

DAVID LUCKING

## Our Devils Now Are Ended: A Comparative Analysis of *The Tempest* and *Doctor Faustus*

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES I wish to discuss a point that, in consequence perhaps of its very obviousness, has seldom attracted more than glancing attention on the part of critics,<sup>1</sup> and yet is perhaps worthy of more sustained investigation. This is the remarkably close correspondence that exists between Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, works that are both concerned with the problem of knowledge and its relation to other aspects of human life, and that both employ the metaphor of magic to dramatize this issue. The persistent reference in both works to magic as *art*, furthermore, deepens the resonance of the metaphor

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the more notable exceptions that should be cited are David Young, "Where the Bee Sucks: A Triangular Study of *Doctor Faustus*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Tempest*" 149–166 in *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1978); and John S. Mebane, "Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination in *Dr. Faustus* and *The Tempest*," *South Atlantic Review* 53.2 (1988): 25–45. Also relevant to the concerns of the present paper are Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition in Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1989); and Kurt Tetzeli Von Rosador, "The Power of Magic: From *Endimion* to *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Survey* 43 (1990): 1–13. For the most part these studies discuss the texts in terms of the different attitudes towards magic evinced by their respective authors, and their relation to the cultural and historical matrix within which they were written, without entering into the specifics of the parallels existing between them as it is my purpose to do here.

still further, ultimately implicating the activity of the dramatists themselves within the thematic concerns of the plays. Such an assimilation is reinforced by the fact that one of the principal means by which both magicians publicly manifest their power is that of staging their own theatrical spectacles within the framework of the dramatic constructs in which they themselves figure. The two plays are thus invested with what it is reasonable to describe as a metadramatic dimension, with the consequence that the investigation into magic—a heightened metaphor for man's power to refashion reality after the image of his own desire—becomes in effect a meditation upon the status of the artistic effort itself.<sup>2</sup> Although this metadramatic aspect is more readily discernible in Shakespeare's work, it is latent in Marlowe's play as well, so that in this respect as in others *The Tempest* might be seen to be actualizing implications already present in its predecessor.

While there is obviously no way of determining whether Shakespeare was intentionally invoking *Doctor Faustus* as a precedent, or merely responding to the earlier work at the subliminal level, there are numerous points of convergence between the two plays that suggest that there is a direct connection between them. It is to be observed, first of all, that the names of the two protagonists—Faustus and Prospero—have their origin in words expressing the same concept, that of fortune or prosperity. The name Faustus was not of course invented by Marlowe, and it has been conjectured that Shakespeare too might have derived some of his material from a text in which the name Prospero figured.<sup>3</sup> But it seems very likely as well that the associations of the word Prospero, so similar to those attaching to the word Faustus, might have been one of the factors motivating Shakespeare's decision to adopt this particular name for his protagonist. There would have been a con-

---

<sup>2</sup> This aspect of the two plays has been explored in considerable depth by Mebane in "Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination."

<sup>3</sup> This is the story of Prospero Adorno as recounted in William Thomas' *Historie of Italie* (1549). However, a Prospero also figures among the original *dramatis personae* of Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, a play in which—since Jonson acknowledges his performance in the 1616 Folio of his works—Shakespeare is known to have performed. For a discussion of the source of Prospero's name, see Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, Introduction to the Arden Edition of *The Tempest* (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1999) 23.

siderable measure of poetic propriety in such a decision, for what is significant from the point of view of an analysis of the analogies and divergences between the two works is the discrepancy that emerges between the virtually identical import of the two names and the very different destinies that await those who bear them. This discrepancy is thrown into relief by the explicit use that is made of the words *fortune* and *fortunes* in both works. When the chorus in the Prologue to *Doctor Faustus* undertakes to “perform / The form of Faustus’ fortunes, good or bad” (*F* Prologue 7–8),<sup>4</sup> the audience is perhaps meant to register the coupling of words that share common semantic terrain, a juxtaposition that will reveal itself to be either tautological or oxymoronic according as the positive or negative character of the protagonist’s “fortunes” appears to dominate. In the event, of course, these “fortunes” prove to be unmitigatedly calamitous, so that the “fiendful fortune” that eventually befalls Faustus (*F* Epilogue 5) belies the implications of a name that connotes good fortune. The name of Shakespeare’s Prospero, on the other hand, turns out in the end to accord perfectly with the character’s destiny. He is able with complete assurance to inform his daughter that “bountiful fortune” is now his “dear lady” (*T* I.ii.178–79),<sup>5</sup> and although the words *fortune* and *fortunes* assume a variety of contrasting significations within the play of which he is the protagonist, the predominant impression is that in Prospero’s life at least fortune does play a generally positive role. Not only does his good fortune manifest itself in his own affairs, but he is able to share this “prosperity” with others. Sebastian’s ironic comment that “we prosper well in our return” (*T* II.i.73–74) should not be construed as an authoritative commentary on the events of the play in their totality, but rather as an expression of the vicious nature that prevents the speaker from recognizing their underlying significance.

