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Richard Hillman, André Lascombes & Pauline Ruberry-Blanc

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Bob GODFREY pp. 149-166
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Offence and Appeal: A Marlowe Paradox?

Bob Godfrey
University of Northampton

Even if the Baines libel and Kyd's evasions be only partly true—and there's quite enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that there's smoke, if not absolute fire—Marlowe's writings give evidence of a disposition to confrontation. He is bent not just on subverting traditional views but on proceeding along alternative lines, scurrilous or blasphemous or even treasonous as these might appear to less adventurous spirits. Dominant cultures always offer themselves to challenge, especially from the up-and-coming generations. Thus, while the fact of Marlowe's youth might be raised in his defence, since rebellion is its concomitant, I see it as a necessary element in any assessment of him. Whatever his age or immaturity, we must never forget that Marlowe was a lead member in a revolution in theatre writing and performance. So my essay will explore how far Marlowe's image as the *enfant terrible* of the early English stage may be deserved and some of the ways in which he challenged the values of the elders. In pursuit of this I will treat of two plays, *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage* and *The Tragicall History of Dr Faustus*, regarded as early and late productions of the playwright, and seek some contiguous cultural and ideological issues out of two recent performances, the production of *Dido*

given by the Royal National Theatre in Spring of 2009 and my own production of *Dr Faustus* in December 2008.

The Royal National Theatre's production of *Dido* received a mixed reception. In *The Guardian*, Michael Billington welcomed "a straight, sober rendering of an unfamiliar work" that "forced us to listen to the text" and found it "inspiriting to see a forgotten dramatic landmark rendered with such style and dignity". Dido's journey through the play was indicated first by "tender compassion" succeeded by "fierce eroticism", and in the final moments she was "close to madness in her moment of desertion". It had, for Billington, "the authentic whiff of tragedy". In contrast, Charles Spencer of the *Telegraph*, under the influence of a previous "sprightly promenade performance" that "achieved a fine tragic intensity", found that the RNT actors made "a messy, three course dog's dinner of the blank verse". The love relationship he saw was "without sexual spark", and Aeneas "a prolix bore". The "painfully slow and lack-lustre production" was "no way to treat a difficult but potentially rewarding classic". Kate Kellaway in *The Observer* was surprised that this "dazzling, unwieldy, rarely performed tragedy" was "also brimful of comedy". She also responded to Dido's "awakening" to love and her second awakening to anguish at Aeneas's apparently heartless abandonment of her. Such mixed messages invite response and, above all, the question remains as to what the Elizabethans might have made of the play.

It is indeed true that *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage*,[1] thought of as the earliest of Marlowe's plays, is a mixed experience in reading as well as in performance. First, it is an adventure in dramatic adaptation: either through straight translation or close paraphrase, Marlowe makes direct use of forty percent of his source in Books One, Two, and Four of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus he borrows energy and vital characterisation from the original. Secondly, in spite of this dependency upon his source text, Marlowe's script exhibits an independent and sharp understanding of dramatic writing. Finally, his thematic choices contain signs of original and indeed challenging emphases.

As far as dramatisation is concerned, take, for example, the extended story of the Fall of Troy to which Virgil gives over the whole of Book Two, about 800 lines of densely expressed verse. Marlowe skilfully contracts that into 170 lines and builds a dramatic tension with his own interpolations. At a great feast to entertain this fabled hero, Dido first drinks to Aeneas's "better fortune" (II.i.98)

1 All references to *Dido* derive from the edition of Oliver.

and then invites him to tell the story of the battle and his escape from Troy. At first Marlowe's Aeneas is overcome with emotion—he cannot bring himself to speak. A tension is thus created in the audience—both on and off the stage—already keen to hear the details. Aeneas then begins, but very soon succumbs again to grief. Kate Kellaway remarked how, in the hands of a skilful actor, the story appeared "almost too painful to tell". Dido, intent and by this time absorbed in the story, curious as to what may follow, voices, perhaps, what an audience might feel—"Nay, leave not here; resolve me of the rest" (II.i.160)—and Aeneas is encouraged to continue and so perseveres. At different points in the narration, however, Marlowe gives Dido interjections: "O, Hector, who weeps not to hear thy name!"(II.i.209); "Ah, how could poor Aeneas scape their hands?" (II.i.220). The playwright thus consciously varies the tempo and plays on the emotional tension in the spectators. As the story intensifies, Dido suddenly voices a painful unease, with "O end, Aeneas, I can hear no more!" (II.i.243). The interruption is momentary, and on this occasion Aeneas presses forward to the climax of his account, in which he describes most graphically Pyrrhus's gross treatment first of Hecuba, who is flung over the walls, and then of Priam, whose hands are cut off. Aeneas tells how he took his father on his back, how he lost his wife in the *mêlée*, how he left Cassandra "sprawling in the streets", how he failed to save Polyxena, who was "after, by that Pyrrhus, sacrificed" (II.i.288). All of which compels Dido at last to cry out, "I die with melting ruth; Aeneas, leave!" (II.i.289)—and so he does. He claims that sorrow has tired him out.

