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"The Devil to pay"

Temptation and Desire in Christopher Marlowe's
Doctor Faustus

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“The devil to pay”
-Temptation and desire in Christopher
Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus*

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Introduction

Oscar Wilde, true to his penchant for eloquence, famously pointed out that: “there are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it” (*Lady Windermere’s Fan*, 1917, Act III). The story of world-weary *Faustus*’ tragic quest for redemption and his ultimate fall into damnation is a version of the potential for tragedy in desire that has never ceased to fascinate. It has even led to the cementation of a plot archetype and a particular genre across the arts portraying a deal with the devil for omnipotence or some other desire -the so-called Faustian plot. The Faustian myth may not have started with Christopher Marlowe and the staging of his play *The Tragical tale of Dr. Faustus*, but few adaptations have managed to become as prominent as Marlowe’s in passing on the Faustian myth to future tradition. In 1806, Goethe would come to rival his predecessor’s work with his staging of *Faust*, which when published expanded the thirty or so pages of Marlowe into a full-length opus in the same vein as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Yet, as a piece of theatre, Marlowe’s play has endured the test time, subjecting the viewer to a first-hand immersive account of human nature and desire. In the centre of the play is the intertwining of life and death, and herein might lie its main fascination, a death-wish is what propels Faustus towards his inevitable doom, but his desire for life and earthly delights is what sustains him. Yet, his relentless desire for omnipotence and eternal jouissance is shrouded in a sense of loss, for what becomes clear is that by seemingly obtaining what he desires he is still rendered unfulfilled. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan highlights the presence of a more or less conscious catalyst behind each desire, the *objet petit a* (the lost object of desire), thus indicating that desiring is not a straight path but rather a constant filling of the void that comes with being human. As a consequence, we are never fulfilled but perpetually displacing our *objet a* onto new desires.

My own “desire” to explore this theme has its roots in this theoretical soil. Because, in a sense, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* stands as the ultimate symbol of unfulfilled desire. The play eloquently paints the picture of Faustus’ incessant search for his true desire -his *objet a*-, by veiling it in other desires. This quest ultimately culminates in the demonic pact with Mephistopheles, which, as will be explored and argued in the analysis is what locks Faustus out from achieving his true desire: salvation. Hence, the main investigative aim of this essay

is to assess how Lacan's *objet a* can be used to explore the development of the theme of unfilled desire in Faustus.

Author Background:

Christopher Marlowe's place within the canons of Western literature is one that critics have loved to hate. Allegations of atheism, homosexuality and general unorthodoxy have hovered over his name since he entered the public sphere. Yet much of his life and personality remains pure speculation, a mix of fact and fiction cobbled together by scattered notes and letters. Downie (in Erne, 2002, p. 30) poignantly notes that the person Christopher Marlowe appears to have been subsumed into a larger mythology created around a fictional persona. The mysterious circumstances surrounding his death in 1593, being stabbed in the eye over an alleged bar bill, along with a famous letter (see Nicholls, 1992) pointing towards Marlowe being both a spy and a counterfeiter (a letter from 1591) helped create a trove of conspiracy theories that has bogged biographical inquiries ever since (Downie, in Erne, p.32). Indeed, Erne goes as far as to proclaim that research into Marlowe often ends in: "(...) pseudobiographical investigations in which historical evidence happily mixes with fanciful inventions" (Erne, p.34).

On his conspicuous nature, one may note the varied responses his death evoked, ranging from the dry statement attributed to Henry Beard that: "[Marlowe's death was] a manifest signe of Gods judgement ... in that hee compelled his owne hand which had written those blasphemies to be the instrument to punish him, and that in his braine, which had devised the same" (Honan, p.364) to Havelock Ellis, whose more favourable opinion is that "Marlowe's place is at the heart of English poetry" (ibid, p.364). T.S Eliot later joined the jubilant choir, declaring that "the direction in which Marlowe's verse might have moved ... [was toward] ... intense and serious and indubitably great poetry" (Eliot, 1932, p. 125) Eliot further notes that Marlowe, in Doctor Faustus, "penetrates deeply into the experience of a mind isolated from the past, absorbed in the realisation of its own direction (Eliot, 1932, p. 132).

Moving towards established biographical information, sources agree that Marlowe was baptized in Canterbury on February 26, 1564. Born into the household of Carpenter John Marlowe he entered scholarship at the Corpus Christ College at the University of Cambridge and received his M.A at 1587. At this time he wrote both translations of Ovid and the

critically acclaimed screenplay of *Tamburlaine* (c. 1587-88), foregrounding the usage of blank verse. Soon after, in quick succession, followed *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1589-92), *The Jew of Malta* (c.1590) and *Edward II* (c. 1592). Alongside his work as a playwright, he also composed poetry; here should be mentioned *Hero and Leander* and *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*. On his alleged work as a spy, some ambiguous evidence may be found in a letter from the Privy Council dating to 1587 wherein he, suggestively, is noted to have “behaved himself orderly and discreetly, whereby he had done her Majesty good service and deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealing” (Erne, p.31). Regardless of his alleged undercover work, unorthodoxy and sexual behavior (alleged in a letter by Thomas Kyd to have quipped: “all who loves not men and tobacco are fools”)((see, Erne, p. 34), his stage plays remains a hallmark of Elizabethan Theatre tradition.

Debate on Authorship

Despite being attributed to Marlowe, the specifics of authorship and publication of *Doctor Faustus* have remained obscured in controversy. There exist two early versions of the text; one published in 1604 (The A-text, or the 1604 quarto) and a later abridged version published in 1616 (The B-text, or the 1616 quarto). Incidentally, both were published after the death of Marlowe, who passed away not long after its premiere in 1593. As such critical opinions vary as to which text is most authoritative and concordant to Marlowe’s original vision.

As Nicholl (2017) poignantly notes, the two different versions “provide different readings, and in some cases whole different scenes”. Despite being some 600 lines shorter, most modern critics favour the A-text, which in the words of Roma Gill reads “more like the play that Marlowe wrote”, noting also that it is “more Elizabethan” than the B-text. Following this line of argumentation, I have chosen to base this essay on the A-text; not only does it focus more on Faustus’ internal conflict (thus being more psychoanalytically relevant), it is also not encumbered with additions (comical and otherwise) drawing attention away from the central conflict.

Previous psychoanalytical research

Despite the fact that the play offers a veritable treasure trove of psychological material, remarkably little has been written from a psychoanalytical perspective. To the best of my knowledge, a Chinese master's thesis, "Desire: The Lacanian Approach to Marlowe's play Doctor Faustus" (2007) by X.J Liu currently constitutes the sole full-length dive into Lacanian theory and its probable applications to the play. Access has not been gained, so sadly this tantalising read remains beyond the veil of desire. However, a search for general psychoanalysis in relation to the play yields more results, and for this essay there are three relevant studies: "Doctor Faustus and the Art of Dying" (2017) by Maggie Vinter, "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, The Oedipal Complex, and the Denial of Death (1989) by Christopher Wion, and Fred.B Tromly's excellent account of Marlowian desire "Playing with Desire" (1998), which will be discussed below. Because it is impossible to look at the play without touching on religion, I will also present the ideas of Anne O'Brien and her essay "Religion in Doctor Faustus".

Maggie Vinter; "Doctor Faustus and the Art of dying" (2017)

Maggie Vinter's article "Doctor Faustus and the Art of Dying" (2017) dissects the notion of the Christian death and its psychological connections and implications in the play?. As Vinter eloquently observes in her first paragraph, "the moral and theological framework of Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus has proven notoriously hard to fix" (). She then adds that "Critics have plausibly interpreted the play through a variety of religious and philosophical lenses, from Calvinist predestinarianism to free-thinking iconoclasm" (). Despite seemingly distancing herself, her own article on the subject explores a side-by-side analysis of Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and Wager's *Enough Is as Good as a Feast*. Her focus is on how parodic inversion, perversion and distortion of various religious and philosophical concepts and ideas work to reinforce the poetic message of the text. She also notes the parody that comes from imperfect mimesis or representation. In the centre of the posited analysis lies the death-concept, or the Christian 'bad death'(refusing divinity) contra the Christian 'good death' (repentance and salvation), which Vinter (2017) links death

to parody by stating that “parody in their plays (Marlowe and Wager) becomes a tool for analyzing and representing the approach to death, when the disjuncture between a person’s earthly and spiritual state can appear especially stark and especially in need of resolution” (Vinter, 2017). She also further proposes the dual concepts of “parody as inversion”, wherein a traditional idea is inverted for humorous effect, and “parody as juxtaposition” (in this case linked to death, with Hell being Faustus ‘salvation’ instead of Heaven).