---

<sup>4</sup> The edition of *Doctor Faustus* used here and in all subsequent references is that included in *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> The edition of *The Tempest* used here and in all subsequent references is that edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan for the Arden series (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1999).

Another prominent feature that the two works have in common, and that sets them apart from the generality of plays, is their peculiar obsession with time, both works insistently reminding us of the period of time allotted to the drama and the amount of that time that remains to transpire. In *Doctor Faustus* this period is twenty-four years, the duration of the contract stipulated between Faustus and Mephistophilis (*F* II.i.103–09). As the years pass Faustus becomes increasingly haunted by time, and the relentless chiming of a clock provides a grim counterpoint to his anxious meditations in the final scene of the play. “What are thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?” he asks himself at one point, adding that “Thy fatal time draws to a final end” (*F* IV.v.33–35). In the 1604 quarto we find the observation that “the restless course / That time doth run with calm and silent foot, / Shortening my days and thread of vital life, / Calls for the payment of my latest years” (*F* IV.v.1–4). As the expiration of his term on earth approaches Faustus imagines a voice from Hell reminding him that “thine hour is almost come” (*F* V.i.58), and when Lucifer lays claim to his soul at the end of the tragedy, it is on the grounds that “The time is come / Which makes it forfeit” (*F* V.ii.6–7). On the last evening of his life Faustus delivers a succinct account of his situation to the scholars who have assembled at his house, and once again he lays great stress on the element of time:

For the vain pleasure of four and twenty years hath  
Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity. I writ them a bill  
with mine own blood. The date is expired. This is the  
time, and he will fetch me. (*F* V.ii.626–25)

And when the clock strikes eleven, time becomes an almost palpable presence in the room in which the doomed man awaits his fate:

Ah Faustus.  
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damned perpetually.  
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,  
That time may cease and midnight never come.  
Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make

Perpetual day; or let this hour be but  
 A year, a month, a week, a natural day,  
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul.  
*O lente, lente currite noctis equi!*  
 The stars move still; time runs; the clock will strike;  
 The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.  
 (F V.ii.130-41)

The Latin epigraph appended to *Doctor Faustus*—“*Terminat hora diem; terminat auctor opus*”—in a certain sense sets the seal on this intense preoccupation with time, at the same time assimilating the creative labour of the author to the events depicted within his play in a moment of metaliterary self-reflection that anticipates Prospero’s Epilogue.

In *The Tempest* the span of time with which the play is concerned is the three-hour term within which Prospero must bring his project to fruition. This juxtaposition of a radically circumscribed and vividly illuminated present within which a series of decisive events is destined to take place, and a temporal backdrop constituted by the “dark backward and abysm of time” (*T* I.ii.50) corresponding to Prospero’s extended sojourn in a social limbo, is analogous to the foreshortening of time that occurs as the expiration of Faustus’s term on earth approaches in Marlowe’s play. Prospero is intensely aware of the fatefulness of the moment and of the fact that if he does not exploit it without hesitation “my fortunes / Will ever after droop” (*T* I.ii.183–84). His relation of the details of their history to Miranda commences with the portentous announcement that “The hour’s now come; The very minute bides thee ope thine ear” (*T* I.ii.36–37), while his initial conversation with Ariel delineates the temporal boundaries within which events will evolve:

*Pros.* What is the time o’ th’ day?  
*Ariel* Past the mid-season.  
*Pros.* At least two glasses. The time ’twixt six and now  
 Must by us both be spent most preciously. (*T* I.ii.239–41)

Such references to time and its passing abound in *The Tempest* as they do in *Doctor Faustus*. At the beginning of Act V Prospero asks “How’s the day?” to which Ariel replies “On the sixth hour; at which

time, my lord, / You said our work should cease" (*T V.i.3-5*). At the end of the play Alonso says that it is "three hours since" that they were "wrecked upon this shore" (*T V.i.136-37*), and to Ferdinand later that "Your eld'st acquaintance cannot be three hours" (*T V.i.186*). The Boatswain also remarks that the shipwreck occurred "three glasses since" (*T V.i.223*). Even the title of the play might, as Northrop Frye has suggested, embody an allusion to time.<sup>6</sup> It is at least arguable, furthermore, that it is Faustus' invocation of Ovid—"O lente, lente currite noctis equi!"—that is being recalled in altered form in *The Tempest* when Ferdinand anticipates that his wedding day will be one on which "I shall think or Phoebus' steeds are foundered / Or night kept chained below" (*T IV.i.30-31*).<sup>7</sup> If Faustus wants to retard the course of the steeds of the night, Ferdinand, more faithful to the spirit if not to the words of the Ovidian source, will want those of the day to complete their passage as rapidly as possible.

There are a number of more specific verbal echoes linking the two plays that might be mentioned in passing. Miranda's description of the storm—"The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch / But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek, / Dashes the fire out" (*T I.ii.3-5*)—recalls Faustus' description of the night that "dims the welkin with her pitchy breath" (*F I.iii.4*). Faustus' comment that "fearful echoes thunder in mine ears: / 'Faustus, thou art damned!'" (*F II.ii.20-21*) bears a certain resemblance to Alonso's exclamation in *The Tempest* that "the thunder— / That deep and dreadful organpipe—pronounced / The name of Prosper. It did bass my trespass" (*T III.iii.97-99*). The almost perpetual snarling of thunder, indeed, is another feature that the two plays have in common, although music also figures prominently in both works. The indirect reference in *The Tempest* to Amphion, whom legend credits with having raised the walls of Thebes with the music of his harp—

---

<sup>6</sup> Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965) 153.

<sup>7</sup> Note what would appear to be a parody of Ovid's line in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*: "Swift, swift, you dragons of the night" (*Cymbeline* II.ii.48). In his note to this line in the Arden edition of *Cymbeline*, J.M. Nosworthy makes no mention of the probable Ovidian echo, but does identify a possible source in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (1955; rpt. London: Routledge, 1991).

*Ant.* His word is more than the miraculous harp.

*Seb.* He hath raised the wall, and houses too. (*T II.i.87–88*)

—recalls a more explicit allusion in *Doctor Faustus*:

And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes

With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,

Made music with my Mephistophilis? (*F II.ii.28–30*)

Since Amphion's feat might be regarded as paradigmatic of the power of art to impress its own forms upon reality, partaking of a realm of the imagination in which art and magic are coextensive with one another, the legend is peculiarly appropriate to both of the plays we are examining.

In view of its theme, it is hardly surprising that the world of *Doctor Faustus* should be densely populated with devils and lesser demons that function as the magician's agents and enact his fancies. What is perhaps less to be expected is that those who arrive on Prospero's island should labour under the impression that it too is a domain infested by devils. According to Ariel's report, when Ferdinand leaps into the water during the shipwreck he cries: "Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here" (*T I.ii.214–15*). Prospero says that the torture inflicted upon Ariel by Sycorax before his own advent was "a torment / To lay upon the damned" (*TI.ii.289–90*), and it is undoubtedly significant that when he threatens to punish Ariel it is through precisely the same means. Trinculo, hearing Stephano's voice when he thinks he is drowned, fears that he is being assailed by devils (*T II.ii.86–87*), and Stephano also arrives at the conclusion that Caliban must be "a devil, and no monster" (*T II.ii.96*). For somewhat different reasons, Prospero too stigmatizes Caliban as "A devil, a born devil" (*T IV.i.188*). On the other hand, Prospero also remarks in an aside that some of those belonging to the King's party are "worse than devils" (*T III.iii.36*). And that attributions of diabolism are, like everything else, wholly dependent upon individual point of view is indicated by Sebastian's comment concerning Prospero, who has revealed his knowledge of their conspiracy against Alonso's life, that "The devil speaks in him" (*TV.i.129*).