Thus it may be seen how Marlowe both does justice to his source and at the same time vibrantly transforms it for the theatre. He makes it possible for an actor to manage what otherwise would be a truly extensive monologue, and he prompts his audience to share in the rising tension, as the events of the story grow to a climax. The emotional parabola of the scene is excellently controlled. Finally, the audience is let down gently from the emotional heights of the tale, and Dido ends the scene with an invitation to find "some pleasing sport, / To rid us from these melancholy thoughts" (II.i.302-3).

Indeed, it could be said that Marlowe's approach to adaptation in this early work is surprisingly mature. Aeneas's account of the fall of Troy, taken from Book Two of the *Aeneid,* fills out most of Act Two. The scene that completes the act, however, Venus's plan to substitute her own son Cupid for Aeneas's son Ascanius, belongs to Virgil's Book One. While the main plot for Acts Three, Four and Five derives directly from Book Four of the *Aeneid*, nevertheless Marlowe

works to adapt his source to meet his dramatic needs. For instance, in the *Aeneid* Hermes visits Aeneas twice, once in person and once in a dream. Marlowe reverses the order of these occurrences in support of his other major change to Virgil, which is to make Aeneas's departure from Carthage not a single, determined action but rather a hesitant two-step affair. The reversal of these two events enables Marlowe to develop the substance of his hero's hesitation in betraying Dido. Aeneas's first attempt to leave is reflected in the speech that begins:

> I fain would go, yet beauty holds me back.
> To leave her so and not once say farewell
> Were to transgress against all laws of love;
> But if I use such ceremonious thanks
> As parting friends accustom on the shore,
> Her silver arms will coll me round about
> And tears of pearl cry, "Stay Aeneas, stay!"
> Each word she says will then contain a crown,
> And every speech be ended with a kiss.
> I may not dure this female drudgery:
> To sea, Aeneas, find out Italy! (IV.iii.46-56)

Despite this apparent decision to set off for Italy, the subsequent encounter with Dido goes exactly as Aeneas has imagined. Marlowe intensifies the situation by having Dido seduce him with the sovereignty of Carthage. She invests him first with the Punic crown and sceptre. Aeneas's passionate response expresses both gratitude for her help and intense love:

> O Dido, patroness of all our lives,
> When I leave thee, death be my punishment!
> Swell, raging seas, frown, wayward Destinies;
> Blow, winds; threaten, ye rocks and sandy shelves!
> This is the harbour that Aeneas seeks,
> Let's see what tempests can annoy me now. (IV.iv.55-60)

Dido then hails him "Carthaginian King" and invites him to join her. "Speak of no other land, this land is thine", she says, "Dido is thine, henceforth I'll call thee lord" (IV.iv.83-84).

Marlowe develops the space thus gained into scenes and avowals of love between his two protagonists that reinforce the audience's impression of a fulfilled love story. It is possible that some of the intensity of these exchanges between

the lovers derives from a reading of Ovid's *Heroides*. However, the playwright has prepared a trap for his audience. Aeneas's acceptance of the loving invitation to become lord and creator of a new imperial Carthage will founder in face of the message that Hermes brings in person. It is abrupt and unequivocal: "I tell thee thou must straight to Italy / Or else abide the wrath of frowning Jove" (V.i.53-54). And thus the events that Virgil has recounted ensue; Aeneas departs and Dido immolates herself. The will of the gods triumphs but at the cost of a life, a theme I will return to shortly.

My main point so far is that this apparently early play reveals a startlingly capable talent in terms of dramatic invention and structuring. Furthermore, there is maturity in the shaping and music of the language, the skills of rhetoric confidently applied to the lively representation of character through interactive speech. The blank verse has that life and flexibility that feed off the rhythms and stresses of the spoken language. Virgil's evocative poem was itself an inspiration, but here it is most successfully animated into drama. If this was his first performed play, then Marlowe really had arrived in spectacular fashion.

