

Doctor Faustus and Intertextuality (A Response to Paul Budra and Paul Yachnin)

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Contributions by Paul Budra and Paul Yachnin to the first issue of *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* develop in exciting and fruitful ways an understanding of the self-conscious literary qualities of Marlowe's work. Concentrating on the importance invested in books in *Doctor Faustus*, Budra looks at scenes where texts are written, read or exchanged (the volumes of magic, or the signing away in blood of Faustus' soul, for example) and argues that the play "revolves around the text, the reader's manipulation of it, and its manipulation of the reader."¹ In his response, Yachnin extends these observations, historicizing *Doctor Faustus* in terms of its "anxious enactment of the guilty desire on the part of literary culture to appropriate the power of words which had once belonged exclusively to scripture."² Although what these critics propose is not entirely new (there have been studies of writing and reading in Marlowe's plays, and attention has been paid to the theatricality and performative character of his work) they push Marlovian criticism in fresh directions and suggest possibilities for reinterpretation and reassessment.³

If *Doctor Faustus* is imagined as a text about texts, the play's dark corners are illuminated. The textual concerns are apparent from the start, even before the first scene begins. In particular the chorus preoccupies itself with the relationship between books and authority: earlier play-texts are rudely dismissed in the opening lines of the prologue; a later chorus informs the audience that Faustus seeks astronomical secrets "Grauen in the booke of *Ioues* hie firmament" (812); and the epilogue bestows upon Faustus the laurel wreath of the poet (or writer) laureate (1511).⁴ The bookish chorus intervenes to restore an illusion of order at critical moments. And books are used to quell anxieties and to placate resentment, too; when Mephostophilis

offers the gift of a book, he endeavours to dampen Faustus' noisy questions, and one recalls that in sixteenth-century Europe books were exchanged as gifts to cultivate favour, to assert superiority and to initiate a series of social obligations.⁵ It is the historical embeddedness of *Doctor Faustus* that most interests Yachnin who situates the play in the context of post-Reformation scepticism about the efficacy of the "word" of the Bible. Certainly the Renaissance was marked by a fear that, between "word" and "thing," there was a growing divide; semantic shifts were taking place, and the power of language adequately to represent the world was placed in doubt.⁶

I

But it is not the purpose of this contribution to the discussion to offer further examples which will bolster Budra's and Yachnin's conclusions. It is another aspect of the subject that requires investigating. In any appreciation of the textuality of *Doctor Faustus*, the play's multiple textual versions present themselves as an urgent issue. *Doctor Faustus* exists in two, radically different versions, the A-text printed in 1604, and the longer B-text printed in 1616. During the nineteenth century Marlovian scholars generally agreed that the A-text was closer to Marlowe's "original intentions." However, later editors such as F. S. Boas, Leo Kirschbaum and W. W. Greg joined to contend that the A-text was a "Bad Quarto" (or a memorial reconstruction) and that the B-text represented a more authentic version, based (Greg argued) on Marlowe's "foul papers."⁷ Editions followed by John D. Jump (1962), Leo Kirschbaum (1962), Irving Ribner (1963), Roma Gill (1965 and 1971), Sylvan Barnet (1969), J. B. Steane (1969), Fredson Bowers (1973) and E. D. Pendry and J. C. Maxwell (1976), all of which endorse these arguments and use the B-text as copy-text.⁸ In contrast, most scholars would now argue that the A-text stands up well on its own and has integrity, and that B is based on a later edition of the A-text and a manuscript of theatrical provenance censored by a book-keeper, and that it was further changed and added to by Birde and Rowley, two popular dramatists. Accordingly the shelves of bookshops have recently been lined with

a plethora of editions of the A-text. An Australian edition of 1985 prints a modernized text; Roma Gill modernizes and preserves old spelling respectively in her editions of 1989 and 1990; Michael Keefer modernizes in his 1991 Canadian edition which combines theoretical sophistication with bold textual revisions.⁹