In *Doctor Faustus* the word *spirit* is frequently used interchangeably with *devil*—as in Mephistophilis’s statement that Lucifer is “Arch-regent and commander of all spirits” (*F* I.iii.64)—and spirits of various sorts abound in *The Tempest* as well. The word is most often used in connection with Ariel, and there are occasions indeed in which this particular spirit comports himself in a manner very similar to that of the diabolical agencies inhabiting Marlowe’s play. He is commanded to be invisible to all eyes other than Prospero’s own (*T* I.ii.303–04) as Mephistophilis is bound to render himself invisible by the terms of his contract with Faustus (*F* II.i.100). He plays a pipe and beats a drum, as various devils do in *Doctor Faustus* (*T* III.ii.124 SD, IV.i.175; *F* II.ii.109 SD, IV.iii.105 SD). He deceives people into thinking they have been insulted by other persons present on the scene as Faustus himself does at the Pope’s banquet (*T* III.ii.43,60,73; *F* III.ii.59). This is not of course to imply that there is anything malicious about him. On the contrary, it might be wondered whether the triangular relationship that exists between Prospero, Ariel and Caliban might not have had its origin in that between Faustus and the Good and Bad Angels that represent the contrasting tendencies of his own nature.<sup>8</sup> Faustus’s destiny is sealed when he rejects the advice of the Good Angel who tells him that salvation is still available to him and obeys the promptings of his evil counterpart. The affirmative outcome of *The Tempest* becomes possible once Prospero has repudiated the impulse towards brute vengeance that Caliban embodies, allowing himself to be persuaded by Ariel’s words that “The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance” (*T* V.i.27–28).

In both plays the power of the magicians is concentrated in their books, which means that the traditional emblem of learning assumes something of a talismanic significance both for themselves and for others. We first encounter Faustus in his study, poring over the volumes that have delighted him in the past but which he now

---

<sup>8</sup> There is no contradiction between this suggestion and the view that it is the Morality Tradition in general that lies behind this configuration of personages, or that the relationship adumbrates the doctrine of the “hierarchy of souls” that was a central tenet of Elizabethan psychology. For a discussion of *The Tempest* in terms of this latter doctrine, see Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (2nd ed. rpt. London: Macmillan, 1955) 195.

finds unsatisfactory. So disenamoured has he become of conventional learning that it is his opinion now that only “necromantic books are heavenly” (*F* I.i.51), notwithstanding the Good Angel’s admonitions that the volume he is perusing with such attention is a “damnèd book” (*T* I.i.71). After Faustus has pledged body and soul to Lucifer, Mephistophilis bestows upon him a book of charms, a “sweet book” that Faustus promises to “keep as chary as my life” (*F* II.i.164–65). At the end of the play, however, Faustus expresses the wish that “I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book” (*F* V.ii.45–46), and the final words he pronounces as the devils appear to carry him away are “I’ll burn my books!” (*F* V.iii.200). Prospero’s drama also begins in his study, though we learn of this only through his own retrospective account of the events culminating in his expulsion from Milan. Prospero confesses to Miranda that he became so absorbed in his recondite studies that it seemed to him that “my library / Was dukedom large enough” (*T* I.ii.109–110), and that it was this singleminded dedication to learning that engendered the ambition in his brother that led to the insurrection in Milan. Even on the island Prospero remains in possession of volumes that “I prize above my dukedom” (*T* I.ii.168), books which, it would appear, lie at the basis of his magical power:

... I’ll to my book,  
 For yet ere supertime must I perform  
 Much business appertaining. (*T* III.i.94–96)

Caliban makes the connection even more explicit in his instructions to Stephano and Trinculo as to how they can most expeditiously render Prospero impotent:

Why, as I told thee, ’tis a custom with him  
 I th’ afternoon to sleep. There thou mayst brain him,  
 Having first seized his books, or with a log  
 Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,  
 Or cut his wezand with thy knife. Remember  
 First to possess his books, for without them  
 He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not  
 One spirit to command. They all do hate him  
 As rootedly as I. Burn but his books. (*T* III.ii.87–95)

This final injunction, interestingly enough, echoes Faustus's exclamation *in extremis*: "I'll burn my books." An even more significant transmutation of Faustus's words occurs at the conclusion of *The Tempest*, when Prospero, announcing his intention to renounce his "rough magic" (*TV.i.50*), promises that "I'll drown my book" (*TV.i.57*).<sup>9</sup>

In both *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest* the magical powers wielded by the protagonists are parodied in subplots revolving around the comic antics of subordinate characters. Faustus's acolyte Wagner makes a disciple of the clown Robin as Stephano makes a slavish follower of Caliban. Whereas Wagner parodies his master's pact with Mephistophilis by prevailing upon Robin to bind himself to his service for a term of seven years (*FI.iv*), Stephano exercises his dominion through the power of a bottle containing what Caliban conceives to be "celestial liquor" (*TI.ii.115*). Here too the role of books as the source of magical power is alluded to, though only in travesty. The clown Robin in *Doctor Faustus* seeks to invest himself with occult powers by appropriating one of Faustus's volumes: "I have gotten one of Doctor Faustus's conjuring books, and now we'll have such knavery as't passes" (*FI.iii.1-3*). When Stephano plies Caliban with wine in *The Tempest* the rather curious words he pronounces are "Here, kiss the book" (*TI.ii.127*). It has already been mentioned that Caliban urges his accomplices to possess themselves of Prospero's books in order to divest him of his magical power.

Both Faustus and Prospero become the objects of conspiracies on the part of other characters, and their methods of dealing with their enemies are virtually identical. In *Doctor Faustus* the sceptical Benvolio is converted into a latter-day Acteon, and Faustus not only threatens to conjure up a pack of dogs to hunt him but explicitly summons them by names which one assumes are those of his diabolical servants (*FI.ii.96-99*). Similarly, Prospero unleashes a pack of dogs on Caliban and his confederates in *The Tempest*, in a scene that is described as follows: "A noise of hunters heard. Enter diverse Spirits in shape of dogs and hounds, hunting

---

<sup>9</sup> A point that is noticed by Young, 153.

them about" (*T IV.i.254 SD*).<sup>10</sup> In this case too, the names of the dogs are explicitly mentioned, though they are somewhat less exotic than those of the spirits at Faustus's command (*T IV.i.255–57*). When Benvolio and his accomplices lay an ambush against Faustus, the magician retaliates by instructing his spirits to inflict a number of exemplary punishments:

Go, Belimoth, and take this caitiff hence,  
 And hurl him in some lake of mud and dirt.  
 Take thou this other; drag him through the woods  
 Amongst the pricking thorns and sharpest briars ...  
 (*F IV.iii.84–87*)

When one of the victims reappears he describes himself as having been "Half smothered in a lake of mud and dirt, / Through which the Furies dragged me by the heels" (*F IV.iv.5–6*). Prospero deals similarly with Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, who after being drawn by Ariel through briars and thorns like one of Faustus's victims are finally plunged into a noisome pond like the other:

... they my lowing followed, through  
 Toothed briars, sharp furzes, pricking gorse and thorns,  
 Which entered their frail shins. At last I left them  
 I th' filthy-mantled pool beyond your cell,  
 There dancing up to th' chins, that the foul lake  
 O'erstunk their feet. (*T IV.i.179–84*)

Such parallels as these suggest either that magicians as a category are singularly deficient in imagination when it comes to devising ingenious torments, or that Prospero has somehow allowed himself to be directly influenced by his German predecessor.

---

<sup>10</sup> This is not the place to enter into the vexed question of whether these and other stage directions were actually contributed by Shakespeare, or whether—as has occasionally been argued—they were inserted at some later point in order to embellish the play that was to occupy pride of place in the 1623 Folio. It seems to me that in the absence of definite indications to the contrary, the least complicated course is to assume that the stage directions were present in the manuscript or prompt-book that Ralph Crane transcribed for the Folio, and are therefore to be regarded as an integral component of the play.