But perhaps the greatest departure of all from his source resides in Marlowe's treatment of the gods. In the *Aeneid,* Virgil offers a picture of the behaviour of the gods in direct and often bad-tempered conflict with each other over the destinies of their chosen heroes. He does so apparently without irony or criticism. Yet Virgil's gods are revealed as a dysfunctional family, whose governance of mortals is conditioned by their own appetites, preferences, hates and loves. Marlowe, it would appear, perceived the absurdity of this situation, responded directly to it and ran with it in his own imagination. So the play opens with Jupiter shown in the company of Ganymede. Marlowe here takes the opportunity to subvert any established view of an almighty god by representing him as in thrall to a catamite—a rent boy, as it were. Ganymede complains against Juno, whose daughter Hebe he has supplanted as cup-bearer to Jupiter, for smacking him round the head—the action of a deeply affronted goddess who has not only lost out to Venus in the Judgement of Paris but also finds insult in Jupiter's preference for this boy. Jupiter, who is utterly besotted with Ganymede, responds to this as a personal affront, at first angrily complaining against Juno, and then, more weedlingly, to the boy himself:

> What is't, sweet wag, should I deny thy youth,
> Whose face reflects such pleasure to mine eyes

As I, exhal'd with thy fire-darting beams,
Have often driven back the horses of the night,
When as they would have hal'd thee from my sight?
Sit on my knee, and call for thy content,
Control proud fate, and cut the thread of time.
Why, are not all the Gods at thy command
And heaven and earth the bounds of thy delight? (I.i.23-31)

That this spoilt brat should be enticed into sexual favours with the gift of absolute power in heaven given away at the whim of the almighty represents an anarchic situation. As Dena Goldberg has suggested, it would appear that "Indirect satire of Christian providentialism … figures largely in *Dido Queen of Carthage*" (Goldberg, p. 578). Marlowe seems here to be asking how it is possible to take seriously any idea of the gods' care for human beings. Furthering this impression, Venus enters and berates Jupiter for favouring "that female wanton boy" while her poor little boy, her son Aeneas, "wanders on the seas, / and rests a prey to every billow's pride" (I.i.51-53). She then goes on to blame her sister, "false Juno", for Aeneas's shipwreck troubles. Thus, however much the gods may appear to be concerned about the individual lives of mortals, their own conflicts, rivalries, and jealousies get in the way. Goldberg draws especial attention to the speech in which Venus blames her father for allowing Juno to raise the storms that trouble Aeneas:

False Jupiter, rewards't thou virtue so?
What, is not piety exempt from woe?
Then die, Aeneas, in thine innocence,
Since that religion hath no recompense. (I.i.78-82)

A similar denial of the gods' interest occurs at the point where Aeneas is about to leave Dido. He excuses himself by stating that he must not "gainsay the Gods' behest". Dido's reply delivers a further resounding blow to faith:

The Gods? What Gods be those that seek my death?
Wherein have I offended Jupiter
That he should take Aeneas from mine arms?
O no, the Gods weigh not what lovers do:
It is Aeneas calls Aeneas hence (V.i.128-32).

Having shown us the gods' own wilfulness and irresponsibility, Marlowe takes a step further in allowing his eponymous heroine to deny the gods' interest in human affairs altogether. Through this, responsibility is shifted to the human

sphere—a perspective that is echoed in each of Marlowe's other plays, most graphically, of course, in *Tamburlaine*. Framed in the absurd manner that it is in *Dido*, it is a perspective that suggests that experience, especially of misfortune, as in Dido's case, may be attributed to human rather than divine influence, and that this casts real doubt upon the efficacy of the divine. It is easy to hear how such ideas resonate with the Baines libel, where Marlowe is reported as querying "*If* there be any god or any good religion, (etc, etc)" and "*If* he were put to write a new religion" (Honan, p. 374), as if the existing religious sensitivities, engaged in the process of the Elizabethan Reformation, were open to such "ifs" being asked, as we know they were not. Dido dies a blameless victim of misplaced love that has been engineered by Venus to assist Aeneas in pursuit of his destiny. The gods are not even-handed in their distribution of blessings.

