

Hamlet: The Poem or the Play?

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If the title of this essay looks vaguely familiar, that is as it should be. It echoes, with deliberate distortion, the topic on which the late C. S. Lewis gave his British Academy Shakespeare Lecture in 1942, "Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?" That lecture has been printed several times, and I would rate it as one of the best short essays on *Hamlet* that I have ever read. Following paths opened up by Wilson Knight, Caroline Spurgeon and others, Lewis began by debunking character criticism. If we were to account for the almost unrivalled hold that *Hamlet* had had on generations of readers and theatregoers, he argued, we had to concentrate on the whole dramatic poem, not just on the Prince. This was not to deny that Shakespeare's presentation of Hamlet as a character was matter of legitimate interest; but Professor Lewis insisted that what was much more illuminating was the way in which the play described, through poetry and dramatic situations, a certain spiritual region, a region centring on the imagined experience of *being dead*. Thus the true hero of Hamlet is man—

haunted man—man with his mind on the frontier of two worlds, man unable either quite to reject or quite to admit the supernatural, man struggling to get something done as man has struggled from the beginning, yet incapable of achievement because of his inability to understand either himself or his fellows or the real quality of the universe which has produced him. To be sure, some hints of more particular motives for Hamlet's delay are every now and then faded up to silence our questions, just as some show of motives is offered for the Duke's temporary abdication in *Measure for Measure*. In both cases it is only scaffolding or machinery. To mistake these mere *succedanea* for the real play and to try to work them up into a coherent psychology is the great error.¹

This was well said, in 1942. But in 1975, with the battles against character criticism and illusionist theatre both long since won, why breed a mutant, changing "Prince or Poem?" to "Poem or Play?" I think it needs doing because the emphasis on "dramatic poem" which ousted emphasis on "character" has in turn become

1 C. S. Lewis, *Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?* (1942), p. 16. The lecture is reprinted in Peter Alexander (ed.), *Studies in Shakespeare* (1964), pp. 201-18; and with slight abridgements in Laurence Lerner (ed.), *Shakespeare's Tragedies: A Selection of Modern Criticism* (Pelican, 1963), pp. 65-77.

SYDNEY STUDIES

a form of critical distortion. Implicit in Lewis's lecture was the kind of proposition that had come explicitly from L. C. Knights: "*Macbeth* has greater affinity with *The Waste Land* than with *The Doll's House*".² As a way of alerting readers of a Shakespearian tragedy to its metaphoric life, its reverberative power, such a half-truth as this could once be tolerated, but in the forty-odd years since it was first offered our awareness of the category "drama" has grown wider. Where critics in the 1930s and 1940s were content to lump in verse-dramas with all the other long poems they knew, we nowadays have to insist that the words on the page are not everything when it comes to this particular art-form. We have learned to give detailed attention to theatrical elements that cannot be accounted for entirely in terms of how "the poem" works. I suspect that there are many different reasons for this change in critical method, but I shall mention just two of the most obvious. First, scholars in the past two or three decades have been more exposed than earlier generations were to drama from outside their own immediate cultures: English-speaking critics have encountered Japanese classical theatre, for instance, or Balinese dance-drama. Secondly, they have been influenced by revolutionary developments in modern European theatre, such as the plays, and the theories, of Bertolt Brecht. These and other factors have made serious readers of drama more conscious than they used to be of theatrical first principles. The script of a play (or as we say of classics, the text) begins life as a blueprint for performance, the theatrical counterpart to an orchestral conductor's score. Its author's verbal and imaginative skills make it, additionally, a work of literature, but that is secondary, even accidental, a kind of artistic bonus payment. In the beginning were the words, but the words were for performance. Drama is action, acting, doing: that is what the word means.

Invoking that consideration on behalf of *Hamlet*, I am at once faced with a practical difficulty. If we are to describe how this play works on the consciousness of its audiences, how far can we afford to take emphasis off the poetry in favour of the acting? For one thing the poetry is comparatively easy to verify—the words in the dialogue are there in the book for anyone to read—whereas the stage action depends partly on very sketchy stage directions (not all of them likely to have been written by Shakespeare), and

2 L. C. Knights in "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" (1933), as reprinted in his *Explorations* (Peregrine, 1964), p. 30.

partly on the individual theatre director's "feel" for what the dialogue demands in the way of setting, lighting, movement, grouping, stage business and all the other elements that go to make up the action that we see on stage. There are a great many variables here, so that even to "act the play in the theatre of your own mind" becomes a complex and sometimes arbitrary process. Some of the play's instructions to us are clear enough: "*Ghost cries under the stage*" or "Look here upon this picture, and on this"—even the second of these, a stage direction implied in a line of spoken dialogue, indicates plainly enough that Hamlet is holding up a miniature of his dead father and comparing it with another that depicts his uncle. But many other actions in the play are far harder to discover from the text in the form in which it has come down to us after some 375 years. For example, just when, and why, does Hamlet's willingness to sweep to his revenge "with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love" (I.v.29)³ crumble into the evasiveness of those wild and whirling words with which he greets Horatio and Marcellus after the Ghost has vanished? C. S. Lewis might have been eager to dismiss this among the "*mere succedanea*"—we cannot be sure, since he did not mention it specifically in that connection. Yet it remains a point on which every careful reader of the play (not to mention any director in the theatre) must form a judgement. Or again, what sparks off Hamlet's fury in the nunnery scene? Should he be imagined as actually overhearing Polonius planning to have Ophelia walk up and down in the lobby and thus act as decoy duck for the Prince? One of Dover Wilson's notorious stage directions in the New Cambridge *Hamlet* (at II.ii.159) would have it so. But we could just as easily suppose that Hamlet in III.i. simply *deduces* that Polonius and Claudius are hidden witnesses to his whole interview with Ophelia. These and dozens of other specific difficulties in interpretation lie in wait for every critic who tries to account for the quite undeniable impressiveness of the play. As readers, we have to tackle these problems one by one, drawing whatever reasonable inferences we can from what the printed text does tell us, in order to work out rational guesses about the things that it does not tell us.

Fortunately, however, the converse also applies. It is a characteristic of this particular play that its most obviously "poetic"

3 Quotations from *Hamlet* in this article are taken from the Pelican Shakespeare edition, ed. Willard Farnham (Baltimore, 1957).

SYDNEY STUDIES

passages actually gain clarity from stage movement implied within them, or in their immediate contexts, or in both. Far from being set pieces which slow down the dramatic process, they in fact speed it up. This claim can be supported, I think, by glancing at each of the four famous soliloquies in turn.

