

Faustus and the Angels¹

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Are the Angels of *Doctor Faustus* no more than curious medieval survivals, small fragments of morality play set incongruously in a narrative that a great deal of the time could be labelled as 'realistic'? Critics have made them intelligible for the twentieth-century reader by stressing their psychological function: they are projections of Faustus's inner conflicts. The emphasis is also to be found in some notable modern productions of the play. Thus John Barton in 1974 (Royal Shakespeare Company, Edinburgh and London) showed the Angels as mere aspects of Faustus's consciousness, entirely dependent upon him. Ian McKellen as Faustus held a white doll and a black puppet, manipulating them and supplying the voices. Christopher Fettes in 1980 (Fortune Theatre) dispensed with visible figures; the angelic voices were supplied by Faustus's fellow scholars as they sat at a long refectory table.²

This emphasis on the psychological is relevant and necessary. Yet it is not entirely adequate: the Angels' role in the play encompasses more aspects than signalling inner conflict and representing inner voices. The dramatic effect of speaking figures is different from that of spoken thoughts; and the Angels are not made redundant by Faustus's soliloquies. To appreciate their significance we need to set aside their more obvious psychological functions and turn to their dramatic ones. When we consider the Angels as a means of presenting Faustus's character and condition, their especial feature – and usefulness – is that they are visually separate from him. The audience sees and hears

- 1 The text used for quotations is that of the Revels Plays edition, *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen – University Paperback, 1968); with reference as necessary to W. W. Greg's Parallel Texts, *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: 1604-1616* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950).
- 2 William Tydeman, *Doctor Faustus: Text and Performance* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.75,81-82; Michael Scott, *Renaissance Drama and a Modern Audience* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.29.

them at the same time as they share the stage with Faustus. It is, paradoxically, only by insisting upon the physical, separate nature of the Angels that we can arrive at a full understanding of Faustus's psychology, for his interaction with them illuminates the workings of his mind.

Faustus's awareness of the Angels is imperfect: he neither hears nor understands them adequately. This response is both a departure from the morality tradition, and, more importantly, an index to the presentation of his experience. The tragedy of Faustus results from a failure of perception, a failure epitomized by his encounters with the Angels. Yet this 'blindness' cannot be attributed entirely to his own limitations. Faustus inhabits a world of semantic instability, of confusion and ambiguity, in which words impede the perception of reality. His tragic struggle is not only against the limitations of self, but against the restrictions imposed by his world. Understanding can be gained by experience, but experience may lead to damnation.

The first consequence of the Angels' visual separateness is that it enables them to act as interpreters, reminding the spectators of the metaphysical frame to the action. The Good Angel is thus seen not only as the materialization of Faustus's conscience but as a separate being, representative of and spokesman for the viewpoint of heaven. As a dramatic device the Angels (of scenes I to VI) operate similarly to the vices and virtues of earlier, more consistently allegorical plays: as well as signifying to the audience the fact, and the terms, of inner conflict (their psychological function), they also interpret, again for the audience, the general issues involved in the action, especially the contest between good and evil for the human soul (their metaphysical function). The Angels of scene XIX function only in this latter sense. The metaphysical emphasis has been realized in some modern versions of the play. Michael Benthall's Old Vic production of 1961 (Edinburgh and London) positioned the Angels at the back of the stage 'like winged sentries ... providing a constant reminder of the tug-of-war between good and evil'.³ The allegorical point was made, but perhaps at the cost of some emotional impact. If the Angels do not share Faustus's theatrical

3 Tydeman, p.70. The Good Angel 'chanted its advice' (p.75).

space, they risk becoming no more than remote reminders of supernatural forces.

