Peripheral Knowledge: The Witch, the Magus, and the Mountebank on the Early Modern Stage

Rinku Chatterjee

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Abstract

Focusing on the work of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Dekker, my dissertation, *Peripheral Knowledge: The Witch, the Magus, and the Mountebank on the Early Modern Stage*, argues for a humanist intellectual investment in various forms of liminal knowledge embodied by socially marginalized figures. I read the figures of the witch, the magus and the mountebank as embodying forbidden knowledge, philosophical knowledge, and false knowledge respectively. While humanist philosophers like Ficino and Pico della Mirandola glorified the pursuit of limitless knowledge, humanism itself was grounded within political, legal, religious, and educational institutions, and was invested in maintaining their integrity. In my dissertation, I discuss how categories of marginal knowledge are shaped by the intellectual culture of humanism and the socio-religious context of the Reformation. While knowledge is traditionally constructed as an abstract category, I argue that it is deeply rooted in the material culture and is determined by it. *Peripheral Knowledge* begins by re-considering theories of historicism and cultural materialism, and examines how historicist accounts are constructed and what kinds of assumptions are made in the process. Though predicated on literary texts, my dissertation follows a historical mode of inquiry, and makes references to a wide range of historical documents, which range from legal treatises and records, pamphlets and ballads, recipe books and books of magic (or grimoires), many of which I have come across during my archival research at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

While my dissertation concentrates on early modern literature, the larger issues that it addresses – the exploration of what constitutes legitimate and illicit knowledge, how and why certain forms of knowledge find institutional validation, and how popular literature strikes a
balance between the different determinants of knowledge, have a contemporary resonance. Since
humanists are our own intellectual predecessors, the present study of the humanities is predicated
on the renaissance intellectual enterprise. I understand the current academic debates of Stanley
Fish, Michael Berube, and Martha Nussbaum, concerning the relevance of the humanities, as
well as the current crisis of the humanities represented by the recently proposed budget cuts to
the NEH, as a derivative of similar debates inhering early modern humanism.
Peripheral Knowledge: The Witch, the Magus, and the Mountebank on the Early Modern Stage

by

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Acknowledgements

One summer afternoon, more than a decade ago, I was browsing the shelves of the British Council Library in Calcutta, when I came across a book on women writers of the renaissance. Though a curious undergraduate, my study of nineteenth century literary histories had not prepared me to expect female authors in the renaissance. I devoured the book in a manner Bacon would have approved of, more with an intent of saying something clever than solely for the scholarly merits of the work. But I believe that this was the beginning of my interest in early modern literature. Professor Dympna Callaghan, my advisor, has honed this interest with her generous scholarly guidance, and unadulterated enthusiasm. But for her unwavering faith in my abilities, and for her sense of humor, this task would have been much more arduous and much less rewarding. I am indebted to her able supervision of this project, and continue to find inspiration in her commitment to scholarship.

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Rinku Chatterjee

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Introduction

On July 3, 2007, in his address to the participants of the School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University, Stanley Fish condemned political activism in academia. He asserted that the job of professors of English departments constituted the interpretation of texts within the confines of the interests of the academy. By these standards, anyone who imbued literary texts with current political debates and attempted to engage their students in the larger civic concerns was overstepping a boundary. Fish has been an advocate of academic insularity for quite a while. With the authority of someone who has been in the academia for five decades, of which he has spent more than five years as a dean at a public university, Fish, in a *New York Times* opinion piece titled, “Why we built the ivory tower,” on May 21, 2004, defines the boundaries within which an educator is expected to work:

Marx famously said that our job is not to interpret the world, but to change it. In the academy, however, it is exactly the reverse: our job is not to change the world, but to interpret it. While academic labors might in some instances play a role in real-world politics...it should not be the design or aim of academics to play that role...No doubt, the practices of responsible citizenship and moral behavior should be encouraged in our young adults – but it’s not the business of the university to do so, except when the morality in question is the morality that penalizes cheating, plagiarizing and shoddy teaching, and the desired citizenship is defined not by the demands of democracy, but by the demands of the academy. This is not
so because these practices are political, but because they are political tasks that belong properly to other institutions.....

Fish’s ideas, are in fact, part of ongoing conversations about the relevance of the humanities, and its role in fostering liberalism, identified by its spirit of inquiry and engagement. What’s Liberal About the Liberal Arts?: Classroom Politics and Bias in Higher Education by Michael Berube, the 2012 president of the Modern Language Association, especially engages with this conversation. He holds authoritarian conservative politics, which is essentially wary of the power of liberal inquiry, as the reason for apathy towards liberalism and a resistance to free inquiry. Martha Nussbaum is one of the strongest proponents for engaging humanities students with contemporary political questions and underscores the role of the study of the humanities as an important democratic tool for contesting dominant opinions. Her advocacy of the humanities is specifically on the grounds that it teaches us to understand and negotiate our everyday existence. In her study of classical texts, Cultivating Humanity (1997), especially, Nussbaum discusses the contemporaneous issues of race, gender and sexuality, and expounds an inextricable relationship between literature and the ethical questions that one confronts on a daily basis.

Renaissance humanists like Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives could not have agreed more. In fact, there is a clear historical and intellectual trajectory that the humanists’ commitment to political life, has bequeathed to us the current crisis in the humanities. In his discussion of

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2 Michael Berube, What Liberal About the Liberal Arts?: Classroom Politics and Bias in Higher Education (New York: Norton, 2006).

Florentine Humanism, J. G. A. Pocock argues that each of the branches of the humanities was expected to inculcate in the scholar an engagement with life:

...the humanist had a profound commitment to participation in human life and in concrete and particular detail...The need to make the particular intelligible had given rise to the idea of conversation, the idea that the universal was imminent in participation in the web of life and language, and so the highest values, even those of nonpolitical contemplation, had come to be seen as attainable only through conversation and social association.4

The study of the humanities was never meant to be an exclusively discursive practice. On the contrary, as Quentin Skinner illustrates, the institution of the study of humanities, the *studia humanitatis*, was deeply rooted in administrative institutions, and the study of rhetoric, logic and literature was conducted with the precise intent of participation in public life.5 Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argue that even scholasticism, the system of education that humanism replaced, “provided a lively and rigorous training in logic and semantics,” and imbued the scholar with an interest in the polity.6 The history of the establishment of *studia humanitatis* as a discipline illustrates that the early modern intellectual was expected to be an active participant in the administration of the state, and after the Reformation especially, the *vita contemplativa* gave way to an absolute ascendancy of the *vita activa*. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which were dedicated to the study of Latin, had Elizabethan courtiers like Robert Dudley, Earl of


Leicester (1564-88) and Lord Burghley (1559-98) as their chancellors. J. W. Binns argues that the concentrated study of Latin literature, in fact, fostered an engagement with the polity among Elizabethan and Jacobean intellectuals, especially since Latin was not just the language of scholarship, but also the language of the court. Making one’s scholarship politically relevant, besides, provided the intellectual opportunities for what Stephen Greenblatt calls self-fashioning. Greenblatt argues that there was a reciprocal relationship between the construction of one’s public identity and aesthetic expressions of literature and art.

With the early modern reappraisal of scholarship with its newly-apprehended potential for effecting social changes, scholars became increasingly concerned about defining what constituted correct knowledge, especially by identifying what they constructed as the incorrect forms of knowledge – the esoteric scholarship of the magus; the forbidden, demonic knowledge of the witch; and the false knowledge of the mountebank. These peripheral figures challenged the authority of the very institutions that sought to punish them. The quintessential humanist scholar, university-educated, proficient in the classics, and often holding an influential position, was extremely invested in the success and furtherance of institutional structures, and therefore it was imperative for him to be able to identify and condemn these marginal figures.

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9 An understanding of marginal characters is sometimes indispensable to the proper appraisal of the dominant. In her study of masculine character types of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Erin Mackie argues that the less respectable, even marginal characters were instrumental in the development of the male archetype of the modern polite gentleman. Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). There has been a re-emergence of interest in transgression in early modern studies as well. The yet to be published *Staged Transgression in Shakespeare’s England* edited by Rory Loughnane and Edel Semple (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) is a collection of essays that investigate performances of transgression on early modern English stage.
The magus was originally a revered, spiritually-astute figure before he began to be condemned for his dissident wisdom. Significantly, the biblical magi were the visionaries, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, who had visited the infant Jesus. Zoroaster, Solomon, and Merlin were all considered to be wise men.\(^\text{10}\) By the fifteenth century however, the magus assumed the status of a sorcerer, especially “skilled in eastern magic and astrology” (OED). In my dissertation, *Peripheral Knowledge: The Witch, the Magus, and the Mountebank on the Early Modern Stage*, I conceive of the magus as a person with great learning, but not necessarily conforming to the dictates of educational institutions. Outside the confines of traditional academia, and the knowledge validated by it, the magus was seen as a threat to the foundational principles of the academy. Given the persecution of heterodox teaching not only in Protestant England, but also in Continental Europe, it is hardly paradoxical that an era that celebrated the burgeoning of knowledge also saw the execution of some of the greatest scholars on charges of heresy – famously, Galileo and Giordano Bruno, because the knowledge they professed was seen as contrary to religious authority of Catholic Italy.

While the medieval witch was construed as a sorcerer or a magician, with the power to effect evil deeds, early modern legislators differed from their medieval precedents like Kramer and Sprenger in identifying a witch chiefly by his or her association with the devil. Unlike the medieval witch, the early modern witch was an agent of evil rather than the source of it. In England, witchcraft became a crime punishable by death only with Henry VIII’s enactment against witchcraft in 1542. In this act the accused could be executed for having conjured spirits in order to cause harm, for attempting to find hidden treasures, and so on. In short, any of the

\(^{10}\) For a more detailed discussion of the magus and the transition of the status of the magus, refer to E. M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
actions that could potentially undermine royal authority – causing harm to the royal subjects, or gaining knowledge of wealth that could otherwise be deemed state property, could result in the execution of the accused.\footnote{Marion Gibson, “Witchcraft in the Courts,” in Marion Gibson (ed.) \textit{Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750} (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 1-9.} That enactments against witchcraft demonstrated a more civic rather than a religious concern is proved by subsequent enactments against witchcraft, in 1562 and 1604, during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I respectively, both of which made the accused subject to the jurisdiction of courts of common law, with ordinary criminal procedures, rather than ecclesiastical courts. Though the ones found guilty of practicing witchcraft were often executed, the more painful death – burning at the stake, was reserved for those who were also found guilty of the treasonous action of harboring the devil in defiance of the authority of the church and the state.

The mountebank was “an itinerant charlatan who sold supposed medicines and remedies, frequently using various entertainments to attract a crowd of potential customers” (OED). Humanist scholars, including Erasmus, were concerned about the proliferation of these tricksters, because they often appropriated scholarly rhetoric in order to gain the confidence of their customers. Erasmus’s colloquy \textit{De Alcumistica} (1524) illustrates that it would have been virtually impossible for the lay person to distinguish between true knowledge and the performance of it for mercenary purposes, and this, in turn, would create a suspicion against scholars and scholarship. Not only did the charlatans pose a threat to the very foundations of the institution of humanist learning, not being affiliated with a trade or a master made them akin to vagrants. The state conscientiously persecuted charlatans as is apparent in the enactment of
stringent laws on vagrancy, especially the Vagabond Act of 1572, in which any person found guilty was subject to corporeal punishment and even mutilation.