The first soliloquy, "O that this too too sullied flesh would melt" (I.ii.129), emerges from a background of Claudius and Gertrude's wedding celebrations. The Prince who speaks it is not only the odd man out in their bland, corrupt court; he is sunk in suicidal despair, as much because of his mother's incestuous infidelity as because of his father's death. In so far as it explains several matters that have been only a puzzle to the audience up to now, this speech resolves suspense, yet it also adds to the suspense of Act I as a whole. We know that Horatio will soon take Hamlet to where he can encounter the Ghost, but what consolation will a ghost be able to offer for the frailty of Gertrude? Most directors use two thrones as conspicuous stage properties for I.ii., and they are quite right: behind Hamlet, as he speaks his thoughts at length for the first time in the play, the two empty thrones stand side by side like double question-marks. The answer to the question of consolation comes in I.v., where the Ghost can offer none. On the contrary, what the Ghost in fact demands of Hamlet is much the sort of thing that Claudius's world of politics and self-aggrandisement would expect—an act of vengeance, the cold-blooded killing of an exposed murderer. Now, since this is a Renaissance play and not an attempt at exact reconstruction of early medieval Jutland, Hamlet has his share of the ethics of a sixteenth-century aristocrat. The prince who has been the looking-glass of fashion, the mould of good form, well knows that a revenge-killing would be expected of him. Yet if the Almighty has fixed his canon law against suicide, it goes without saying that it is fixed against murder too. Faced with his commitment to this kind of deed, Hamlet veers away. As soon as the Ghost is no longer visibly confronting him, hysteria rushes to his aid, freeing him from the necessity of immediate activity. He is in the archetypal tragic predicament described by Hegel 150 years ago and modified by A. C. Bradley in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*:

The essentially tragic fact is the self-division and intestinal warfare of the ethical substance, not so much the war of good with evil as the war of good with good. Two of these isolated powers face each other, making incompatible demands. The family claims what the state refuses, love requires what honour forbids.⁴

4 A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (2nd edn, 1909), pp. 71-2.

For Hamlet, two ethical imperatives have come into collision, so that whichever course of action he chooses is bound to be wrong, or at least to appear wrong when considered from his own point of view. If he does not kill Claudius, he will seem to himself to be betraying his dead father and letting corruption rule unchecked. But if he does kill Claudius, that will only be answering murder with murder—and Shakespeare presents Hamlet as someone who is aware of a great deal that will not cure. As critics have often said in different ways, it is because the character—and hence the play—is aware of so much that the moral dilemma becomes insoluble.

To dramatize the resulting frustration, Shakespeare once again makes stage action and poetic soliloquy tightly interdependent. The frustration finds expression partly in Hamlet's mockery of Polonius and his teasing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with gnomic ambiguities, but some of it comes out also in direct, explicit self-reproach for a delay which the Prince himself cannot account for or explain, and which drives him spasmodically to frenzy. Ophelia's report of his distraught, though wordless, visit to her as she was sewing in her closet (II.i.75-100) foreshadows some such mood, and in the second of the major soliloquies, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I", we see the frenzy build up in front of us:

... I,
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
 And can say nothing. No, not for a king,
 Upon whose property and most dear life
 A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
 Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
 Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' th' throat
 As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
 Ha, 'swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be
 But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this
 I should ha' fatted all the region kites
 With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
 O, vengeance!

(II.ii.551)

Even in a monologue running to some sixty lines in all, as this one does, *Hamlet* the poem is still, very dynamically, *Hamlet* the stage play. Just how much movement and excitement a particular actor or director will read out of the speech will depend on many factors besides the immediate wording here, but Shakespeare's habitual

SYDNEY STUDIES

indicators of high excitement are all present—compressed or shortened words (“i’ th’”, “should ha’ fatted”); a rush of rhetorical questions from “Am I a coward?” onwards; spectacular imagery (“fatted all the region kites / With this slave’s offal”); the piling up of abusive adjectives so rapidly that the pentameter structure of the verse almost collapses under the pressure (“Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!”). Of all the performances of Hamlet I have ever seen, the best in this particular passage was that of Alec Guinness in 1951. Guinness’s fury with himself was physical as much as verbal: at these climactic lines he hurtled across the stage, pulled his dagger and stabbed Claudius’s throne, again and again. It was a wholly faithful enactment of the frustration and resentment embodied in the words of Shakespeare’s text.

The third famous soliloquy, “To be, or not to be” (III.i.56ff.), follows surprisingly soon after “rogue and peasant slave”, and is framed by Ophelia’s loitering with intent to draw Hamlet out in seemingly accidental conversation.⁵ The movement of this speech is far steadier, far calmer, than that of “rogue and peasant slave”, but the new monologue is more than just a despondent contemplation of suicide. It develops into an analysis of the whole play’s concern with human aims as set in a wider context than that of living human experience. If, as Shakespeare makes Hamlet do here, you try to assess your possible actions in terms that embrace the unknowable, merely-guessed-at experience of being dead, then it is almost inevitable that you must “puzzle the will” and arrive at no practical decisions at all. It is as if an applied mathematician were to go on trying to solve some problem in, say, packaging, after having divided one of the relevant quantities by zero.

So the gate swings shut on suicide, and Hamlet admits that such great enterprises as the purging of Denmark can easily turn awry. One of the elements helping to create this impasse is starkly dramatized immediately afterwards, in the “nunnery” conversation. Hamlet pours out on Ophelia a double resentment—resentment at her own apparent disloyalty to him in allowing herself to

5 Q1, the “Bad Quarto” of *Hamlet* (1603), brings its version of the nunnery scene forward, beginning it immediately after the idea of using Ophelia to verify Hamlet’s madness has been proposed. The reporters may have had in mind an acting script by Shakespeare which ordered events in that way. But Q1 lacks textual authority—and the whole matter is, in any case, an intricate one that lies outside the scope of this essay.

be used as bait, and resentment at his mother's easy betrayal of his dead father's memory. If, as must now seem to Hamlet to be the case, Ophelia has allied herself with the sordid middle-aged sensuality of the King and Queen, then the degradation of love into a mercenary form of sexual titillation will be virtually complete. The Prince's jokes in the play scene grow from this supposition, and his underlying disgust comes to a fearsome climax in III.iv., the so-called "closet scene" between him and his mother in private—the privacy being gained at some cost to Polonius. Here the flood of lascivious detail with which he indicts Gertrude for her sexual crimes suggests a neurotic loss of self-control in Hamlet himself. Even after the Ghost has re-appeared to reproach him—the Ghost now as a subjective voice of conscience—a note of fascinated loathing can still be heard following the tricky, transposed negative of the Prince's instructions to his now contrite mother:

Queen. What shall I do?

Hamlet. Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:

Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out . . .

(III.iv.181)

An ugly obsession with the mechanics of seduction has brought Hamlet close to being possessed by the very duplicity and sensuality that he would claim to be exorcizing.

At about this point in the play, Shakespeare could easily have chosen to follow the pattern of Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy*, plunging his hero into madness and an early death. Instead, he turns on the opposite tack. He makes Hamlet's harangue against his mother have the effect of some great fever that leaves the sufferer calmer afterwards. As Hamlet makes wry jokes over the body of Polonius, lugging the guts into the neighbour room, he is showing a new objectivity, a comedian's sense of detachment. This persists in the early scenes of Act IV, where we have a Prince who clearly enjoys the situation in which he and the King go circling around one another in plot and counterplot. "A weeps for what is done," lies Gertrude, loyally covering up for her far-from-conscience-stricken son. In fact, when we see him, his jocularly confirms a new toughness, almost a hardening of his mind:

King. Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet. At supper.

SYDNEY STUDIES

King. At supper? Where?