Even the choice of the story of *Dido and Aeneas* was not without its implications in the 1580s. As is well known, Tudor royal portraits were fashioned to carry emblematic meanings that were underpinned by ideological premises. The viewer was invited to read the representation of an imperial crown, for instance, in the famous "Armada portrait" of Queen Elizabeth of 1590, as an index of her burgeoning imperial status in relation to the world at large. In the less well-known "Sieve portrait" of ten years earlier, an imperial crown is also pictured. In this earlier portrait, the crown is less dominant, appearing only as a motif on a decorative column set behind the Queen. However, it shares space on the column with engravings of nine episodes from the story of Dido and Aeneas. The juxtaposition of the crown imperial, the classical narrative and the sieve held by Elizabeth carries a weight of signification that is directly applicable to Elizabeth's situation in the early 1580s. It is a period when English seamen like Francis Drake, encouraged by the Crown, are venturing in earnest and seeking to extend British rule, as well as trade. As significantly for our case, around 1580 Elizabeth revived a courtship between herself and the Duke of Anjou. It was carried on with an extravagant chivalric courteousness on both sides but played out against a political background in which it is clear that Anjou was seeking an influential marriage with a view to gaining an ally in his war against the Spanish in the Netherlands. On her side, Elizabeth was responding to pressure at home to marry and have children to carry on the succession. As it was often interpreted at this time, the story of *Dido and Aeneas* might be said to have a direct bearing on this situation. In her *Astraea*, Frances Yates expresses the interpretation succinctly: "Pious Aeneas, the Trojan ancestor, through Brut, of the British Imperial line of which Elizabeth is the descendant", rejected the

love of Dido in pursuit of his imperial destiny to found the city of Rome (Yates, p. 115). The sieve as emblem of the Vestal Virgin, Tuccia, who appears in Petrarch's *Triumph of Chastity*, supports and confirms Elizabeth's role as "Gloriana", the Virgin Queen. "The message is clear", as Roy Strong writes: "Elizabeth, descended from Aeneas, has also spurned the wiles of love to found an empire, this time a British one. And this message is rounded off by the globe that sits in the lower corner of the painting showing ships voyaging forth to colonise new lands from the island of Britain" (Strong, p. 12).

With all this emblematic luggage associated with the story of *Dido and Aeneas*, one might ask under what conditions a young and inexperienced poet was commissioned in the early 1580s to dramatise this same story for the Children of Her Majesty's Chapel. Was it, for instance, intended for performance before her majesty? If so, then the play that emerged from Marlowe's pen was clearly unorthodox in one significant way. From the evidence of the adaptation, Marlowe clearly empathises deeply with the predicament of his heroine. He places Queen Dido at the centre of the tragedy and cuts down Virgil's representation of Aeneas drastically. The playwright develops the scenes of Aeneas's hesitation so that his final departure appears even more reprehensible as a betrayal of his own and his lover-queen's feelings. Dido's hyperbole expresses her genuine passion:

> If he forsake me not, I never die,
> For in his looks I see eternity,
> And he'll make me immortal with a kiss. (IV.iv.121-23)

Her final speech carries a devastating condemnation of the man:

> Now, Dido, with these relics burn thyself,
> And make Aeneas famous through the world
> For perjury and slaughter of a queen. (V.i.292-94)

Marlowe chooses to foreground the passionate wronged love, rather than the purity of the imperial destiny. But what might the queen have made of this—she who on another occasion could recognise herself in the character of Richard II? She, who can on one day say publicly to the French ambassador, "You may write to your King: that the Duke of Anjou shall be my husband", and at the same moment turn to Anjou and kiss him on the mouth, is the same person who next day can tell the Duke of Anjou that she cannot marry him after all—her people would not approve (Weir, p. 340). Seated at the play, would she be inclined

to identify herself with the desperate Dido—rumour had it that she was amorously engaged with the Duke of Anjou, the courtship has been interpreted as more than just a flirtatious political game—or would she identify herself with the figure of Aeneas, the betrayer? If with the betrayer, would she be able to go further and compliment herself on her good judgement in escaping from a compromising situation? Her emblematic portrait, commissioned, some think, by her favourite Christopher Hatton, might suggest this, but if her sympathies did lie with Dido, would she not mourn a lost opportunity to find fulfilment through love? History has lent us little to confirm or deny such speculation, but in so far as plays, like portraits, were open for interpretation, Marlowe's emphasis in *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage* reflects at the very least an alternative inflection of his classical source. It indicates a perceptive imagination at work that sets its own terms for representing the world.