To be fair, Budra and Yachnin do acknowledge *Doctor Faustus'* problematic textual status. "The A text does not allow for an inner stage," Budra notes, plotting the possible physical movements of the actor playing Faustus in the opening scene.¹⁰ Yachnin goes further and states: "The fact that there exist two widely different plays called 'Doctor Faustus,' both published after Marlowe's death, and that we continue to talk about Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as if such a unitary text existed, attests to our persistent need for a myth of presence in order to stabilize the text's authoritative meaning and its supposed attendant power."¹¹ But Yachnin resists building upon these reflections, while Budra cites from Bowers' edition which prints the B-text even though it sees as non-Marlovian Birde's and Rowley's comic additions.

II

A comparison of both texts (A and B) reveals two plays (each with its own flavour and internal logic) which diverge sharply in the suggestions they make concerning intertextuality, reading and writing, and the power of books.

Where the B-text responds to or modifies the A-text, sometimes it is to make more richly ambiguous book-related issues in the earlier play. Faustus' lines in the A-text, when he reads from the Bible in a frustrated inspection of the sacred texts of knowledge, are end-stopped, pointing to finality, resolution and decisiveness. But the B-text hints at openings, flexibility and doubt; the deployment of rhetorical colons suspends the endings of utterances and quotations:

*Ieromes Bible Faustus, view it well:
Stipendium peccati, mors est; ha, stipendium, &c.
The reward of sin is death? that's hard:
Si peccasse, negamus, fallimur, & nulla est in nobis veritas:
If we say that we haue no sinne
We deceiue our selues, and there is no truth in vs. (65-70)*

This is not to imply that the B-text is aesthetically more satisfying; it only presents an alternative perspective on Faustus' preliminary ruminations. Similarly, additional meanings are generated by variant spellings. Whereas Faustus will "write a deede of gift" (475) in the 1604-version, in the 1616-version he is urged to "wright a Deed of Giff" (423)—the B-text introduces a note of legality and authority (punning upon "wright" and "right") and capitalizes letters, lending an official tone to Faustus' satanic negotiations. Legal echoes are heard again in the scene in which Faustus signs away his soul for twenty-four years of whimsical, self-indulgent pleasures. He informs Mephostophilis that he will describe "All articles prescrib'd betweene vs both" (536) in the A-text; the equivalent line in the B-text, however, has a greater forcefulness—"All Couenants, and Articles, betweene vs both" (483)—and alludes both to sealed contracts and to the compact between God and the Israelites.

At other points in the B-text the textual themes of the 1604-version are merely expanded without the play being pushed into a confrontation with ideological contradictions. The Pope scenes gain weight in the transition from A to B, and in the 1616-version Faustus urges Mephostophilis to plague the friars as they turn to their "superstitious Bookes" (922), a request that possibly harks back to Envy's contempt for the literate during the pageant of the seven deadly sins. As the critical hour of reckoning approaches in the B-text, Mephostophilis' eyes light upon his victim: "He and his seruant *Wagner* are at hand, / Both come from drawing *Faustus* latest will" (1912-13). The term "drawing," with its associations of writing, brings to mind Faustus' fatal act of writing earlier in the play, and underscores the fact that no new contract will be sufficiently powerful to turn back the clock.

Part of the slipperiness of the B-text lies with the ways in which it sensitively enlarges upon the A-text and closes down possibilities at one and the same time. Some scenes are imaginatively augmented; others are flattened and reduced, falling prey to doggerel and to slapstick comic routines. Thematic tightness and concision characterize most scenes in the A-text, but the B-text incorporates materials whose distracting qualities do not advance the play's arguments. To the supernatural business at the court of Charles, the German emperor, the B-text adds Benvolio's attempts to be revenged for the humiliation

he suffers at Faustus' hands. The closing scenes of *Doctor Faustus*, the outcome of which is uncertain in the A-text, become crudely predictable in B, and their mechanical inevitability can be traced to their treatment of books. Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephostophilis enter to oversee Faustus' anguished final moments, and his fate, it seems, is assured. Mephostophilis states:

'Twas I, that when thou wer't i'the way to heauen,
 Damb'd vp thy passage, when thou took'st the booke,
 To view the Scriptures, then I turn'd the leaues
 And led thine eye. (1989-92)

Budra suggests that Mephostophilis' disclosure is sure to "break" Faustus as "he has been betrayed by that which he most covets," but it also needs noting that these B-text additions prevent the escalation of dramatic tensions and foreclose questions about Faustus' racked movements between heaven and hell: in the later version of the play, at least, Faustus' damnation is a certainty.¹²

On close inspection the A-text emerges as the *Doctor Faustus* which most powerfully supports the findings of Budra and Yachnin, and this is surprising as it is Bowers' version of the B-text which is cited by Budra in his article. The textual cruxes which Budra identifies are given a particularly succinct statement in the A-text, pared-down and unadorned with appended developments. At the start of the 1604-version of the play Faustus rhapsodizes about the "Lines, circles, sceanes, letters and characters" (81) of his necromantic books in language which self-consciously suggests theatrical practices. Magical diagrams and dramatic structures are simultaneously alluded to in "sceanes": no such word appears in the parallel line in the B-text. Fussy and petulant behaviour by Faustus towards Mephostophilis in the A-text results in his leaving the stage weighed down with books (Budra opens his discussion with this scene); an impoverished Faustus in the B-text departs with only one book in his hands. An irreverent A-text Faustus happily contemplates burning the "Scriptures" (727) yet is disallowed from countenancing the idea in the B-text with its more pronounced theological severities. Faustus, then, in the A-text is a "Coniurer laureate" (276); in the (probably censored) B-text, he enjoys no equivalent title.¹³

It should be clear that my sympathies are mainly with the A-text which appears as a tauter production with a crystalline subtlety not shared by the B-text; while tending toward the earlier play, I am also aware of the interest which the B-text generates: in the words of Faustus, it goes forwards and backwards in its representation of textual questions. A consideration of the clown scenes will help clarify my argument. Bent upon subduing the maidens of the parish to his inordinate sexual appetite, Robin the ostler enters in the 1604-version with a conjuring book. The sexual references accumulate as the scene unfolds, and the bawdy implications of "chafing" (957), "beare" (967), "turne" (977) and "vse" (980) build towards a sense of degraded lasciviousness. Accompanying the wanton fantasies are exclamations which obliquely reflect Faustus' own predicament. "*Nan Spit*" (979) is a grotesque parody of Helen of Troy (with whom Faustus commits demonality), and Robin's threats—"you are blown vp . . . dismembered *Rafe*" (960-61)—grimly anticipate the doctor's bodily tortures at the catastrophic close. The powerlessness of the books, moreover, indirectly highlights Faustus' growing weaknesses. "Canst thou coniure with it?" (971) asks Rafe, pointing to the magical book, and is obviously disappointed by Robin's boastful assurances: "Our maister Parson sayes thats nothing" (975). As Faustus is held ever more tightly by the forces of darkness, so is it suggested, through comic bombast and bathos, that it will not be in books that his salvation lies.

The parallel (probably misplaced) scene in the B-text is shorter and less suggestive.¹⁴ It broaches a number of issues that cast Faustus' activities into an ironic light—reminders of Dick's "*Maister*" (758) encourage speculation about Faustus' domination by Mephostophilis, and Robin's drunken extravagances look forward to the banquet with the scholars in the final scene—but generally it fails to announce arresting dramatic developments. In his struggle to decipher the letters in his stolen conjuring book, Robin shows himself as a shrunken Faustus, even though the complications attendant upon textual interpretation were declared as part of the play's agenda in the early stages.