To function effectively as interpreters the Angels must be easily recognizable. This presents difficulties for a modern producer, who must decide on the visual signs and cues that will serve to identify them for an audience. In contrast, early performances of the play could utilize established conventions of staging. The figures themselves were quite unambiguous. They most probably had wings, and perhaps 'yellow silk hair', with the Bad Angel denoted as evil by grotesque or ugly visual detail.⁴ They were not necessarily static figures: they may, as Alan C. Dessen suggests, have carried distinctive properties (Bible, rope and dagger), and have spoken and moved in distinctive ways (entry through different doors is an obvious possibility).⁵

The visual separateness of the Angels has a second consequence, one more evident in performance. The Angels may provide a framing commentary on the action, but what they focus attention on, and what the audience watches, is the figure of Faustus as he reacts in their presence. What becomes important is not simply that Faustus is in conflict, but how he is seen to interact with and respond to the figures of the Angels. The appearance of the Angels effects a stilling of the action, a suspension of time, so that attention is focused on 'the act of choice in slow motion'.⁶ And yet there is more to be observed in the process than a choosing; and this greater complexity points to Marlowe's distinctive adaptation of the dramatic device.

Plays in the morality tradition did present inner conflict in more than one way, with the relationship between protagonist

4 T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1958), p.53.

5 On staging possibilities, see Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp.137-39; Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp.170-83.

6 Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p.217.

and allegorical figures shown variously. Some of the possibilities can be seen in *Apius and Virginia* (entered in the Stationers' Register 1567, only known edition 1575). The virtues Conscience and Justice are first seen literally 'coming out' of the judge Apius, complete with emblematic properties:

*Here let him make as though he went out and let
Conscience and Iustice come out of him, and let
Conscience hold in his hande a lamp burning, and let
Iustice have a sword and hold it before Apius brest*
(428.1-4)⁷

As the figures stand near him, Apius speaks for them ('And Iustice saith ...'); then the Vice, Haphazard, dismisses these statements as 'but thoughts'. When Apius and the Vice leave, Conscience and Justice remain on stage to lament their ill-treatment. Thus in sequence the Virtues are seen as physically part of and then separate from the protagonist, as spoken thoughts, and as independent figures. Later, the judge's 'secret' Conscience is heard to speak offstage ('*Here let CONSCIENCE speake within*' – 559.1). At all times he is on stage the protagonist is presented as conscious of the moral issues (and the Virtues, left on stage, elaborate upon what he has said). The same awareness is to be found in the use of the morality technique in *A Looking Glasse for London and England* by Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene, written about 1587-8, when Marlowe was writing for the popular stage.⁸ An Evil Angel appears and tempts the Usurer to despair, offering the dagger and rope the Usurer has brought on to the stage; the Angel does not speak, but his action is preceded by the Usurer's telling of murmurings about damnation. The Usurer then hears 'a voice amidst my eares', urging repentance and offering mercy. (The play does have a Good Angel, but only as a narrative figure, sent as a messenger from heaven to the prophet Ionas.) In these and other plays which employ morality devices the action slips easily

7 *A new Tragicall Comedie of Apius and Virginia*, by R. B., in *Tudor Interludes*, ed. Peter Happe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

8 *A Looking Glasse for London and England by Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene: A Critical Edition*, ed. George Alan Clugston (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980).

from one kind of presentation into the next. The boundaries between soliloquy and psychomachia are blurred.

In *Doctor Faustus* Marlowe preserves the easy transitions in the action, but defines the boundaries between spoken thoughts and speaking figures. Alone on stage, Faustus is conscious of his inner voices. Before the Angels appear in scene V, he is aware of the elements of his spiritual conflict, the urging to 'Abjure this magic, turn to God again!' and the opposing impulse to 'Despair in God, and trust in Beelzebub'. Similarly, after the third appearance of the Angels, he recounts in soliloquy experiences of 'deep despair' and 'sweet pleasure': 'But fearful echoes thunders in mine ears, / "Faustus, thou art damn'd!" ' and the 'ravishing sound of his melodious harp' (VI.20-21, 29). In the soliloquies Faustus is responsive both to statements presented as thoughts ('Despair in God, and trust in Beelzebub') and those presented as heard 'external' voices ('Abjure this magic, turn to God again!').⁹

