With Magic Comes Power:

Exploring Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

When an individual reads Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and then sequentially reads Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, it would be difficult to argue that the stories did not have an influence on the other. Thematically, the characters of Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* are ridiculed for being the religious other (in fact, for both being Jewish) and both seek vengeance on their Christian counterparts. The similarities are too obvious to be overlooked, however, these two characters also demonstrate differences in their humanity—whereas Barabas seeks the power that accompanies wealth, Shylock desires respect of the Venetians. The two stories diverge from the seemingly similar plot structures they portray, and in the end, produce original works that are reminiscent of each other while still maintaining their own authentic complexities. Marlowe's *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* follow this paradigm as well. More specifically, although Faustus and Prospero demonstrate similarities in relation to their intellectual desires and cravings for possessed magic and the power that accompanies it, Marlowe exhibits Faustus' unwavering anti-Christian perspective and decision to obtain diabolic power while Shakespeare demonstrates Prospero's decisive transition to renounce his 'art' and embrace humanism.

Within the first lines that Faustus speaks, the reader becomes aware of the Faustus' intellectual quest for knowledge. Throughout his life, he has studied and mastered "Aristotle's works" (Marlowe 1.5) of philosophy, the field of medicine to become a "physician" (1.15), and "the universal body of law" (1.35). These fields of intellect, however, are not adequate for Faustus. Faustus desires "a world of profit and delight/of power, of honor of omnipotence" (1.53-54) and through Faustus' logic, the only way in which this may be obtained is in becoming

a "studious artisan" (2.55) and practice necromancy. Along with this, Faustus denounces Christianity and its divinity, paraphrasing half a verse from scripture and deducting that "we must sin/And so consequently die" (1.45-46). Marlowe expresses Faustus' logic on the inadequacy of 'worldly knowledge' explaining that the only solution is to become "a sound magician" for he "is a mighty god" (1.62). Faustus' quest of ultimate knowledge goes beyond the humanly intellect as he cannot see past the triviality of these subjects. His search for knowledge leads him to the solution of demonic magic—which ultimately leads to his eternal damnation.

Prospero, too, shares this quest of knowledge with Faustus. In Prospero's first conversation with his daughter Miranda, the reader discovers the reason why Prospero was banished as the Duke of Milan: "In dignity, and for the liberal arts/Without parallel; those being all my study…I thus neglecting my worldly ends, all dedicated to closeness and the bettering of my mind" (Shakespeare I.ii. 73-74, 89-90). Like Faustus, Prospero seeks knowledge to the fullest extent, and by doing so, he neglected his duties as a duke and was overthrown by his brother. However, unlike Faustus, Prospero does not find triviality in human subjects, and it is through this laborious study of liberal arts that he is able to obtain magic. Caliban explains that if one can "possess his books; for without them/He is but a sot" (III.ii.92-93). The books that Caliban is referring to represent those given to him by Gonzalo as he was banished (I.ii.166-168). It is true that the island allows him to have the power of magic, but it is only through his study that he is able to control it. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the nature of Prospero's "art" differs extensively from Faustus. He does not call up evil spirits or jeopardize his morality in order to control. In fact, when Miranda asks how they came to ashore, Prospero replies "By Providence divine" (I.ii.159). Where Prospero still believes in this divine entity, Faustus has

abandoned it: “Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub” (5.5) and relies on his own power and the power of the diabolic. Shakespeare illustrates to the reader that the magic in which Prospero gains is unlike Faustus,’ and that his religious morality is still intact.

However, with saying this, it is important to note that both Prospero and Faustus struggle with the power that accompanies the magic that they obtain—be it demonic, moral, amoral, or spurned from a magical island. Faustus’ struggle to give up his magic and power lies within two principles in which he cannot break away from. Primarily, this struggle lies within his unwillingness to give up his indulgences: “Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again. To God? He loves thee not: The god thou servest is thine own appetite” (5.9-11). Marlowe demonstrates to the reader that Faustus is disinclined to ‘abjure his magic’ because of the amount of pleasure he receives from it, prominent in the scenes in which he plays practical jokes on the pope, friar, and horse-courser and also through his sexual desire with Helen of Troy. However, the reader also becomes aware of Faustus skepticism in terms of the validity of hell as a reason for Faustus’ objection to renounce his magic. As Faustus explains to Mephastophilis that “Come, I think hell is a fable” (5.126), the reader becomes aware of Faustus’ negligence to fully repent, even after various opportunities with the Good Angel. Although Lucifer agrees with the condition that “Mephastophilis shall do for him, and bring him whatever” (5.99-100) Faustus misunderstands Mephastophilis explanation that there is a hell, and that “Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed” (5.120). In this perspective, Mephastophilis grants him a valid answer just as he wishes for in his pact—that there is a hell and that there is no place for it, just a state of being. Therefore, although the reader may want to reduce Faustus as an immoral and ignorant character at this point, the reader must comprehend that through Faustus’ overwhelming power, he fails to

understand Mephastophilis' message. Although given that there is a hell, Faustus' own power and intellect clouds his mind, and therefore he does not feel the need to surrender such magic.