On *Dr. Faustus*, Vinter notes that from the very beginning Marlowe distorts the scientific ideals of the Renaissance by having Faustus denounce most sciences with the exception of magic. More specifically he understands magic to be demonology. Another parodic effect lies in the fact that this denouement is a result of Faustus having achieved “logic’s chiefest end” (Vinter, 2017), proving that not even this highest principle of Renaissance learning is a safeguard towards damnation. This theme of juxtaposition continues through the play in its entirety, or in the author’s own words: Faustus practice does “not strike out into new territory but perverts other modes of thought and behavior—most notably the religious ceremonies he parodies, from the black mass that summons Mephistopheles to the exclamation “consummatum est” (ibid, 2017). Continuing, Vinter stipulates that absence of any ‘positive’ links to divine grace (there is no heaven, and Faustus Bible offers no salvation) forces the viewer (and Faustus) into “a blasphemous register, where “imitation and damnation are knotted together”. In the same vein; and connecting to the earlier concept of” parody as juxtaposition”, Vinter raises the notion that: ”throughout the final two scenes of *Doctor Faustus*, Christian models of death are invoked and then revealed as unsatisfactory. The Old Man is succeeded by the Scholars, who also ineffectively exhort Faustus to repent” (Vinter, 2017). In a final juxtaposition of the ‘good Christian death’ (with repentance and subsequent salvation), Faustus is suffered to experience an everlasting procession of deaths. Examining the models of the Christian death-concept put forward by Vinter, and acknowledging its central position in the play it might help to shed light on Faustus’ underlying motivations and also to understand the religious world that the play acts in.

Philip.K Wion, “Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, the Oedipus Complex, and the Denial of Death“ (1980)

Beginning by acknowledging the scarcity of psychoanalytic analyses on *Doctor Faustus*, Wion immediately strikes out. In his own account, Wion explores the permeating presence of Oedipal conflict that underlies the play; featured both in the plethora of master-servant relationships and the striking amount of analogous parent-child relationships. For, as Wion notices “although Faustus’ own parents never enter the play, there are many relationships in it which are analogous in various ways to the relations between child and parents” (1980).

According to Wion, the language of the play is suffused with Oedipal signifiers. Beginning with master-servant relationships, Wion notes that Wagner is labelled “Faustus’ boy” Wagner in turn is master of Robin, and Mephistopheles is “servant to the great Lucifer”, and after the signing of the pact, Mephistopheles offers to become Faustus’ “slave” if he “buy my services with his soul”. At the heart of the Oedipal trope, according to Wion, lie the relationships between God and Faustus, and that between Faustus and the devils (prominently Mephistopheles). Symbolically, God acts as the analogous father to both Faustus and Lucifer (and by extension Mephistopheles), a synergy that Wion deems essential in the Oedipal framework of the play. Both Faustus and Lucifer are what Wion terms “rebellious sons”, which he further states is contrasted with the relationship between Christ, ‘the good son’, and God. Incidentally, Faustus remains at a continuum, ranging between rebellion and obedience to his ‘symbolical father’.

In addition to his focus on Oedipal relationships, Wion widens his net by further exploring the various threats of dismemberment and mutilation which riddles the play and that he connects with dysfunctional Oedipal desire (symbolic castration anxiety). Wion concisely observes; “once Faustus’ has concluded his bargain, the threat of dismemberment is renewed every time he wavers in allegiance to the devils”. Along the same lines, Faustus constant practice of masochism (or self-wounding) seen most prominently in the stabbing of his arm is lifted by Wion to be just another outlet for Faustus’ Oedipal fixation to connect with the symbolical father. Wion ultimately concludes that the play’s patriarchal and authorial portrayal of the Christian “world view is thus paradoxically both the play’s central defence against Oedipal motives and anxieties, and at the same time a manifestation of them” (1980). From the very first line, Faustus explicitly rages against the boundaries of mortality, more specifically the

unjust nature of death and how the narrow path to Christian salvation is sealed away from sinners by the grace of God. From the onset, Faustus voices conflicting notions of both subservience and rebellion; he desires power, yet also yearning to submit. Emblematically, Faustus' apostate odyssey may also be read as a quest for the Father.

Fred B. Tromly; *Playing with desire* (1998)

In a succinct dissection of Marlowe's entire dramaturgical output, Tromly immediately establishes that a prevailing thematic feature of Marlowe may be discerned in the suffusion of frustrated desire, hubris and tantalisation. Christening this feature as tantalisation games he ascertains the idea that Marlowian protagonists continually entice themselves with fantasies of desire, while also being tantalised themselves by other characters. Faustus, of course, remains as the centrepiece of this discussion but Tromly argues that the same frustration of desire may also be traced in *Tamburlaine* and *Dido*. Drawing upon the mythology of Icarus and Tantalus, and their thematic connection to the overreacher (Icarus) and undereacher (Tantalus) he thusly notes a common Marlowian pattern. This pattern, may, according to Tromly be interpreted as successive transformation of the protagonist from overreacher to impotence. Or in the author's own words:

“(This pattern emerges when) in the opening scenes the protagonist imagines himself or herself to be wielding exalted powers, but in the closing scene we see that he or she is in fact impotent” (Tromly, 1998, p.23).

To exemplify this feature, Tromly lifts *Tamburlaine* wherein the audience in the first part is treated to Tamburlaine's mocking of the encaged Emperor Bajazeth only to be paralysed by the same impotence in the second part wherein he, on his deathbed, is faced with a map showing all the lands that he has not conquered despite all his power. In *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas early on voices his desire for material wealth, yet he ends up dispossessed in a kettle of boiling water.

In his chapter on Faustus, following his earlier discussion on frustrated desire, he promptly stipulates: “in the world of Doctor Faustus religion is inseparable from tantalisation” (p.134.

Entering the same discursive territory as Vinter he notes the many empty heavenly tantalizations; the cup of grace, the blood of Christ and the face of God are all evoked in the presence of Faustus “only to be denied him” (Tromly, p.134). As a counterpoint, he notes the overabundance of devils and devilish tantalization, most prominently the very tangible pact offered to Faustus by Mephistopheles. This very physicality of Hell, as a contrast to Marlowe’s earlier plays wherein Hell stays metaphorical, is, according to Tromly, another way of painting a very real picture of damnation. In *Faustus*, not only does Lucifer himself make an appearance, by the end of the play Faustus - due to his pact with Mephistopheles- is carried screaming into oblivion. In a very interesting quote on desire, he arrives at the poignant notion that “though magic promises him (Faustus) everything he is never contented with anything” (ibid, p. 138). To further connect with the initial ideas of the paragraph, Tromly argues that, in *Doctor Faustus*, tantalization is “a game which create power through the manipulation of desire” (ibid, p.136).

Previous research on religion in the play

From the very beginning, *Doctor Faustus* is teeming with Eucharist symbolism; direct allusions to both religious rituals and sacraments make it almost impossible to critically discuss Faustus without entering into the religious sphere. The perversion of holy confession and the covenant, as observed in Faustus’ signing away his soul in a writ dictated in his own blood, the apostate conjuring of Mephistopheles to the presence of Lucifer and the Cardinal sins all serve to create a direct link to the spiritual world. Throughout the play, Faustus explicitly cites passages of the Bible in his soliloquies. As such, there has been no shortage of religious research applied to the play. Ranging from the very interesting work of A.D Nuttal (1998), who reads Marlowe through a Gnostic lens to more traditional Calvinist readings (DeCook, 2018; Macdonald, 2014) on how Faustus’ damnation is a product of hubris and renouncement of the Scripture.

However, since the focus of this essay is centered on psychoanalysis, the forays into religion will be complementary to this main focus. For the purpose of this essay, I happened upon Anne O’Brien and her succinctly titled essay, “Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus”. True to its title, the main focus lies on exploring the Christian elements of the play and how these influence the psyche of Faustus and reader alike. However, it does so in a manner that is

almost psychoanalytic in its application, focusing heavily on the psychological undertones of religion and especially the framework of damnation. The essay will also connect somewhat with Thomas Aquinas and his treatise *Summa Theologica*, as his ideas on the fall of Lucifer and the nature of the Divine are reflected in aspects of the play.