This consciousness is in contrast to his different reaction when the Angels are present on stage. Faustus's response to them can be traced in the language of these brief encounters; it is observable as a fluctuating and erratic attention to them and a limited awareness of what they say. When he does respond, it is most often to fragments of their speeches, to individual words and phrases, and seldom to whole statements or to their meanings. It is only after the fourth appearance of the Angels, midway through scene VI, that he exhibits any real comprehension. He is least attentive during their first two appearances. In scene I the Angels arrive when he sends for Valdes and Cornelius. The Good Angel ensures that the audience understands the implications of what is seen on stage, the figure of Faustus standing absorbed in the book of magic:

O Faustus, lay that damned book aside
 And gaze not on it lest it tempt thy soul
 And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head.
 Read, read the scriptures; that is blasphemy. (I.69-72)

Faustus seems entirely unaware. Nor does he respond directly to

9 The modern editor has provided the inverted commas for direct speech in these examples.

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the Bad Angel; the relationship suggested is one of affinity of imagination. The words of the Bad Angel echo and confirm Faustus's aspirations:

Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all nature's treasury is contain'd:
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of these elements. *Exeunt Angels*

Faustus is silent until the Angels leave. His thoughts ('How am I glutted with conceit of this! ...') then develop from the Bad Angel's suggestions of wealth and power.

Faustus is no more attentive to the words of the Angels on their second appearance:

Bad Ang. Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art.
Good Ang. Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.
Fau. Contrition, prayer, repentance, what of these?
Good Ang. O, they are means to bring thee unto heaven.
Bad Ang. Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy,
That make men foolish that do use them most.
Good Ang. Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things.
Bad Ang. No, Faustus, think of honour and of wealth.
Exeunt Angels

Faustus. Wealth!
Why, the signiory of Emden shall be mine. (V.15-24)

Once again he continues with his own thoughts, apparently unaware of the angelic presences. The Angels both mention 'art', both advise Faustus to 'think', both answer his question 'Contrition ... ?' with rhetorically balanced appeals, but they are in effect debating each other. Faustus responds only to the final word of the Bad Angel. His repetition of 'wealth' then sends his thoughts off in another direction, and he becomes 'resolute' and eager for the return of Mephostophilis. In the third appearance of the Angels, near the beginning of scene VI, Faustus hears more but still attends erratically:

Good Ang. Faustus, repent; yet God will pity thee.
Bad Ang. Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee.
Fau. Who buzzeth in my ears I am a spirit?
Be I a devil, yet God may pity me;

Yea, God will pity me if I repent.
Bad Ang. Ay, but Faustus never shall repent. *Exeunt Angels*
Fau. My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent. (VI.12-18)

Faustus responds to part of the speech of each Angel, picking up individual words, echoing the rhythm of phrases: the Good Angel's 'God will pity thee' ('God may pity me ... God will pity me') and 'repent'; the Bad Angel's 'Thou art a spirit' ('I am a spirit') and 'never shall repent' ('I cannot repent'). He momentarily achieves some understanding ('Be I a devil'); but when the Angels leave he retains only the last words of the Bad Angel.

Faustus's imperfect awareness may not be unprecedented in the morality tradition – many of the plays do not survive – but it is unusual. More commonly, the figure at the centre of the psychomachia listens first before rejecting or accepting the advice proffered, even where there is a lengthy rehearsing of arguments. The decision taken is often made visually emphatic by gesture or changes in stage grouping: a typical example is found in *The Conflict of Conscience* by Nathaniel Woodes (printed 1581), where Philologus denies Conscience and then leaves the stage with Suggestion. Words and action suggest that a wilful choice has been made:

My Conscience speaketh truth mee think, but yet because I feare
 By his advice to suffer death, I doo his wordes forbear.
 (1897-98)¹⁰

Faustus's response to the Angels reveals the nature of his mind, suggesting that his actions are not always the product of wilful choice, of full consciousness of the alternatives. His reactions to them confirm a more general failure to attend and perceive, a persistent and inherent inability that operates even when he seems most alert. For much of the action he seems to be unaware of the full significance of his encounters with hell. As with the Angels, a double perspective is established: the spectators watch Faustus, and understand more than he does. Both Faustus and spectators are told, but he does not apprehend the consequences:

10 *The Conflict of Conscience* by Nathaniel Woodes 1581 (Oxford: Malone Society Reprints, 1952).

