4). There were fruitful lessons to be drawn from the contemplation of reprobation, and these basically amounted to a pedagogy of fear and terror since no other means are capable of rousing fallen humanity. Calvin notes in his preface to Matteo Gribaldi's account of the death of the famous reprobate Francesco Spiera: "Because god woulde shake from vs this beastlye sluggishnes, he sheweth often tymes, such monstrous examples as maie constraine vs to feelee, yea, thoughe we be aslepe" (Aiiiv).<sup>19</sup> In *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei* (1552), Calvin similarly exhorts

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<sup>19</sup> Francesco Spiera, the Protestant archetype of despair, was an Italian Protestant who recanted before the Inquisition of Venice and consequently died in despair and in the conviction of his reprobation in 1548. See M. A. Overell 619-37.

believers “to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling” in order to correct “the indolence of our flesh” (8.8). Calvin is aware of the Scylla of complacency and false security. Unlike Bullinger and Vermigli, however, he is hardly worried about the Charybdis of despair: “God commands the ears of His people to tremble at the voice of His prophet (Is 6.9). That their hearts may be touched? Rather that they be hardened. That those who hear may repent? Rather that the already lost may perish twice over” (9.6). For Calvin, despair is not an unintended consequence of preaching predestination that provides an opening for the Devil’s destructive insinuations. It is a vehicle of providence.

For a dramatic rendition of Calvin’s pastoral view of predestination, we might turn to Woodes’s *Case of Conflict*, which is based on Gribaldi’s account of Spiera’s death. Spiera/Philologus is convinced that he is reprobate and repeatedly makes sense of his own downfall in the same terms as Calvin in the preface to Gribaldi’s account. God plagues him with suicidal despair, but nonetheless keeps him alive, in order to instruct others with his godly tragedy: “But I alas, shall in this lyfe, in torments still remaine, / while Gods iust anger, vpon mee, shall be reuealed plaine: / And I example made to all, of Gods iust indignation” (5.2.2325-27).<sup>20</sup> However, this emphasis on divine purpose in the drama of reprobation is muted in Vermigli’s suggestion that “peradventure God did not this to Spiera, but the diuell” (3.1.33). Vermigli and Bullinger are at pains to clear God from any responsibility for the tragedy of reprobation.<sup>21</sup> With its stress on demonic agency, the B-text encourages the same conclusion. Not God, but the devils are keeping Faustus from repentance. While the A-text lays bare the horrors of predestination by highlighting Faustus’s spiritual paralysis and largely removing the Devil from the equation, the B-text can indeed be considered as a return to orthodoxy, that is, an interpretation of predestination in the sense of Bullinger and especially Vermigli, whose theology is captured in Article

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<sup>20</sup> See also 5.4.1984-90; 5.4.2039-40; 5.2.2205-06.

<sup>21</sup> Strictly speaking, however, God can not be entirely dissociated from the actions of the Devil. Like most Protestants, Bullinger thinks that the Devil “can doe nothing without Gods permission” (753). This, however, is an inference that Bullinger and Vermigli understandably prefer not to draw when it comes to reprobation. Vermigli makes a similar concession when he admits the possibility that “God would in [Spiera], by a certeine singular, and vnaccustomed dispensation, feare awaie others from the like wickedness and impietie.” Unlike Calvin, however, he refuses to propagate a pedagogy based on the fear of reprobation and insists “that this neither customablie happeneth, as far as we can gather out of histories; neither also can anie man, by the holie scriptures, see this desperation.” Hence, “it is vaine . . . that manie fall into suspicion of their reprobation” (3.1.33).

17. By focusing on agency rather than the problem of volition itself – or the lack thereof – the B-text sidesteps the issue of free will and reflects Vermigli's and Bullinger's pastoral uneasiness about reprobation. Instead of sounding the depths of God's decrees, the B-text simply rehearses Vermigli's and Bullinger's warning against the Devil's temptation to despair. *Doctor Faustus* should therefore not be read as a Calvinist drama of reprobation that instils fear and terror of an inscrutable God, but rather a moralising gloss on Article 17, which aptly captures the article's pattern of diabolical temptation, despair, and damnation. In Bullinger's words, Faustus makes the mistake of listening to "the eggings of the diuel, wherewith he goeth about not onely to ouerwhelm the hope of our election, but to make vs suspect and doubt of God as though he had his creature in hatred, whom hee had rather haue destroyed than saued" (647). God is not responsible but the Devil. Unlike Philologus in the Calvinist *Conflict of Conscience*, the B-text Faustus is therefore not the chosen vessel of God's didactic spectacle of terror; instead, he dutifully accuses Mephistopheles: "O thou bewitching fiend, 'twas thy temptation / Hath robbed me of eternal happiness" (5.2.89-90).

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