

TO MONIKA

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The Overreader:

An Essay
On (Con)Textual Magic From
Marlowe’s Faustus to
Shakespeare’s Prospero

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Introduction

Il n'y a pas de hors-texte¹

Jacques Derrida

Living in a culture knit out of myriads of various types of semiotic experiences, or else - texts, one becomes a habitual reader. In order to make his or her way through this immensity of interwoven material, one needs to create certain standards, by which to organize all these texts into a meaningful environment. The primeval, probably most fundamental of these standards is the demarcating line between reality and fiction. Now, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, the advancement of high technology and the media tangibly reduces the distinction between these two modes of perception. This is why, I think, it may be interesting, perhaps even instructive, to look back for comparison at a similar period in the evolution of Western culture – an age in which reality and fiction were as closely wedded as they have ever been – the Renaissance.

In this period, there are moments, as Greenblatt writes:

When the boundaries between life and art completely break down, and to understand such moments, the conventional distinction between reality and the imagination must give way to a sense of their interplay. (Greenblatt, *Raleigh*, ix)

The Renaissance brings to a climax the medieval project to order everything in the world into neatly systematized hierarchies. The entities in them are structured by the principle of resemblance, and in their unity are believed to re-constitute the dispersed image of God. Due to this, the universe is seen as full of items, each of

them having a unique place in the *episteme*². The role of man, placed in the middle of this universe, is to interpret the signification of its patterns, and marvel at the miracles of the Creator:

This is why the face of the world is covered with blazons, with characters, with ciphers and obscure words, with ‘hieroglyphs’ [...] And the space inhabited by immediate resemblances becomes like a vast open book; it bristles with written signs, every page is seen to be filled with strange figures” (Foucault 38)

This occupation raises the cosmographic position of man, he becomes the interpreter and appreciator of divine designs, a heavenly appointed hermeneutist. The re-invention of man and the re-discovery of his surroundings lead to an upsurge in the spirit of the age, which translates itself into a flamboyant aesthetics of being. Art enters every sphere of life and adorns it with new joyful light. On the other hand, gifted and ambitious scholars keep unearthing and combining religious and philosophical doctrines, in the hope that, eventually, everything will fit together and form the passage to one ultimate truth. They produce extensive *books*, trying to pour in them all the knowledge of the universe. The most extreme form of this epistemological aspiration is still called *magic*, and it is still to be found on the edge between the forbidden and the allowed. Often, the *book* absorbs the life of the scholar and brings him to his destruction. This pattern brings about a revision of the myth of the *overreacher*. It seems to me that due to his place in a highly textualized age, and considering the epistemological nature of his ambitions, he can be seen also as an *overreader*.

The objective of this paper is to focus on the image of the *overreader* and the nature of his aspiration. It will be presented as an enhanced reading of Christopher Marlowe’s play: *Doctor Faustus* as an actual-fictional *hypertext*. A concise survey of the Renaissance *episteme* at the height of its existence will provide the background to an inter-textual relation of the play to episodes from the life stories of selected historical and literary personages. Eventually, the search for an alternative ending of the Faust myth will lead to the destruction of the *book*, in William

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and aspiration's retreat to the indeterminate pleasures of the text.

The overall critical practice used in this research is probably best described by Levi-Strauss' concept of "bricolage", which is defined by Derrida as a strategy of using whatever is at hand, in order to analyze.

The first major influence is the refusal of the New Historicists to accept unproblematic distinctions between "literary" and "non-literary" texts; their belief in the inseparable *circulation* of all types of texts, and the *dynamic oscillation* of meaning among them.

Another major influence is Roland Barthes' concept of the *plurality*³ of the literary text – the feeling that each literary text is woven entirely with fragments of other texts. The *literary text*, here, is not considered as a number of printed pages, bound together, lying on a library shelf, but as the literary experience, brought to life in the consciousness of the reader; contrastively, the texts interwoven in the literary text, are not only other literary texts, but all sorts of cultural semiotic phenomena. Thus, the between-textual space that defines the realization of a literary text includes texts, antecedent to its writing, and texts contemporary to its reading, as well as everything in between. Sometimes the links between texts are easily discernible – references, quotations, allusions, etc., but most of the time they are elusive, untraceable, subjective. The literary text appears to be like an electronic hypertext without most of the hyperlinks underlined.

The third major influence is Foucault's description of the late medieval–Renaissance *episteme* as a "vast book", combined with Derrida's concept of the book as an epitome of *l'écriture* – the standard imposed on the free variation of thought (*texte*), a guardian of absolute reality – it brings about the idea of *the* book in this paper. Its destruction Derrida sees as a liberation of the primordially metaphorical nature of language. To this relates the fourth major influence of this research, Barthes' theory of *the pleasure of the text*. It concentrates on the narrow space between the certainty and uncertainty of meaning, and the erotic promise of an exposure that flashes there.

The belief in the venture of restoring the subtleties underlying the text, it seems to me, relates to the occultist's belief in the invisible network of influences among things. It is even more similar if we consider the fact that literary criticism is by nature speculative – there is no way to test empirically its claims. This means that its basic constructive principle is that of resemblance, i.e. it is looking for the code for recognizing reflections and relations between things – their signatures. It follows that the practice of interpreting texts is as much magical as magic is textual. This, however, only shows that the text alone is magical – it is the secret that carries within itself the promise of a buried revelation. As a searcher for the philosopher's stone, I embark on this course, whose end may eventually turn out to be merely a delusion, yet “the failure of a young man with but slender talent and little learning in so grave and so great a matter will be more deserving of pardon than of blame. Nay according to the poet: 'If strength fails, there shall surely be praise for daring; and to have wished for great things is enough'” (Pico 241)

Chapter One

THE BOOK OF MAGIC

*Pragmatick Schoolmen, men made up of pride,
And rayling Arguments, who truth deride,
And scorn all else but what your selves devise,
And think these high-learned Tracts to be but lies,
Do not presume, unless with hallowed hand
To touch these books who with the world shall stand;
They are indeed mysterious, rare and rich,
And far transcend the ordinary pitch.*

Io. Booker.⁴

In thinking itself as *rinascimento dell'antichita*⁵, the Renaissance has consciously encoded in its very name the idea of a perpetual return to the purity and profoundness of a civilization higher and closer to truth than its own. This enthusiasm bends the linear human time (*tempus*) into the cyclic, "angelic" time (*aevum*) (Панчева 8) which turns backwards and forwards into the perfect circle of eternity – a cyclic pattern that perfectly fits into Plato's ever moving image of the everlasting, ideal Being⁶. The intense belief in this stimulated an

unprecedented longing for the wisdom of past times, an overwhelming aspiration to regain this ancient state of a glorious spiritual enlightenment. Antiquity, however, reached the Renaissance mainly in the form of a heterogeneous body of texts: philosophical illuminations and theological revelations were interwoven with historical, pseudo-historical and fictional accounts of lives and events all incorporated into a veritable mythology of ideas. The Renaissance thinker saw his role in synthesizing this variety of texts, synergizing all existing doctrines, thus purifying them to a meta-textual, yet at the same time, very textual indeed, all-encompassing, all-containing *book* of being, precisely the same way as the alchemist believed that he should "heal" the substance until he received pure gold (Панчева 37).

"There must be one only, if the created copy is to accord with the original" (Plato, *Timaeus* 79) postulates Plato in his universe – emanation of a divine artificer, in which the progenitor (*eidos*) impresses itself on the receptacle (*chora*) (Plato. *Timaeus* 92) and by this creates being in resemblance. The world hence is a mirror of the Demiurge and reflects Him in its unity: " True, without error, certain and most true: that which is above is as that which is below, and that which is below is as that which is above, to perform the miracles of the One Thing" (*The Emerald Table of Hermes Trismegistus*). Yet the image cannot be identical with the original. Book VII of Plato's *Republic* tells the allegory of the cave: like the people with chained legs and necks on the bottom of an underground den, we can only see the shadows of ourselves and the things that take place outside in the light, we can hear merely the echoes of sounds that come in through the opening. Similarly, in *Phaedon* Socrates compares human reality with living under the sea: seeing the sun, the moon and the stars through the water, we believe that this is the sky, but if one manages to rise high, high above to the very surface, he will catch a glimpse of another, better world uncorrupted by the corrosive power of the salty water (Qtd. Панчева 12).

But how is man to break his bonds, how is he to climb above his delusions? Suppose, the myth of the cave continues, that one of these wretched men is suddenly liberated and dragged up into daylight. Will he suffer sharp pains – the

deluge of brightness pouring into his eyes – will he be rendered blinder in the immediate glare of the sun than he was in the twilight of his den? Naturally:

he will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day."

(Plato, *The Republic*, 181)

A hierarchy of realities projecting through the space between the absolute truth and its corrupt copy manifests itself. It is to evolve into a "stairway to heaven" (*Scala Coeli*) for the Alexandrian neo-platonists, who constructed being as a succession of worlds descending from the Creator and reflecting up to a differing degree the intensity of His perfection. The body receives being from the soul, the soul from the intelligences, the intelligences from the divine One. These abstract worlds are, in fact, densely populated and strenuously organized. Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Celestial Hierarchies* describes the world of intelligences or angels: he arranges them in nine Orders (three superimposed triades): Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim; Powers, Virtues and Dominions; Principalities, Archangels and Angels (Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Celestial Hierarchies* 21). They reflect the nine Archetypes in God, each one corresponding to the property in God which it exhibits. Plato's mathematical distribution of soul⁷ anticipates Ptolemaic astronomy which places the earth in the middle of nine crystal spheres - the orbits of Luna (the moon), Mercury, Venus, Sol (the sun), Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the firmament (the sphere of the fixed stars) moving one within the other out of love for the *primum mobile*, and filling the essence with Pythagorean *harmonia mundi*. The elemental world, expectedly, is the most neatly ordered. It unfolds into human, animal, bird, fish, vegetal, and mineral hierarchies, all analogous to each other, presided by king, lion, eagle, dolphin, oak and gold, respectively, and descending down to the lowest modes of existence.

Now that the pages of the book are full, reassurance of so elaborate a creation is, naturally, desired. "The aim of Hierarchy" is already stated as "the

greatest possible assimilation to and union with God, and by taking Him as leader in all holy wisdom, to become like Him, so far as is permitted, by contemplating intently His most Divine Beauty" (Pseudo Dionysius. *The Celestial Hierarchies* 13). It is the intensity of this contemplation that breathes life into the *episteme*, it is through intense belief that the profusion of invisible strings holding this universe together is revealed. Yet it is the intense ambition to validate this profound knowledge, the urge that in modern times would take its place behind the cogwheels of science, that engenders the conviction that these strings can be manipulated and their influences exploited. "With God all things are possible. In God all things consist [...] I will seek to draw down influences, and to fill my soul with a new strength [...]" (Morley 162). The name of this new old strength is magic - the magic that was assimilated into the Renaissance *episteme* through the appetite of its architects for ancient wisdom, and subsequently brought about a completely different reading of the unified Renaissance *book* of being.

Around 1462 in Florence the already aged Cosimo Medici commissioned Marsilio Ficino to translate a collection of manuscripts from the Greek into Latin – it was the assembled at last complete works of Plato. Ficino had just started working on them when a monk named Leonardo da Pistoia, one of those many agents employed by the Medici to collect precious manuscripts, brought from Macedonia a copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. It contained fourteen out of the total fifteen treatises that have come down to us. In 1463 Cosimo asked Ficino to put aside Plato's works and to move to the ones ascribed at this time to Hermes Trismegistus, which he did and completed them in the following few months. Ficino himself tells about Cosimo's request in the dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici of his commentaries of Plotinus: "mihi Mercurium primo Termaximum, mox Platonem mandavit interpretandum" (Qtd. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 13). Retrospectively, scholars believe that Cosimo was making haste because he wanted to read the *Corpus Hermeticum* before he died, which indeed happened within the following year. This only affirms the impression that to these texts was assigned an extraordinarily great

importance, and a brief insight into what went under the label "Hermetic literature" should provide some clues why.

First of all, who is Hermes Trismegistus? Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance it was believed that he was a godlike sage who lived so far back in history that he was the one who gave the letters and laws to the Egyptians: "*Aegyptiis leges et litteras tradidisse*" (Cicero Qtd. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 43) – both a counterpart and contemporary of Moses. In its ambition to keep historical fact discrete from fiction, modern scholarship disperses this romantic image and places his person entirely on the mythological plain. The texts ascribed to him are roughly dated around the I-III centuries A.D. – their authorship remains uncertain. These works can be divided into two categories: philosophical like *Pimander (The Corpus Hermeticum)*, and *Asclepius* - passages from which were quoted in Latin by the early Church Father Lactantius⁸; and treatises on sympathetic and astrological magic. The philosophical works bear close relation to both Platonic tradition and the Scripture, they even make an ominous mention of the Son of God; and since they were believed to be produced long before Christ was born, or Plato ever wrote, they were considered divinely inspired. Consequently, Hermes was read as an excellent authority and this gave his occultist texts a very different reading. A long-expected link between religion and magic presented itself and placed man in a completely new light: "Nay more, if we must boldly speak the truth, the true Man is even higher than the gods, or at the [very] least, the gods and men are very whit in power - each with the other equal" (*The Corpus Hermeticum. The Key* 24). By nature *Pimander* is a myth of creation and fall but its credo is very different from that of Mosaic tradition:

Now the *Nous*, Father of all beings, being life and light, brought forth a Man similar to himself, whom he loved as his own child. For the Man was beautiful, reproducing the image of his Father: for it was indeed with his own form that God fell in love and gave over to him all his works. Now, when he saw the creation which the Demiurge had fashioned in the fire, the

Man wished also to produce a work, and permission to do it was given him by the Father. Having thus entered into the demiurgic sphere, in which he had full power, the Man saw the works of his brother, and the Governors fell in love with him, and each gave to him a part in their own rule. Then having learned their essence and having received participation in their nature, he wished to break through the periphery of the circles and to know the power of Him who reigns above the fire. Then Man, who had full power over the world of mortal beings and of animals, leant across the armature of the spheres, having broken through their envelopes, and showed to Nature below the beautiful form of God. When she saw that he had in him the inexhaustible beauty and all the energy of the Governors, joined to the form of God, Nature smiled with love, for she had seen the features of that marvellously beautiful form of Man reflected in the water and his shadow on the earth. And he having seen this form like to himself in Nature, reflected in the water, he loved her and wished to dwell with her. The moment he wished this he accomplished it and came to inhabit the irrational form. Then Nature having received her loved one, embraced him, and they were united, for they burned with love.

(The Corpus Hermeticum. The Shepherd of Men, Ch. XII-XIV)

Man, "a *magnum miraculum*, a being worthy of reverence and honour" (*Asclepius* Qtd. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 35), fashions his own fall with the creative power of a god, inherent from his Father, his carnality is not a punishment but a lover's embrace with Nature. The fruit of this communion is an intimate knowledge of her body, which is a mirroring image of the Progenitor: "From Will of God. [Nature] received the Word (*Logos*), and gazing upon the Cosmos Beautiful, did copy it, making herself into a cosmos" (*The Corpus Hermeticum. The Shepherd of Men*, 8). Just like his Father, Man fell in love with his own form, for he is yet another copy of the Creator. The difference lies in the code: the same Truth is encoded through one language in nature, through another in God, and through yet another in man. The

amorous contemplation of nature, deciphering her secrets, discovering patterns, establishing relations, grasping for its unity – is in its essence a contemplation of the marvellous image of the Deity. Yet, is not the most devout contemplation of God, the purest pursuit to lay open one's soul for a more perfect apprehension of His ways, indeed a disguised, mystical contemplation of Man? Is not the belief in an equal Original, Saint Anselm's "credo ut intelligam" (I believe in order to understand), a complex act of self-reflection? Is not the mirror world of the Renaissance, an elaborate trick to combine the points of view of the artist, the object of art and its gazer⁹, constructed in the hope that man can finally catch a glimpse of himself?

In 1486, at the age of 24, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola arrived in Rome with nine hundred theses from all philosophical traditions known so far to the Western world, and offered to prove in public debate that they are all reconcilable with one another. His opinions showed that his thought was "largely coloured by astrology, that he was favourable to natural magic, and that he had a penchant for such occult and esoteric literature as the Orphic hymns, Chaldean oracles, and Jewish cabala" (Thorndike Qtd. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 86). This, naturally, stirred the theological spirits of Rome and the great debate never took place. Yet, this caused the publishing of an Apology in the following 1487 which contained a large part of the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* - intended to preface Pico's argumentation. "That oration was to echo and re-echo throughout the Renaissance" (Yates, *Giordano Bruno* 86) fastening wings to the aspirations of inspired men. "A great miracle, Asclepius, is man," it opens quoting Hermes Trismegistus,

At last it seems to me I have come to understand why man is the most fortunate of creatures and consequently worthy of all admiration and what precisely is that rank which is his lot in the universal chain of Being - a rank to be envied not only by brutes but even by the stars and by minds beyond this world. It is a matter past faith and a wondrous one. Why should it not

be? For it is on this very account that man is rightly called and judged a great miracle and a wonderful creature indeed.

(Pico 223)

When the creation of the cosmos was completed, "the Craftsman kept wishing that there were someone to ponder the plan of so great a work, to love its beauty, and to wonder at its vastness" (Pico 224), so he created man his equal:

Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have We given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgement thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thine own nature. (Pico 224-25)

In the bosom of man the Father sowed the germs of all kinds of existence and it is up to each man which ones he will choose to cultivate: "If they be vegetative, he will be like a plant. If sensitive, he will become brutish. If rational, he will grow into a heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God"¹⁰ (Pico 225). The path upwards relies on "Bacchus, the leader of the Muses," who

by showing in his mysteries, that is, in the visible signs of nature, the invisible things of God to us who study philosophy, will intoxicate us with the fullness of God's house, in which, if we prove faithful, like Moses, hallowed theology shall come and inspire us with a double frenzy. For exalted to her lofty height, we shall measure therefrom all things that are and shall be and have been in indivisible eternity; and admiring their original beauty, like the seers of Phoebus, we shall become her own winged lovers. And at last, roused by ineffable love as by a sting, like burning Seraphim

rapt from ourselves, full of divine power we shall no longer be ourselves but shall become He Himself Who made us. (Pico 234)

The rise to divinity, hence, depends on an insight into the mystery of signification, a headlong immersion into the boiling surf where the surging powers of heavenly intelligence are eternally modelling the visible world. This is, however, the domain of a secret knowledge that transcended philosophy and over-brimmed the realm of theology. This is the path of a most intense belief in the *episteme* combined with the explorer's urge to test the routes and effects theoretically described. Pico, as Frances Yates observes (*Giordano Bruno*, 85), discovered a meaningful parallel between Hermes Trismegistus and Moses. Both of them presented their peoples with a version of the Creation myth and a powerful body of theological philosophy, yet more importantly, they both handed down to the elect a key to knowing God. Hermes left his texts on natural and astral magic: "The virtue of the soul is Gnosis. For he who knows, he good and pious is, and still while on the earth divine" (*The Corpus Hermeticum, The Key* 9). Moses left what was reputedly given him on Mount Sinai together with the written law - the Jewish Cabala¹¹.

Hermetic teaching relies on the methods of sympathetic magic. Sympathies are the network of relations, the web of powers that holds all the world together, and provides the communication between separate parts. In astral magic, for instance, the sympathies are seen as a continual effluvia of influences pouring down into the world:

The stars are the matrix of all the plants and every star in the sky is only the spiritual prefiguration of a plant, such that it represents that plant, and just as each herb or plant is a terrestrial star looking up at the sky, so also every star is a celestial plant, its spiritual form, which differs from the terrestrial plant in matter alone... the celestial plants and herbs are turned towards the earth and look directly down upon the plants they have procreated, imbuing them with some particular virtue. (Qtd. Foucault 33)

These influences apply not only to the vegetal sphere, but to the mineral, animal, and human ones as well - every object in the material world is full of occult sympathies streaming downwards from the star on which it depended. It was believed that they could be explored and exploited by a magician with sufficient knowledge. If the power of Saturn was needed, the magician had to use the plants, stones, metals, animals, etc. that were connected with Saturn. Their belonging to Saturn was determined either according to their properties: melancholy is one of the major Saturnian features - so opium is a veritable Saturnian plant; or through looking for signatures by which the possessor marked his possession: **I ♁ ΛΜΧΞΩ** these are Saturnian signs each of which seen as a characteristic feature of a herb, bird, mineral, etc. gives reason to the magician to enlist it in his arsenal of categorisation. This direction of thinking developed into the practices of image making. If the astral sympathies present themselves in signs, then it should be possible to manipulate them through signs of our creation inscribed on the right material and at the right astrological moment. In this way the influences of the given star are captured for later use and talismans are made. "Two images of Saturn:

'The form of a man with a crow's face and foot, sitting on a throne, having in his right hand a spear and in his left a lance or an arrow.' The form of a man standing on a dragon, cloathed in black and holding in his right hand a sickle and in his left a spear.' (*Picatrix* Qtd. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*)

Stars can be considered also in their constellations, most importantly in the twelve constellations of the zodiac. In Egyptian astrology each zodiac sign has three decans, or gods, each presiding over ten of the 360 degrees of the full circle of the year. This is mirrored further in the cycle of day and night, so every moment of each day and night is spent under the auspices of the respective god. All these deities have an image (sometimes several) through which the adept can regulate their influences:

In the first face of *Cancer* ascendeth the form of a young Virgin, adorned with fine cloathes, and having a Crown on her head; it giveth acuteness of senses, subtilty of wit, and the love of men: in the second face ascendeth a man cloathed in comely apparel, or a man and woman sitting at the table and playing; it bestoweth riches, mirth, gladness, and the love of women: in the third face ascendeth a man a Hunter with his lance and horne, bringing out dogs for to hunt; the signification of this is the contention of men, the pursuing of those who fly, the hunting and possessing of things by arms and brawlings. (Agrippa, *Book Two* xxxvii)

There is a legend told in the Arabian *Picatrix*¹² of the ancient city Adocentyn, which was built by Hermes Trismegistus. It was twelve miles long and around its circumference the Magus-King placed engraved images and talismans of all Art with such knowledge and skill that by their power the inhabitants were made virtuous and free from all wickedness and harm (323). It appears then that the visual arts can be seen in the context of natural and astral magic as a form of enchantment themselves.