Anne O'Brien "Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus" (1998)

Commencing with a dissection of Marlowe's alleged atheism, O'Brien (1998) succinctly establishes her subject matter; a side-by-side analysis of *Doctor Faustus* against the *Summa Theologica* and *On Christian Doctrine*, exploring the pervasive Christian elements of the play (most saliently damnation) and how they work to influence the psyche of both the audience reader and on-stage Faustus. On the modern anachronistic practice of deeming Marlowe's play "heretic", she notes in her first paragraph (citing Irving): "it is clear that in his own day Marlowe was known as a skeptic and heretic, not above uttering what more sober Elizabethans might have considered blasphemous". Indeed, O'Brien thoughtfully questions the modern usage and application of "atheism", noting that it need not coincide with its definition in 16th-century Elizabethan England. Moving into her analysis, O'Brien begins by noting the connotations between mystery plays and *Doctor Faustus*, stating that central to both is the celebration of incarnation (or God becoming man, in modern belief evident in the mystery of the Holy Communion). By Marlowe's depiction of Faustus' gradual descent and eternal separation from the love and union with God, O'Brien further connects the play with Morality plays. Or, in the author's own words:

"In this portrayal of a man moving away from Divine Love, Marlowe approaches areas of doctrine which invite heresy in their distinctions: the nature of good and evil, the possibility of free will, the nature of human repentance, the availability of Divine forgiveness, the impossibility of angelic repentance, and the fact of eternal hell" (O'Brien, 1989).

Further, she observes that *Doctor Faustus* contains other links to mystery plays: encompassing analogies to 'the fall of Lucifer (and Man)', the cardinal sins and devilish temptation. Continuing, O'Brien commences the actual contrapuntal analysis noting the obvious loss of the love of God apparent in Faustus but also in Mephistopheles and Lucifer.

This phenomenon, raised by St Thomas in his *Summa Theologiae* to be the “chief suffering of the damned”, is characterised by that one’s “intellect is completely shut off from the divine light, and that his affections are stubbornly turned against God's goodness (...) It is known as the punishment of loss.” (Aquinas: 9). She further stipulates that despite Faustus’ cold deliberation when renouncing God and embracing Lucifer (taking care both to throw out the Bible and blaspheme the Holy Trinity), there is still a sliver of a chance for redemption, once again citing Aquinas, who states that humans become locked in their choice (salvation or damnation) first upon death. What she does note, though, is that Faustus’ continual deliberation to abjure God makes the chance for redemption moot.

Moving forward, she notes the love element apparent in both the Christian covenant and Faustus’ pact with Mephistopheles, in that Faustus, after abjuring God, ironically seeks to escape damnation by re-enacting the same union of love with the Devil. O’Brien further observes Marlowe’s practice of contrasting between the Christian covenant and Faustus’ covenant with Lucifer, noting that:

”It is only through fidelity to this union that man can achieve the Divinity which he is created to enjoy. Faustus's sin lay in trying to become God by his own powers rather than through God's power within him” (O’Brien, p. 8)

In his journey towards damnation, Faustus over and over again displays a lack of fidelity, renouncing every invitation for repentance, eventually leading to God withholding his grace, something that O’Brien connects with Aquinas’ notion of the “hardness of heart”;

”Spiritual blindness and hardness of heart imply two things. One is the movement of the human mind in cleaving to evil, and turning away from the Divine light; and as regards this, God is not the cause of spiritual blindness and hardness of heart, just as He is not the cause of sin

(...)

On the other hand, God, of His own accord, withholds His grace from those in whom He finds an obstacle: so that the cause of grace being withheld is not only the man who raises an obstacle to grace; but God, Who, of His own accord, withholds His grace” (Aquinas, pp 390-1, in O’Brien)

Interesting in conjunction with the play- and the theme of unfilled desire- is the striking correlation between Aquinas musings on the nature of God and Faustus' many theological pitfalls. From his rejection of the Scripture in order to conjure forth Mephistopheles to the very anathema that is the soul-binding pact, Faustus perpetually renounces every chance for redemption and locks himself away from the salvation of God.

Theoretical background

Before entering into an analysis about the cause of Faustus' desire (*objet a*), a clear definition of the term coined by Jacques Lacan is needed. To better understand the dynamics of Faustus' desire, the essay will also touch upon Freud and the primordial drives/urges Eros and Thanatos. These will mainly be utilised in the final chapter of the analysis. In order to flesh out the argument and the implications of the *objet a*, this introductory chapter will conclude with modern Lacanian Slavoj Žižek's musings on the fantasy of desire, and the inherent deadlock that comes with it.

Lacan's *objet a*

At first glance *objet* would seem to signify a material representation, which is that the cause of desire has to be projected unto something tangible in the physical world. However, and not to say that it could not be "incarnated" into certain physical objects, Lacan rejects the notion of physicality and instead explicitly postulates that "the desire's support (the *petit a*) in the fantasy isn't visible in what constitutes for man the image of his desire" (Lacan, 2006, p. 35). What Lacan tries to formulate here is that behind each desire is a desire to achieve the desired and that this cause of desire in turn is what sustains the fantasy (our ideal mental representation of the fulfilment, or the *jouissance*, of the desire).

Another necessary distinction put forward by Lacan is that the *objet a* is the cause of the desire and not its aim. The *objet a* thus remains forever lost; should it be obtainable than there would be no need (nor motivation) to desire anything. Herein lies of course, the main paradox of the *objet a*, for as Lacan notices:

"The more man approaches, circumscribes, caresses what he believes to be the object of his desire, the more in fact he is deviated, turned aside from it, precisely because of the fact that everything that he does on this path in order to get closer to it, always gives

more body to what in the object of this desire represents the specular image (ibid, p. 88).

What seems to be evident from the above is the apparent paradox of fulfilment; that however much we try, we are never satisfied. A poor man might desire wealth, yet having received a windfall of money he turns immediately to new desires; maybe he now wants the latest model of Tesla. Another fundamental aspect of the *objet a* is its intangibility. Human subjects are forever slaves under the spell of desire. In his seminar on anxiety Lacan explicitly stipulates that:

“We are always searching for fulfilment, for knowledge, for possessions, for love, and whenever we achieve these goals there is always something more we desire; we cannot quite pinpoint it but we know that it is there. This is one sense in which we can understand the Lacanian real as the void or abyss at the core of our being that we constantly try to fill out. The *objet a* is both the void, the gap, and whatever object momentarily comes to fill that gap in our symbolic reality.” (Lacan, 2006, pp. 87-88)

Moving to *Faustus*, Lacan’s theory of the *objet a* offers an interesting interpretation on the synergetic communion between audience and the on-stage story world in that Faustus’ ultimate desire for salvation would most likely be mirrored, or at least recognised, by the theatre-going audience. Being anchored in the same theological soil, and by extension the same symbolical reality, the ultimate *objet a* for any devout Christian (as it is for Faustus) would be to attain salvation an eternal life. Religion in itself presents itself as a prime example of an escape-route from Lacan’s existential void; follow a set of principles and you are assured a path through life (and death). Fail in adherence and Hell awaits. Thus Faustus’ perpetual obstruction of his salvation, and his *objet a*, by literally forming a covenant with Lucifer would probably cause the audience to shake their heads, or nod in recognition. For what Faustus’ fails to notice until it is too late is the availability of Christian redemption, a notion that the audience is being nudged to notice by on-stage cues: Faustus is continually offered the chance of redemption but his own apostate actions locks him from achieving it.

Eros and Thanatos

“The aim of all life is death”, concluded Freud in one of his essays, thereby emphasising the inborn mortality that goes with being human. In his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud seeks to distinguish between ‘ego-instincts’ (the drive for death) and ‘sexual instincts’ (preservation of life); getting more nuanced Freud identifies “two kinds of instincts: those the purpose of which is to guide life towards death (Thanatos, ed.) and the others, the sexual instincts (Eros), which perpetually strive for, and bring about, the renewal of life.” (Freud, p. 36).

A more religious and mystical interpretation of Eros and Thanatos may be found in the letters of French Archbishop Francois Fenélon to and fro Madame Guyon. Written between 1689 and 1691, the correspondence touches upon existential questions with a focal theme being the interaction between ‘divine love and union with ditto’ (Eros) and ‘the compulsion to die’ (Thanatos) in order to obtain this ‘union of souls’. Fenélon also raises the notion of a “union” in the “death” driven by love and devotion hence highlighting the intrinsic relationship between love, life (Eros) and death (Thanatos). In a never-ending stream, the correspondents dissect this concept in terms such as:

“When the soul (...) really desires to die to die to itself, she is pleased only with the beauty of her Beloved, and says his beauty shall be my beauty” (Fenélon, p. 153).

“As you reach the state of death, which is preceded by an experience of your misery and poverty, great truths will be discovered to you” (Fenélon, p. 179).

