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"'TIS MAGIC THAT HATH RAVISHED ME": THE SCHOLAR MAGICIAN IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA

by

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Introduction: Setting the Stage
Magic in the English Renaissance

"Man, striving still to find the depth of evil,
Seeking to be a God, becomes a Devil."
The Merry Devil of Edmonton 1.1.60-61

Magic in the English Renaissance occupied a peculiar space in real life and in literature. Seen as both a way of raising oneself to a higher spiritual level in a manner that could involve communication with angels, and a possible perversion of the laws of nature which could lead to consorting with demons, magic was difficult to define, and even more difficult to determine what forms were acceptable and what were not. After a period of relative theatrical indifference to the theme in the Middle Ages, at which point drama was all but confined to religious morality plays and allegories, there was a massive surge in portrayals of magic and sorcery on the stage beginning around 1587 and continuing until sometime around the 1620s. This dramatic interest in magic could also be seen in other aspects of life. In *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age*, John S. Mebane writes that "the interest in plays about magic also correlates directly with a resurgence of pamphlet literature on alchemy and other Hermetic subjects, as well as with an increase in the number of works published on mathematics, applied science, and Paracelsian medicine; it also coincides with an upswing in trials for witchcraft" (Mebane 6). Robert R. Reed, Jr. elaborates on this claim in *The Occult on the Tudor and Stuart Stage*, stating that "In almost every village there were reputed to be at least three or four witches; in several trials, as many as twenty were indicted in communities of no more than five hundred persons" (19). King James himself (then James VI of Scotland) was personally involved in the 1590 North Berwick witch trials, which convicted several people of using witchcraft to send storms after his ship, and would later write a book

called *Daemonologie* (1597) detailing the dangers witches posed and endorsing the practice of witch hunting.

However, it was also possible to read magic texts, and even practice their contents openly, and remain well-respected by one's countrymen. Texts by medieval magicians such as Marsilio Ficino and Cornelius Agrippa were widely disseminated throughout Europe, and their writings influenced not just occult philosophy in the Renaissance, but secular philosophy as well. While it is difficult to point definitively to a reason for these seemingly contradictory ideas, the prevailing idea of the English Renaissance seemed to be that, in essence, the separation between acceptable magic and unacceptable magic stemmed from whether or not a particular kind of magic could help one develop their relationship with God. In this paper, I will explore the rise and fall of the scholar magician or sorcerer, both as a popular dramatic subject and as an arc for individual characters, and the ways in which these figures tied into contemporary fears about the intersection of religion and developing scientific knowledge. To do so, I will focus on the 1604 A-text of Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* and William Shakespeare's 1616 play *The Tempest*, with a lesser amount of attention paid to Robert Greene's 1594 play *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and the ca. 1600-1604 play *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (Anonymous). Before beginning an analysis of these texts, however, it is important to understand the ways in which magic was understood at the time they were written.

Magic did not come in a single form, and the question of what to call its various types is a thorny one, in part because different scholars make different distinctions. Mebane refers to good magic as *magia* and bad magic as *goetia*, with no explanation of

what constitutes good or bad magic. For Frank Klaassen, the distinguishing factor comes from whether or not the summoning of demons is involved. If it is, then the magic is necromancy. If it is not, then it is angelic. This seems neater, but the problem with this approach, as Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum points out, is that some writers of magical texts had conceptions of demons which differed from the Christian interpretation. The Italian philosopher and priest Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), for example, had a conception of demons which was Platonic rather than Christian, with the demon in his writings acting as "a good mediator between god(s) and humans, and… even the carrier of the 'genius,'" or the divine nature present in every person, place, or thing (Greenbaum 110). In the interest of clarity, I will refer to magic that deals with (the Christian conception of) demons as necromancy, because that is what appears more often in the texts I will be discussing. I will refer to magic that does not require the assistance of demons as magia. I would also like to clarify that, in contrast with the way in which the term is most commonly used today, necromancy does not need to involve death or the dead and is focused purely on the summoning of demons.[1]

To ask whether or not magic was accepted in Elizabethan society is really to ask how it was regarded in a number of settings. It was certainly accepted at the highest level; Queen Elizabeth seemed to have no qualms about taking on magicians as trusted advisors. Among these was John Dee (1527-1608 or 1609), possibly the most famous of English Renaissance magicians and a prime example of everything that made them complicated, compelling figures. Walter I. Trattner describes Dee as "a lover of divine wisdom, a dreamer, and a thinker, living in an age which was becoming increasingly

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[1] The term "necromancy" in this context is actually a corruption of the Latin "*nigromantia*," or "black magic."

dominated by the middle-class utilitarian ideal. Dee was an intellectually honest, sincere, and pious Christian torn between the passing old and rising new order. He was, in other words, an Elizabethan" (17-18).

Known for his studies in mathematics, astronomy, astrology, navigation, and occult philosophy, Dee was one of a small number of magicians who was said to have made contact with angels at a time in which it was commonly believed to be possible, and the combination of his high profile and varied interests seems perfectly suited for the subject of a play. Perhaps unsurprisingly, scholars such as Frances Yates have hypothesized that he served as an inspiration for Prospero in *The Tempest*, with the Encyclopedia Britannica calling the connection "almost certain" ("John Dee"). Another influential figure and member of court, the writer, soldier, and spy Walter Raleigh, was heavily involved in a cult of Elizabeth, which described her as the reincarnation of Astraea, a virgin goddess of justice (Mebane 83). According to a line in Virgil's *Eclogues*, Astraea's return to earth would bring on a new Golden Age[2]. The visibility of this cult points to a general acceptance of the discussion of magical and pagan figures, at least among the upper echelons of Elizabethan society.

Among the common people, however, there was considerably more distrust of any type of magic, necromantic or otherwise. Much of this came from a distinct difference between the types of practitioners of magic. Figures such as John Dee would have been regarded as sorcerers, "But great learning and great prestige were essential attributes of the sorcerer, and consequently there were few of them in sixteenth-century England" (Reed 49). Far more common than sorcerers were witches. One did not have to be educated to be a witch because it was believed by the common people that, in contrast

[2] "*Iam redit et virgo, redeunt Saturnia Regna"* (Astraea returns, returns old Saturn's reign).

to sorcerers actually using magic, witches did not use magic themselves. Instead, they relied on the assistance of imps in the forms of small animals such as cats, dogs, or toads. While the sorcerer does tend to rely on the assistance of supernatural creatures to practice magic, these creatures are the source of power rather than the practitioner of power. Additionally, while the upper-class sorcerers tended to pursue interests relating to academia and the court, witches could be found anywhere and were capable of using their necromancy to afflict anyone, making them much more terrifying figures. There also seemed to be a gender divide in this categorization: witches could be male or female, but sorcerers were always male. With all this in mind, I will be spending some time discussing witches, but the majority of my analysis will be centered on sorcerers. I will also use this term interchangeably with "scholar magician."

There were a few overarching schools of thought which influenced Renaissance English belief in magic and therefore the depiction of sorcerers on the stage. The newest and most influential was humanism, a product of the Renaissance which emphasized the thought and capabilities of ordinary humans rather than focusing on purely divine subjects. There was a new focus on scholarship for practical purposes, rather than simply as an abstract intellectual exercise. Renaissance humanists wanted to enact social reform, and they believed that in order to be successful, it was essential for citizens and political leaders alike to study literature, moral philosophy, and rhetoric, with a special emphasis on the writings of the Greek and Roman philosophers. Humanism was secular rather than theological, though it was not anti-religious, and its ideals became highly important in the development of Renaissance magic. It would also be one of the major influences for the portrayal of Prospero in *The Tempest*.

Another of these philosophical schools was Neoplatonism, of which John Dee considered himself a member. The school had been founded by the Greek philosopher Plotinus in the third century CE, based on the ideas of Plato. Renaissance Neoplatonism, meanwhile, melded classical Neoplatonism with humanism, scholasticism, and Christian philosophy. They believed that in addition to the Christian angels and demons, there existed a variety of spirits of ambiguous type and neutral morality, and these could all be summoned to aid in the practice of magic (Trattner 20). Mebane discusses Neoplatonism as evolving out of humanism, saying:

> They also absorbed from the humanists their intense concern with the dignity and freedom of humanity, their appreciation of the beauty of the world, and their celebration of the uniqueness and creative powers of the individual. The Neoplatonists attempted to reconcile these attitudes with traditional Christian philosophy by emphasizing God's immanence in the created world and His incarnation in humanity. (Mebane 17)

Neoplatonists believed that all of reality derived from a single principle, the One, and they linked this with God.

