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Renaissance Drama and Magic: Humanism and Hermeticism in Early Modern England

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With deals made with the devil, the promise of base metals turned into gold, and charms cast over beasts, humans, and spirits, magic has a profound role in the drama of Early Modern England. Even more than magic, be it black or white, the magus repeatedly takes center stage in front of Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences. There exists a fascination in the period with unnatural or supernatural powers, especially in light of the reputations of figures such as the physician-magicians John Dee and Simon Forman, and even King James I. Yet the magic and magician that emerge in principal plays such as Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1592-93), Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610), and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) draw from numerous, at times conflicting, sources of magical philosophy, from that of the natural to the demonic, and the learned to the popular. Furthermore, along the course of these dramas occurs a shift from the tragic danger of magic tied to sin and ungodliness, to the counterfeit "magic" tied to avarice and lust, and finally to the at times unbalanced, ultimately abjured, but still positive and productive magic tied to growth and virtue.

There are numerous other plays that treat magical philosophy and what constitutes magic in the Renaissance mind. Placing the work of Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare in the context of the larger body of Tudor, Elizabethan, and Jacobean drama reveals how each respective play diverges from traditional approaches to magic. For example, John Bale's *King Johan* (its composition beginning in 1538) shows the Roman Catholic Pope to be a conjurer; magic here relates to perceived heresy far more than to a recognizable system of thought. Marlowe's presentation of magic is related to his other works that criticize major systems of thought, such as humanism or religion in *Tamburlaine the Great* and *The Jew of Malta*. To analyze Jonson's discussion of magic, it is necessary to place *The Alchemist* against some of his masques, such as

The Masque of Queens (1609), *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1616), and *The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union* (1624), and to acknowledge his purpose in the production of material specifically for the occult-minded James. Among all of these works, there are varied presentations of humanism, as well as overlapping and contradicting systems of magic.

There is a strong opposition between what constitutes witchcraft and what falls under the broader categories of learned, nearly scientific and certainly philosophical magic, such as Hermeticism and Cabalism. While Hermeticism and Cabalism were not as frequently discussed as witchcraft or alchemy, and thus were more underground systems of thought, those studying or analyzing them generally (though not always) took care to distinguish their purpose from popular magic. Witchcraft, centered on the idea of a pact made with the devil for malevolent purposes, forms the basis for the popular conceptualization of magic (Larner 80; Szőnyi 1). The witch does not need intensive study or significant education to pursue magic, drawing his or (more often) her power from demons, something that will complicate Faustus's potential position as a learned, humanist magus. Additionally, this popular view of magician as witch is that which affirmers of philosophical magic need to overcome. Gnosticism, another type of mystical thinking, focuses entirely on self-knowledge and learning as the only form of potential salvation; additionally, the separation of the emanations and demiurge from God and the subsequent feeling of pantheism (Arendzen) make Gnosticism problematic for humanist dramatists and those seeking to legitimize magical philosophy within existing Christian doctrine. Conversely, Hermetism stems from the *Corpus Hermeticum* and *Asclepius*, texts attributed to an Egyptian magus thought to be contemporaneous with Moses, Hermes Trismegistus. The Hermetic texts primarily concern the potential for man to access secrets of nature in order to pursue a degree of power and understanding akin to that of the prelapsarian man. As Barbara Traister observes,

man achieves this amount of control mainly through a combination of study and theurgy, the actual practice of magic (8). Hermeticism refers to these texts and practices in combination with the interpretations of later thinkers: principally, Neoplatonists, but also alchemists, Cabalists, and thinkers of other “esoteric systems” (Shumaker 293). Furthermore, as J. S. Gill has shown through his article, Hermetic and Hermeticist thinking was brought to in England by 1547, illustrating the presence of more learned magic among the popular conceptions of magical thought.

There has been extensive criticism of *Faustus*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Tempest*, their ties to Hermeticism, and the tension between the white magus and the lures of demonic magic and fraudulent alchemy; critics, however, largely have not deliberately and explicitly examined Hermeticist thought in conjunction with Christian humanism. Humanism, at its fundamental level, perpetuates the idea of man’s ability to construct consciously a more virtuous society. Humanism is similar to Hermeticism as that which is more virtuous and perfect is man before the fall and the society of the Garden of Eden: “Magic powers were gained by restoring the magician to the prelapsarian status of man as the complete image of his creator” in order to do God’s work (Gibbons 39). The magus and the humanist should have a holier position and purpose in order to gain power. Also similar to Hermeticism is the precept that virtue is attainable through learning. As Francis Yates has discussed, Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, prominent Renaissance humanists, worked intensively with Hermetic and, for Pico, also Cabalist texts, often believing them to have importance and value comparable to the work of Aristotle or Plato. An analysis of humanism together with Hermeticism informs the role of Faustus, Subtle, and Prospero, and the magus in general, and how he plays into his respective dramatic world.

While magic as it is traditionally understood, whether as witchcraft or philosophical magic, is not immediately present in *King Johan*, the play does address superstition and sorcery. Written during the reigns of Henry VIII, Mary, and Elizabeth I, John Bale's *King Johan* is a vitriolic, anti-Catholic play in support of England's break from the Church. Unlike the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, Bale assigns Roman Catholicism to the realm of superstition, almost as its own form of witchcraft, and characterizes the Pope as a witch. At the start of the play, Englande, a widow "ungodly usyd" (I.23)¹, approaches King Johan with a demand that he address and prohibit the "vyle cerymonyes" (I.73) of the Pope, the "wyld bore of Rome" (I.71). Yet, the anger against the Church and the Pope escalates when Bale makes it clear that Catholicism is not only heretical but also superstitious, and the Pope akin to a black magician. Responding to Englande's diatribe against the Pope and his "monstres bestyall" (I.84), Sedicyon, a follower of the Pope, states, "Hold yowr peace, ye whore, or ellys, by masse, I trowe, / I shall cawse the Pope to curse the a black as a crowe" (I.87-8). The start of the play systematically removes all legitimacy of Catholicism as a religion. It is ungodly, vyle, wyld, and bestyall, unlike Anglicanism's perceived purity. The Pope no longer has holy powers as God's highest representative on Earth, but rather he can curse England. The concept of the curse is one assigned to witchcraft; by relegating Catholicism to a form of witchcraft, Bale seeks to validate England's break from the Church of Rome. King Johan questions, "Might he not under the pretence of holynes / Cawse yow to consent to much ungodlyness?" (I.548-9). The Pope is not only witchlike in his ability to curse but also demonic in his seduction of others to ungodliness.

The presentation of the Pope, otherwise called Usurpid Power, as a witch does not emerge solely from outsiders' projections (Englande, Sedicyon, King Johan). Toward the end of

¹ John Bale. *King Johan. Four Morality Plays*. Ed. Peter Happé. Middlesex, England: Penguin Classics, 1987. Print. All citations refer to act and then line number in this edition.

the first act, the Pope uses the word curse to describe his actions against Johan. Furthermore, he does not only use the declaration as the means by which to curse, but also has materials with which to curse: “Here I do curse hym with crosse, boke, bell, and candle” (I.1035). The notion that the rituals of the Catholic Church are superstitious emerges earlier with Dissymulacyon’s statements of “*Pater noster* I pray God bryng hym sone to his grave” (I.643), and “The dead sayntes shall shewe both visyons and myracles; / With images and rellyckes we shall work serracles” (I.996-997). Bale continually subverts Catholic rituals and undermines traditions crafted by men. The reference to the “*Pater noster*,” the Lord’s prayer, and the use of its Latin name (Latin being the language of the Church) through dialogue in which someone calls for the death of a king, particularly reveals Bale’s antipathy towards the Church. Yet, the culmination of his subversion lies in the Pope’s longer curse against King Johan. Within this passage, the Pope carefully lays out his curse with the holy relics of Catholicism becoming the means by which to cast a spell:

As this burning flame goth from this candle in sight,
 I wyll God to put hym from his eternal lyght;
 I take hym from Crist, and after the sownd of this bell,
 Both body and sowle I geve hym to the devyll of hell. (I.1041-3)

After his curse, the Pope then gives Sedicyon, Dissymulacyon, and Private Wealth “my powr my full autoryte” (I.1051) to ensure the fall of King Johan. The Pope seeks to damn the King through the highly blasphemous rhetoric of the curse. Here, the Pope assumes the power to command God, to remove Johan from Christ, and to damn physically and spiritually a king. His title of “Usurpid Power” refers not only to civil power, meaning his assumption of greater authority over the British king, but also to religious power as he sees himself as more powerful

than God and Christ, which renders this power unnatural. The Pope, however, does not demand actions of the devil. While he states, "I wyll God," he also states "I geve hym to the devyll." Bale insinuates that the Pope serves the devil more than God. Through this establishment of the Pope as the devil's servant, *King Johan* reveals that Early Modern conceptions of magic are far more fluid than the strict definitions of entirely demonic witchcraft, and even perceived intellectual magic. While Bale's primary focus is not magic but the legitimacy of Protestantism over Catholicism, the noticeable use of magical language and ritual through the character of the Pope is illustrative of one manner in which to discuss magic and one way in which magic is perceived in Tudor England. For Marlowe in *Doctor Faustus*, the fluidity of magic in regards to superstition and the demonic opposed to human intellect becomes central.