This theme of ‘divine love’ and the Christian duality of death- being an enabler for salvation- are paramount when discussing *Faustus*. It not only help us to plot a course into the ever-elusive objet a; with the ego-drives often serving as catalysts for human desire. What is also interesting to consider here is the apparent synthesis of death and life in religion that Fenélon touches upon in his dissertation. Essentially, the guiding principle of life would appear be a journey towards death, for only by dying might the devout receive the divine love of God and eternal life. Death, according to Fenélon and Christian Doctrine, is not the Freudian homeostasis, or the nihilistic return to nothingness, but instead a portal to a new, more radiant life. In a tangled paradox, Thanatos seemingly becomes Eros, and Eros Thanatos.

Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*

Slavoj Žižek's work in re-interpreting the cobweb of seminary drafts that Lacan (and Freud) left behind sheds further light on the *objet a*. It does this chiefly by placing it into a larger context as a constituent for the larger desire-fantasy. As Žižek phrases it:

Desire emerges when drive gets caught in the cobweb of Law/prohibition, in the vicious cycle in which jouissance must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire' - and fantasy is the narrative of this primordial loss, since it stages the process of this renunciation, the emergence of the Law. In other words, fantasy provides a rationale for the inherent deadlock of desire: it constructs the scene in which the jouissance we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us. (Žižek, 2009, p.43)

Expanding on the theoretical groundwork put forward by Lacan, Žižek further pinpoints three aspects of the *objet a* and its conception, namely: subtraction (which is the winnowing of the desire), protraction (which is the enlargement of the desire) and obstruction (our perpetual tendency to unconsciously obstruct the realisation of the *objet a*) (Žižek, 2009, p 18, 20).

Continuing, Žižek puts forward an essential distinction of what exactly constitutes a fantasy, raising the notion that “a fantasy does not simply realise a desire in a hallucinatory way (...) a fantasy constitutes our desire” (Žižek, p. 7). Drawing these premises to their absolute limit, Žižek proposes that our existence as subjects is a perpetual constructing and reconstruction of fantasies, that is we constantly perceive the Real through a screen of fantasy. This sublimation of the real, notes Žižek, is necessary to sustain the horror of the real, or what Lacan termed the “void of existence”. Žižek further notes that fantasy “is what sustains the subjects sense of reality” (Žižek, p. 84), and that it is first when this phantasmal screen is shattered that we experience true cognitive dissonance. To avoid and counter the intrusion of the primordial void, the Subject immediately constructs a new desire-fantasy to bridge this dissonance, leading to a never-ending chain of desiring and fantasising. Thus, Faustus', being nothing more than mortal, cannot help but to soothe his primordial anxiety of death with an endless spiral of delusional fantasies. Indeed, his entire being appears subsumed in desire: during the play we see Faustus repeating, over and over again, the same procedure of displacing his *objet a* of salvation onto fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience. However, as a tragic

realisation of the nature of fantasy his phantasmal screens are, one by one, shattered. In an ordinary mundane setting, this would not be much of a terror; the Subject would bridge the dissonance by constructing new fantasies in perpetuum. However, the play adds another dimension to the nature of desire by adding the demonic pact. In itself, it is framed by Mephistopheles to act a synthesis of omniscience and omnipotence, seemingly bestowing upon Faustus all that he longs for. Yet, being caught up in his fantasy, Faustus fails to note that while it might appear as an enabler in the realisation of his perceived desires it is also the very thing that obstructs him from achieving his true desire.

Analysis

According to Lacan, we are all chasing an ever-elusive object of lost desire (*objet a*), and this is exactly what Marlowe appears to want to convey in portraying Faustus' odyssey for eternal life and the salvation of God. The quintessential quality of this lost object of desire (*objet a*) is that it always remains unconscious. Lacan claims that were it conscious there would be no need to desire at all. Instead "we are always searching for fulfilment, for knowledge, for possessions, for love, and whenever we achieve these goals there is always something more we desire; we cannot quite pinpoint it but we know that it is there" (Lacan, *Seminar X: Anxiety*). Significantly, the play returns over and over again to ponder this notion: Faustus continually desires, yet never attains the bliss and jouissance of fulfilling his true desire. His apparent and vocal desire, first for knowledge and later on for power may in this light be seen as nothing more but a displacement of his true *objet a*, salvation. Seemingly true to the nature of Lacanian desire, he remains oblivious to this fact, continually applying new desires in his quest to achieve salvation, yet only succeeds in creating a chain of fantasies that leads him into oblivion.

The first part of the analysis will deal with Faustus' desire for knowledge and omniscience. More specifically, it will explain how this desire may be seen as nothing more than a vestige (*objet a*) of his true longing, his desire for salvation. Utilising the biblical connections between Original Sin and Faustus' vocal renouncement of the holy Doctrines in order to acquire forbidden knowledge the aim is to explore how Faustus' perpetual craving for more knowledge is linked with the banishment from Eden. This part will also touch upon the

synergy between Faustus and Lucifer and their relationship to God as ‘rebels’ and the link between books and knowledge both esoteric and worldly.

The second part of the analysis will be centred on his second desire: the desire for worldly and spiritual omnipotence. More specifically, it will deal with the hollowness of power: Faustus signs away his very soul to become a spirit with the “power of Lucifer”, yet he soon realises that even Mephistopheles and Lucifer are bound and subjected to the will of God and the laws of the physical dimension. Another segment will deal with the direct allusions to Icarian hubris while adding the aspect of Tantalian desire: throughout the play Faustus is continually tantalised with promises of salvation yet they are never fulfilled.

The final part of the analysis will try to dissect his primordial fear and longing for death through the Freudian ego-drives Eros and Thanatos. For what will become clear is that Faustus is driven both by self-preservation and a death wish. Calvinist Christianity does not only offers a very tangible ultimate goal, or *objet a-* salvation. It also presents a very visual antithesis to heavenly bliss, the blistering fires of Hell that awaits the sinner and the apostate. As has been discussed in earlier chapters this fixation on attaining salvation might only be achieved by death, a death that Faustus has barred himself from ever achieving by signing away his soul.

Desire for knowledge

”Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.”

(Genesis 3: 4-5)

Faustus unquestionably desires knowledge: in the initial soliloquy he proclaims, “these are those that Faustus most desires. O, what a world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, and omnipotence” (Marlowe: I: 52). Apparent here is the osmosis between knowledge and power, a first indication to the reader that Faustus desires to emulate and in a sense rival the knowledge of God. A bit later, the Evil Angel explicitly tempts Faustus with this prospect: “be thou on Earth as Jove’s in the sky/ Lord and commander of these elements (I: 76-7).

Faustus has knowledge, but not to the extent that he is omnipotent. He exists at the pinnacle of Renaissance learning, yet he still craves and desires more knowledge, as he cannot find an answer in established lore for how to achieve salvation and yet sin. Thus, as a consequence, he turns to the occult and forbidden. In a Lacanian sense, his desire switches from knowledge for the sake of knowledge to a fantasy of omnipotence but the ever-elusive *objet a* remains intact. Ironically, this trait of intrepid exploration and accumulation of obscure and established knowledge is of course a chief ideal of a renaissance researcher (a theme that is explored in, among others, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*). Furthermore, the audience is told in the first chorus that knowledge is what enabled Faustus to break away from his humble roots and rise to the elevated position as doctor at Wittenberg that he comfortably holds in the introduction of the play. But as the scholars later lament, Faustus' acquisition of forbidden knowledge is specifically what reduces him to a shadow of his old self while also being the main factor in accelerating his journey down the path of damnation. Evidently, the more Faustus strives for forbidden knowledge and the closer he comes to discerning the fundamental mysteries of being and not having to die, the further he is moving from eternal life. This once again shows the paradox noted by Lacan that the closer in proximity one gets to the realisation of the *objet a* the more one gets deviated from realising it.

Marlowe also seems to play with Biblical imagery, in the sense that Faustus' fall from grace eerily mirrors that of Adam and Eve's original sin and their subsequent banishment from the Garden of Eden, and therefore from life in eternal bliss. Importantly, eating from the tree of knowledge and obtaining the forbidden and esoteric knowledge is the cause for banishment. In an eerie re-enactment of the Original sin, when Faustus consummates his pact with Mephistopheles -ventriloquizing the last words of Jesus on the cross: "consummatum est"-, he is eternally disavowing God and thus perpetually locking himself out from what he most desires: salvation and eternal life.