Also important were Hermeticism and Cabalism, the Renaissance conceptions of which were formulated by Ficino and another Italian philosopher named Pico della Mirandola, and made popular in northern Europe through Cornelius Agrippa's 1533 book *De occulta philosophia libri tres*. Hermeticism came from the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, who may have been an Egyptian priest, prophet, or king, and who provided the basis for the studies of alchemy, astrology, and other related arts. Cabalism, meanwhile, came from Jewish traditions and was studied by Jews and Christians alike. A

common belief among Cabalists of the time was that the human soul had become fragmented after the original sin, leading to an imperfect universe populated by fallen people. Magic, therefore, was a way of helping to purify the world and move it closer to God's creation, while simultaneously healing one's fragmented soul. According to Mebane, however, "the claims of magicians in the Hermetic/Cabalist tradition were much more extreme than those of the mechanical artisans or the Aristotelians" (Mebane 38). He believes that this is in part a reason for the growing dominance of magic as a symbol in English Renaissance literature for human attempts to control our own destiny, which is shown most clearly in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

It is important to note that despite a general ecclesiastic suspicion toward the practice of magic and the fear that it could lead to communion with evil spirits, it was not regarded as being mutually exclusive with Christianity. Many writings on medieval and Renaissance magic used it as a way to become closer to God. Interaction with angels was another distinct possibility. Many of these texts were part didactic literature, and part prolonged exercises. In "Subjective Experience and the Practice of Medieval Ritual Magic," Frank Klaassen describes how the most utilized of the ritual magic texts, the *Ars notoria* or *Notary Arts*, contains so much fasting, repetition of prayers in various languages, periods of isolation, and contemplation of images that it has been suggested that the process would take two full years to complete. The practitioner, however, could hope to gain, "among a wide variety of more minor benefits, complete knowledge of the arts and sciences and other spiritual and intellectual gifts through infusion by angels" (Klaassen 26). The writer John of Salisbury (1120-1180) was one who practiced the *Ars notoria* and claimed he had learned how to make it work. He does not describe what this

mastery accomplished for him personally, but Salisbury also claims that his sister practiced the *Ars notoria*, and as a result, she was able to sing the Latin mass flawlessly (Klaassen 31). This unstable theological relationship with magic would heavily influence the plays which I will be discussing, and tends to be especially weighty in the later acts, when the scholar magician is forced to confront the consequences of his actions. Notably, however, the magic of these plays does not stem from the practice of ritual magic and instead is the result of forming a deal with supernatural beings.

It is impossible to say for certain whether or not magic was accepted without question by the common people. According to Reed, "To Tudor Englishmen, witches and demons were unquestioned actualities, called into doubt only by some apostate such as Reginald Scot," a member of Parliament and author of the 1584 book *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, which argued against the existence of witchcraft altogether (Reed 18). Reed believes that the Renaissance Englishman would have been constantly on the lookout for the possibility of malicious magical activity. Klaassen, however, disagrees with this claim, arguing that

> Medieval people were not wildly emotive and suggestible creatures, with quivering emotional antennae waiting to be lit up like a Christmas tree at the slightest suggestion of spirits, angels, or magic. The frequency of stories about saints, demons, and angels in religious didactic literature (both monastic and secular) suggests that most medieval people did not have personal experience of such things and needed to be guided in how to think about spiritual presences or even convinced of their existence. (1)

Whether or not the average Elizabethan would have readily believed in spirits, Reed and Klaassen would at least agree that the clergy had a responsibility to help the laity take both the threat and possibilities of magic seriously. They could be both aided and hindered in this regard through their own practice of magia. Ficino was a priest, and one of the incidents John of Salisbury describes involves a magic ritual performed by a priest. According to Ficino, through the practice of magia, the human soul becomes one with God, and the practitioner gains the power to "gather the clouds together in rain, drive away fogs, cure the diseases of human bodies," and other miracles (Ficino 2:229). In short, the magia Ficino describes is purely beneficial to humanity, both on an individual and global scale.

However, there is still necromancy to consider, and this did not lack for spiritual consequences. In the realm away from the stage, the German magician Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) in particular is notable because of the way he oscillates between espousing magic as another form of piety and waxing eloquent about the creative, often grotesque uses of magic. He openly admits that that the magic he describes is demonic in nature and that although it may seem benevolent, this may end up being nothing more than a deception. In 1531, Agrippa "declared in print that anyone who attempted magic or practiced Cabala was likely to be damned" (Mebane 61). This is a far cry from earlier beliefs that if magic was to be used, using it with the intention of serving God was what mattered. Agrippa also spent much of his life being investigated as a heretic for his writings, which not only seemed fascinated by the darker aspects of magic, but also frequently attacked the ecclesiastical hierarchy and foundations of inherited social privilege, and claimed that "the sole reliable sources of truth are Scripture and divine

inspiration" (68). Taking Agrippa as an example, the danger of magical scholarship as leading to dissidence becomes clear.

The habit of Renaissance writers to create a distinction between good and evil magic may have stemmed from true belief, and it may come from a desire to protect themselves against any potential backlash their use of magic may have caused. Marsilio Ficino, for example, wrote extensively on the invocation of celestial demons and on talismans, which "impose upon natural substances a form… which corresponds to the higher forms more perfectly than do natural objects, and therefore the talismans attract a more forceful influx of *spiritus* than do natural substances unaltered by human art" (Mebane 30). Orthodox Christian authorities maintained that these items called upon pagan deities and therefore were necromantic in nature. As a result, despite the fact that Ficino's conception of demons was Platonic rather than Christian, he had to be careful to emphasize that he did *not* advocate for the usage of talismans, but was simply describing them.

Trattner notes, however, that science might have been just as frightening as magic to the average Elizabethan, albeit for opposite reasons: while using magic might make the practitioner vulnerable to evil spirits, "the student of nature might always go above the stars and find no Christian God" (20). Mathematics, even, was considered dangerous, and was "sometimes suspected of being associated with evil conjurers and antisocial forces" (Mebane 74). Much of this stemmed from the relative newness of such subjects. In 1520, Francis Bacon had published his *Novum Organum*, in which he laid out a method of investigative reasoning meant to replace that of classical Aristotelianism. For comparison's sake, Aristotle's *Organon*, the work which Bacon intended to supplant, had

been arranged by Andronicus of Rhodes around the year 40 BCE. The distrust of new methods replacing something so engrained in society was perhaps natural, but it also made life difficult for the scholars who sought to find new methods of understanding their world.

The Renaissance was a time of rediscovery of ancient texts, but it was also a time of incredible growth and developments of entirely new fields. As a result of the *Novum Organum*, the scientific method would eventually develop, propelling scientific progress forward at unheard-of rates. Thanks to the uneasiness associated with these new pursuits, however, scientists had to do something similar to Ficino in his disclaimers regarding talismans: they "made every effort to show that natural philosophy served religion well and humbly; the dedications, prefaces, and even the texts of their scientific publications carried explicit reassurance on this cardinal point" (Mebane 74). The ancient concern of magic and the contemporary concern of science meant that the scholar magicians of English drama were dangerous on multiple levels, and playwrights had to work carefully in order to make them palatable to the masses. Expressing a combination of the remnants of medieval fears of witches and growing contemporary anxieties over a scientific understanding of the world which left long-standing scientific beliefs in the dust, the scholar magician was a source of both fascination and distrust to contemporary audiences, and his eventual attempted renunciation of magic and atonement with God (and therefore return to social norms) brought a much-needed sense of security into the lives of people who were watching their world change more quickly than it ever had before.

Chapter 1: The Pursuit of Power and the Dangers of Knowledge

"*Ubi desinit philosophis, ibi incipit medicus*"
"Where the philosopher leaves off, there the physician begins."
Doctor Faustus, 1.1.13

To the English Renaissance audience, magic was not an inherent quality of a few select individuals, akin to red hair or short fingers. Rather, magic was a practice and a choice, and whoever took up its practice had, either implicitly or explicitly, agreed to accept its potential consequences. In many cases, this agreement was a literal one rather than being simply metaphorical, with the practitioner selling their soul to Lucifer himself (such as in *Doctor Faustus*) or an unremarkable, individual devil (such as in *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*) in exchange for magical mastery. While not all scholar magicians seem to have made this sort of bargain, it happened often enough to indicate contemporary fears of the source of magical power, many of which were religious in nature.

I. The Obsession with Knowledge

The fear that magical power is inherently blasphemous in nature is made obvious in the opening scenes of *Doctor Faustus*. In order to summon the devil Mephistopheles, Faustus must draw a circle containing the corrupted names of Jehovah and various saints and call upon Lucifer and Beelzebub; in order to gain his service, Faustus must "abjure the Trinity / and pray devoutly to the prince of hell" (1.3.54-55). Finally, in order to gain magical power, Faustus must sign away his soul to Lucifer, rejecting the core tenets of Christianity and throwing in his lot with the most villainous figure conceivable. This process does not seem to be unique to Faustus' adoption of magic, as it appears a few years earlier in *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (Anonymous, ca. 1600-1604) with the

sorcerer Peter Fabell. The play, which deals predominately with Fabell helping a young couple get married against their parents' wishes, actually begins with the consequences of necromancy: the very first scene has the devil Coreb coming to collect Fabell's soul, and reminding the distressed Fabell that "Didst thou not write thy name in thine own blood, / And drew'st the formal deed 'twixt thee and me. / And is it not recorded now in hell?" (1.1.29-31). The repeated idea that magical power stemmed from a deal with the devil indicates a fear that magic was inherently corrupting. For the devoutly Christian audiences of the day, this is one of the most frightening fates imaginable: knowingly and willingly signing away one's chance at eternal salvation, all for the sake of earthly knowledge and power. *Doctor Faustus* and *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (the latter at least initially) offer audiences a warning against blasphemy and atheism.