Turning, then, to *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*,[2] ostensibly one of his most popular pieces and one which most people think they know as Marlowe's, we find, in the first place, that the texts we read raise a number of awkward questions about their provenance and reliability. Eric Rasmussen's detailed study of the texts (*A Textual Companion to Doctor Faustus*) has shown that in so far as one can tell, the 1604 Quarto may be seen to be the result of a collaboration with a second writer who was largely responsible for the comic scenes, while Marlowe produced the central plot of Faustus's conjuring, his compact with the devil and his eventual end. The second text taken to be authoritative, the 1616 Quarto, can be shown to represent the 1604 version with some editing, but also with some censoring and considerable additions. Now I have been involved with three productions of the play, first playing Mephistopheles and then later the Chorus, and most recently as director. The production in which I played Mephistopheles in 1960 was based on a hybrid text that took some of A and some of B and cut swathes of both to accommodate a central dance drama reflecting Faustus's dreams of omnipotence and his failure. Although the central history of Dr Faustus was very like that of the 1604 version, it incorporated elements from 1616 that assumed that the devil had guided Faustus into his transgression:

> When thou took'st the book
> To view the Scriptures, then I turned the leaves
> And led thine eye. (B-Text, V.ii.93-95)

2 References to the text will be based upon the dual version edited by Bevington and Rasmussen.

This was made more obvious by having Mephistopheles present and performing just that action during Faustus's first speech. Thus represented is a clear case of temptation deriving from a malevolent source, in which the need to enlarge Lucifer's kingdom becomes paramount. Such determinism serves to enhance the tragic nature of Faustus's position—his hubris was the hamartia that led him into a forbidden place. He had not the power then to escape his destiny. In this case, perhaps, for the devil read the agent of a Christian god concerned with preserving what in ancient Greece was known as *diké* and, for Faustus, the protagonist who strives against his fate but who must inevitably take the consequences of his false pact with the devil.

In the production where I played the Chorus in 1967, the 1616 version was performed in full, and I was asked to play the role as if it was the "atheist" Marlowe. The heavy irony of this approach makes Faustus's "fiendful fortune" (B-Text, Epilogue, 5) an example of an heroic attempt to outface the existing and limiting ideologies of the church and state—a very late 60s stance, you might say. My own production in 2008 was based firmly in the 1604 text, a version that on the face of it attempts to represent Faustus's acts as hubristic and maybe misguided but also as deserving of some sympathetic understanding. As a central conceit, the production offered the audience the image of a Faustus already in hell, whose eternal torment was repeatedly to play through his life choices and his progress to damnation. Thus, for a twenty-first century audience, for whom the whole idea of summoning the devil belongs more with computer gaming than with a soul's ultimate destiny, the story was presented in an objective fashion that invited questions. Even though Faustus's hellish predicament is already established, such a frame focuses attention both on Faustus's own journey, a retrospective view, and the devil's case, as it ostensibly remains.

These three productions with their different emphases illustrate well how for present day audiences the play eludes certainty and as such offers the widest variety of approaches to interpretation. Nor is the dating of these different productions insignificant, as they reflect in part the cultural moments at which they were realised. One of the key elements, however, in the issue of interpretation is the questions surrounding the texts that survive: the A-Text of 1604 and the very different B-Text of 1616. Despite Eric Rasmussen's detailed and clearly argued piece, the deeper question about which is closer to Marlowe's original is, of course, incapable of absolute resolution, not least because the A-Text was published at least ten years after the play was first written and performed, and the

B-Text ten or so years after that. The picture is further complicated by Henslowe's note of payments to Samuel Rowley and William Burde in 1602 for "additions in Dr Fostes" (Henslowe, p. 206), raising the spectre of Marlowe's original play even by 1604 having become a palimpsest of versions in which the purity of Marlowe's contribution has become obscured.

While the textual issue of priority may not be resolved, it remains clear that the A- and B-Texts do inflect the story differently, and it is worthwhile briefly to consider these differences in more detail. While Acts One and Two in each version are similar and exhibit only minor, mainly verbal, differences, most of the additional material in the B-Text is contained in Acts Three and Four. For instance, the anti-papal scenes are more developed than in A, where we have just a knock-about episode that attempts to disparage the papal court and to reveal a level of superstitious terror amongst the attendant friars. In this A follows the *English Faust Book* closely. B, without abandoning this scene, offers a more complex though somewhat anachronistic version of the intrigues and evils of imperial Catholicism. This addition has facets that link it ostensibly to Samuel Rowley, who, as elsewhere, seems to have relied to some extent on John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* as a source. Likewise, the Emperor scenes are expanded to include the Knight's revenge, and extensions are made to the Horse Courser and Clown scenes that dovetail with the Vanholt episode to increase the comic effect.