*Peripheral Knowledge* argues that there was a strong humanist intellectual investment in various forms of liminal knowledge embodied by above-mentioned figures that arguably inhabited the social margins. Humanist philosophers like Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, who glorified the pursuit of limitless knowledge, had themselves become marginal in the early modern conception of correct scholarship, which was more invested in the practical aspects of everyday administration. It is hardly surprising that both Ficino and Pico were accused of harboring heretical thought and barely escaped the wrath of the Catholic Church. The persecution of intellectual who lay outside institutional authority precipitated the structuring of knowledge within institutional parameters. While knowledge is traditionally constructed as an abstract category, I argue that with the beginning of *studia humanitatis*, it came to be understood as essentially rooted in material culture and determined by it. Much contemporary scholarship, notably, popular student editions like *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, compendia of abstract intellectual thought of humanist scholars like Lorenzo Valla, Marsilio Ficino, Pietro Pomponazzi, etc., give the impression that humanism was primarily an intellectual enterprise, inhering in the abstractions of Neo-Platonism, with little or no political bearing. I emphasize, that on the contrary, humanism was, from its inception, politically committed, and humanists like Desiderius Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Thomas More believed that the primary purpose of knowledge was the welfare of the polity, rather than an endless indulgence in abstract thought.

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12 Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, eds. *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948)
Though predicated on literary texts, *Peripheral Knowledge* follows a historical mode of inquiry, as it makes references to a wide range of historical documents, from legal treatises and records, pamphlets and ballads, and a book of magic (or grimoire), many of which I have come across during my archival research at the Folger Shakespeare Library. I re-contextualize literary texts within larger historical narratives in order to interpret the power dynamics that underlie the texts under review. Though both historical and literary documents are representative, and subject to interpretation, they have one essential difference—historical documents provide evidence of what might have been thought, while literary texts—drama, poetry, and fiction, point towards what was thinkable at the time, since they allow the space for multiple truths to coexist simultaneously. Unlike a specific historical event, the literary interpretation of the event is not static, but illustrates, elaborates and animates the sensible, lived experiences of the time.\(^{13}\)

I find that the political stakes of literary criticism were most fully articulated in the wake of new historicism and cultural materialism. It is essential here to clarify my theoretical position with relation to the debates between new historicism and cultural materialism. Though both approach the study of literature through the prism of history, there are some essential differences between their practitioners. These differences become apparent in the famous debates between Catherine Belsey on the one hand and Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield on the other in the late eighties and early nineties—debates, which end up privileging the cultural materialists. The practitioners of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism privilege history as a means to access

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\(^{13}\) Speaking of fully understanding the complexities of the early modern theatrical experience, Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare’s Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), argues that it is not enough to merely understand “the material conditions of playing, including playing space; artifacts such as parts, plots, and playbooks; the social structures of companies....” but to appreciate the role of “internal cognitive mechanisms...an understanding of the biological and psychological constraints governing human memory.”
and understand a culture and its literature – not the idea of history as a given set of knowledge or a succession of events, but, as Jeremy Hawthorne explains, a post-structuralist understanding of history as a “contemporary activity of narrating or representing the past.” The New Historicists and Cultural Materialists read history through a variety of documents – legal, medical, penal, as well as travel writings and anecdotes, to understand the operation of power within a culture and see literary texts as vehicles for providing present political impetus. New Historicists believe that literary texts produce subversions to power (“Power” used in the Foucaultian sense of the term: “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.”) However, these subversions are always contained by power. New Historicists “see their practice as one of exposition, of revealing the systems and operations of power so that we are more readily equipped to recognize the interests and stakes of power when reading culture.” Cultural Materialists too privilege power relations for interpreting literature, not the power relations of past societies, but contemporary ones. They argue that the manner in which we read literary texts is revealing of our contemporary social, cultural and political positions. Cultural Materialists like Alan Sinfield argue that there are sufficient contradictions in the systems of power to “allow for some oppositional intervention.” Cultural Materialism, argues Brannigan, “takes the implications of new historicist work further in historicizing its own practices within power relations.”


17 Ibid., p. 10.

18 Ibid., p. 11.
In his essay, “Shakespeare, cultural materialism and the new historicism”, the introduction to Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism, Jonathan Dollimore, speaking of the differences between the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist understanding of the making of history, says that the New Historicists “concentrate on culture as this making of history…which allows much to human agency, and tends to privilege human experience,” while the Cultural Materialists, pursuing Marx’s idea that the conditions under which men and women make their own history is not of their choosing, study the “unchosen conditions which constrain and inform that process of making” and concentrate “on the formative power of social and ideological structures which are both prior to experience and in some sense determining of it…”19 Dollimore points out that by Stephen Greenblatt’s own admission in the epilogue of Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare, the emphasis shifts from the individual to the cultural institutions to a point in which the human subject does not seem to have much of an agency. Dollimore agrees that Greenblatt’s subversion-containment paradigm is extremely useful in understanding how power operates in society.20 However, Dollimore is uncertain about the efficacy of this subversion, with its unidentified perspective, which cannot be construed as independent from articulation, context and reception. “How else can we explain why what is experienced as subversive at the time may retrospectively be construed as a crucial step towards progress? More extremely still, how is it that the same subversive act may be later


20 Radical subversiveness, explains Dollimore is not simply the attempt to seize authority, but to challenge the principles on which authority is based.
interpreted as having contributed to either revolutionary change or anarchic disintegration?” asks Dollimore.²¹

Catherine Belsey’s validation of New Historicism is predicated on the argument that this critical tradition is all-inclusive in its philosophy and not solely dependent on the canonical texts as the previous critical traditions have been.²² The New Historists recognize that at any given point there are numerous texts in circulation and privileging a particular text, or even a group of texts over others takes away from understanding a culture. She proposes a cultural history that is a “story of conflicting interests, of heroic refusals, of textual uncertainties. It tells of power, which always entails the possibility of resistance...” Given this idea of the cultural poetics, Belsey believes that Dollimore’s conceptualization of subversion in his introduction to Political Shakespeare is somewhat limiting, and considers it a “unitary phenomenon.” She feels that Dollimore is not specific in the precise way in which ideas might have currency. She also feels that Dollimore does not take into account the post-structuralist concept of text as an inherently unstable construct.

Dollimore and Sinfield refute Belsey’s accusations in their essay “Culture and Textuality: Debating Cultural Materialism”.²³ They set out by clarifying their use of the term “Cultural Materialism” as a legacy of Raymond Williams “because it seemed to insist that culture is material rather than ideal; and because it implied a determined radical politics.” The very clarification of the term can put to rest some of Belsey’s objections to Dollimore’s critical

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²¹ Political Shakespeare (op. cit.), p. 13.


practice, especially that Dollimore might be conceiving of cultural struggles as a “unitary phenomenon.” On the other hand, Dollimore theorizes what he believes as Belsey’s reading of the introduction to *Political Shakespeare* as illustrative of the manner in which power functions – creating an “other” to make itself visible. Dollimore also feels that Belsey’s perception of texts as the loci of all struggles might be reductive and that there should be a niche for analyzing struggles that are located outside texts. Dollimore also recognizes the instability of texts, and thinks that Belsey’s conceptualization of textual instability as unreservedly subversive of authority is too uncomplicated. Textual instability, argues Dollimore, has the potential for being a repressive force as much as a liberating one.

I do think that Belsey’s reading of Foucault as conceptualizing power as not just an “irresistible omnipresence” but a “history of resistances” of the socially marginalized – fools, criminals, deviants – can be a productive manner in which one can begin an enquiry into each of the above categories. I would however like to align my own approach with that of Dollimore and Sinfield’s practice, since it is self-reflexive, and they emphasize that an understanding of the contemporary political environment is indispensible to the generation of an intellectual debate. In *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality*, Sinfield argues that it is not capitalist institutions but intellectual initiative that generates new modes of inquiry:

Today academic work is generated increasingly in terms set by pre-packaged formulae, either of funding bodies or of publishers. The former grope for measurable criteria of research quality. The latter find it more profitable, or perhaps just more convenient, to reprint edited highlights of the interventions of a generation ago, rather than promote new work. Ironically enough, it is market
forces that have facilitated new kinds of study. Cultural materialism, new
historicism, queer, lesbian and gay studies, and theory in general have gained
ground because of student-market-demand.  

Jean Howard, in her essay “The New Historicism in English Renaissance Studies,” makes
similar claims for new historicism:

...the historically-minded critic must increasingly be willing to acknowledge the
non-objectivity of his or her own stance and the inevitably political nature of
interpretive and even descriptive acts. Self-effacement, neutrality,

disinterestedness – these are the characteristics privileged in the Academy, but are
claims to possess them more than a disingenuous way of how one’s own criticism
is non-objective, interested and political?  

I believe that our access to and interpretation of these discourses are mediated by our own
political, social and cultural frames. It would be intellectually dishonest to ignore this. The
literary texts that have been part of a past culture are also part of the present one. Sinfield points
out that Belsey’s class at McMaster, by her own admission, failed because “we didn’t know
enough to relate our readings to contemporary cultural phenomena.” My dissertation, which
explores the early modern reappraisal of knowledge, is prompted not only by present debates
concerning the purpose of the humanities (with its early modern disciplinary roots), but also as a
resistance to the popular understanding of the study of the humanities as the leisure of the
privileged, and therefore inhabiting an aesthetic vacuum. Moreover, in his study of the term


“intellectual” in the British context, Stefan Collini demonstrates that the idea of the intellectual in the present context has come to be associated with pretentiousness and arrogance, a set of performances, rather than “insights, perceptions, arguments, beliefs, observations, redescriptions, characterizations, judgments, assessments...” that essentially constitute intellectual life.\(^\text{26}\)

Intellectual life, however, historically has, and continues to engage with popular concerns and political debates.

In this dissertation, I concentrate on the study of drama in its urban context. Stephen Greenblatt points out that the performance of Shakespearean drama is especially an accurate indicator of the collective consciousness, since it is not only “the product of collective intentions,” but also because it “addresses its audience as a collectivity”\(^\text{27}\) – an observation that is equally as valid for the all the early modern plays that enjoyed some popularity:

The Shakespearean theater depends upon a felt community: there is no dimming of lights, no attempt to isolate and awaken the sensibilities of each individual member of the audience, no sense of the disappearance of the crowd.\(^\text{28}\)

Literary representations of historical happenings served to ascribe meanings to occurrences, as “collective beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption.”\(^\text{29}\) In Theater of a City, Jean Howard emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between commercial and cultural London,


\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 5

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 5
and argues that “the theater... was important in shaping how people of the period conceptualized or made sense of this fast-changing urban milieu.”