Indeed the act of sinning permeates the play, being touched upon one and again in different word-guises. As a matter of fact, the seven deadly sins make a physical appearance and more importantly is what entices Faustus to continue his pact when he falters in his dedication to Lucifer. More specifically, in his final conversation with the scholars, Faustus lamentably states that the cause of his ailment (damnation, ed.) may be traced in "A surfeit of sin/ that hath damned both body and soul" (XII: 10-12). Intriguingly, Faustus further displays facets of all seven sins during the play; anger and envy in his destructive relation to God (and the

Devil); gluttony and avarice in his perpetual search for omnipotence and omniscience; lechery when asking Mephistopheles to conjure forth Helen of Troy as a wife; overbearing Pride in his hubristic pursuit to emulate God and finally Sloth in his lulling idleness even after receiving 'divine' power. Of course, according to theologians (among them Thomas St. Aquinas) these act as counterpoints to the seven heavenly virtues. Seen in this light, Faustus' perpetual sinning and blasphemous practice is the direct cause of his downfall, and what locks him from achieving his true desire, ironically proving the words uttered in his initial soliloquy to be true that "the reward of sin is death, why then belike we must sin" (I: 40, 44).

Interestingly, the play further seems profuse with a dual motion between free will and determined fate, often ranging between the two opposites. In a sense, Faustus' insatiable quest for omniscient knowledge could be seen as man trying to break away from the confining yoke of predetermined death imposed by our biological clock or – as in the play- ascribed to an Omnipotent God. Seen in this light, Faustus' fall from grace would seemingly further appear to mirror the relationship between Lucifer and God, often portrayed as being the antithesis of Christ, or the rebellious son. But Wion (1980) also notes the paradoxical notion of Lucifer as the "obedient son", acting as the instrument by which God punishes those who provokes his divine wrath. With the ever-burning fires of Hell ' being the antithesis of the resplendent glory of Heaven, Marlowe seemingly utilises the parallels induced by Christian framework to mould Faust as the apostate son but not without chance of salvation.

In a Lacanian sense, Faustus' pact could be said to work as a physical manifestation – or displacement container- of his *objet a*. By signing his soul away Faustus explicitly works in order to further what he believes to be his desire: avoiding death while also attaining limitless power and knowledge. Incidentally, the conditions of said pact are also what lock him away from achieving his true desire, salvation. True to the *objet a*, Faustus' inability to locate his true desire has once again only served to move him away from the realisation of his true desire.

Taking a little detour from the main argumentation, it would seem that Freud himself noticed the striking resemblance between God and the Devil, going as far as to proclaim them being a synthesis of the same original concept:

It does not need much analytic perspicacity to guess that God and the Devil were originally identical-were a single figure which was later split into two figures with opposite attributes. . . . The contradictions in the original nature of God are . . . a reflection of the ambivalence which governs the relation of the individual to his personal father. If the benevolent and righteous God is a substitute for his father, it is not to be wondered at that his hostile attitude to his father, too, which is one of hating and fearing him and of making complaints against him, should have come to expression in the creation of Satan. (Freud, in Wion, 1980)

Of course, Mephistopheles -and by extension Lucifer- feature as Faustus' instrument of doom, seemingly fulfilling the tenets of God even through their apparent disobedience and rejection of his power and writs. Marlowe further seems to draw upon the synergy between Lucifer and Faustus in that Lucifer's falls prefigures the fall of Faustus. For as Mephistopheles tells Faustus, when being asked about why Lucifer lost the love of God, he receives the following answer: "O, by aspiring pride and insolence/ for which God threw him from the face of heaven" (IV: 67-8), eerily ventriloquizing the soon-to-be damnation of Faustus. Aquinas touched upon the same theme of striving to be more than God (apparent both in Faustus and Lucifer) when stating that:

"Without doubt, the angel (Lucifer) sinned by seeking to be a God.... he sought to have final beatitude of his own power, whereas this is proper to God alone. (Aquinas, p. 707-8).

Moving away a bit from biblical notions, there exists an interesting synthesis of knowledge being vested in books and thus anchored in the physical dimension, as opposed to the ethereal plane. Tromly acknowledges this phenomenon by inferring that "the conflict between magic and Christianity is represented as a battle of books" (p.140). In order to perform the conjuring ritual Valdes, among other things, urges Faustus to "hasten to some solitary grove, and bear wise Bacon's and Albanus works, The Hebrew Psalter and The New Testament" (Marlowe: I: 153-155). Of course, the act of conjuring further requires Faustus to literally renounce the Scripture, and with it God and the possible salvation that he so desires. Additionally, the conjuring ritual requires a verbal incantation or in the words of magus Cornelius "first let him know the words of the art" (I: 158). Even after signing his soul away and becoming seemingly omnipotent, his "abilities" are dependent upon tomes of magic, as when Mephistopheles

instructs Faustus to “take this book, peruse it thoroughly:/ the iteration of these lines brings gold;/ the framing of this circle on the ground brings whirlwinds, tempests, thunder and lightning” (V: 157-160). After this Faustus continues to ask for “a book (...) that I might raise up spirits” (V: 165) and “a book where I might see all characters” (V: 168-9), which he subsequently acquires. The contingency and synthesis of knowledge with words, and the power of the written and spoken words is explored once and again during the play. It is through vocal intervention that Mephistopheles keeps Faustus on the path of perdition when he wavers; indeed, he takes great pleasure in reminding Faustus that he is bound by word to eternally toil in Hell and that there are no means by which to escape this outcome. As a counterpoint, Faustus is tantalised by the promises of absolution and salvation offered by God when he intervenes in the form of the Old Man, and by the urging words of the good angel. Most saliently, Faustus appears to emulate and profuse the physical with the spiritual, when he seals the pact, exclaiming that:

“Know that your words have won me at last, / to practice magic and concealed arts;/ yet not your words only, / but mine own fantasy, / that will receive no object for my head” (Marlowe, I: 101-104).

In a turn of phrase, Faustus tragicomically gives voice to his inability to ground himself in logic. Despite his apparent knowledge of worldly subjects he contradicts himself by saying that his fantasy of omnipotence “will receive no object for my head” (“pay attention to physical reality”)) (I: 104). Here, one might also trace Lacan’s thoughts on the *objet a*, as Faustus’ inability to ground his fantasy in reality seemingly expresses his inability to pinpoint his true desire -showing that the *objet a* remains perpetually unobtainable. Paramount to this argument of the potency of words may be heard in Faustus’ final words, wherein he, in a last-ditch effort to achieve salvation, exclaims: “(...) Come not, Lucifer/ I’ll burn my books” (XII: 114), harkening back to his initial statement wherein he paralleled heavenly bliss to that of conjuring;

“These metaphysics of magicians/ and necromantic books are heavenly/ Lines, circles, letters, schemes, and characters” (Marlowe: I: 50-51).

As a final point in this discussion, there exists an interesting notion of equating obtaining knowledge with the physical act of eating: often featuring different forms of the verb “glut”

and its connotations with cardinal sin Gluttony. This is apparent in the first chorus where this practise is repeated twice, first in the passage:

“Till swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit, / his waxen wings (evoking the myth of Icarus who in hubris flew too near the sun only to fall into the ocean and drown) did mount above his reach” (Marlowe: Prologue: 20-21).

And later with the more explicit line:

“And gluttoned more with learning’s golden gifts, he surfeits upon cursed necromancy, nothing so sweet as magic is to him, which he prefers over his chiefest bliss” (ibid: Prologue: 24).

This line is salient from a Lacanian perspective; here the reader/viewer is explicitly experiencing the apparent disjunction between Faustus’ desire for knowledge and his true desire-cause, “his chiefest bliss”, or his *objet a*. Returning to the biblical, there is a high possibility that this “glutting” is a paraphrasing for the Original Sin”- or the consumption of the apple of knowledge which damned Adam and Eve. It further directly connects with the Lacanian and Freudian notion of the void, which Faustus’ aspires to ‘fill’ with omniscience, though ultimately failing and thus applying his desire to a new fantasy, the fantasy of omnipotent power.

Desire for power

Interlinked with Faustus desire for knowledge is his desire for power. Already in the reader’s first encounter with Faustus he plays with the fantasy of divine power as seen when he proclaims that “all things that move between the quiet poles, shall be at my command (...)/ A sound magician is a mighty god, here Faustus try thy brains to gain a deity.” (I: 56-7, 62-3). In a sense, Faustus’ ceaseless struggle for power is nothing but a mirroring of his desire to avoid death, hoping that achieving just a little more power would place him above the limits of mortality, and more importantly, over the judgement of God. Ironically, this only brings him closer to the death that he so fears. Another testament to how fundamental this drive is for the

play is Faustus' willingness to trade away his soul solely to become a spirit "with the Powers of Lucifer" and thus not having to taste the bitterness of mortality. Faustus entices himself with illusions and grandeur and creates a fantasy of omnipotent power to sustain and defer his primordial anxiety of death. Over and over again, he returns to dwell on what omnipotence will bring, most notably making him equal of God: "A sound magician is a mighty god, Here Faustus try thy brains to gain a deity." (I: 62-3)

Tromly observes this curious link between desire and power, noting that:

"It is through the experience of desire that his (Marlowe's) protagonists derive a feeling of power" (Tromly, p 18).