Cabala has a theoretical and a practical aspect. The theoretical one is laid down in the *Sepher Yetzirah*, the Hebrew Book of Formation as the doctrine of the ten ineffable Sephiroth and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Sephiroth are the "the ten names most common to God and in their entirety they form his one great Name" (Scholem Qtd. Yates, *Giordano Bruno* 92). Of the letters: three mothers, seven doubles and twelve simple, God created the world. Out of the three mothers, Aleph, Mem and Shin, proceeded the three fundamental elements: air, water and fire. From the seven doubles, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tau, formed the seven planets and due to their double nature, each of them brought forth a virtue and its negation: Life and Death, Peace and War, Wisdom and Folly, Riches and Poverty, Grace and Indignation, Fertility and Solitude, Power and Servitude. The twelve simple letters, Héh, Vau, Zain, Cheth, Teth, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samech, Oin, Tzaddi and Qoph, gave birth to the twelve signs of the zodiac,

and also to the twelve months of the year (See *Sepher Yetzirah* Ch. 1-5). This is just the beginning and merely point out the direction of a whole tradition which aims to prove that the creation of all things can be seen through the Hebrew alphabet and arithmetical combination. The second important feature of Cabalism is the importance assigned to angels or divine spirits as intermediaries throughout the separate spheres of being - as teachers in interpreting the secrets or as messengers from the Progenitor. They are organized in hierarchies to which directly correspond other hierarchies of evil angels or demons.

Practical Cabala teaches that since the world was created out of the Word of God, it is in the Word of God that men should search for the ultimate truth. A textual edifice of the divine Word are the Scriptures – of heavenly authorship, they must possess extraordinary power. They cannot be read, however, as ordinary human texts, because their rhetorical value can easily be surpassed by many literary texts; so they must be seen as a cryptogram. Just as angels were thought to be men by the unenlightened, so Lord's wisdom is concealed from the eyes of the uninitiated in the words and sentences of the Old Testament. The mission of the Cabalist is described in *Sepher Yetzirah*, as the necessity to "restore the Word to its Creator, and replace Him who formed it upon His throne" (I.5). There are three methods to examine the text for hidden meaning: The first one, *gematria*, had three versions: arithmetical, figurative and architectonic. Like in Old Greek, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has also numerical value. By the simplest forms of arithmetical *gematria* the letters of a word are added up as numbers and the sum calculated; it is believed that another word the letters of which gave the same number, could be substituted for the first one. Figurative *gematria* derived revelational interpretations from the shapes of the letters used in sacred writing. Architectonic *gematria* constructed words from the numbers given in the Scripture. The second method, *notaricon*, develops a word out of each letter of the words in the text, as if it consists of many abbreviations, or out of the first and last letter of a word, or else out of the first letters of successive words. The third method, *themura*, uncovered mysteries by reorganising the letters

of words into sacred anagrams – *zeruph* (See Morley 71-73). The Cabalist's major belief is that with the help of special names, words or symbols that were reached through mystical interpretation, one could receive counsel or help from God through the angels.

In his twenty-six *Conclusiones Magicae* Pico attempts to combine natural magic and Cabala into one mutually complementary system. He starts stating: "Magia naturalis licita est, & non prohibita" (Qtd. Yates *Giordano Bruno* 87), it is indeed nothing but "pars practica scientiae naturalis" (Ibid. 88), which simply uncovers the link between earth and heaven. However, natural magic is not complete in itself and no significant miracle can be performed without its supreme, heavenly part – Cabala: "Nulla potest esse operatio Magica alicuius efficaciae, nisi annexum habeat opus Cabalae explicitum uel implicitum" (Ibid. 91). Thus, a truly ambitious seeker of the truth shall marry both teachings and perhaps many others, and so attired in the many-coloured robe of unified divine wisdom can peep into the higher palace of the Lord.

In 1486, the same year when Pico was ready to defend his opinions of all the world's knowledge in Rome, a son was born in the noble house of Nettesheim in Cologne, the town in which Albertus Magnus had professed and died two hundred years before. The name of this child was Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa. A bright and promising youth, he enrolled in 1499 in the Faculty of Arts at Cologne University and received his License in Arts in 1502. From his *Epistles* (Qtd. Morley 25) we know that at the age of twenty he became secretary to the Emperor Maximilian I and studied at the University of Paris, where he made himself the centre of a knot of students who formed a secret society of theosophists dedicated to the study of the mysteries of knowledge. This sort of associations, in which curious and learned men assisted one another in the search of wisdom, had by this time become numerous and numerous (Morley 58). It is documented that Cornelius Agrippa was employed on secret service more than once both by the German court and by the Emperor himself, but great or small his diplomatic secrets were well kept, only one account of

one of his adventures has come down to us in his letters¹³. It tells us about a wild and daring enterprise in which Cornelius Agrippa ended up besieged in a tower near Villarodona in Spain and vanished miraculously with all his companions in arms around Saint John the Baptist's feast in midsummer 1508.

There is a complex network of political intrigues and speculations behind this story, which for us are irrelevant, suffice it to say that in all his actions the young Cornelius Agrippa, defended the interests of his Emperor. At the head of four brave men he was supposed to penetrate deep into revolt-ridden Catalonia, seize the castle of Tarragon, or else Fuerto Negro the home of his friend Juanetin Bascara de Gerona, and keep it for few days until the Baron comes with reinforcements. Almost immediately after the arrival of the host at Tarragon a messenger brought tidings that Juanetin was captured and they must not expect any help from him. It was a matter of hours before the hordes of peasants would reach the castle and Cornelius Agrippa knew that he had too few people to defend it. He was advised to make haste to a tower nearby which was built at the foot of a vertical rocky ridge and surrounded by marshes with only one solid strip of land to be reached by. When they got to the tower they found there only the keeper and his boy. Still it was easier to defend a narrow passage than the almost ruined ramparts of the old fort. It was not long before their enemies arrived. The companions managed to beat down the initial attack with their muskets, but the peasants encircled the marshes and built their camps there determined to starve the trapped host into surrender. Two weeks passed and the provisions of the besieged were almost gone, when the keeper who spent his time examining every inch of the rock behind the tower in the hope of finding a way out, fell upon the narrow mouth of a cave which led high above in the mountain from where the ridge could be overcome. On the other side the steep slope dropped into an enormous lake with mountain-cold water, on the opposite bank of which, however, stood their sanctuary – the Abbey of Villarodona. The companions realised that the only way to make it was to somehow send a word to the Abbot, so that he could command two boats to wait for them under the rocks. The resourceful

wit of Cornelius Agrippa devised the way to do this, he took the keeper's boy, shaved his head, and with ashes, mud, and his medical ointments counterfeited on his skin all over the signs of leprosy, and bound to his neck the leprosy bell; then he mounted him on the back of the old ox his father kept, and asked the keeper to lead him during the night through the marshes to a place remote from the tower. One can assume that when the boy emerged on the next morning before the peasants, they did not want to know whence he came or where he was heading, they just quickly moved to make space for his passage. And when after some time the besiegers found out that their prisoners had miraculously vanished, they most probably found it easier to explain this with the intervention of supernatural powers and evil spirits rather than with their encounter of a little leper the other day.

On his return Cornelius Agrippa was knighted but nevertheless decided to change the sword for the quill and returned to his passionate search for knowledge. 1509 found him lecturing at the University of Dôle, with the support of the University's chancellor and Archbishop of Besançon - Antoine de Vergy. His courses were so highly thought of that even Parliament councillors attended them. He dedicated some lectures and a treatise to the grace of Princess Margaret, daughter of Maximilian I and governess of Dôle. By 1510 he became Professor of divinity even though the dark clouds of hatred were already gathering on the horizon of his bright career from the direction of the Franciscan order of Burgundy. It was during these two years that Cornelius Agrippa produced his grand opus - the book that would condemn the remaining part of his life, the book that would inject him directly into the Faust legend: *Of Occult Philosophy: Three Books of Magick (De Occulta Philosophia)*.

The work is an amazing in its scope synthesis of the doctrines of Plato, Pliny, Apuleius, Alexandrian Platonists: Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus; Aristotle, the Pythagoreans, *The Orphic Hymns*, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Avicenna, Albertus Magnus, Cabala and some others, from all of which Cornelius

Agrippa claims to have removed all darkness, and composed three compendious books of Magic for:

Magick is a faculty of wonderfull vertue, full of most high mysteries, containing the most profound Contemplation of most secret things, together with the nature, power, quality, substance, and vertues thereof, as also the knowledge of whole nature, and it doth instruct us concerning the differing, and agreement of things amongst themselves, whence it produceth its wonderfull effects, by uniting the vertues of things through the application of them one to the other, and to their inferior sutable subjects, joyning and knitting them together thoroughly by the powers, and vertues of the superior Bodies. This is the most perfect and chief Science, that sacred and sublimer kind of Philosophy, and lastly the most absolute perfection of all most excellent Philosophy. (Agrippa, *Book One*, ch. ii)

"Wise men" Agrippa argues,

conceive in no way irrational to ascend by degrees through each world to the Author of All Worlds, and not only to admire the more exalted things, but to draw down their virtues from above. They search, therefore, the powers of the elementary world by studying physics and the many combinations of things natural, they inquire into the harmonies of the celestial world by studying the mysteries of numbers and proportion, and applying to a contemplation of the stars the rules discovered by astrologers. Finally, they ratify and confirm this knowledge by a study of the intelligences working in the world, and of the sacred mysteries. (Ibid. Ch. i)

Thus, the first book is dedicated to Natural Magic and, as Morley observes, is predominantly Platonic; the second to Celestial Magic, which combines mainly Pythagorean and Hermetic influences; and the third to Cabalistic Magic, or in Cornelius Agrippa's own words: "Ceremoniall". All these philosophies are, however,

modified and fused into one unified system, under the forming heat of a truthful and devout study of the Gospel (Morley 209).

The first book starts with the theory of the four elements and moves on to the occult virtues of things and how they are infused by the Ideas through the World Soul and the rays of the stars. The following chapters offer a categorisation of the animals, plants and stones, belonging to each planet and the signs of the zodiac; and explain how the signatures, seals, or characters, of the stars are to be found imprinted on the objects or living organisms attributed to them. Then we find out how by natural things and their virtues we may draw forth and attract the influences of Celestial bodies. There follow chapters on fascination, binding and enchantment; the preparation of perfumes, suffumigations, unctions, love-medicines, poisons and rings; the importance of light, colours, candles and lamps; discussions of psychology, divination, the interpretation of auguries and gestures; geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy, pyromancy. The might of Orphic hymns is described as one of the most efficacious resources of natural magic, depending on the right use of words and verses "aptly and duly made according to the rule of the stars, and being full of signification and meaning, and opportunely pronounced with vehement affection", which "by the violence of imagination, do confer a very great power" (Agrippa, *Book One* Ch. lxxi).

The second book deals with the genuine fusion point between the traditions of natural-astral magic and the Cabala – mathematics. The belief that everything that is done by natural virtue is governed by numbers (weight, measures) confirmed the Pythagorean statement that " Mathematicall things are more formall then Naturall, so also they are more efficacious: as they have less dependence in their being, so also in their operation" (Agrippa, *Book Two* Ch. i). The first chapters discuss the virtues of numbers and of number groups, which naturally combines with the numeric-linguistic function of the letters of the Hebrew and Greek alphabets. The study of mathematics leads to its neighboring disciplines: geometry, music and astronomy; respectively, to the magic value of geometrical figures, the harmony of

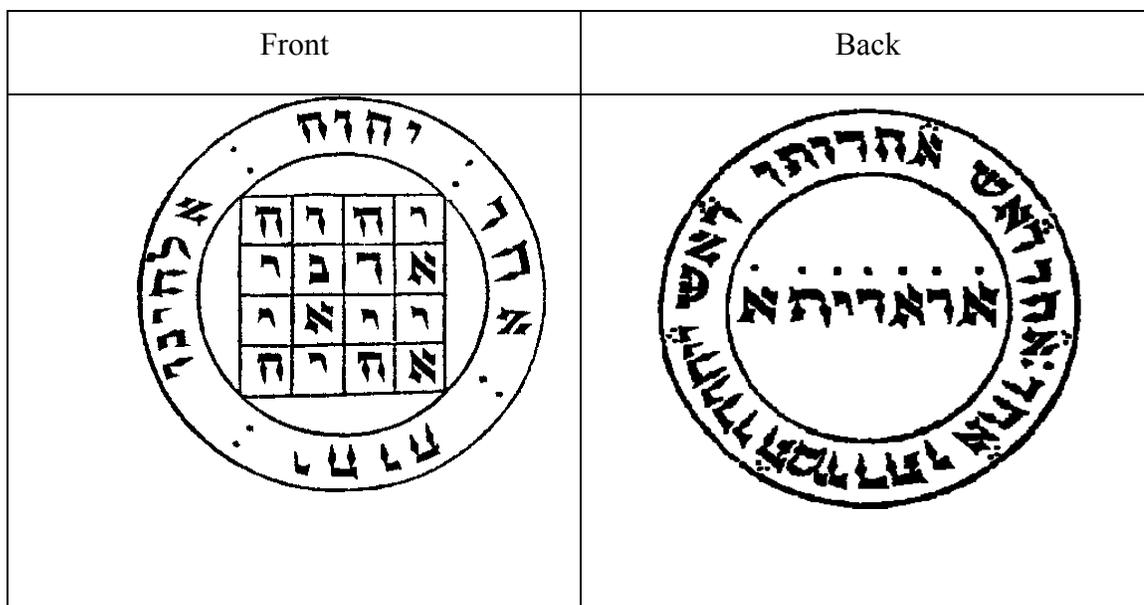
the soul, and the calculation of astrological influences. A large part of this book is dedicated to tablets, seals and images of the planets, the zodiac signs, and the thirty-six decan demons. However,

such images work nothing, unless they be so vivified that either a naturall or Celestiall, or Heroicall, or animasticall, or demoniacal, or angelicall vertue be in them, or assistant to them. But who can give a soul to an image, or make a stone to live, or mettall, or wood, or wax? and who can raise out of stoness children unto Abraham? Certainly this Arcanum doth not enter into an Artist of a stiffe neck; neither can he give those things which hath them not. No body hath them but he who doth (the Elements being restrained, nature being overcome, the Heavens being over-powered) transcend the progress of Angels, and comes to the very Archetype it self, of which being then made a cooperator may do all things, as we shall speak afterwards. (Agrippa, *Book Two* Ch. 1)

The third book rises to the mysteries of divine religion, to the *prisca magia* which is in organic continuity with celestial and elemental magic and is the only thing that is believed to provide the magician with the divine inspiration he needs and guard him against the demons and evil spirits stirred by the lower modes of enchantment. The first chapters introduce the Three Guides in religion: Love, Hope and Faith, through which the magician should know the true God. It is argued that the ancient philosophers, being representatives of a Gentile magical tradition were illuminated as to the unity of the Father, the Trinity, the birth of Christ, using here extensively Pico's arguments from the *Conclusiones*. The divine names are revealed to the pious magus so he can use them to communicate with the intelligences, perform miracles and heal men:

A sacred seal more efficacious against any diseases of man, or any grieves whatsoever, in whose foreside are the four squared names of God, so subordinated to one another in a square, that from the highest to the lowest

those most holy names or seales of the Godhead do arise, whose intention is inscribed in the circumferential circle, but on the backside is inscribed the seven lettered name *Araritha*, and his interpretation is written about, the verse from which it is extracted, even as you see it here described:



But all must be done in most pure gold, or Virgin Parchment, pure, clean and unspotted, also with Inke made for this purpose, of the smoak of consecrated wax lights, or incense, and holy water; The actor must be purified and cleansed by sacrifice, and have an infallible hope, a constant faith, and his mind lifted up to the most high God, if he would surely obtain this Divine power. In like manner against the affrightments and mischief of evil spirits and men, and what dangers soever, either of journey, waters, enemies or arms. (Agrippa, *Book Three* Ch. xi)

The influx of virtue from the divine names comes through the meditation of angels, hence, the tongues of angels and their speaking among themselves and with people are discussed. A manifold fusion of the hierarchies of the the spheres, the sephirot and the angels is offered furtheron. This is followed by a lengthy review of Cabalist

methods of derivation of sacred names and mysteries from the letters and words of the Scriptures, illustrated by extensive tables. How good spirits may be called up by us, and how evil spirits may be overcome by us is disclosed together with comments on the bonds of spirits and their adjurations. A sequence of chapters is dedicated to the four types of "phrensie" (ecstasy), projection of divine intelligence into the souls of men, which transmutes the human mind to God: from the Muses, from Dionysius, from Apollo, and from Venus. There follow discussions on prophetic dreams, oracles, sacrifices, consecrations, ceremonies, abstinence, fasting, solitariness, and holiness.

After Cornelius Agrippa finished his book he sent the manuscript to his most respected friend and teacher Johannes Trithemius, the abbot of Spanheim. Trithemius, as his much circulated *Steganographia* shows, was himself deeply interested in the search for the ultimate truth along the mysterious paths of secret knowledge. He was so overwhelmed by young Cornelius Agrippa's text that he kept the servant by whom it arrived until he had read it through. Then he sent him back with his good word: "I wondrously at your more than vulgar learning, That you being so young should penetrate into such secrets as have been hidden from most learned men, and not only clearly, and truly, but also properly, and elegantly set them forth", he wrote, "Your work, which no learned man can sufficiently commend, I approve of." (Agrippa, *Appendices, Trithemius' letter to Agrippa*). The wise man knew, however, that what earned his lavish praise could easily earn the aversion of others, so he warned his young friend: "Yet this one rule I advise you to observe, that you communicate vulgar secrets to vulgar friends, but higher and secret to higher, and secret friends only. Give Honey to an Ox, Sugar to a Parrot only; understand my meaning, lest you be trod under the Oxen's feet, as oftentimes it falls out." (Ibid. loc. cit.)

Cornelius Agrippa took his advice and even though he made his book familiar to his friends in manuscript, it remained unpublished until twenty-one years later. By this time, however, the wayward currents of his life had dampened his

belief in man's use of true knowledge. In 1530, under the motto: "Nihil scire felissima vita"¹⁴, was published his *On the Uncertainty and Vanity of Sciences and Arts (De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum)*. Modern scholarship considers this work a scepticist classic, yet it seems to me that Agrippa's bitterness is directed not against the overall epistemological optimism of the age, but against the further profanation of the essentially sublime art of Magic, to remedy which, he wrote *Of Occult Philosophy* twenty years earlier:

Now the cause, as I conceive is no other then this, because by a certain fatall depravation of times, and men, many false Philosophers crept in, and these under the name of Magicians, heaping together through various sorts of errors and factions of false Religions, many cursed superstitions and dangerous Rites, and many wicked Sacrileges, out of Orthodox Religion, even to the perfection of nature, and destruction of men, and injury of God, set forth very many wicked, and unlawfull books, such as we see carryed about in these dayes, to which they have by stealth prefixed the most honest name, and title of Magick. They therefore by this sacred title of Magick, hoped to gain credit to their cursed and detestable fooleries. Hence it is that this name of Magick, formerly honorable, is now in these dayes become most odious to good and honest men, and accounted a Capital crime. (Agrippa, Appendices, Agrippa's letter to Trithemius)

It is certainly not accidental that Cornelius Agrippa's opinion voiced here echoes Pico's *Oration*, in which along with the praise of the genuinely wise man, the young Count of Mirandola raises a warning finger before the enemies of knowledge and those who profane the true art of magic:

Rather, it has come to the point where none is now deemed wise, alas, save those who make the study of wisdom a mercenary profession, and where it is possible to see the chaste Pallas, who was sent among men as the gift of the gods, hooted, hissed, and whistled off the stage; and not having anyone to

love or to befriend her, unless by selling herself, as it were, she repays into the treasury of her 'lover' even the ill-gained money received as the poor price of her tarnished virginity. (Pico 238)

Not only commercially determined, but also abortively futile in their approach, "lawful" science and scholarship cannot offer a passage to the ultimate truth that spreads beyond the reach of their prelimited grasp:

You tie down free inquiry, you chain our spirits to the ground; you claim to have all wisdom, and beyond it lies an undiscovered world in God's Word and His Works. Hear me cry. Out upon your knowledge. You who claim to be the fountain-heads of wisdom, are not so wise as you account yourselves. I can say, more you shall find in praise of an ass than of any one of you. (*On the Vanity of Sciences and Arts* Qtd. Morley 152)

This text ends with the *Digression in Praise of the Ass*, yet it was under the maculate oxen hoofs that Cornelius Agrippa was to suffer his lamentable end. Now, as we may read in his last work *Complaint against the Calumny of the Monks and Schoolmen* (Morley 208), against him were the Emperor, the monks of Louvain and the scholars of the Sorbonne. The three books of *Of Occult Philosophy* were finally published in the first months of 1533 without information on place or publisher. In July 1533 Cornelius Agrippa's correspondence suddenly ended and the following events of his life were described by his pupil Johann Wierus. The Dominicans continued their prosecution and urged Charles V to sentence Agrippa to death for heresy. He had to flee to France where before long he was put in prison. He was released with the help of his still loyal friends and made his way towards Lyon but never appeared there. He was last seen in the following year in Grenoble as a guest in the house of a friendly noble family from where he departed in good health. In 1545 we read a little note: "Henricus Cornelius Agrippa ab Nettesheym a conciliis et archivis Indiatrii sacrae Caesareae Maiestatis armatae militiae equitis aurati et utriusque iuris doctoris qui intra decennium aut circiter Gratianopoli in Gallia ad

summam paupertatem redactus obiit". It is a mystery when and how his highly impoverished life expired, what we know is that his body rests in a Dominican convent and on the tombstone that marks his grave the inscription reads:

This Tomb scarcely the Graces keep, but the black daughters of hell; not the muses, but the furies with snakes spread abroad. Alecto collects the ashes, mixes them with aconite, and gives the welcome offering to be devoured by The Stygian Dog who now cruelly pursues through the paths of orcus, and snatches at that of which when alive he was the companion, and he leaps up at him. And he salutes the furies because he had known them all, and he addresses each one by her own name. O wretched Arts, which afford only this convenience that as a known guest he can approach the Stygian waters. (Qtd. Morley 320)

Chapter Two

THE OVERREACHER

*Our souls whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous activities of the world,
And measure every wandering planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest.*

(Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* 113)

The previous chapter displayed that the magnificent belief in the possibility of man's epistemological enterprise, his hope that through experiencing the universe and projecting his intellect to stretch out at the infinity of the Supreme Being, he could gain the formative power to know and construct himself, can be paralleled by the painful awareness of an *impasse* before cognition. The realization of this impossibility has developed into a myth, a pastiche unfathomable in its multifacedness, shaped by the imagination in the course of time; its unifying objective being to translate the palpability of an imposing bound before the endeavor of aspiration. In a textualized being, where the increasing significance of vertical hierarchies asserts itself, as if to contest the linearity of time, this deadlock is naturally perceived as a headlong fall. Heedless of his father's warnings

Icarus flew too high on his waxen wings and fell to his destruction in the dissolving waters of the Aegean sea. Thunderstricken, the race of Titans, who dared to question the superiority of the Olympian gods, was doomed to an eternal fall down through space. Similarly, the fairest of the angels, Lucifer, most dearly loved by God, for his aspiring pride and insolence was thrown from the face of Heaven with his rebellious legions to pave the path of man's subsequent fall. In concord with this, the most intense form of epistemological optimism was often seen as an abominable act of overreaching and hence firmly proscribed:

For divers men having attained to a great perfection in learning, and yet remaining overnare (alas) of the spirit of regeneration and frutes thereof: finding all natural thinges common, aswell to the stupide pedants as unto them, they assaie to vendicate vnto them a greater name, by not onlie knowing the course of things heavenlie, but likewise to clim to the knowledge of things to come thereby. Which, at the first face appearing lawfull vnto them, in respect the ground thereof seemeth to proceed of natural causes onlie: they are so allured thereby, that finding their practize to proove true in sundry things, they studie to know the cause thereof: and so mounting from degree to degree, vpon the slipperie and vncertain scale of curiositie; they are at last entised, that where lawfull artes or sciences failes to satisfie their restles mindes, even to seeke to that black and vnlawfull science of Magie. (King James I, *Daemonologie*. 1597¹⁵)

In the previous chapter the "magus" was seen rather as a "μάγος". When it came first into the Greek the word signified what it did originally in Persian: a priest in service of the gods; one who according to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, like Pherecydes of Syros and certain other poets uses myths and allegories to assay the unity of the primary generator, the Supreme Good (Haar 50). In this sense magic can be nothing but the crown of all sciences, the highest, purest pursuit of knowledge, the glue behind the unity of everything, the grid against which all the constituents

are ordered, the link between the outmost edge of man's understanding and the eternal truth of God. Ironically, however, this is also the very place where the impassability of the ground manifests itself. The tension caused by this manifestation is so strong that it threatens to disperse the unity of the whole system, as we know it. It appears that the coexistence of systematic knowledge of the material world, an all-enlightening, all-containing divine truth, and the leap of faith that bridges them is impossible. To preserve the mutual existence of at least two of the elements, one needs to be sacrificed. If there is to remain the Deity and that secret knowledge which leads to a full understanding of His infinite being, then it appears our knowing of the tangible universe is faulty; thus, it seems, we must dispense of our structures of "lawful" knowledge. Perhaps angels blind with jealousy created the world evil only to corrupt man and there imprison in a mortal coil that exuberant beauty, *ennoia*, our procreator's first thought, and leave to man only this last hope – that a helping *gnosis*, a mystic recognition, can lead his way out to his Father. Or else, if the structure should remain married to the glory of man's aspiration, then we must dispense of God: marvel at our own creations and see ourselves reflected in our deeds; the hierarchies of ascension are all gone, but we can build high towers on earth's firm ground in their stead. And yet, if man's world should exist bathing in the benevolent beams of Almighty's life-giving breath, then we must, logically, not reach the state from which to question His authority. The splendor of highest curiosity, else magic, needs be dogmatized and downcast, as Milton's Raphael answered to Adam's remarkably Renaissance curiosity:

To ask or search I blame thee not; for Heaven
Is as the Book of God before thee set [...] [yet]
Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid:
Leave them to God above; him serve and fear...
Joy thou in what he gives to thee, this Paradise
And thy fair Eve; Heaven is for thee too high
To know what passes there. Be lowly wise;
Think only what concerns thee and thy being;

Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there
Live, in what state, condition, or degree,
Contented that this far hath been revealed
Not of Earth only, but of highest Heaven.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VIII, 66-178)

The rebellious self of our glorious grandsire of humanity immediately shows through a pretended piety in the form of his bitingly ironic answer:

How fully hast thou satisfied me, pure
Intelligence of Heaven, Angel serene,
And freed from intricacies, taught to live
The easiest way, nor with perplexing thoughts
To interpret the sweet of life, from which
God hath bid dwell far off all anxious cares,
And not molest us, unless we ourselves
Seek them with wandering thoughts, and notions vain!

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VIII, 179-186)

One Buddhist koan tells us about the master who holds his disciple's head in the waters of a lake long until little by little the bubbles of air cease to appear on the surface; in the last moment the master pulls the disciple's head from the water, breathes air into his lungs to save his life and tells him that the only way to know the truth is to long for it as intensely as he had just longed for the air to breathe (Barthes 26). The absence of a passage to the ultimate truth can be compared with a hand that holds a man's head under the water, and while little by little the oxygen is running out and his lungs are painfully contracting, the mind loses its firm grasp on reality and in its overwhelming desire to breathe constructs a new truth. *Agnosia* - the awareness that no finite knowledge can fully comprehend the Infinite One - already contains the germ of darkness: because darkness is the lack of light, yet darkness is also identical with the excess of light – between the two of which stretches an octave of light (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, Ch. I). For a creature that sees

only in the light, however, the two extremities of darkness may converge for it is said that:

He who has made darkness His secret place [...] is super-essentially exalted above created things, and reveals Himself in His naked Truth to those alone who pass beyond all that is pure or impure, and ascend above the topmost attitudes of holy things, and who, leaving behind them all divine light and sound and heavenly utterances, plunge into the Darkness where trully dwells, as the Oracles declare, the One who is beyond all. (Ibid. 4)

There on the verge of light, ready to plunge into the darkness of his overpowering ambition, we find in all his glory and all his misery a semi-mythical figure - Faust.

In 1587 the German printer Johann Spies, a pious Lutheran, collected a body of German folk tales about Johannes Faust¹⁶, edited them and published them in Frankfurt in a volume known as *Das Faustbuch*. There are several records of actual early-sixteenth-century Faustus. A Johannes Faust took a divinity degree at Heidelberg in 1509. Two years earlier the Abbot of Würzburg had warned a friend against a Georgius Sabellicus Faustus junior, a necromancer, astrologer and magus secundus. It is suggested that Sabellicus adopted the name Faustus from St. Clement's *Homilies*. Two of the stories, compiled in *Das Faustbuch*, are about a John Faust of Knütlingen. There are also an historical account of a Faustus, who "died of strychnine poisoning, which leaves the body twisted and deformed - a circumstance that allowed writers to dwell on the grotesque savagery of the devil's exactement of his fee" according to their agreement (Brockbank 12). The theme of a compact with the devil derives most probably from the sixth-century story of Theophilus of Syracuse, who seems to have been unjustly deprived of his archdeaconship. It was believed that due to this he sold himself to the devil by signing a compact in his own blood and forsook God and all the saints; but because he did not abjure the Virgin, he was finally saved by her.

A more interesting aspect of the Faust legend is how episodes from the lives of prominent people of the times were immersed into it and were utterly transformed and hyperbolized. The *Faustbook's* numerous advertences to the peregrinations and

the undeservedly ill fame of Cornelius Agrippa has filled many pages (See Butler and Yates among others), this is why I would like to compare here only one, yet very representative, relationship between a comparatively short Faust story and a scene from the life of Johann Reuchlin, considered by many the father of the Reformation, for the fact that both Luther and Erasmus had instruction from him, which makes even more paradoxical the inclusion of a reference to events of his life into the *Faustbook*:

He was detained once in an inn when it was raining very heavily, and of course, had his book with him. The rain had driven into the common room a large number of country people, who were making a great noise. To quiet them Reuchlin called for a piece of chalk, and drew with it a circle on the table before which he sat. Within the circle he then drew a cross, and also within it, on the right side of the cross, he placed with great solemnity a cup of water, on the left, he stuck a knife upright. Then placing a book - doubtless a Hebrew one [It was known that Reuchlin was indeed very interested in the Hebrew Cabala] - within the mysterious circle, he began to read, and the rustics who had gathered around him, with their mouths agape, patiently waited for the consequence of all this conjuration. The result was that Reuchlin finished comfortably the chapter he was reading without being distressed even by a whisper of disturbance. (Morley 87)

In the Faust legend the curious little anecdote, which displays hardly more than the character of a good-humored scholar, transmutes into a manifestation of potentially dangerous supernatural powers:

Doctor TTFaustus went into an Inne, wherein were many tables full of Clownes, the which were tippling kan after kan of excellent wine, and to bee short, they were all dronken, and as they sate, they so sung and hallowed, that one could not heare a man speake for them; this angered Doctor Faustus; wherefore hee said to those that had called him in, marke my masters, I will shew you a merrie iest, the Clownes continuing still hallowing and singing,

he so coniured them, that their mouthes stoode as wide open as it was possible for them to hold them, and neuer a one of them was able to close his mouth againe: by and by the noyse was gone, the Clownes notwithstanding looked earnestly one vpon another, and wist not what was happened; wherefore one by one they went out, and so soone as they came without, they were as well as euer they were: but none of them desired to goe in any more. (*The English Faustbook*, Ch. xxxvii)

It is easy to assume that given sufficient historical clues, all the Faust stories can be shown to relate to actual events in a similar way, yet the great mystical power of the text lies not only in its ability to reflect other texts and tangible events, but in its capacity to project itself into life and determine what happens there: rather than "holding the mirror up to nature", the author would attempt, through his text, to make nature mirror his own will. In terms of this *circulation* the Faust myth, considered along the line of its development and transformations, has still a lot to offer¹⁷ to scholars, but for the purposes of this study we must concentrate on the English scene.

In 1592 the translation of *Das Faustbuch – The English Faustbook: The Historie of the damnable life, and the deserved death of Doctor Iohn Faustus* was published in London to be sold "by Edward White, dwelling at the little North doore of Paules, at the sign of the Gun". P. F. Gent., even though anonymous, presents himself in his rendition of the text as a widely travelled man who displays an excellent education and a taste for the topical contentious issues in the philosophy of the times - most certainly he really was a man of leisure. And yet the first exceedingly powerful re-creation of this popular myth belongs to Christopher Marlowe and follows directly the translation of P. F. Gent. It transports the world of Faust and his problematic nature to another dimension of art - the theatre.

Theatre has a very special place in Renaissance hermeneutics: it appears as a mirror set in front of a world, which is itself a complex system of mirrors. The world is a stage but the stage is also the world. Very much like the Scriptures for the Cabalist it teaches the spectator the patterns of a transcendental semiosis, how to

decipher from his own artistic reflection, an idealized, a divinized image of himself; and how projecting this image back into life, to gain the formative power to completely re-fashion himself. Theatre contains in itself a Velasquez-like meta-stage of illumination in which the roles of painter, model and viewer merge into an aspiration for a higher form of existence:

Then, as he of gods the greatest, embracing all things in his might, is all things, they saw man, Jupiter's mime, be all things also. He would change himself so as to appear under the mask of a plant, acting a simple life without any power of sensation. Soon after, he with drew and returned on the stage as a moral satirist, brought into the shape of thousand wild beasts: namely, the angry and raging lion, the rapacious and devouring wolf, the fierce and wild boar, the cunning little fox, the wistful and filthy sow, the timid hare, the envious dog, the stupid donkey. After doing this, he was out of sight for a short time; then the curtain was drawn back and he returned a man, prudent, faithful, just, human, kindly, and friendly, who went about the cities with the others, held the authority and obeyed in turn, cared for the public interest and welfare, and was finally in every way a political and social being. The gods were not expecting to see him in more shapes when, behold, he was remade into one of their own race, surpassing the nature of man and relying entirely upon a very wise mind. O great Jupiter, what a spectacle for them! At first they were astonished that they, too, should be brought to the stage and impersonated by such a convincing mime, whom they said to be that multiform Proteus, the son of the Ocean. Thereupon there was an unbelievable outburst of applause, and they prevented that great player from acting any longer. They begged Juno to let him into the stalls of the gods, unmasked and to make him a spectator rather than an actor. She was already eagerly going about obtaining this of her husband, when, at that very moment, man came out upholding the great Jupiter, the worthiest of gods and with marvellous and indescribable gestures impersonating his father. He had transcended the characters of the lower gods and was piercing

into that unaccessible light surrounded by darkness where Jupiter dwells, of kings and gods the king. (Vives 389)

Man's chance to enter the stalls of the gods as a reward for imitating the gods was understood quite literally in Elizabethan England. As a result of this, dramaticity oozed into all spheres of social and political life. In the very center of power and glory in England there stood a figure "who perfectly embodied the idea of the individual as an actor totally and irreversibly committed to a role" - Queen Elizabeth I (Greenblatt, *Raleigh*, 52). "Both by temperament and intellect she understood, as no one before or since, the latent drama in kingship and exploited it to the fullest. 'We princes', she told a deputation of Lords and Commons in 1586, 'are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed'." (Ibid. loc. cit.)

It was under the reign of Elizabeth I, in 1594, that Marlowe's *The Tragical History of D. Faustus* was performed for the first time. The playwright had been dead for one year already, but the play was wildly acclaimed by the Elizabethan audience and even surpassed the fame of *Tamburlaine*. It was to be played over and over again until the prohibition of all public entertainment in the forties of the seventeenth century. During the Age of Reason *Doctor Faustus* was not produced on the stage of the 'serious' theatre, yet it continued its existence on the market squares and in the streets of England and whole Western Europe, in the form of farces, pantomimes, and puppet shows. In the eighteenth century it was rediscovered and re-invigorated by the Romantics. The first performances of the play in its original fashion would not take place before the last decade of the nineteenth century. (Шурбанов 179)

It is a consummately intimidating task even to approach the Daedalian nature of the question why Marlowe's play became so popular, i.e. to embark on a critical rethinking of the myriads of uncertainties within and around it. Nevertheless, there seem to have existed two basic approaches: one examining the fascination of the forceful heroism displayed by Faustus' rebellion against everything that confines the essential freedom of the human spirit; and another that sees the play as a Christian

piece of didactics, closely linked to the purpose of its source: to condemn the frivolous apostates. Frances Yates takes the second approach so far as to claim that *Doctor Faustus* is an ideological reaction against the Renaissance – the epistemological positivism in the compound of Magia and Cabala, blended to harmony in Agrippa's *Occult Philosophy*. She sees "the dismissal of Cornelius Agrippa as a black magician" as "a dismissal of the traditions of Renaissance magic and science". (Yates, *Occult Philosophy* 119) It appears unproductive and unfair to the complexity of the play to follow one of these two approaches independently from the other. For only in combination they provide the incantation that can resuscitate the spirit of a mighty text, first brought to life by Marlowe, but imprisoned in its author's tomb after his death. As Shakespeare observes: "When a man's verses cannot be understood nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child Understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room"¹⁸. (*As You Like It*. III, 3-9-12)

Yates' major argument to support her 'ideological', anti-magical reading of *Doctor Faustus* is a perfectly logical one: "This play was not written to be read by literary critics looking for mighty lines in the quiet of their studies" (Yates *Occult Philosophy* 119). However, it seems to me, she underestimates the same epistemological mechanisms of resemblance she describes so thoroughly as governing Renaissance thought and determining the textual essence of the Renaissance universe. Naturally, this knowledge was not possessed by most of the Elizabethan spectators, but still there is enough evidence to believe that Marlowe was himself sufficiently well read in both sciences and arts, and spent his time in the company of people intellectually, at least, his equals. Withal, it is difficult to be convinced that a true artist, as Marlowe undoubtedly was, in his aesthetic Hedonism, could address someone supposedly lower in learning than he himself. This should give us enough excuse to examine *Doctor Faustus* as a Cabalist would¹⁹, and search for a hidden truth beyond the apparently faithful rendition of a moralistic fable.

Above all, we should consider certain contextual reverberations. In the first soliloquy there is a passage in which Faustus makes an inventory of the Renaissance

academic mind, as many a critic diligently observe, it echoes very discernibly Cornelius Agrippa's *On the Uncertainty and Vanity of Sciences and Arts*, in which each branch of knowledge, including magic, is considered and dismissed as vain and incapable of helping one to attain ultimate intelligence. Dialectic and rhetoric fail to satisfy Faustus' ambitious cravings; yet “[u]bi desinit philosophus, ibi incipit medicus”²⁰, but the highest summits of medicine are already conquered by the 'studious artisan'; law proves equally useless; even divinity, the most exalted of arts, does not offer a passage to truth, it just requires blind submission. Thus, Faustus presents in a miniature the bitter disappointment of the human epistemological pursuit with the 'lawful' sciences - discontent which, by this time, was already harrowing the minds of early modern scholars. He appears on the stage not as a sacrilegist, nor as an insolent dishonourer of Christianity, but rather as the spokesman of a certain class of learned men confronted with the *impasse* of Renaissance positivism. If there is no way to overcome the blockade that appears in the end of the road, what is left to do is to walk back and see whether there is an opening the other way.

The devil who tempted Faustus appears to be the same who, observing Paradise from the mountain high, commented:

One fatal tree there stands, of knowledge called,
Forbidden them to taste. Knowledge forbidden?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord
Envy them that? Can it be sin to know?
Can it be death? And do they only stand
By ignorance? Is that their happy state,
The proof of their obedience and their faith?

(Milton, IV. 514-20)

We cannot but admit that Satan has a remarkably strong case on this. Even if, from the viewpoint of politics, obedience has again and again proved a creative

power, the human spirit has again and again longed and striven for freedom. It is namely the promising potential for absolute freedom that makes the devil so attractive to the latitudinarian, Renaissance individual. Marsilio Ficino concluded in his Platonic-Hermetic *Five Questions Concerning the Mind*, that "by a natural instinct every soul strives in a continuous effort both to know all truths by the intellect and to enjoy all good things by the will". (Ficino 201) This ties into a mysterious knot the aspiration to an ultimate truth and the pleasure-seeking artistic *furor*, the power of eloquence to "refresh our moral being even before we are fully alive to its meaning". (Brockbank 29) As Blake wrote in one of his notes to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils&Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it." Marlowe too was a true poet and therefore he sent Doctor Faustus to explore this demonic Promised Land, this enticing alternative to eternal suppression of man's forceful aspiration.

First of all, Faustus rejects all the books that taken together make the core of Renaissance "lawful" learning; he replaces them with other books:

These metaphysics of magicians
And necromantic books are heavenly,
Lines, circles, signs, letters and characters—
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires [...]
wise Bacon's and Albanus' works,
The Hebrew Psalter, and New Testament [...]
Agrippa [...]

(Marlowe, *Faustus*, I.i. 52-4)

It is easily observable that these books are not by intention evil or Satanist, what is more, in this text some of them were already considered as books essential for the Renaissance episteme. They were excluded by the prejudices of the age, however, only because they encourage the aspiration of man's intellect, and logically question the validity of religious and social dogmas. Faustus' 'infernal' reading of these books promises him infinite riches and power:

his dominion that exceeds in this
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.

A sound magician is a mighty god

(Ibid. I.i. 62-4).

They suffice to teach him how to put Jehova's name in a circle "Forward and backward anagrammatised" (Ibid. I.iii. 9), and pronounce the blood-freezing incantation:

*Sint mihi dei Acherontis propitii! Valeat numen triplex Jehovahae! Ignei, aerii, aquatici, terreni, spiritus, salvete! Orientis princeps Lucifer, Beelzebub, inferni ardentis monarcha, et Demogorgon, propitiamus vos, ut appareat et surgat Mephistopheles! Quid tu moraris? Per Jehovaham, Gehennam, et consecratam aquam quam nunc sprago, signumque crucis quod nunc facio, et per vota nostra, ipse nunc surgat nobis dicatus Mephistopheles!*²¹

To which responds the princely devil Mephistopheles²² who arrives with the candid announcement that Faustus' books have no power on him, but only his Lord Lucifer, and he could not serve Faustus without his master's leave. It becomes clear that the supposed potency and demonic efficacy of the magical books equals zero, they are only a signal for the devil to come and win the overreacher's "glorious soul". Moreover, it appears that the only soul under the working of the pompous spells is that of the Doctor of Divinity himself, and this alone explains his fanatic determination further in the play. As Satan explicates in *Paradise Lost*:

The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n

(Milton I. 254-55)

Mephistopheles is even more direct: "Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it" (Marlowe I.iii. 78). The trance into which Faustus has conjured himself is, however, too profound to let him harken to these warnings:

Had I as many souls as there be stars,

I'd give them all for Mephistopheles [...]"

(Ibid. I.iii. 104-5).

What follows is a systematic deconstruction of Faustus' vision, textual as it is, of himself as a potent magician wielding the powers of elements and familiar spirits. When he asks Mephistopheles for a wife, the limitations of the devil's mastery are displayed:

I'll cull thee out the fairest courtesans
And bring them ev'ry morning to thy bed.
She whom thine eye shall like, thy heart shall have,
Be she as chaste as Penelope,
As wise as Saba, or as beautiful
As was bright Lucifer before his fall.

(Ibid. II.i. 156-61),

yet "marriage is but a ceremonial toy. If thou lovest me, think no more of it" (Ibid. II.i. 154-55). To dilute Faustus' discontent Mephistopheles gives him a ceremonial book of magic:

Hold, take this book. Peruse it thoroughly.
The iterating of these lines brings gold;
The framing of this circle on the ground
Brings whirlwinds, tempests thunder, and lightning.
Pronounce this thrice devoutly to thyself,
And men in armour shall appear to thee,
Ready to execute what thou desir'st.