This moral is arguably cheapened, however, by the fact that unlike Faustus, Fabell is able to bargain for seven more years of freedom from Coreb by releasing the devil from his service, indicating that even if one doesn't repent, it is possible to bargain with the forces of hell. Friar Bacon, meanwhile, retains his position as a friar and is treated with great respect by his fellow friars for his mastery of necromancy. He even says that "The great arch-ruler, potentate of hell, / Trembles, when Bacon bids him or his fiends / Bow to the force of his pentageron," and indeed, the devils in his play appear to fear him more than he fears them (1.2.48-50). In contrast with Faustus' damnation at the end of his play, and despite the links they have with hell, all of these scholar magicians manage to avoid the consequences of their actions, at least for the time being. The one clear exception to this trend is Prospero, whose magical learning period appears to have been solitary and utterly unconnected with hellish forces. In contrast with the malicious,

conniving devils of the other plays, who seek to trick the scholar magicians into believing there is no chance for their redemption, *The Tempest* has only Ariel, who proves to be a beneficial influence on Prospero, and Caliban, who is repeatedly shown to be weaker than Prospero both in terms of magical prowess and moral character. There are no demonic pacts and no indication that Prospero's power stems from Ariel. As far as the reader of the play knows, Prospero learned his magic simply through reading his books.

This fascination (and even obsession) with learning is one of the characteristics which mark scholar magicians as suitable for the role, even before they begin the practice of magic. While this fascination applies to virtually all fields of knowledge, a few fields in particular come up repeatedly. In *The Tempest*, Prospero describes himself as having been reputed for the liberal arts, which consisted of grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, before moving on to "secret studies," or the occult (*Tempest* 16). Fabell discusses how he and an old friend spent their days at Cambridge reading "the liberall Arts / The Metaphysickes, Magicke, and those parts / Of the most secret deep philosophy" (*Edmonton* 1.3.14-16), and Faustus declares to his friends Valdes and Cornelius[3] that:

> Philosophy is odious and obscure;
>
> Both law and physic are for petty wits;
>
> Divinity is basest of the three,
>
> Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile.
>
> 'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me (*Doctor Faustus* 1.1.108-12)

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[3] Marlowe's choice to name one of Faustus' corrupters Cornelius may have been an attempt to bring the dissident magician Cornelius Agrippa to the minds of the audience; Agrippa is mentioned in one of Faustus' earlier monologues as an example of a cunning magician (1.1.119).

This speech also marks another characteristic of the scholar magician: a frustration with the limits of earthly knowledge. At a certain point, they come to feel that the accumulated knowledge of humanity is not enough, and the only thing that can sate their lust for learning is to look to the supernatural. Faustus' friend Cornelius expresses this sentiment when he tells him that "The miracles that magic will perform / Will make thee vow to study nothing else" (1.1.138-39). This becomes true for Faustus, as he loses himself in necromancy throughout the course of the play, and Prospero, who shows off little of his reported scholarly acumen while on the island in favor of solving his problems through magic.

While the majority of the other plays of the era begin with a scholar magician who has already come into his magic, *Doctor Faustus* differs slightly, showcasing the full process of becoming a scholar magician, from his beginnings as a mere academic, to his becoming a powerful sorcerer, to his inevitable end in which he must face the consequences for his use of magic. Faustus' punishment is also the most explicit, as he is dragged off to hell once his deal with Mephistopheles has run its course and he has failed to repent. Fabell's punishment seems it will be similar once his time has run out. Friar Bacon's punishment, meanwhile, is internal rather than external, and prompted by his own regret rather than a deal he made with a devil. In Act 5 Scene 8, he is approached by two young scholars who wish to use his scrying glass to see how their fathers are doing in their absence. It turns out that the fathers are in fact about to fight a duel, and they die as their sons watch from Bacon's cell. The distressed scholars then turn on each other and kill each other. In response to indirectly causing two deaths, Friar Bacon breaks the glass and vows to give up his necromancy.

Unlike Friar Bacon and Faustus, Prospero's punishment for his obsession with magic is not part of the story—it takes place, as a matter of fact, before the play even begins. His backstory, as he explains it to Miranda, revolves around his being so preoccupied with his "secret studies" that he grants more and more power to his brother Antonio, until Antonio finally stages a coup and exiles Prospero to the island. There does not seem to have been any value judgement placed upon Prospero's studies of magic, however; as far as the audience knows, his exile was more connected to neglect of his ducal duties, though it is likely possible to stage a performance in which the magic was much more of a contributing factor. Even in the most Machiavellian readings of Prospero, in which his machinations on the island are almost thoroughly selfish, Antonio would still likely be considered a villain.

Regardless of Antonio's justifications for his coup, the fact remains that Prospero has already seen the danger that comes with losing oneself in the magical arts. His lesson, therefore, is not to reject magic, but to learn how to use it in a balanced fashion. However, this is something with which he struggles throughout the play, as his desire for revenge against Antonio threatens to overtake his better instincts. In the end, he manages to let go of both his anger and his magic, deciding that the best way to regain what he has lost is to give up the obsession which led him to lose it.

To the more devout audience of Shakespeare's day, Prospero's "neglecting worldly ends" in favor of more spiritual subjects would have been almost commendable (1.2.109). But then, even this spiritual power is complicated; while Ariel's positive influence on Prospero and lack of connection to hell means that he matches better with the Platonic conception of demons than he does the Christian conception, the fact remains

that Prospero's magic seems utterly divorced from spirituality, either good or bad. The word "necromancy" does not even appear in the play, in stark contrast with many of the other scholar magicians who are explicitly described as necromancers. Rather than being Cabalistic or Hermetic like that of Faustus, Bacon, and Fabell, Prospero's magic is Neoplatonic and humanistic, preoccupied with coming to a better understanding of the world rather than simply manipulating it. This position is also complicated by the fact that Prospero's obsession with magic leads to his shirking his responsibility as duke and even losing his dukedom, as well as the fact that the play revolves around his desire to leave behind the spiritual island and regain his earthly power in Milan. While he does come to realize the dangers of using magic, this is not accompanied by any sort of Christian spiritual growth.

The scholar magician's never-ending desire to learn may serve them well initially when they are only scholars, but they must be careful to ensure that this desire does not turn to obsession. In *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, Fabell takes the last moments he believes he has before being dragged to hell to lament the obsession with knowledge which eventually led to him selling his soul to Coreb. This moment perhaps best sums up the fear of magical study, which is tied in with the general fear that too much knowledge has a corrupting influence:

> The infinity of Arts is like a sea,
> Into which, when man will take in hand to sail
> Further then reason, which should be his pilot,
> Hath skill to guide him, losing once his compass,
> He falleth to such deep and dangerous whirl-pools

> As he doth lose the very sight of heaven:
>
> The more he strives to come to quiet harbor,
>
> The further still he finds himself from land.
>
> Man, striving still to find the depth of evil,
>
> Seeking to be a God, becomes a Devil. (1.1.52-61)

Whether or not Fabell can be considered a devil by the end of his play, the fact remains that a brush with hell is presented as something with which almost all scholar magicians struggle. The trick is to avoid magic entirely—or, if one has already begun the practice of magic, to give it up and to come out a better person.

II. The Scholar Magician as Teacher, and the Failed Student of Magic

While the central scholar magicians of these plays share traits which serve to explain their fascination with magic, there are also characters who lack these traits and yet seek to practice magic anyways. These figures tend to be students of the scholar magicians, yet they are also often completely inept at whatever tasks they are given. The balance of their comic subplots with the more dramatic main plots of the plays in which they appear minimizes the threat of the common magician who does not have the training of the scholar magician, while giving an indication of what can happen when magic is used improperly.

While the scholar magicians are at least reasonably competent in their control of magic, the same cannot be said for their students. *Doctor Faustus* features a subplot in which Faustus' apprentice Wagner attempts to teach the clown Robin use his master's books of magic, with comedic results. *Friar Bacon*, meanwhile, has the figure of Miles, whose failure is actually tied into the plot and has more serious consequences: because he

does not follow his master's instructions, the Brazen Head is destroyed, and with it, Friar Bacon's plans to protect England by constructing a magical bronze wall around its border fall apart. As per usual, Prospero's instruction of Caliban and Miranda places him in a slightly different category than Bacon and Faustus, and his students become educated in essentially everything *but* magic. Magical knowledge does not seem to function like human knowledge in terms of how it is passed on, as none of the students in these plays manage to learn anything of worth from their mentor figures. Rather, the only teachers who manage to accomplish anything are those of supernatural origin.