Simultaneously both a highly educated scholar of divinity and a rash, unskillful practitioner of black magic, Doctor Faustus is a complicated and seemingly contradictory individual who shows both the heights and depths of the humanist pursuit to ascend and grow through knowledge. The complexity of the principal character reflects the ambiguity of the text as a whole for many critics today: there are the textual problems and dating questions; genre issues in reference to the tragic versus the comic, which refer to the textual issues, and the morality play method versus the *de casibus* tragic mode; and the overarching complications of the play's treatment of philosophical questions and systems of thought, including both religious and magical systems. Yet the issue of magic endures as critics struggle to classify Faustus as a witch, magus, or an amorphous hybrid of magical philosophy, and to discern what Faustus's magic reveals about Marlowe and Early Modern England.

While earlier audiences of *Doctor Faustus* viewed the play as an obvious condemnation of magic, criticism over the past seventy years has varied in its approach to the play. Mid-

twentieth century criticism tends to place firmly the magic of the play in the realm of dramatic plot and theatrical spectacle. Investigations of Marlowe's possible position in the "School of Night" (following his friendship with scientist and alchemist Thomas Harriot, and Harriot's friendship with Raleigh) show Marlowe's potentially serious and sustained interest in material outside rigid religious thinking (Bednarz 92); yet, even these claims have been contentious and most criticism has separated Marlowe from the content of *Faustus*. Marlowe's representation of necromantic magic is for the dramatic purpose of Faustus's damnation and for the "magic of stage illusion" (Palmer 214) in both its poetic and physical representation. As G. Blakemore Evans later writes, "Witches, of course, along with conjurers, necromancers, and devils, indeed the whole range of the supernatural, appealed to the dramatic imagination" (263). The supernatural and demonic presence in the play is a point of intrigue for the dramatist, not something representative of Marlowe's own possible philosophical thinking. In terms of plot, magic serves as antagonistic to Christianity, whether the antagonism stems from "an agnostic protest" of Christian limitations, or an exploration into human damnation (Ribner vi). Furthermore, *Faustus*, considering both the spectacle and the religious questions of the play, evokes an ambiguous response from the audience, where the viewer simultaneously judges and sympathizes with Faustus (Wine 5).

Later criticism of the play seeks to argue the play's magical elements to be central to the content and argument, and to Renaissance philosophy as a whole, rather than only a vehicle for spectacle or conflicting response. Although some recent critics, such as Thomas Healy, argue against the contention that the play presents "a coherent intellectual vision on magic and its relation to religion" (189), over the past twenty-five years criticism consistently has delved into the implications of Faustus's role as a magus both outside of, and in opposition to, religion.

Hilary Gatti, for example, argues that Faustus's magic is a reaction against the constrictions Christian doctrine places on the unlimited human intellect (248). Jonathan Dollimore advances a similar argument as he writes that Faustus transgresses the containment of both God and Lucifer in his pact (238). Gerald M. Pinciss relates the religious struggle in terms of Marlowe's subversion of the morality play and representation of Calvinist and Anti-Calvinist doctrine, and he also comments on Faustus's role as a witch (29). The question of how to classify Faustus and his magic is one central to numerous critics. Barbara Traister analyzes the blurred role of magician/witch Faustus holds in his completion of compact witchcraft, and she argues that while he does not intend to become a witch, in his failure to study and to learn magic properly, he cannot avoid it. György Szőnyi addresses the non-conformism of magic in his assertion that Faustus is more of an "intellectual black magician" (1); conversely, most recently Andrew Duxfield has argued that Faustus is a failed Hermeticist magician whose fall comes from his focus on the physical over the spiritual and the attempt for divine knowledge (105).

The moral and religious questions, Faustus's magic, and the humanist elements of the play are not separate entities, though criticism has treated them as such. A more explicitly focused close reading of *Faustus*, with an aside to *Tamburlaine the Great, Part 1* to examine Marlowe and the humanist overreacher and *The Jew of Malta* to examine religious questions, in terms of the philosophical questions of humanism, learned magic, and witchcraft reveals that Marlowe's criticism of humanism is intertwined with his commentary on magic. His criticism examines both the issues with the philosophical systems themselves and the individuals that act within them. Although the goals of humanism and learned magic are virtuous, the people who seek to ascend within them may not be, and just as these humans are fallible and prone to error, so are the systems.

In examining *Faustus* within the context of humanism, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is crucial as it establishes the possibly simpler, secular treatment of the potential failings of humanist philosophy and education. As Meander describes, Tamburlaine is:

Hoping, misled by dreaming prophecies,
 To reign in Asia and with barbarous arms
 To make himself the monarch of the East. (I.i.41-43)

At the start of the play, Marlowe establishes that Tamburlaine, the son of shepherds, seeks to fulfill the humanist mandate to ascend. He also establishes, however, that Tamburlaine pursues ascent through the violent seizure of earthly, secular power, a perversion of the humanist goal to reach a state of virtue through learning and language. The use of physicality to achieve power above all, but also to acquire material wealth, land, and to satisfy his lust replaces spiritual and divine enlightenment. Marlowe similarly subverts humanist tools in showing that, while for Theridamas "thy words are swords" (I.i.74), language is unable to defeat the tangible, physical "barbarous arms" of Tamburlaine. Furthermore, his lust for both Zenocrate and for "pluméd helms . . . swords enameled and . . . massy chains of gold" (I.ii.124-126) is a distortion of the humanist quest for the Golden Age, wherein necessities are plentiful and humans interact peacefully as beings in a world much closer to the Garden of Eden. In *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe satirizes the perception that continual ascent will always lead to virtue or is entirely incorruptible.

Similar to *Tamburlaine*, in *The Jew of Malta* Marlowe subverts humanist tenets, but here the subversion comes from a clear denouncement of the Christian faith with an individual, Barabas, mainly focused on wealth. Instead of the association of ascent with power, success and virtue are found in money. In his plan to attain his remaining wealth, Barabas asks that his

daughter enter his former home, now a nunnery, as a convert, stating, “for religion / Hides many mischiefs from suspicion” (I.ii.281). Instead of working within religion to ascend and promote virtue, religion becomes a mask for greed. Although religion is crucial to the play, Machevil, in the play’s prologue, states, “I count religion but a childish toy / And hold there is no sin but ignorance” (Pro. 14-15). In *The Jew of Malta*, the focus is the denial of faith and virtue for wealth, and the play is not as concerned with the denial of knowledge – Barabas frequently references his cunning, reason, and wits – than with religion. The “sin of ignorance” figures far more prominently in *Doctor Faustus*.

Faustus, like Tamburlaine, has origins “base of stock” (Pro. 10)² and he is able to ascend beyond his perceived social limitations. Faustus achieves this through learning and the pursuit of knowledge and language, whereas Tamburlaine uses violence. Additionally, Faustus initially studies and respects religion as “he was graced with doctor’s name, / Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes / In heavenly matters of theology” (I.i.17-19). At the start of the play, he illustrates the perfect student of the humanist system of education: studied in languages, religious, and representative of the human capability to grow. Yet, Marlowe quickly reveals that the desire to grasp more power and knowledge is not limited to religious, virtuous knowledge and that it can overshadow the humanist mandate that learning should be in pursuit of virtue. It is in this way that Faustus is the humanist overreacher, the Icarus “swoll’n with cunning of a self-conceit” (Pro. 20). Furthermore, it is in this way that Marlowe critiques humanism as a system, especially in terms of education; if it is through “learning’s golden gifts” (Pro. 24) that people will embody virtue, then how is it that Faustus is able to abandon them for “curséd

² Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*. *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*. Ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey. London: Penguin, 2003. 341-395. Print. All citations refer to scene and then line number in this edition.

necromancy” (Pro. 25)? Is he simply one individual who has gone wrong, “falling to a devilish exercise” (Pro. 23), or is the system naïve to assume learning will create virtue and erase vice?