These scenes may in themselves add decoration and extend the comic element, but far more significant differences occur through Act Five in B. In the *Faust Book* (Chap. 48), Faustus takes dinner with an Old Man, a neighbour, who exhorts him to repent. In A, the Old Man takes up the theme of "flagitious crimes and heinous sins" (A-Text, V.i.44), and invites Faustus to turn to Christ, acknowledge God's mercy and Christ's sacrifice of atonement. He sees an angel hovering over Faustus's head "with a vial full of precious grace" (A-Text, V.i.54). In B, different elements from the same source have been tailored to a different set of values. It is more of an appeal to Faustus's reason as a man. The Old Man has "hope that this my kind rebuke, / Checking thy body, may amend thy soul" (B-Text, V.i.50-51). The A-Text Old Man suggests a hieratical authority and ritual comforts associated with the "old religion", whereas the B-Text Old Man speaks evenly, though magisterially, in a style that might be associated with a minister of the "new religion".

Approaching the final moments of the play, however, the B-Text develops a sensational series of actions that serve to rack up the audience's sense of

Faustus's sin and to present all the horror of his future in hell. The B-Text brings Lucifer, accompanied by Mephistopheles and Beelzebub, onto the scene at V.ii to observe and to gloat over their victim in his final agonising moments of freedom. Their speeches deliberately shape the audience's perception of sinful consequences. Beelzebub says that they will sit in Faustus's study, "To mark him how he doth demean himself" (B-Text, V.ii.10), to which Mephistopheles replies,

> How should he but in desperate lunacy?
> Fond worldling, now his heart-blood dries with grief;
> His conscience kills it, and his labouring brain
> Begets a world of idle fantasies
> To overreach the devil. But all in vain.
> His store of pleasures must be sauced with pain. (B-Text, V.ii.11-16)

Both texts then reproduce the very affecting scene with the scholars, who show real concern for Faustus, a scene derived very particularly from the *English Faust Book*. While A then proceeds directly to the final great speech, B adds uniquely the moment in which Mephistopheles tells of his guiding hand in the process of temptation. B then provides a further interlude reintroducing the Good and Evil Angels, who show respectively "the joys of heaven" (B-Text, V.ii.177) that Faustus will miss, manifest in a splendid descending and ascending golden throne, and the terrors and torments of hell for which he is destined, in a hell mouth revealed and the sententious line, "He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall" (B-Text, V.ii.135). It is an added moralising spectacle clearly intended to impress the audience yet again with the dire nature of Faustus's transgression and the contrast between his punishment and his loss of bliss.

Faustus's final agon before he is taken by the devils is rendered similarly in both texts, but once again B adds in material before the final chorus. The scholars re-enter the room to discover, literally, the bits and pieces of Faustus—teeth and brains and limbs—scattered about, another direct borrowing from the *English Faust Book*. It is a ghoulish moment, as they gather up the body parts for a proper burial.

This demonstrates further that the additional material of B seems both to appeal to an audience's appetite for sensation while attempting to impose a moral fear upon them—a very Jacobean kind of ethos. I would have to agree with those who suggest that this detracts from the drama as represented by the A-Text, which I would assert offers a simpler but no less affecting finale just because the response is most in the imagination. While Marlowe was no stranger