If the students of these scholar magicians fail in their pursuit of magic, are we as readers or viewers of these plays meant to blame this on their own shortcomings, or on the failings of their teachers to properly educate them? Miles' failure, at least, seems to be purely on his own shoulders: he is given clear instructions to report to Friar Bacon when the Brazen Head speaks, and he is punished when he does not. He also does not seem to understand what is at stake thanks to his association with magic. When the devil Plutus comes to "torment his lazy bones / For careless watching of [the] brazen head" (15.8-9), Miles actually preempts his punishment by first asking if there are taverns in hell, and, if so, if he could work as a tapster there. When Plutus answers in the affirmative, Miles puts on a pair of spurs and rides to hell on Plutus' back, so thoroughly subverting the ways in which one would be expected to regard hell that even the devil isn't quite sure what's happening. The comic nature of the scene is emphasized by Greene's stage direction: "Exeunt roaring."

To a certain extent, the reader should not be surprised by Miles' failure, as his common nature and relatively simple mind is clear in his speech. While other characters

speak largely in verse, almost all of his lines are prose. On the occasions in which he does speak in verse, it is in short couplets rather than iambic pentameter; he is the only character in the play with this particular dialogic quirk[4]. He is also prone to sprinkling his speech with random bits of Latin, often unnecessarily and without context. Bacon uses Latin sparingly, and always with a point; his conversations with Miles have the feel of a lesson (1.2.2-4), or he may use Latin to summon his demonic servant Belcephon (1.2.115). Miles, meanwhile, notes that "Some call me dunce; another saith my head is as full of Latin as an egg's full of oatmeal" (15.14-15). The effect is that of a Faustus writ small: a would-be scholar who reaches beyond his capacity to understand the forces with which he meddles. Considering that *Friar Bacon* was written and performed after *Doctor Faustus*, it is even possible that Miles was meant to serve as a comical response to Marlowe's hubristic protagonist.

The usage of Latin as an attempt to make one seem more educated than one is can also be seen with Wagner in *Doctor Faustus*. When offering to teach Robin magic in return for his service, Wagner asks the clown, "wilt thou serve me, and I'll make thee go like *Qui mihi discipulus*?" (1.4.15-16). While his Latin seems more advanced than that of Miles, Bevington and Rasmussen note that this phrase is in fact "the opening line of *Ad discipulos carmen de moribus*, a didactic Latin poem by William Lyly… [that] was much read in grammar schools" (133). In short, Wagner's Latin is the bare minimum he would be expected to know as a young man who went through a basic education. Compare this with Faustus and Bacon's more extensive and contextual use of Latin, and Wagner's lack

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[4] Rhyming lines had become somewhat antiquated by the time the play was written, in part due to Christopher Marlowe: he had a particular dislike of couplets and opened his first play, *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587), with a prologue stating a desire to move past "jigging veins of rhyming mother wits / And such conceits as clownage keep in pay" (*Tamburlaine* 1.1.1-2).

of knowledge becomes obvious. Faustus especially demonstrates his intelligence in his very first scene by mentally translating and discussing Latin as he reads it, highlighting both that he is well-educated and that his beliefs about theology and related subjects are subversive, if not blasphemous. Wagner, meanwhile, only manages to express his dull nature.

Wagner's subplot juxtaposes Faustus' tragic scenes with a more comedic story of a man seeking the secrets of magic, as he assumes the role of Mephistopheles, taking on the clown Robin as a pupil in return for seven years of service. While he thoroughly fails as a sorcerer, his failure to practice magic actually benefits him in the end, as he misses so many steps in his pursuit of power that he avoids being damned along with Faustus. He summons two devils, Balioll and Belcher, but all they do is frighten Robin. He manages to summon Mephistopheles (possibly accidentally), but the devil is so irritated with being called away that he doesn't even give Robin time to command him before transforming him into an ape[5]. The largest mistake he makes, however, (if one is to consider it a mistake) is that neither he nor Robin abjures the Trinity. Wagner's lack of understanding the forces with which he meddles once again links him with Faustus, but his failure is a more profound one, as he does not even understand what he must do in order to gain power—and this is what saves him. It seems that when it comes to magic, it might be better to be unintelligent and avoid damnation than it is to be intelligent and risk losing everything.

While Bacon clearly has not taught Miles well, Faustus seems utterly uninterested in taking on Wagner as a student of magic, and Wagner tries to teach Robin but fails

[5] Bevington and Rasmussen theorize that some comic physical transformation takes place here, but there is no indication in the text as to how it might have occurred (*Faustus* 3.2.40).

comprehensively, Prospero would seem to fit the profile of a proficient teacher most readily, at least on a superficial level. His first scenes with Miranda and Ariel comes almost in the form of catechism, as he explains their pasts and instructs them in how they are meant to be perceived through a series of questions to which he assumes they know the answers. Prospero also gives his students a more comprehensive education than either Miles or Wagner seem to have received from their respective masters, teaching Miranda well enough that she is able to do the same for Caliban. She takes the credit for teaching Caliban to speak, and her tutoring style seems to have been effective, as Caliban delivers some of the most eloquent lines in the play, such as his famous reassurance to Trinculo and Stephano that they should "Be not afeard; the island is full of noises" (3.2.148). Miranda and Caliban do not pepper their speech with Latin phrases, but neither do they embarrass themselves through misunderstanding what they have been taught in the way that Miles and Wagner do; instead, any mistakes they make are because they have grown up on an island isolated from any other company.

However, Miranda and Caliban's education has a rather glaring hole in it: neither of them knows how to use magic. This is relatively easy to justify in the case of Caliban, as Prospero ended his education when he attempted to rape Miranda, but it is perhaps more difficult with Miranda. While Miranda's begging her father to stop the tempest at the beginning of the play signals her knowledge that magic exists, she never interacts with Ariel, and Prospero never openly acknowledges the spirit while Miranda is around. Instead, any interaction that Prospero has with Ariel comes in the form of asides, and the first time they speak in the play, Prospero makes Miranda fall asleep and wakes her once Ariel has left. It would seem that either the idea of teaching magic to Miranda never

occurred to Prospero, or he wanted to shield her from it for some reason that he never explains.

The reason behind Miranda's lack of magical education may be found through English Renaissance ideas of magic and gender. As a highly educated man who used his command of magic for benevolent or at least neutral reasons, Prospero would have been viewed as a sorcerer, which was considered relatively safe to contemporary audiences—or at least safe in comparison with the unpredictable malevolence of the witch. However, while a man could be either a sorcerer or a witch, women were confined to the latter role. This dichotomy plays out in *The Tempest* through the opposing figures of Prospero and Sycorax. Throughout the play, the two are placed as opposing figures, both by Prospero himself and by other characters, and much of what happens on the island—Ariel's service to Prospero, Caliban's presence and bestial nature—is directly related to the time Sycorax spent there.

While Sycorax stands out as a dangerous figure through the shadow she still casts on the island even twelve years after her death, she would not have stood on her own as a female magic user at this point in Shakespeare's career. Contemporary audiences would also have had in mind Hecate and the Weird Sisters from *Macbeth*, Titania from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the ambiguous example of Paulina from *The Winter's Tale*. However, while the women from the first two plays are indisputably magical (and supernatural beings in their own right), Paulina is obviously a human whose use of magic is questionable and may in fact have been an elaborate trick to hide the fact that Hermione had been alive the whole time Leontes had supposed her to be dead. Paulina is

also cognizant of the dangers she faces in revealing Hermione's statue is in fact the living queen, telling Leontes that:

> If you can behold it,
>
> I'll make the statue move indeed, descend
>
> And take you by the hand; but then you'll think—
>
> Which I protest against— I am assisted
>
> By wicked powers. (*Winter's Tale* 5.3.109-13)

Paulina has more than one reason to be afraid here. Not only does she run the risk of being seen as a witch, but Leontes is not known for his patient nature—the whole reason Hermione's disappearance occurred was because he believed she had been unfaithful to him. In the end of the play, Paulina's transformation is accepted because it is a way of righting a wrong, but she is also married off to Camillo, a figure in whom she has shown little to no interest, possibly as a way for Leontes to control her. If one is to assume that Paulina is not in fact a practitioner of magic, then Prospero teaching Miranda would make her the only benevolent human female magician in Shakespeare's plays. As manipulative and vengeful as Prospero can be, he is at least protective of his daughter and understands that the real world is far more dangerous than the island. Unlike the other students of scholar magicians in these plays, Miranda fails to live up to the title not because she is unintelligent or incompetent, but because she is never given the opportunity to learn.

III. The Priorities of Magic

The practice of magic is not taken up without purpose, and this purpose often serves to justify the scholar's magician's use of magic to the audience. This is not to say

that all reasons for studying magic would have been regarded as valid; rather, the scholar magician's purpose would have to be beneficial to people beyond himself in order for him to be worthy of redemption. Ranging from beneficial to the state to utterly selfish, the uses to which the scholar magician puts magic informs the amount of sympathy the audience feels for him, and later influences how likely he is to avoid negative consequences for his magic.