In his treatment of literary texts as historical documents, Peter Lake illuminates his study of the history of Puritanism from his reading of plays like *The Alchemist*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and *Measure for Measure*. Texts and tropes, once distributed, accrue an agency of their own. Drama especially, underscores the mobile relations between the text and its audience. In my reading of literary and historical texts, I analyze the relation between institutional and intellectual identities, and how they are interpreted in the public realm. Though I privilege the agency of texts over authorship, I acknowledge the author’s self consciousness as a participant in the literary marketplace. I especially focus on the prologues and epilogues of the plays I discuss, because these are the meta-theatrical moments when the authorial voice, and its commentary on the text, becomes most prominent.

I base my study on early modern drama, since it conscientiously highlights the performative aspect of knowledge – be it in the elaborate (and for most of the audience members, unintelligible) recitation of Latin verses, or the display of books. Moreover, the conception of witches, magi and mountebanks is inextricably linked with magic, which is essentially apprehended through a series of performances, whether they be the ritualized conjuration of spirits by a magus, the cauldron magic of witches or the crystal-gazing of a soothsayer. As Marcel Mauss argues, the status of magic is validated by its acknowledgement as such, and its

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replication. While in the early modern conception the theatrical space was considered magical and transformative, the stage was literally able to enduringly reproduce these iterations of magic visually and aurally, and had more of an imaginative appeal than the illustrations of pamphlets and ballads.

Theater, moreover, was the most accessible form of popular entertainment, and the plays I have chosen to discuss were extremely popular, as testified by the records of their performance in the stationer’s register. Early modern drama was, besides, unique in its status as the newly-emergent form of non-religious entertainment, well adjusted to the market economy of London, and not necessarily didactic in its purpose, as the Morality plays were. Though non-religious in its intent and conception, Louis Montrose, points out, that the theater effectively performed the function of uniting a society, which was otherwise divided in its religious affiliations. Robert Weimann emphasizes that the essential heterogeneity of the London audience makes early modern plays representative of the lived experience at the time of its authorship:

Its audience was made up of every rank and class in society...It was a multiple unity based on contradictions and as such allowed the dramatist a flexible frame of reference that was more complex and more vital to the experience of living and feeling within the social organism....

The plays that I discuss in my dissertation are generically diverse, and range from tragedy, comedy, city comedy, and romance, and they traverse both the rural and the urban milieu.

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Though part of an aesthetic form that is essentially all-embracing, and within a forum that is self-consciously inclusive, it is paradoxical that the plays I consider are able to achieve a harmonious dramatic denouement only by effecting the elimination of what they perceive as dissident subjects. I concentrate on these moments of exclusion and marginalization that popular literature is able to highlight in order to understand the power dynamics that make these exclusions necessary. This is because, as Alan Sinfield argues in *Faultlines*, the sources of dissidence are inherent within and produced by the dominant discourses: “The inter-involvement of resistance and control is systemic: it derives from the way language and culture get articulated...Any position supposes its intrinsic *op*-position. All stories comprise within themselves the ghost of alternate stories they are trying to exclude”

The history of early modern criticism illustrates that there has been a steady output of scholarship on the subject of the subordination of women in the context of capitalist ideology, since the eighties by critics like Linda Woodbridge, Kathleen McLuskie, Mary Beth Rose, Jean Howard, Lisa Jardine, Cora Kaplan, Ann Rosalind Jones, and Valerie Traub, among others. In

35 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), draw out connections between the socially marginal and the aesthetically central and how the former category has the potential to transform into the latter. On similar lines, Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) explores why homosexuality, in spite of being socially marginalized is symbolically so central and integral to societies that denounce it.


Shakespeare Without Women (2000), Dympna Callaghan concentrates on “the absence of women in particular and uses the problem of female impersonation in Shakespeare to focus on wider problems in feminism about what it means to secure cultural and political representation in patriarchy for women and other oppressed groups.” My dissertation also considers the complexity of liminality and exclusion that are effected by a humanist understanding of institutions and those who could be accepted within them.

In my first chapter I discuss Christopher Marlowe’s play Doctor Faustus (1592). Faustus has to be excluded in the denouement of the play, I argue, because, in spite of his scholarship, he refuses to make himself socially relevant. Faustus damns himself the moment he refuses to participate in professional life, and expresses his intention to pursue knowledge for its own sake. Within the context of humanist scholarship, however, Faustus would have been expected to be an active participant within the legal, religious or educational institutions that he specifically rejects. Reformed life, which is the conscious context of the play, makes it imperative for the human subject to make himself useful, and further instrumental reason. By refusing to fulfill the expectations of a scholar, Faustus challenges the institutions that proscribed anyone who did not submit to their authority. Though Doctor Faustus very closely follows the tropes of Morality plays, it undermines the generic expectation of Faustus’s redemption. This only serves to emphasize that within the altered context of Reformation, at a time when ideas regarding both God and knowledge are being recoded, Faustus’s damnation is an inevitable outcome.

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I situate my second chapter on *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), by Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley, in the context of popularly circulated anti-witchcraft manuals, reports of witchcraft trials, and pamphlet literature on witches, that re-iterate, at least partially, the language of Early Modern legal treatises, like Jean Bodin’s *The Demon-Mania of Witches* (1560), which I argue are essentially humanist. Though there was a potent fear of witches even in the medieval times, as is evident from the fear-mongering treatise *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) by Kramer and Sprenger, the key shift in the early modern conception of witches is that, witches began to be understood as morally as well as physiologically deformed subjects. The medieval witch was alluring, had the power to perpetrate evil, and was to be punished for causing palpable harm. The early modern witch, in contrast, was powerless. She was marred in the course of her association with the devil, who used her body only as an instrument for effecting evil. The witchcraft enactments therefore sought to punish witches on account of their treasonous association with the devil, even if there was no specific act of evil-doing attributed to the accused. The mere harboring of the devil amounted to treason, and earned her an execution. Since the perceived malevolent agency shifted from the individual to the devil, the indictments of early modern witches were based on proving the relationship of the accused with the devil, and physical deformity began to be understood as the conclusive proof of this association. *The Witch of Edmonton* is based on a recorded court case that punished Elizabeth Sawyer of Edmonton according to the Act against Conjuration of 1604, which had provisions for punishing those who were accused of harboring spirits, even if it was not for the purpose of causing harm.

The succeeding chapter on the mountebanks argues that the stage does not simply enable an inversion of power hierarchies in the Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque, but that the popular depictions of marginal figures in fact influence the works of elite Humanist intellectuals. In this chapter, I discuss Giordano Bruno’s closet play Il Candelario (1582) and Erasmus’s colloquy Alcumistica (1524) as expressions of concern on the part of the intellectuals, not only in England, but also in the Continent, regarding misappropriation of knowledge at a time when the intellectual was vulnerable to charges of practicing necromancy. The charlatans Bruno and Erasmus present in their works adopt the rhetorical stance of a scholar of natural philosophy, in order to dupe the gullible. Both Bruno and Erasmus had friends in English intellectual circles, and their work had gained much popularity in early modern England. It is no coincidence then, that their characters are akin to the ones present in popular literature like the later Ben Jonson play The Alchemist (1610), who, to an extent, draw their inspiration from not only their immediate literary precedents, but also from Plautine tropes as well as court cases that try itinerant mountebanks. The depiction of false claimants to intellectual acumen in the works of Erasmus, Bruno, and Jonson is an attempt on their part to define knowledge by pointing out its antithesis.

In chapter four, I discuss the secularization of the devil in Early Modern popular literature. The cornucopia of seventeenth century London domesticates Satan. I explore this idea in Ben Jonson’s play, The Devil is an Ass (1616). Taking a cue from the popular dramatic representations of the medieval devil, the early modern stage devil is often a non-threatening, even a comic character. Unlike the medieval devil, however, he is well integrated within the social matrix, and is much like a charlatan, forever on the look-out for human souls – a corrupt merchant according to Nashe’s Pierce Penilesse (1592). Jonson’s play, with its Plautine
sensibilities takes this idea further, as the minor devil, Pug, having failed to cause any evil at all, finds himself incarcerated at Newgate, where small-time criminals and petty thieves were imprisoned. I argue that the play is informed by an understanding of reciprocal relations between the intellectual and the commercial enterprise in London. Intellectual endorsement of commercial enterprises extends to the condoning of economic practices like usury that were earlier considered evil. Humanists, though ambiguous about the underlying morality of some of these practices support them nonetheless, since they are crucial to the funding of the intellectual enterprise.

The final chapter on *The Tempest* (1611) concentrates on the institution of royalty. Though undoubtedly scholarly, Prospero is hardly the ideal humanist since he abandons his administrative obligations in favor of the pursuit of knowledge. For humanist scholars, knowledge was only the means to achieve political stability, and they would have condemned Prospero’s indifference towards the work of his dukedom that is entrusted to him. In this context, Prospero’s exile is not only inevitable but also desirable in the interest of the political stability of Milan. In the play, Prospero is able to redeem himself, and is able to gain back his position as the duke of Milan only after he has arranged the politically astute marriage between his daughter Miranda, and the son of the king of Naples, Ferdinand – an alliance which has the potential to strengthen the city state of Milan. His return to Milan however is contingent on his promise to drown his book – symbolic abjuration of the pursuit of scholarship so that he is able to carry out his ducal responsibilities.

While my dissertation focuses on Early Modern literature, the larger issues that it addresses are – the exploration of what constitutes legitimate and illicit scholarship, how and why certain forms of knowledge find institutional validation, and how popular literature strikes a
balance between the different determinants of knowledge. Mainstream humanism, I argue, was the dominant form of early modern knowledge, and intrinsically engaged with the polity. However, contemporary political opposition to liberal inquiry, which opposes any form of intellectual dissidence, has increasingly discredited the political enterprise of early modern humanism as Jean Howard points out in *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (1994). Here she proposes to engage in liberal humanist inquiry, and complains about the resistance to the politicization of literary study by:

...strong conservative voices empowered in the Regan-Bush era who see the politicizing and pluralizing of cultural study as endangering the primacy of the Anglo-American tradition and spoiling aesthetic pleasures by inquiring into art’s social function. William Bennett, Lynne Cheney, and Allan Bloom are not negligible powers in this society. An alternative pedagogy and critical practice must counter theirs, committed to the belief that a more just society emerges from *diversity* and not *in spite of* it, from the *dispersion* of power and not from its *consolidation* in the hands of a few.\(^{39}\)

Governments, forever wary of inquiring, dissident voices, seek to suppress them. Most recently, for example, the Committee of Appropriations’ bill, outlining the spending budget of 2014, proposes that the government grant to the National Endowment for the Humanities be reduced by half, stating that it “seeks to protect vital programs that directly affect the safety and well-being Americans, while dramatically scaling back lower-priority, or nice-to-have programs.”\(^{40}\) This bill


sees the study of the Humanities as privilege “enjoyed by people of higher-income levels,” and funding organizations like the NEH makes it a means of “wealth transfer from poorer to wealthier citizens.”

The outline of NEH’s mission – to fund intellectually invigorating research projects, advancement of critical thought, and fostering better cultural understanding among Americans, can hardly be accused of elitist proclivity. On the contrary, it seeks to make humanist inquiry accessible to the economically disadvantaged. Finally, *Peripheral Knowledge* provides a critical basis for understanding popular or “low” literature within the context of elite intellectual concerns.