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Fau. Why, dost thou think that Faustus shall be damn'd?

Meph. Ay, of necessity, for here's the scroll

In which thou hast given thy soul for Lucifer.

Fau. Ay, and body too; but what of that? (V.130-33)

The discussions with Mephostophilis show an imperfect grasp of the devil's words (Mephostophilis aptly promises to 'give thee more than thou hast wit to ask' – V.47). Faustus is more impressed by the 'passionate' response of Mephostophilis to 'being depriv'd of everlasting bliss' (III.82) than by his revelation of the nature of hell; he offers 'manly fortitude' as a less than appropriate remedy for loss of heavenly joys. He cannot discriminate between the evasiveness of such statements as 'Nothing, Faustus, but to delight thy mind' (V.84) and the honesty of 'Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd/ In one self place, but where we are is hell' (122-23); he asserts that 'hell's a fable' and the torments of hell 'trifles and mere old wives' tales' (128, 136). In a similar way, he disregards or misinterprets the visible and audible evidence of hell's activities: the fireworks and sound effects, the chafer of fire, the shows of Devils and Sins.

The B-text of the play established his lack of awareness more emphatically than the A-text. In scenes III and XIX thunder announces the entry of Lucifer and other devils, probably 'above', to watch over the action. Unconscious of their presence, Faustus invokes the powers of hell, converses with Mephostophilis, farewells the Scholars, submits to angelic judgement, and awaits the striking of midnight. In the early scene the Devils watch, ready to take advantage of Faustus. In the later, every gesture upwards, towards heaven, involves an ironic inversion of the visual commonplaces which located heaven above and hell beneath the stage, and reinforces the inevitability of damnation: 'Yet, Faustus, look up to heaven and remember God's mercy is infinite' – XIX.39-40; 'O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?' – XIX.145).

These failures draw attention to the disordered processes of his thinking, as faulty perception is associated with confused and disjointed expression. The mind of Faustus is prone to distraction. His attention to serious matters can fade suddenly:

'But, leaving this, let me have a wife' – V.141-43). His 'distractability' renders him vulnerable. The Devils use shows to divert him from thoughts that will imperil their contract: Mephostophilis provides dancing devils ('I'll fetch him somewhat to delight his mind' – V.82); Lucifer and Beelzebub the Show of Sins. Faustus himself requests the distraction of Helen ('Whose sweet embraces may extinguish clear/Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow' – XVIII.94-95).

In moments of crisis, the confusion intensifies. Thought and feeling are subject to abrupt shifts in direction. Faustus's impulses towards repentance – before and after the bond-signing (scenes V and VI), in the Horse-courser scene (XV), in response to the Old Man – are marked by sudden switches between despair and 'resolution':

Now go not backward; no, Faustus, be resolute:
 Why waver'st thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears,
 'Abjure this magic, turn to God again!'
 Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.
 To God? He loves thee not. (V.6-10)

The emotional disjunction is apparent in the syntax, in the urgent, interrupting questions, in the shifts of viewpoint between first, second, and third persons. A similar but more intense confusion can be observed when Faustus attempts to sign the bond:

What might the staying of my blood portend?
 Is it unwilling I should write this bill?
 Why streams it not, that I may write afresh?
 'Faustus gives to thee his soul'; O, there it stay'd.
 Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thine own?
 Then write again: 'Faustus gives to thee his soul'.
Enter MEPHOSTOPHILIS with the chafer of fire. (V.64-69)