In addition to the romance between Margaret and Lacy that is central to *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, the play has a patriotic sentiment in Friar Bacon's actions. One of the play's subplots concerns his plan to use the Brazen Head to construct a bronze wall to surround the entirety of England, and Bacon hopes that by doing so

> I shall strengthen England with my skill.
> That if ten Caesars lived and reigned in Rome,
> With all the legions Europe doth contain,
> They should not touch a grass of English ground. (2.57-60)

Bacon is presented as an English champion through his skill in magic, being told after his defeat of the powerful German magician Vandermast that "thou hast honoured England with thy skill / And made fair Oxford famous by thine art" (9.165-66). Because of Bacon's ceaseless attempts to help England, other characters are willing to look past his use of demons and other occasionally petty uses of magic. Even after he has given up his magic, Bacon retains his position as being not simply a magician, but an *English* magician in the final scene of the play when he prophesies the glorious coming of Queen Elizabeth. Not only does Friar Bacon reject his magic and once again devote himself to the worship of God, but he also upholds the state structure in his glorification of the

queen. As a result, his actions can be seen as permissible because they are driven by a desire to help his country.

In contrast, Faustus' adoption of magic is closely linked with the overthrow of the state. He sees magic as a way to gain riches and knowledge, and while he mirrors Friar Bacon when he expresses a desire to protect Germany by walling it with brass[6], this is not done for benevolent reasons. More than anything, Faustus dreams of power, and he imagines reshaping the earth, and specifically Germany, to his will in order to gain control over it:

> Had I as many souls as there be stars,
> I'd give them all for Mephistopheles.
> By him I'll be a great emperor of the world
> And make a bridge through the moving air
> To pass the ocean with a band of men;
> I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore
> And make that land continent to Spain,
> And both contributory to my crown.
> The Emp'ror shall not live but by my leave,
> Nor any potentate of Germany. (1.3.104-13)

Even beyond Faustus' close relationship with Mephistopheles later on in the play, this is where the audience first becomes aware that this is a man driven purely by hubris, who

[6] While this particular feat seems to be a fairly odd one to come up repeatedly, Bevington and Rasmussen theorize that Marlowe had drawn it from Merlin's desire to circle Cairmardin with a brazen wall in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (*Faustus* 1.1.90). They also suggest that Robert Greene uses the brazen wall in *Friar Bacon* in order to draw from Marlowe's success as he often did, but this ignores the sixteenth-century prose romance *The Famous Historie of Friar Bacon*, on which Greene's play was directly based, and which includes the incident with the Brazen Head.

has little regard for the social structures in place (on a more comedic note, he also imagines abolishing the dress code at Wittenberg University), and who is willing to give up his soul many times over for the aid of demons to accomplish his goals.

Prospero's reasons for the adoption of magic must almost be broken into two parts in order to understand them. His initial interest in magic was, as discussed earlier, due to an obsession with knowledge. After his exile, however, his continued use of magic falls somewhere between Friar Bacon and Faustus: he wants power, certainly, but rather than gaining power he never had, he wants to regain what he has lost. Even more than that, he wants to escape from the island. Prospero's use of magic is to help Miranda and himself survive, as well as to uphold the structures which were shifted with Antonio's coup. This makes his use of magic just benevolent enough for him to be considered a heroic figure, but with enough self-serving desires to make the term fit loosely.

Chapter 3: Spirits, Demons, and Things in Between

"Hell is empty,
And all the devils are here."
The Tempest, 1.2.252-53

In discussing the figure of the scholar magician, it is important to remember that it is rare that these figures work alone; they are almost always assisted (or sometimes hindered) by the supernatural creatures[7] they have summoned to do their bidding. However, these creatures sometimes have agendas of their own, which may or may not be in line with what the scholar magician wishes to achieve. Through analysis of the characters of these supernatural creatures, one can come to a better understanding of the magicians they serve, and recognize the ways in which the scholar magicians fall in line with particular philosophies of magic with varying potential to corrupt.

I. Humourism and Incompatible Magic

The relationship between the scholar magician and his supernatural companions is rarely purely harmonious. One way of understanding this is through humourism and the role it played in Renaissance England. From the 5th century BCE to the mid-19th century CE, the classical concept of humourism was a widely accepted medical theory that would have been known and understood by the Renaissance audience. Humourism was based in the idea that the human body had four fluids, or humours, which mingled in the blood and determined both personality and health. In order for a person to be "balanced," they needed to have the humours in proper proportion; both an excess and a dearth of a particular humour was believed to produce detrimental results. However, the proper

[7] I refer to supernatural creatures rather than spirits or demons throughout this paper largely because Caliban's humanity is constantly called into question, but he does not appear to have any of the abilities that would mark him a spirit.

proportion also differed from person to person. One might naturally have more black bile and little phlegm, while another might have more phlegm and little blood.[8] The trick was to determine what was natural for an individual and then work to correct any imbalance which may exist. A temperament, then, was a personality type defined by which humour was present in the greatest proportion. A naturally higher proportion of black bile would make one melancholic; blood, sanguine; yellow bile, choleric; and phlegm, phlegmatic. One of the more famous examples of a "temperamental" character is Shakespeare's Hamlet, whose melancholy is often referred to both by him and other characters. Because of the prevalence of humourism and the importance ascribed to it as a way of evaluating health and personality, it seems reasonable to use it as lens through which to view the scholar magicians and their relationships.

These humours were also associated with various categories, including the seasons, stages of life, and the classical elements. The sanguine temperament, or blood, was associated with air. According to Noga Arikha,

> Blood was the "best" of all the humours. The sanguine person was typically balanced, equanimous, patient, thoughtful, active in a measured way, able to judge people and situations well, and to contain his or her own shifts of moods, as well as those of others. The presence of blood diminished the power exerted by other humours that might have been present in high doses. An excess of it, however, went along with a general insensitivity and indifference to the fate of others. (*Passions and Tempers*)

This description of the sanguine seems to aptly describe Prospero. At his best, he is clever, obviously cares a great deal for Miranda, and is capable of deftly handling any

[8] The humour blood was considered to be different from the usual blood (Arikha).

situation that may arise. At his worst, he is manipulative and occasionally cruel, using Ferdinand's infatuation with Miranda to advance his plan to escape the island and sending Ariel to convince Alonso that his son died in the tempest. While cruelty is not necessarily an attribute of an unbalanced sanguine temperament, Prospero's focus on his own goals to the point where he does not consider the feelings of others certainly would be.

Humourism may also help to explain why Ariel, the spirit on which Prospero relies to aid in his magic, is placed in opposition with Sycorax, the witch who was Prospero's predecessor on the island and the mother of Caliban. Ariel was either unwilling or incapable of performing her commands, for which he is punished by being sealed in a pine tree for twelve years, and yet he seems to have no trouble with the tasks Prospero gives him. Prospero refers to Sycorax's commands as being "earthy and abhorred," and the one feat she performs of which the audience knows is the sealing of Ariel within the tree, an act deeply rooted in the earth (1.2.325). Humourism is in some ways based in oppositions, and these oppositions include earth versus air and melancholy versus sanguine. If Prospero's association with Ariel links him with air, and therefore the sanguine temperament, then it may be possible to read Sycorax as linked with earth, and therefore melancholic. With this in mind, Ariel and Sycorax may have been simply incompatible.

Ariel is called an "ayrie spirit" in the list of actors, but his abilities range beyond simple wind-related feats. He is a shapeshifter, capable of turning invisible and creating storms and fire. This ability to control elements other than air may relate to the classical conception of air as having qualities which are both hot and wet. Also notable is the fact

that Ariel's gender has been commonly considered to be less stable than other supernatural characters, both in Shakespeare and elsewhere. There are only two places in the text where Ariel is referred to with gender pronouns, and only one of these is spoken.[9] These gender pronouns are masculine, but from the mid-1600s to about the 1930s, Ariel was played by women, and it was only after this point that he was played by both male and female actors (Brokaw 24). Additionally, in humourism and the classical conceptions of the elements, air was considered hermaphroditic.