(Ibid. II.ii. 162-68)

Recognizing the opportunity to satisfy his curiosity, Faustus solicits and receives three more books: one "wherein [he] might behold all spells and incantations, that [he] might raise spirits when [he] please[s]"; another that contains "all characters and planets of the heavens [...] their motions and dispositions"; and a third which exhibits "all plants, herbs and trees that grow upon the earth" (Ibid. II.ii. 169-79). Here once again the textual being takes the upper hand and manages to suppress the carnal one. Yet, it is interesting to observe that, in fact, various books

on these topics, and supposedly possessing the same powers were available to Faustus even before he joined the society of devils.

When Faustus and Mephistopheles discuss contentious for the Renaissance mind issues, and the Doctor requires the infernal spirit to resolve his ambiguities, the limitations of the devil's knowledge show through once again. There is nothing that Mephistopheles can tell Faustus outside what he already knows. To the question about hell, the familiar takes the philosophical form of a Gnostic and says:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place, for where we are is hell,
And where hell is must we ever be.
And to conclude, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be hell that is not heaven

(Ibid. II.i. 125-29)

Another time, Mephistopheles appears as a Hermetic discussing the beauty of heaven:

Think'st thou heaven is such a glorious thing?
I tell thee, 'tis not half so fair as thou
Or any man that breathes on earth [...]
It was made for man; therefore is man more excellent

(Ibid. II.iii. 4-9).

Later, on the subject of astronomy, Mephistopheles slips on the costume of an ancient Ptolemaist and is unable to explain the emerging doubts in the accuracy of this long established system, hiding his incompetence behind an evasive phrase in Latin. Finally, when the ultimate question is placed before him: "Tell me who made the world" (Ibid. II.iii. 66), the devil remains silent: "Move me not, for I will not tell thee." (Ibid. II.iii. 69). It appears that the whole new Promised Land of freedom that Faustus saw in the dominion of the devil, is but a barren ground, even more finite than that he gave up to gain this one. Like Columbus, he opened up a new universe

full of hope, bending at the same time the world and closing it into a circle, in which the journey of aspiration ends where it first began (Панчева 88-89).

This glorious venture, however, cannot remain unchastised. As Boas points out, there is a strange similarity, almost identity, between the lives and fates of Doctor Faustus and Marlowe, the poet who immortalized him. (Boas 208) The Canterbury boy, 'base of stock', just like the Rhodesian one, reached through the bounty of Archbishop Parker Cambridge, to qualify himself there, as most lowborn students did at the time, for a clerical career. Historical records from that time show that the University authorities were complaining of the blasphemous extravagances of their students, their atheistic opinions, and their unbecoming behavior during church service. As Francis Bacon observed: "Divisions in Religion were the first case of disbelief; and when Protestants divided from Catholics, or Puritans from Anglicans, they devoted much of their zeal to controverting each other's doctrines. This stimulated more curious minds to look beyond the orbit of Christianity itself." (Levin 19) To this should be duly added the increasing rationalism of the day, which combined with the speculations of certain texts. The literary scholar Gabriel Harvey, "in a letter to Spencer of 1579, the year before Marlowe went up to the university, writes:

You cannot step into a scholar's study but (ten to one) you shall likely find open either Bodin de Republica or Leroy's Exposition upon Aristotle's Politics or some other like French or Italian political discourses. And I warrant you some good fellows amongst us begin now to be prettily well acquainted with a certain parlous book called, as I remember me, *Il Principe di Nocolo Machiavelli*, and I can peradventure name you an odd crew or two that are as cunning in his *Discorsi*, in his *Historia Fiorentina*, and in his *Dialogues della arte della Guerra* too, and in certain gallant Turkish discourses... (Qtd. Henderson 10-11)

The work of Marlowe bears witness that he managed to read most of these curious books, the unconventionality and intellectual daring of which pestered the minds of his contemporaries. Most probably, he had a first hand knowledge of the

fundamental works of Bruno, Machiavelli, and Ramus; and probably this in combination with his profound study of theology, which laid bare the numerous controversies within this doctrine, accounted for his doubtless skepticism as regards the Christian faith.

While still at the University, Marlowe embarked on another enterprise, which would, according to the general opinion, bring him to his early death - international espionage. The College registers keep record of his long and frequent absences, and because of them he would be accused to have intended to join the English Catholics at Dr. Allen's seminary for the training of Jesuits at Rheims, a cradle of Catholic plotting against Elizabeth, and the Masters degree would be denied him. A confidential resolution of the Queen's Privy Council, dated 29 June 1587, however, would inform the University authorities that:

Whereas it was reported that christopher Morley was determined to have gone beyond the seas to Rheims and there to remain their Lordships thought good to certify that he had no such intent, but that in all his actions he had behaved himself orderly and discreetly whereby he had done Her Majesty good service, and deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealing. Their Lordships request that the rumour thereof should be allayed by all possible means, and that he should be futrthered in the degree he was to take this next commencement. Because it was not Her Majesty's pleasure that anyone employed as he had been in matters touching the benefit of his country should be defamed by those that are ignorant of the affairs he went about. (Henderson 18)

This facet of Marlowe's life is not related directly to the tale of Doctor Faustus, but ominously calls to mind another's history - the adventurous career of Cornelius Agrippa. Further on, the yarn of the two men's fates would interweave even more closely: both of them would make clerical enemies with their progressive thinking; the life-stories of both would be transformed by churchmen, after their death, into moralistic examples of overreaching.

After his graduation from the University, Marlowe seemingly kept going on secret missions. In the meanwhile he wrote plays for the theatre, and probably even acted for one of the companies performing them. There is enough evidence to suggest that he attended the intellectual conversations at the house of Sir Walter Raleigh, with people like Sir Henry Percy, Ninth Earl of Northumberland, Thomas Harriot, and others - the so called - "School of Night". Its members were accused of atheism in a number of reports, the most widely circulated bearing the title *An Advertisement written to a Secretarie of my L. Treasurers of Inghland* (1592). It speaks "Of Sir Walter Rawleys Schoole of Atheisme by the waye, and of the Coniurer that is Master thereof, and of the diligence vsed to get young gentlemen to this Schoole, where in both Moyses and our Sauior; the olde, and the new Testamente are iested at, and schollers taught amonge other thinges, to spell God backwarde." (Shirley 23) These charges were part of a massive hunt against atheism that swept England about this time. Richard Cholmeley, another member of the secret society, was reported to have given speeches claiming that "Jhesus Christe was a bastarde St Mary a whore & the Angel Gabriell a Bawde to the holy ghoste [...] that Moyses was a Jugler & Aaron a Cosener [...]" (1593). When questioned later Cholmeley testified that "Marloe tolde him that hee hath read the Atheist lecture to Sr Walter Raleighe & others." (Harleian MSS 6848 pp. 190-191. Qtd. Shirley 23) In May 1593, the testimony of one Richard Baines describes "the opinion of one Christopher Marly concerning his damnable Judgement of Religion, and scorn of Gods Word", which contained a number of claims, some of them being: "That the Indians and many authors of antiquity have assuredly written of above 16 thousand yeares agoe wher Adam is proved to have lived within 6 thowsand yeares"; "That Moyses was but a Iugler, & and that one Heriots being Sir W. Raleighs man can do more then he"; "That it was easy matter for Moyses, being brought up in all the arts of the Egyptians, to abuse the Jews, being a rude and gross people"; "That the first beginnings of Religion was onley to keep people in awe". (Henderson 62-64)

On 12 May 1593 Thomas Kyd was arrested and his house was searched by the police. In his “waste and idle papers” the servants of the Privy Council found “vile and heretical conceits denying the deity of Jesus Christ”. Being examined under tortures, Kyd said that these papers were “fragments of a disputation”, which belonged to Marlowe and got accidentally shuffled among his own papers at the time when he and Marlowe shared the same room, two years before. As for himself, Kyd declared that he had no doubts whatsoever about the divinity of Jesus Christ, he abhorred the very idea of atheism, while many people would swear that Marlowe was an atheist. Henderson (55-56) observes that the notes in question are in fact “a reasoned defence, based on scriptural texts, of the Unitarian or Deist position”, and yet it was for similar opinions that Francis Kett, a fellow of Marlowe’s college at Cambridge, was burnt at Norwich in 1589.

It is as difficult to take all these accusations at face value as it is to defy them, but one thing is certain - that being among Raleigh and his companions, Marlowe mastered to perfection the Renaissance *self-fashioning* which, as Greenblatt observes, is so characteristic for Elizabethan England. The art to make a play, an epic, a legend of one's own life, fascinated the Elizabethans. It granted them the possibility to become both authors and performers of their being, and like Vives' man they would imitate a celestial audience, hoping to gain their favor and applause, yet not unaware of the power their dramatic skills would win them in the world of men. Sir Walter Raleigh himself was a luminously bright example of this projection of textuality and theatricality into everyday life, "for he was an actor, and at the great public moments of his career he performed unforgettably" (Greenblatt, *Raleigh* 1). He would undertake the most extravagant adventures, wear the most lavish clothes, and enthral through his excellent rhetoric every society he emerged in. During one of his imprisonments in the Tower he wrote a short epigram:

What is our life? A play of passion,
Our mirth the musicke of division,
Our mothers wombes the tyring houses be,
Where we are drest for this short Comedy,

Heaven the Judicious sharpe spectator is,
That sits and markes still who doth act amisse,
Our graves that hide us from the searching Sun,
Are like drawne curtaynes when the play is done,
Thus march we playing to our latest rest,
Onely we dye in earnest, that's no Jest.

(Qtd. Ibid. 26)

Behind the wit of the poem shows the anxiety that death will remain the only reality, beyond which the player may be heard no more. On the other hand, however, perceiving life as theatre may make death seem less fearful. As Greenblatt shows, the culmination of Raleigh's "dramatic performance" was his inspired speech to the crowd upon the scaffold on the day of his execution, 29 October 1618. So methodically did he defeat all the arguments accusing him of treason, so calmly and humbly did he look in the face of the Almighty for pardon, so artfully did he "throw away the dearest thing he ow'd, as it was a careless trifle"²³, that even Sir Henry Yelverton, King James' attorney general, dropped the piteous remark: "He hath been a star at which the world hath gazed; but stars may fall nay they must fall when they trouble the sphere wherein they abide." (Ibid. 1)

It seems that Marlowe also fashioned his "role" on the Elizabethan world-stage and devoted a great deal of his creative energy to act it out. Like Hamlet, the famous prince of Denmark, he evidently found his vocation in holding a mirror up to the faults and taboos he saw in society and the social practices of the age. In his effort to impersonate them most convincingly, he fell into the mousetrap of being identified with them. This indeed was the genesis of the "unholy trinity of Marlowe's heresies" (Levin 45): his Epicureanism, or *libido sentiendi* - the appetite for sensation; his Machiavellianism, or *libido dominandi* - the will to power; and his Atheism, or *libido sciendi* - the zeal for knowledge. Each one of them, to a different degree, contributed to the destruction of the man, but it was his rationalistic skepticism for religion that buried him under the thick shadow of Doctor Faustus. Unlike Raleigh, however, Marlowe could not write the script for the final scene of

his life. Towards the end of May 1593, in a Deptford inn, or spy safe-house, in what seemed to be a quarrel with one of his three companions, Ingram Frizer, he is stabbed in the eye and dies a few days afterwards in great agony. Robert Greene, a fellow dramatist and critic, writes on his death bed: "I knowe the least of my demerits merits this miserable death, but wilfull striuing against knowne truth exceedeth al the terrors of my soule. Defer not (with me) till this last point of extremitie; for little knowest thou how in the end thou shalt be visited." (Butler 42) With this Greene, wilfully or not, started a tradition of homiletic readings of Marlowe's turbulent life and violent end, which through the subsequent writings of religious moralists eventually rivetted Marlowe to the Faust legend.

In 1597 Thomas Beard translated from the French the *Theatre of God's Judgements*, a pious work that illustrates "the admirable Iudgements of God upon the transgresours of his commandements". Among the additional examples with which the Englishman augmented his version we find:

Not inferiour to any of the former in Atheisme & impiety, an equall to all in manner of punishment was one of our own nation, of fresh and late memory, called Marlin, by profession a scholler, brought vp from his youth in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, but by practise a playmaker, and a Poet of scurrilitie, who by giuing too large a swinge to his owne wit, and suffering his lust to have the full raines, fell (not without iust desert) to that outrage and extremitie, that hee denied God and his sonne Christ, and not only in word blasphemed the trinitie, but also (as it is creditly reported) wrote bookes against it, affirming our sauour to be but a deceiuer, and Moses to be but a coniuurer and seducer of the people, and the holy Bible to be vaine and idle stories, and all religion but a deuice of pollicie. But see what a hooke the Lord put in the nostrils of this barking dogge: It so fell out that in London streets as he purposed to stab one whome hee ought a grudge vnto with a dagger, the other party perceiuing so auoided the stroke, that withall catching hold of his wrest, he stabbed his owne dagger into his owne head, in such sort, that notwithstanding all the means of surgerie that could be wrought,

hee shortly after died thereof. The manner of his death being so terrible (for hee even cursed and blasphemed to his last gape, and together with his breath an oth flew out of his mouth) that it was not only a manifest signe of Gods iudgement, but also horrible and fearfull terrour to all that beheld him. But herein did the iustice of God most notably appeare, in that he compelled his owne hand which had written those blasphemies to be the instrument to punish him, and that in his braine, which had deuised the same. (Norman 244-45)

The drama *Doctor Faustus* resembles an Orphic journey into the underworld of darkness by which the spectator is offered a chance to explore the promises of this world. This quest, however, seems to be taken for the sole purpose of finding out that forbidden knowledge mesmerizes chiefly with its interdiction, yet indeed it is another impasse – a far more sinister one. This conclusion is indeed very useful for the didactic reading of the play: the anathema of black magic and Satanism, the demonstration of their impossibility and weakness, is productive only as long as they are held in opposition with a white, priestly magic and holy miracles. Similarly, displaying the irrationality of all sorts of magic is advantageous only when we see them as something opposed to an orthodox religion and straightforward social practices grounded on reason. In the domain of the literary text and its interpretation, however, a realm still governed by the principles of resemblance, a realm in which things imitate one another from one end of the universe to the other, even oppositions can reflect each other, and by the very power of sympathetic similitude become so alike as to converge into one. It appears to me that, unlike the German *Faustbuch*, Marlowe's drama was not only intended to provide a didactic example, defined by the opposition between a devout aspiration towards God's wisdom on the wings of lawful learning, on the one hand, and a sinful aspiration towards knowledge and power, sought even under the menace of an everlasting bonfire, on the other. On the contrary, it seems to me that the theatrical being, Doctor Faustus, despite all his wickedness, reflects what can be seen as righteous, admirable ambition so much that at one point the two could become one and the same thing,

were they not already labelled as “bad” and “good” respectively. And yet, perhaps, the binary code of rationality could give way to the mystical power of emulation.

Let us now shift our vision to another dimension of *Doctor Faustus* – its structure. There is an easily observable peculiarity in the way the play is organized: the main plot, marked by what seems to be a powerful heroic pathos, is paralleled by a parodic sub-plot, a *parallelistic irony* (See Shurbanov 239), which mirrors in a purposefully distorted way, and yet clearly enough to arise immediately recognition, the key scenes of the main narrative. The technique is by no means unusual for Renaissance drama in general, and even less for Marlowes work in particular, but the consistency and the methodicalness by which the two plots are interwoven here suggests a pattern.

The humorous dispute of Wagner with the scholars in Act I, Scene ii, which opens the design, repeats Faustus' introductory soliloquy item by item. First the servant mocks the university wits through logic and argumentation: "That follows not necessary by force of argument that you, being licentiate, should stand upon't. Therefore, acknowledge your error, and be attentive." Then he moves on to physics and medicine: "For is not he *corpus naturale*? And is not that *mobile*? [...] But I am by nature phlegmatic, slow to wrath [...]". Immediately he goes on to law: "I would say - it were not for you to come within forty foot of the place of execution, although I do not doubt to see you both hanged the next sessions." And finishes with a bogus religious benediction: "And so the Lord bless you, preserve you, and keep you, my dear brethren, my dear brethren." (Marlowe 122-24)²⁴ The idea behind combining all these domains of knowledge is Wagner's desire to sneer at the educated minds, exposing the futility of their own devices and turning them against themselves. A pattern appears: Wagner holds up a sardonic mirror to the scholars, the whole scene reflects Faustus' initial speech, in which he holds up an ironic mirror to the basic disciplines of learning personified by their prominent representatives - Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, Saint Jerome - the question arises: What overhanging level does this scene reflect?

In the second sub-plot scene (Act I, Scene iv) Wagner steps both in the shoes of Faustus the conjurer and Mephistopheles the tempter, and compelling the clown Robin to become his servant, re-enacts the episode in which Faustus signs the compact with devil. Among other things, a metaphor used throughout the play is mirrored here - the 'food' trope. Faustus is "*swollen* with cunning, of a self-conceit", "*glutted* now with learning's golden gifts", the God he serves is his "*own appetite*", he feeds on "*the fruits* of lunacy", and wants to be "*cloyed* with all things that delight the heart of man"²⁵. In this scene Robin speculates about selling his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, which expresses his genuine bodily hunger; throughout the main plot, however, the value of overfeeding, hunger, appetite is inevitably metaphorical and relates to overreaching for knowledge or power, with a very strong religiously-moralistic colouring. It is enough to recall Plato's use of the same metaphor in *Timaeus*: "You conferred together and agreed to entertain me to-day, as I had entertained you, with a feast of discourse. Here am I in festive array, and no man can be more ready for the promised banquet [...] with a perfect feast of reason" (Plato, *Timaeus* 72) in order to perceive the gradation.

In the third sub-plot scene (Act II, Scene ii) immediately follows the episode in which Mephistopheles buys Doctor Faustus' slightly shaken trust in his powers with four secret magical books; the two clones Robin and Rafe have "Stol'n one of Doctor Faustus' conjuring books, and [...] mean to search some circles for [their] own use" (Marlowe 147) They profanely speculate how they will "make all the maidens in [their] parish dance at [their] pleasure stark naked", get "drunk with hippocras at any tavern in Europe for nothing", wind the kitchen maid, Nan Spit, to their own use at midnight as often as they want, and so on. (Ibid. 147-49) This distorted-looking-glass scene shatters flat all ambitions of the conceited Doctor to wield amazing powers and control by them the course of the world.

Further on, in Act III and IV, the sub-plot merges with the main one: Doctor Faustus steps into the role of a roaming court entertainer, the peregrinations of whom already closely follow the *Faustbook*. Some critics even express doubts that this part was actually planned and written by Marlowe himself, yet the logic behind

the sub-plot supports this organization because, as Shurbanov observes, in the remarkable Horse Courser episode "the would-be master of the universe and sole possessor of all its riches sinks to the lowest depths of his career, trying to cheat an ignoble rogue out of some forty dollars" (Shurbanov 240). The allusion to Faustus' bargain with the devil is extremely obvious as it is in the Simonian versions of this story, but we should not forget its function for introducing the more robust and more meaningful Gnostic myth of Helena - God's exiled *ennoia* - hedonistically intertwined with the fabulous beauty of Helen of Troy. However, it is in this episode that the roles of Mephistopheles, as the representative of Lucifer, and Faustus are reversed for the first time. In the last Act parallelistic irony presents itself in the episode of the Old Man who, similarly to the Good Angel, holds up a didactic speculum at the wretched Faustus, already corrupted beyond hope: "Where art thou, Faustus? Wretch, what hast thou done? Damned art thou, Faustus, damned! Despair and die!" (Ibid. 188).

An obvious symmetry is disclosed within and without the play: the mirroring sub-plot is meaningful enough in itself, especially if we see it as the purposefully distorted image of an overhanging, pompously heroic plot. However, it is not the case because the main plot, even in the first two acts where the distinction between story and sub-story is most visible, is nonetheless infused with irony. This is why I rather perceive a gradation in the overall ironicalness of the play. A little trying of my brains may gain a hierarchy. Seeing that the mirroring sub-plot parallels the main not only in content but also in function, the interesting question that presents itself is: what does the main plot of *Doctor Faustus* emulate and what can I make of this emulation? Following this chain of thought, I can assume that the play contains in itself the semiotic key to a wider interpretation, a sort of a self-extracting mechanism; that the way the sub-plot relates to the main one, the similarity in their modalities, and a discernible tendency to transition from pure, bitter irony towards pure, glorious dignity, evoke the aethereal presence of another layer of the story looming above the text. In the following chapter I will essay to retrieve and

reconstruct a presumably suitable variation of this implicit super-plot and offer a possible reading of the play with a new sense for completeness.

Chapter Three

THE OVERREADER

*Perhaps spiders flying in the aire, are carried by strings
of their own spinning or making, or else I know not how.*

John Dee²⁶

It seems to me that a story that could imbue successfully in the meta-position opened up by a *hyper*-reading of *Doctor Faustus* is the life history of an extraordinary man, an Englishman far ahead of his contemporaries in mathematics, astronomy, geography, and various other sciences and arts, a man burning with aspiration towards a pure and sound wisdom, towards an ultimate understanding, such as might be brought under his talent and capacity, to God's honor and glory and the benefit of his servants. This man himself recalls the vision of a sign, a mysterious hieroglyphic monad, that just has risen from the pages of a dusty book; his whole being – nothing but texts, printed pages, rare manuscripts, secret knowledge, tales already told, and such yet to unfold; he has consumed them all, he is all interwoven words, only to write himself, project his shadow through a semiotic world. For it was him that collected a private library of over 4 000 valuable volumes, the contents of which stretched over the best part of the intellectual accomplishment of the age. This man's name was John Dee, and he was for some time Queen Elizabeth's trusted philosopher and astrologer.