Faustus desire for power is not purely a yearning for the spiritual, though; on the contrary earthly wealth seems to be his main goal, as seen in the conversation between Cornelius and Faustus:

"Cornelius: The spirits tell me they can dry the sea/ and fetch the treasures of all foreign wrecks/ ay, all the treasures that our forefathers hid/ within the massy entrails of the Earth/ (...)

Faustus: O this cheers my soul/ that I may conjure in some lusty grove/ and have these joys in full possession" (I: 144-147)

This yearning might be purely Lacanian in its nature, for by substituting the metaphysical with the physical, and by filling his thirst for the blood of the saviour with that of blood-red wine and golden treasure Faustus tries to fill the void that is the human condition. Accordingly, in true fashion his *objet a* remains veiled. Unbeknownst to Faustus his desire for earthly and spiritual power is just a vestige for his real longing, salvation. This yearning remains unfulfilled, though dangling salvation is offered, but just as he stretches his yearning hand to grab it, like Tantalus the fruit flies away. As touched upon earlier, Faustus' powers even after becoming the "like of Lucifer" is bound in the physical dimension. Nor is mighty Mephistopheles omnipotent: when asked by Faustus to procure a wife he hesitates, as he cannot conjure that which God does prohibit, and since marriage is a holy sacrament, Faustus is once again locked out from what he ardently desires in spite of acquiring the power he

believed himself to be wanting. At one critical turning point, more specifically during the second intervention of the angels when Faustus wavers in devotion, the Evil Angel tantalises Faustus with earthly delights and thus coerces him to continue his devotion to Mephistopheles:

“Faustus: ‘abjure this magic, turn to God again’/ and Faustus will turn to God again/ To god?/ he loves thee not/

(...)

Good Angel: Sweet Faustus, think of Heaven, and Heavenly things

Evil Angel: No Faustus, think of honour and wealth

Faustus: Of wealth! (V: 8-10, 20-22)

In the language of Žižek, Faustus would appear to remain suspended in a limbo of temptation and damnation in that all non-earthly characters, even the Old Man, tease Faustus with illusions and lurid promises of salvation -either through repentance or omnipotence-, yet these remain unfulfilled and are to no avail for Faustus.

Doing a detour, there seems to be an uncanny resemblance between the mythological Tantalus and Faust, noted by many (Tromly, 1998, Belsey, 1989) as the primordial desiring subject. In the words of Tromly: “Tantalus represents the epitome of frustration and desire which is literally fruitless” (1989, p.145). In the myth, Tantalus is punished with eternal thirst and hunger for dismembering his only son, cooking him and then serving him to the Gods. Tantalus’ motive for this fell deed remains obscure but Tromly attributes it to “his (Tantalus) proud, curious desire to test the omniscience (and hence the divinity) of the Gods” (1998, p. 13). In a metaphorical sense, Tantalus’ perpetual hunger and thirst may be interpreted as desire as suffering -being in proximity of fruit and water yet unable to consume them.

Faustus expresses the same desire to test the Divine, though he intends to acquire omniscience and omnipotence for himself; in a sense he also is testing the capacity of God to forgive a sinner (thereby assaying the divinity of God). For by once and again acting out in blasphemous rebellion, Faustus is evoking a desperate cry for atonement, urging God to

intervene and save his damned soul. As before, this desire remains yet another unfulfilled tantalisation. Continuing in the mythological vein, there exists another interesting synergy to explore, namely the presence of the Icarian myth in conjunction with the nature of Faustus' desire. The association between mythic Icarus and Faustus is promptly alluded to in the prologue chorus, "till swollen with cunning of a self-deceit/ his waxen wings mounted above his reach" (I. 20-21), But already here, Marlowe seems to sprinkle Icarus with elements of Tantalus, with Faustus being tormented by his own "self-conceit" (his own desire, my emphasis). In addition to the verbal connections, there exists a metaphorical connection between the fall of Icarus and the damnation of Faustus. Unlike Icarus, who drowns in the ocean, Faustus like Tantalus is transfixed in the ocean of his own desire, perpetually wing-clipped, and doomed to lament in a hell of his own making.

This Icarian fixation appears again later in the words that are written onto Faustus's arm after the sealing of the pact - "Homo fuge" (Human, fly!) - but in a sense they are also Tantalian, tempting Faustus with the prospect of salvation, while also reminding him that the pain he feels is self-inflicted by his desire and that there is no salvation due to his demonic pact "whither should I fly/ if unto God he'll throw me down to Hell" (V: 77-8). Tromly draws this argument further by proposing that Marlowe perpetually incorporated the metamorphosis of Icarus into Tantalus in his plays; with "great promise (Icarus) giving way to disappointment (Tantalus)" (Tromly, p. 18). In one uncannily well-phrased passage Tromly arrives at the bottom of this apparent paradox:

"Marlowe's protagonists invariably announce their desire in Icarian hyperbole but eventually become victims of a Tantalian game, rendered powerless by the forces that manipulates their desires" (Tromly, 1998, p. 18)

Nowhere is this osmosis of desire and power more clearly explored and tragically obvious than in Faustus initial soliloquy. In a fiery deluge of hyperbolic statements Faustus (in a mirroring of Icarus) "mounts above his reach" (Marlowe: I: 21). For in his ejaculations of grandeur and his disavowing of worldly knowledge in favour of being ravished by magic and the forbidden he is practicing "more than heavenly power permits" (Epilogue: 8) and thus, like Icarus, has to be smote down. The same Icarian hubris might be seen in his overreaching arrogance in his attempt to conjure forth Mephistopheles: "this night I'll conjure, though I die

therefore” (I: 166). If desire amounted to power, Faustus would soar high above his pitiful existence, and as explored earlier it is the desire for power and knowledge and not power nor knowledge in itself that siphon Faustus with desirous resolve.

Expanding on the subject, Tromly notes that a common Marlowian conceit may be discerned in that: “a character invests an object with desirous value (displacing objet a), and then withholds it from another character, or is himself/herself prevented from obtaining it” (Tromly, 1998, p. 11). Mephistopheles poses as a prime example of this paradox, being the both the desired object for Faustus, as a locus for omnipotence, while also being the withholder of it - knowing fully well that the semblance of omnipotence he uses to entice Faustus is just a means to win his soul for Lucifer and Hell. Likewise, Faustus in his inexorable quest for omnipotence - infusing it with his entire being- prevents himself from obtaining the salvation that so yearns for. In a sense, literally obstructing himself by tantalising himself with the fantasy of omnipotence. Continuing this argument, God and Heaven exist at the pinnacle of this desirous drive, being both the primordial withholder of Faustus’ salvation while also being the ultimate object of desire for Faustus.

What is also apparent is Faustus’ relentless desire for worldly power as a mirroring of God’s heavenly power, as seen when he proudly proclaims that: “All things that move between the quiet poles, Shall be at my command (...) A sound magician is a mighty god, here Faustus try thy brains to gain a deity” (I: 20-21). As before, though, Faustus confuses his real desire -and with it the *objet petit a*- with what he believes to be his desire. His ever-elusive *objet a* (salvation) remains perpetually locked beyond his reach, coinciding with Lacan’s notion that one can never be cognisant on what one really desires. In a sense, he substitutes worldly indulging and power for his real yearning for redemption. There exists another synergy between spiritual- and earthly power, as evident in Faustus’ relationship to first the Pope and later the Emperor. As a reader might remember, Faustus, in a tragic blaze of arrogance and hubris (returning to Icarus) initially expresses his desire to “be great emperor of the world (...) the emperor shall not live but by my leave, nor any potentate of Germany” (IV: 110-11). Later on he displays the same arrogance when interrupting the banquet of the pope (the paramount Spiritual vestige and God’s representative on Earth) in his spirit form, parodying and trivialising the holy sacraments and forcing the attending clerics to perform an elegiac dirge. Ironically, when finally presented to the Emperor, the paramount vestige of Earthly power (and by extension the Devil), Faustus remains subdued and respectful. Seen in a

symbolic light, this gives further evidence of Faustus' destructive Oedipal tendencies, but it also acts as a tragic reminder to Faustus and viewer alike that:

Now that I have obtained what I desire, I'll live in speculation of this art" (I: 94-6, IV: 113-4)

Tragically, and evident from the quote above, Faustus' illusions of power and lofty ambitions -created from disillusion and distortion- remain just a fantasy. Even after acquiring the ostensible omnipotence he so inherently expresses a longing for, he is struck by lethargy and entertains himself with simple parlour tricks instead of performing the biblical deeds he set out to put in motion. And by this once again showing the intrinsic dissonance between fantasy and its ideal fulfilment and the reality of its jouissance or fulfilment (the objet a always remains hidden and thus one can never be truly fulfilled). This coincides with Lacan's paradoxical notion of the un-fulfilment that comes with wish-fulfilment, having seemingly fulfilled his desire for omnipotence, by acquiring both magic tomes and a spiritual form, Faustus is still not content nor filled with the bliss he imagined this would bring. By unconsciously veiling his true desire for salvation in a fantasy of omnipotence, his true objet *petit a* remains forever out of his grasp. In a sense, Faustus' also becomes oversaturated, receiving too much jouissance. For once all the gates of knowledge and power open to him, and even after achieving omnipotence "he is still but Faustus and a man" (I: 23). Though in possession of tomes, he does not use his newfound power to obtain answers to his previous queries on the transcendental; instead preferring questioning Mephistopheles on the same topics. Here is also expressed Faustus' dual desire to obtain power and to yield to some greater power (be they Lucifer or God).