Like Prospero, Faustus seems to match up with the sanguine temperament, though he suffers from the excess about which Arikha warns. Faustus certainly has the potential to be a more balanced person, as indicated by the various points at which his Good Angel is almost able to persuade him to repent, but Faustus ruins this for himself, claiming "My heart's so hardened I cannot repent" (2.3.18). However, Mephistopheles' temperament is more melancholic. Arikha's discussion of melancholy states that "Those who were generally balanced could have episodes of mild melancholy, akin to the blues. Those who were less balanced might be more affected by it and develop a syndrome akin to depression." Mephistopheles' reflective, sometimes mournful disposition places him in opposition with Faustus. This is not to say that the two oppose each other on the same level as Ariel and Sycorax. Mephistopheles and Faustus do have a working relationship and seem to enjoy each other's company on some level; in the scene in which they visit Rome, Mephistopheles is the one to suggest staying to see the Pope so that Faustus can play petty tricks on him (3.1.50-51). However, their relationship in general is based on Faustus' continuously misunderstanding the contract he has made, and the only

[9] The second occasion is a stage direction in Act 3, in which Ariel enters in the form of a harpy and "claps his wings upon the table" (3.3).

misperceptions Mephistopheles chooses to correct are those which have to do with the perceived power Faustus has over him, rather than the actual power Lucifer has over Faustus. Anything which might help Faustus save his soul, he ignores. Ariel, meanwhile, encourages Prospero to show mercy towards those who have wronged him, to the point where Katherine Steele Brokaw declares that "it is Ariel, not Prospero, who has the humanity to be compassionate, even if he is not human" (34).

II. Mephistopheles and Hermeticism

Mephistopheles has a name with a contested etymology which fits in with his complicated personality and emphasizes his dangerous nature. The name appears to have been invented for the Faust legend, and its first known usage comes from late 16th century Faust chapbooks in Germany. In "The Etymology of Mephistopheles," Julius Goebel identifies two camps regarding Mephistopheles' name: those who interpret the name as Greek, and those who interpret it as Hebrew. The Greek camp argues that the name is a corruption of Megistopheles, translated as "highly useful" (Goebel 149). The Hebrew camp counters that the name comes from "mephiz," meaning destroyer, and "tophel," meaning liar. However, Goebel argues that because of the rules of Hebrew noun-composition, the combination "mephiz-tophel" would in fact mean "destroyer of liars" (150). Unsatisfied with these two camps, Goebel has come up with his own explanation: he believes that Mephistopheles is a corruption of Megist-Ophiel, combining the names of Hermes Trismegistus, on whose teachings Hermeticism is based, and the serpent-god Ophiel (152). Goebel also identifies the suffix "-el" as one used in the Hebrew names of demons, but he does not draw a link between this and Johnson's assertion that it means "God." Working off this assertion, Goebel argues that "We may,

therefore, easily understand why Mephistopheles should appear in close connection with Faust, the greatest of all magicians, astrologers, and alchemists. When the latter conjures up the devil, it is not Satan, or Lucifer, who makes his appearance, but the very demon who had been the god of the magicians" (Goebel 155). The possibility that Mephistopheles is a specifically Hermetic demon also brings back Mebane's assertion that Hermeticism made stronger claims regarding the power of its rituals than the comparatively "safe" Neoplatonism, making its practice more worrisome. With just the name of his demonic companion with which to begin, and with knowledge of the connotations of that name, one can see that Faustus has set off on a path that is even more dangerous than that of the other scholar magicians.

Faustus' summoning of Mephistopheles points to an interesting tendency of ritual magic: specific spirits and demons are named within these texts, and the practitioner could choose which to summon. In the summoning scene, Faustus requests Mephistopheles directly: "*Orientis princeps Lucifer, Beelzebub, inferni ardentis monarcha, et Demogorgon, propitiamus vos, ut appareat et surgat Mephistopheles*!"[10] (1.3.18-20). Unlike Ariel and Prospero, however, Mephistopheles has allegiances beyond Faustus, and even superseding him: "I am a servant to great Lucifer / And may not follow thee without his leave. / No more than he charges must we perform" (1.3.41-43). These allegiances are reflected in Faustus' summoning, as he does not call upon Mephistopheles directly, but must first call upon Lucifer, Beelzebub, and Demogorgon. Mephistopheles does have some degree of agency, as he also tells Faustus that he came of his own accord, without Lucifer's prompting. However, he also came without Faustus' prompting:

[10] "Lucifer, Prince of the East, Beelzebub, monarch of burning hell, and Demogorgon, we ask your favour that Mephistopheles may appear and rise" (126).

Faustus' conjuring speeches were "the cause, but yet per accidens. / For when we hear one rack the name of God… / We fly in hope to get his glorious soul" (1.3.47-50). Faustus' misunderstanding of how he summoned Mephistopheles foreshadows what will be a tendency for him throughout the play: he overestimates his own capabilities and underestimates the capabilities of the devils who seek to gain his soul.

III. Ariel and Platonism

Once again, the names of the supernatural companions reveal something of the play's attitude toward magic and how the scholar magician should be viewed. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare gives the audience almost polar opposites in the figures of Ariel and Caliban, with their names almost immediately showing who was meant to be seen as benevolent and who was not—and Ariel inarguably fares better in this regard. As W. Stacy Johnson notes in "The Genesis of Ariel," the suffix "-el" means "God," and is used for seventy-two divine names which may have evolved from Jewish demonology, in which Ariel is a spirit of the waters. Ariel may also have been a variation of Uriel, the favorite angel of John Dee. Another layer is added with a gloss from the Geneva Bible (1594) regarding a passage from Isaiah: "The Ebrewe word Ariel signifieth the Lyon of God and it signifieth the Altar, because ye Altar seemed to devour the Sacrifice that was offered to God" (qtd. in Johnson 206). Johnson argues that this Biblical link may indicate that Ariel simply may not have been capable of following Sycorax's commands, placing him as "a rational Platonic demon, able to carry out general commands through his own devisings, but not such evil commands as those of Sycorax" (206). If rationality and evil are mutually exclusive, as Johnson suggests, and Neoplatonism is meant to be a rational school of thought, then Prospero's use of magic is justified further.

Caliban's name, meanwhile, lacks a complicated history and makes up for it with a relatively straightforward anagram. As many have noted, his name is an almost-anagram of "cannibal," illustrating his bestial and violent nature. Considering that Shakespeare never spelled his own name the same way twice, however, the idea of Caliban as an anagram becomes more promising. This also points to Caliban as a character with a general sense of "wrongness"— not human enough to be treated with respect, and yet still with enough human qualities to be linked with the visceral wrongness of cannibalism. Prospero uses Caliban to carry out tasks around the island, yet he does not trust him with his plans in the same way that he trusts Ariel—for good reason, considering that Caliban once tried to rape Miranda. And yet unlike Ariel, Caliban has some form of agency. He insults Prospero, threatens him, and tries to kill him and claim the island. Caliban's ability to rebel against Prospero points to a sense that he is human, but the control that Prospero has over him suggests a liminal status between human and spirit. However, this control only extends so far, and Prospero cannot stop Caliban from recruiting Trinculo and Stephano to kill him, though he is able to stop the attempted coup as soon as he encounters them. If one is to assume that despite Caliban's liminal status he is capable of following magical commands, Prospero's lack of real control over him could indicate that his magic is more in line with Marsilio Ficino's benevolent and rational Neoplatonism than Agrippa's dangerous and occasionally grotesque Cabalism and Hermeticism.

Accordingly, Ficino's conception of a neutral spirit is embodied in Ariel, which in turn fits with his association with classical Greek concepts of air. In a discussion of the evolution of views towards spirits from the Elizabethan to Jacobean eras, Johnson says,

"For a follower of the Neo-Platonist Iamblichus, or for such a learned spirit-raiser as the famous Dr. John Dee… there might be neutral and even rational spirits, useful in good faith" (205). Barbara H. Traister agrees with this view, calling Ariel "a daemon not a demon," with the former as Platonic and the latter as Christian (27). Ariel may not be entirely rational—there does not seem to be much purpose behind his tendency to break into song—but he certainly seems to be neutral. He has served both the disciplined Prospero and the malicious witch Sycorax, though as I have discussed, the latter relationship seems to be incompatible. While Prospero calls Ariel "malignant," Mebane argues that this word choice

> probably refers to Prospero's somewhat exaggerated accusation that Ariel is resistant to the magician's orders, not that he is necessarily evil, and the accusation itself evokes speeches from Ariel which develop the contrast between Prospero's art—which the airy spirit does, in fact, obey— and the witchcraft of Sycorax, with which Ariel had refused to comply. (181)

Of all the scholar magicians I have discussed, Prospero arguably comes closest to the ideal of the wise figure that uses his powers for serious, benevolent means. Reed argues that this is in part because the island is home to only "fragile, harmless demons" and he therefore could not be corrupted by the presence of a Mephistopheles-like figure (128). However, Reed fails to take into account the "more potent ministers" (*Tempest* 1.2.327) who served Sycorax and who were both willing and able to assist with her "earthy and abhorred commands" (1.2.325). There is no mention of what happened to these other spirits after Sycorax died, but it seems unlikely that they died with her, as it is not even clear if a spirit can be physically harmed. It also seems unlikely that the reason

Prospero does not command them is because he lacks the strength, as Caliban says that "His art is of such power / It would control my dam's god, Setebos, / And make a vassal of him" (1.2.448-50). This seems to strengthen Prospero's moral virtue, as he is aware of these spirits, knows of their power, and yet relies solely on Ariel for his magic. It also strengthens Caliban's assertion of Prospero's strength as a magician; while the reader does not know exactly what Sycorax did with her power, she still needed the aid of multiple spirits, while Prospero commands only one directly (while other spirits do appear throughout the play, Ariel appears to be the one leading them). This brief mention of Setebos is also important, as it shows that Sycorax was in a similar situation to Faustus, having dedicated herself to the service of a malignant power. Prospero, meanwhile, has done no such thing and manages to maintain his position as the only one of the scholar magicians I have discussed who did not gain his power through a deal with a devil.

