

March 2016

# “Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight?”: Spiritual Bondage, Carnal Corruption, and Horror in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus and Shakespeare’s Macbeth

Jared Johnson

Thiel College, [jjohnson@thiel.edu](mailto:jjohnson@thiel.edu)

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/spovsc>

 Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Johnson, Jared (2014) "“Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight?”: Spiritual Bondage, Carnal Corruption, and Horror in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus and Shakespeare’s Macbeth," *Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference*: Vol. 7 , Article 7.

Available at: <http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/spovsc/vol7/iss2014/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Literary Magazines at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact [mjon@uakron.edu](mailto:mjon@uakron.edu), [uapress@uakron.edu](mailto:uapress@uakron.edu).

**“Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight?”: Spiritual Bondage, Carnal Corruption, and Horror in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth***

Jared Johnson, *Thiel College*

**W**ith the early success of English commercial theater, professional theater companies soon found themselves competing to produce works to meet the ever-increasing appetite for entertainment of London audiences. Theater companies met the growing demand for variety at sparsely equipped playhouses lacking scenery and having limited capabilities for special effects. Emerging in the wake of the medieval theatrical tradition based in and extending from Christian worship, early English commercial theater continued the practice of staging the supernatural despite the gradual secularization of the emerging industry. Christopher Marlowe brought the German *Faustbuch* to London audiences in 1588 in the form of *Doctor Faustus*, a play that infused the legend of the devil pact with supernatural pageantry. When Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* debuted almost two decades later, the widespread social anxiety that became manifested through witchcraft litigation and pamphleteering of the 1590s became vivified and embodied on the London stage as Shakespeare, too, staged supernatural spectacle as the result of a tacit agreement between Macbeth and the Weird Sisters.<sup>1</sup> “Soliciting” with supernatural figures—whether they be devils, the Devil, the Weird Sisters, or Hecate—is rendered as a high-risk activity that incapacitates both protagonists, trapping them in a condition of spiritual bondage.

Both Marlowe and Shakespeare provide access to the raw emotions of their protagonists, encouraging theatergoers to mirror the fluctuating mental states of the plays’ central characters. Impaired by self-imposed spiritual bondage, Faustus and Macbeth struggle to trust their own perceptions throughout their respective tragedies only to experience the horror of *anagnorisis*, as always, too late. At the close of both plays, theater spectators, like the plays’ eponymous tragic heroes, are left to puzzle the reliability of their own perspectives and realities. If Faustus’s magic is mere illusion, then is the audience also fooled by the specter of Helen? If Macbeth’s levitating dagger is simply the result of his

overcooked brain, then are the Sisters, too, illusory? Through the blurry lens of spiritual bondage, both *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth* employ and exploit epistemological crises to create conditions of ontological uncertainty for both their central characters and their audiences. Uncertainty regarding what is real and what is not guides both dramas, evoking fear and horror in characters and spectators alike.

### **From Concept to Contract: Theorizing Spiritual Bondage**

In early modern Europe, the concept of spiritual bondage was imagined as a form of heretical slavery to demons that functioned as a foil to proper Christian service to God.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to freedom from sin through Christ's resurrection, spiritual bondage evokes unfortunate circumstances by which a person's soul becomes endangered by supernatural forces that seek to capture or harm it.

Early modern belief in demons is widely documented in the literature of the time, and English and Scottish publications treating the subject took the form of demonological tracts and popular pamphlets. While demonological tracts include elaborate taxonomies detailing various types of witches, sorcerers, incubi and succubi, news pamphlets dealing with witchcraft commonly report crimes through narratives that incorporate testimony and legal details. In the pamphlets, Lyndal Roper identifies common elements that she believes constitute a genre, which she names "the witchcraft narrative." According to Roper, the witchcraft narrative "had become standardised [in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] with seduction, [the devil's] pact, dance, baptism and Sabbath" as the chief features (123-24). In England, witchcraft pamphlets circulated widely in the 1590s, carefully illustrating the imagined pseudo-legal and spiritual arrangements that witches made with Satan.

Spiritual bondage became codified through English and Scottish litigation in the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century through a series of acts that moved crimes of witchcraft from the ecclesiastical courts under the jurisdiction of the common law courts. According to Joseph Klaitz, English and Scottish law reimaged witchcraft during this time by incorporating a new focus on the crime of witchcraft as "the witch's pact with Satan and her promise of servitude" in the 1590s instead of simple *malefice*, as had been the case in 1563 (58). The secular enforcement of

witchcraft culminated in 1604 in King James’s *Act against Conjurat[i]on, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits*, which made spiritual bondage a crime punishable by death.