Desire for death (salvation):

Faustus' quest to avoid death, among other means by separating his soul and body, is yet another will 'o' wisp. For at the heart of the human dilemma, as Becker insists, is the fact that the nature of human beings is radically paradoxical, that we are "half animal and half

symbolic" (Becker, p. 26). Faustus is tortured upon the cross of that paradox. When he signs the pact, he signs away "both body and soul" (V: 108). Faustus tries desperately to separate the two warring aspects, apparently in an effort to avoid death, yet he is ultimately incapable of reconciling them, in the end his body is ripped to shreds (B-text only) while his soul is forcibly brought down to hell (both A and B). Even as he signs away his soul in a writ of his own blood his physical body revolts by congealing the blood, forcing Mephistopheles to fetch infernal cinders to make the blood stream anew. Faustus muses upon this clash by arguing with his body:

"What might the staying of my blood portend / is it unwilling that I should write this bill? / (...) why should'st thou not? Is not thine soul your own?" (Marlowe: V: 64-5, 68-9)

The conjuring ritual in itself appears to juxtapose the crucifixion of Christ and the sealing of the Christian covenant, reversing the Eucharistic property of blood as an instrument of salvation to a tool of damnation. This might also explain Faustus' tragic, yet unfilled, tendency to identify himself as Christ (noted by Wion, 1980, p. 10): as in his exclamation of "consummatum est" after the pact is finalised and his own blood has damned him to suffer an eternity of torment instead of eternal bliss. In a further reversal of the property of blood, Faustus panicked question of "why streams it not? /that I should write afresh" (V: 66) will be echoed in his final desperate plea for a single drop of Christ's redemptive blood: "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament, one drop would save my soul" (XII: 70-1). In a further distortion of Christian ceremony, Faustus exclamation of "veni, veni, Mephistopheles" (V: 29) manages to displace the ecstatic invocation of Christ and the Holy Ghost into a blasphemy. Yet, Faustus still clings to his fantasy of transcending mortality by separating the bond between the degenerative vessel that is his body and that of his immortal soul. Indeed the first clause of his contract with Mephistopheles stipulates that "Faustus shall be a spirit in form and substance" (V: 96), yet Faustus soon discerns that even powerful spirits may suffer as painfully as the corporeal. Even mighty Mephistopheles trembles with fear at Faustus' mention of Heavenly bliss and voices the same conflicting desire as Faustus and is tormented by the thoughts of what he has lost, for by "having seen the face of God" he is haunted perpetually by the absence of it. Significant in this context also is the line from Justinian's *Institutes* that Faustus ponders in his initial soliloquy stating the conditions under which a father may disinherit his son: "Exhereditare filium non potest pater nisi (a father

cannot disinherit his son unless...)" (I: 31). Not only does this reveal his fundamental flaw, it also emphasises the powerlessness that Faustus feels in relation to God. There exist no doubts that the implied father here is God -interestingly Faustus seems to constantly evoke a fatherly picture of God- and that Faustus fears the disinheritance of heavenly bliss that comes with sinning. Interesting is also the absence of condition(s) on which the implied father might disinherit the son, as the stipulating 'unless' receives no resolution in text but resounding silence. By consciously omitting the essential content -the conditions of Heavenly disinheritance-, Marlowe plays once again with Tantalian elements, teasing Faustus' desire for salvation yet neglecting to mention what he should do to achieve it.

Further evidence of Faustus subconscious yearning for God may be traced in his command that Mephistopheles (when first conjured) should "go and return an old Franciscan friar" (III: 26) only to add: "that holy shape becomes a Devil best" (III: 27). Not only evoking the quintessential Eucharistic picture of God as the father of man but also transposing and mixing the picture of the devil with God, and vice versa. For in the heart of the void that is Faustus' desire (and which Faustus remains blind to) remains the yearning for submission and redemptive salvation. Even after signing his soul away, Faustus crucifies himself on the thought of redemption by constantly reminding himself that: "Christ did call the thief upon cross" (X: 28).

Already from the first line in the chorus, Marlowe seems to play with the dual themes of death and life as correlated, which in the case of Faustus might be renamed temptation (death) and salvation (life). Were there no temptation, there would be no hope of salvation for Faustus. In the opening soliloquy Faustus laments that: "the reward of sin is death? That's hard. (...)/ why then belike we must sin,/ and so consequently die/ Ay, we must die an everlasting death" (I: 40, 44-5). Remembering Žižek's musing on the subject of fantasy where he states that: "fantasy provides a rationale for the inherent deadlock of desire: it constructs the scene in which the jouissance we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us". From the onset of the play, Faustus expresses an almost Oedipal fixation on God (noted by Wion, 1980), thus the Other that stole Faustus' ideal fantasy of eternal life may be interpreted as none other than God himself. God, of course, remains the only purveyor of eternal life and herein might lie the key to Faustus' twisted relationship with the Heavenly Father. God, in essence, function as both the enabler of salvation and withholder of ditto. Another testament to Faustus' subconscious yearning for God may once again be traced in his command that

Mephistopheles (when first conjured) should “go and return an old Franciscan friar” (III: 25) only to add, “that holy shape becomes a Devil best” (III: 26). God, of course, exists in a limbo being both the procurer of life and the instrument of doom upon those he deem unrighteous. By once again displacing his *objet a*, this time by literally personifying the instrument of doom – Mephistopheles- with the exterior shell of God, Faustus continues his delusional path of perdition.

Overall, there seems to be a pendulum motion between temptation and salvation, with both powers vying for control over Faustus’ soul, climaxing in a final juxtaposition of salvation wherein Faustus’s soul is forcibly carried down to hell to suffer the everlasting death he so sought to circumvent. In a further transposing of the traditional picture connecting Lucifer with death and punishment (Thanatos), and God with life and salvation (Eros), Marlowe suffuses the play with ambiguity as to the exact nature of both Divines. God remains apparently aloof; his punitive nature is what compels Faustus to seek the ravishment “of necromantic books” and the substitution of Divine salvation with involuntary eternal torment as Faustus himself reminds us: “what will be shall be, divinity adieu” (I: 46).

Faustus explicitly touches upon the intertwining of sin and death in his initial soliloquy when disavowing religion: “The reward of sin is death? That’s hard. (...) why then belike we must sin/ and so consequently die” (III: 40, 44-5), implicitly giving voice to Freud’s Thanatonic death-wish, but important here is that what sustains the death-wish is the prospect of dying an “everlasting death” which reads as Eros in nature. This impression is strengthened if one reads the phrase as an allegory for salvation and eternal life, a plausible conceit found also in contemporary Crashaw who suffuses his poetry with similar language. In his poems on the life and death of Saint Theresa, one may trace verbatim such as “a still-surviving funeral” (Crashaw, 1872: Hymn: 78). Masterfully, Marlowe has further suffused this passage with ambiguity, “everlasting death” might in a more nihilistic sense be read literally as the cessation of life, or the great black abyss of nothingness that border our (and saliently Faustus’) perception of death (and reality). Though it would be tempting to read “everlasting death” as eternal life and salvation, and thus early establishing Faustus’ subconscious *objet a*, the latter interpretation is most likely to be the intended here. Faustus later return to this topic when discussing the nature of hell with Mephistopheles directly after the transaction of the oath: “think’st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine/ that after this life there is any pain/ tush, these are trifles and mere old wives’ tales” (V: 132-5). Interesting to

note in the context of death and salvation, is that Faustus' first inquiry after the sealing of the pact directly concerns the afterlife, seemingly clashing with his hubristic statement -even in the face of one of its inhabitants- that "hell is just a fable" (V: 126).