IV. The Supernatural in Opposition

Ariel and Mephistopheles both have moments in which they define themselves in opposition to humans. These moments almost counterintuitively work to show the ways in which their human counterparts perhaps fall flat in their empathy and understanding of their circumstances, traits which were commonly thought of as human rather that supernatural. In Ariel's report of how Prospero's magic is affecting Gonzalo, Alonso, and Antonio, this exchange takes place:

> ARIEL: Your charm so strongly works 'em
>
> That if you now beheld them, your affections
>
> Would become tender.

> PROSPERO: Dost thou think so, spirit?
>
> ARIEL: Mine would, sir, were I human. (5.1.22-26)

Ariel indicates the ways in which he differs from humans, but he understands them enough to predict how he would react if they were more similar. Depending on the performance, this line is capable of provoking a remarkable emotional response, with Ariel being either wistful or pointed, and Prospero responding either with regret or indifference. Similarly, Mephistopheles tells Faustus that he has pain "As great as have the human souls of men," before quickly returning to bartering for Faustus' soul (2.1.44). For Faustus, Mephistopheles is the most bizarre of foils: for the ambitious, short-sighted scholar who imagines Hell as a place where he can be with the old philosophers, there is the measured, reflective devil who repeatedly emphasizes the pain that comes with damnation. However, in contrast with Prospero's willingness to at least listen to what Ariel has to say, Faustus ignores all of Mephistopheles' warnings. Traister argues that these parallel dynamics point to what is perhaps an unexpected similarity between the two spirits:

> Ironically, Ariel resembles Mephistopheles more than do the other demonic spirits [Traister's] paper considers. Imaginative, able to innovate when unexpected things happen, and capable of arguing with Prospero, much as Mephistopheles stands up to Faustus, Ariel embodies the promise of spiritual magic just as Mephistopheles embodies the sophistical danger of demonic magic. (27)

In the end, however, Prospero frees Ariel and turns away from this promise of spiritual magic to return to life as Duke of Milan, while Faustus succumbs to the danger of

demonic magic. It is easy to justify Faustus' fall by citing the hubris he displays throughout the play, but if the pursuit of the former kind of magic is a worthy goal, why does Prospero stop his practice before he achieves the heights toward which he seems to be headed?

The explanation for this perhaps comes from the fact that Prospero seems to be the only one of the three to have begun practicing magic with a particular goal in mind. While Faustus seeks a rather vague "world of profit and delight / Of power, of honour, of omnipotence" (1.1.55-56), and Friar Bacon never actually shares the reason he began his studies, Prospero's use of magic has helped him and Miranda to survive on the island and, eventually, escape from it. Prospero can give up his magic without the consequences suffered by other scholar magicians because he knew what he wished to achieve and, rather than exceeding that goal, he in fact stops short of it. He shows his self-control in this way, as well as his understanding that if he does continue to use magic, he may pass a point from which he cannot redeem himself. Although Prospero may have begun his practice of magic with good intentions, the fact remains that even initially benevolent magic, or magia, is capable of corrupting its practitioner if used improperly or to excess. Prospero does not reach this point, but he arguably comes close with his manipulation of Ferdinand and attempts at vengeance against Antonio.

Chapter 4: The Consequences of Magic

"Why, think'st thou then that Faustus shall be damned?"
Doctor Faustus 2.1.132

For the hours the English Renaissance audience would have spent watching a play about a scholar magician, they would have known it was driving toward one thing: the consequences of magic. With the exception of Prospero, the scholar magician's power stemmed from a deal with a devil, and the audience would have wanted to know if said devil came to collect what he was due. However, a literal agreement with hell was not the only way in which the use of magic could come to corrupt its practitioner, and so even magicians like Prospero had something to fear if they continued down their paths. The dangers of necromancy and the fear that time would catch up with them were never far from a scholar magician's mind, and, consequently, from the minds of the audience as well.

In the plays I have discussed, the dramatic scholar magician is perhaps more aptly titled the dramatic scholar necromancer, as his form of magic relies on the command of demons and ambiguously Platonic spirits rather than communication with any more angelic figures. This latter relationship also does not appear to have been the goal for any of these men. Accordingly, considering the dangerous nature of this practice, the scholar magician feels concern (whether this be fleeting or constant, superficial or deep-set) over the spiritual repercussions of his actions.

In a society in which the acceptable form of magic is meant to bring the practitioner closer to God, the scholar magician does not seem to consider the possibility of using magic for spiritual fulfillment, instead largely focusing on ways to further their own needs. Any good they happen to do for other characters tends to be almost

incidental. Prospero supports Miranda and Ferdinand's burgeoning relationship because it will help him get off the island, while Faustus does not even try to help people, but instead amuses himself at various royal courts. Friar Bacon does actively try to help people, but almost everything he does ends in either failure, in the case of the Brazen Head, or tragedy, in the case of the two young scholars, with only his defeat of Vandermast functioning as a solid victory. While the possibility of redemption is constantly kept open for these characters, there is no guarantee that the scholar magician will take advantage of it, or even understand the circumstances under which his sins would be truly forgiven. There appear to be three categories into which the endings of these plays fall: the bad, in which the scholar magician does not turn away from necromancy in time to avoid eternal damnation, the neutral, in which the scholar magician does not meet a clear end and instead continues in his practice of magic, and the good, in which the scholar magician turns away from necromancy and begins his reconciliation with God.

I. The Bad: Eternal Damnation

Possibly one of the most famous stories of damnation, *Doctor Faustus* begins with Marlowe's habitual request that the audience not come into the play with preconceived ideas about the morality of his protagonist: "We must perform / The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad. / To patient judgements we appeal our plaud" (Prologue 7-9). While Faustus does not begin the play making an especially good impression on the audience, the presence of the Good Angel and his repeated doubts offer up some hope that he may gain the strength to reject Mephistopheles and Lucifer. By the end of the play, however, after Faustus has thoroughly lost himself in necromancy and

self-obsession, his physical damnation onstage is accompanied by the Chorus' decisive moral condemnation of him:

> Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
> And burnéd is Apollo's laurel bough
> That sometime grew within this learnéd man.
> Faustus is gone. Regard his hellish fall,
> Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
> Only to wonder at unlawful things,
> Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
> To practice more that heavenly power permits. (Epilogue 1-8)

Faustus is a character who begins his play with a staggering amount of potential, but becomes corrupted by his hubris. Because he believes he has mastered all knowledge, he turns to necromancy as a means of gaining more power and knowledge; because he believes he is more cunning than Mephistopheles, he does not understand what it will mean for him to be damned until it is too late.

In fact, it is debatable as to whether or not Faustus ever truly understands his failure. In the moments before Lucifer and Mephistopheles appear and drag him off to hell, Faustus seeks to find a way to escape from them. Rather than seek a true path to repentance, however, he tries to run away and repeatedly calls out for his body to dissolve into mist and be hidden within the earth, seeking to exercise a form of magical power he never managed to learn. He finally calls upon God to aid him, but he still does not understand the mindset he must adopt if he is to be saved. Rather than recognizing the ways in which he has sinned and expressing true repentance for them, Faustus tries to

bargain with God, as he begs "Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years, / A hundred thousand, and at last be saved" (5.2.102-3). Further, he demands of himself, "Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul? / Or why is this immortal that thou hast?" (5.2.105-06). Faustus does not regret the time he spent practicing necromancy. Rather, he regrets the fact that the presence of his soul has prevented him from practicing necromancy without repercussions.

Yet another one of Faustus' many fundamental misunderstandings is that he has not simply deprived himself of "the joys of heaven," but that he deprived himself of the opportunity to spend eternity in the presence of his Creator. His idea of heaven is just as insubstantial as his ideas of what to do with his newfound magic power at the beginning of the play and his conception of hell as a place where he can be with the old philosophers. He comes perhaps the closest to genuine understanding of the situation in which he has placed himself when he cries out:

> Curst be the parents that engendered me!
>
> No, Faustus, curse thyself. Curse Lucifer,
>
> That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven. (5.2.113-15)

However, while Faustus does lay some blame on his own feet, he almost immediately turns to blaming Lucifer, settling on the devil himself as the one responsible for his damnation. He also either ignores or forgets the fact that Mephistopheles and Lucifer never lied about what would happen to him at each step of the way. In the end, the only one Faustus should be blaming for his damnation is himself.