Prospero also struggles with sacrificing his power, and like Faustus, becomes too comfortable in the power that he possesses. Prospero's magic prompted the tempest itself, as Miranda expresses "If by your art, my dearest father, you have/Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them" (I.ii.1-2) and the tempest was Prospero's plan to gain his vengeance on his brother—but only through being able to control the individuals on the island. On the island, the shipwrecked crew from Milan is under his control, and he utilizes his magic and spirits to keep them in his captivity. But it is through his control of the island—and the individuals on it-- that he struggles with his power. Unlike Faustus, who fails to repent and remains unwavering in his perspective on the diabolic magic and power, Prospero undergoes a major transformation in his thoughts on power, exhibited by his speech to Ferdinand in scene IV as he reflects on the plot of Caliban to take his life:

> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on' and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd
> Bear with my weakness, my old brain is troubled (IV.i.154-159).

The solemnity, 'vexation,' and troubled nature that Prospero illustrates to the reader in this passage expresses the realization of his role as a human—not as a deity or one who uses magic to controls others. By understanding that he, as a human being, "will leave not a rack behind," and eventually perish, leaving no magic or power behind. It is not until now that he comprehends that life is more than vengeance, control, and power. The magic and power that he possesses now will not allow him to be immortal, and rather, he should enjoy his life as his daughter prepares for matrimony. At this point of the play, Prospero faces the human condition and recognizes that

he was hindered in the false life of the magical. Although he forgets what it is like to be truly human throughout the course of the play, this passage exemplifies that he has regained this knowledge, knowing that his life is 'rounded with a sleep' and that one day, he will perish, regardless of the magic or power he possesses.

Unfortunately for Faustus, this transition or epiphany to relinquish his powers does not occur—or, arguably, occurs too late. The complexity of Faustus' last soliloquy mirrors the complexity of the magic and power that he has, and also the complex character that he has portrayed. Like Prospero, Faustus realizes that he too, in fact is a human, but his realization only signifies one message-- that he will perish and be eternally damned. Although the reader believes that within the hour he has left to live his last words will ring of repentance, they do not. Surprisingly, Faustus proclaims, "One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ--/Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;/ Yet will I call on him—O Spare me, Lucifer" (13.71-74)! The reader fully expects that Faustus will give his soul to Christ, but in the last clause, alters his mind and stands firmly in the diabolic as he has done throughout the play, proclaiming 'Spare me, Lucifer!' His stance—and consequently, his downfall-- is resolutely rooted in his belief in that the magic and power from Lucifer will save him. However, the complexity continues as the speech draws to a close. Faustus proclaims that "This soul should fly from me, and I be changed/Unto some brutish beast:/All beast are happy" (13.98-100). The man who proclaims his wish to become a beast is the same man who wished to be 'mighty god' earlier in the work. The responsibility of his magic and power has now come full-circle. In all of his desires, power, and magic, his only desire now is for the powers to free him from his bond with Lucifer. One of the most desperate lines in the play occur in Faustus' last words, exemplified by the dashes, pauses, and exclamation points: "I'll burn my books—ah,

Mephastophilis" (13.113)! His last words are haunting, not only because of his presumed damnation but also because of the first clause—'I'll burn my books.' In his desperation, did Faustus wish to repent through burning the books of his demonic magic?

It seems as though Shakespeare believes so. In one of Prospero's last lines, the rhetoric and diction used is uncannily similar to Faustus' last words. Prospero explains that "but this rough magic/I here abjure…*I'll drown my book"* (V.i50-51, 57). Again, as Caliban mentioned to his newly-found comrades in Act III, Prospero's books represent his magical 'art' and his power. Although the tones of the lines are much different, Propsero's desire to free himself of magic and regain his life lies within his ability to rid himself of his book, and therefore his magic and power that he has on the island that he has resided for years. Prospero's metamorphosis from 'a sound magician' (to use Marlowe's phrase) to one concerned with the worldly and humanistic again, occurs with the 'drowning' of his book. Likewise, perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting that by Faustus proclaiming he would 'burn' his book, his repentance too would be inevitable, due to his willingness to surrender his magic and power.

It seems almost too perfect that by relinquishing his power in the world of the magical, Prospero gains the worldly power of his dukedom in Milan. The "moral" of the play seems to echo some of Mephastophilis' thoughts, that if something were "made for man, therefore is man more excellent" (5.185) and more concretely, in the epilogue of the play: "Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits/to practice more than heavenly power permits" (Epi.7-9). And of course, this *is* too perfect. As a Christian 'moral' play, *Faustus* relies on the horror of demonic and diabolic magic and the craving of power (outside the worldly) to be the downfall of our tragic hero. But the reader has to be more aware of the complexities that both protagonists—and plays—instill. Although one can reduce a moral from each story and attempt to minimize a

character as moral or immoral, the artistry of Marlowe and Shakespeare relies on the complexity of the plays and characters themselves. Without Faustus' dramatic and multifaceted last speech or Prospero's troublesome self-realizations, Marlowe and Shakespeare would not have achieved the representation of *human* characters—those who desire, contradict, realize, and feel-- without any magical powers whatsoever.

Works Cited

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