Faustus’s opening soliloquy demonstrates that he seemingly has never been a true humanist, or perhaps he has in form but not in content. David Riggs notes the “curious mistakes” as Faustus “reads from Aristotle’s *Analytics*, but quotes the definition that Cicero bequeathed to humanist dialecticians When he goes on to discard Aristotle, he says farewell to a phrase – *on kai me on*, ‘being and not-being’ – that appears nowhere in Aristotle” (239). Faustus is “a divine in show” (i.3), and he appears to have followed the path of the true humanist, but Marlowe calls into question the substance of what he has learned and what he has done with it. Initially, it appears that Marlowe criticizes the individual far more than the system, but it is the system that promotes the belief that learning must lead to virtue, ignoring individuals like Faustus who do not fall into this mold. Following the concept that man is nearly limitless in the humanist system of education, there is a real danger that a man will take this too far, become the proverbial overreacher and misinterpreter of an ambiguous line. For example, Faustus does not realize his limits. Referring to Faustus’s manipulation of the Scriptural verses, Riggs further writes that Faustus “diminishes his control over that meaning. He thinks he is interpreting the Scriptures while the Scriptures are interpreting him” (240-241). This same question of control in terms of Christian humanism will become crucial to Faustus’s desired *versus* his actual control of magic once he enters into the demonic pact with Mephistopheles and Lucifer.

Strongly connected to the presentation of the humanist system of education is the presentation of magic, specifically the presentation of what might have been, without Faustus’s impulsiveness and recklessness, Hermetic magic. While the Chorus asserts, “Nothing so sweet as magic to him” (Pro. 26), the method in which Faustus gathers his magical power, or what he

perceives to be his own magical power, suggests that the lack of care he has expressed in regards to Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, and God is equal in his interactions with magic. Careful study lies as the foundation of Renaissance humanism, as Shakespeare will later show in *The Tempest*, and Faustus disregards this process in his pursuit of magic. Faustus has spent years learning of classical philosophy and divinity, which he has bade “adieu” as he tears through his library picking up one book and moving to the next. Although the stage directions in the middle of the soliloquy indicate, “[Faustus] picks up a book of magic” and the Good Angel laments, “O Faustus, lay that damnéd book aside” (i.72), he never does keep these texts in front of him for long, nor does he give them the same focused attention that he should as a humanist or as a magus. As he looks at “those metaphysics of magicians” (i.51), he notes:

Lines, circles, schemes, letters and characters –
 Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.
 O, what a world of profit and delight,
 Of power, of honour, of omnipotence
 Is promised to the studious artisan! (i.53-57)

The references to such texts suggests that Faustus will intently study this magic, which bears resemblance to the Hermetic, alchemical, and Cabalist magic of earlier and contemporary magicians such as Agrippa, Dee, and Bruno. Yet, what Faustus points out is superficial. It is merely what he sees on the pages in front of him. While Valdes later states that he will “instruct” Faustus (i.163), Faustus replies, “This night I’ll conjure, ere I die therefore” (i.168). Traister argues, “In his haste to become immediately powerful . . . he neglects an important rule of magic, black or white. He resolves to conjure at once and thus effectively makes impossible the purification, the ritual preparations, recommended by magical handbooks” (93). Sometime

between dinner and sleep, ignoring his own exclamation of the promise given to the “studious artisan,” Faustus believes that he will “canvass every quiddity” (i.166) of magic, which he cannot do.

What Faustus seems to desire is the power akin to that of the Hermetic magician. Embodying the humanist belief that education “removes the consequences of the fall and restores man, a rational and fully developed creature, to his Creator” (Rivers 130), the Hermetic magician, in the context of Christian Early Modern England, seeks to study and understand so that he can transcend original sin. While Marlowe references numerous elements of learned magic (such as the reference to Agrippa and theurgical texts), Faustus does not truly pursue any of these Hermetic elements. Agrippa, as Traister explains, demands that in practicing magic, the conjuror must always control the devils; although by contract it seems that Faustus controls Mephistopheles, he does not, and even if he did, he still has subjected himself to Lucifer (95). The lines and symbols of his first conjuration are merely superficial as Mephistopheles does not come by Faustus’s magical bidding, but “*per accidens*” (iii.47) as “the shortest cut for conjuring / Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity / And pray devoutly to the prince of hell” (iii.53-55). Additionally, Hermetic magic never advocates the calling forth of Beelzebub or Mephistopheles. Marlowe indicates the possibility of such benevolent, learned magic, but firmly denies its existence in terms of Faustus, who has nearly all of the necessary preparation to be a Hermetic magus, as he seemingly has had all of the humanist preparation to be a virtuous human, but he has none of the inclination to embody that role.

Faustus’s arrogance regarding his own mental state adds to the danger of his belief in his ability to conjure, especially within Hermetic magic, without complete study and the necessary body of knowledge. Faustus states, “A sound magician is a mighty god” (i.64). Marlowe

ridicules Faustus in his ironic statement. Not only is Faustus unsound in his later immature usage of magic, but also in that to be sound he needs his rational faculty, his spark of god, which he renounces mere sentences before this point. Valdes claims, “Faustus, these books, thy wit, and our experience / Shall make all nations to canonize us” (i.121-122). Faustus already has set aside the books. He superficially uses them here, as he has used the humanist and religious texts, and the pattern continues throughout the play. When Mephistopheles gives Faustus a book with the demand, “Peruse it thoroughly” (v.160), Faustus replies “Yet fain would I have a book wherein I might behold all spells and incantations” (v.167-168). The reader or viewer cannot assume that he peruses these books off the page or offstage, considering both his previous treatment of central humanist texts, and Mephistopheles’s position as the being that performs nearly all the magic in the play. Faustus obtains books, which would initially suggest him to be an intellectual magician, but he does not use them. Faustus never has the skills to execute high magic. The “wit” to which Valdes refers is not present, as seen by Faustus’s perception of the sound mind, and his acceptance of the argument that nations would “canonize” a practitioner of black magic. Lastly, any knowledge Valdes and Cornelius have does not benefit Faustus, as they are present for one only night. The “aspiring pride and insolence, / For which God threw [Lucifer] from the face of heaven” (iv.69-70), are that which damns Faustus. Faustus’s failings as a humanist directly prefigure his failings as a magus, white or black; he is never prepared for serious magical conjuring, and he never achieves his desired power.

Furthermore, Faustus’s ambiguity in terms of white and black magic and his resistance to classification as a Hermetic magician are found in his expressed purpose for magic. Traister argues that he is ambiguous as a user of black magic or as a witch due to his misdirected but still benign goals: “Faustus had announced his original magical aspirations – to circle Germany with

a wall, to stop rivers, to raise tempests . . . None of his ideas was specifically evil or harmful, and several were actually benevolent” (102). Faustus is also ambiguous, however, because he never possesses the correct goal as a potential white magus; his ideas may not be harmful, but they do not go beyond his own desire for power and fame. Isabel Rivers notes that “the philosopher must descend the ladder from the first to the second world and apply his knowledge for social and political purposes” (34) – Faustus never intends to use magic to benefit society, only to control it. Mephistopheles tells him that he will “give thee more than thou hast wit to ask” (v.47), but Faustus never has the wit to ask for that which can bring him success as a magus. While his arrogance may represent the confidence and “piety” of the Hermetic magician in his attempt to understand all under God (Duxfield 103), it also blinds Faustus from understanding that he must remain under God. He is too focused on seizing as much control as he can, not realizing that in his haste he does not gain any significant power and only surrenders his soul.