Both the production of demonological literature and changes in legal culture in England from 1563 onward point to widespread belief not simply in the conceptual construction of spiritual bondage but in the material, physical manifestation of spiritual bondage upon real people, driving them to perform harmful actions.<sup>3</sup> In the midst of a historical period in which belief in the objective reality of spiritual bondage was underlined and legitimized by literary and legal documentation, Marlowe and Shakespeare transported the concept of spiritual bondage to the imaginative, performative space of the theater.<sup>4</sup>

**“Then, Mephistopheles, receive this scroll, / A deed of gift of  
body and soul”: Spiritual Bondage and the Devil Pact**

Separated by over a decade, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* testify to the sustained interest in the supernatural on the part of London theatergoers from the late eighties into the new century. Shortly following the publication of the German *Faustbuch* in 1587, Marlowe began adapting the supernatural cautionary tale for the London stage. William Prynne, a contemporary of Marlowe, recalls a performance of the play at Belsavage Playhouse, a converted inn on Ludgate Hill, in 1588, and Henslowe records the staging of *Faustus* at the Rose Theater on multiple occasions in 1594.<sup>5</sup> The period of *Faustus*’s popularity, if not notoriety, reflects a time in which the early modern English cultural lens focused intensely on the phenomenon of witchcraft, itself an epistemological certainty as evidenced by the Exeter audience.

Spiritual bondage appears in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* in the form of Faustus’s pact with Lucifer. Marlowe explores Faustus’s submission to spiritual bondage as a legal contract stipulating the terms of a service agreement involving Faustus, Mephistopheles, and Lucifer. In Act 1, scene 3, Mephistopheles appears to Faustus “*per accidens*” (46) when the scholar performs his first evocation.<sup>6</sup> Adapting the central precept of the German *Faustbuch*, Marlowe’s play stages the signing of the devil pact, an inversion of the covenant between Jesus and his followers, instantiated by the Christ event, according to Calvinist theology.<sup>7</sup>

Marlowe stages the inversion of Christ's covenant through the co-creation of a legal document by Faustus and Mephistopheles that must be signed and sealed in Faustus's blood. The play prolongs the spectacle of the signing in Act 2, scene 1, when Faustus's blood congeals in the midst of his bloody calligraphy, prompting Mephistopheles to bring in a "*chafer of hot coals*" to help the blood dissolve (60-59). The spectacle of blood, of course, mocks Christ's bloodletting at the crucifixion and his sealing of the covenant with his own blood through the resurrection. The play underlines the parallels between Christ's covenant and Faustus's contract through the physical deed itself. In the deed, Faustus explicitly submits to spiritual bondage, rendering his soul to Lucifer as "A did of gift of body and soul" (90). Here, as well as in Faustus's blasphemous pronouncement of "*Consummatum est*" after signing, the play both invokes and inverts Christ's gift of salvation through his sacrifice and resurrection.

Likewise, the devil pact is also likened to a bond as Mephistopheles commands Faustus to "bind thy soul that as some certain day / Great Lucifer may claim it as his own" (50-51). Marlowe's binding of Faustus to a legal contract reflects the perversion of both Protestant covenant theology and the apocalyptic advent of Christ's second coming. The inversionary representation of the devil pact in Marlowe's play recalls the implicit contractual agreement between Satan and his witches in descriptions of the sabbat, which appear in the pamphlet literature and demonological tracts of the era.

While *Doctor Faustus* reifies spiritual bondage as an explicit contract, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* explores the concept through prophecy. Like *Faustus*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* explores the inversion of spiritual mores that came to define English Protestantism in the early seventeenth century. Written after James I had ascended the English throne, the play is generally dated as being written sometime between 1603 and 1606, and though the first dated performance is at the Globe in 1611, scholars generally accept that the play was most likely performed as early as 1606.<sup>8</sup> Following closely on the heels of the Gunpowder Plot, Shakespeare's play literally demonizes and vilifies rebellion.

Though the play employs the fulfilling of devilish prophecy rather than the formal signing of the devil's pact, *Macbeth* borrows from *Faustus* both demonic intervention embodied in the witches and the *psychomachia* raging within the play's central character. After the witches

first reveal the prophecy to Macbeth in Act 1, scene 3 that he “shalt be King hereafter” (50), Macbeth engages in Faustian oscillation, which Banquo interprets as being “rapt” (43), between a positive and negative interpretation of the news: “This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill; cannot be good” (130-31). Despite Banquo’s warning that “instruments of Darkness tell us truths; / Win us with honest trifles, to betray’s / In deepest consequence” (124-26), Macbeth enters into the implicit contractual relationship with the witches, choosing to interpret the prophecy as “[a]s happy prologues to the swelling act / [o]f the imperial theme” (128-29), much in the vein of Faustus’ imperial fantasy.