41 Ibid.
Chapter 1

“I’ll burn my books”: Doctor Faustus as a Renaissance Magus

In 1398, the theology faculty of the University of Paris issued and approved twenty-eight articles condemning ritual magic as blasphemous, heretical, idolatrous and superstitious, and emphasized the conjurer’s entente with demons as a violation of God’s will. This event is both representative and symptomatic of a pan-European crisis about the relation between magic and institutional, ethical, and epistemic orthodoxy. Yet the intellectuals at the University were not in fact, principally concerned about its faculty practicing conjuration. Instead, they sought to protect themselves against charges of heresy and witchcraft in their study of natural philosophy, astronomy, and mathematics. Scholars were vulnerable to such charges, since there was no well-defined boundary between legitimate and illicit branches of study well into the Early Modern period. Both church and state sought to control Protestant intellectual institutions in England as well as Catholic organizations in Italy. Humanist philosophers like Pico della Mirandola, a strong proponent of the pursuit of limitless knowledge was accused of holding heretical opinions. Infamously, Giordano Bruno, who had lived in Oxford in the early 1580s, and counted the courtier-poet Sir Philip Sidney among his English admirers, was burnt at the stake for heresy in Rome in 1600.

This condemnation of magic by the University of Paris, then, illustrates a tendency by authoritarian institutions to persecute a marginal discipline of learning as early as the fourteenth century. Crucially, the Paris articles represent the tension between the pursuit of knowledge for
its own sake and practical, instrumental knowledge, which could be rationalized within institutional parameters. As a result, humanists sought to allay concern about the dangers of the former by defining their mode of inquiry in terms of the latter. That is, humanism in its own historical moment was defined primarily and overwhelmingly as “useful” knowledge. While we understand humanism to be synonymous with transgressive and perhaps overweening intellectual aspiration, early moderns sought to define humanism within the constraints of social, intellectual and religious orthodoxy. Indeed Antony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have strenuously argued that humanism was grounded within and restricted by political and religious institutions, and was committed to maintaining their authority. Further, as Quentin Skinner illustrates, humanism was invested, for the most part, in practical matters, and initially the study of rhetoric and logic were used in instilling the arts of clerkship. It was only later that the study of rhetoric and logic became an integral part of studia humanitatis. Humanists, however, never lost sight of the primary purpose of scholarship – that of fulfilling civic duty.43

Humanists understood intellectual exercises outside institutional constraints as dangerous and ungodly. Crucially it was not just new scientific knowledge that was felt to breach the bounds of Christian orthodoxy and fall into the proscribed sphere of magical and demonic knowledge, but also older philosophical understandings of natural philosophy. The argument of this chapter is that conventional understandings of humanism as inherently transgressive are quite simply anachronistic, and by extension the readings of Doctor Faustus that are informed by


it over-simply the characteristics of humanism. In this chapter, I explore the tension the play presents between an investment in limitless learning for its own sake and one that is instrumental in upholding institutional hierarchies. Referred to as one of the university wits by traditional literary historians like A.C. Baugh, Christopher Marlowe was a Cambridge intellectual, who had attended Corpus Christi College, and was acquainted with the sometimes seemingly contradictory views about scholarly activities. I understand the tensions in *Doctor Faustus* as an articulation of these debates.

Scholars of all ideological stripes from Roma Gill to Jonathan Dollimore have argued that Faustus is damned because he exemplifies a perhaps exacerbated instance of intellectual transgression. A traditionalist such as Irving Ribner claims that Faustus’s damnation was the result of his Promethean intellectual aspirations, the tragedy of a man “who will not surrender in return for the promise of salvation those heroic attributes – the craving for knowledge, wealth, power, and delight.” Harry Levin, Roma Gill, and Paul Kocher understand Faustus’s intellectual curiosity as Faustus’s fatal flaw. Similarly, Leo Kirschbaum and Douglas Cole understand Faustus’s intellectual aspirations as untenable within a Christian framework. What these readings of *Doctor Faustus* fail to recognize is the degree to which humanism was fundamentally practical, and deeply invested in ensuring the furtherance of bureaucratic

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hierarchies. Indeed it was to this end that the study of the paradigmatically humanist arts of rhetoric and logic were aimed. Further, as Grafton and Jardine point out, humanism required a docility in relation to authority that enabled it to supplant scholasticism, the now increasingly arcane and obsolete inquiries of medieval theology and philosophy. In contrast, the basis of humanist scholarship was to educate a bureaucratic class in the service of statecraft. Humanism “stamped the more prominent members of the new élite with an indelible cultural seal of superiority, it equipped the lesser members with fluency and the learned habit of attention to textual detail and it offered everyone a model of true culture as something given, absolute, to be mastered, not questioned...,” argue Grafton and Jardine. They understand humanism as an ideal that led to the study of humanities “...a curriculum training a social élite to fulfill its predetermined social role.”

“...The education of the humanists was made to order for the Europe of the Counter-Reformation and of the late Protestant orthodoxy,” argue Grafton and Jardine. Moreover as Quentin Skinner contends, both Calvin and Luther were models of humanist learning in that their ideas regarding the ideal polity suggested that the human condition could be reformed within a well-instituted Protestant state, their ideas representing the humanist investment in streamlined social institutions. Faustus neither conforms to the kind of restrictions that the University of Paris sought to impose, nor do his actions uphold the institutional hierarchies that intellectuals


49 Ibid., pp. xiv- xvi.

50 Ibid., p. xiv.

were expected to endorse. Even before he makes his pact with the devil, Faustus renounces the instrumental uses of humanism declaring that the professions of law, physic and divinity are for “petty wits.” Though Faustus’s summoning of the devil might seem the obvious cause for his damnation, in fact Faustus contravenes the fundamental premise of humanist scholarship when he violates one of its crucial regulatory injunctions namely, scholarly inquiry in the service of state authority. In Marlowe’s play, Faustus is irredeemable because he refuses to practice the professions an intellectual was expected to, and as he abjures these vocations, he challenges the institutional hierarchies that humanism sought to establish and strengthen.

Both law and physic are for petty wits;

Divinity is basest of the three:

Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile: (I, i, 107-109)\(^{52}\)

Faustus, then, is a bad humanist, by which I mean that in rejecting the professions that the scholar was typically expected to practice, he defies the basic tenet of humanism – deference to institutional hierarchies by conforming to one’s social role. The humanist scholar was indeed expected to be proficient in the fields of logic, medicine, law, and theology, as Faustus demonstrates, rehearsing pithy excerpts from Aristotle, Petrus Ramus, Justinian, and the bible at the very beginning of the play. In spite of his facility in the various fields of learning, he refrains from using his knowledge in the service of religious and legal institutions.

Representative of the contradictions that beset humanism are two of Cornelius Agrippa’s best known treatises, *De Occulta Philosophia* and *De Vanitate Scientiarum*. While the former is a comprehensive catalogue of Renaissance magic and occult beliefs, the latter undermines

\(^{52}\) All quotations from the play are from David Scott Kastan (ed.), *Doctor Faustus* (New York: Norton, 2005).
human learning and knowledge.\textsuperscript{53} Summarizing these incongruities, Richard Hardin argues that the “conflict between the practical and spiritual ends of education had reached a crisis in Marlowe’s time.”\textsuperscript{54} Humanism, while it endorsed rhetoric about relentless pursuit of knowledge, one that Faustus embodies, never discounted the scholar’s social responsibilities. Faustus wants to “live and die in Aristotle’s works” (I, i, 35). Since the inception of humanism, however, the Aristotelian contemplative life was increasingly seen as the less preferred one to an intellectual life that fostered political involvement and prudent action by humanist scholars. While humanist philosophy emphasized intellectual achievements, \textit{studia humanitatis} was strongly grounded in its socio-economic context. The study of Classical authors and rhetoric, the basis of humanist scholarship, was used to educate the students of \textit{ars dictaminis}, who proposed to take up employment at the various administrative offices. Their education was expected to enable them to draft well-crafted, rhetorically persuasive official letters for their masters. Gradually, the study of the Classics came to be seen as essential for the development of \textit{virtus}, both virtuousness and manliness (Lat: \textit{vir} = man), and entailed the development of both intellect and social skills. While the enhancement of an individual’s virtues was the most important concern for the humanist, these virtues were defined specifically in relation to institutional authority. The knights, for example, in Spenser’s \textit{The Faerie Queene} each embody a virtue that makes them good courtiers to Gloriana. The Ciceronian precepts of education that humanists advocated, stressed the development of social skills along with intellectual advancement. A life devoted to the uninterrupted pursuit of scholarly abstractions, divorced from practical affairs, that Faustus


wants to lead, a life of *otium*, roughly understood as contemplation, was criticized by the humanists, who encouraged application of learning in a life of *negotium* or duty. In his *Life of Dante* (early fifteenth century), Bruni emphasized that a conscientious poet was always involved with civic life. To “estrange and absent oneself from society is peculiar to those whose poor minds unfit them for knowledge of any kind,” he concludes. Making philosophical speculations or garnering knowledge about the natural world cannot be ends in themselves, but should serve some practical purpose. Scholarship, according to Castiglione, ought to be employed in political life. His ideal courtier is one with a scholarly disposition. *The Book of the Courtier (Il Cortegiano)*, which was well circulated in England after Sir Thomas Hoby had translated it in English in 1561, details the duties of the courtier, who is expected to an able orator and well-versed in the finer arts, and emphasizes that his primary responsibility is to be able to give well-considered advice in the matters of state.

...lucidity can go hand in hand with elegance.... He should always, of course speak out fully and frankly, and avoid talking nonsense...And when he comes to discuss obscure or difficult matters, I want both his ideas and words to be so precisely formulated that he makes his meaning absolutely plain, taking pains to clarify every ambiguity, without being pedantic. Similarly, when the circumstances are opportune, he should be capable of speaking with dignity and emphasis....And at other times he should know how to speak with such simple candour that it seems

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like nature herself softening, and as it were, drugging our emotions with sweetness.\(^{56}\)

Machiavelli’s fusion of practical wisdom and scholarship also appears on virtually every page of *Il Principe*. Though he had gained much ill-repute in Britain, Machiavelli was essentially a scholar, well-versed in history. He had used his knowledge to fashion himself as an advisor to his prince, Lorenzo de Medici, on how to best govern his principality.

I understand the reason for Faustus’s damnation within the context of his perception of scholarship. Though Faustus’s conjuration of the devil might seem the obvious cause for his damnation, in the context of the reservations expressed by the University of Paris, conjuration of spirits was not outside the scope of orthodox Christianity. Given that ritual magic was accused as being heretical and in defiance to theological paradigms according to the 1398 articles, one would hardly expect a book of magic to have any mention of God at all. In *The Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits, etc.* 1577-83 [Folger MS Vb26], however, contrary to this expectation, the author praises God, while placing himself in the abased position of a sinner as an orthodox Christian. This manuscript is one of the generic books of magic or grimoires, which had elaborate instructions on how to conjure spirits.\(^{57}\) In the manuscript Vb26, God is attributed the only agency over demonic spirits and, in the beginning, the conjurer implores God to grant him the power to use and control the spirits he conjures.