Hamlet. Not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten. A certain con-
vocation of politic worms are e'en at him. (IV.iii.16)

This new quality in Hamlet's outlook is seen again, though from a different angle, in the fourth of the long soliloquies, "How all occasions do inform against me". Meeting the army which Fortinbras is leading to Poland, Hamlet learns that they are to fight for "a little patch of ground". Like many another Renaissance prince, on the stage or off it, he reveals no deep concern at the immorality of war. On the contrary, he is struck with admiration and even envy for the readiness with which Fortinbras will sacrifice other men's lives on the altar of his own princely dignity. Hamlet immediately contrasts this with his long hesitation over murdering Claudius.

... Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (IV.iv.32)

Hamlet the Prince is saying one thing, while *Hamlet* the play says another. The admirability of Fortinbras's venture is repeatedly undercut by stress on its sheer futility: 20,000 will die to gain that little patch of ground, that eggshell, that straw, that five-ducats-a-year graveyard. And if the poetry encourages us, with these undertones of worthlessness, to query Hamlet's bloody thoughts with a humanist's "Yes but—", the *action* of the play goes on to sound the questioning note much more stridently. No sooner has Hamlet ended his soliloquy than the next scene begins (we have to remember, as always, the uncluttered flow of action on Elizabethan stages), and the Queen and others are upon us

with news of the real cost of bloody thoughts. Ophelia has gone mad, largely as a result of Hamlet's murder of Polonius. Her schizophrenia, yielding a famously effective piece of theatre much imitated by later dramatists for its throat-gripping pathos, is part of Shakespeare's answer to the implicit question "Why shouldn't Hamlet kill his enemies?" This is why. This is what can emerge when "the invisible event" is rendered visible by the passage of time. The point is further sharpened—and once again the means are more theatrical than poetical—by the behaviour of Laertes. Discovering that his father has been killed, Laertes does precisely what Hamlet has not done in a comparable situation—he makes a rash and mindless attempt at armed rebellion. If the limitations of bloody thoughts need any further dramatic underlining, they get it, later, from Hamlet's account of how he has engineered the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Horatio surely speaks for every wondering audience when he weighs this: "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't".

I hope that the particular structural technique that I set out to illustrate from the four well-known soliloquies has become clear. In *Hamlet*, poetic reflection in soliloquy meshes with, and never impedes, significant stage action, and a satisfying dramatic logic is one of the results. The effect is not, of course, limited to these four speeches alone. They were the obvious ones to test, if only because, with their length, their articulacy, their decisive extensions of the expressiveness of the whole work, they represent the case for *Hamlet* as poem at its strongest. But much the same argument could also be mounted on the basis of such embedded prose-poems as "What a piece of work is a man" or the central section of the grave-digging scene. Indeed, it is when Hamlet takes Yorick's skull in his hands and talks about it, talks *to* it, that his achieved perspective on vengeance and corruption opens out fully. In the presence of the skull, a theatrical property which is also a totem, a controlling symbolic object, Hamlet (and through him the audience) is struck afresh by the pathetic limits of human endeavour. The corruption of the living, which has so fascinated Hamlet in the past, and which has surged through the play in images of sickness, infection, hidden abscesses, now fades into insignificance beside the complete physical corruption of dead people.

So C. S. Lewis's Hamlet, the Hamlet of two worlds, makes a choice between them at last. His commitment is to a larger world than that of immediate everyday experience, an imagined world of

SYDNEY STUDIES

immense time-scale, embracing the dead as well as the living, the metaphysical as well as the physical. Such a commitment is bound to make his own early death inevitable, since it implies a refusal to go on playing a political game against Claudius or Laertes. But from Hamlet's final viewpoint, the king of shreds and patches has dwindled, like a man seen through the wrong end of a telescope.

It follows from this that Shakespeare—characteristically—manages to have it both ways. His play questions the wisdom of a Renaissance ethic of vengeance and he gets us to admire Hamlet for intuitively rejecting that ethic; yet in the end he also lets Hamlet take the revenge, in circumstances that rule out any feeling that he has failed us ethically. Even the waste of human lives in the last two acts is wrapped in consolation, in part because Hamlet's integrity is seen to hold good to the end, in part because his acknowledgement of some broader frame of reference than just everyday materialism or hedonism is obscurely justified. And through it all, Shakespeare's breathtaking skill, like Richard Wagner's two-and-a-half centuries after him, lies in communicating precise ideas within a widely inclusive ritual enactment. Watching the Prince of Denmark, sharing in his decisions and to some extent in his agonies, we in the audience live our own lives the more richly during it. C. S. Lewis was right about the sense in which we all know Hamlet. "I would not cross the room to meet Hamlet," he said. "It would never be necessary. He is always where I am." True. But to enjoy such kinship fully, the critic must constantly relate the play's poetry to its stage action. *Hamlet* the poem is part of a larger whole.

Doctor Faustus and the Renaissance World

ROSEMARY CRESWELL

In the movement in recent years to demonstrate a continuity between Renaissance drama and the medieval morality plays, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* has become something of a problem case. Critics may now offer two possible but quite different readings of the play. Its hero can be, and is, seen as the supreme archetype of the Renaissance man—in his heroic assertion of willpower, in his extreme isolated individualism, in his imaginative and rebellious quest for knowledge, and perhaps, too, in his expression of a highly poetic sensibility. (For, as I shall go on to suggest, there is a sense in which the sacrifice of Faustus's soul can be viewed as a Humanist offering to art and beauty.) *Doctor Faustus* scorns the narrow confines of medieval scholastic learning to seek power through the knowledge that can be acquired by experimenting in black magic. As "Renaissance man" he stands pitted against the constrictions of an earlier world in which knowledge that aspired beyond the bounds imposed by religious faith was regarded as hubristic, or overreaching. Faustus's questing imagination accords with that view of the Renaissance as a universe peopled by men whose discoveries in science and astronomy, in geography and navigation and in New World exploration, testify to the individual's capacity to create his own world and master it. The spirit which informs Faustus's quest for power through knowledge is the spirit of the adventurous new world of the Renaissance. That, at least, is one view of the play's protagonist.

On the other hand, *Doctor Faustus*, more obviously than any other play of the period, employs the conventions and techniques of medieval allegorical drama. The warnings and advice of the Good and Bad Angels, the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins—these, it is argued, are taken over directly from the drama of an earlier period. And so there is the alternative view of the play—one which sees it as completely steeped in the philosophy and world picture of the middle ages. For literary and dramatic conventions are not simply a matter of "style", but are the means of expressing a particular view of the world. In this "medieval" interpretation, Faustus's aspirations and dabbings in Satanic art are judged and condemned by the play. He is an overreacher who is punished. His quest for knowledge is blasphemous. The enquiring individualism that we might see as characteristic of the new man

SYDNEY STUDIES

of the Renaissance is a misguided assertion of self which culminates in the play's final portrait of the agonized scholar's fall from spiritual grace to Hell, and the didactic judgment of the choric epilogue:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man.
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
Only to wonder at unlawful things,
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,
To practise more than heavenly power permits.¹

This reading of the play offers other evidence by way of denying its Renaissance modernism. We are told that the play's judgment against Faustus supports a Christian orthodoxy in Marlowe which counters his putative atheism. And we know that Faustus's so-called magical skills amount to little more than an ability to play somewhat feeble practical jokes on the Pope, and worse still, on men surely beneath his contempt. There may, indeed, be topical theatrical gain in using the Pope-baiting scenes in Rome to pander to the anti-Papist sentiments of a Protestant English audience of the late sixteenth century, but the play's other evidence of Faustus's diabolical talents suggests, surely, that his pact with the Devil has been less than fair: he sells his soul in return for the most paltry of powers. Not understanding that Satan has no real power to sell to him (since only God has the knowledge to which he aspires), he is deluded in placing his faith and his fate in the forces of evil. The gradual degradation of the learned scholar of the opening scenes to Faustus the petty magician of the middle acts is a sign of the inevitable moral degeneration consequent upon intercourse with the agents of Hell. This is the most generally accepted interpretation of the difficult middle scenes whose authorship is in doubt. That is to say, whether or not Marlowe wrote them, they are consistent with an overall theme of the protagonist's moral and spiritual collapse. They support a traditionally Christian reading of the play.