**“This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good”:  
Carnal Corruption in *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth***

Once Faustus and Macbeth become enrapt by the allure of the supernatural, they become driven by worldly desire. Both protagonists privilege the mundane over the celestial, themselves over God, the carnal over the divine. Carnal corruption, then, can be understood as a form of uneven substitution in which characters indulge in pleasures of the body instead of engaging in service to God, which, in early modern England, is perceived as the highest good. The result of carnal corruption in both plays results in a form of idolatry. In *Faustus*, carnal corruption surfaces as sexual temptation, culminating in a version of the *osculum infame*. Similarly, the corruption of the flesh in *Macbeth* takes the form of lust, blood- and otherwise. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, much like Marlowe’s *Faustus*, inverts Protestant morality by privileging the mundane world over the divine, but while Marlowe’s play explicitly employs sexual temptation as a motive for apostasy, Shakespeare’s drama infuses sexual and spiritual temptation with the grotesque.

In Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, carnal corruption takes the form of sexual desire that is directed toward a sexual object that proves an unworthy substitute for the only legitimate recipient of a man’s sexual desire in early modern England, his wife. After Faustus has signed the devil pact in blood in Act 2, scene 1, he explains the motives guiding his first wish from his demonic servant: “let me have a wife, the fairest / maid in Germany, for I am wanton and lascivious and / cannot live without a wife” (143-45). Faustus’ request for a spouse would register to

Renaissance audiences as idolatrous at it substitutes, in David Hawkes's words, "the *eidola* of *nomos*," or idol of the law or custom with all of its associations with carnality and materialism, for "*physis*," or nature (4). In other words, Faustus' privileging of sex for the sake of pleasure over the divinely sanctioned marriage contract and its promises of sex for the purpose of reproduction is analogous to worshipping idols instead of God.

In this scene, Marlowe calls attention to the early modern Christian distinctions between licit and illicit sexual relations. Faustus' substitution here of sex for love constitutes breach of "natural teleology," to borrow Hawkes's understanding of the intersection and intertwining of Aristotelian *telos* and Protestant epistemology (5). Marlowe represents the results of Faustus' idolatrous request when Mephistopheles "*Enter[s] with a Devil dressed like a woman, with fireworks*" (2.1.151). The demon elicits a response from Faustus that inverts the figure of a Christian wife: "A plague on her for a hot whore!" (2.1.153). Faustus' associations of the demon with promiscuity and disease underline the point that the demon functions as a foil to a Christian wife who would be theoretically shielded from non-marital sex and venereal disease by monogamous marriage.

Mephistopheles first rebuts Faustus' frightened reaction to the demon's presentation of the ghoulish bride, saying: "Tut, Faustus, marriage is but a ceremonial / toy. If thou lovest me, think no more of it" (2.1.154-55).<sup>9</sup> Here, Mephistopheles couches his equivocal response in the language of anti-Papal reformers, alluding to the Church of England's position that only two rituals, Baptism and Holy Communion, qualify as sacraments and dismissing the other five forms recognized by the Catholic Church, marriage among them. The sacramental status of marriage aside, Mephistopheles does not have the power to confer such a ceremony.

Unable to produce a wife for Faustus, Mephistopheles reconceptualizes Christian monogamous marriage as a mere outlet for sexual desire, a carnal corruption of the institution. At Faustus' dissatisfaction with the demon's ability to produce an adequate wife, Mephistopheles offers to, "cull thee out the fairest courtesans / And bring them ev'ry morning to thy bed" (2.1.156-57). In this scene, Mephistopheles trivializes Christian marriage by conflating it with sexual desire. The uneven exchange that Mephistopheles proposes aims to swap the legitimized object of male sexual desire, a Christian wife, with a commodified version, an array of exotic prostitutes. The carnal corruption

of Faustus’s desire for a wife enacted by Mephistopheles debases marriage by substituting for it the fantasy of sex with infinite partners, a product and/or service offered for Faustus’s soul.

The demonic bride and exotic courtesans that Mephistopheles offers in Act 2 become mirrored and mimicked in Act 5, scene 1, as Marlowe again revisits the carnal corruption of marriage as an idolatrous inversion of the ceremony. In this scene, Marlowe showcases the dynamic of spiritual and sexual temptation as Faustus asks, as his final wish before he is summoned to Hell by Lucifer, for, “[t]hat heavenly Helen which I saw of late” (85). Marlowe represents here the imagined power of sexual forms of commerce in the early modern period to tempt the Renaissance subject away from God. In this English Protestant iteration of the dynamic, the sexual commodity becomes imbued with fantasy, a substitution of the idol of custom over nature, borrowing Hawkes’s characterization of the problem of idolatry, that renders the (im)material commodified object of marriage perversely equivalent with its sacramental source. Faustus commits the sin of idolatry by replacing the early modern concept of natural sexual object (i.e., wife) with the image of the commodified form (here, the specter of Helen). Marlowe stages the power of fantasy and temptation to distract and, subsequently, to spiritually enslave the Renaissance subject, rendering spiritual death. When Helen of Troy appears, Faustus famously asks, “Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships, / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?” (91-92), employing the synecdoche of Helen’s face to conjure the concept of beauty, which in this context also evokes the fantasy of power and empire represented as metonymically tied to the Trojan War.