From the throne of the majesty & most mighty Jehova look down here below

upon thy unworthy servant...extend thy favor & pity toward me as thou did on


\(^{57}\) It is possibly the kind of grimoire, Barbara Mowat argues, that Shakespeare’s Prospero might have used in *The Tempest*. Barbara A. Mowat, “Prospero’s Book”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Spring 2001, p. 1-33.
David, Peter, Marie Magdalene; divers other sinners & offenders.... Christ Jesus say unto me o lord “lo I give thee power over all clean & unclean spirit” for I
know o lord that thou hast power to do it...  

Belief in existence of demons was part of Christian theology. There was an intrinsic connection between being a devout Christian and acknowledging the deviousness of the devil. In Select cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcrafts, (1646), John Gaule, “Preacher of the Word at Great Staughton in the County of Huntington” argues that not believing in witches and witchcraft is tantamount to denying the existence of the devil, which in turn indicates a disbelief in God.  

“God is the supreme commander of all things, and permitteth wonderfull actions in the World, ... the Diuell is the mere seruant and agent of God, to prosecute whatsoeuer hee shall command rather than giue leaue unto...” concludes the record for The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower (1618).  

For the early religious reformers, witchcraft was inextricably linked to doctrinal truth, argues Stuart Clark.  

Given the context, and the rites of the grimoire tradition, Doctor Faustus’s conjuration of Mephistopheles in Christopher Marlowe’s play, then, does not overtly defy contemporary theological thought, especially since it is done while invoking divine power. Faustus follows the

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58 All transcriptions from the manuscript are mine with spellings and punctuations modernized.

59 John Gaule, Preacher of the Word at Great Staughton in the County of Huntington, Select cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcrafts (London, Printed by W. Wilson for Richard Clutterbuck, and are to be sold at his House in Noblestreet. 1646). (no page number)

60 The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Philip Flower, Daughters of Joan Flower neere Beuer Castle: Executed at Lincolne, March 11, 1618. Printed at London by G. Eld. For I. Barnes, dwelling in the long walke neere Christ-Church. 1619. (no page numbers).

61 Stuart Clark, Thinking With Demons: The idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). “These men were not ‘demonologists’; what they were, of course, was religious reformers...what witchcraft meant to them was inseparable from their notions of doctrinal truth and their experience, personal or vicarious, of evangelical fieldwork...” p. 440.
convention of the grimoire tradition in calling upon Jehovah and the saints as he prepares to conjure the devil:

Within this circle is Jehovah’s name
Forward and backward anagrammatized,
The ’breviated names of holy saints,
Figures of every adjunct to the heavens,
And characters of signs and erring stars,
By which the spirits are enforced to rise.
Then fear not, Faustus, but be resolute
And try the utmost magic can perform. (I, iii, 8-15)

Valdes instructs Faustus to have at hand, besides Bacon’s and Albanus’s works, also the Hebrew Psalter and the New Testament. A conjurer stands within a circle of the title page in the 1619 edition of The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus. This circle is inscribed with letters and numbers. The conjuror has a book in his hand (arguably a book of magic for conjuring spirits similar to MS Vb26). God, while giving the conjuror power over demonic spirits, also protects him. “...let not them nor any of them be able to delude contemn or in any wise disobey me”, prays the author of MS Vb26.

Prospero, in Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1611) also dabbles in magic and conjures spirits, but unlike Faustus is accepted back in the social matrix, and regains his regal authority. Even though Faustus recognizes Christ’s redeeming power as the hour of his appointed doom approaches (“where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!/ One drop would save my soul, half a drop” (5.2.74-5)), Faustus is not saved. There is no doubt at any point in the play that
Faustus has the potential to be saved, especially since the play generically situates itself within the tradition of Morality plays with the inclusion of an anthropomorphized Lucifer, Mephistopheles, and the seven deadly sins. Morality plays always end with the triumph of the human soul, successful in evading the machinations of the devil. In this theatrical tradition, the devil is not an overwhelming threat, but is reduced to a comic character on the shrewd look-out for the human soul, much like a charlatan on the look-out for an unguarded purse. Though temporarily distracted by the shenanigans of the devil, the erring man is always saved by either his good deeds or his faith. The human soul, protected by God’s grace, invariably achieves mental clarity at the eleventh hour and is able to overcome the deceptions that the devil has worked. Gaule says, the devil does not really have any agency over God’s subjects – to grant him any would be heretical (Manichean heresy), and since the devil works with complete divine knowledge, albeit by deceit, cannot cause the reprobation of the human subject. In The Alternative Trinity, A. D. Nuttall argues that if a medieval person were to watch Doctor Faustus, he would be surprised at Faustus’s destiny because “Faustus clearly repents in the sense that he wishes he had not done what he has done, and he calls on Christ...” However, Doctor Faustus follows the tropes of a medieval morality play only in the B-text, where he is deluded by the devil. In the “theatrical” version of Doctor Faustus, the B-text (printed in 1616), moments

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63 In his introduction to the play David Scott Kastan argues that the A-text printed in 1604 is the “authorial” version and that the B-text printed in 1616 is the “theatrical” version of the play. David Scott Kastan (ed.), Doctor Faustus (op. cit), pp. ix-xi. Paul Menzer in “Fractional Faustus: Edward Alleyn’s Part in the Printing of the A-Text” references Michael H Keefer, “The A and B Texts of Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus Revisited”, Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America 100 (2006): pp. 227-57 to “explore the possibility that players’ parts may have played a role not just in the performance but in the printing of plays, in this case the A-text of Doctor Faustus. In doing so, the essay joins recent work that argues for “heterogeneous copy” for the A-text, rather than the “authorial foul papers” that critical consensus has come to accept over the last fifteen years.” Christopher Marlowe the Craftsman: Lives, Stage, and the Page, ed. by Sarah K. Scott and M. L. Stapleton (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 215.
before the devils triumphantly carry Faustus away to hell for eternity, Mephistopheles revels in the fact that he had averted Faustus’s scholarly attention away from the divine and enticed him into studying magic.

I do confess it, Faustus, and rejoice.

'Twas I that, when thou wert i'the way to heaven,

Dammed up thy passage. When thou took'st the book

To view the scriptures, then I turned the leaves

And led thine eye. (5.2.92-6)

In so doing, the B-text attributes Faustus’s damnation to his gullibility at being deluded by the devil, and in accordance with early modern witch lore emphasizes the horror accompanying Faustus’s death. The Wittenburg scholars close the play with their horrified observations that:

“Such a dreadful night was never seen/ Since first the world’s creation did begin./Such fearful shrieks and cries were never heard....The devils whom Faustus served have torn him thus...”

(5.3.2-8). The A-text (printed in 1604), which is considered the “authorial” version, is significantly different because of the omission of this episode, where Faustus’s decision to practice magic is the result of well-argued reasons in favor of intellectual enhancement. He finds that the study of magic, the not fully explored “Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters” (1.1.51), can give the avid scholar in him the intellectual satisfaction that the practical pursuit of professions with their mercenary limitations cannot. The consequences of the practice of magic, according to early modern perception, moreover, holds for him the promise of immense temporal

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Leo Kirschbaum in “The Good and the Bad Quartos of Doctor Faustus”, The Library, XXVI (1945-6) bears the marks of a text constructed from memory by an actor. Roma Gill in her edition of Doctor Faustus (op. cit.) argues that the B-text is the playhouse text, which was preferred over the A-text because the latter was less spectacular. P. xv.
power that the practice of worldly professions cannot possibly give him: “what a world of profit and delight,/ Of power, of honor, of omnipotence,/ Is promised to the studious artisan!” (1. 1. 53-5). While the devils are a threatening omnipresence in the world of the B-text, Faustus actively conjures up the devil in the A-text in an attempt to control and command it, very much in keeping with the early modern tradition of scholarly magic. Since the A-text continually makes references to the learned perception of magic, it eludes the neat theological paradigm that the B-text presents. The practice of magic and the conjuration of spirits were arguably integral parts of early modern intellectual culture. Moreover, since the A-text ends with Faustus’s abjuration of his books, his tragedy in this text can only be understood by situating him as primarily a scholar within both a Protestant context (since he is from Wurttemberg) as well as a humanist intellectual context, given his command over different branches of humanist scholarship that he demonstrates in the opening speech. The A-text of Doctor Faustus, emphasizes that Faustus had contravened the precepts of Protestant Humanism, which advocated the practical implementation of knowledge rather than abstract intellectual pursuits, and that is why he was damned. At the very beginning of the play, Faustus rejects all professions and expresses his desire to acquire knowledge for its own sake. Within the early modern context, however, knowledge came to be seen as a means to an end, as the perception of knowledge as an end in itself underwent major revisions. Faustus uses the rhetoric of the Neo-Platonic scholar, like Ficino, purporting to follow limitless knowledge. The chief aim of humanist education, however, was to create responsible and productive subjects for the State. The Reformist preacher, John Calvin, himself a humanist scholar, stressed the social relevance of man and his endeavors, including scholarly ones, in Institutes of the Christian Religion (1559), a central Protestant text. The scholarly agendum of the humanists included an education in the disciplines of rhetoric, logic, grammar, intended
primarily to create educated subjects to help in the smooth functioning of the state. Revered humanist scholars concerned themselves with political life and often held important social positions. The Spanish nobleman, Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540), who was a tutor to Mary Tudor, went on to become Professor of the Humanities at Louvain. Roger Ascham (1515-68) served as a tutor to the future Queen Elizabeth in the 1540s. Both Erasmus and Castiglione wrote advice books for princes and those who served at the court. In terms of this humanist paradigm, an intellectual would be expected to be an active participant in social life. John Calvin’s emphasis on social good and responsibility largely informs his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), which Leah Marcus suggests is useful for understanding the context of the two versions of Marlowe’s play. Set in “Wertenberg” (the context of “militant Protestantism”), the A-text draws attention to its Calvinist context. The B-text, notably, places Faustus in Wittenberg, “a less committedly Calvinist, more theologically conservative and ceremonial milieu.” The A-text then defers more to Calvin’s concern with the preservation of social structures, in contrast to the B-text’s overweening concern with and condemnation of the practice of necromancy. The second book of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* emphasizes that man

is naturally a creature inclined to society, he has also by nature an instinctive propensity to cherish and preserve that society; and therefore we perceive in the minds of all men general impressions of civil probity and order...

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64 Leah Marcus, “Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: The Case of *Doctor Faustus*”, *Renaissance Drama*, 20, 1989, pp. 1-29

In the Calvinist conception of Christian life, poverty does not necessarily indicate the ideal life. On the contrary, poverty leads man to temptations. Want drives man to making money by unfair means and this disrupts social organization. Since material prosperity is seen as one of the preconditions for a well-ordered society, Reformist theologians revised the medieval theological disdain for wealth. Tawney summarizes the medieval attitude to wealth as follows: “...economic interests are subordinate to the real business of life, which is salvation, and ... economic conduct is one aspect of personal conduct, upon which, as on other parts of it, the rules of morality are binding.” This economic re-organization, argues Weber in his seminal work, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, preceded, brought into effect, and even encouraged the religious one. “Calvin,” says Weber, “saw no hindrance to the effectiveness of the clergy in their wealth, but rather a thoroughly desirable enhancement of their prestige.” This changing economic scenario re-conceptualized the ideal human subject as one whose duty was “the increase of capital, which is assumed as an end in itself.” Faustus, however, shows no inclination towards the creation of wealth. On the contrary, his chief reason for not practicing the professions that intellectuals were expected to is that these activities merely yielded profit, “heap up gold” (I, i, 14).