As I have already remarked, one of the more conspicuous features that *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest* have in common is the fact that the magicians exhibit their skill by staging theatrical spectacles within the plays of which they are the protagonists. Indeed there is an element of the histrionic in all their doings, and the protagonists of both plays occasionally discharge the function of actor as well as that of playwright. When Faustus witnesses the ceremony practised in the papal palace in Rome he says "in this show let me an actor be, / That this proud Pope may Faustus's cunning see" (*F* III.i.76–77). In the second scene of *The Tempest* Prospero performs the stock role of *senex iratus* for the benefit of Ferdinand, thus promoting the burgeoning of love between the two young people whose union he has planned. The emissaries of Hell exhibit a no less pronounced dramaturgical bent in *Doctor Faustus*, and in their efforts to induce Faustus to respect his promise contrive various entertainments to divert his mind from thoughts of repentance. In one stage direction we read: "Enter Devils, giving crowns and rich apparel to Faustus. They dance and then depart" (*F* II.1.81 SD). Very similar stage directions are to be found in *The Tempest*. Thus in the third act we read "Enter several strange shapes, bringing in a banquet, and dance about it with gentle actions of salutations, and inviting the King, etc. to eat, they depart" (*T* III.iii.17 SD). Slightly later we have "enter the shapes again and dance with mocks and mows, and carry out the table" (*T* III.iii.82 SD). The aborted banquet which these stage directions frame may be a reminiscence of the Pope's feast in *Doctor Faustus*, in which various tantalizing dishes are snatched away from the participants just as they are on the point of partaking of them (*F* III.ii).

In Act Four of Marlowe's play Faustus conjures up Alexander the Great and his paramour at the bidding of the German Emperor in a scene that is comparable to that in which Prospero stages what he admits to be "Some vanity of mine Art" (*T* IV.i.41) for the benefit of Ferdinand and Miranda. Faustus warns the spectators that they must not attempt to interrogate the apparitions, "But in dumb silence let them come and go" (*F* IV.ii.47). This corresponds to Prospero's injunction to Ferdinand and Miranda to "Hush, and be mute, / Or else our spell is marred" (*T* IV.i.126–27). A stage direction shows the Emperor about to disregard this warning, when, saluted by the two apparitions, he "offers to embrace

them, which Faustus seeing, suddenly stays him. Then trumpets cease and music sounds" (*F IV.ii.52 SD*). Prospero's masque is disrupted when he remembers the conspiracy of Caliban and his confederates, an intrusion that shatters the spell that his art has been weaving: "Prospero starts suddenly and speaks; after which, to a strange hollow and confused noise, they heavily vanish" (*T IV.i.138 SD*). The words that Faustus addresses to the Emperor at this point consist in the reminder that "you do forget yourself. / These are but shadows, not substantial" (*F IV.ii.53–54*). While Prospero's remarks are very much of the same tenor, he goes to considerably further lengths to draw out the metaphysical implications of what has occurred:

... These our actors,  
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
 Are melted into air, into thin air;  
 And—like the baseless fabric of this vision—  
 The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
 And like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
 Leave not a rack behind. (*T IV.i.148–56*)

It might perhaps be remembered in this connection that one of Faustus's most spectacular achievements, reminiscent of Amphion's feat of raising the Theban walls through the agency of music, has been that of "erecting that enchanted castle in the air" for the benefit of the Duke of Anholt (*F IV.vii.2–3*).

While the role played by coincidence is by no means to be ruled out in discussing occasional points of similarity between works of literature that are otherwise unconnected, it seems to me that the parallels I have been tracing here are too many and too close to be accidental, and that Shakespeare must have had Marlowe's play somewhere at the back of his mind while he was composing *The Tempest*. It would be tempting indeed to go even further, and endorse Mebane's view that in "Shakespeare's final, consummate dramatic statement on the nature and purposes of art he chose to return to the subject of the occult in part because both Marlowe and Jonson, Shakespeare's two great rivals, had previously made