According to the horoscope he drew for himself, Dee was born in London on 13 July 1527. He was the son of Sir Rowland Dee, a gentleman server to King Henry VIII, who traced his origins back to Roderick the Great, an ancient Prince of Wales. From his early years the boy was bred into "grammar learning" and it was at the age of fifteen that he entered St. John's College, Cambridge, where he became a most assiduous student, as he tells us in his autobiographical *The Compendious rehearsall of Iohn Dee, his dutifull declaration and prooffe of the course and race of his studious life, for the space of halfe an hundred yeeres, now (by Gods fauor and helpe) fully spent, &c*²⁷: "In the years 1543, 1544, 1545, I was so vehemently bent to studie, that for those years I did inviolably keep this order: only to sleep four houres every night; to allow to meate and drink (and some refreshing after) two houres every day; and of the other eighteen houres all (except the tyme of going to and being at divine service) was spent in my studies and learning." (Qtd. Smith 6-7) Early in 1546 Dee graduated a Bachelor of Arts; by the end of the same year Trinity College was founded, and he was elected one of its first Fellows. It was there that the young man showed for the first time his resourcefulness and exceptional skill. The students were preparing a performance of Aristophanes' play *Eirene* (Peace), for which Dee devised a mechanical gimmick by which Trygaeus, the Attic cup-bearer, carrying a large basket of food, and mounted on a gigantic scarab, could ascend from his dwelling on the stage to enter the palace of Zeus in the clouds above. The audience was amazed by the spectacular scenic effect, which appears to have been for that time impressive and unusual enough to excite rumors of supernatural powers.

In 1547 Dee travelled abroad, to confer with learned men of the Dutch Universities upon the science of mathematics, to which he had begun to devote his serious attention. He spent several months in the Low Countries in the friendly society of philosophers of worldwide fame: Gerard Mercator, Gemma Frisius, Joannes Caspar Myricaenus, among others. Returning to Cambridge, he brought with him two large globes made by Mercator, and an astronomer's armillary ring and staff, "such as Frisius had newly devised and was in the habit of using" (Qtd. Ibid.

8). In the following year he left England again and entered as a student the University of Louvain where he read for two years. On his leaving the Low Countries, shortly after his twenty-third birthday, Dee had acquired both a reputation for learning far beyond his years and the Doctor's title before his name. He moved on to Paris, where he began a course of free public lectures on Euclid, "Mathematicé, Physicé et Pythagoricé" (Ibid. 11). His fame had obviously preceded him because the audience (most of them older than himself) was so large that the lecture halls would not hold them, and many of the students had to climb up the windows from outside, from where, "if they could not hear the lecturer, they could at least see him". Dee himself observes that his readings at the College of Rheims in Paris created a greater astonishment even than his scarab's mounting up to the top of Trinity Hall in Cambridge. His outstanding fame made him many friends among the intellectual elite of Europe and brought him attractive lectureship propositions, yet the Doctor had made up his mind to return to England.

The first few years at home Dee devoted to writing: among other things he published *The Cause of Floods and Ebbs* and *The Philosophical and Political Occasions and Names of the Heavenly Asterismes*, both at the request of Jane, Duchess of Northumberland. Due to this he was too busy to accept two invitations to become Lecturer on Mathematical Science at Oxford. A curious record from 1555 shows that an informant named George Ferrys testified that one of his children had been struck blind and another was killed by the magic of John Dee; he also declared that Dee was directing his enchantments against the life of Queen Mary Tudor. Naturally, the scholar was arrested and examined before the Secretary of State, afterwards by the Privy Council, and at last brought into the Star Chamber for trial. Due to his erudition and learning, he managed to defend himself and was cleared of all suspicions of treason. It was recorded that during the questioning held in the presence of Bishop Bonner to test Dee's orthodoxy, he quoted St. Cyprian to John Philpot, a clergyman, who replied: "Master Dee, you are too young in divinity to teach me in the matters of my faith, though you be more learned in other things." (Qtd. Ibid. 15)

It appears that this trial, in effect, brought to Dee credit rather than doubt in his loyalty or further questioning of his orthodoxy. Only a few months later, in January 1556, the Queen considered his *A Supplication for the recovery and preservation of ancient writers and monuments* (Qtd. Ibid. 15-16), which was the initial step of Dee's "most praiseworthy" project for the foundation of a State National Library of books and manuscripts. Over the past few years the intensely bookish man had painfully observed how the English monasteries had been ravished and their priceless collections destroyed or dispersed. Therefore he pleaded for the protection of "the treasure of all antiquity and the everlasting seeds of continual excellency". Dee hoped that there may be saved and recovered the remains of a body of theological and scientific writing, which were at that time scattered throughout the kingdom, some in unlearned men's hands, some walled up or buried in the ground. To this end, he suggested a commission be appointed to search and borrow these valuable documents from their owners until a fair copy be made. He also suggested that he, himself could be made responsible for providing copies of many famous manuscript volumes to be found in the great libraries abroad, the expenses only of transcription and carriage to England to be charged to the State. As for printed books, they were to "be gotten in wondrous abundance". It almost goes without saying that nothing became of Dee's proposal, and thus he became the more industrious in collecting a library of his own. A catalogue of Dee's collection can be found appended to the 1842 Camden Society edition of Dee's *Diary*. At its height, it comprised 4,000 volumes on various topics, for which he writes in the *Compendious Rehearsall*, he expended about three thousand pounds, a very large sum in his days; and which he diligently read and re-read until he absorbed all the knowledge contained in them, so that he became what his friends called him: "a living librarie" (Qtd. Sherman 61)

When Princess Elizabeth inherited the English throne after the death of her unhappy sister, Dee was quickly sought for at court. He was asked by Robert Dudley to make the necessary astrological calculations and choose an auspicious day for the coronation. After much deliberation 14 January 1559 was selected and

whether or not we believe in the influences of the stars over the lives and fates of men, we have to admit that this politic act was followed by benign and fortunate destinies.

Charlotte Fell Smith tells us a curious episode of the life of the young Queen:

One morning the whole Court and the Privy Council were put into a terrible flutter by a simple piece of what was common enough in ancient times and in Egypt - sympathetic magic. A wax image of the Queen had been found lying in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with a great pin stuck through its breast, and it was supposed undoubtedly to portend the wasting away and death of her Majesty, or some other dreadful omen. Messenger after messenger was dispatched to summon Dee, and bid him make haste. He hurried off, satisfied himself apparently of the harmless nature of the practical joke, and repaired, with Mr. Secretary Wilson as a witness of the whole proceedings and a proof of all good faith, to Richmond, where the Queen was. The Queen sat in that part of her private garden that sloped down the river, near the steps of the royal landing-place at Hampton Court; the Earl of Leicester (as Dudley had now become) was in attendance, gorgeous and insolent as ever; the Lords of the Privy Council had also been summoned, when Dee and Mr. Secretary expounded the inner meaning of this untoward circumstance, and satisfied and allayed all their fears. (Smith 19-20)

The English scene in those times was, however, intellectually not sufficient enough to satisfy Dee's immense appetite for knowledge: soon he left again his homeland to search among ancient book collections for rare treasures. In February 1563 he wrote to Sir William Cecil, the highest in power and most dignified of the Queen's servants, that in a great bargain he has picked up, a work, "for which many learned man hath long sought and dayley yet doth seek," (Qtd. Ibid. 21) the in-depth study of cipher writing, *Steganographia*, still in manuscript, by Johann Trithemius of Würzburg. Dee certainly knew that a proficiency in code writing was considered very important by the busy Secret Service of Elizabeth, therefore he hurried to copy

and present Trithemius' treatise, "so nedefull and commodious, as in human knowledge none can be meeter or more behovefull" to the Secretary of State.

During his stay in the Low Countries, Dee completed one of his most famous, and most vehemently advertised by himself, texts - *Monas Hieroglyphica*. He had it printed in April 1564, and dedicated it to the Emperor Maximilian II. It is a treatise that consists of twenty-four theorems, by which the enormity of related meanings in the whole universe is compressed down to one highly symbolic hieroglyph:

Curiously enough, it resembles, at first sight, the horny silhouette of a hook-legged little devil, but apparently combines in their essential unity four separate symbols: the crescent of the moon, the disc of the sun, the cross of the four elements, and the two conjoined semi-circles, used by astronomers to represent the zodiacal



sign Aries; the last was "to signify that in the practice of this Monad the use of fire is required" (Dee, *Monas Hieroglyphica*, Th. X). Dee wrote that many "universitie graduates of high degree, and other gentlemen, dispraised it because they understood it not" (Qtd. Smith 23) and there is no surprise, for the scholar's exalted praise of his treatise points at a secret meaning, definitely irretrievable just from the surface of the text. The work appears to be written in some sort of intellectual code of the elect, or just expounds the vast potential of semiosis, the very last sentence reading: "Here the vulgar eye will see nothing but Obscurity and will despair considerably." (Dee, *Monas Hieroglyphica*) On Dee's return to England Queen Elizabeth, expectedly baffled by the book, desired him to read it together with her and explain its mysteries. "Whereupon her Majestie had a little perusion of the same with me, and then in most heroicall and princely wise did comfort and encourage me in my studies philosophicall and mathematicall." (Dee, *Compendious Rehersall*, Qtd. Smith 23-24)

As the foremost mathematician of the Elizabethan court at the time, Dee was commissioned, in the beginning of 1570, to write the preface "annexed to Euclide, ([translated] by the right worshipfull Sir Henry Billingsley Knight, in the English language first published) written at the earnest request of sundry right worshipfull

Knights, and other very well learned men” (Dee, *True and Faithful Relation*, 16). In this short text he attempts with the magnitude of all his erudition and skill of argumentation to infuse with every paragraph a positive attitude towards human progress, and vindicate the cause of the champions of true learning. He writes about the virtues of every art and science, and reaches arithmetics, "which next to theologie is most divine, most pure, most ample and generall, most profound, most subtele, most commodious and most necessary [...] it lifts the heart above the heavens by invisible lines, and by its immortal beams melteth the reflection of light incomprehensible, and so procureth joy and perfection unspeakable." (Qtd. Ibid. 25) Further, Dee describes the wonders of artifice and their assets to people. He writes about a telescope, a convex mirror, authomatic sawing mills operating by the force of running water, which he saw in Prague; a diving chamber supplied with air; the brazen head made by Albertus Magnus, which seemed to speak; Archimedes' sphere; the dove of Archytas; the wheel of Vulcan, mentioned by Aristotle; the mechanical fly, fashioned by a German scholar in Nüremberg. All this can be readily achieved through "skill, will, industry and ability duly applied to proof."

But is any honest student, or a modest Christian philosopher, to be, for such like feats, mathematically and mechanically wrought, counted and called a conjuror? Shall the folly of idiots and the mallice of the scornfull so much prevaile that he who seeketh no worldly gaine or glory at their hands, but onely of God the Threisor of heavenly wisdom and knowledge of pure veritie, shall he, I say, in the mean space, be robbed and spoiled of his honest name and fame? He that seeketh, by S. Paul's advertisement in the creatures' properties and wonderfull vertues, to find juste cause to glorifie the eternall and Almightye Creator by, shall that man be condemned as a companion of Hell-hounds and a caller and conjuror of wicked damned spirits? (Dee, *Preface*. Qtd. Smith 27)

This bitterness would echo again and again in Dee's writings, and he would write many a text to prove that what he did and the the truth he was after did not spring from the nether sphere but were to be used for the benefit of his Queen and counry. An early but bright enough example of such a text is *Brytanicae Republicae Synopsis*. Written in 1570, it presents its author's scholarly meditations on the current state of the realm and suggests means for curing its ills.

Dee spent a great deal of 1576 working over a series of books (*The British Monarchy*, *The British Complement*, and *Famous and Rich Discoveries*), which were to be compiled under the title: *General and Rare Memorials pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation*. These ambitious works, in reality, deal with matters much beyond the issues of navigation in the sea. Even though a considerable part of the second volume is dedicated to the explication of a "paradoxall" compass invented earlier by Dee himself, the rest of the texts rather essay on the navigation of England's still unborn empire towards a vision of the greatest sea power and global colonizator. Here, among other things, was discussed for the first time the importance of establishing "a Petty Navy Royall, of three score tall ships or more, but in no case fewer," to be thoroughly equipped and manned "as a comfort and safeguard to the Realme". Thousands of soldiers "will thus be hardened and well broke to the rage and disturbance of the sea, so that in time of need we shall not be forced to use all fresh-water Soldyers," but we shall have a crew of "hardy sea-soldyers" ready at hand. The Navy will also be useful in "deciphering out coasts", sounding channels and harbours, observation of tides. "We must attain this," Dee concludes, "incredible political mystery" – the supremacy of our sea power; for we must be "Lords of the Seas" in order that our "wits and travayles" may be employed at home for the enriching of the kingdom, that "our commodities (with due store reserve) may be carried abroad," and that peace and justice may reign. (Smith 41-43) The arguments to support his propositions Dee often draws directly from books: he dedicates a whole chapter, for example, to the history of "that peacable and provident Saxon, King Edgar", and the effectiveness of his fleet, by which he maintained his forts along the coast²⁸. In this way Dee bends together the two kinds

of navigation and voyage: the ones that are recorded as great geographical discoveries; and the others through the dusty pages of re-discovered books and manuscripts, which projecting into the living day conjure up political visions and inspire people into the submission to higher ideas. Both endeavours, Sherman suggests, were comparable, often related, and ultimately, equally important in the shaping and re-shaping of the Renaissance world. This facet of Dee's career calls upon Cornelius Agrippa's bitter observation that "if good and just men be the possessors of knowledge, then Arts and Sciences may become useful to the Commonwealth, though they make their possessors none the happier". (Qtd. Morley 154)

No matter what he did, however, and how much he read, Dee could not attain this "pure & sownd wisdome" he "desired and prayed unto" from his youth on (Dee, *Mysteriorum Liber Primus* 13). He always found himself a hair's breadth away from wresting the ultimate secret of the universe from the caverns of hidden knowledge, yet he continuously perceived a tangible impasse before his epistemological pursuit, he found that the books of men cannot satisfy his hunger for the "radicall truthes" of being:

And for as much as, many years, in many places, far & nere, in many bokes, & sundry languages, I have sowght, & stidyed; and with sundry men conferred, and with my own reasonable discourse labored, whereby to fynde or get some ynckling, glyms, or beame of such the foresaid radicall thruthes: But, (to be brief) after all my foresaid endeavor I could fynde no other way, to such true wisdome atteyning, but by the extraordinary gift: and by no vulgar schole doctrine, or humane Invention. (Ibid. loc. cit.)

This "extraordinary gift" which, for Dee, remains the only path towards true understanding, is naturally Revelation. The erudite man's close reading of the Scriptures and the available Apocrypha long for the lordly boon of Divine conference: "Enoch enjoyed thy favor and conversation, with Moyses thou wast

familier: And also [...] to Abraham, Isac, and Jacob, Josua, Gedeon, Esdras, Daniel, Tobias, and sundry other, thy good Angels were sent, by thy disposition, to instruct them, informe them, help them” (Ibid. loc. cit.) Logically, the question was asked: Is the value of an Ass or two for Cis, Saul’s father, greater than a philosopher’s need for ultimate knowledge²⁹? “Therefore, Seeing I was sufficiently towght and confirmed, that this wisdome could not be come by at mans hand, or by humane powre, but onely from the[e] (O God) mediately or immediately) [...] I did fly unto the[e] by harty prayer, full oft, and in sundry manners”. (Ibid. loc. cit.) It is quite evident that the scholar craved for perfect knowledge as much as the half-drowned Buddhist apprentice craved for air; it is perfectly logical then, that the intense determination of his devout mind would eventually breathe life into the insubstantial, textual spirit of his aspiration. On 25 May 1581 Dee put down in his *Diary* the laconic but solemn entry: “I had sight in χρυσταλλω³⁰ offered me, and I saw.” (Dee, *Diary* 11) What exactly he saw in his show-stone on this day remains unsaid, but whatever it was, it certainly convinced the exalted scholar that he had been chosen to converse with God, and passage to infinite intelligence had been granted him by divine grace.

Just like the misfortunate Doctor of Wittenberg, having excelled in the sciences and arts conceived by the minds of men, swollen with learning’s golden gifts, Dee embarked on a transcendental journey to explore as yet uncharted territories. Unlike Faustus, however, he believed he sailed the seas of flawless light, driven by the benevolent winds of the highest and purest Cabbala, and guarded by the ardent vigil of his sincerest Christian benediction. He believed that the path which was offered him, like Ariadne’s thread, would lead him out of the cloying twilight of the impassable labyrinth of human limitation into the glorious brilliance, the heavenly beatitude of true wisdom. In this inspired quest, just like the hero of the German tale, he too needed a traveling companion, someone to guide and serve him. Dee, himself, could not see clearly the spiritual creatures that he sought to converse with; this is why what he really needed was a medium, someone whose mind was open to another sphere of existence.

The record of his first conference with a heavenly creature Dee preserves in his secret chronicles *Mysteriorum Liber Primus*³¹ under the date 22 December 1581. After fervent prayers made to God for his merciful comfort and instruction³², Dee asked the professional skryer³³, Barnabas Saul, to look into his great crystalline globe and see if he could espy the messenger. A man showed to him, “very bewtifull, with apparell yellow, glittering like gold: and his hed had beams like ster beames, blasing and spredding from it; his eyes fyrie. He wrote in the stone very much in hebrue letters, and the letters seemed all transparent gold: which, Saul was not able eyther presently to reade, that I might write after his voyce, neither to imitate the letters in short tyme.” (Dee, *Liber Primus* 15) The spiritual being assured Dee that many truths shall be declared to him by another worker, assigned to the show-stone, after the feast dedicated to the birth of Jesus. He advised the scholar to keep his doings in secret, but fervently prepare himself through fasting and continuous prayer to receive the object of his desire. The stone had to be set in the sun, the brighter the day the better, and the skryers might deal both kneeling and sitting.

Two months after this first séance, on 10 March 1582, one Mr. Edward Talbot came to Dee’s house at Mortlake “willing and desyrous to see or shew some thing in spirituall practise”. Dee set before him his stone to which, he was already convinced, were answerable “*Aliqui Angeli boni*”. The skryer fell on his knees into prayer and entreaty. Within one quarter of an hour, or less, before his eyes there was a heavenly creature who, after being welcomed and inquired for his name, disclosed that he was Uriel, the light of God. He said that together with Michael and Raphael he was commissioned to help Dee in his philosophical studies through this crystal and with the help of this medium only, for “yt [wa]s the wyll of God, that [they] shold, jointly, have the knowledge of his Angells to gither.” (Ibid. 18) Naturally, Dee was overjoyed with the success of his new assistant; heeding little the potentiality that the project on which they were to embark together would utterly change the whole current of his life and worldly outlook. He did not know yet that the name of the person he accepted so heartily was feigned and possibly so were his

prophetic powers. The real name of the man was Edward Kelley and throughout the following eleven years he would become Dee's closest companion, yet most feared menace; both a servant and a master; sometimes loving as a son, sometimes treacherous as a jealous foe. The parallel with Dr. Faustus' familiar devil asserts itself; even more so because, just like Mephistopheles, Kelley never attempted to trick Dee - he was always a faithful mirror to the scholar's driving ambitions. The imagination behind the visions and narratives of crystal gazing was inevitably that of Dee, skillfully reflected by the resourceful skryer, who like a master playwright would feed his only spectator just the sensation of truth that the appetites of the second most desire. The cascade of events to follow, the peregrinations for the search of the utmost bound of human thought, both in the marvellous world of heavenly spirits, and onto the precarious ground of European princely courts, are captivately intriguing in themselves. The scope of this text, however, does not allow me to pursue them in great detail and I need to make do only with highlights.

The angels instructed the crystal gazers how to make a sweet-wood, square table covered with characters and names and cloaked with red silk, mounted on four seals of precise design; one larger seal, wrought out of the purest wax, had to be placed in the middle of the table, upon which the show-stone was to be set in its frame. This was to be the seat of perfection, from which the long-desired wisdom would be shown unto the scholars. Not long after these preparations were taken care of the sittings began:

Δ Than cam in Michaël, with a sword in his hand, as he was wont: and I sayd unto him, are you UUMichael?

Mich. Dowt not: I am he which rejoyceth in him that rejoyceth in the Fortitude and strength of God [...] Thow shalt sweare by the Living God, the strength of his Mercy, and his Medicinall vertue, powred into mans soule, never to disclose these Mysteries.

Δ yf No man, by no means, shall perceyve any thing herof, by me, I wold think that shold not do well.

- Mi. Nothing is cut from the Churche of God. We in his Saints are blessed for ever. We separate the, from fyled and wycked persons: We move the to God.
- Δ I vow, as you require: God be my help, and Gwyde, now and ever, *amen*.
- MIC. This is a Mystery, skarse worthy for us ourselves, to know, much lesse to Reveale. Are thou, then, so Contented?
- Δ I am: God be my strength.
- Mic. Blessed art thou among the Saints: And blessed are you both [...]
Dee, what woldest thou have?
- Δ *Recte sapere et Intelligere & c.*
- Mic. Thy Desyre is graunted the [...] I will shew the in the mighty hand and strength of God, what his Mysteries are: The true Circle of his aeternitie Comprehending all vertue: The whole and sacred Trinitie.
Oh, holy be he: Oh, holy be he: Oh, holy be he [...] *Amen*.
- Δ There cam in 40 white Creatures, all in white Sylk long robes: and they like chyldern, and all they fallyng on thyr knees sayd, Thou onely art Holy among the highest. O God, Thy Name be blessed for ever.
- Δ Michael stode up out of his chayre, and by and by, all his leggs semed to be like two great pillars of brass: and he as high as half way to the heven. And by and by, his sword was all on fyre and he stroke, or drew his sworde over all theyr 40 heds. The Erth quaked: and 40 fell down: and Michael called Semiael, with a thundring voyce, and sayd, Declare the Mysteries of the Living God, our God, of one that liveth for ever [...]