The play may also be interpreted as affirming Marlowe's conservatism in astronomy and science. The universe of *Doctor Faustus* is not a modern Copernican cosmos—it is a geocentric,

1 *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, Oxford University Press, 1970, edited by Roma Gill. All subsequent quotations are taken from this text.

Ptolemaic world, with the earth at the centre of seven planetary orbits. Despite the scientific revolution of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, despite the influence of Copernicus and his followers—an influence that was certainly operative at some intellectual levels in late sixteenth-century London—Marlowe shows no awareness of the new universe. One does not, of course, find post-Copernican universes in Shakespeare's drama, but where we are looking at a play which specifically concerns itself with the nature of the cosmos, a play often considered to epitomize the Renaissance man's search for knowledge and discovery, and whose author himself is regarded as intellectually radical, one might indeed expect evidence of the scientific revolution. But the Chorus to Act III, with Mephistophilis's responses to Faustus's questions regarding astronomy (II.ii), make it clear that the universe of *Doctor Faustus* is geocentric, traditional and finite. So, in this view of the play, along with the use of medieval dramatic conventions, we find a religious and philosophical orthodoxy.

The problem, then, that I propose to examine is whether a close consideration of the play does sustain these diametrically opposed interpretations. Is *Doctor Faustus* a great and early exposition of modern Renaissance man, or is it thoroughly traditional? Alternatively, is it a hybrid work, a play in transition? Or is it merely confused: either the result of textual corruption, or worse, the product of a confused mind? I shall begin by suggesting that there is another reading which goes some way towards reconciling the varying views of the play, and by suggesting that *Doctor Faustus* is undoubtedly a work of and about the English Renaissance despite apparent inheritances from earlier drama—indeed, because of an *altered* use of that heritage. Since the most obvious inheritance consists in the use of dramatic conventions from the medieval morality plays, I begin by considering their function in this play, written some fifty years after the popular performance of plays like *Everyman*.

Medieval drama is largely allegorical. In the moralities, the personifications of abstractions are given autonomy; they exist as separate entities and dramatically interact with the protagonist. Envy, Greed, Death and so on are conceived of as external forces in the universe, located outside the psyche of the protagonist. Though they operate *on* him (and at another level, *through* him), they are seen as universal realities manifesting themselves in their encounters with men rather than as traits within the human personality. The characters of a morality play are not objectifications

SYDNEY STUDIES

of emotions within the protagonist (say, Everyman): the interaction which takes place between them is not to be taken as symbolic of warring emotions within his psychology. Everyman provides those abstractions with a form on whom they can operate. Man offers a vehicle for their activities, but they have existence *whether or not* they have an object on which to act. In these plays, the existence of personified abstractions is not conditioned by or dependent upon the existence of the protagonist. In other words, the allegorical nature of medieval drama consists in giving physical shape to ideas which are thought to exist as separate realities. With Marlowe, on the other hand, abstract personifications function in two ways—both of them quite differently from the role in which they are employed in medieval drama. Either (as in the case of the Good and Bad Angels) they are absolutely conditional upon the existence of and the conflict within Faustus himself, so that they are without ontological freedom. Or else (as in the Parade of the Sins) where they appear to be independent of him, the play is structured to show us that they are meaningless. There is a crucial epistemological difference in Marlowe's use of the convention, and it is a difference which reflects changing attitudes in the Renaissance to human psychology.

The abstractions in the moralities, in taking on an independent existence, reflect the scholastic system of Realism which posits universal abstract forces as the highest forms of reality. Truth is located outside of particulars, outside of individuals. In so far as such forces do exist as human emotions within a man, then they are merely reflections of the greater abstract forms. Marlowe, in his rejection of the autonomy of abstractions, can be regarded as being influenced by Nominalist thought. For him, abstractions are merely words, and unless they have a referential function in terms of human experience then they are without meaning. His use of allegory represents a Renaissance view of individual psychology, whereas the moralities use allegory to deny such individuality. It is a difference of "movement" between—to use I. A. Richards's terms—tenor and vehicle. In the drama of the middle ages, the personifications are the tenor, human nature the vehicle. In Marlovian drama, human nature is the tenor, personification the vehicle. And that difference in the "direction" of the allegory represents a changed understanding of psychology. In this sense, Marlowe is modern, and to see in his drama simply a late use of an ossified tradition is to oversimplify his technique. In employing allegory the way he does, he gives new vitality to a dramatic con-

vention. Most of Marlowe's plays reveal a scepticism towards abstractions—a fundamental belief that they have no reality except in so far as they are rooted in individual human behaviour—and this “inverted” use of allegory is another means of asserting that belief. Marlowe's apparent cynicism towards abstractions is consonant with the Renaissance emphasis on the importance of individual, particularized, human experience. One of the consequences, of course, of the scholastic doctrine of Realism is to deny the importance of individual characteristics. Since they are merely reflections of a greater form, they will not, per se, *characterize* an individual. The philosophy of Realism expresses itself in the moralities by asserting that forces like pride and envy are located outside the individual, existing as universals which operate on the protagonist in his journey through life. Essentially they suggest that each man's experience is the same.

Now whatever else characterizes the Renaissance, the primacy of the individual has long been thought to be its one defining quality. In the Protestant revolution, it is the individual relationship each man has with his God. In the new scientific method, it is the individual's sensory experience of phenomena that validates knowledge and which is the essence of such systems as Francis Bacon's empiricism. In the New World discoveries, it is the individual's assertion of self over the unknown, a willingness to pit himself against his environment and in so doing, master it. And in the literature of the Renaissance, we find a new emphasis on the individual psychology of man—on the uniqueness of his own personal experience of the world.