The compact into which Faustus enters relegates his magic to witchcraft. While initially it does not appear that Faustus desires to become a witch, he does begin to fit the role and he does have the willingness to perform *maleficum* (Larner 80). Although his earlier plans are relatively harmless, Faustus, in his determination not to repent and turn back to God, begins purposefully to degenerate his own morality in his speeches: “To [Lucifer] I’ll build an altar and a church, / And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes” (v.13-14). He later exclaims, “Never to name God or to pray to him, / To burn his Scriptures, slay his ministers, / And make my spirits pull his churches down” (vii.96-98). These are mere words as Faustus never endeavors to complete any of these actions, but in both humanism and in learned magic, words are crucial. Faustus moves further away from his proposed level of power toward the physical, base magic of the later scenes as he tries to remove himself completely from God. Even at the start of the play,

it is clear that Faustus does not understand the gravity of the magic into which he boldly enters. Marlowe juxtaposes Faustus's rapid offer to sell his soul in order to obtain power against the comic scene of Wagner and Robin. Of Robin, Wagner states, "The villain is bare and out of service, and so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood raw" (iv.6-8), to which Robin replies, "How? My soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton though 'twere blood raw? Not so, good friend. By'r lady, I had need have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear" (iv.10-13). The clown figure exhibits more discretion in the possibility of selling his soul than does Faustus, who offers it for what he may have been able to procure were he a legitimate magus. In the comic sections, the tragedy of Faustus emerges in his surrender of his soul and true intellect for what amounts to power only in the contract, as Faustus never exhibits significant power and only superficial knowledge. The only time Faustus asks a question that cannot be answered by any of man's books, "Tell me who made the world" (vii.65), Mephistopheles replies, "Move me not, for I will not tell thee" (vii.69). Faustus serves Mephistopheles and Lucifer, and he does not have the power of any magus, let alone the white magic designed to restore man from the fall that the Hermetic magus should possess.

Yet, similar to the questions regarding Marlowe's possible critique of Faustus as an individual student of humanism *versus* a critique of humanism, the question of whether Marlowe's critique is of Faustus as an individual student of magic or of magic itself remains. Just as Faustus states, "Sweet *Analytics*, 'tis thou hast ravished me" (i.6), he cries, "'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me" (i.112). The entirety of the play, however, does not suggest that it is magic itself that destroys Faustus. Traister argues:

Nothing in the play suggests that Faustus would have succeeded had he been more careful. The play rules out theurgic magic as a possibility for Faustus, although it does not make clear whether such magic is impossible because of Faustus's carelessness or because theurgic magic never succeeds. (94)

Similarly, Duxfield argues that the occultist ambitions for unity “soon fade in the face of the reality of the ambiguous world that Faustus inhabits” (109), moving the possible critique away from occultism itself, towards the world that does not allow pure, learned, white magic to succeed in unifying the ideas of magical knowledge and Christian faith. Faustus, however, states, “O, would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book!” (xiv.19-20), and in his final speech he cries, “I’ll burn my books” (xiv.120). Additionally, the chorus issues the warning not “to practice more than heavenly power permits” (Epi. 8). From both outside and within the play, conflicting messages and “morals” emerge. The play is not sufficiently clear-cut enough to warrant the singular interpretation that Marlowe relegates both humanism and learned magic to fools' errands. Furthermore, Marlowe does not seem to present a simple morality play regarding one individual, as the chorus would suggest. Faustus also still fails to understand that it is not books that have damned him but his actions and willingness to sell his soul. *Faustus* leaves unanswered the questions of whether, with the right and virtuous individual, humanism and Hermeticism could lead to virtue; rather, it shows that with the wrong individual, as Faustus is tragically wrong, humanism and what-may-have-been-Hermeticism will not allow man to ascend as entering into the system does not guarantee that virtue will be the result.

The complexity of humanist education and magic, analyzed both separately and together, shines through in a piece known for its ambiguity when any part of it is examined. *Doctor Faustus* illustrates how the lofty promises of humanism and Hermeticism, though not necessarily

untrue or unworthy, falter in the face of the humans who may wish to carry them out. The complications that exist within these systems, especially within magic, demonstrate the care with which individuals must study and seek to ascend. There is clearly a line between the humanist and the overreacher, as exemplified by both Tamburlaine and Faustus, the Christian humanist and the blasphemer, and the learned magician and the witch; yet while there is clearly a line, the line itself is not clearly drawn. The ambiguity with which Marlowe treats humanism and Hermeticism in *Doctor Faustus* reflects the ambiguity of Early Modern England that although the belief that man can ascend is strong, how and why man makes his ascent can mean the difference between a society headed toward virtue and salvation, and one headed toward sin and damnation.

The magic of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, a play performed approximately two decades after *Faustus*, is markedly different from that which Faustus works under Mephistopheles and Lucifer. Jonson's Subtle, the alchemist, is a charlatan, and while he is well-versed in the language of alchemical magic, he is incapable of actually executing his magical claims, and instead he perverts the purported aim of magic to improve society by seeking only to pursue his own fortune. While his lack of magic makes Subtle somewhat similar to Faustus in terms of magical impotency, Subtle is well-aware of his ruse, whereas Faustus mistakenly believes in his own abilities to wield power. Whether magic be a reality or a trick, Jonson illustrates his distaste with magical philosophy and those who believe it, connecting it to supposed humanist art and the Early Modern audience in *The Alchemist* and several of his masques, including the *Masque of Queens* (1609), *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1616), and *The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union* (1624).

Much of the scholarly work on Jonson and magic alludes to Jonson's more humanist purposes, whether the text discussed is *The Alchemist* or one of the masques. While the masques, according to Traister, offer "very little specific or coherent magic" (153), the magical qualities within several of them contribute to the larger picture of Jonson's treatment of magic. With the masques, it is also important to recognize the element of patronage that Robert C. Evans has discussed; Jonson continuously sought patronage from king and court, and the masques especially were opportunities to maintain favor. It is no coincidence that King James had a particular fascination with magic, and Jonson wrote masques with magical elements. Unlike the masques, *The Alchemist* does not have as many political implications for Jonson. The play, also unlike the masques, represents a more systematic delivery of Jonson's perception of occult thinking. *The Alchemist* is "not just a biting satire on alchemy; it was also an attack on any form of occult learning" (Vaughan 63). Still, Jonson uses alchemy on the basis of its own claims and contentions as Edgar Hill Duncan argues, "He did not find it necessary to exaggerate or distort the claims made for the 'science' of alchemical literature, as he did, for instance, in the case of the Puritan religion" (707).

Critics have also seen the use of magic in *The Alchemist* (and the masques) as a metaphor for literature and Jonson's contemporary authors. Just as Marlowe uses Faustus to discuss the weakness of the humanist system of education consumed without thought and believed in without question, Jonson uses *Subtle* and the masques' magicians to discuss playwrights' limitations and proper literature. Robert Watson argues, "Jonson's representation of that alchemical fraud is similarly a cover for an effort to transform the base drama of his time into something resembling its classical Golden Age" (112). Evans, when discussing the masques' content and not patronage, argues that Jonson, in satirizing alchemists in *Mercury Vindicated*, is

“implicitly depicted as an artist who cooperates with Mercury (knowledge)” (229). Jonson, in seeking to correct the “base” drama he sees, functions as an ally to knowledge and an example of how to embody humanist, Horatian thinking. Traister further discusses Jonson’s preoccupation with the power of literature as she writes, “Jonson defeated magical pretensions by suggesting that all magic is illusion and that a magician who assumes he has special powers is deluded. Jonson regarded the literary artist, not the magician, as the appropriate master and controller of illusion” (167). While David Bevington remarks, “Playwriting is like alchemy; the dramatist conspires with an acting company to manufacture an exotic dream that disappears” (84), Jonson is more interested in the humanist, educational, and classical elements of literature than the “exotic,” which he mocks throughout his works.

Jonson’s concern with humanist education and magic are important to the masques, despite their political nature as opportunities for patronage. Jonson takes the genre seriously and uses each masque, all admittedly advantageous career opportunities, to forward commentary; here, the commentary is on magic in its various forms, literature, and virtue (as connected to humanist education and literature). In the *Masque of Blackness* (1605), Niger states, “Virtue, though chained to earth, will still live free, / And hell itself must yield to industry” (106-107).³ This statement encompasses much of Jonson’s purpose in his discussions of both magic and literature, as does Aethiopia’s concluding line, “This sun is temperate, and refines / All things on which his radiance shines” (234-235) if we view the sun as the writer. Virtue, the primary goal of the humanist educational system, is that which Jonson conveys in his masques and plays. Jonson himself, and the work of good playwrights, represents the industriousness that can

³ Ben Jonson. *Masque of Blackness. The Complete Masques. The Yale Ben Jonson*. Ed. Alvin B. Kernan and Richard B. Young. New Haven: Yale UP, 1969. All citations for this and the other masques refer to line number in this edition.

combat hell, which can be seen more literally as immorality, the trickery of charlatan magic users, and the irresponsibility and tastelessness of bad writers.