Marlowe’s representation of the sex act, the kiss, too functions as an idolatrous instantiation of the divine as Faustus hopes to be “ma[de] immortal with a kiss” (93). Faustus’ surrender to the spiritual temptation embodied in Helen signals his renunciation of Protestant Christian faith in this scene in its mirroring the sexual perversion present in witchcraft pamphlets. The *osculum infame* of John Carmichael’s *Newes from Scotland* parallels Faustus and Helen’s transgressive kiss, confirming yet another iteration of Faustus’ signing of the devil pact in Act 2, scene 1.<sup>10</sup>

Like Marlowe’s *Faustus*, Shakespeare’s play imagines carnal corruption through earthly lust that supersedes any possibility for Christian worship. Carnal corruption in *Macbeth*, though, is not only



comprised of sexual lust between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the vein of Faustus's desire; it is also embodied in Lady Macbeth's power over her husband. By empowering Lady Macbeth to function as the driving force behind her husband's bloodlust, Shakespeare inverts early modern European gender norms, implicitly rendering Macbeth subservient to his sexual desire.<sup>11</sup>

The carnal corruption in Shakespeare's play becomes embodied through Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's language is often maternal, but Shakespeare employs such language in an inversionary fashion to elicit shock from early modern audiences. Maternal images associated with nursing become inverted as Lady Macbeth employs them in a derogatory manner, indicating a sharp disruption of natural teleology. When Lady Macbeth frets about the possible intervention of her husband's "nature" as an obstacle to his killing of Duncan, she represents it maternally as "th'milk of human kindness" (1.5.16-17). Though she is quite correct in identifying milk as fulfilling the its motherly *telos* of providing nourishment to her child, Lady Macbeth's condescending tone negates and denaturalizes the teleology of the metaphor. Similarly, Lady Macbeth inverts the role of nurturer of her child in attempting to illustrate her willingness to follow through with her husband's plan to murder Duncan in Act 1, scene 7:

I have given suck, and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,  
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this. (I.vii.54-58)

Here, quite explicitly, milking as an act of nourishment is replaced with murder as Lady Macbeth inverts the natural *telos* of early modern Protestant motherhood. Shakespeare punctuates the inversion by imagining Lady Macbeth's willingness to disrupt the moment in which her child is wholly dependent on her in order to violently murder it.

More clearly in line with the witchcraft pamphlets' inversionary rituals of the sabbat and the *osculum infame*, though, is Lady Macbeth's rhetorical substitution of demons for children in Act 1, scene 5. In the

same vein as Faustus’ conjuring of Mephistopheles, Lady Macbeth’s apostrophe to the “Spirits, / That tend on mortal thoughts” (40-41) rhetorically represents the idolatrous sin of praying to false gods. The incantation turns maternal, though, as Lady Macbeth symbolically substitutes “Spirits” for her children which she nourishes: “Come to my woman’s breasts, / And take my milk for gall, you murth’ring ministers” (47-48). Similar to the idolatrous image of Satan exposing his buttocks at the pulpit for his parishioners to kiss that appears in Carmichael’s *Newes from Scotland* as an inversion of the early modern Scottish kirk service, complete with unholy communion, Lady Macbeth’s offer to suckle the demons like children inverts early modern concepts of childrearing by allowing the occult to invade the domestic sphere.

### **“Oh, horror, horror, horror!”: Audience Perception, Epistemological Uncertainty, and Demon Sighting**

Thematically, the concept of spiritual bondage pervades the play scripts of *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth* as Marlowe and Shakespeare entrap their lead characters, rendering them bound psychologically, physically, and legally to supernatural forces. A similar phenomenon seems to have taken place among audiences as well, as evinced by the various sightings of supernatural spirits, particularly at early performances of *Faustus*.<sup>12</sup> Recent scholarly attention has focused on the problems of perception that stage representations of the supernatural in *Faustus* and *Macbeth* seem to facilitate.<sup>13</sup> I do not wish, here, to enter into the debate regarding the voracity or authenticity of the accounts. Instead, I wish to introduce the possibility that the author of one of the accounts was clearly invested in creating a crisis of knowing among theater audiences.