In *Doctor Faustus*, the play so often cited as epitomizing this truly Renaissance spirit of individualism, we find allegorical features which seem to be taken over from medieval drama, and which should, therefore, express that medieval world view which stresses the essential sameness of each man's experience in his encounter with universal abstract realities. The parade of the Seven Deadly Sins ostensibly exists to provide entertainment for Faustus and to acquaint him with the inhabitants of the Hell to which he has committed his soul. Critics argue that, as in the moralities, their presence is a warning to Faustus of the temptations to which he will be subjected. He sees them as abstract realities and then goes on to experience each of them. It has been claimed that “Faustus learns to know the sins abstractly and objectively. In subsequent scenes he comes to know them concretely and objectively, by actually committing each of them in

turn".² This is a familiar motif in the morality play, and so, it can be argued, the world view of the play is medieval. Faustus's assertion of himself is a misguided, blasphemous one, and by ignoring his encounter with these abstractions as they are objectified in the Parade of the Sins, he is ignoring forms of reality higher than himself. His individualism counts for nothing in such a world.

But several aspects of this scene should be considered. Unlike Adam in the Genesis story, who can *name* the inhabitants of Paradise, Faustus actually has to ask the sins their "names and dispositions". He has no knowledge of them. More importantly, we are struck by the peculiar mundanity of the scene. The parade is decidedly unimpressive. Even Faustus, though he later claims that the sight has delighted his soul, remains singularly unmoved by it, responding to each Sin with a marked lack of enthusiasm: "What art thou, the third?"; "Out, envious wretch. But what art thou, the fourth?"; "And what art thou, the fifth?"—and so on. The only figure with whom he has any interaction at all is Gluttony in his jaunty response, "I'll see thee hanged; thou wilt eat up all my victuals . . . Choke thyself, Glutton"—and this is explicable, as I shall go on to argue, in terms of a motif of appetite which runs through the play. We are given the distinct impression that not only is Faustus unmoved by the parade, but that he is almost bored, and this is hardly surprising when the characters give utterance to such lame and weakly comic expression. There is no dynamic interaction with the protagonist, no suggestion that these abstractions carry any real threat for him. The parade represents an odd stasis in the movement of the play, and in this way differs quite radically from the dramatic encounter with forms of evil that is undergone by the protagonist of a morality play. This failure to dramatize evil is consistent with a general tendency in the play not to portray the abstraction of evil with any real conviction. To be sure, the final picture of Hell's fire and brimstone, and the presence of a Lucifer complete with fireworks, thunder and attendant devils might have great theatrical effect. Nevertheless, Mephistophilis is certainly "sleeping, eating, walking and disputing" (II.i.138), so that like Faustus we are inclined to be sceptical of the so-called horrors of Hell, and he is touchingly humanized. It is difficult to be in awe of a figure who purportedly represents evil but for whom we feel a certain tender sympathy.

2 Sherman Hawkins, "The Education of Faustus", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, VI (1966), 195.

And it has already been noticed that evil as it manifests itself in Faustus's own diabolical activities reveals him as little more than a petty prankster throughout most of the play. I am arguing, then, that in general the play fails to give any reality to an abstraction called evil—and that what one critic calls the “peculiarly trivial” nature of the Parade of the Seven Deadly Sins is deliberately part of a refusal to credit abstractions with reality. And so I would want to suggest that it is not, as in the moralities, a question of the protagonist knowing a sin first “abstractly and objectively” and then “concretely and intimately”, but rather of not *knowing* until experiencing. Faustus does in one way or other commit these sins, but until he does they have no existence—and not just no existence *for him*, but ontologically as well. In this play, as well as in other Marlovian drama, only the individual's experiential knowledge has any validity. As epistemologies, both Empiricism and Nominalism collide in Marlowe's use of allegory. He uses the conventions of an earlier drama to new ends. Rejecting that system of thought which posits the unconditional reality of abstractions, he employs allegorical personification to destroy the very concept which personifications were formerly used to express. So that while it is proper to point to Marlowe's use of medieval conventions, it should be recognized that they are no simple survival from a tired tradition, but rather, function to reject medievalism in favour of individual experience. And that is thoroughly in accord with a Renaissance emphasis on the primacy of the individual.

The play's use of the Good and Bad Angels also points to Marlowe's interest in the psychology of Faustus. Their role is one that has puzzled readers of the play, and though most critics ascribe to them the simple function of representing external phenomena—calling them agents of abstract forces of Good and Evil—others have obvious difficulty in determining their precise status, in ascertaining whether they are to be located within or without Faustus's psyche. They are cited as evidence that *Doctor Faustus* is a “morality play”, yet there is a certain unease, a lack of conviction in the claim. So that typical comments include, “Critics have long recognized that *Doctor Faustus* is both a tragedy and a morality play”, whose personifications are “semi-allegorical figures”;³ and “The morality elements in *Doctor*

3 Susan Snyder, “Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as an Inverted Saint's Life”, in *Studies in Philology*, LXIII (1966), 565. (My emphasis.)

Faustus—the Good and the Bad Angels . . .—cannot be ignored”, an assertion which is then warily modified with the somewhat vague remark, “I think that Marlowe introduces these elements as elements, not as theme, and that he is interested in a complex reaction to his play”.⁴ A New Critical approach ingeniously resolves the problem by suggesting that the angels have to be seen in two ways at once, both as aspects of Faustus himself and as external forces of the universe. “Marlowe chooses certain characters,” writes James Smith, “so as to be capable of at least a double function; they are significant as symbols, in virtue of what they symbolize; but significant as themselves, in virtue of what they are. And they are not significant now as the one thing, now as the other by a sort of alternation; but continuously and simultaneously, as both.”⁵

There is, however, no convincing reason for seeing the angels as representing external universal orders. Their presence is never acknowledged by Faustus, except for where he talks of a “buzzing” in his ears, and that certainly does not have to be interpreted as meaning that they have an objective presence. What he “hears” is as likely to be his apprehension of what is taking place in his heart or mind as it is to be a perception of outside realities. And he only “hears” it (as a “buzzing”) once. Faustus is perceiving an inner voice, a conflict in his mind between clashing emotions. And so, because he does not acknowledge the presence of the Angels (he undergoes the conflict they symbolize, but he does not concede their concrete reality), we see them as embodiments of a drama within the protagonist and not as agents of external phenomena. That is to say, that like the Seven Sins, their existence is utterly conditional upon their status as experienced and internalized emotions within Faustus. They are without autonomy. Once again, Marlowe’s employment of allegory works to sharpen an awareness of individual psychology; the moralities use allegory to deny its importance.

Literary, or dramatic conventions, then, are not merely value-free stylistic devices. Rather, they are the means of expressing particular ideas about the world. In altering a convention, Marlowe is revealing an altered perception of reality.

Because of its interest in human experience, and particularly in

4 Sidney R. Homan, “*Doctor Faustus*, Dekker’s *Fortunatus*, and the Morality Plays”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, XXVI (1965), 504.

5 James Smith, “Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*”, *Scrutiny*, VIII (1939-40), 38.

the use of the Good and Bad Angels as an allegory of an emotional war within the protagonist, the play can be called a psychomachia. This does, of course, leave us with the problem of the play's traditional Christian framework and the way in which Faustus is punished by ignoring that framework. Harry Levin raises a tantalizing idea in this regard. "How far," he asks "was [Marlowe] utilizing theology as a modern playwright might utilize psychology?"⁶ Certainly, the play makes use of a Christian framework, and a largely traditional one at that, for all Marlowe's supposed atheism. But given a great deal of scepticism and comic religious irreverence within the play—and especially the refusal to render abstract evil dramatically—it is tempting to take up Levin's suggestion and consider the theological anchor of the play as in part a metaphor for a psychological state. Using points of reference (and stage properties—such as the gaping trapdoor of hell in the final scenes) readily comprehensible and familiar to his audience, Marlowe examines the psychological condition of a man whose excessive imagination must go beyond the limits of organized knowledge, of "odious" philosophy, of "petty" law and physic, of "base" divinity, to seek fulfilment in a forbidden art. Marlowe is much more interested in the psychology of Faustus than he is interested in the objective reality of the play's polarities of Heaven and Hell.