The masques that discuss the varied types of magic elucidate Jonson's criticisms of both occult thinking and literature. Throughout the masques, he discusses each principal variation of magic: witchcraft, alchemy, and natural philosophy (at times, specifically Hermeticism). Witchcraft is the subject of the *Masque of Queens*, performed for the court in 1609. The *dramatis personae* of the masque reads like that of a morality play, and the first three witches the Dame (their leader) names, are Ignorance, Suspicion, and Credulity. While the other witches also represent various aspects of immorality (Slander, Malice, Impudence, Falsehood, etc.), the concepts of ignorance, suspicion, and credulity are those that Jonson addresses most clearly throughout the masques and in *The Alchemist*, and they are reminiscent of Marlowe's discussion of the sin of ignorance. The nature of the witches' magic is demonic; they desire to "mix hell with heaven, and make Nature fight / within herself" (135-136) and to "set the elements at wars" (213). The magic of this masque is disruptive. It seeks to disturb the natural order and to work against virtue and balance, and is analogous to the unlearned, disordered literature Jonson also criticizes. Evans argues that "the witches' crazed disorder and perverted rituals are framed by Jonson's scholarly thoroughness and rationality; their unruly passion highlights his devotion to learning and reason" (235). Jonson, however, makes a point to note the "power attributed to witches by the ancients, of which every poet (or the most) do give some" (192-193). The section is a very humanist recalling of classical learning and tradition, as Jonson elucidates just which ancients refer to the power. The section provides a supposedly concrete, respectable basis for a belief in witchcraft. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that Jonson regards the belief in such power as the product of ignorance, suspicion, and credulity. Jonson's reference to the classical past,

then, is not to affirm his own conception of the witches' power, but to illustrate that thinkers of his own time should not consume all that is to be found in the classical, pagan past, a notion similar to that of what famous humanist philosophers, such as Erasmus, express. Jonson's political connections to King James I, a believer in witchcraft and author of *Daemonologie*, which refutes Reginald Scot's claims in *Discoverie of Witchcraft* against believing in the demonic arts (Donaldson 252-253), prevent Jonson from explicitly denying witchcraft. The section can therefore be read as both a reference to the classical affirmation of witchcraft, and a statement against being beholden to the classical past in matters of "suspicion," not to mention believing in such powers to the extent that they are practiced.

The criticism of magic and its believers as seen through Jonson's reference to his humanist education emerges as well in *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* and *The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union*. *Mercury Vindicated* is a short masque in which Mercury (knowledge) speaks most of the dialogue. At the start of the masque, Mercury attempts "to escape / This polt-footed philosopher" (31-32). In the masque, Jonson does not deal with the demonic, malevolent magic of witches, but the self-aggrandizing nature of philosophers: "As if the title of philosopher, that creature of glory, were to be fetched out of a furnace, abuse the curious and credulous nation of metal-men through the world, and make Mercury their instrument" (42-45). Jonson doubts the intelligence and the morality of the alchemist as well as the Hermetic philosopher, and equates them to those who would attempt "to commit miracles in art and treason again' nature" (41-42). Their "miracles" of art are tricks, and, were they able to achieve their goals of immortality or transmuting lead to gold, they would be committing crimes against the natural world. Mercury laments, "It is I that am corroded and exalted and sublimed and reduced and fetched over and filtered and washed" (48-51). To Jonson, these would-be

philosophers abuse knowledge and power just as much as the witches, and none of these types of magic successfully promotes virtue. Mercury is the character through which Jonson criticizes magic, but some of the first lines, spoken by Cyclope, convey his criticism of current art: “The very age abhors [Nature] so / That it learns to speak and go / As if by art alone it could be righted” (13-15). The “adultery and spoil of nature” (110) to which Mercury refers exists within polluted literature that is incapable of conveying virtue. Mercury’s corrosion through alchemists is literature’s corrosion through poor authors. Thus, both represent an abuse of knowledge. The concluding lines of the text similarly speak to art, as well as magic, as the Chorus states, “They are not with his light, [who] go backward from the sun” (235).

The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union, performed in 1624, continues more explicitly Jonson’s criticism of Hermetic magicians, but this time as separate from alchemists. The principal characters of the masque are Johphiel, “an airy spirit and (according to the Magi) the intelligence of Jupiter’s sphere” (1-2), and Merryfool, called and variously spelled Merefool, a student. Johphiel encounters Merefool while the student complains about the Rosy Cross, the Rosicrucian brotherhood, he has just joined. Then, as Barbara Traister remarks, “Iophiel dupes Mere-Fool and debunks the philosophical magic in which Mere-Fool believes” (165). In tone, this masque is much less serious than *Queens* or *Mercury Vindicated*, but the message against occult thinking is just as clear. Johphiel tells Merefool that he has learned a Rosicrucian master has chosen to die so that the newly recruited Merefool would inherit his power and become “principal secretary to the stars, / know all their signatures and combinations” (79-80) and “master all the learnings / were, are, or shall be” (87-88). The promise of natural philosophy then appears to be relatively benevolent. Johphiel, in a scene purposefully drawing from *Faustus*, asks Merefool whom, out of any person of history, he wishes to see. Merefool initially

chooses King Zoroastres, “the father of conjurers” (135), only for Johphiel to tell him that Zoroastres is busy. Merefool then requests to see Hermes Trismegistus (140). With this request, Jonson shows that he is aware of Hermeticist philosophy and its connection to Neo-Platonic thinking. What is important, however, is that Zoroastres and Trismegistus (and Pythagoras, Archimedes, and Brahman) are unavailable. Johphiel instead brings Scogan and Skelton, and Elinor Running when Merefool “had rather / See Ellen of Troy” (249-250) – the explicit reference to Marlowe. Merefool’s natural philosophy cannot bring him what he wants, and Johphiel intentionally supports his delusions with promises of power and prestige. Fortunately for Merefool, this is not a Marlovian tragedy, and Johphiel eventually, after occupying his time and securing his frustration, sends Merefool along. The masque is certainly a more light-hearted critique of magic but a critique all the same. Merefool is simply a fool to believe in natural philosophy, which suggests the ability to master all learning, but offers no practical way of doing so. The student has turned from what would enable him to master learning, which is his own study, as Jonson repeatedly shows the learned author within the humanist system of education to be in control of an immense power, to educate and to delight.

The Alchemist opens with a clear acknowledgment to the aims of the humanist system of education, under which Jonson learned: “this pen / Did never aim to grieve, but better men,” (Pro. 11-12).⁴ The humanist introduction to the comedy reveals Jonson’s much larger purpose of criticizing dramatists lacking the skills necessary to write worthwhile work and the audience for consuming such material. In his letter to the reader, Jonson never mentions magic but rather discusses his own profession:

⁴ Ben Jonson. *The Alchemist. Ben Jonson: Volpone and Other Plays*. Ed Michael Jamieson. London: Penguin, 2004. 175-317. Print. All citations refer to scene and then line number in this edition.

If thou art one that tak'st up, and but a pretender, beware at what hands thou receiv'st thy commodity; for thou wert never more fair in the way to be coz'ned than in this age in poetry, especially in plays; wherein now the concupiscence of jigs and dances so reigneth, as to run away from nature and be afraid of her is the only point of art that tickles the spectators. But how out of purpose and place do I name art, when the professors are grown so obstinate contemners of it, and presumers on their own naturals. (2-9)

In the play itself, the “pretender” Jonson illustrates is Subtle (not the reader), the figure that represents not only charlatan magicians, but also “artists” that diminish and corrupt art. Jonson’s representation of magic is linked to his representation of art, and the role of art as it is connected to the humanist purpose. Face asks Subtle, “Speak you this from art?” (I.ii.102). Subtle replies, “Ay, sir, and reason too, the ground of art” (I.ii.103). Yet, it is clear that Subtle perverts both reason and art, twisting them both to become types of “commodity,” spoiling the purpose of art and ignoring the place of reason. While Marlowe criticizes individuals that have an unquestioning belief in the humanist system of education, Jonson, writing approximately fifteen years later, finds that art has stepped too far from humanist principles, and has become even worse than a pointless endeavor, but a degrading force.