In *The Black Book*, his 1604 prose account of the London underworld told from Lucifer’s perspective, Thomas Middleton alludes to a performance of *Doctor Faustus* in his description of a “villainous lieutenant” who “had a head of hair like one of my devils in *Doctor Faustus* when the old theatre cracked and frightened the audience” (515). Though Middleton’s mention of the performance plays a bit part in the author’s portrayal of brothel client who becomes one of Satan’s minions, the author employs it as a cultural touchstone for visceral “fright” felt by

London audiences. Why would audiences feel a sense of fear at the theater? Why would Middleton mention the incident in *The Black Book* in order to augment his description of a London lowlife?<sup>14</sup>

Middleton is commonly credited with revising Shakespeare's play between 1610 and 1611, introducing Hecate in 4.1. The author of a play called *The Witch* (c. 1616), a drama that employs the same songs as those in the *First Folio* version of *Macbeth*, as well as *The Black Book*, Middleton stood to benefit in the same way modern-day horror film directors such as Roman Polanski, Wes Craven, John Carpenter, and George Romero profit from cultural interest in the supernatural. Like horror films, *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth* share in evoking the emotional affect of "fright" in the viewer, as apparent in supernatural sightings at performances of *Faustus* and the famous "curse of *Macbeth*."<sup>15</sup>

The lead actors who embodied Faustus and Macbeth on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage—most likely Edward Alleyn of Marlowe's Admiral's men and Richard Burbage of Shakespeare's King's Men—were assigned the unenviable task of creating an almost immediate emotional reaction with their London audiences. As Michael David Fox has convincingly argued, actors playing Macbeth and Lady Macbeth created emotional intimacy with their audiences through nonrepresentational modes of performance, such as soliloquies, asides, and metatheatrical allusions that call attention to the illusion of the theater. Fox consults the work of Robert Weimann in identifying two distinct theatrical spaces, each imbued with a characteristic performative mode and meaning: the *locus* and the *platea*. The *locus* refers to "the particularized site of the represented action—a throne, a tent, a bed—that is both physically and psychically distant from the audience" that characterized by "imitative mimesis, the illusion of verisimilitude, dialogic speech, and the 'specifying capacities of an enacted role.'" In contrast, the *platea* is "the unspecified theatrical space associated with the earlier medieval conventions of non-illusionistic acting, extemporization, non-dialogic speech, direct address, anachronism, and identification with the audience" (211). For Fox, during stage performances of *Macbeth*, the lead actors were able to win the sympathy of theater spectators by inviting them into the realm of the *platea*, no easy task for a pair of serial murderers. If the Macbeths could create emotional intimacy with their audiences, the Admiral's

Company’s charismatic lead Edward Alleyn most likely was able to do so as well as Faustus.

London theatergoers were invited not only into the physical and psychological worlds occupied by Faustus and Macbeth but also into the unmasked, embodied personal spaces of the actors playing those roles, presumably Alleyn and Burbage. It was in these spaces, the psychological worlds of the stage soliloquy, that Marlowe and Shakespeare “frighted” audiences with the horror of true evil. In witnessing the staged sins of Faustus and Macbeth, audiences experienced sights:

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? (*Macbeth* 1.3.135-37)

Like Macbeth’s fantasy of murder that he acknowledges is “but fantastical” (1.3.139), the performance of evil by Faustus and Macbeth transfers the fear of eternal punishment onto audiences. The performative space of the theater—projecting the same epistemological uncertainty as that felt by the plays’ central characters—captures the horror of facing sin’s final reckoning.

## Notes

All citations of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* are from the A-Text. (Norton Critical Edition of *Doctor Faustus: A Two Text Edition. A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616. Contexts and Sources Criticism*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. New York: Norton, 2005)

<sup>1</sup> Though I link together Marlowe's *Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by employing the trope of spiritual bondage, a variation on the concept of the devil pact, it should be noted that various scholars have compared the two plays. Helen Gardner, for example, understands *Faustus* and *Macbeth* from the perspective of damnation. Viewing Marlowe's *Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as precursors to Milton's Satan, Gardner observes in all three characters the demonstration of steadfast will that deviates from the will of God and an unquenchable desire for the forbidden (49). More recently, in *Shakespeare's Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry*, Robert Logan argues that in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare borrows Marlowe's theatrical technique of "shift[ing] from representational to realistic modes of perception" (210).

<sup>2</sup> In early modern England, "bondage" carried negative connotations as the word held close associations with feudal serfdom: "bondage" is etymologically tied to "bondarii," one of the four subcategories of bound laborers in the Roman feudal system that became conglomerated under the heading of "bondmen" in England. The word "bondage" was used with scorn or derision. When William Harrison speaks of bondage in his jingoistic "Description of England," he casts the term in opposition to English national identity, rendering the state of physical bondage and that of Englishness utterly incompatible:

As for slaves and bondmen, we have none; nay, such is the privilege of our country by the especial grace of God and bounty of our princes, that if any come hither from other realms, so soon as they set foot on land they become so free of condition as their masters, whereby all note of servile bondage is utterly removed from them. (Harrison)

Bondage, then, was understood as an undesirable socioeconomic circumstance, a contemptible social category from a bygone era.

While the early modern understanding of bondage unquestionably differed from current conceptions, the term carried a good deal of semantic consistency across the centuries. Bondage, then as now, refers to the state of being physically bound. From the medieval period onward, “bond” literally referred to any apparatus that physically restrains a thing or holds it in place. Figuratively, though, bondage acquired a range of psychological, social, and legal meanings that both inform an understanding of spiritual bondage and register as familiar today.