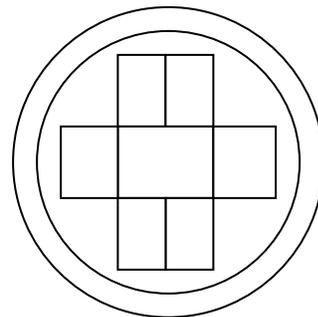
(Dee, *Liber Secundus* 5-7)

And so it went on and on and on: Dee received daily pageants, with content ranging from utter incomprehensibility to most delicate poetry; exuberance of signs,

hieroglyphs, letters, numbers, tables, and pictures to satiate his “zeale to honest and true knowledge” for which, he wrote earlier to Sir William Cecil, if needs be, his “flesh, blud, and bones should make the merchandize”. He constantly felt on the brink of a fundamental revelation, almost touching the shore of a newly discovered prodigious land, somehow always withdrawing before his very eyes a step further towards the uncertain horizon of days yet to come. Sometimes it crossed the scholar’s mind that this may not be the true path of wisdom, but he would not believe that he should have “fished with so large and costly a nett, and been so long time drawing, even with the helpe of Lady Philosophie and Queen Theologie, and at length have caught a frog, nay a Devill” (Qtd. Smith 27) It crossed his mind that he saw the spiritual creatures “onely by faith and imagination” (Ibid. 112), but his angst was soon allayed by the assurance that this is purposefully so, because this sight is perfecter than that through the senses.

When his faith is most shaken Dee, just like Faustus, is distracted with dramatic pastimes: instead of the Seven Deadly Sins, however, before him appear seven women “bewtifull and fayre”. They, Michaël says, represent the seven “Governers that work and rule under God: By whome you may have powre to work such things, as shalbe to god his glorie, profit of your Cuntrie, and the knowledge of his Creatures”. Each of the women carries a table wherein lie the names of God’s Angels of Light, they place them together in the shape of a cross:

- E.T. One stept furth, and sayde,
 1: Wilt thou have witt, and wisdome:
 Here, it is (Δ: Pointing to the middle table.)
 2: An other sayd, The Exaltation and Government of Princes is in my hand. (Δ: Pointing to that on the left hand of the two uppermost.)
 3: In Cownsayle and Nobilitie I prevayle: (Δ: Pointing to the other of the two uppermost: which is on the right hand.)



- 4: The Gayne and Trade of Merchandise is in my hand: Lo, here it is. (Δ: [s]he pointed to the great table on the right side of the myddle Table that I meane which is opposite to our right hand while we behold these 7 Tables)
- 5: The Quality of the Earth, and waters, is my knowledge, and I know them: and here it is. (Δ: pointing to that on the right hand: of the two lowermost.)
- 6: The motion of the Ayre, and those that move in it, are all known to me. Lo, here they are. (Δ: pointing to the other Table below, on the left hand.)
- 7: I signifie wisdome: In fire is my Government. I was in the begynning, and shalbe to the ende. (Δ: pointing to the great table on the left hand of the Middle Table.)
- Mi: Mark these mysteries: For, this knowne, the State of the whole Earth is known, and all that is thereon. [...]
- E.T. Uriel opened a boke in his own hand, and sayde,
The Fowntayne of wisdome is opened.
Nature shalbe knowne: Earth with her secrets disclosed.
The elements with their powers judged. [...]
- Ur: Beholde, I teache. There are 49 Angels glorious and excellent, appointed for the government of all earthly actions: which 49 do work and dispose the will of the Creator; Limited from the begynning in strength, powre and glorie. These shalbe Subject unto you, in the Name and by Invocating upon the Name of GOD, which doth lighten, dispose and Cumfort you. By them shall you work, in the quieting of estates, in learning of wisdome: pacifying of the Nobilitie, judgement in the rest, as well in the depth of waters, secrets of the Ayre, as in the bowells and entrails of the Earth.

(Dee, *Liber Tertius* 13-25)

According to Dee's *Diary*, it was on 1 May 1583 that Albert Laski, Count Palatine of Siradia, one of the most powerful noblemen in Poland, came to London to visit the Queen. He eagerly wanted to make Dee's acquaintance, see his library, and discuss philosophy and occultism, a subject which had seemingly occupied his thoughts lately. Testimony for this provides the note delivered at Mortlake by one Mr. North from Poland over a month prior to the Prince's arrival. Laski was described by contemporary writers as a "most learned man, handsome in stature and lineaments, richly cloathed, 'of very comely and decent apparel', and of graceful behaviour". (Qtd. Smith 98) In his actions so far he had proved a dashing adventurer of heroic courage who did not hesitate to spend generously his quite substantial finances. Dee met the Prince for the first time in the chamber of the Earl of Leicester at the Court at Greenwich, but it was not long before Laski came to visit the philosopher in his house and stayed for supper. Soon after that, he paid a very spectacular call, stopping at Mortlake, on his way back from Oxford, in a splendidly decorated barge, rowed by the Queen's men, enjoying the company of Lord Russell, Sir Philip Sydney, and other gentlemen. The visit honored Dee, and he recorded his gratitude and his praise to God for it in his chronicles. A strange relationship was beginning to develop between the erudite mystic and the ambitious nobleman.

Naturally, during his sojourns at Dee's house the Polish Prince too participated in the actions of crystal gazing. It was then that an "Angel in a white Robe, holding a bloody Crosse in his right hand, the same hand being also bloody" (Dee, *Liber Sexti* 25) appeared in the globe. He said that his name was Jubanladec and he was the one appointed to be "Keeper and Defender" of the distinguished guest. The Guardian disclosed that great Victories, in the name of his God, lay in store within a year's time in the destiny of the Prince. "The Jews in his time shall taste of this Crosse: And with this Crosse shall he overcome the Sarazens, and Paynims". He also pledged to open the hearts of all men, so that his noble charge may have free passage through them, and will not let him suffer or perish by the violence of the wicked. To this end the Angel decided to appear unto him through

the mediation of this stone, for it was now that he needed guidance, moving among true friends and camouflaged foes.

Expectably, Laski was incredibly impressed by these revelations. With his actions driven by divine deliberation, he saw a miraculous way to a long desired destiny – the crown of Poland. He immediately proposed to Dee and Kelley to take their wives and children and follow him to the Continent. For the scholar this was a prospect of a step towards a long desired financial and political stability, something he intensely needed for the furthering of his costly studies. For over fifteen years already he had been constantly promised a steady means of income, which he had never got, and so was forced, time and time again, to plead for help to the Queen and the nobles, in order to sustain his family and work. In addition to that, from the chronicles, he so diligently kept of his life and conversations with spirits, we learn that his political security was no longer as firm as it used to be. The entry in his *Diary* of 24 November 1582 tells about a strange dream he had: “Saturday night I dreamed that I was deade, and afterward my bowels wer taken out I walked and talked with diverse, and among other with the Lord Thresorer³⁴ who was com to my howse to burn my bokes when I was dead, and thought he loked sourely on me.” (Dee, *Diary* 17-18) The importance of an odd dream increases when the fear transfused in it re-appears on the pages of *Liber Sexti* of 2 July 1583:

Δ: How is the mind of Mr. Secretary³⁵ toward me, me thinketh it is alienated marvelously.

Mad³⁶: Those that love the world are hated of God. The Lord Treasurer and he are joynd together, and they hate thee. I heard them when they both said, thou wouldst go mad shortly: Whatsoever they can do against thee, assure thy self so. They will shortly lay a bait for thee; but eschew them.

Δ: Lord have mercy upon me: what bait, (I beseech you) and by whom?

Mad: They have determined to search thy house: But they stay untill the Duke be gone.

Δ: What would they search it for?

Mad: They hate the Duke, (both) unto the death. [...] They suspect the Duke is inwardly a Traytor.

Δ: They can by no means charge me, no not so much as of a Trayterous thought.

Mad: Though thy thoughts be good, they cannot comprehend the doings of the wise. In summe, they hate thee. Trust them not: they shall go about shortly to offer thee friendship: But be thou a worm in a heap of straw.

(Dee, *A True & Faithful Relation* 38)

Thus, on 21 September, after dark, Dee, Kelley, both their wives, Dee's children and few servants joined Lord Albert Lasky and his men, and secretly made haste towards the two ships waiting to bring them across the Channel. This was the beginning of a six years' journey to the heart of Europe and back, which often moved along the muddy, wintry field roads and the sluggish canals of the Continent, but also passed through nobles' mansions, through the Court of the ruling Polish King, Stephen Báthory, at Cracow, and through the Palace of the Holy Roman Emperor at Prague, the age's metropolis of alchemy and secret art. Dee records both the diverse events that encountered them on the way, and the yet even more enigmatic conversations with ethereal creatures in his *Libri Peregrinationis*, also published by Casaubon in *A True & Faithful Relation*. He describes the hardship of their travels, the want for money, Kelley's emotional outbreaks, threatening to break up their fellowship; and on the other hand he writes about his doubts that the promises of ease, wealth and honor, repeated again and again by the spirits are but mere illusions. Dee's painful misgivings are immediately mirrored within the esoteric séances, a new type of creatures begin to appear who, just like the Good Angel in Marlowe's drama, beseech the disheartened Doctor to repent: "Deny that you have done, Confesse it to be false, Cry you have offended, And let the Angels of God see you do so, (that they may carry up your prayers) so shall you become righteous [...] Rent your cloaths, pluck those blasphemous books in pieces; And fall

down before the Lord: for he it is, that is Wisdom.” (Ibid. 102) It was difficult, though, for the devout scholar to believe that all his world, this whole transcendental, fabulous universe to which he had transported himself, was just a delirious deception. From the point he had already reached, he could no longer perceive the way back, so there was but one choice for him – to keep hoping that one glorious day the heavens would open to him and his aspiring soul would plunge into the blissful deep of profound understanding.

On 15 August 1584 Dee and his companions arrived in Prague. Before two weeks had passed, he was invited to the Palace for an audience with the Emperor, Rudolf II, the son of Maximilian II, to whom the philosopher had dedicated his *Monas Hieroglyphica* twenty years earlier. The monarch received the Englishman gracefully in his Privy Chamber and thanked him politely for the copy of his book, which he had kindly sent him at the time of his arrival, and commented that its essence was too hard for his capacity to understand. He encouraged the philosopher to tell him all that was on his mind. Dee slipped into a lengthy and eloquent rehearsal of his life and fate: how for many years he had sought true wisdom in various books and conferences with learned men, alas, without much success; how God had sent him his angels to instruct him in divine intelligence, and presented him with a priceless, marvellous stone; how Uriel, the Light of God, had given him an important message to deliver. Dee was to bid the Emperor to repudiate his transgressions from equitable purity and pray to the Lord, who would show himself through a Holy Vision, to receive his repentance: “This my commission is from God. I feign nothing, neither am I a hypocrite, an ambitious man, or doting or dreaming in this cause. If I speak otherwise than I have just cause, I forsake my salvation.” (Qtd. Smith 150) Even though, according to the legend, Rudolf’s grandfather, Charles V was amused by Faustus’ conjuration of ancient spirits amid his Hall in Innsbruck, his grandson remained rather unmoved by Dee and Kelley’s presentation of celestial clairvoyance. The speech of Uriel was indeed admirably poetic but in content hardly surpassed a Sunday churchly exhortation: “If he live righteously and follow me truly, I will hold up his house with pillars of hiacinth, and

his chambers shall be full of modesty and comfort. I will bring the East wind over him as a Lady of Comfort, and she shall sit upon his castles with Triumph, and she shall sleep with joy.” (Ibid. 151)

There was, however, something to which no sovereign can remain indifferent, a word the mention of which will bedazzle the mind of every governor, a substance whose name, like the inspiring power of a potent incantation, can explode the fantasy of each ruler – the appellation of this magical entity is gold. Soon after it became clear that the conversations with spirits could not alone gain the desired honor and affluence, Kelley began to spread the rumor that through the guidance of angels Dee and he had discovered the philosopher’s stone and were able to convert base metals into gold. He even made a few demonstrations before Laski and some other nobles. The reaction to this news was, expectably, sensational. The King of Poland, Stephen Báthory, immediately granted audience to the philosopher and his companions; Sir Francis Walsingham sent letter after letter in the hope of reminding the potentially invaluable man his importance for his own nation; even the Emperor of Russia, Feodor Ivanovich, promised an allowance of £2,000 yearly, or any sum that the Doctor would ask for, a free diet at the royal kitchen, and a regal train of 500 horses to transport him, his companions and his belongings to Moscow. Naturally, some advance payments were solicited, and securing progressively his financial independence, Kelley little by little emancipated himself from Dee’s prominence. Soon he began to announce that it was only him who knew the secret of transmutation, which allowed him to make gold alone, without the help of his respected master. Before long he was knighted by the anxious Rudolf II, who could not wait to see the results of his extraordinary gift. The exaltation of the newly-created, ambitious alchemist reached the point at which he decided to give up crystal gazing, and eventually, altogether abandoned the fellowship with Dee. His life from this moment onwards took the direction described by Cornelius Agrippa towards the end of his *On The Vanity of Sciences and Arts*:

But the true searcher after the stone which is to metamorphose all base metals into gold, converts only farms, goods, and patrimonies into ashes and

smoke. When he expects the reward of his labours, births of gold, youth and immortality, after all this time an expense, at length, old, ragged, famished, with the continual use of quicksilver paralytic, rich only in misery, and so miserable that he will sell his soul for three farthings, he falls upon ill courses.” (Qtd. Morley 199)

A laconic entry in Dee’s *Diary* of 25 November 1595 reads “the newes that Sir. Edward Kelley was slayne”, but the more popular story has it that he was imprisoned, at last, by the Emperor, who decided he had waited enough for his gold, and attempting to escape through a turret window, fell from a great height to his wretched death.

Doctor Dee, on the other hand, having lost what was most valuable to him – the coveted dream to gain ultimate wisdom by divine perusal – had no longer reason to stay on the Continent; after an extensive and tiring journey back, he and his family returned to England on 2 December 1589. He entered his ancient house a poor, disappointed and disillusioned old man, only to find his priceless library irreparably spoiled, many of his carefully collected books destroyed or missing, and all his precious instruments broken down to bits. This time even his formerly favorable and congenial Queen would remain quite aloof to his consecutive appeals for help. On 29 June 1594 we wrote in his *Diary*: “after I had hard the Archbishop his answers and discourses, and that after he had byn the last Sondag at Tybald’s with the Quene and Lord Threasorer, I take myself confounded for all suing or hoping for anything that was. And so adiew to the court and courting tyll God direct me otherwise!” (Dee, *Diary* 50) When his Queen died in 1603, and was succeeded on the throne by the pragmatic Scot, James I, who in his *Demonologie* announces his belief in the “power of conjurers to invoke the devil when they choose, and to invest others with his spirit” (Smith 292), and, furthermore, licenses the pious and godly people to unite in persecuting and exterminating these dangerous individuals, Dee could not hope for anything better for himself. He wrote a poetic *Address to the Parliament*, in June 1604, attempting to clear his reputation of the crawling suspicions of the day:

[...]

Now (if you write) full well you may,
Fowle sclandrous tongues and divelish hate,
And help the truth to beare some sway
In just defence of a good Name.

In sundry sorts, this sclander great
(Of *conjurer*) I have sore blamde:
But wilfull, rash, and spiteful heat,
Doth nothing cease to be enflamde.

Your helpe, therefore, by Wisdom's lore,
And by you Powre, so great and sure,
I humbly crave, that never more
This hellish wound I shall endure [...]

(Qtd. Smith 296)

As might be expected, this graceful political act had no effect whatsoever, and Dee spent the last four years of his life, enjoying merely the memory of better times. The myth of the dignified philosopher, wielding miraculous powers of pristine knowledge for the benefit of his Sovereign and Commonwealth, had given way to the sarcastic, grotesque, lamentable plight of Doctor Faustus – the overreacher.

It is curious, of course, how much of the fabulous stories about Dee's conversations with angels and Kelley's hunt for the philosopher's stone, told all through Elizabethan England and abroad, reached Marlowe, and to what extent they influenced his brilliant re-working of the Faust legend. Frances A. Yates offers a hypothesis in *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, according to which Marlowe launches his volatile play in a rationalist's attempt both to ridicule the already defamed person of Dee, and to ideologically subvert everything that he

stood for. She finds significant proximity between the time when the playwright worked on the drama and the date of the philosopher's return to England. On the other hand, however, there is no specific mention of neither author nor play in Dee's chronicles, complaints, or endeavors to clean his stigmatized name. Moreover, considering the richness and complexity of *Doctor Faustus*, Yates's suggestion seems not only highly presumptuous, but also tremendously delimiting in its inclination to confine the vast potential of Marlowe's text to a more or less personal assault. Anyhow, it seems to me that the parallel existence of texts in an overall textual universe, their tendency to imitate each other, and the glittering manifestation of particular common recurring patterns, is a sufficient reason for looking for meaningful resemblances between them. After all, it is in the imagination of the reader that magic preserves its primordial stronghold; the interpretation and overinterpretation of texts still depends on the practitioner's ardent belief in the revelational signification, reached through constructing and deconstructing elaborate, yet not entirely justifiable, ever fluctuating and constantly metamorphosing configurations of images, reflections and emanations.

By affixing the history of John Dee to the familiar structure of *Doctor Faustus*, I do not claim to expose Marlowe's intention to relate his work to the life of this misfortunate man, but to suggest a possible enhanced reading of the play, through which two oppositions, which have so far been kept in counterbalance, can be meaningfully merged together. The two oppositions in question are namely: the good, godly, uncorrupted learning, on the one hand, and the bad, maculate, arcane diablerie, on the other. Rather than promoting the former and condemning the latter, Marlowe's *hypertext* could be seen as associating them in their resemblance to the point where they become one and the same thing. In both stories the intense pursuit of lawful knowledge discovers the inability of human science to explain being, Socrates' *aporia*³⁷; from then onwards stretches the realm of overreaching. Whether it be called divine conference with angels or smutty Satanism, it is the consuming darkness that envelops the space beyond man's native octave of light, it is the alluring mirage, which by its mesmerizing power draws the delirious wanderer

deeper and deeper into the desert of his own destruction. This reading leads to a magical journey into this pseudo-promised land, just to provide the necessary perspicacity to discern that it too is another refection, a quite desperate one indeed, of the impassibility to ultimate truth. Somehow along the way, however, the uncompromising craving for overpowering freedom, the amazing dream of everlasting recognition, artfully intoned by the powerful rhetoric of events, has engendered in the heart of the reader a dazzling, passionate infatuation. Perhaps, enamoured, thus, he, or she, would fain look for an offered chance to change the course of affairs and save the souls of these noble overreachers. Perhaps, after all, there is a possibility for an alternative ending to this story.

THE BOOK UNDONE

*All the miracles since the world began,
almost, have been wrought by words.*

Roger Bacon

Another close look at the kaleidoscopic symmetries among the interwoven narratives, reviewed so far, could conceivably detect the key to escaping the Faustian hopeless doom. It is there, lying unconcealed on the surface, manifestly simple, but, at the same time, diabolically hard to interpret – yet another sign, another complex metaphor, another hieroglyph. It is easily observable that nearly all the heroes of the stories discussed so far, in one way or another, are counseled to restrain their eager ambitions, and to annihilate their precious, all-containing books: “Vgly hell gape not, come not Lucifer; Ile burne my bookes!” Faustus cries; alas, it is too late; “[P]luck those blasphemous books in pieces!” an angel scolds Dee, but by that time, there is no longer any hope of return; “Defer not [...] till this last point of extremitie [...]” Greene appeals half regretfully, half reproachfully to the already departing Marlowe; “To ask or search I blame thee not; for Heaven is as the Book of God before thee set [...] [and yet] solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid: Leave them to God above;” Raphael warns Milton’s inquisitive Adam; “To know nothing is the happiest life” sarcastically remarks Cornelius Agrippa before he publishes his grand opus, *Of Occult Philosophy*, which would devastate completely his remaining days. It is easy to

reach the conclusion that it is their reluctance to take this good advice that eventually leads all these glorious souls to the everlasting bonfire. It would be logical then, to wonder what would befall them if they could summon up all the necessary strength and, at one blow, part with their ambitions; would this act reduce their dignity; and more fundamentally, what one could make of annihilating the books.