Continuing this line of argumentation, a central theme that haunts the play is indeed the looming shadow of death, or the concurrent omnipresence and absence of the death-concept. As stipulated earlier, the death-wish (albeit in the guise of apparent self-preservation) is what propels the play while also being the main catalyst for Faustus' deal with Mephistopheles. However, even death promises to be nothing but tragic tantalisation for Faustus at the end of the play: the immortality that Mephistopheles offers is nothing but an illusion for eternal torment. In the ultimate Oedipal defeat, the 'love' of Mephistopheles by which Faustus once transacted the oath "Lo Mephistopheles, for love of thee/ I cut my arm (V: 53-4) is revealed for what it really is: another false promise of salvation instigated by Faustus himself in his incessant desire for omnipotence. Significant here is that even when Faustus storms into a passionate deluge of repentance, God, who is evoked by Faustus as stretching "out his arm and bend(ing) his ireful brows" (XII: 75) remains silent. Having abjured the chance for repentance too many a time, even damning the messianic Old Man to a physical death (though essentially not a spiritual death), Faust is suspending himself in damnation. By displacing his desire for salvation onto omnipotence and omniscience he has, once again, forever locked him out from the triumphant salvation in death so magnificently displayed by the Old Man. Once again, he has displaced his objet a, this time seemingly with no turning back.

As Vinter notices, one must certainly take into consideration the Christian model of death. In a sense religion in itself is a dichotomy of salvation and death, a juxtaposition of themes where death instead of being something finite is itself a journey, or an elevation to a more radiant afterlife. From the onset, Faustus rages against the boundaries of mortality, returning once and once again to dwell on the mortal lot of Man. In a sense, Marlowe seemingly transforms Faustus into the apostate martyr: in that his pilgrimage for salvation brings him further and further away from the eternal life that is promised the righteous and that he so yearns for. Though paradoxically, Faustus achieves a semblance of immortality, for by having signed away "both his body and soul" to Lucifer, death no longer offers neither solace or salvation, nor does his spiritual form protect his soul from being dragged forcibly to hell to suffer in perpetuum. As a counterpoint to Faustus, the audience is offered the messianic Old Man "Hence hell, for hence I fly unto my God" (XII: 109), but not even this Christ-like

incarnation manages to sway Faustus from his delusions of omnipotence. In a tragic twist of fate, Faustus is offered the blood of salvation “a vial full of precious grace” (XII: 45) which the Old man offers to “pour the same into thy soul” (XII: 46), but like previous promises this is nothing but Tantalian water, for Faustus’ soul is already lost. Even as Faustus mellows; “Ah my sweet friend, I feel thy words/ to comfort my soul/ leave me awhile to ponder at my sins” (XII:48-9); Mephistopheles intervenes: “Thou traitor, Faustus: I arrest thy soul, for disobedience to my sovereign lord” (XII: 57-8).

Ironically, the fiery deluge of Faustus’ final hour seems to echo with Fenélon’s promise that: “as you reach the state of death, which is preceded by an experience of your misery and poverty, great truths will be discovered to you (p. 176)”. In his desperate attempt to circumvent his departure to Hell, Faustus finally yields and submits to God, hence mirroring his initial soliloquy, but transposing it from rebuttal of God to a litany of repentance. Once again, Marlowe seemingly inverses another Christian ritual, the sacrament of confession, transposing forgiveness and penance with damnation... There is no redemptive absolution for Faustus at the end of the confession, “my heart’s so hardened I cannot repent” (V: 197). Instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit, nothing but the spirits of Hell remains at the end of his desperate confession:

“Oh God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soul, yet for Christ’s sake (...) impose some end to my incessant pain/ let Faustus live in hell a thousand years (...) and at last be saved” (XIII: 89-93)

Returning for a moment to Fenélon, it is interesting to note that it is indeed as Faustus draws near to his primordial trauma - his fantasy of death that the Other (God) stole from him- that he ultimately become cognisant of his own part in his damnation. In a way he tragically realises his “great truth”: that his displacement of salvation (*objet a*) onto other desires (omniscience and omnipotence) which culminated in his demonic covenant with Mephistopheles and Lucifer- is the cause “(...) for which Faustus hath lost (...) Heaven itself – Heaven, the seat of God, the throne of the blessed, the kingdom of joy; and must remain in Hell forever- hell, ah, hell forever” (XIII: 21-5). In the ultimate conceit, Marlowe, in Vinter’s words, has distorted salvation into damnation. And in the ultimate paradox, Faustus’ quest for salvation is tinted with shades of both Eros and Thanatos, contrasting the preservation of life with the death-wish connected to the death as a portal to a more radiant afterlife. His

incessant quest to avoid death only serves to propel him towards the flames of oblivion, yet he suspends himself in a state of in-between, signing away his soul (and coincidentally his chance of redemption) as a means to transcend the chains of mortality". True to the nature of desire, and the *objet a*, the pact only bestows upon him a screeb of his true desire, literally obstructing himself from achieving his much longed for salvation.

Conclusion

"Cut is the branch that might have grown straight/ (...) Faustus is gone! Regard his hellish fall" (Marlowe: I: 1, 4).

From the onset, the purpose of this essay was to analyse how Faustus' continuous desire, and unfulfilment, through the lens of Lacan's *objet a*. Making the stakes more literal, Marlowe ups the ante by adding Heaven at one end of the desire-spectrum and Hell on the other, with Faustus true yearning for Heavenly salvation being perpetually displaced unto other desires (omniscience, omnipotence), which paradoxically is what locks him from reaching his true desire (*objet a*).

From the onset, the purpose of this essay was to analyse how Faustus' continuous desiring may be read through the lens of Lacan's *objet a*. As evident from the analysis, *Doctor Faustus*, and Faustus with it, is the epitome of unfulfilled desire. From the apparent parallels between Faustus and Tantalus, Lucifer, Icarus, God or Christ Faustus constantly crucifies himself on his desire, or more specifically, what he perceives to be his desire. Like Tantalus, Faustus is tragically tantalising himself- and being tantalised by all other characters, without ever obtaining the dangling fruit. In a final twist of the fatal knife, and in the ultimate manifestation of unfulfilled desire Faustus is tantalised by the Old Man with redemption, yet by his previous self-tantalising of his fantasies (consumed with the pact) he has suspended himself from receiving "his chifest bliss". Faustus is literally suspended in a torture device, twisted apart by promises of salvation and immortality offered by both God and Lucifer, ultimately he achieves none of the above as even the death he so feared offers neither solace nor salvation. For even when seemingly having attained what he desires: tomes of omniscience, and the powers of a spiritual form, Faustus still remains "but Faustus, and a

man". And here might lay the beating heart of Faustus' void, namely his inability to cope with the lot of mortality. He falls into lethargy since he still has not, and never will, perceive his *objet a*. Interesting is, though, that it is first when Faustus is literally confronted with the symbol of his *objet a*, certain physical (and spiritual death), that he realises his "great truth" proving both Fenélon and Lacan to be right in their assumption that the closer one gets to what one really desires, the farther away from it one gets. Because somehow, Fenélon's "great truth" echoes with the notions of Lacan's *objet a*, though with the primordial distinction that one does not know one's true desire before the hour of one's death.

Finally, to capitalise on the results of this essay, a tantalising prospect would be apply Lacan's theory about the *objet a* to Marlowe's other material (for even if this has been carried out, see Tromly, to the best of my ability, scarcely nothing has been written from a Lacanian standpoint). What has also been carried out but could be fleshed out would be to do a diachronic study of incarnations of the Faustus myth, and see if the element of *objet a* and tantalisation has changed with history and the different adaptations. This essay is by no means a complete Lacanian analysis, merely a tentative dabble into unknown theoretical waters. Hopefully it will provide a starting point for further expeditions into the nature of Lacanian Desire. It is insufficient in scope, in my analysis I have focused solely on the subjective aspect of the *objet a*, centered on the psyche of Faustus. As such, the intrapersonal Other and its effects on the *objet a* remains somewhat unexplored. I touch upon it cursorily through Faustus' Oedipal relationship with God and Mephistopheles but the social aspect deserves an essay of its own.

As evident from the word "tragic" in the title of the play, Marlowe makes clear that the subject matter at hand is no comedic trifle. Yet, in an uncanny manner, whether consciously or unconsciously, he has managed to encapsulate the futility of desire; that beyond every desire is another desire. Whether one chooses to focus on the Oedipal, Freudian or Lacanian aspects of psychoanalysis, the play remains a trove of research material simply because of its focus on the interior struggle of its protagonist -pitching his unconscious desire against his conscious.

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