Unlike Faustus, the university-educated men of early modern England were actively involved in state affairs. Important courtiers of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras, like Lord

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68 Ibid. p. 157.

69 Ibid. p. 51.
Burghley; Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester; Sir Christopher Hatton; the Earl of Essex had strong intellectual inclinations. This was a society where economic acquisition was “no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs.” In this context, the relentless pursuit of knowledge without any material enhancement or social obligations, the life of the idealized magus became only a myth, as the learned were expected to take up specific professions after an expensive and time-intensive educational experience. The educated, laments Robert Burton, pursues the arts as only of secondary interest:

...our ordinary students, might well perceiving in our *Universities*, how unprofitable these Poeticall, Mathematicall, and Philosophicall studies are, how little respected, how few patrons, apply themselves in all haste to those three commodious professions, of Law, Physick, and Divinity, reiecting the Arts in the mean time, or lightly passing them over, as pleasant toyes, fitting only table-talke, and to furnish them with discourse.

Since making philosophical speculations is not materially rewarding, those who do so require wealthy patrons, who are hard to come by. They are therefore compelled to take up professions that result in profit. “It is not surprising,” says Ian McAdam, “that two of the three most significant dramas concerning the failed ‘magus’ figure in Early Modern literature are written by

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71 Ibid. p. 53.

72 Democritus Iunior., *An Anatomy of Melancholy, What it is With all the Kindes. Cavses, Symptomes, Prognostickes, And Severall Cyres of it. In three main partitions with seuerall sections, members, and subsections. Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically, Opened and cvt up. With a Satyricall Preface, Conducing to the following Discourse. At Oxford, Printed at Iohn Lichfield and James Short, for Henry Cripps Anno Dom. 1621. P. 175.[Source: EEBO]
university wits, Marlowe and Greene, struggling to turn their education into artistic profit through the theatrical but deeply ironized celebration of ‘magic’.”73

In spite of his expertise in medicine, law, and theology, Faustus rejects the professions that the university educated men mostly took up. He wants instead to devote his intellect and energy to philosophical study, with Agrippa, the renowned white magician, or magus of the Renaissance as his role model:

- Both law and physic are for petty wits;
- Divinity is basest of the three:
- Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile:
- 'Tis magic, magic, that hath ravished me...
- Will be as cunning as Agrippa was,
- Whose shadows made all Europe honor him. (I, i, 107-118)

By doing so Faustus thinks he can escape the intellectual limitations that accompany each of the institutionalized professions, as well as dodge the servility inherent in the practice of any trade, since all professions subscribe to worldly hierarchies. Instead, he wishes to earn everyone’s respect by his intellectual endeavors. Further, in the Renaissance context, magic was not understood as simply the practice of conjuring spirits. To the humanist scholar, magic meant the pursuit of philosophy and an intense intellectual exercise, suitable to those who had mastered the different fields of humanist learning, as Faustus illustrates in his opening soliloquy. “The intellectual study of magic,” says Keith Thomas “was a European phenomenon emerging in the Florentine Italian Renaissance with the Platonism of such writers as Ficino and Pico della

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Mirandola, and spreading to Northern Europe through the works of Paracelsus and Cornelius Agrippa.” Agrippa, whom Faustus proposes to emulate, defined magic in *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy, or of Magic* (printed in English in 1651) as:

> a faculty of wonderful virtue, full of most high mysteries, containing the most profound contemplation of most high things, together with the nature, power, quality, substance, and virtues thereof, as also the knowledge of whole nature, and it doth instruct us concerning the differing, and agreement of things amongst themselves... 

According to this definition, magic, besides connoting an intellectual exercise, also implied deep a spiritual knowledge and virtue (the perception of the divine in a theological context) on the part of the true practitioner, who needed to have the acumen to appreciate the coherence within nature through the various branches of acquired information about the material world. Whereas, according to Agrippa’s conception, magic was chiefly a philosophical exercise, it was popularly misapprehended as the practice of dark arts. Mathematics and astronomy, important areas of study in university curricula, were inextricably enmeshed with the practice of ritual magic. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from *Friar Bacon His Discovery of the Miracles of Art, Nature and Magick faithfully translated out of Dr Dees own copy, by T M* (1659). The author says that Roger Bacon,

> ...an Englishman, a founded scholar of Merton-Colledg in Oxford, a very quick Philosopher, and withal a very famous Divine, he had an incredible knowledge in

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the Mathematics, but without Necromancy...although he be defam’d for it by many...Nicholas the Fourth Pope of Rome did condemn his Doctrine in many things, and he was by him kept in prison for many years together; as Antonine hath it in his Chronicle. He flourished in the year of our Lord, 1270...

The disarticulation of mathematics from magic especially points to the confusion between an arguably secular branch of study with and the pursuit of the irrational and indulgence in malevolence. Since Roger Bacon was assumed to be practicing magic privately, he was institutionally persecuted – his works were discredited and he himself was imprisoned. This was so because the practice of ritual magic was thought to subvert the authority of legislative and religious institutions that sought to exercise complete control over human existence. T M’s Roger Bacon was actually the accused magus of the thirteenth century, and had found a place on the early modern stage in Robert Greene’s play, The Honorable Historie of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay (1589). He also believed that the knowledge of the natural world should be instrumental in leading to knowledge of the divine. In his book Opus Tertium, he says that “[A]uthority may impel belief, but cannot enlighten the understanding...The end of all true philosophy is to arrive at a knowledge of the Creator through knowledge of the created world.”

Bacon’s ideas on scholarship, not surprisingly, echo those of Agrippa’s. In this context, Faustus’s intention to study magic and follow in the footsteps of Agrippa, can be understood to be his desire for scholarly enhancement, which in spite of being well rooted within the

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76 Friar Bacon His Discovery of the Miracles of Art, Nature and Magick faithfully translated out of Dr Dees own copy, by T M and never before in English (London, Printed for Simon Miller at the Starre in St Pauls Church-yard, 1659)

intellectual culture of the time, defied the expectation that the scholar was duty-bound to render civic service.

Though the epilogue of the play, attributes Faustus’s “hellish fall” to his Icarian intellectual aspirations, which led him “to wonder at unlawful things,” and made him “practice more than heavenly power permits,” what was permitted ultimately depended on the dictates of religious, political and legal institutions. James I, the head of the English church after 1603, states in his treatise *Demonologie* (1597) that there were limitations to legitimate knowledge and the desire to acquire more than is granted to man results in his spiritual degradation. He traces the etymology of the word magic to pre-Christiant societies, which, according to him, were alienated from the knowledge of true divinity and argues that holding their knowledge in high esteem and continuing their ritualistic practices, which he terms the “vnlawfull artes,” can only re-create in the scholar the spiritual vacuum of pre-Christian ages. The over-reaching scholar, proficient in the “artes and science of Magie,” moreover, according to James I, is akin to Lucifer and vulnerable to damnation. The scholar’s desire for more than the divinely apportioned knowledge has the potential to replicate the fatal fall.

This word *Magie* in the *Persian* toung, importes as muche as to be ane contemplator or Interpretour of Divine and heavenlie sciences: which being first vsed amongst the *Chaldeed*, through their ignorance of the true divinitie, was esteemed and reputed amongst them, as a principall vertue: And therefore, was named vnjustlie with an honorable stile, which names the *Greekes* imitated, generally importing all these kinds of vnlawfull artes...For divers men having attained to a great perfection in learning, & yet remaining over bare (alas) of the spirit of regeneration and frutes thereof...they are so allured thereby, that finding
their practize to prooue true in sundry things, they studie to know the cause thereof: and so mounting from degree to degree, vpon the slipperie and vncertaine scale of curiositie; they are at last entised, that where lawfull artes and sciences failes, to satisfie their restless mindes, even to seeke to that black and vnlawfull artes and science of Magie.  

There are constant reminders in Doctor Faustus of this much-dreaded alienation from the grace of god. Even as Mephistopheles says the quintessence of beauty was “Lucifer before his fall,” with a Miltonic nostalgia for lost spiritual innocence (II. i. 606), Faustus persists in his pursuit of knowledge, the perceived cause of the fall of the angels as well as the original sin.

*The English Faust Book* (1592), on which *Doctor Faustus* is loosely based, draws attention to Faustus’s expertise in exactly those areas of knowledge, and proficiency in precisely those languages, which James I had denounced as leading to spiritual degradation of man:

So, who can hold Faustus from the devil, that seeks after him with all his endeavour? For he accompanied himself with diverse that were seen in those devilish arts and that had the Chaldean, Persian, Hebrew, Arabian and Greek tongues, using figures, characters, conjurations, incantations, with many other ceremonies belonging to these infernal arts, as necromancy, charms, soothsaying, witchcraft, enchantment, being delighted with their books, words and names so well, that he studies day and night therein: insomuch that he could not abide to be

78 James I, *Demonologie, In Forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into Three Bookes* (Edinbvrgh, Printed by Robert Waldegraue, Printer to the Kings Majestie. An. 1597), 8, 10 Source: EEBO
called doctor of divinity but waxed a worldly man and named himself an astrologian, and a mathematician...\textsuperscript{79}

Besides giving what Reformed society would see as undue advantage to pre-Christian languages and cultures, which were thought to be devoid of true spiritual knowledge, the methods Faustus uses for gaining forbidden knowledge – the “figures” and “characters” – were in themselves suspect for the Protestant iconoclasts. \textit{The English Faust Book}, like \textit{Demonologie}, completely ignores the potential for knowledge the humanists found in pre-Christian learning, and instead denigrates the learning revered by the humanists as both an aspiration for forbidden knowledge, that is, witchcraft by the practice of necromancy, and false knowledge, that is, charlatanism by the practice of soothsaying. While Faustus intellectually aligns himself with scholars like Agrippa, the practices like necromancy that are an integral part of these scholarly practices are at odds with institutional dictates, as seen in the case of punishment of Roger Bacon, in the indictments issued by the University of Paris, in King James I’s \textit{Demonologie}, and in the choric condemnation of the scholars in the last act of the play.

In Marlowe’s play, the traditionally iconic representations of forbidden learning that both \textit{Demonologie} and \textit{The English Faust Book} enumerate, are downplayed in favor of the humanist discourse about scholarship. Faustus enacts the part of the magician with all the diagrams and the book of conjuration, just so the audience recognizes him as one.\textsuperscript{80} Though the practice of magic and his access to the services of Mephistopheles makes it possible for Faustus to have access to


\textsuperscript{80} According to Marcel Mauss, “magic should be used to refer to those things which society as a whole considers magical...”The actions/ rites that are associated with magic, says Mauss, have to be repeated often to draw attention to a particular act as magical. Marcel Mauss, \textit{A General Theory of Magic} (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 18.
much wealth, the control and mastery over nature and temporal power, he does not seem to avail any of these endowments. Prior to signing the bond with Lucifer, Faustus indulges in grand fantasies of what he might achieve in terms of temporal power:

...I’ll be a great emperor of the world
And make a bridge through the moving air
To pass the ocean with a band of men;
I’ll join the hills that bind the Afric shore
And make that land continent to Spain,
And both contributory to my crown.... (I, iii, 104-9)

After his contract with the devil, however, Faustus is mostly desirous of gaining limitless knowledge, and in the play, he demands books about the natural world and the knowledge of astronomy from Mephistopheles, rather than fulfill the particulars of his earlier bombast.