Granted, Hell is conventionally located. Mephistophilis, Belzebub and Lucifer have concrete form and emerge from a definite region: "Thus from infernal Dis do we ascend / To view the subjects of our monarchy" (V.ii.1ff.); at the end of the drama, "Hell is discovered" to Faustus who is asked "with horror" to "stare / Into that vast perpetual torture-house" (V.ii.109-110). God is seen, quite traditionally, as inhabiting a region above the earth, Lucifer's monarchy is in the nether world, and Faustus's final conflict of movement is between these forces: "O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down? / See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!" (V.ii.138-39).

On the other hand, there is much in the play which appears to oppose this somewhat schematic eschatological structure. In a traditional Christian view of the sufferings of the damned as "the pain of loss", hell is seen as the deprivation of God's love: Mephistophilis is tormented "in being depriv'd of everlasting bliss" (I.iii.80) and "All places shall be hell that is not heaven"

6 Harry Levin, *The Overreacher* (1952), p. 154.

(II.i.125). But this more sophisticated view of Hell aside, there is a strong suggestion that hell may be a state of mind, a kind of torment of the psyche. "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed / In one self place, but where we are is hell, / And where hell is there must we ever be" (II.i.120ff.) is Mephistophilis's response to Faustus's question on the whereabouts of Hell; as he also replies (to surprise that he is "out of hell") with "Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it" (I.iii.76). And when Mephistophilis asserts that he is "tormented with ten thousand hells" (I.ii.79), the notion of hell is certainly "de-localized". Hell, as it is expressed here, is a metaphor for pain, and since Mephistophilis appears to suffer no physical torment, we must regard it as a spiritual pain, or to take up Levin's suggestion, a psychological condition. "Ten thousand hells" is a metaphor reductive of the idea of a single hell, and Faustus's beautiful cry, "Had I as many souls as there be stars / I'd give them all for Mephistophilis" (I.iii.102-03) also has this reductive effect. In a religious sense, the hyperbole is blasphemous, denying as it does the sacredness of the individual's proper single and unique soul, but it also has the effect of suggesting that the soul (as the spiritual part of man surviving after his corporeal death) has no existence. The dialogue between Faustus and Mephistophilis on the nature of hell and damnation (II.i.118-38) is also interesting for its suggestion that the soul (because it does not exist as a theological entity) cannot suffer pain. Faustus's magnificently terse reply to Mephistophilis's speech on hell, "I think hell's a fable", meets with the empiricist rejoinder, "Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind". But the play does not offer us any experience of hell as a religious entity. Certainly in the end Faustus is *shown* hell, but there is no real experience of it in the play and in any case there is altogether too much evidence of hell's not being a real, localized phenomenon, with fiends and endless torture, for us to be able to accept that vision of hell as anything more than Marlowe's use of spectacular stage properties. So that when Mephistophilis asserts that he is "an instance to prove the contrary, / For I tell thee I am damn'd, and now in hell", we are rather inclined to agree with Faustus, "Nay, and this be hell, I'll willingly be damn'd (II.i.137).

The play then, offers an ambiguous vision of hell. On the one hand it is located—but perhaps only theatrically. On the other, it presents a more sophisticated Christian hell envisaged as a spiritual suffering resulting from the deprivation of God's love. And in yet a third view—expressed more pervasively through the play—it

virtually denies the existence of religious concepts of the soul and of hell (which are variously regarded as fables, old wives' tales and trifles, and which are further weakened by their endorsement from that thoroughly undermined authority, the Papacy). This third view, however, does not deny that there might be a psychological or emotional state expressed in a metaphor of hell, but it certainly abolishes the idea of hell in eschatological terms. Faustus, we are encouraged to understand, abandons the safety of structured, formal knowledge to give up his soul to that dangerously isolated state of individual imaginative experience. It is a state Marlowe regards as "hellish", but one to which Faustus is compulsively drawn. His "fall" may not be theologically determined, but it is psychologically and intellectually.

I have referred to Faustus's faculty of imagination, as well as to his love of beauty and of art, all of which are very much concerns of Renaissance literature. In the love poems of men like Spenser, Wyatt, Sidney and Donne we find (conceding, of course, a certain dependence on tradition) a questioning of the rightness of old poetic forms and a need to strike out in new ways, using the imagination as a means of creating an art that will immortalize their subjects. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* we find evidence of that peculiarly Renaissance literary self-consciousness—that is, a sense the work of art has of itself, a consciousness of the processes of the imagination. One notable consequence of Faustus's moral decay seems to be a flowering of visionary poetic art. It is the means by which he can truly transcend the mortal world in a way commensurate with his greatness, and Marlowe uses the traditional Neo-Platonic image of music to render this artistic transcendence, this harmonic identity with an ongoing ideal world:

Have I not made blind Homer sing to me
Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death?
And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
Made music with my Mephistophilis?

(II.ii.26-30)

Faustus here is communicating with the muse of poetry—that "ravishing sound" is the music of a transcendent poetic art which he can achieve only by the sacrifice of his soul to art and the abandonment of formal learning. The culmination of Faustus's career is his union with Helen of Troy—an episode many critics have seen as indicative of his moral degeneration, as revealing his wanton sensuality. But Helen here (as well as representing a succuba) is primarily an ideal of beauty, and Marlowe's lines—

"Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships . . ." (V.i.97ff.)—which are some of the most beautiful he ever penned, indicate in Faustus a love of beauty and a capacity for the poetic expression of that. Helen has become the ultimate object of Faustus's yearning imagination. Earlier in the play, it is apparent that Faustus's compulsive need to engage with the powers of darkness is precisely because his imagination had no object on which to vent itself. His admission to Valdes and Cornelius that they have won him over to black magic continues:

Yet not your words only but mine own fantasy
That will receive no object for my head . . . (I.i.101-02)

Before his fall from grace, Faustus has an imagination frustrated because it lacks an object—for that, after all, is a crucial sense of the word "fantasy": "Imagination, the process, the faculty, or the result of forming representations of things not actually present" (*OED*). Faustus's Satanism, then, allows him a visionary power with which he can slake his artistic imagination. That Renaissance consciousness of the power of art, and its function in immortalizing beauty, pervades Marlowe's play.