Understood metaphorically, a bond could be anything that binds, subdues, or subjugates. The term acquires the meaning of “a force which enslaves the mind through the affections or passion” around 1440, when an English translation of the *Gesta Romanorum* employs the word in a religious context as one story features the Devil “had envenomed all mankind, And lay upon our breasts, and held in the bond of servitude of sin.” Similarly, a bond could refer to either “A constraining force or tie acting upon the mind, and recognised by it as obligatory” or “Obligation, duty,” rendering the term a psychological circumstance in the first instance and a social circumstance in the second. Building on the idea of social obligation, bond also acquired a legal meaning that formalized social expectations in the form of a contract. A bond became “A deed, by which A (known as the *obligor*) binds himself, his heirs, executors, or assigns to pay a certain sum of money to B (known as the *obligee*), or his heirs, etc.” (*OED* “bond, n. 1.”). From an early modern European perspective, spiritual bondage referred to an undesirable condition or circumstance in which a person’s spiritual wellbeing becomes endangered by supernatural forces or entities that constrain or oppress it.

- 3 Spiritual bondage did not merely exist in the pages of dense supernatural taxonomies or cheap sensationalist pamphlets framing the witchcraft narrative, though; the idea that individuals could be controlled and manipulated by demons became woven into England’s legal fabric, further legitimizing belief in the existence of demons and their power to influence human behavior. In his book, *Servants of Satan: The Age of Witch Hunts*, Joseph Klaits observes that the criminality of witchcraft experienced a shift in the 1570s in England. Before then, argues Klaits, the punishable offence was inflicting harm

on others through witchcraft; after 1570, though, it became dealing with the devil. Klaitz traces this shift in conception of witchcraft criminality as coinciding with manuals for witch hunting that appeared in the 1560s, which likewise featured the witches' worship of Satan as a salient feature (57-58).

- 4 Indeed, Lyndal Roper has recently argued that the presentation of demonological subject matter in the early tracts became co-opted by the English theater and eventually permeated the narrative fabric of the early English novel as they "used literary techniques such as the dialogue form, hyperbolic set-piece descriptions of the [back-to-back devils'] dance or the Sabbath, told stories to pique the reader's interest, and employed humour, salaciousness and horror" (117).
- 5 See Bevington and Rasmussen's "Introduction" *Doctor Faustus A- and B-texts* (Manchester UP, 1993. pp. 48-49) for a discussion of early performances of the play.
- 6 After Faustus has sent Mephistopheles away and the devil returns to formalize the pact, Mephistopheles characterizes his duties to his earthly master as "slave[ry]" (2.1.45-7). The temporary slavery that Mephistopheles renders to Faustus, of course, contrasts sharply with both Mephistopheles' perpetual role as "a servant to great Lucifer," which entails a form of bondage such that he "may not follow [Faustus] without his leave" (1.3.40-41), and the terms Faustus' pact with Lucifer, which is articulated as a "bill" (5.2.37) that stipulates that the scholar be "damned perpetually" (5.2.59). The twenty-four years of "slavery" that Mephistopheles agrees to offer Faustus obfuscates, in a subtle, Satanic way, the larger, permanent obligation of service and damnation engendered by the so-called devil pact.
- 7 The inversionary representation of the devil pact in Marlowe's play recalls the implicit contractual agreement between Satan and his witches in descriptions of the Sabbath, which appear in English pamphlet literature and demonological tracts. Even more inversionary, though, than the devil's pact *per se* in *Doctor Faustus* is the rhetorical and spiritual mechanism guiding the initial conjuring of Mephistopheles. According to the demon, "Therefore the shortest cut for conjuring / Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity, / And pray devoutly to the prince of hell" (1.3.53-55). Faustus' idolatry, his literal worshiping of the false god Lucifer, not only instantiates the devil pact within the

world of the play but also would register as idolatry within the early modern English Protestant discourse of anti-popery. For a sustained illustration and application of the concept of religious inversion, see Stuart Clark's *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999).