Friar Bacon has a similar situation with Miles in which the shortsighted scholar is sent to hell, but bizarrely, this is played for comedy and in fact inverts the tragic,

religious nature of the scene present in *Doctor Faustus*. While Miles is certainly taken to hell, he does so by buckling spurs to his shoes and riding on a devil's back, throwing even the devil aback, and it is unclear as to whether this is a punishment for him, or if it is actually a step up in his circumstances as a lowly failed scholar. While *Friar Bacon* is a comedy overall, the Miles subplot has a level of darkness to it that throws the light-hearted earlier scenes into starker relief. Miles may have failed to practice magic adequately enough to be considered a necromancer himself, but he is still roped into the consequences which Friar Bacon avoids, suggesting that even an incompetent practice of magic is dangerous.

II. The Neutral: The Delaying of Consequences

Despite the black and white nature of the heaven vs. hell dilemma, there is still room for endings which do not fit easily into the scope of good or bad. The most striking example of this is found in *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. While the play has a superficially happy ending in which Harry Clare and Milliscent are able to get married (and the name of the play itself suggests that it is a comedy), the titular Merry Devil, Peter Fabell, receives only a momentary happy ending, with his eventual damnation deferred for seven years as a result of his deal with Coreb. This is made even more bizarre by the fact that the play itself glosses over this, as no mention of Fabell's deal is made after his initial conversation with Coreb in the Induction, and Coreb vanishes from the play afterwards. With the extra time that Fabell has been given, he seems inclined to go on practicing magic as he did before without any sense that he seeks reconciliation with God, even after he came so close to damnation. Rather than a good or bad ending, the play seems to fall into a kind of stasis in terms of Fabell's use of magic, and what

seems to matter more than anything else at the end is that "The devil of Edmonton did good in Love." The audience is implicitly advised to not worry about the implications of Fabell's necromancy, focusing instead on the good that came out of his actions. This avoidance of critical thought, however, may mirror Fabell's failure to reevaluate his use of necromancy after his near-damnation at the beginning of the play. The audience falls into the same trap as Fabell, dismissing his close call as the romance of the rest of the play unfolds. Fabell's delaying of consequences and decision to ignore his mistakes continues the implication from *Doctor Faustus* that some people simply do not understand the true dangers of necromancy.

III. The Good: The Rejection of Magic

While Faustus is damned and Miles is sent to hell, there is still room for the scholar magician to save himself through reconciliation with God. In discussing *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, another English Renaissance play featuring a magician whose books are burned (though this is through his son's will rather than his own), Andrew Ettin writes that

> Were this a universe of moral chaos, Bomelio's attempts at magic would be meaningless gestures in an empty theater; if this is a conventionally well-ordered universe, then attempting magic in the name of justice is redundant. Only in a universe wherein the mortal and divine have a protean and elusive relationship could such magic be useful as well as appropriate. (Ettin 271)

Ettin's thoughts on the nature of the mortal and divine in the universe of the scholar magician plays is useful for understanding why some forms of magic were acceptable

while others were not, and by extension, why some scholar magicians were able to atone for their sin.

As stated earlier, the spiritual ramifications of renouncing magic are not to be overlooked, and are often the driving force behind the renunciation. While Faustus' attempted renunciation is only halfway spiritual in nature, Friar Bacon's speech to Friar Bungay is less about his own fears of damnation and more about his regret over "using devils to countervail his God" (5.13.97). Bacon also has the added spiritual pressure of his status as a holy man, making his initial studies of necromancy perhaps even more blasphemous than that of even Faustus. Marlowe makes clear Faustus' inability to thoroughly understand the subjects he studies, up to and including the reasons for which he is damned. Friar Bacon has no such excuse. This also perhaps makes Bacon's renunciation the most unambiguously "good" ending of the plays in terms of Christian spirituality, as the act of reconciliation is done with a clear mind and brings him back to the holy life to which he had sworn himself. Bacon has the clearest idea of how to redeem himself after his blasphemous use of magic, and he also appears to be the most willing to go through with it:

> Sins have their salves. Repentance can do much….
> Bungay, I'll spend the remnant of my life
> In pure devotion, praying to my God
> That he would save what Bacon vainly lost. (5.13.99, 106-08)

Bacon's earnestness in this scene is clear, and his use of the phrase "my God" shows a desire to regain an intimate relationship with God, and suggests that his repentance for his necromancy is genuine.

Prospero shares Bacon's happy ending with a moment of repentance, though with a twist that makes said repentance almost questionable. While Prospero achieves his goal of twelve years when he is finally able to leave the island, this victory comes hand-in-hand with a fear that he will eventually be damned for his use of magic. His final lines (and the final lines of the play itself) are an exhortation to the audience, as he expresses his hopes and fears regarding what will come next for him:

> Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer,
> Which pierces so that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
>   As you from crimes would pardoned be,
>   Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue 13-21)

This is the first time in which Prospero overtly indicates some degree of Christian spirituality, with his assertion that his "ending is despair, / Unless I be relieved by prayer" (Epilogue 16-17). However, the spiritual aspect of his redemption is lessened by the fact that unlike in the other plays, in which redemption is purely between the scholar magician and God, Prospero gives the choice, and the responsibility, of accepting his repentance to the audience. In giving the audience the power to forgive sins that is typically only granted to God, Shakespeare continues with the humanistic themes present throughout *The Tempest* and brings to the surface an idea which had floated beneath many of the earlier scholar magician plays: if the scholar magician is not damned on

stage, therefore showing definitively that his sins have outweighed his repentance, then the audience is left to decide whether or not he can be forgiven. The audience has always had the power which Prospero now openly grants to them, and Shakespeare's acknowledgement of this is a showcase of the increasingly strong idea that humanity controlled its own fate.

Conclusion: "This Insubstantial Pageant"
The Fall of the Scholar Magician

"These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air"
The Tempest 4.1.165-67

On September 2, 1642, the staging of plays in London was banned by the newly powerful Puritan government, and the era of the dramatic scholar magician officially ended. Even before that, however, interest in the subject had begun to wane, with the number of plays centering on magic decreasing rapidly in the mid-1620s. *The Tempest* presents one of the last examples of the character type that would be seen for some time, and the underlying philosophy behind Prospero's magic was a far cry from that of Faustus and even Friar Bacon. Humanism had supplanted the Christian spiritual nature of the earlier scholar magician plays, which were in turn far more secular than the morality plays of the medieval era. Shifts in dramatic portrayals of magic went hand-in-hand with changing perceptions of the danger that magic and witchcraft played in the real world. From its high point in the late 16th century, around the time in which the more pointedly anti-magic *Doctor Faustus* and *Friar Bacon* were first performed, the frequency of witch hunts fell drastically after 1630, and would be banned entirely a hundred years later by the Witchcraft Act of 1735. King James I, who had previously written *Daemonologie* as a guide to hunting down witches and had personally participated in a series of witch trials, became skeptical of the views he had expressed in the book and later wrote to his son Henry that "most miracles now-a-days prove but illusions, and ye may see by this how wary judges should be in trusting accusations without an exact trial, and likewise how easily people are induced to trust to wonders" (Halliwell 102).

Clearly, something about the period of time between the 1580s and 1620s made the scholar magician a popular subject for dramatic works. Once again discussing *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, Andrew Ettin writes of the central magician in the play:

> Perhaps Bomelio's subsequent madness suggests that necromancy and insanity can be kindred expressions of emotional instability and intellectual shortsightedness. Incapable of reacting flexibly to life, the character first tries to control his world by magic, perhaps as the agent of an imperiously distant god, perhaps in place of a vanished god. The inevitable failure of that effort can be devastating. The intensity of the magician's response to experiences gives him some of the dimensions of a tragic hero, both positive and negative; for if the vibrant commitment of energy is magnificent, still the neurotic need for comprehensible order thinly disguises the lurking presence of chaos. (Ettin 273)

At the time in which the scholar magician plays were written, England was undergoing a series of rapid changes. Intellectual and scientific development was moving forward at unprecedented speed, the national religion had been bouncing back and forth between Catholicism and Anglicanism since 1534, and Queen Elizabeth's later years were marked by high taxation and factional strife within the government, problems which James inherited upon his ascension to the throne in 1603. In the midst of all this confusion, the scholar magician sought to master the world around him and create his own sense of stability.

The scholar magician would never regain the same kind of popularity he had enjoyed in the English Renaissance. While the archetype lives on in figures like *The Lord of the Rings*' Gandalf, *Harry Potter*'s Albus Dumbledore, or the varying portrayals of Merlin, the quantity of media with him as the protagonist has shrunk drastically and he is now almost exclusively a wise old mentor and side character—who notably does not need to give up his magic in order to be redeemable. But then, the particular forces with which he grappled had come to be products of another age. The scholar magician of the English Renaissance was a transitionary figure, walking both sides of the line between medieval superstition and modern science, Christianity and humanism, mortal limitation and divine power. His rise to power may have been inherently unsustainable and his source of power may have needed to be set aside in order to for him to feel like a safe character, but his complicated system of morality and struggles with his own limitations made him a popular figure at a time in which few things seemed set in stone.

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