In terms of imagery, Faustus's yearning imagination is represented as a kind of appetite. Sensory words, particularly language invoking the sense of appetite, are stressed in the Prologue. Words such as "sweet", "delight", "glutted", "surfeit" and so on are extended and deepened through the play—but we should notice that they rarely apply to Faustus's physical hunger but are epithets used of his soul and mind. The density of such sensuous language has led many critics to describe Faustus's fall in terms of a decadent sensuality: "Utter satisfaction of the will and utter satisfaction of the senses are what Faustus desires", Leo Kirschbaum has written, while he also talks of Faustus as a "wretchedly irresolute hedonist".⁷ Similarly, Clifford Davidson claims that "Faustus's life is progressively cheapened through his own sensuality".⁸ The play, however, simply does not offer a portrait of Faustus as hedonist. Granted, his career in magic begins with a dinner with Valdes and Cornelius, and his final hour is preceded by a visual enactment of a feast—but these feasts have thematically important symbolic dimensions. The final banquet inevitably suggests Christ's last supper; the scene is an ironic parallel of the scriptural story—just

7 Leo Kirschbaum, "Marlowe's Faustus: A Reconsideration", *Review of English Studies*, XIX (1943), 225-41.

8 Clifford Davidson, "Doctor Faustus at Rome", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, IX (1969), 233.

as Wagner's mock clerical language in describing Faustus's initial—and initiating—supper with Valdes and Cornelius (I.ii.12ff.) evokes scriptural parallels.

More importantly, the play's sensory language is used to define Faustus's soul; it is his imagination that hungers, not his stomach. And that idea is underscored by ironic parallels in the play's comic scenes. In the first of them Wagner describes Robin, the clown, as "so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood raw", to which Robin replies, "Not so neither. I had need to have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear, I can tell you." These scenes are, of course, parodic of the main plot, but they operate at a more complex level than the traditionally ironic function that Elizabethan dramatic comic underplots have. In their continuation of the language of appetite they serve to show by implication that hunger must be satisfied whether it be a desire of the stomach (as in Robin's case) or a desire of the mind (as in Faustus's). As hunger is basic to the stomachs of base characters like the clown, so it is basic to the mind of a man of extreme intellectual and imaginative capacity like Faustus. When Faustus asserts (of himself) "The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite", it is to be interpreted as an appetite of the imagination that can find no fulfilment in the dry mechanics of scholastic learning. Robin serves the voracity of his belly, Faustus that of his mind. Another of the comic scenes underlines the physical appetite of the clowns. With Faustus's conjuring book, Robin promises to produce "white wine, red wine, claret wine, sack, muscadine, malmesay and whipcrust". And perhaps, as part of the general Pope-baiting appeal to English audiences, the burlesque of Faustus's snatching of the Pope's meat and wine is meant to indicate a grossness in this man of the cloth whose hunger should be spiritual but whose major interest in food and wine, being physical and not sacramental, reduces him to the same belly level as the clowns.

In Faustus, the use of sensory language to refer to mental or spiritual states is a means of differentiating him from other men. Marlowe is studying the psychology of a man of almost voracious imagination, an individualist for whom ordinary knowledge can bring no satisfaction. That individualism is underlined by the sense given to us of Faustus's spiritual isolation. The opening scenes of the play, with Faustus alone in his study (the technique is used also in *The Jew of Malta* to portray social alienation) renders that

sense of solitude, and the early scenes go on to intensify it. Faustus talks of his dominions as stretching "as far as doth the mind of man" (I.i.59); the world he will enter is to be the world of his own mind—a lonely universe but one where his imagination will at last be given reign. The play gives us a strong feeling of Faustus as poet or artist, so that the constant stress on the word "art" in relation to his cunning in black magic, carries with it overtones of art as the exercising of imagination in beauty and poetry. And I would want to argue that the play's pervasive consciousness of the power of individual imagination and of art mark it as a play of the Renaissance, a work consistent with the artistic concerns in the poets of the period.

If, then, we can find in Faustus's diabolism a spiritual and poetic flowering, what is to be made of the other knowledge he seeks but is denied—or at least is given no advance on what is already known or can be deduced through the disputative and deductive methods of scholastic learning? Faustus's earliest experiment in his newly acquired status is to confront Mephistophilis with questions about the universe, about the movements of stars and planets. The answers he receives give a picture of a wholly traditional universe, one that in no way recognizes more recent scientific discoveries—and Faustus, disgusted with those answers, replies, "These slender questions Wagner can decide" (II.ii.49). Faustus's pact with the Devil gives him access to no further scientific knowledge. This suggests two things: namely, that Satan has no real power (and this accords with the play's general tendency to credit evil with no potency), but secondly, that all knowledge can be derived from scholastic systems of learning, and as such the play could be interpreted as endorsing those medieval systems. To arrive at the truth about the universe, it is necessary only to consult the great masters in the universities' learning syllabus. All knowledge of the world, for instance, can be derived from propositions stated by Aristotle. Learning by disputation, learning from authority seems to be supported by the play.

There is, however, an important sense in which Faustus's magical powers do accord with the new science of the Renaissance. Though the play makes it clear that Faustus acquires no new knowledge, the *methods* by which he validates already existent knowledge are new. The empiricist scientific method of the Renaissance clearly reveals itself in the play. That is to say, knowledge is arrived at by experiment and by the individual's experience of phenomena through his sense organs, particularly the sense of

sight. In the English Renaissance what man could feel and see was real and knowable. As the intellectual deductive method gave way to the new scientific method, no longer was truth seen to be that which resulted from logical, theoretical argument and reasoning. Rather, man's recording of individual experience provided the highest form of truth. As Christopher Hill has claimed:

In the sixteenth century the individualist revolt of Luther, together with the scientific and geographical discoveries, had shattered the old universe, the old certainties. The truth which jesting Pilate's generation was seeking was being slowly reconstructed by experiment and by religious experience. Truth could no longer be imposed from above, by authority: it had to be rebuilt from below, on individual conviction. Many of the ideas [of the English Renaissance] can be linked by the emphasis on experience, experiment, rather than authority; on things rather than words, on the test of the senses and the heart as against intellectual exercises divorced from practice, on thinking as against learning by rote . . . ; on reason against precedent, but on experience against 'reasonings vain'. 'Their whole knowledge of learning without the book', said Ascham, 'was tied only to their tongue and lips, and never ascended to the brain and head, and therefore was soon spit out of the mouth again.'⁹

And there is a sense in which such observational and experiential methods took on heroic proportions. Renaissance navigation and cosmography, discoveries in medicine and the natural sciences—all these testify to man's willingness to explore his own nature and his universe by dint of personal effort. Marlowe's Faustus participates in this new personal acquisition of knowledge. His understanding of the cosmos is validated by his observation of it as he circles the world with Mephistophilis; and the Chorus to Act III is a perfect example of the new epistemology:

Learned Faustus,
To find the secrets of astronomy
Graven in the book of Jove's high firmament,
Did mount him up to scale Olympus top,
Where sitting in a chariot burning bright,
Drawn by the strength of yoked dragons' necks,
He views the clouds, the planets, and the stars,
The tropics, zones, and quarters of the sky,
From the bright circle of the horned moon,
Even to the height of *Primum Mobile*.
And whirling round with this circumference,
Within the concave compass of the pole,
From east to west his dragons swiftly glide,
And in eight days did bring him home again.