Despite the important overtones of the role of art and humanism, magic is still a crucial element to the text, and there is a mix of magical traditions within the comedy. The alchemical references are clear and, as Bevington notes, “Jonson shows himself to be immensely learned in lore about this fascinating pseudo-science” (81). Jonson’s treatment of alchemy suggests his definition of it to be harsher than a “pseudo-science,” but entirely fantastical and illogical, based on his own “remarkable knowledge” of the subject (Duncan 699). Subtle’s alchemical

instructions sound, as Jonson intends, ridiculous, as he demands that Dapper, “Bathe your fingers’ ends and wash your eyes, / To sharpen your five senses, and cry ‘hum,’ / Thrice, and then ‘buzz as often; and then come” (I.ii.168-170). In this context, the more Hermetic, and generally more serious or learned magical studies, take on the same note of foolishness. When Drugger asks Subtle about his ability to know men’s “good angels, and their bad” (I.iii.16), the idea of seeing angels (something serious scholars such as John Dee believed possible, as Peter French has shown) despite the religious undercurrent absent in alchemy, is just as ludicrous as humming and buzzing.

The rationality of magical practices is not all that Jonson analyzes, as rationality is inextricably linked to morality, and Jonson delineates the morality of magic clearly in the exchange of insults between Face and Subtle. While Subtle calls out “cheater,” “cow-herd,” and “cut-purse,” Face progresses from an accusation that Subtle is a liar, to “bawd,” conjurer,” and “witch” (I.i.106-107). The insults themselves are empty in that Subtle is no less of a cheat than Face, and Face is no more a witch than the charlatan Subtle. Still, Subtle and his associates lack virtue and the will to inspire virtue in others. Jonson does not damn these characters, nor does he damn those artists who, like Subtle, are con-artists, but their immorality is visible to the audience as well as to the characters themselves. Self-recognition is key to Faustus, Subtle, and Prospero. Faustus just partially recognizes his fall far too late, Subtle recognizes his immorality and does not care to change, and Prospero recognizes his growing abuse of magic and is willing to correct his behavior. Jonson’s concern with Subtle is his clear, immoral abuse of reason and art, and his profit from such abuse. It is important here to remember Jonson’s own struggles with profit and patronage, and the very practical reasons for his dislike of the pretend “art” of his day: “I speak not this out of a hope to do good on any man against his will; for I know, if it were put to the

question of theirs and mine, the worse would find more suffrages, because the most favour common errors” (Let. 24-28). Both aesthetically and morally, Jonson finds art wanting, and his frustrations emerge through Subtle’s general success in his scams and his ability to enchant others with his “art.”

Questions of natural magic, what would seem to be a purer art, and nature itself in relation to Subtle’s alchemy are complicated by Subtle’s status as a scam artist. Face calls Subtle, “You smoky persecutor of nature!” (I.iii.100). Subtle is just another of the alchemists from which Mercury strives to be vindicated. There is another potential magic-wielder to consider in *The Alchemist*, however, and one that genuinely believes in magic: Mammon. Mammon appears almost as a Faustus figure in his willingness to purchase power. He is similarly as gullible as Faustus in his consideration of the efficiency and potency of such power; he is an earlier incarnation of Merefool. Robert Watson writes that Mammon “seems to perceive himself as the kind of modern savior who appeared frequently in Jacobean poetry: the spiritual, scientific, or sensual creator of a new world” (121). Yet Watson continues:

[Mammon] unwittingly sells, if not his eternal jewel, at least his temporal ones, for a conquest of nature that can never quite lift him above mundane physical objects and mundane human appetites. Mammon’s true potential is as limited as that of Faustus, who managed only to perform some slapstick violence and to acquire fresh grapes out of season. (122)

Mammon uses ancient texts as proof of the existence of the philosopher’s stone, essentially buying into justification for irrational magic through classical, here biblical, texts, which Jonson also includes in the *Masque of Queens*. When Surly questions this stone, Mammon asks, “Will you believe antiquity? Records? / I’ll show you a book where Moses, and his sister, / And

Solomon have written of the art” (II.i.80-83). Regardless of his explanation of his belief in magic, he desires to use it only for wealth, soft beds, to “walk / Naked between my *succubae*” (II.ii.47-48). Mammon is just as much one of the “deriders of diligence” (Let. 10) as Subtle despite his more honest belief in magic, and his ignorance is simply one more aspect of his character to ridicule. He is somewhat representative of the audience of art’s pretenders, unable to distinguish true art from what is “sordid and vile” (Let. 23). Natural philosophy, just as Merefool learns, is as much a subject of derision as alchemy.

Yet, despite Jonson’s ridicule of alchemy and magical philosophy, he does not punish Subtle (or Mammon) to any great degree at the conclusion of the play. Being a comedy, the reader certainly does not expect a tragic ending like that of *Faustus*, but Jonson has punished severely some comedic characters, such as Volpone, to create his pleasing resolution. As Bevington points out, “Judgment is most harsh on the ‘brethren’ of the Dutch church” (84). Watson further remarks that the play is more about theatricality and awareness than it is about morality (134-135). There is a great deal of importance attached to theatricality in the play, but the morality within the play is crucial, and fully explored through the variations of degeneracy through would-be magic-users like Subtle and Mammon. The fact that they are pretenders, however, contributes to the play’s conclusion. Very little magic is done, and similarly very little lasting harm is caused. Throughout the masques and *The Alchemist*, Jonson elucidates how magic and magi are connected to art and “artists,” and his criticisms are clear and, at times, harsh. He finds that magic has no place in the rational, humanist sphere of thinking. Although he is willing to dramatize witchcraft in a somewhat serious manner in the *Masque of Queens*, this is mostly to secure patronage, and his underlying argument is that occult thinking is irrational. As he expresses in *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*, the proposed magus has

wrongly seized the title philosopher, with no understanding of true philosophy, rationality, and morality, and this leads only to the spread of foolishness as seen in *The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union*. Jonson finds his contemporaries to be guilty of the same crime. For Jonson, humanism has fallen to the wayside, and artists must turn to the humanist system of education once more in order to find some purpose and virtue to the creation of art.

Shakespeare, although never as explicitly as Jonson, also treats the goals of humanist education in *The Tempest*, and the supernatural likewise has a pronounced role. In his treatment of both subjects, Shakespeare, as he often does, tends to present a more balanced perspective. The presence of the supernatural in *The Tempest* manifests itself in a uniquely humanist fashion, and is the most instructive in a discussion of Renaissance magic and humanism. The connection between magic and humanism is similarly important, and the importance of the supernatural beings in the play lies not in what they reveal, or conceal, about the superhuman, but about what they illuminate in the human. Unlike *Faustus*, the supernatural is not demonic, and unlike *The Alchemist*, the supernatural is real and powerful. Furthermore, although Prospero's proposed use for his magic at the start of the play is less than pure, his method of learning magic leads to the possibility for pure, white, natural magic, the closest expression of Hermeticism even though Shakespeare does not name it directly (as Jonson does in his work). Yet, Prospero emerges at the play's conclusion having renounced his magic and asking to leave the island, despite his incredible learned and moral power. By representing the Renaissance preoccupation with white magic through Prospero's control over the elements, his fellow humans, and supernatural spirits and beasts, Shakespeare demonstrates humanity's potential power and the potential success of the humanist system of education and magical learning. The Early Modern goal to restore man's power and understanding to their peaks in the Garden of Eden is especially crucial as Prospero

attempts to rise to the same prelapsarian heights. Despite the dominating presence of the superhuman, what also shines through *The Tempest* is the human; it is humanism, and the Renaissance belief in man's ability to ascend beyond his apparent limitations to achieve the ideal state.