The blood and fire signify to the audience what this experience 'portends': the unnaturalness of the signing, the revolt of the body against the will, the need for hellish assistance. Faustus struggles to understand, but he is deflected by his own questions: 'Is it unwilling I should write this bill?' 'Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thine own?' The conflict is so acute that perception is distorted and language approaches incoherence: 'My senses are deceiv'd, here's nothing writ. – /O yes, I see it plain; even here

is writ, / *Homo fuge!*' (V.79-81). Other accounts of inner conflict similarly give the impression of hallucination: in their use of terms evoking physical impact – 'thunders in mine ears', 'with a roaring voice', 'rend not my heart'; this is especially marked in Faustus's confession to the Scholars:

Ay, my God, I would weep, but the devil
draws in my tears. Gush forth blood, instead of tears, yea,
life and soul! O, he stays my tongue! I would lift up my
hands, but see, they hold them, they hold them.

All. Who, Faustus? (XIX.56-60)

Even in less agitated moments, his thinking is disjointed, characterized by shifts in direction and changes in mood:

Why, then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die.
Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
What doctrine call you this? *Che sara, sara,*
What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!
These metaphysics of magicians
And necromantic books are heavenly. (I.43-49)

Faustus has omitted the second part of each biblical text, ignoring their assurances of redemption and forgiveness. His flawed conclusion, 'and so consequently die', then becomes a more far-reaching claim in 'we must die an everlasting death'. '*Che sara, sara*' records another shift in attitude: fatalism is not a necessary consequence of belief in damnation, even assured damnation. The next line shows another redefinition in 'What will be' becoming the more deterministic 'shall be'. The mood of the passage swings from depression (perhaps even despair) to cynicism to scorn to resolution to enthusiasm.

These aspects of Faustus's response to his world – the failures of perception and the confusions in thinking – are often attributed to flaws in character: the wilful blindness of arrogance and egotism; the presumption which aspires to usurp the place of God; the persistence in 'resolution'; the cowardice which confirms him in despair. Certainly such negative qualities are all too apparent in the survey of learning in scene I. The student of divinity, the proud possessor of 'learning's golden gifts', demonstrates a curious ignorance of biblical texts; and this ignorance would have been obvious to the contemporary

audience. He is prone to facile enthusiasms: 'Sweet Analytics, 'tis thou hast ravish'd me!' His credibility is undermined by his inconsistencies: a desire to 'heap up gold' becomes a despised preoccupation with 'external trash' only twenty lines later. Most important is his presumption. It is demonstrated by the repeated assertions of superiority ('A greater subject fitteth Faustus' wit'; 'Then this profession were to be esteem'd'; 'Too servile and illiberal for me'). It is revealed even more in his pretension to some kind of divinity: he wishes to be 'eterniz'd' or to have the power to raise the dead; he believes that magic can provide the powers of a 'demi-god' or 'deity'.

This presumption suggests that his failures of perception are in fact acts of will. The shifting directions of his thought may well represent attempts to subordinate what he encounters to what he prefers to believe. Interpreted in this way, the early conversations with Mephostophilis (and the decision to master 'the words of art') may reveal not so much an inability to perceive as an active impulse to redefine any knowledge inconvenient to his desires. He thus wilfully ignores the implications of the devil's words. When Mephostophilis testifies to man's 'glorious soul' (III.51) Faustus chooses not to see beyond the 'vain trifles of men's souls' (64); soon thereafter he redefines (and trivializes) the soul to something that can be counted: 'Had I as many souls as there be stars' (104).

Even so, Faustus's failure to perceive (and ultimately to repent) cannot be attributed entirely to the limitations of self; his confusion is at least partly a result of the deceptive appearance of his world. Just as ceremony can disguise the empty power of the Papacy and pleasing shows the ruthlessness of hell, so do words mask reality. Words deceive; they shift and slide. Faustus inhabits a world of semantic instability, of ambiguity and equivocation. The Angels themselves are unambiguous, as are the other morality survivals – the Old Man, the Devils – yet they are responded to within a world in which words are redefinable.