to sensational effects, nevertheless the direct appeal of the man, Faustus himself, in the A-Text, hallucinating devils in the presence of the scholars, finally facing up to the consequences of his bond with the devil, seeing Christ's blood streaming in the firmament in the long lonely hour of his personal torment before the end, tells us movingly of the pain of anticipation and foregrounds the sheer terror of death and damnation without any added machinery of fantasy or threat. Indeed, as the action progresses in the A-Text, Faustus has become more and more afraid of the immanent prospect of physical dismemberment, of being torn in pieces by devils and of eternal torture and pain. In this, I would argue, Marlowe is invoking a familiar image and, in light of his own "risky" career as a special agent, one of which he himself has some reason to be genuinely afraid. In Elizabethan England the rack awaited the heretic, the atheist, the non-conformist, as did the prospect of hanging, drawing, quartering and sometimes even fire. The audience, too, would be only too familiar with the state rituals of such merciless public punishments. Faustus's terror at the end, for all his arrogance and foolishness, for all his pursuit of appetite and self-aggrandisement, could strike a sympathetic chord, in spite of everything. The speech still has power to invite sympathy for the protagonist without making Faustus easily attractive or without blame. The very human predicament in the face of metaphysical absolutism seems fraught with such crosscurrents, and the play, I think, especially through its A-Text, poses the question directly as to whether this is either a just or necessary, let alone a desirable or believable, outcome. It seems that here in *Faustus* we have a reworking of the *Dido* question regarding the dependability of the gods and their supposed goodwill towards mankind. Most audience members in the 1590s would undoubtedly have agreed that magic was an illicit means of gaining power and that Faustus was at fault. But we are dealing with an age of deeply held beliefs that there is another contiguous world of "influences", even "spirits", that can interfere for good or ill in your life. If Alleyn feels he must take out insurance against the possible effects of conjuring a devil on stage—the white surplice with a pronounced cross upon it—what of the spectators' anticipation of that possibility? Sure enough, they had seen devils a-plenty on the popular stage, but had they not generally been presented in the margins as essentially comic—an element that the comic scenes in *Faustus* certainly exploit. But in this play, when the devil is conjured and appears as a ferocious dragon to fright the people, he has to be dismissed to appear in a more acceptable shape. He then appears in the personable and all too human figure of Mephistopheles,

who assumes a hauntingly manipulative role through the remainder of the play while disguised as a friar.

One thing above all that Marlowe's contemporaries would have seen in Faustus was a man exhibiting hubris: "swoll'n with cunning of a self-conceit, / His waxen wings did mount above his reach" (A-Text, Pro.20-21). Once summoned, Mephistopheles makes clear the analogy by reciting the circumstances of Lucifer's fall. And the conversation turns upon Mephistopheles' answers to Faustus's apparently naïve assertions regarding hell: "I think hell's a fable". "Ay, think so still", comes the reply, "till experience change thy mind" (A-Text, II.i.130-31). In spite of that response, Faustus goes on to assert: "Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond / To imagine that after this life there is any pain? / Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales" (A-Text, II.i.136-38). He seems not to hear Mephistopheles' response: "But Faustus, I am an instance to prove the contrary" (A-Text, II.i.139). Faustus is overweeningly confident in his intellectual ability to meet all consequences of his actions. His challenge to Mephistopheles throughout his first meetings with him is essentially atheistic. Most puzzling of all their exchanges, however, is Mephistophiles' reply in answer to Faustus's question, "How comes it then that thou art out of hell?" (A-Text, I.iii.77):

> 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,
> Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
> In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
> O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,
> Which strike a terror to my fainting soul! (77-83)

This utterance resonates with the yearning cries of Adam and Eve as they depart the Garden. In it is contained the profound sense of loss that characterises sinful man and that animates the promise of the Christian myth. And Marlowe writes it in the voice of the devil and has his human representative dismiss the message. The statement smacks of profound Christian orthodoxy, while the enemy of Christ pronounces it. The sentiment that it conveys no doubt registers a truth with believers. It is nevertheless freighted with pathos that must arouse a sympathetic response to the character of this devil. But the speech does point to an orthodox view of the world, a view that is then represented by Mephistopheles in his discourses with Faustus. None of John Donne's New Philosophy enters into the debate to cast doubt, and Mephistopheles is revealed as bound by the limits of

safe traditional thought—the freshmen's suppositions that Faustus dismisses as the realm that Wagner inhabits. The devil, then, cannot escape the mindset of the world into which he has been written, while Faustus is shown as an unbeliever. The play thus may indeed suggest that Faustus's yearning for release may be heroic, but that existing ideological certainties contain his ambition. The gradual perception of this dichotomy brings with it a sense of tragedy, a sentiment that some at least of Marlowe's audience would have shared. But of course the rack awaits such forward wits—Elizabethan culture is not ready for such enlightenment. So whether the Christian deity, the absent presence in this whole story, exists or not, the society at large remained convinced of its validity. There was no immediate future for the free thinker unless he was prepared to face mortal consequences. His own premature death may have spared Christopher Marlowe just what he envisaged in the climax to his play. For us, the character of Faustus retains its fascination not least in its final dynamic but desperate cry to be spared the pain and suffering of torture, to stop time, to escape death and consignment to eternal suffering.

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