9 Christopher Hill, *The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*, (1965), p. 294.

Not long he stay'd within his quiet house,
 To rest his bones after his weary toil,
 But new exploits do hale him out again,
 And mounted then upon a dragon's back,
 That with his wings did part the subtle air,
 He now is gone to prove cosmography,
 That measures coasts and kingdoms of the earth . . .

"To prove cosmography"—the "proof" Faustus is seeking here is not the traditional proof by argument, but proof in the sense both of discovery and confirmation. Here, Marlowe's hero is very much like a heroic explorer of the New World. To be sure, Faustus learns nothing new, but it is important that he *sees* the world as he has been taught it. Knowledge becomes real through observation, and that is very much consistent with the new scientific method, just as the restlessness of his quest is a quality we associate with the aspiring, self-willed man of the Renaissance.

Restlessness is a notable quality of Faustus's personality, but it is also characteristic of the whole world of the play, which employs a predominant cluster of images suggesting cosmic movement. We are given a picture of an unstable world of moving elements and of a man possessed of a high degree of mobility. Wagner, quipping with the scholars about Faustus's whereabouts, says, "For is he not *corpus naturale*? And is that not *mobile*?" (I.ii.13). And the play creates an entire picture of a universe in movement. Faustus's aspirations include the desire to have at his command "All things that move between the quiet poles" (I.i.54); he wants to make "a bridge through the moving air" (I.iii.105). And the concept of planetary movement is stressed: "Nor are the names of Saturn, Mars or Jupiter / Feigned, but are erring stars" (II.ii.43-44); Faustus's incantations include the signs of "erring stars" (I.iii.12). He is fascinated by movement and asks whether the heavens that "jointly move upon one axle-tree" "have all one motion, both *situ et tempore*?" (II.ii.45). All this is no more than a pre-Copernican description of the world, yet the insistence on movement is so marked as to create a world that we feel to be almost volatile. Faustus's proposed commands to Mephistophilis include making "the moon drop from her sphere, / Or the ocean to overwhelm the world" (I.iii.38-39). There is a sense of imminent elemental disorder and movement, and that is compounded in other of the play's speeches, for instance in Faustus's personification of night:

Now that the gloomy shadow of the night,
 Longing to view Orion's drizzling look,
 Leaps from th' antarctic world unto the sky

And dims the welkin with her pitchy breath,
Faustus begin thine incantations.

(I.iii.1-5)

Doctor Faustus abounds in descriptions of the universe which employ violently active verbs of motion—it is a language of elemental violence. Things are perpetually in movement and this contrasts with Shakespeare's plays where the universe is seen to be a stable, ordered hierarchy, disordered only where it corresponds to a moral disorder in man—as in *Macbeth* or *King Lear*. No such cosmic order is given us in *Doctor Faustus*, and I would want to suggest that we might see this in terms of that general uncertainty engendered by the scientific revolution. Those discoveries which put the sun rather than the earth at the centre of the universe, and which even posited that the universe was infinite, upset man's concept of a stable, regular and ordered world with himself at its centre. Though many aspects of life in the middle ages were violent, dark and ugly, nevertheless there was a strong sense of cosmic order and regularity. That certainty, as Hill says, had been "shattered" by the new scientific discoveries. Though Marlowe's play gives no details of the new infinite and heliocentric universe, it certainly presents us with a world that seems in upheaval. That is to say, it partakes of a *spirit* created by the scientific revolution. And all this movement adds to the general feeling that the possibility of stability in it for a man of Faustus's restless will is remote. It is in the nature of physical bodies to move. So the earth and the heavens are in motion, and so is Faustus; the imagery of instability strongly suggests his propensity to fall. Scientifically, *Doctor Faustus* shows evidence both of a new methodology and of a general sense of a less stable universe than we might expect to find in the worldview of the middle ages.

There is a further, more complex way in which Faustus's relationship with his world might be viewed—and it is a way in which the "Medieval" and "Renaissance" interpretations of the play can be in some measure drawn together. The work is structured by an orthodox Christian framework, the perimeters of Heaven and Hell, and presents us in detail at least with a scientifically traditional cosmos. Within that relatively static structure, Marlowe presents us with the portrait of a man whose sensibility and individualism are decidedly "modern". And this creates the basic tension of the drama. The play offers no release for that tension (unless, as many critics do, one feels obliged to describe the tension as confusion and thus avoid the problem). There is no channel into which Faustus's restless energy can be directed. In

SYDNEY STUDIES

part, this accounts for the peculiarly trivial nature of Faustus's practices in evil, for it is as though the world offers him no medium through which to work, no material consonant with the nature of his extraordinary imagination. He is a man out of tune with his age—discordant, that is, in the sense of being ahead of it. However else tragedy is defined, it almost always offers a tension between the protagonist and his world. Often, that disjunction between the tragic hero and the operation of his universe is seen in social, political or psychological terms. In *Doctor Faustus*, the tension is imaginative and intellectual. And that is the nature of his tragic flaw. It is in the nature of tragedy that the inevitable catastrophe is the result of a combination of an inherent flaw, for which the hero has a certain responsibility, and circumstances beyond his control which predetermine the course towards destruction. Faustus's flaw is an overreaching intellectual ambition, an imaginative restlessness, and at the same time he operates within a structured universe that cannot accommodate or sustain that individualism. There can be no real discharge for him, except, as we have seen, in the harmonic transcendence he occasionally achieves through the poetic exercising of his imagination. There is, then, a conflict between the hero's "Renaissance" sensibility and a universe which can be seen as largely medieval. And it is not a question of mere confusion in the drama, but an essential part of its tragic meaning. True, the epilogue morally judges Faustus, but I would suggest that our experience of the play cannot be undermined or contracted by that solemn and traditional warning.

All these, then, are ways in which *Doctor Faustus* can be seen as definitively a play of the English Renaissance. There is a radicalism in the work that denies the abstract realities of medieval philosophical systems in order to concentrate on individual experience. It is true that Marlowe takes over the conventions of an earlier drama, but he uses them in such a way as to quite alter the ideas they formerly expressed. The play is a study in individual psychology, and though it employs a traditional Christian structure in which Faustus is finally punished, attention is directed much more towards the inner conflict in the protagonist, than it is to the externalized vision of Hell and damnation offered by the play. Theology, as Levin says, is used in much the same way as a modern playwright might use psychology. Furthermore, the play's consciousness of the processes of the imagination and the way they can operate to create a transcendent art, is fully consistent

with the issues that concern the great poets of the Renaissance. And if we cannot claim for the play an awareness of the new universe, then we can properly discern a scientific spirit that is new.

I offer these comments on the play not by way of suggesting a complete resolution of its meaning, but rather in an attempt to reconcile some of the apparent contradictions which have led readers to see it either in terms of a modern tragedy of the Renaissance or as a medieval morality play. And I am aware that I have paid little attention to the play as dramaturgy, as drama in performance. Still, drama like all literature can be read for its place in the history of ideas, and that has been my major concern. Difficulties remain in resolving its total meaning—but perhaps no resolution is finally possible. It is, after all, only a relatively modern tendency to seek absolute unity and consistency in a work of art—and perhaps we should let the play stand as it is: irresolute, problematic, various in its treatment of theological issues, but a very great work and one that is thoroughly suffused with the spirit of the Renaissance.