The second half of the thirteenth century saw the rise and fall of one of the most famous and, at the same time, most controversial English mystics and philosophers. His name and work appear in *Doctor Faustus*; John Dee avidly collected and studied his texts; Cornelius Agrippa too acknowledged him as one of his principal teachers, and so did Johannes Trithemius. The story of the life and feats of this man was still in the mouth of people, two hundred years after his death – as we can see from the play written about him, which appeared, most probably, shortly before Marlowe’s drama, under the authorship of the already mentioned Robert Greene³⁸. The name of this remarkable man is Roger Bacon, Doctor Mirabilis. He dedicated his life to the study of mathematics, optics, astronomy, astrology, and alchemy. In his writings later scholars found, among other things, detailed descriptions of the process of making gunpowder, ideas for the construction of flying machines, motorized ships and carriages. In Greene’s play “Bacon can by books make storming Boreas in the cave of Æolus thunder from his cave, and dim fair Luna to a dark eclipse. The great arch-ruler, potentate of hell, trembles, when Bacon bids him or his friends bow to the force of his pentageron”; and also he can make “a brazen head by art which shall unfold strange doubts and aphorisms, and read a lecture in philosophy, and by the help of devils and ghastly fiends, [...] ere many years or days be past, to compass England with a wall of brass.” (Greene I, 25-46) Moreover, legend has it that Bacon devised a magical mirror, in which people could see anything they wanted, regardless of what it was and how far it was from them. According to one didactic account of his adventures, it was this invention that utterly transformed Bacon’s life:

When two youths begged him to let them look into his magic mirror, the famous 'perspective glass', in order to see how their fathers fared at home. Unfortunately, these parents were discovered to be fighting a duel. High words arose between the sons as they looked impotently. Finally, drawing their swords, they stabbed each other to death. Overcome with sorrow and remorse, Bacon shattered the glass; and then, calling his friends and scholars together, he addressed them in this wise: "My good friends and fellow students, it is not unknowne to you how that through my art I have attained to that credit, that few men living ever had: of the wonders that I have done, all England can speak, both king and commons: I have unlocked the secret of art and nature, and let the world see those things, that have layen hid since the death of Hermes, that rare and profound philosopher: my studies have found the secrets of the starres; the bookes that I have made of them, doe serve for presidents to our greatest doctors, so excellent hath my judgement been therein. I likewise have found out the secrets of trees, plants and stones, with their severall uses; yet all this knowledge of mine I esteeme so lightly, that I wish that I were ignorant, and knew nothing: for the knowledge of these things (as I have truly found) serveth not to better a man in goodnesse, but onely to make him proud and thinke too well of himselfe. What hath all my knowledge of natures secrets gained me? Onely this, the loss of better knowledge, the losse of divine studies, which makes the immortal part of man (his soul) blessed. I have found, that my knowledge has beene a heavy burden, and has kept downe my good thoughts: I will remove the cause, which are these bookes: which I doe purpose here before you all to burne." They all intreated him to spare the bookes, because in them there were those things that after-ages might receive great benefit by. He would not hearken unto them, but threw them all into the fire, and in that flame burnt the greatest learning in the world [...] Then caused he to be made in the church-wall a cell where he locked himselfe in, and there remained till his death. His time he spent in prayer, meditation and such

divine exercises, and did seeke by all means to perswade men from the study of magicke. Thus lived he some two yeares space in that cell, never coming forth: his meat and drink he received in at the window, and at that window he did discourse with those that came to him; his grave he digged with his own nayles, and was laid there when he dyed. (*The Famous Histories of Frier Bacon* 245-250)

The historical accounts of Bacon's life tell a different story: Most probably because of his feverish activity in matters too precarious for the times, and his sound contempt for those not sharing his interests, at a certain stage, he was given the cold shoulder by his contemporaries: he felt forgotten by everyone and all but buried. Consequently, he reconsidered his career and joined the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor. He saw his role in confirming the Christian faith by explicating the secrets of the natural world, mathematics, alchemy, and astrology. To this end, he started an extensive correspondence, concerning the issues of science, with Pope Clement IV, and at his request wrote his *Opus majus* ("Great Work"), the *Opus minus* ("Lesser Work"), and the *Opus tertium* ("Third Work"), which were an attempt, remarkable for its scope, at a vast encyclopaedia of all the known sciences. A large part of these works survives to this day, and to them can be added: *Communia naturalium* ("General Principles of Natural Philosophy"), *Communia mathematica* ("General Principles of Mathematical Science"), *Compendium philosophiae* ("Compendium of Philosophy"). In 1268 the Pope died and with him perished his protection over Bacon's studies: Sometime between 1277 and 1279, he was condemned to prison by his fellow Franciscans, reportedly, because of certain "suspected novelties" in his teaching. How long he was imprisoned is unknown but there are reasons to suspect that he spent the last years of his life locked up in a convent.

Against the background of this story, the argument held up by the previous one seems quite unconvincing, even ironic. If these two narratives, however, are seen not as counterpoised phenomena, catalogued under the mutually excluding

entries: “reality” and “fiction”, but as dimensions of the same text, existing parallel to each other, at the two foothills of a mere fold in perception – then they illustrate perfectly the unfathomable essence of an overwhelming textuality. “The glory of the reader is to discover that texts can say everything.” (Eco 40) Derrida says the same, but in a different way: “no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation.” (Derrida, *Living On*, 81) The idea of the book, then, which is the idea of an ultimate unity of signification, appears as a limitation before the freedom of the text to construct and re-construct itself. No reader can learn how to read without the help of a book, but too long a journey upwards along the grid, even of the most elaborate system, evidently, leads only to the disappointing realization of its finiteness and debility. Therefore, in order to set the text free, we should gain the courage to explode the book, and dissolve the text back into a primeval language, subtle enough to perceive each absolute moment. Perhaps, this new perspective can enhance our vision, so that it could seize the elusive, dreamy beauty of the brusque, tangible world, or else descry the waking clarity shrouded into the gorgeous mists of a half-somnolent imagination. For the *permanent*, the affirmed form that defines reality, seems to exist only because of man’s unbearable anxiety before a possible drift away in textuality, yet it reduces all things, and stuffs them into isolated cells. “*Text* means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving [of different realities]; lost in this tissue – this texture – the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of his web.” (Barthes 64)

On “Hallowmas nyght” in 1611, according to the Revels Accounts for this year, “was presented at Whitehall before the kinges Majestie a play Called the Tempest”. The text comes first in the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare’s works, even though, (or namely because) it is generally considered, at least in intention, the last play produced by the great playwright; his poetic valediction to the stage; the truest

expression of his personal feelings and aesthetics; his “*Ars Poetica*”, as Auden writes; consequently, a powerful parallel between the magician-poet Prospero and Shakespeare himself has been drawn ever since by many readers. Numerous arguments for and against all these claims can be found in critical literature, together with studies on the connection of the work to colonialism, power relations, racism, art & nature, etc. What is striking, however, is the fact that very few readers indeed recognize *The Tempest* as a possible alternative ending of the Faust story; very few onomasticians indeed discover in Prospero, a doubtless namesake of the misfortunate Doctor of Wittenberg. But now, after the life history of John Dee has elucidated for us how negligible a space divides Satanism and sanctity within the plight of overreaching, there is no reason why we could not see in the benevolent person of the banished Duke of Milan a more mature, a wiser Faustus – a Faustus who had the chance to live to the age of forty-seven, and who was allowed to speak up once more from the oblivion of his exile.

“Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since,” the dignified castaway tells his daughter, “thy father was the Duke of Milan and a prince of power”; immersed headlong into the study of the *liberal arts*, thus, being transported and rapt in *secret studies*³⁹, the government of the state he left into the hand of his brother. For him, “poor man, [his] library was dukedom large enough”; and yet blindfold in his enlightenment he failed to foresee the surging peril of his brother’s ambition. A dark conspiracy followed – and out into the sea the Duke and his precious child were hoist, into the mere carcass of a boat, which the very rats had instinctively quit, unrigged and unnavigable. A loyal nobleman Gonzalo, by his charity, furnished the banished with some food and fresh water, clothes, necessary stuff, but, above all, invaluable volumes from Prospero’s hand-picked collection. (Shakespeare I. ii. 154-67)

It is not very difficult to conjecture what the books in question might have been. By their profound wisdom, the Duke establishes his magical kingdom on the uncultivated shore of an isolated island. From them he teaches to his daughter the

essentials of human knowledge, imprinting on her what in his opinion are the highest and purest accomplishments of his culture:

Pros. [...] and here
Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit
Than other princess' can, that have more time
For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful. (Ibid. I. ii. 171-74)

These books contain also the secret learning, which endows the studious artisan with astonishing magical powers. By their potency Prospero releases the gentle spirit Ariel from his prison into a cloven pine:

Pros. [...] it was mine Art,
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
The pine, and let thee out. (Ibid. I. ii. 291-93)

By the same art he makes from the airy creature his servant – obeying him in fear that by his magic Prospero can “rend an oak, and peg [him] in his knotty entrails”. Enslaved once, Ariel can perform amazing tasks for his master:

To answer thy best pleasure; be 't to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task (Ibid. I. ii. 195-256)

On his arrival to the island the banished Duke finds there another creature – Caliban, a “freckled whelp hag-born – not honour'd with a human shape.” (Ibid. I. ii. 282-84) He and his daughter decide to civilize the savage⁴⁰ by teaching him their language:

Mir. [...] I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like

A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes

With words that made them known.”⁴¹ (Ibid. I. ii. 356-60)

Like a colonist, Prospero thinks that by imposing the order of his culture, his “print of goodness”, on the indeterminate being of the primitive, he would tame and control him. This is, however, not the case with Caliban. Being a true slave only to his instinctual drives, he tries to violate Miranda. Consequently, he falls into disgrace with his master and is degraded to an “abhorred slave”, grudging and hostile to his master, and dominated by brutal force.

Prospero’s books enable him to place under his power everybody and everything that happens on the island and off its shore, but it appears that his potency does not stretch much further. Even by the skill of his attending spirits, he cannot affect the events in Milan or Naples. It is by divine providence that a ship, on board of which are the people responsible for his exile, approaches the coast of his realm. Prospero knows about this but chooses not to seek harsh retribution for the men that wronged him. He decides instead to use his magical capacity to work a charm upon their souls and thus transform them into good men. He summons all his creative skill to devise a gigantic dramatic performance, which is to stretch on to the whole island and turn it into a stage. His enemies will be both spectators and participants into the ultimate play, so that they could see, feel, and experience his power. This venture of Prospero’s transports the whole action of the play into a *meta*-dramatic plane. *The Tempest* becomes a play within a play, but it also to become also a play about play-making. The spectator follows the plots, but also becomes a witness of Prospero’s dramatic intentions and designs. Wrought out of words, the magician’s scheme becomes an experiment on the spellbinding quality of words, a *meta*-text – a text that discusses the philosophy behind language and rhetoric.

A characteristic foretaste of this dimension of the text provides the episode, in which Gonzalo and the rest of his companions take a first look at the island and

see it in two completely different ways: “this island seem to be a desert [...] uninhabitable, and almost inaccessible,” says Adrian; “Here is everything advantageous to life [...] How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green!” muses Gonzalo; “The ground, indeed, is tawny⁴².” argues Antonio. This starts a game, in which most of the companions team up to contradict and ridicule Conzalo’s idealized, poetic vision: “No; he doth but mistake the truth totally.” protests Sebastian. In answer of this, Gonzalo brings up another reality, which leads to yet another one:

Gon. [...] Methinks our garments are now as fresh as when
We put them on first in Afric, at the marriage of the
King's fair daughter Claribel to the King of Tunis [...]

Adr. Tunis was never graced before with
Such a paragon to their queen.

Gon. Not since widow Dido's time [...]

Adr. 'Widow Dido' said you? you make me study of
That: she was of Carthage, not of Tunis.

Gon. This Tunis, sir, was Carthage. (Ibid. II. i. 56-80)

In the twinkling of an eye, Gonzalo takes his companions on a journey through space and time only to remind them that there is no objective reality – that every person experiences as real, what he, or she, chooses to. He shows that this so palpable *now* and *here*, which most people cherish as absolute, is just a variable. It is constructed by the magic fibre of correlation, playing over a textual tissue of preceding narratives. He displays how an internal aestheticism can overpower the difficulties and impossibilities of natural environment, and translate life into an intoxicating poetics of being. The others seem to understand him because they follow his example:

Seb. His word is more than the miraculous harp;
He hath raised the wall and houses too. (Ibid. II. i. 83-84)

The allusion is to the Greek myth of Amphion, by the spellbinding music of whose lyre, huge blocks of stone rose into the air and formed themselves into the walls of Thebes. With his words, however, Gonzalo not only raises the walls, but also rebuilds the whole city of Carthage before the eyes of his friends.

Ant. What impossible matter will he make easy next?

Seb. I think he will carry this island home in his pocket
And give it his son for an apple.

Ant. And, sowing the kernels of it in the sea, bring forth more islands.

(Ibid. II. i. 85-89)

The speculations stretch out into the absurd. Against the overall reading of the play, however, they seem to make sense. If an ordinary man can, by the power of his words, build cities in the air, then another man may be able to produce a whole island and perform a play upon it, even without the help of magical books. This creation develops even more, later on, and sprawls into a veritable utopia:

Gon. Had I plantation of this isle, my lord [...]

And were the king on 't, what would I do?

I' the commonwealth I would by contraries

Execute all things; for no kind of traffic

Would I admit; no name of magistrate;

Letters should not be known; riches, poverty.

And use of service, none; contract, succession,

Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;

No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;

No occupation; all men idle, all;

And women too, but innocent and pure;

No sovereignty; [...]

All things in common nature should produce

Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,

Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,

Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people⁴³. (Ibid. II. i. 139-60)

Gonzalo's exaltation is immediately undermined by the irony of the sub-plot. Frustrated by Prospero's authoritarianism, Caliban meets two survivors from the shipwreck – Trinculo, a jester, and Stephano, a butler. The monster thinks they are spirits sent by Prospero to torment him, while the men see in him a curious, exotic freak of nature, which would make them rich if only they could bring him to the civilized world. For this purpose Stephano decides to tame Caliban with the help of his bottle of wine. An obvious parallel appears here between Prospero's way of enslaving the savage and that of the two clowns:

Ste. Come on your ways; open your mouth; here is that
Which will give *language*⁴⁴ to you, cat: open your
Mouth; this will shake your shaking, I can tell you,
And that soundly: you cannot tell who's your friend:
Open your chaps again. (Ibid. II. ii. 84-88)

The liquor works – Caliban is expectably fascinated, for him the bearer of the bottle becomes a true deity. Getting more and more tipsy with every sip, he prepares himself to forsake his tyrannical master to swear allegiance to the two buffoons:

Cal. That's a brave god and bears celestial liquor.
I will kneel to him [...]
I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject;
For the liquor is not earthly. (Ibid. II. ii. 118-27)

Another resemblance puts itself forward at this point: "These Metaphysics of Magicians, and Necromantic books are heavenly;" exclaims the misfortunate Doctor of Wittenberg, "Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires. O what a world of profit and delight, of power, of honor, of omnipotence." (Marlowe I. i. 49-54) One cannot help comparing Caliban's revolt against the oppressive futility of an existence regulated by the order of Prospero's language, and Faustus'

disappointment with the uselessness of straightforward sciences and arts; the alluring appeal of alcoholic intoxication to the first, and the magnetic dedication of the second to black, forbidden magic. The celebration of evil as a revelatory experience, as Eco observes, is doubtlessly akin to the Dionysian hurl into the irrational. (Eco 37)

Soon Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban form a bibulous pact and decide to overthrow Prospero and become masters of the island. Naturally, there is a very logical parallel to this development of affairs: Antonio's treason twelve years before, especially that the same events are mirrored by the political conspiracy planned by Sebastian and Antonio against the King of Naples. The inebriation of Stephano's wine can easily be seen as the exhilaration of princely power, which has stimulated Antonio's appetites for the dukedom of Milan; the same, which poured into the ear of Sebastian, would make him plot against his brother. And yet there is the rub: why in this case the bottle, which is so very meaningful simply as a bottle, should become a book:

Ste. Come, swear to that; kiss the book: I will furnish

It anon with new contents: swear. (Ibid. II. ii. 143-44)

There is an obvious shift in focus. From the political plane the allusion moves onto the epistemological one. What could the new contents of the book be? There is a strikingly similar treatment of the bottle as a prophetic book in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*: Pantagruel, Panurge and Friar John travel to Lantern-land to look for the Oracle of the Bottle, which is to disclose to them the ultimate truth. They are led to the Temple and with the help of the high priestess Bacbuc⁴⁵ sing a mysterious incantation before the Goddess-Bottle. The bottle immediately begins to brew and boil, and in the end pronounces one single word, the word "Trinc". Then Bacbuc takes a huge silver book, "in the shape of a half-tierce, or hogshead", and addresses the companions with the words:

The philosophers, preachers, and doctors of your world feed you up with fine words and cant at the ears; now, here we really incorporate our precepts at

the mouth. Therefore I'll not say to you, read this chapter, see this gloss; no, I say to you, taste me this fine chapter, swallow me this rare gloss. Formerly an ancient prophet of the Jewish nation ate a book and became a clerk even to the very teeth! Now will I have you drink one, that you may be a clerk to your very liver. Here, open your mandibules. (Rabelais, Book V. Ch. xlv)

The first to drink is Panurge and pleased with the effect exclaims: “By Bacchus [...] this was a notable chapter, a most authentic gloss, o' my word. Is this all that the trismegistian Bottle's word means? I' troth, I like it extremely; it went down like mother's milk.” (Ibid. loc. cit.) Then all the rest of the party drink too and begin to express themselves in rhymes:

This Bottle is the Womb of Fate;
Prolific of mysterious wine,
And big with prescience divine,
It brings the truth with pleasure forth; (Ibid. loc. cit.)

Perhaps, this is the ultimate message, indeed: knowledge is like alcohol – small portions of it are invaluablely creative, they lead to high revelational experiences, they enhance the aesthetic pleasure of being; but on the other hand, it is easy for people to develop a dependency on it, and strive for more and more, which eventually leads to their destruction. On the other hand, the suggestion might be that the essence of true knowledge invariably escapes the authority of the written book (thinking the book as a system of thought). The nature of knowledge is metaphorical – truth seems to always quiver between the two planes drawn together by resemblance. It can be captured in this living state only by the irrational, intoxicating language of poetry, for it perishes if an attempt is made to immobilize it. The failure to ‘rationalize’, as Derrida speculates, is due to the qualities of language to be “of erotic *suggestion* and teasing *différance*, which breaks down its claims to interpretative mastery” (Derrida, *Spurs*, 89) A similar tendency to sensualize language is characteristic for the late Barthes – it is characterized by the

overwhelming desire to yield to the seductive repertoire of images and figures, at the borderline of making and un-making language, where reason loses its mastery:

The language is *redistributed* [...] two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, culture), and another edge, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the death of language is glimpsed [...] Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. The pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible instant [...] the cut, the deflation, the dissolve, which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. (Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 7)

It seems that Prospero stages exactly this amorousness, which takes place at the moment of the dissolution of the book, in his own dramatic project. A very vivid erotic innuendo is perceived in the love story between Ferdinand and Miranda, which he so powerfully manipulates from the very beginning of the play. At the time of the tempest, Ariel is instructed to separate the prince of Naples from the rest of his companions and, as “a nymph o’ th’ sea”, to draw him with his enthralling song to Prospero’s dwelling. On his arrival Ferdinand sees Miranda and both immediately fall in love. This is naturally the Duke’s design but in order to preserve the erotic strength of their infatuation, he has to make their love more difficult:

Pros. They are both in either’s pow’rs: but this swift business
I must uneasy make, (Shakespeare I. ii. 453-54)

He calls Ferdinand a traitor and makes him his slave like Caliban. At the same time he puts on his invisible garments, observes the two lovers unnoticed and rejoices:

Pros. Fair encounter
Of two most rare affections! Heavens rain grace

On that which breeds between 'em! (Ibid. III. i. 74-76)

When the time comes, Prospero tells Ferdinand that all the hardships he endured were a test of his personal qualities and his love for Miranda, but nevertheless, he should be very careful not to violate her virginity before the time has come. He discloses to the prince that he intends to give him his daughter's hand in marriage, and confirms this promise with a betrothal masque. Ariel and his spirits are in charge of the performance, and they have to impersonate Iris, Juno and Ceres, and also dancing nymphs and reapers. The design and content of the mask is rather conventional for the Jacobean stage – it is expectable that everyone would identify and interpret its meaning: “*To bless this twain, that they may prosperous be, and honour'd in their issue.*” (Ibid. IV. i. 104)

What is more interesting, however, is the realization that Prospero navigates the amorous relationship between Ferdinand and his daughter in two ways. On the one hand, he makes their physical communion more difficult; and on the other, he augments their growing passion by exuberant, illusory performances, promising blissful life and fertility. This is, in my view, very similar to what Barthes describes as the basic quality of the text. By the inspiring beauty of its ambiguous language, the text bedazzles the reader and entices him, or her, into an incessant pleasurable pursuit of the ultimate interpretation – the truth which glitters through the crevice between the certainty and the uncertainty of meaning:

The intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 10)

At a point, it appears that Prospero is himself drawn by his mesmerizing art. For a moment, the power of his magic grows so strong that he forgets he is, in fact, the dramatist. He remains a viewer, tantalized by the pastime he devised, and forgets Caliban's conspiracy against his life. The infatuation he develops during the

betrothal masque, to my mind, could be related to an earlier, almost puzzling, exchange of amorous remarks with his spirit Ariel:

Ari. [...] Do you love me, master? no?

Pros. Dearly, my delicate Ariel. (Shakespeare IV. i. 48)

A number of critics compare this to other instances of romantic exchange between the servant and the master; they tie them up with the descriptions of Ariel as ‘quaint’, ‘graceful’, ‘airy’, ‘moody’ – in order to suggest the existence of a half-suppressed homosexual relationship between the two. It seems to me, however, that the lover’s discourse between Prospero and his attending aethereal creature is of a different nature. It is evident that ever since the appearance of the magician on the stage, one and the same agent performs his charms invariably. The spirit single-handedly concocts the storm, produces “the fire and cracks of sulphurous roaring”, and disperses the bands of men over the island. He makes himself like a “nymph o’ th’ sea”, and sings to the bewildered Ferdinand. Later, the airy apparition puts on the costume of a Harpy, “*claps his wings*”, and pronounces a bloodcurdling speech before the terrified King of Naples and his companions. Ariel commands the company of spirits, who perform the delicate communion-blessing festivity; and it is again he who sets a pack of goblins on the denounced conspirers Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo. In short, Ariel carries out Prospero’s whole dramatic project – he appears to be the force realizing the Duke’s fancies and creative powers. In this chain of thought, the man’s falling in love with the spirit can be compared to an author’s love for his text. For any text is inherently erotic – but one’s own text is both a mirror of oneself, and the place where one’s desires come into being. Just like Ariel, however, the text has to be set free from the book in order to reach the euphoria of its meaningfulness.

Initially, it appears a little strange that there is no specific moment in the play when Prospero visibly destroys his staff and book. In his speech in Act V, after an incredibly poetic contemplation of the art of magic, he announces:

Pros. [...] But this rough magic
I here abjure, and, when I have required
Some heavenly music, which even now I do,
To work mine end upon their senses that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book. (Shakespeare V. i. 50-57)

Somehow, though, the very act of partaking with the attributes of magical power remains hidden from the spectator, until in the *Epilogue* we hear that Prospero's charms are "*all o'erthrown*". The reason for this, I believe, is that it simply never happens on the stage of Prospero's performance – it happens by virtue of his performance. The whole drama, which takes place on the island, can be seen as a ritualistic staging of the dissolution of the book – the idea of the book as a finite unity of understanding, the idea of the book as an anchor for human reality. The act of annihilating the book is in itself a quest to the outermost verge of signification – where the 'solid' rock of human credibility is dissolved in the tumultuous surf of free interpretation. By putting this moment on a stage, the magician manages to capture the elusive moment between the possibility and impossibility of meaning.