The verbal environment renders difficult the perception of reality. The problem is especially acute in the passages which centre upon the Angels, and is increased by Faustus's limited awareness of what they say. His state of confusion in these

passages is reflected in words that shift rapidly in meaning and recur in changing contexts. In the conflict that precedes the Angels' second appearance (scene V), the shifting can be observed in the words 'God' and 'love'. Faustus constantly realigns his attitude to God ('vain fancies', turning to God, and 'He loves thee not'), but also and more significantly he redefines the concept of deity, appropriating a new meaning for 'his' god: 'The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite' (11). 'Love' and deity are then combined in a new set of associations: the 'love of Beelzebub' (12) involves worship by blood sacrifice (13-14). Distracted by the new vision his words have constructed, Faustus ignores the Angels.

In scene VI Faustus comes close to repentance. That he does not succeed results from the semantic instability of his world. In the two crises, early and mid-scene, the action is affected by shifting words. Amidst this confusion Faustus struggles to find firm ground but invariably – and inevitably – fails:

Fau. When I behold the heavens, then I repent
And curse thee, wicked Mephostophilis,
Because thou has depriv'd me of those joys.

Meph. 'Twas thine own seeking, Faustus, thank thyself.
But think'st thou heaven is such a glorious thing?
I tell thee, Faustus, it is not half so fair
As thou or any man that breathes on earth.

Fau. How prov'st thou that?

Meph. 'Twas made for man; then he's more excellent.

Fau. If heaven was made for man, 'twas made for me:
I will renounce this magic and repent.

Enter the two Angels.

Good Ang. Faustus, repent; yet God will pity thee.

Bad Ang. Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee.

Fau. Who buzzeth in mine ears I am a spirit?

Be I a devil, yet God may pity me;

Yea, God will pity me if I repent.

Bad Ang. Ay, but Faustus never shall repent. *Exeunt Angels*

Fau. My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent. (VI.1-18)

Language is unstable. Mephostophilis here alters the 'heavens' of Faustus's urge to repentance (1) to a different kind of 'heaven', less 'glorious' or 'fair', to which man must be superior

(5, 9). Mephostophilis's 'made for man' proof is a glib syllogism (reminiscent perhaps of Faustus's own logic); Faustus's thoughts, however, accept only part of the Devil's meaning and fly off at a tangent in 'made for me' (10). The word 'repent' summons the Angels, and Faustus responds, as seen above, to parts of the speech of each Angel. At the same time, underlying this surface instability, is a definite aural pattern established by the repetition of the word 'repent'. The pattern is made emphatic by its frequent end-of-line position, and strengthened by the minor aural pattern of 'pity thee'/'pity me'. The message is clear, and accessible to attentive spectators; but Faustus is attending only to the confusing surface where the context of the word changes rapidly. Even so, when the pattern recurs in the Angels' fourth appearance, Faustus seems to listen at last.

Faustus's struggle with words is crucial to the outcome of the mid-scene crisis. At first the action culminates in a genuine attempt at prayer before Faustus, once again, fails to perceive:

Meph. Thou art damn'd; think thou of hell!
Fau. Think, Faustus, upon God, that made the world.
Meph. Remember this! *Exit*
Fau. Ay, go, accursed spirit, to ugly hell!
 'Tis thou hast damn'd distressed Faustus' soul.
 Is't not too late?
 Enter the two Angels
Bad Ang. Too late.
Good Ang. Never too late, if Faustus will repent.
Bad Ang. If thou repent, devils will tear thee in pieces.
Good Ang. Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin.
 Exeunt Angels
Fau. O Christ, my saviour, my saviour,
 Help to save distressed Faustus' soul.
 Enter LUCIFER, BEELZEBUB and MEPHOSTOPILIS.
Luc. Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just;
 There's none but I have interest in the same. (VI.75-88)