- 8 Muir, Kenneth. Ed. and Intro. Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Arden Second Series. London: Thomson Learning. p. xx, xvii.
- 9 Mephistopheles helps Faustus ignore the early modern religious understanding of marriage by anthropologically and economically fetishizing it; that is, he construes marriage both a trifle and a commodity. Mephistopheles' characterization of marriage as a toy squares with William Pietz's understanding of the inability to identify the value of objects across cultures, in this case, the challenge of assessing material and spiritual value of an institution from the perspective of the Protestant understanding of God's will and inversion of that will through the construction of Hell. For Protestants, marriage would represent one of the three sacraments spared by the Reformers that was imbued with spiritual meaning linking a man's power over his wife and the telos of the production of children to God's will. Furthermore, the construction of Satan and Hell for the Protestants would represent the inversion of that ideal that could take on many permutations: wives having power over husbands through shrewish behavior, cuckoldry, and disobedience; monstrous births; and the commodification of sex through prostitution. Mephistopheles' response issues a radical response to Protestant monogamous marriage, relegating it as a mere trifle that has an inverse and altogether different value among Lucifer and his minions in much the same way that West Africans would have no concepts of value of the products presented to them by Portuguese merchants in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, signaling a wide ideological and epistemological gap between cultures. For a further explanation of anthropological fetishism, see William Pietz's "The Problem of the Fetish, I", *Res* 9 (1985), 5-17 and "The Problem of the Fetish, II", *Res* 13 (1987), 23-45.
- 10 See James Carmichael's *Newes from Scotland*. London, 1592. The following passage describes the *osculum infame*, or obscene kiss, that Satan's Scottish parishoners purportedly performed. Carmichael observed that the *osculum infame* understood as a "sign of duty to [the



Devil]; which being put over the pulpit bare, everyone did as he had enjoined them. And having made his ungodly the devil then being at North Berwick kirk attending their coming in the habit or likeness of a man, and seeing that they tarried over long, he at their coming enjoined them all to a penance, which was that they should kiss his buttocks in exhortations, wherein he did greatly inveigh against the king of Scotland, he received their oaths for their good and true service toward him, and departed; which done, they returned to sea, and so home again” (315).

- 11 As with *Faustus*' representation of the fetishistic substitution of courtesans for marriage a partner, *Macbeth* demonstrates the inversion of natural telos in terms of characterizing the marriage relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as unnatural. Lady Macbeth proves aggressive when wives were expected to be obedient, taking the lead from her husband in Act 2, scene 2 when he returns from killing Duncan by placing the daggers in the drunk chamberlains' hands and wiping blood on them. Furthermore, she scolds him here for being “Infirm of purpose!” (52).
- 12 See documents provided in the “Early Performance” section of the Norton Critical Edition of *Doctor Faustus: A Two Text Edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616) Contexts and Sources Criticism*. Ed. David Scott Kastan (New York: Norton, 2005) pp. 180-81.
- 13 See Andrew Sofer's “How To Do Things with Demons: Conjuring Performatives in Doctor Faustus” (*Theater Journal* 61: 1-27), Anthony Oliveira's “One devil too many: Understanding the language of magic spells in the English Renaissance” (*The English Languages: History, Diaspora, Culture* 3), and Kristen Poole's *Supernatural Environments in Shakespeare's England: spaces of demonism, divinity, and drama* (Cambridge UP, 2011).

Andrew Sofer examines Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* through the lens of performance studies, arguing that Faustus's acts of “conjuring” onstage illuminate “the tension between conjuring as hocus-pocus and conjuring as black magic—or, as speech-act theory recasts the distinction, between hollow performance and efficacious performativity” (10). In a live early modern theatrical context, Sofer concludes that the semantic ambiguity encoded in the act of conjuring would have empowered the actor playing Faustus as “the distinction

between performance and performativity threatened to dissolve whenever an actor conjured a demon onstage” (20).

In response to Sofer’s article, Anthony Oliveira attempts to extend Sofer’s observations on drama beyond a theatrical context by considering “conjuring” in the larger rhetorical and ontological context of the relationship between language and magic in the early modern world. Oliveira dovetails speech act theory with deconstruction, placing Heidegger’s reading of the speech act as incapable of fully expressing meaning in conversation with Levinas’s notion that “the Other” becomes an audience to the speech utterance (16).

In her consideration of the accounts of spirits at performances of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, Kristen Poole points out that such documents underline early modern belief in the ontological certainty of spectral spirits interacting with the mundane world. Speaking of William Prynne’s record of a performance of *Faustus* at the Belsavage Playhouse in his antitheatrical treatise, *Histrion-mastix*, Poole asserts that: what Prynne’s account does indicate is that the possibility of devils on the stage was a real one for him, and a real one for his audience; even if the account is a form of propaganda, it would only work as such if it were believed to be true. This was a matter in which ‘the people...[understood] the thing as it was’: the real incursion of demonic agents into the daily space and time of their lives” (34).

- <sup>14</sup> Middleton presents the lieutenant in the following way: “His brow was made of coarse bran, as if flour had been bolted out to make honest men, so ruggedly moulded with chaps and crevices, the I wonder how it held together, had it not been pasted with villany: his eyebrows jetted out like the round casement of an alderman’s dining-room, which made his eyes look as if they had been both dammed in his head; for if so be two sould had been so far sunk into hell-pits, they would never have walked abroad again: his nostrils wer cousin-germans to coral, though of a softer condition and a more relenting humour: his crow-black muchatoes were almost half an ell from one end to the other, as though they would whisper him in the ear about a cheat or a murder; and his whole face in general was more detestable ugly than the visage of my grim porter Cerberus, which shewed that all his body besides was made of filthy dust and sea-coal ashes: a down

countenance he had, as if he would have looked thirty mile into hell, and seen Sisyphus rolling, and Ixion spinning and reeling” (515-16).