A censor's eye may well have passed over the 1604-version of the vintner scene as it differs in several points of textual detail from its reincarnation twelve years later. The A-text clearly specifies that Robin

"reades" (1008) from a book of spells in order to quell the vintner's angry outbursts; Robin seems to have no such book in the B-Text. Tormented by spirits, Robin vows to Mephostophilis: "good diuel / fõrgiue me now, and Ile neuer rob thy Library more" (1018-19). The 1616-version does not contain a comparable line to suggest that Robin selects books as the objects of his thieving tendencies. During the course of its transformation from A to B, the vintner scene deprives Robin of literacy and bibliophilic criminality.

III

Although the A-text would seem to express in a more concentrated and direct form the literary anxieties which are addressed by Budra and Yachnin in their contributions, the singularity of the B-text should not be overlooked. Many editors would now want to maintain that A and B derive from independent copies of *Doctor Faustus* (whether printed or in manuscript), one good reason for recognizing their textual autonomy and separateness. It is also clear that it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to talk about favouring one version or another. What is needed is a new parallel-text edition, updated and with an editorial commentary which allows readers to adjudicate and to make their own, informed choices. Without doubt it will be the work of a Marlovian bibliophile.

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NOTES

¹Paul Budra, "Doctor Faustus: Death of a Bibliophile," *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 1 (1991): 2.

²Paul Yachnin, "Doctor Faustus and the Literary System: A Supplementary Response to Paul Budra," *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 1 (1991): 75.

³See Mark Thornton Burnett, "Marlowe: An Elizabethan Witness," *L'Artiste, Témoin de Son Temps* (?), ed. Pierre Sahel (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1990) 48-50; Marjorie Garber, "'Here's Nothing Writ': Scribe, Script,

and Circumspection in Marlowe's Plays," *Theatre Journal* 36 (1984): 301-20; Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 193-221. Writing and reading in Shakespeare's plays have been addressed most recently by David M. Bergeron, "Reading and Writing in Shakespeare's Romances," *Criticism* 33 (1991): 91-113.

⁴All references to the A-text cite *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus 1604-1616: Parallel Texts*, ed. W. W. Greg (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1950) and are indicated by line numbers. This edition is also followed for line number citations from the B-Text.

⁵See Natalie Zemon Davis, "Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 33 (1983): 69-88.

⁶Mark Thornton Burnett, "Doctor Faustus and the Form and Function of the Chorus: Marlowe's Beginnings and Endings," *CIEFL Bulletin* 1 (1989): 42-43.

⁷*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, ed. F. S. Boas (London: Methuen, 1932); Leo Kirschbaum, "The Good and Bad Quartos of *Doctor Faustus*," *The Library* 26 (1946): 272-94; W. W. Greg's edition of the play appeared in 1950.

⁸*The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen, 1962); *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Leo Kirschbaum (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company [Meridian Books], 1962); *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey, 1963); *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (London: Ernest Benn, 1965); *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Signet, 1969); *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); *Christopher Marlowe: Complete Plays and Poems*, eds. E. D. Pendry and J. C. Maxwell (London: Dent, 1976).

⁹*Dr Faustus: The A-Text*, eds. David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1985); *Dr Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill, 2nd ed. (London: A & C. Black, 1989); *Dr Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); *Christopher Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus": A 1604-Version Edition*, ed. Michael Keefer (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1991). Keefer's edition is reviewed by Mark Thornton Burnett in *The Dalhousie Review* (forthcoming).

¹⁰Budra 2.

¹¹Yachnin 76.

¹²Budra 7.

¹³For a stimulating analysis of the censorship of the play following the Act of Abuses, see Janet Clare, "Art made tongue-tied by authority": *Elizabethan and Jacobean Censorship* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990) 27-30, 104-06. William Empson discusses censorship in *Doctor Faustus* with customary idiosyncrasy in *Faustus and the Censor: The English Faust-book and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus*, ed. John Henry Jones (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

¹⁴On the arrangement of the clown scenes, see Roy T. Eriksen, "The Misplaced Clownage-scene in *The Tragedie of Doctor Faustus* (1616) and its Implications for the Play's Total Structure," *English Studies* 62 (1981): 249-58.