Faustus’s scholarly aspiration, in the rhetorical stance of the humanist philosophers like Ficino, is to extend his intellectual dominions. In his *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium* (15th century), Marcilio Ficino places the “Angelical mind,” or intelligence, just below God and higher than the soul in the great chain of being. The soul, according to Ficino, is something that animates a being. It does not, however, possess cognitive ability. Intelligence of the Angelic mind is then higher than the soul in divine hierarchy because it has the ability to perceive and guide the

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81 Mephistopheles tells Faustus to “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 armor shall appear to thee,/ Ready to execute what thou desir’st.” (II, i, 155-160)

82 The title of chapter 15 of his commentary is “The soul is higher than the body, Angelic mind than the soul, and God than Angelic mind.” Stevie Davies (ed.), *Renaissance Views of Man* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979), p. 43.
latter as well as conceptualize the presence of the divine. For the Italian Neo-Platonists, the intellect had to be nurtured just so it could move on to the next step of perceiving God. In the fifteenth chapter of Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s “Symposium,” Ficino speaks about Diotima guiding Plato “from body to soul, from soul to Angelic Mind, and from Angelic Mind to God” in a precise hierarchical order. The intellect in itself is of no purpose and should ideally be used to contemplate the divine. The perception of Godhead is the true purpose of the spiritual magician, or the magus, in the tradition of the wise men of the Biblical tradition – Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar, who had visited the infant Jesus with gifts. While Neo-Platonist scholars like Ficino, as well as the thirteenth century polymath Roger Bacon in *Opus Tertium*, emphasize that acquiring the knowledge of the creator is the true reason for scholarship, practical Humanism emphasized the social impact of scholarship. Erasmus, in *The Praise of Folly* (1517), for example critiques Socrates because the latter

held the opinion that a wise man ought not to meddle in affairs of state – perhaps he should have admonished us further and said that he who wants to be counted among men should abstain from wisdom itself...For while he philosophized about clouds and ideas, while he measured the feet of a flea and wondered at the voice of a gnat, he did not learn the common, ordinary things of life.

John Calvin, who had a humanist education, moreover, states that the “knowledge of God [is] conspicuous in the formation and continual government of the world,” thus relating the ultimate goal of scholarship, the knowledge of godhead, as expounded by Ficino with the stability and

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83 Ibid., p. 43.

furtherance of institutions. The knight at the court of Emperor Carolus the fifth, where Faustus conjures up the spirits of Alexander and his paramour, is similarly critical of Faustus’s acumen, which others at the court, including the emperor, are in awe of. He dismisses Faustus’s “art and power of my spirit” with “I’faith, that’s nothing at all,” (IV. i. 42-44) before relegating him to the position of a common street performer, irrelevant to the court. This is the only occasion when Faustus has a politically influential audience, but he wastes his intellectual prowess, one that the chorus derisively calls his “learnéd skill,” for entertainment alone. Not put to any practical use and outside institutional support, all the knowledge that Faustus has garnered with what Burton points out as a very expensive education, to which few have access, is reduced to the entertaining skill of any street conjurer or charlatan. It is because Faustus squanders his knowledge on what is seen as trivialities, stories about him, which had currency in Europe for a couple of centuries before Marlowe’s play, often reduce him to a confidence trickster, who is ever ready to have a laugh and entertain others. A late seventeenth century collection of anecdotes about magicians lists Faustus among trickster magicians and relates a tale about him when he had fooled his friends into thinking that their noses were bunches of grapes. These amusing anecdotes

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86 Sara Munson Deats in “Marlowe’s Interrogative Drama: *Dido, Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Edward II*” argues that by “magnifying the hero’s aspirations (making them more grand although not necessarily more elevated) and sharply curtailing his realization, the play highlights the vacuity of Faustus’s bargain. The exclusion of extraneous elements from the source [*The Faustbook*] further clarifies Faustus’s progressive demotion from eminent academician to politician to court entertainer to jester to greengrocer.” Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (eds.), *Marlowe’s Empery: Expanding his Critical Contexts* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 118.

87 “John Faustus among a sort of his companions, who when they were half drunk, importuned him to play some of his pranks; and the feat must be a Vine full of Grapes, as the greater novelty now in the winter season. Faustus consented to satisfy their curiosity, upon this condition, that they should keep silence, and not stirre out of their places, nor offer to pluck a Grape till he bad, otherwise they might pluck their own perill. The praestegious sight is presented, and everyone had his knife drawn and hold of a branch, but not to cut till he spake the word. But having held them a while in suspense, all suddenly vanished, and every man appeareed to have hold onely of his own nose, and ready to have cut it off, if the word had been once given.” From *A Collection Out of the Best Approved Authors, Containing Histories of Visions, Apparitions, Prophecies, Spirits, Divinations, and other wonderful Illusions of the*
obliterate most of Faustus’s scholarly achievements, and Faustus ends up being constructed as a reckless charlatan.

In the play, Faustus’s essential solitude from social structures, the ordinary things of life, indicates that he is a misfit within the social context as well. In spite of the elevated rhetoric that was associated with humanist scholarship, single-minded pursuit of knowledge, says Burton, often invites ridicule for the scholar. The quintessential scholar is the subject of derision because he is thought incapable of performing basic tasks, ones that do not require any scholarly acumen at all. The scholar’s social ineptitude is seen as the inevitable result of his solitude, except for the company of the muses:

...they live a sedentary, solitary life...free from bodily exercise, and those ordinary disports which other men use...how many poor scholars have lost their wits, or become dirds, neglecting all worldly affairs, and their own health, wealth, esse, and bené esse to gain knowledge? For which after all their pains, in the worlds esteem they are accounted ridiculous, and silly fools, Idiot, Asses and (as oft they are) rejected, contemned, and derided, doting, mad...

The unworldly scholars, Burton goes on to say, are denied the attributes that even the lowest in social hierarchy enjoy because the latter are able to earn a livelihood by their wits. In a society that measures a man’s worth by his worldly possessions, the humblest worker enjoys more

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Democritus Junior, *The Anatomy of Melancholy, What it is With all the Kindes, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, And Severall Cyres of it. In three maine partitions with seuerall sections, members, and subsections. Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically, Opened and cvt vp With a Satyricall Preface, Conducing to the following Discourse. (Oxford: Printed at John Lichfield and James Short, for Henry Cripps Anno Dom. 1621), pp. 168-9 [Source: EEBO]
esteem than someone committed to intellectual application. The scholar’s committed intellectual ambition is often considered the reason for his legendary poverty, as Marlowe laments in *Hero and Leander*: “And to this day is everie schollar poore,/ Grosse gold, from them runs headlong to the boore.”

Faustus literally embodies this scholar, who neglects his physical, material and spiritual well-being. When the three scholars meet Faustus in the final act of the play, the third scholar, noting Faustus’s paleness remarks, “He is not well with being over-solitary” (V. ii. 33). Overtly pointing to his apparently weak physique, the three scholars, by implication decimate Faustus’s intellectual prowess as well as his moral fiber. The derided scholar that Burton describes in *The Anatomy*, besides, least interested in increasing his worldly wealth, is also the embodiment of physical decay, which he willingly embraces in his single-minded pursuit of what is thought to be unproductive scholarship. The neglect of his being and well-being (*esse* and *béne esse*), which causes the scholar’s bodily degeneration, for which Burton gives an elaborate medical explanation. Physically unsound, the scholar cannot productively contribute to the well-being of the body-politic, an extremely problematic situation in Reformed society. Even the humanists did not look too kindly upon men not in sound bodily condition, since intellectual brilliance is expected to manifest itself in excellent physique. It is due to his disinterest in both his self and the body politic marked by his secluded, sedentary life, that Burton’s scholar is often the recipient of ridicule, as he is thought to lack reason.

Reason, according to Ficono’s *Commentary*, enables the scholar to appreciate the hierarchical orderliness of the divine scheme. The haphazard scholarly references in the opening

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soliloquy of the play emphasize Faustus’s lack of order and pragmatism. Unable to apprehend the requirements of temporal institutions, Faustus’s learning effectively degenerates into a commonplace book like collection of clever ideas. Disorderliness, it can be argued, besides signifying a lack of reason, has the added association of alienation from divine grace. Albrecht Durer’s engraving titled *Melancholia I*, is one of a dark and brooding woman, who is surrounded by objects, which signify the many emergent areas of empirical knowledge and experimental science of the Renaissance – a pair of scales, compass, globe. But these objects do not present any coherence and the lack of divine munificence, apparent in the demeanor of Melancholia, reduces intellectual endeavors to disjointed bits of information. Faustus’s speech references all the traditional areas of learning – “the qu*adrivium* of astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and music, and the *trivium* of rhetoric, logic, and grammar” – but this knowledge is neither schematically coherent, nor is it grounded in Christian theology. The disarray of books in Faustus’s study, commensurate with his speech, draws attention to the incoherence of Faustus’s scholarship outside the disciplining religious and social structures. The faculty of reason was expected to weave the different branches of study and enable the human subject to apprehend the universe and consequently the glory of its creator. Intellectual speculation divorced from spiritual knowledge was useless in itself. This coherent knowledge was ultimately expected to be used in the service of society. Within the Protestant social paradigm too, knowledge was ultimately expected to contribute to social welfare. According to Calvin’s doctrines, the strongest influence on the Anglican Church, man’s intellectual capabilities were only the means to better the common weal. The scholar’s intellectual abilities were best harnessed within institutional

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control. The third book of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* details the requirements of the ideal Christian existence, all of which seek to control the life of the individual for the furtherance of pre-existing institutions. The early church fathers were also strong proponents of orderliness within the institution, and the conformity of those affiliated to it. A well-ordered society, according to Augustine, a strong influence on the Reformist preachers, especially Luther, was the only remedy for a post-lapsarian human existence, and the scholar could not be exempt from it, nor could he be allowed the joys of solitary intellectual pursuits. Outside the boundaries of society, knowledge did not have any perceived role and was as such constructed as a transgression.

Learning that is limited to airy speculations or impressive rhetorical exercises, but does not enrich everyday living is essentially alienating. *Doctor Faustus* draws attention to, and makes fun of scholarship that is divorced from social life. Faustus’s profuse use of Latin, recognized as the quintessential scholarly tongue, ultimately degenerates into meaningless, albeit scholarly babble in the public playhouse. In the Protestant context, moreover, Latin is problematic on account of its essential unintelligibility. David Hawkes, in *The Faust Myth* points out that it was important that the Word be understood in the Protestant context because incomprehensibility was associated with Catholicism and witchcraft. Hawkes cites the testimony of Mother Waterhouse, accused of witchcraft in 1566, where she had said that “Sathan wolde at no tyme suffer her to say it in englyshe but at all tymes in laten.”  