The passage resounds with repeated words and phrases, switching from speaker to speaker, modified by their new contexts: 'damn'd' (75, 79), 'hell' (75, 78), 'think' (75, 76), 'distressed Faustus' soul' (79, 86), 'too late' (80, 81, 82), and 'repent' (82, 83, 84). The effect of these insistent repetitions is to

produce a crescendo of emotional tension that leads to Faustus's prayer and enhances the shock of the Devils' entry. Even then, when Lucifer speaks, it is the words of Faustus's prayer that he recasts anew: 'Christ ... save ... soul'. The echoes transform. Justice appears to have been done, the law upheld. Faustus accepts the claim because he cannot see past the surface to the reality beneath: 'God' and 'heaven' are too often merely words that shift and slide in meaning, two amongst many. Unlike Mephostophilis, he has never 'tasted the eternal joys of heaven'. And the angelic voices echo: 'too late ... too late'.

The ambiguity in the verbal environment extends beyond these encounters between Faustus and the Angels. This is especially so of the play's references to desire and satisfaction, with the same terms being used for the pleasures of heaven and hell alike. Faustus begins as 'glutted ... with learning's golden gifts' and ends by asking for Helen 'To glut the longing of my heart's desire'. The ambivalence is implicit in the Prologue's references to the 'sweetness' of both theology and magic: Faustus 'sweetly can dispute/ In th'heavenly matters of theology'; 'Nothing so sweet as magic is to him' (18-19, 26). Thereafter 'sweet' is used frequently, accumulating diverse associations, blurring the distinctions between heavenly and hellish. Faustus, proud of his fame as a scholar of divinity, compares himself to 'sweet Musaeus when he came to hell' (I.115). Faustus, escaping from the threat of being torn to pieces, requests 'sweet Mephostophilis' to torment the Old Man; and for himself he requests 'sweet embraces'.

Redefinition creates a deceptive verbal environment that impedes perception. 'Will be' can be re-labelled 'shall be' (I.47) and hell a 'fable'; the signing of a pact with the devil can be spoken of as a simple legal contract ('buy my service', 'deed of gift'). 'Heaven' itself is not unaffected. Prologue and Epilogue suggest defined limits for what is 'heavenly', but to Faustus the magic books are 'heavenly' (I.48-49), and 'heavenly words' invoke the powers of hell (III.29); the Scholars wish Faustus to be 'happy and blest ... evermore' when he shows them the 'heavenly beauty' of Helen. Indeed the process of redefining seems at times to be inherent in the rhetorical structures of much

dialogue and many set-speeches: the interplay of question and answer, of statement and counter-statement, facilitates exchanges such as 'made for man ... made for me' (VI.9-10); ' 'Tis but a surfeit, sir ... A surfeit of deadly sin' (XIX.36-37). The shifting surface of the language in the more serious scenes is reflected in the word-play of the comic episodes, as in Wagner's verbal games of scene II or the joking about false head and leg in scenes XIII and XVII.

Further restrictions to understanding are imposed by the structure of the play-world. Faustus inhabits a dual world, in which the metaphysical impinges upon, but infrequently coincides with, the level of narrative action. At the metaphysical level of action the issues are clear and the message unambiguous: persistence in the pact and succumbing to despair lead inevitably to damnation (though repentance remains possible until the last moment). Angels and devils, rituals and shows, as well as emblematic images (such as the blood and fire of the bond-signing), ensure that the spectators understand the consequences – even when Faustus does not. At the narrative level of action, perception is inhibited; the issues become blurred and damnation irrelevant. In tavern, court, and study the characters see little beyond their immediate circumstances. The inhabitants of the narrative applaud or suffer from the magic shows, the clowns experiment with magic spells, but none, except for the Scholars of the second scene or the Old Man near the end, perceive the risk of damnation. Emperor and Duke know that Faustus uses spirits to present his magic shows, but there is no hint that they disapprove, nor that they fear for the magician. When Faustus confesses his plight to the Scholars, they offer comfort and prayer, not condemnation.