Criticism of *The Tempest* that discusses magic emphasizes the "spiritual," Christianized sense of magic that Shakespeare illustrates within the play. This magic served several purposes, the most dominant of which was to restore humanity's power over nature to its prelapsarian levels in service to fellow human beings and, more importantly, to God. The natural world is a crucial element of *The Tempest* as the setting is one cut off from civilization. Speaking of Renaissance magic more generally, B. J. Gibbons argues that the perception of the natural world was shifting in Early Modern England as many before had seen nature as "a threatening and hostile realm, beyond the control of even the most extensive of human powers" (19), but then began to view the natural world as positive and controllable (41). Gibbons relates this to *The Tempest*, as he writes, "Shakespeare's Prospero boasted about his control over nature" (38). Shakespeare emphasizes the belief that man could work with nature, along with human texts and philosophies, and utilize it to improve. Yet, this mastery over nature had a higher purpose than simply the growth of power. Gibbons quotes the anonymous author of the alchemical text *The Sophic Hydrolith*, who writes that alchemy is for "the glory of [God and] his most Holy name, and for the good of thy suffering fellow man" (112). Along this line of thought, Shakespeare likely models Prospero after the "self-styled magus" John Dee (Hopkins 21), who wrote that the "essential powers of magic are located in a higher spiritual drive of the soul to achieve proximity to God" (Brann 178).

Critics speaking more to *The Tempest* directly have analyzed several different aspects of Prospero's magic. Ellen Belton has argued that Prospero's complete "higher purpose is not immersion in the inner self, but union with something that is outside and, in Shakespearean terms, higher than the individual" (134), and Robert Egan has discussed Prospero's morality, stating that he must seek "to purge the evil from the inhabitants of his world and restore them to goodness" (175). Traister, who has discussed Faustus's and Subtle's magic as well, argues that Prospero's magic is "hybrid" (125), and that he ultimately abjures his magic in order to apply the advanced wisdom he has gained through magical study to Milan's government (143). Conversely, Virginia and Alden Vaughan suggest the abjuration is because "the magician's power is not really benign and must be rejected" (66). Wayne Shumaker, speaking more specifically to *The Tempest* and Hermeticism, argues that some of Shakespeare's plays do "contain obvious traces of Hermeticism" (296), but that "his plays accordingly testify to the currency of occultist ideas, but not necessarily to his acceptance of them as true" (297). Much of the criticism has emphasized the more positive nature of Prospero's magic, and hinted at its relation to virtue and humanism.

Prospero reveals the humanist and Hermeticist manner in which he has mastered nature when he relates his history to Miranda after the opening scene's tempest. Prospero states that he has been "so reputed / In dignity and for the liberal arts" (I.ii.73)⁵ and has been "rapt in secret studies" (I.ii.77), or the study of mystical texts. In the very growth and development of occult theory, the "secret studies" that Prospero seeks to follow, there lies a foundation of humanism. Prospero is not Faustus, who picks up humanist and magical texts only to set them down quickly

⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest. The Riverside Shakespeare*. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans, et al. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. All citations are to act, scene, and line number in this edition.

without study, who constantly seeks more power and influences, but reaches a point where he no longer wants to work for it. Or Merefool, who believes study to be unnecessary. Nor is Prospero Subtle, who simply wants to profit from a good show of alchemical knowledge but who has no power to back it up. As Hallett Smith writes, in white magic “the magician uses only some secret powers of nature, which he has learned after laborious study” (1656), and Prospero emphasizes his past studies and his magical texts, which are mentioned throughout the play. Prospero tells Miranda, “My library / Was dukedom large enough” (I.ii.109-110). He also states that Gonzalo, in helping Prospero and the infant Miranda after their banishment from Naples, “furnish’d me / From mine own library with volumes that / I prize above my dukedom” (I.ii.166-168). Caliban believes that Prospero is “but a sot” (III.ii.93) without them and that, before attempting to attack Prospero, he and his conspirators must “burn but his books” (III.ii.95). These are the books of Prospero’s “secret studies,” and while their immediate purpose is to allow for the growth of his power, Prospero can use this power to fashion a more virtuous life.

Shakespeare assigns the Hermeticist magus an enormous capability for power, and Prospero’s power over nature is demonstrated at the start of the play. Through the spirit Ariel, Prospero calls forth a storm that shipwrecks a group of people, among which are Prospero’s brother and the King of Naples, who are responsible for Prospero’s presence on the deserted island that he terms his “cell” (I.ii.20). Prospero is the individual that can “command” (I.i.21) the elements that care not “for the name of king” (I.i.17), and he controls the “wild waters” (I.ii.2) that Miranda wishes to calm “Had [she] been any God of power” (I.ii.10). This type of control and power is very different from that of Faustus and Subtle. Once Shakespeare reveals that Prospero has this power, he establishes Prospero as superior in strength to King Alonso and

with powers akin to a god. On the island Prospero seems to be both king and god, and that which is on the island is Prospero's subject, whether by choice or by force.

Prospero's subjects include the humans on the island, as in Renaissance thought nature, as Smith states, "included human nature" (1657), and the *supernatural*, or the above natural (not unnatural) creatures. After demonstrating Prospero's control over weather, Shakespeare systematically reveals each other element over which he is master. His daughter, Miranda, "canst not choose" (I.ii.186) but to sleep when he commands through the use of his magic that she "cease more questions" (i.ii.184) and is "inclin'd to sleep" (I.ii.185). Once she is sleeping, the spirit Ariel, powerful in his own right, enters greeting Prospero with, "All hail, great master, grave sir!" (I.ii.189) Prospero continually refers to Ariel as "my Ariel" (I.ii.188) and "my spirit" (I.ii.215), suggesting a friendship between the magus and the supernatural being until Ariel asks for his liberty and Prospero calls him "my slave" (I.ii.270), reminding the spirit how Prospero has saved him from the tree which was his prison. Following the establishment of his control over Ariel, Prospero states that Ariel's only companion was Caliban, "whom now I keep in service" (I.ii.286). Caliban has been the only other "human shape" (I.ii.283) on the island, and he also is under Prospero's control. After stepping on the island, Prospero grasps control over all of its elements through his authority and his art. Additionally, Prospero does not hesitate to threaten either of his slaves with physical torment to maintain control; he warns Ariel that he will imprison him in an oak tree and Caliban that he will plague him with cramps and aches. Lastly, Prospero controls the shipwrecked crew, like those on the island. He establishes this control in the tempest itself, and it extends to their time on the island. Prospero does not hesitate to use his power when carrying out his revenge against the shipwrecked men (whether they deserve it or are more innocent than Prospero may argue) and Caliban and his conspirators.

As seen in the other texts, the morality of magic is always a concern, and there is often a fine line between what constitutes moral and immoral action. Shakespeare does not present Prospero as infallible or above humanity despite his supernatural power. As Erasmus writes, the revival of ancient knowledge should be for the “knowledge of Christ” not to “cloud men’s eyes with smoke” (83), referring to the revival of classical texts, and the principle applies here as well. In Prospero’s use of magic to deceive the senses of the shipwrecked, possibly immoral crew, his purpose must not be to “cloud” their sense of morality but illuminate it:

It is imperative that Prospero himself have a comprehensive and flawless moral vision of his world. He must perceive not only what is evil in men and what, ideally, they should be, but also what men are, and what relationship he, as a man, bears toward them. Without such a clarity of vision, the exercise of his art may result in corruption for himself and chaos for those around him. (Egan 175)

Yet, with his enormous power and the rage fueled by a dozen years of planning, Prospero strays from this virtuous motive. As Ellen Belton states, “Reason itself is vulnerable to error and corruption” (135), and Prospero has had years with which to analyze all of the reasons why he should avenge himself. Prospero cannot have a “comprehensive and flawless moral vision” because humans are not flawless. Throughout the single day that the crew is shipwrecked on the island, Prospero’s actions grow harsher, and he is not even completely balanced at the beginning; he must find virtue and balance in himself before he can truly educate his “students.”