use of the same metaphor."<sup>11</sup> This is perhaps to personalize Shakespeare's intentions more than is either prudent or necessary, however, and it is moreover to be questioned whether Jonson's *The Alchemist*, depicting the fraudulent practices of a charlatan unendowed with anything even remotely resembling authentic power, can be said to make metaphorical pronouncements concerning the status of any art other than that of cozenage. What we can say with a reasonable degree of confidence is that a play like *Doctor Faustus* could not have failed to constitute an obligatory reference point for anyone exploring the themes of magic and what magic can symbolize in the way of a quest for knowledge. Marlowe's play was a well-known and popular one in the years in which Shakespeare was active as a writer, and that Shakespeare himself was personally familiar with the work is attested by the fact that he invokes it directly in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Troilus and Cressida*.<sup>12</sup> Since *Doctor Faustus* dramatizes issues that were the object of intense investigation in the Renaissance—and in particular the role of knowledge and art in human life—it is only to be expected that in addressing the same themes Shakespeare would have stolen at least a sidelong glance at his predecessor's work and, deliberately or unconsciously, responded to its implications. It is in this sense that Shakespeare's fundamentally affirmative exploration of the theme of magic might be said to constitute an implicit commentary on the pessimism of Marlowe's vision, according to which those faculties which define man as a unique entity in the universe are also those that must fatally condemn him.

---

<sup>11</sup> "Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination" 32. Young expresses a very similar view, arguing that "*The Tempest* is a great play about magic partly because other great plays about magic preceded it, and it is not, therefore, too much to think that Shakespeare profited from considering those plays, recent and distant, as he sat to compose his own." Young, 160–161.

<sup>12</sup> Bardolph's report in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that a trio of assailants "threw me off in a slough of mire; and set spurs and away, like three German devils, three Doctor Faustuses" (IV.v.63–65) recalls an incident in Marlowe's play that is echoed in *The Tempest*, while Troilus's observation in *Troilus and Cressida* that Helen is "a pearl, / Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships" (II.ii.82–83) is a rather pragmatic reformulation of the rapturous words with which Faustus greets the shade of Helen of Troy: "Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ship" (FV.i.99).

Faustus commences his career as a sorcerer by performing the most infamous of all acts of necromantic conjuration, that of tracing a magic circle on the floor in which the name of Jehovah is ritually anagrammatized (*FI*.iii.8). This circle in effect isolates him not only from God but also from the nobler aspects of his own humanity, and it has often been pointed out that one of the more conspicuous features of *Doctor Faustus* is the moral deterioration that its protagonist undergoes once he commands virtually unlimited power. While the temptation has been to attribute the cruder scenes to a less fastidious collaborator rather than to the playwright himself, there is nothing in those scenes that do appear to have issued more or less directly from the pen of Marlowe to suggest that Faustus might be using his magic for more elevated purposes. Magic might begin as the highest possible expression of human creativity, but it swiftly degenerates into an instrument of coercion, cruelty and buffoonery. The man who aspired to infinite knowledge contents himself in the end with clapping antlers upon the heads of his enemies, heaping up material riches, and gratifying his carnal appetites. Except for a few isolated episodes, such as that in which the shade of Helen of Troy materializes at his behest, there is little to distinguish Faustus's magical practices from those indulged in by his parodic double Robin.

In a somewhat different manner, Prospero too has isolated himself from his own humanity by immersing himself utterly in his studies, and the island on which he has sojourned for so many years is the image of that isolation at the same time that it is, as Von Rosador points out, "a geographical version of the magician's circle."<sup>13</sup> As far as we are able to infer from the information made available to us, there is nothing either subtle or particularly noble about the magic that Prospero has been wielding on the island, and a comparison with the witch Sycorax, his predecessor on the island whose career exhibits significant parallels with Prospero's own, is at least invited.<sup>14</sup> From the point of view of those subjugated to his authority he is little more than an overbearing tyrant

---

<sup>13</sup> Von Rosador, 12.