For much of the play Faustus is trapped within this illusory world. Nor is he alone: the spectators are aware of the consequences, but they too are distracted by a stage busy with clowning and magic, with parody and spectacle. They watch, enjoined to 'dumb silence', as the elaborate dumb-show of Alexander unfolds to its accompaniment of music and trumpets; they watch, in some trepidation perhaps, as 'shagge-hayr'd Deuills runne roaring ouer the Stage with Squibs in their

mouthes, while Drummers make Thunder in the Tying-house, and the twelue-penny Hireling make artificiall lightning in their Heauens'.¹¹ The action of the play encourages the audience to set aside explication for experience, to share in the theatrical excitement, to 'Talk not of paradise or creation, but mark the show' (VI.110).

At the end of the play, much changes. It is only in the closing scenes that Faustus acquires understanding, that he perceives clearly. When the Angels arrive to pass judgement on him, he listens. He no longer denies or postpones the contemplating of damnation. This access to understanding appears first in the scene where he farewells the Scholars: 'God forbid/God forbade it, indeed; but Faustus hath done it.' In performance, the sequence of events is critical: the scene follows the second show of Helen, suggesting that Faustus's new awareness (despite some lingering self-deception) is a consequence of his experience with Helen. Faustus has called for her as an anodyne to despair, for embraces that will 'extinguish clear/ Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow': the embracing of Helen is a conscious embracing of an evil spirit. Yet the experience is also, paradoxically, the means by which Faustus awakens to perception. He becomes most fully human in the embracing, by acquiring a knowledge that is carnal, of the flesh. The erotic is a powerful undercurrent to his invocation of mythical and historical power and significance – the attendant cupids, the ambiguous kisses that seem to liberate the soul: 'Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!' (XVIII.102). Faustus becomes a lover and experiencer. He is no longer the disengaged spectator, the idle speculator, the self-assured showman. Experience of the flesh lead to an apprehension of God – the God of law and judgement.

Thereafter, in the final soliloquy, his struggle against the limitations of self and the restrictions of his world extends to one against the nature of the universe itself: the laws of time and matter, the certainties of judgement on the soul, the nature of damnation (alienation and eternity), the wrath and (in the glimpse of streaming blood) the grace of God. Though distracted still

11 John Melton 1620, as cited in the Revels Plays Introduction, p.lix.

by longings for impossible metamorphoses, and clinging too long to the last mementos of his deceiving world – the magic books – Faustus continues to grow in understanding, accepting responsibility for his own sins and own damnation.

The play ends by setting the experience of Faustus within two conventional frames, one established at the narrative level, the other at the metaphysical. The Scholars, in their charity, gather Faustus's remains for 'due burial' as 'a scholar, once admir'd/ For wondrous knowledge in our German schools' (XX.15-16). Their account shows how his death is observed by those who have not been in contact (as Faustus has) with the full range of experience his world affords. The Epilogue, poised in judgement, presents Faustus's fall as 'hellish' and warns both 'forward wits' and the 'wise' against practising 'more than heavenly power permits'. The term 'heavenly' is restored to an unambiguous reference, with the Epilogue on the side of the (Good) Angels. The framing perspectives reflect the duality of the play-world.

The Angels are of more importance to *Doctor Faustus* than many writers would suggest; yet too often they receive only passing mention. They cannot be dismissed as small fragments of morality play, but deserve consideration as a significant and effective dramatic device. When we examine the role of the Angels and explore their relationship with Faustus, we gain a better understanding of both Faustus and the play. His response to them reveals the confusion of his mind and the deceptiveness of his world. It elucidates the tragic consequences of his failure to perceive.