When the show is over Prospero remains alone on the stage. His absolute authority seems to peter out together with the world created by him:

*Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have is my own,
Which is most faint: now, 'tis true, (Ibid. Ep. 1-3)*

He surrenders his magical meta-position on the scene, his power of secret observation and decisive judgment, only to transfer it to the spectators of his own performance. Here his revels end and his sentence must be pronounced – for, as it appears from the *Epilogue*, his whole play was made in the hope of redemption:

*But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands:
[...] And my ending is despair,
Unless, I be reliev'd by prayer,
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and it frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free. (Ibid. Ep. 9-20)*

This seems to be a little unexpected because the implication that Prospero himself needs pardoning is not present anywhere in the story, so far. On the contrary, he is the one who forgives the people that wronged him. This strange reversal suggests that we should look for the faults that he speaks of outside of *The Tempest*. I think that from the context of the play, provided in this paper, it becomes clear that Prospero sees himself as simply yet another Renaissance overreacher – someone who can be seen as a mirroring image of Cornelius Agrippa, Dr. Faustus or John Dee. All his life he used to be an exalted philosopher, agglutinated to his secret studies, with an attending spirit, who was banished from society. From this point of view, the desire of the Duke of Milan to receive amnesty becomes meaningful. It is interesting, however, in what way he solicits his freedom.

The project of the overreacher discovers the impossibility of knowledge to provide passage to an absolute truth. It exposes the realization that by upgrading the system, which can be seen also as a book, thought is inevitably deluded in the mazy detours of meaning. The epistemological aspiration, then, is doomed from the very start, as Auden writes in his *The Sea and the Mirror*: “What the books can teach one is that most desires end up in stinking ponds.” (Auden, Ch. I) In order to remedy this, Prospero enacts the destruction of the book, the dissolution of the system into the metaphorical ambiguity of poetic language. The destruction of the book is the moment when, and the place where, the validity of reason is questioned and

overturned by the irrationality of passion. It is the space between the statement and its denial, between the doing and the undoing of meaning. It can be compared to the flash of flesh, the seductively erotic glimpse of a strip of skin between two garments. It is the locus where realities are created out of texts and texts are created out of realities. It is the place that grants liberation to a naturally textual being – it is the place where man is virtually free.

Conclusion

*And am I wrong to worship where
Faith cannot doubt nor Hope despair
Since my own soul can grant me prayer?
Speak, God of Visions, plead for me
And tell why I have chosen thee.*

Emily Brontë

The journey in the world of overreaching, as it is presented in this paper, passes through three characteristic stages. Initially, the flowering of the late medieval enterprise to order the universe into a gigantic system, the unity of which could provide a reflected image of the Creator, brings about an overpowering enthusiasm. Man sees the world as an enormous book and believes that its correct interpretation can grant him the key to the ultimate truth. As a result of this, reading becomes a practice of transcendental experience and man becomes an author of his own being (Pico). The excitement of this realization inspires many people to interpret and over-interpret the world's text (Agrippa). They see it just as relating one form of language to another, in making everything speak. What they discover, however, is the constant deferral of meaning from one proposition to another.

This leads to the second stage, in which the validity of the system is questioned. Disappointed by the impossibility of science to provide a passage to paramount knowledge, ambitious overreaders explore the possibilities of mystical

revelation. One turns to a deluded worship of the devil (Faustus), another seeks divine conversations with angels (Dee). Eventually, both directions prove to conduct to the same realm of darkness that, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, stretches out at both ends of the octave of light native to humanity. It turns out that it is not the “good” or “bad” nature of the aspiration that destroys men, but the very tendency to aspiration itself.

The third stage follows this realization to the point when the disenchanted overreader gains the courage to rid himself of *the* book (R. Bacon, Prospero). The destruction of the book takes place in art and epitomizes the space between the possibility and the impossibility of attaining valid meaning. This is the time and the space where the pleasure of the semiotic act is experienced, whether it be seen as a text or as life.

This narrative of the *overreader*, to my mind, parallels a fundamental facet of the history of the Renaissance period. The admiration of the re-discovery of man and the infatuation with the motley diversity of the world dominates the spirit of the age up to the point, when the curious gaze of the onlooker reduces the distance between itself and its object. The closer look on the constituents of the system discloses a number of impossibilities and disproportions. This leads to the awareness of the imperfection of the structure and, ultimately, to its crumbling.

On the other hand, however, the intoxicating enthusiasm of the period creates a new surge of aestheticism, which by its overwhelming sway translates all spheres of human life into art. The poetics of the Renaissance mirrors simultaneously the ardent belief in the system and the anxious questioning of its validity. In this duplicity it finds the exact formula to capture the enticing glitter of truth between the making and unmaking of worlds – the instantaneous flash “Brief as the lightning in the collied night / That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth, / And ere a man hath power to say ‘Behold!’ / The jaws of darkness do devour it up”⁴⁶. This idea is most visible in the theatre – the most popular of Renaissance arts. The pleasure of the spectator consists in the construction of his own vision of

truth between the lines of the dialogue – in the space between the certainty and uncertainty of meaning, the space between the statement and its negation.

This *space between*, however, is the same space that sunders the curtains of a modern stage, the same space that divides the beginning from the end of the play, the same space that separates reality from fiction, the same space that stretches between life and death. The ultimate message seems to echo Agrippa's observation that "[t]rue happiness consists not in the knowledge of good things, but in good life; not in understanding alone, but in living understandingly" (Qtd. Morley 154). The revelation seems to say that all the beauty in human life is present in this uncertainty, in the myriads of possibilities latent in every single word, in every single moment. Man is a *magnum miraculum*, a being worthy of reverence and honour, not because he can reach an absolute state, but precisely because he cannot. True beatitude lies in the enjoyment of a perpetually flickering image of truth between being and nothingness, a perpetually present freedom of choice.

Notes on the Text

- ¹ "There is no extra-text." Derrida, *De la grammatologie*. 158.
- ² Foucault gives the term *episteme* (Gr. "knowledge") to this all-encompassing system of human thought.
- ³ Cf. Barthes, *From Work to Text*.
- ⁴ The Epigraph from the 1651 English Translation of Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*.
- ⁵ First used by Giorgio Vazari quoted in Панчева. *Dispersing Semblances*. 7-8.
- ⁶ Cf. Plato's *Timaeus*. 83.
- ⁷ Cf. *Timaeus* 81-85
- ⁸ L. Caecilius Lacantius (250-317 A.D.) - early Christian writer.
- ⁹ Cf. Foucault's commentary of Velasquez' painting *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things*. Ch. I.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Saint Augustine: "Talis est quisque, qualis ejus dilectio est. Terram diligis? Terram eris. Deum diligis? Quid dicam, Deus eris." Qtd. Панчева. 29.
- ¹¹ I prefer to use the old spelling rather than the contemporary and most probably phonetically better justified "Kabbalah" because it appears in this way throughout the texts I will be discussing. In Hebrew "Cabala" means "tradition". This is only one of the legends about the origin of the Cabala. Another claims that the first Cabala were received by Adam from the angel Raziel who gave him at the time of his expulsion from Paradise, to console and help him, a book full of divine wisdom. In this book were the secrets of nature, and by knowledge of them Adam entered into conversation with the sun and the moon, knew how to summon good and evil spirits, to interpret dreams, foretell events, to heal, and to destroy. This book, handed down from father to son came down to the possession of Solomon,

and by its aid Solomon became the master of so many potent secrets. Later scholars hypothesize that the literature of Cabalism, probably began with the Jews of Alexandria under the first Ptolemys. They find reasons for this in its observable influences from Neoplatonic thought. In the book of Simeon ben Schetach it went to Palestine, where it gained importance after the destruction of Jerusalem and *Sepher Jetzirah*, the oldest Cabalist text, and *Zohar* were written (See Morley 70-71). Afterwards, in Medieval times, it went on to Spain from whence it reached Pico and other Renaissance scholars.

¹² *Picatrix* is a treatise on natural and astral magic, originally written in Arabic under strong Hermetic and Gnostic influence, which was translated into Latin and circulated a good deal throughout the Renaissance.

¹³ The Source of the Catalonian adventure is the letters of Agrippa published in the second volume of the Lyons edition of his works soon after his death "per Berlingos Fratres" (See Morley for greater detail 47-60).

¹⁴ Knowing nothing breeds the happiest life.

¹⁵ (Qtd. Butler 4).

¹⁶ "Faust" means in German "fist", yet it acquires symbolic signification from the expression: "auf einem eigenen Faust", which means "on one's own head"; however, there is an obvious pun here because in Latin "faustus" means "lucky, prosperous", and it was probably in this sense that it was first adopted by early-sixteenth-century German occultists. It becomes even more interesting when we realize the unlikelihood of the thought that Shakespeare named his protagonist "Prospero" and created him a direct namesake of Faustus by pure accident.

¹⁷ It would be immensely interesting to compare the text of *Das Faustbuch* and *The English Faustbook*, to see how the German piously "smouldering" work was turned into a "inflammatory" one by the translation of P.F.Gent. (the observation is Butler's); and in what way Marlowe brought it into life on the Elizabethan stage, where it burst into so mighty flames as to consume his own life; how the play developed, and how the world was changed with it, until eventually Faust earned

his redemption, under Goethe's pen - did he finally find a way to trick the devil, or was he tricked instead. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper can only suggest, yet not include, such research.

¹⁸ According to the inquest after the death of Marlowe, he was killed after supper during a quarrel about the bill - "le recknyng". Needless to point at the pun here - a "great reckoning" could be seen as an allusion to a violent retribution, as well as direct reference to the bill.

¹⁹ Why not a 'close-reader', or a 'structuralist', or a 'formalist', why not a literary critic in general?

²⁰ 'where the philosopher ends, the physician begins'

²¹ There is historical evidence that Marlowe's spell sounded really very convincing for the superstitious Elizabethan audience. So much that a tradition arose that the devil had actually appeared on the stage in answer to the invocation.

There are several versions of the story: W. Prynne, in his *Histriomastix*, says: "The visible apparition of the Devill on the stage at the Belsauvage Playhouse in Queen Elizabeth's dayes, (to the great amazement both of the Actors and Spectators) whiles they were profanely playing the History of Faustus (the truth of which I have heard from many now alive, who well remember it) there being some distracted with that fearfull sight." (1633) [f. 556]. E. K. Chambers quotes a more picturesque and circumstantial account from a manuscript note [*The Elizabethan Stage*, 1923, Vol. III, p. 424]: "Certaine players at Exeter, acting upon the stage the tragical storie of Dr. Faustus the Conjurer; as a certain number of Devels kept everie one his circle there, and as Faustus was busie with his magical invocations, on a sudden they were all dasht, every one harkning other in the eare, for they were all perswaded, there was one devel too many amongst them; and so after a little pause desired the people to pardon them, they could go no further with this matter; the people also understanding the thing as it was, every man hastened to be

first out of doers. The players (as I heard it) contrarye to their custome spending the night in reading and in prayer got them out of the town the next morning." (Briggs 127-8)

²² "The proper name of the attendant devil or familiar spirit: Mephostophiles, who did not become Mephistopheles until the eighteenth century, is a name remarkable both for its euphony and for seeming to mean something, although no one has yet discovered what, or even what language it derives from, Persian, Hebrew, or Greek. A sinister ambiguity haunts the syllables and seems to mock such conjectures as "no friend to light" (Mephotophiles), or "no friend to Faust" (Mefaustophiles), or "destroyer-liar" (Mephiz-Tophel)." (Butler, *The Myth of the Magus*, 132)

²³ *Macbeth*, I. iv. 10-11.

²⁴ In view of the subtlety of this scene, one may want to reconsider the question whether Marlowe wrote it for the attention of literary critics or not.

²⁵ My italics.

²⁶ Casaubon, *A True & Faithful Relation, (Libri Misteriorum)*, in the margin of p.153.

²⁷ "The original, partly burned, is in *Cotton MS.*, Vitell, C. vii., ff. 1-14." (Smith 10 fn)

²⁸ This story was used by Hakluyt in his *Principal Navigations* (1589) with due acknowledgment to Dee. (Smith 43 fn)

²⁹ In *Misteriorum Liber Primus* (p. 13) Dee alludes to *The First Book of Samuel*, Chapter 9, where God, through Samuel, discloses to the future king of Izrael – Saul, the whereabouts of his father's lost donkeys.

³⁰ „Chrystallo” – For reasons of privacy, in his *Diary* Dee often penned down English words or phrases in Greek characters.

³¹ The greater part of the *Libri Mysteriorum* was collected and printed in 1659 by Meric Casaubon, D.D. as *A True & Faithful Relation of What passed for many Yeers Between Dr. John Dee (A Mathematician of Great Fame in Q. Eliz. And*

*King James their Reignes) and some Spirits: Tending (had it Succeeded) To a General Alteration of most States and Kingdomes in the World. His Private Conferences with Rodolphe Emperor of Germany, Stephen K. of Poland, and divers other Princes about it. The Particulars of his Cause, as it was agitated in the Emperors Court; By the Popes Intervention: His Banishment, and Restoration in part. As Also the Letters of Sundry Great Men and Princes (some whereof were present at some of these Conferences and Apparitions of Spirits:) to the said D. Dee. Out of the Original copy, written with Dr. Dees own Hand: Kept in the Library of Sir Tho. Cotton, Kt. Baronet. With a Preface Confirming the Reality (as to the Point of Spirits) of this Relation: and shewing the several good Uses that a Sober Christian may make of All; yet another big portion of Dee's chronicles, including the records of his conversations with angels between 1581 and 1583, where the *True & Faithful Relation* begins, *The 48 Claves Angelicae*, *Liber Scientia Terrestris Auxilii & Victoria*, etc. was discovered by Elias Ashmole in 1672 together with the curious history of their preservation (See Ashmole's *Preface to Mysteriorum Libri Tres*)*

³² A tiny fragment of Dee's prayer reads: *Recte sapere, et intelligere doceto me, (o rerum omnium Creator,) Nam sapientia tua, totum est, quod volo: Da verbum tuum in ore meo, (o rerum omnium Creator,) et sapientiam tuam in corde meo fige.* (Dee, *Liber Primus* 9) - Teach me to know aright and to understand (O Creator of all things) for thy wisdom is all I desire. Give thy word in my mouth (O Creator of all things) and drive thy wisdom into my heart.

³³ "Skryer" or "crystal gazer" were the two most common terms Dee used to refer to a spiritual medium.

³⁴ Sir William Cecil, the First Baron Burghley, was Elizabeth's trusted Lord Treasurer one of the most powerful and skillful statesmen of sixteenth-century England.

³⁵ Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's Secretary of State, was probably the most feared man in the English Court.

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- ³⁶ *Madimi* was a very helpful and intelligent spirit who appeared in the shape of “pretty girl of 7 or 9 years”, and spoke in Greek and Arabic to Kelley, to his utter annoyance, for he did not understand any of these languages.
- ³⁷ *Aporia* (Gr. “impassable path”) – an ultimate impasse of thought, “engendered by rhetoric that always insinuates its own textual workings into the truth claims of philosophy” (Norris 48).
- ³⁸ Cf. *Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay*, written some time between 1589 and 1592.
- ³⁹ My italics.
- ⁴⁰ As Kermode suggests in his *Introduction* to the Arden edition of *The Tempest*, the name ‘Caliban’ is, most probably, an anagram of the word ‘cannibal’. Cf. Montaigne’s essay *Of the Cannibals*
- ⁴¹ “A colonist, writes Hawkes [Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare’s Talking Animals*] acts essentially as a dramatist, He imposes the ‘shape’ of his own culture, *embodied in his speech*, on the new world, and makes that world recognizable, habitable, ‘natural’, able to speak his language. Conversely, the dramatist is metaphorically a colonist. His art penetrates new areas of experience, his language expands the boundaries of our culture, and makes the new territory over in its own image. His ‘raids on the inarticulate’ [from T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*] open up new worlds for the imagination.” (Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*, 24-25)
- ⁴² tawny – a light brown to brownish-orange color.
- ⁴³ Cf. Montaigne’s essay *Of the Cannibals*.
- ⁴⁴ My italics.
- ⁴⁵ Note the meaningful onomatopoeic name.
- ⁴⁶ *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, I.i.

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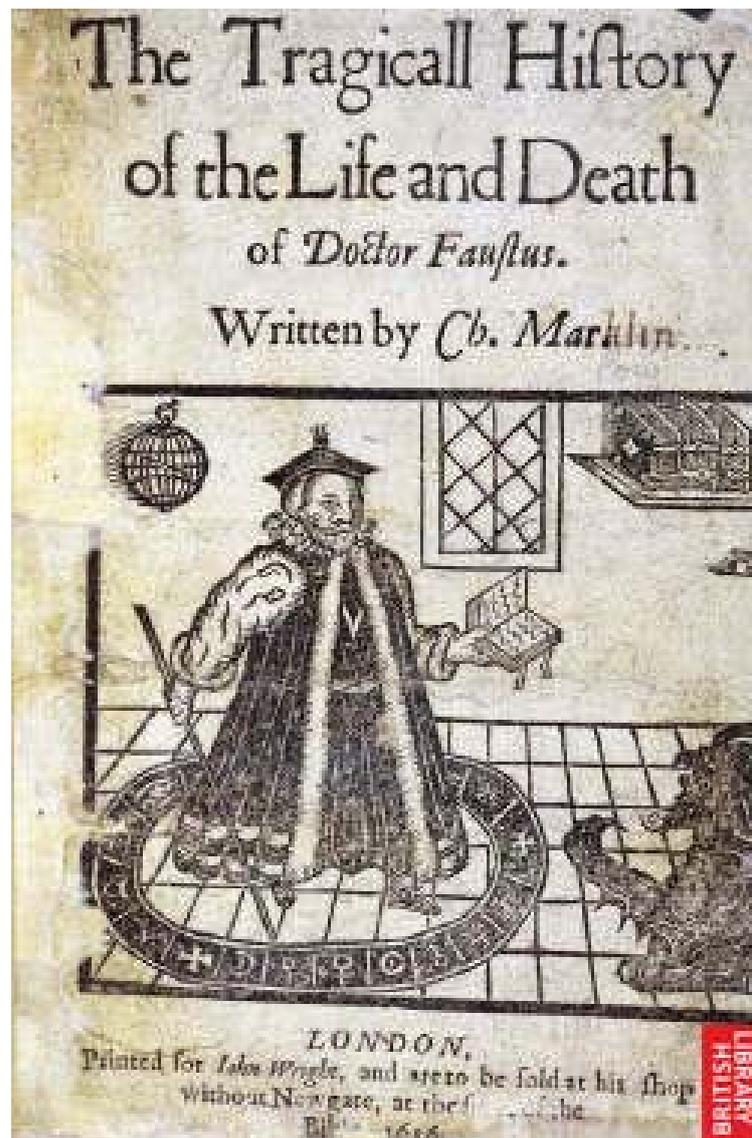
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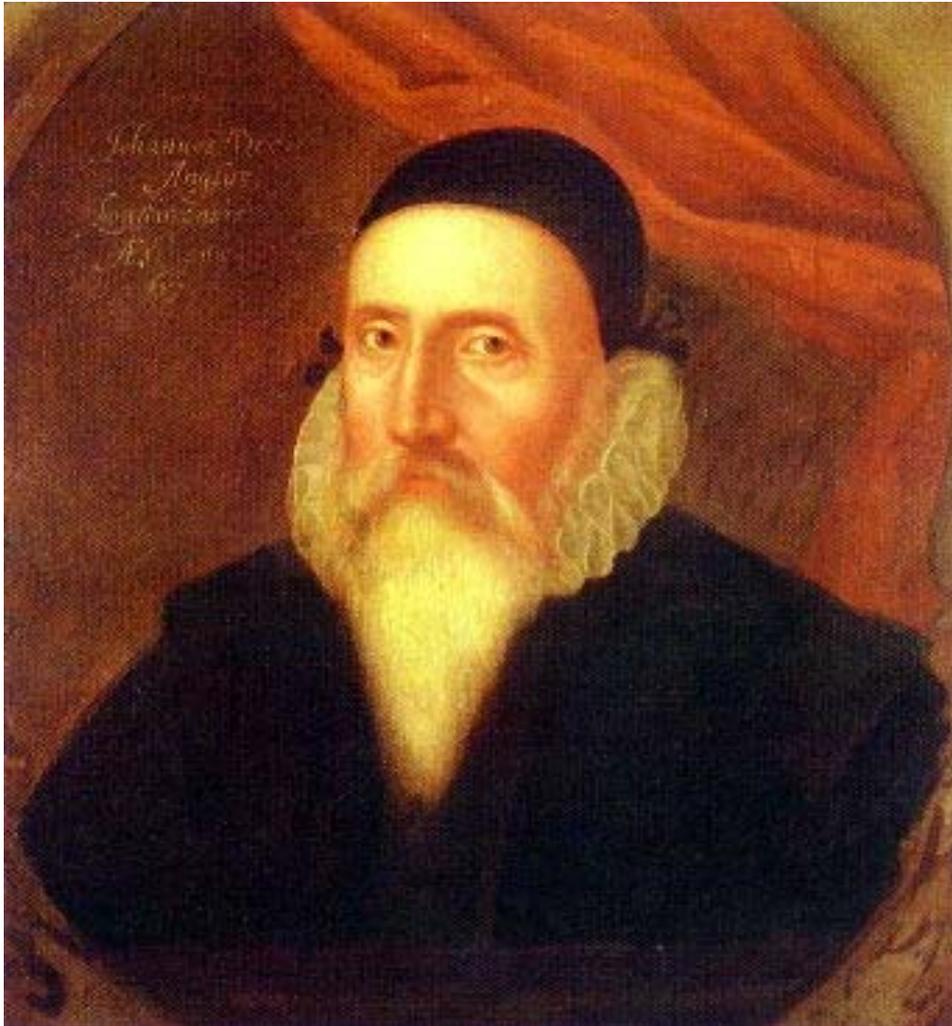
APPENDIX



Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Hettlesheim



The title page of the 1616 Folio of *Doctor Faustus*



Dr. John Dee



The Tempest, c. 1790. George Romney