As he should fulfill the role of educator, and as he possesses incredible power easily abused, Prospero’s imbalance threatens his role as a humanist and magus. Prospero’s rage stems from his brother usurping his position as the Duke of Milan, but Prospero fails to realize the large part he has had in this seizure of power. Prospero spends so much of his time in his “secret

studies” that he fails to see beyond the dukedom that is his library. As a humanist duke he should, ideally, serve as an emblem of both Plato’s philosopher-king and the Aristotelian mean; he should understand the philosophical principles that virtue contains, and he should also act on this virtue. His studies do not help anyone if they remain secret. Prospero’s absence of action in Milan due to his obsession with expanding his powers leads to his expulsion, not merely his brother’s ambition, and on the island the opposite is present. Early in the play, Prospero punishes the innocent Ferdinand by using Ariel to convince the prince that his father has died in the shipwreck. He allows Ariel to taunt Ferdinand through singing, “Full fadom five thy father lies” (I.ii.397) and by emphasizing Ferdinand’s perceived loss. Even his control over Ariel is excessive. The spirit has not wronged Prospero, unlike his brother or Caliban, but Prospero still enslaves him for twelve years. He then uses Ariel to torment Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian, causing them to hallucinate and stripping them, as well as Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, of their reason, as “the loss of reason is the loss of the highest faculty they possess” (Belton 133). Prospero initially seeks to frighten his enemies as a manner of instruction, but Prospero seems to have more concern for their suffering than he does for their transformation into ideal, virtuous beings.

Once Prospero’s perceived enemies are “all knit up / In their distractions” (III.iii.89-90) and their individual suffering, the supernatural dominates the play. The “shapes” (III.iii.81-110) torture Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian after Ariel terrifies them by appearing as a harpy. Shakespeare indicates in the stage directions that soon a group of spirits “in shape of dogs and hounds” (IV.i) hunt Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban. On the more positive side, goddesses, nymphs, and reapers delight Ferdinand and Miranda at their wedding. Prospero is at his full superhuman power. The superhuman permeates every aspect of the plot, whether negatively or

positively, and the human quality of these individuals has faded into the background. At this point, it seems Prospero has lost sight of “what relationship he, as a man, bears toward [the others]” (Egan 175). He has pursued the prelapsarian state of power, but he has lost the morality and holiness that should be behind it. He has control over the entirety of the action, but he has forgotten the virtuous purpose behind the action.

Yet, the student is often affected by his subject – and while he may seem to master his subject, the supernatural still has virtues to teach its student. Jacqueline Fox-Good notes that Prospero’s “decision to forgive his enemies is precipitated by Ariel” (264). Ariel tells Prospero his charms are so strong on his enemies, “That if you now beheld them, your affections / would become tender . . . Mine would, sir, were I human” (V.i.16-20). Prospero replies, “And mine shall” (V.i.21). He wonders:

Hast thou, which are but air, a touch a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier mov’d than thou art? (V.i.24)

Prospero realizes that he is human, “one of their kind” and has flaws and “passion” as well. His “fury” has overshadowed his “nobler reason” (V.i.26), his rational faculty, just as he has weakened the rational faculty of others. He needs to use his magic to show his enemies virtue, as “the rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance” (V.i.27-28). Once he fully understands this concept, he can illustrate virtue and “transfer the new order he has created to the social hierarchy back home” (Belton 135). In forgiving his enemies and teaching them (and Miranda and Ferdinand) by his own example, Prospero believes that they will use the knowledge to create a better Milan and Naples. Ferdinand is the future king, Miranda queen, and now they understand

virtue and may be able to build a virtuous society. Whereas Faustus and Subtle are unable and unwilling, respectively, to achieve self-recognition, Prospero finds the balance within himself and then uses his authority as it should be used in the humanist vision of society.

In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare details the progression of Prospero from a duke too absorbed in his own studies to provide for the wellbeing of others, to a revenge-driven magus, and, finally, to a man that uses his studies to illuminate virtue for others. In the epilogue, “spoken in a meter used elsewhere in the play only by Ariel in his short speech before the masque, and in his songs” (Fox-Good 264) further emphasizing Ariel’s influence on him, Prospero states, “Now all my charms are all o’erthrown, / And what strength I have’s mine own, / Which is most faint” (Epi. 1-3). He shows humility and illustrates the recognition of his own imperfect state as a human. Prospero has risen in mystical power, but has realized that it almost has been at the expense of his spiritual welfare. In this final section, he states that he desires “Spirits to enforce, art to enchant” (Epi. 14) but the audience’s “prayer” (Epi. 16) to release him. Through the methodical, humanist study of the occult and the use of the supernatural, Prospero has ascended, and his powers have been such that he has controlled both kings and clowns, spirits and monsters.

Yet, Shakespeare concludes the play with Prospero overthrowing his charms for his natural and human strength, strength in both rationality and in love. This is not to say that his superhuman powers are somehow immoral, or without merit; rather, in finishing his “showpiece” (Hollander 444) with Prospero relying on his human qualities alone, Shakespeare illustrates that it is the human, and the humanist process, that carries the most value. Fox-Good states that Shakespeare presents “a world in which all manner of things – spirits, banquets, goddesses – take shape and then disperse, seem present then absent, appear and disappear at will” (253-254); I

would emphasize that humans, with all their potential, are that which remain constant.

Shakespeare shows in *The Tempest* not that the supernatural “charms” are necessary, but that society needs human strength, and needs true humanism, to build the virtuous, ideal world.

The possibility of an ideal world is just one of the potential creations that the humanist system of education and white magic could bring in Early Modern England. Humanism and Hermeticist natural philosophy are both ways to combat ignorance and the immorality of demonic power and false alchemy. While Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare all allude to the possibility of an ideal world through these mechanisms, it is only Shakespeare’s character of Prospero that has any interest in bringing it to fruition, that is able to recognize his fallibility and corruption and correct his error. Faustus seeks power for his own individual gain, and Subtle has no interest in improving the world, and but only in disrupting it. The variation of these individuals across the three principle dramas as well as the masques is representative of the individualization characteristic of the Renaissance. Still, these individuals then become representative of the systems of thought popular among Early Modern thinkers and artists.

The humanist system of education and the popular and educated perception of magic and the occult are topics of discussion in numerous Early Modern texts, and especially those of the most prominent playwrights of the period. Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare are artists, and thus they are producing what should, in the ideal humanist world, consequently prompt virtue. Analogous to the humanist artist, classically educated and morally superior, is the magus, who has similarly studied classical texts and seeks to produce a virtuous society. These individuals, however, while embodying systems of thought and ideals, are still individuals, and the plays explore how the individuals’ concerns, prejudices, faults, and imbalances clash with what would seem to be a formula for learned morality, for informed behavior that will produce philosopher-

kings and a new golden age or Garden of Eden. Yet, each writer finds that humanism is not infallible, and neither is magic. They are not panaceas for all of society's ills, and can even be sources of chaos and immorality themselves. Marlowe's overreacher is sometimes violent, sometimes irreligious, and sometimes ignorant of what he professes to do. Jonson's witches, Rosy Cross philosophers, and alchemists at court and in the city use knowledge to their own advantage and twist it to their needs. Shakespeare's magus begins imbalanced and in the pursuit of revenge. Similarly, just as these individuals are uniquely defined, the defined morality of magic is also fluid, and types are distinctive more for their purpose than due to any comprehensive understanding of, or delineation between, magical philosophies. What has been religion becomes witchcraft in *King Johan*, what begins as a seemingly noble pursuit of magical knowledge becomes demonic damnation in *Doctor Faustus*, magic is an object of ridicule in Jonson's masques and *The Alchemist*, and white magic is a fallible, but possibly beneficial, humanist pursuit of learning in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

The system of humanist education is similarly open for discussion in Early Modern England, where Marlowe finds people as too reliant on virtue as being its necessary product, Jonson finds art absent of the humanist purpose, and Shakespeare shows an individual who is an imbalanced humanist, always willing to study and never taking action, and then taking action without proper analysis of the morality of said action. Yet, these individuals throughout the works never define humanism or magic completely. They are examples of potential flaws and potential successes. Faustus, for example, who has been degraded by magic and who has abused the humanist system of education, is not symbolic of what these systems of thought must always produce. Jonson certainly argues that it is not the system of humanism to blame, but artists who fail to use it. While his criticism of magic is more firm in his belief that it is ultimately unhelpful

as it is not real, it is not the magic itself that is a problem so much as it is the uneducated masses who blindly follow it. Shakespeare shows someone who has gone too far, but is able to correct his path and find virtue for himself, his friends and family, and his former enemies – a microcosm of the society that could be produced through humanism and white magic. In Early Modern England, artists continually explored magic along with humanism, creating magical spectacles of their own on the stage, representing the possibilities of magic and humanism through individuals in Renaissance society.

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