<sup>14</sup> The parallel between Prospero's career and that of Sycorax is discussed in Douglas L. Peterson, *Time, Tide, and Tempest: A Study of Shakespeare's Romances* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1973) 218.

imposing his own arbitrary laws and enforcing them by violence. There is therefore a considerable element of justice in the opinion expressed by various characters that the island is riddled with devils, even if Prospero himself believes his magic to be of a wholly virtuous variety. Even when the Europeans arrive on the island, Prospero does not comport himself in a manner markedly different from that of Faustus. He too charms his enemies into immobility, drives them to distraction, inflicts physical torments upon them, subjects them to illusions. Most important of all, perhaps, for much of the play he seems to be impelled primarily by the impulse of revenge, one of the least admirable of human motives, although it must be acknowledged that even early in the play a number of incongruities appear in his conduct which suggest that his project might have been fundamentally beneficent from its inception.<sup>15</sup>

All this changes in the final act of the play, however. Having accomplished his objective of subduing his enemies to his power, Prospero brings his career as a magician to an appropriate end by tracing another circle (*T V.i.32 SD*). In performing this gesture he is symbolically completing a circle of another kind, that corresponding to the trajectory of spiritual evolution which begins with Faustus in Wittenberg and continues in his own career in Milan. Far from being an emblem of isolation in this case, this final circle becomes almost the image of a restored and regenerated community as the other personages in the play "enter the circle which Prospero had made and there stand charmed" (*T V.i.57 SD*). The drawing of this circle, which occurs after Prospero has recapitulated the various prodigies which his "so potent art" has rendered possible (*T V.i.50*), coincides with his announcement of his intention to renounce this "rough magic" (*T V.i.50*) and "drown my book" (*T V.i.57*). The latter phrase, as I have suggested, echoes Faustus's last words that he will "burn my books," and perhaps the difference between the two magicians and the kinds of power they represent appears in their choice of verbs, evoking as they do the contraposed elements of fire and water. If burning partakes of the dimension with which Faustus has been transacting, from which he has been drawing his

---

<sup>15</sup> As in the fact that he preserves Alonso from an assassination attempt, and promotes the "fair encounter" of Ferdinand and Miranda.

power and to which he is now condemned for all eternity, drowning belongs to that of the “sea-change” through the mysterious alchemy of which everything is transmuted into “something rich and strange” (*T* I.ii.401–02). Magic itself is transformed from the “rough” power through which Prospero has been brutally manipulating events and people in accordance with a design that is all his own, to something that is more in harmony with the ordinary exigencies of life and yet also, it is suggested, participates in the divine.<sup>16</sup> What we are afforded a glimpse of, then, is the possibility of a redeemed magic, and what this translates into is the possibility of a redeemed art and science perfectly compatible with the moral and spiritual dimensions of human existence.<sup>17</sup> As the spirits enacting his masque vanish into thin air, Prospero has begun his most sublime speech by declaring that “Our revels now are ended” (*T* IV.i.148), the larger implication of his words being that the rough magic of which this masque has been a culminating expression has been discarded. And yet there is one final theatrical spectacle that remains to be presented, this being the tableau that Prospero discloses when he “discovers Ferdinand and Miranda, playing at chess” (*T* V.i.171 SD). Magic of an occult order has only indirectly contributed to the realization of this image of perfect concord, which even Sebastian, not normally given to sentimental effusions, can find it in his heart to acclaim as “A most high miracle” (*T* V.i.178). The magic that has gone into its making is as entirely natural as it is in its own way mystical, and is of a kind that no one can ultimately fail to approve.

---

<sup>16</sup> There is at least a suggestion at the conclusion of the play that, unbeknownst to Prospero himself, his magic has all the time been at the service of a Providential design transcending his personal intentions. This appears for example in Gonzalo’s suggestion that it is the “gods” who have “chalked forth the way / Which brought us hither” (*T* V.i.201–14), and in his question: “Was Milan thrust from Milan that his issue / Should become kings of Naples?” (*T* V.i.205–06).

<sup>17</sup> This is basically the point that Frances Yates is making when she argues that in the figure of Prospero Shakespeare “vindicates the [John] Dee science and the Dee conjuring” that Marlow’s *Doctor Faustus* had been concerned to discredit. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy* 160. However, I disagree with Yates both in reading *Doctor Faustus* as a pure exercise in anti-Renaissance propaganda, a “dismissal of the traditions of Renaissance magic and science” (119), and in seeing Prospero’s magic as a undeviatingly positive from the start. It seems to me that such schematic interpretations render little justice to either of the plays.