- <sup>15</sup> In his analysis of horror films, Noel Carroll observes that because the genre’s significance derives from its emotional affect on the viewer, the viewer’s near-synchronic mimicking of the emotions of the main character(s) is a defining feature (18). In the same way, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* attempt to draw audiences into the psychological worlds of their protagonists, mainly through the use of direct address.
- <sup>16</sup> In Marlowe’s play, Faustus’s first interaction with his audience takes the form of a soliloquy after the Prologue has exited the stage: “Settle thy thoughts, Faustus, and begin / To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess” (1-2). In the scene, Faustus bares his soul to the audience by systematically cataloging and ultimately rejecting all of the fields of knowledge that he, by master, understands his own identity. Faustus shares a moment of vulnerability with his audience by essentially confessing his nothingness.

Similarly, Macbeth wastes no time in speaking to the audience directly. Although he is given lines of dialogue with Banquo and the Weird Sisters when the audience first meets him in 1.2, he quickly initiates a flirtation with the audience through a series of asides that require him to jump in and out of dialogue with his peers. When Banquo unburdens Macbeth from obligatory conversation by speaking with Ross and Angus privately, Macbeth is able to speak at liberty with his audience:

This supernatural soliciting  
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,  
 Why hath it given me earnest of success  
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.  
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
 Against the use of nature? Present fears  
 Are less than horrible imaginings.  
 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
 Shakes so my single state of man

That function is smothered in surmise,  
And nothing is but what is not” (1.2.131-43).

Like Faustus, Shakespeare’s lead unmasks himself to his audience in an aside so long that Banquo remarks that Macbeth is “rapt” (144). Macbeth shares warring emotional states with his audience, confessing horror and excitement at the thought of his murdered king while figuratively smothering the unnamed thought of facilitating the murder himself.

### Works Cited

- Bevington, David and Eric Rasmussen, eds. “Introduction.” *Doctor Faustus A- and B-texts (1604, 1616)*. Manchester UP, 1993. Print.
- "bond, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2015. Web. 16 July 2015.
- Carroll, Noel. *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Clark, Stuart. *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1997. Print.
- Fox, Michael David. "Like a Poor Player: Audience Emotional Response, Nonrepresentational Performance, and the Staging of Suffering in Macbeth." *Macbeth: New Critical Essays*. Ed. Nick Moschovakis. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

- Gardner, Helen. "Milton's 'Satan' and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy." *English Studies* 1 (1948): 46-66. Google Scholar. Web. June 28, 2015.
- Gurr, Andrew. *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.
- Harrison, William, 1534-1593, Frederick James Furnivall, and Marie Carmichael Stopes. *Harrison's Description of England in Shakspeare's Youth. Being the Second and Third Books of His Description of Britaine and England. Ed. From the First Two Editions of Holinshed's Chronicle, A. D. 1577, 1587*. N.p.: London, Chatto & Windus, 1908. Print.
- Hawkes, David. *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. Print.
- Klairs, Joseph. *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. Print.
- Logan, Robert A. *Shakespeare's Marlowe : The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry*. Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007. Print.
- Marlowe, Christopher. *Doctor Faustus: A Two-text Edition (A-text, 1604 ; B-text, 1616) Contexts and Sources Criticism*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. Print.

- Middleton, Thomas, William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, Philip Massinger,  
John Fletcher, and Ben Jonson. *The Works of Thomas Middleton*.  
Vol. 4. N.p.: JC Nimno, 1885. Google Scholar. Web. July 7, 2015.
- Oliveira, Anthony. "One Devil Too Many: Understanding the Language of  
Magic Spells in the English Renaissance." *The English Languages:  
History, Diaspora, Culture* 3 (2012). Google Scholar. Web. July 7,  
2015.
- Pietz, William. "The Problem of the Fetish, I", *Res* 9 (1985), 5-17. Print.
- Pietz, William. "The Problem of the Fetish, II", *Res* 13 (1987), 23-45. Print.
- Poole, Kristen. *Supernatural Environments in Shakespeare's England:  
Spaces of Demonism, Divinity, and Drama*. Cambridge UP, 2011.  
Print.
- Roper, Lyndal. "'Witchcraft and the Western Imagination'" *Transactions  
of the Royal Historical Society*. Vol. 16. Cambridge: Cambridge  
UP, 2006. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*. Ed. William C.  
Carroll. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Ed. Kenneth Muir. London: Arden  
Shakespeare/Thomson Learning, 1984. Print.

Sofer, Andrew. "How to Do Things with Demons: Conjuring

Performatives in Doctor Faustus." *Theatre journal* 61.1 (2009):

1-21. Google Scholar. Web. July 7, 2015.

Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. New York: Scribner,

1971. Print.