91 Latin is perceived as one of the icons of Catholicism, which Faustus rejects and ridicules in the beginning of the play. Paradoxically, Latin is also the marker of his scholarship and therefore a determinant of his scholarship.

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identity. That Latin is quoted throughout the play, but often to either be dismissed or ridiculed, problematizes Faustus’s scholarly status. For example, Faustus conjures the devil in learned Latin, as laid down in the grimoire he reads from: “Sint mihi dei Acherontis propitii! Valet numen triplex Jehovae!...ipse nunc surgat nobis dicatus Mephastophilis” (I, iii, 258-65). In the magical tradition, words themselves were supposed to carry power and so the magi emphasized the correct enunciation of the words. These words, even had to be written with ritual propriety, and only in red or black ink, like MS Vb26 is. Robin, illiterate for all practical purposes, however, manages to call Mephastophilis by reciting scholarly-sounding gibberish:

“Sanctobolarum Periphraticon!...Polypragmos Belseborams framanto pacostiphos tostu Mephastophilis! etc.” (II, ii, 1008-10), making a travesty of the very words that were expected to endow the conjurer with power of conjuration. The elimination of the scholarly tongue in Early Modern social life is indicated in an earlier episode (I, iv) when Wagner while employing the Clown iterates the first line of poem studied in grammar schools (“Qui mihi discipulus”), which he might have picked up from his learned master. The Clown can only distinguish it as scholarly, but is unable to either understand or respond to it. From the very beginning of the play, Faustus generously peppers his speeches with Latin, the scholarly signifier, and in the process becomes practically incomprehensible to those around him, including the audience. His linguistic alienation is symptomatic of a greater social one. “Even before he abjures God,” argues Jonathan

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Dollimore, “Faustus expresses a sense of being isolated and trapped; an insecurity verging on despair pre-exists a damnation which, by a perverse act of will, he ‘chooses’.”

Faustus’s isolation from Reformed society is emphasized in his exclusion from the institution of marriage, a staple for the idealized life of the Protestant subject. Social restructuring that was necessary for economic changes, which according to Weber was an important factor for Reformation to take roots, encouraged married life and church orders did away with monasticism and clerical celibacy. Luther, in his anti-papal polemics, criticized Catholic injunctions of celibacy as a repression of natural human instincts and argued that perfection can best be achieved in the domestic sphere. In *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), he draws upon the authority of *Genesis* to speak of marriage as a prerequisite to procreation. According to Luther, God’s injunction to “Be fruitful and multiply” is a “divine ordinance” and that barring certain categories of eunuch,

...no man presume to be without a spouse. And whoever does not fall within one of these categories should not consider anything except the estate of marriage. Otherwise it is simply impossible for you to remain righteous. For the Word of God which created you and said “Be fruitful and multiply” abides and rules within you; you can by no means ignore it, or you will be bound to commit heinous sins without end....

Marriage, moreover, according to Luther, is a divinely ordained state because it fulfills a social obligation. “The greatest good in married life,” says Luther in *The Estate of Marriage*, “is that

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God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve him. In all the world this is the noblest and most precious work, because to God there can be nothing dearer than the salvation of souls.” Faustus, however, wants to get married, not in order to procreate law-abiding and reformed subjects for the state committed to the furtherance of its goals, but for personal gratification. He admits to being “wanton and lascivious, and cannot live without a wife” (II, i. 588-9). On Faustus’s request for a wife, Mephastophilis, dismisses the sacrament as a mere “ceremonial toy”, and extends exactly those reasons against marriage that Luther had undermined in *The Estate of Marriage* in favor of matrimony. For example, Mephastophilis emphasizes domestic disharmony, as he parades a devil dressed as a woman and with fireworks trailing it, as he pretends to bring Faustus the wife he had requested. While discord is inevitable in all marriages, admits Luther, it is something the good Christian ought to overlook as temporary, and concentrate instead on marital bliss and mutual support among couples that will ultimately result in social well-being. This attitude, according to Luther, requires the correct appreciation of the purpose of marriage: “He who is married but does not recognize the estate of marriage cannot continue in wedlock without bitterness, drudgery and anguish; he will inevitably complain and blaspheme like the pagans and blind, irrational men. But he who recognizes the estate of marriage will find therein delight, love and joy without end...” Couples are expected to complement each other’s achievements. The conjured spirit of even the great Alexander is incomplete without his beautiful paramour, whose virtuous grace serves to enhance his “glorious acts,” which “lightens the world with his reflecting beams” (IV, i, 1065-6). The carnal pleasures that Mephastophilis promises Faustus instead of marriage do not in any way lead to the fulfillment of the social and procreative responsibilities of the idealized Protestant existence, as
understood by both Lutherans and Calvinists. While Faustus says that he prefers the peacefulness of a solitary existence, which Burton points out is typical to scholars, married life was not essentially at odds with a scholarly one. John Dee, a proficient mathematician and astronomer, revered as magus in Early Modern England, was married twice.\footnote{The Myth of the Magus (op. cit.), p. 162.}

In \textit{Doctor Faustus}, the Duke and his wife in IV, ii conform to the domestic ideal of Reformed life. The brief scene emphasizes the wholesome fecundity of the duchess, who heavily pregnant (“great-bellied”) craves grapes in January. For the Lutheran, fulfilling one’s worldly responsibilities was the only way to redemption because it was seen as conforming to the will of God. The domestic felicity of the Duke and the Duchess contrasts Faustus’s lascivious, unmarried state. Faustus’s amorous advances to the spirit of Helen, juxtaposed with this scene, bring home the barrenness of his conjugal life. His association with the lifeless Helen, incapable of constructive procreation, also robs him of \textit{virtus} that the Humanists held in high esteem in relation to human existence. Petrarch, in \textit{De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae} (1532), quoting the example of Mark Antony led astray by Cleopatra, warns that a woman is capable of causing moral and spiritual degradation of man and that the \textit{vir vir} has to be constantly aware of the unscrupulousness of women. “But O thou foolish man,” berates Petrarch with the literary misogyny of the \textit{Querelles des femme} tradition, “never give credit to a dishonest woman: fear, heat, lightness, custom of lying, desire to deceive, and the gain of deceit, every one of these, and much more, all these maketh it suspicious whatsoever cometh out of her mouth.”\footnote{Mary Hamer, \textit{Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation} (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 39.} To an early modern mind, Helen epitomized the quintessential adulterous woman, who, having abandoned her husband had been the cause of the destruction of the very prosperous Ilium, as well as the
death of many valiant men, all for the fulfillment of her amorous desires. Enamored of Helen, whose lips “sucks forth” his soul (V, i, 1360), Faustus loses his *virtus*, and is ready to let “Wertenberg be sacked” if that is the only way he could possess her (V, i, 1365). The possibility of destruction that typically accompanies the desire to possess Helen is in sharp contrast to the constructive, procreative love between the duke and duchess in the previous scene, which is only a brief respite in the oppressive pedantry and barren poetry surrounding it.

The figure of Helen, however, was not an unequivocal signifier of forbidden desires. For the Gnostics, Helen, paramour of Simon Magus, was the fallen divinity, Sophia, also synonymous with wisdom. The mythical figure, initially powerful, was sexually violated, reduced in stature and finally alienated from divine presence.⁹⁷ Faustus’s obsession with Helen, within the paradigm of this myth, is then the pursuit of fallen knowledge that has the potential to lead him to a fate similar to hers. According to Patrick Cheney, the play proposes that the Greek zeal for the recovery of Helen signifies the desire to regain lost wisdom, and this is apparent in the third scholar’s comparison of Helen’s beauty to a divine one: “...such a queen, whose heavenly beauty passeth all compare” (V, i, 1294-5).⁹⁸ John Parker refers to this myth and points out that Faustus’s description of Helen is reminiscent of Simon Magus’s, who often blended pagan myths with the Greek ones that were accepted by Christianity. Simon Magus’s eulogy of Helen in turn echoes Solomon’s praise of the figure of Wisdom. Solomon’s “sensuous allegory for the love of heavenly “Wisdom” that clearly resembles, and so acts as a suitable replacement for, the Platonic love of knowledge or, alternately, the heathen love of Isis...Marlowe’s gesture is

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⁹⁷ *The Myth of the Magus* (op. cit.), p. 82.

both more and less scandalous than bastardizing scripture with the classics,” argues Parker.\(^9^9\)

Faustus’s desire for Helen then, is as much intellectual as it is carnal. In both Classical and biblical mythology, the lure of knowledge is often the cause of a fatal fall. It is significant, then, to note here that Faustus’s association with Helen is the penultimate episode of the play, after which he is dragged down to hell, in skewed reenactment of the fatal fall.

Faustus’s pursuit of forbidden knowledge that is embodied by Helen, is reflected in the sensuousness of his perception and his poetry remains with him till the last moment of his existence. Just before Faustus is condemned to the tortures of hell for eternity, he recites Ovid, “\textit{O lente lente currite noctis equi,}” as he wills the night to stay her course so that he has a few more moments to live, where he can grasp at some felicity.\(^1^0^0\) His recitation of erotic poetry is not a sign of Faustus’s sinfulness. On the contrary, in the final moments of his life, he exhibits exceptional mental clarity as he recognizes the reasons for his exclusion from society, as well as his unredeemed status within Reformed theological perspective, all because his perception of scholarship does not fulfill social demands made on the scholar, as he craves for the warmth of conjugal love.

Recitation of Latin towards the end of the play serves the added theatrical function of reminding Marlowe’s audience of Faustus’s essential identity as a scholar. Since Faustus does not have a professional identity, his scholarship can only be established by a series of performances. The profusion of books on stage (the few stage directions include references to


\(^{1^0^0}\) Literally: “O run slowly, slowly, horses of the night”, from Ovid’s \textit{Amores}. Quoted and explained in \textit{Doctor Faustus} (ed.) David Wootton, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005), p. 62.
books) and the use of scholarly (Latin) speech are props that indicate Faustus’s erudition. As the hour of his doom gets closer, however, his poetry becomes less lucid as he frantically pulls up all the knowledge he has in short, fearful gasps of pedantry. This final reminder of Faustus’s scholarship serves to emphasize his ultimate exclamation: “I’ll burn my books” (V. ii. 1508). As Faustus gets dragged into hell for eternity, he realizes that his misapprehension of scholarship has barred him from the joys of social existence and therefore the possibility of salvation within the humanist context. In an effort to forestall his eternal doom, therefore, he renounces scholarship – not just magical knowledge, which would have involved the destruction of the book of magic, which he had used for conjuration, but also other branches of learning. He now vows to burn his “books,” the very ones which he professes to have command over in the opening soliloquy of the play. Faustus, in the ultimate moment of desperation, finally, though in vain, renounces the indispensable accoutrements of the scholar.

Chapter 2

“Like a bow, buckled and bent together”: The Case of Elizabeth Sawyer

In “Of Physiognomy,” Montaigne expresses his vexation about why Socrates, in spite of being “a perfect exemplar of all great qualities” had “so deformed a face and body as is said, and so unsuitable to the beauty of his soul, himself being so amorous and such an admirer of beauty: Nature did him wrong.” Montaigne then proceeds to challenge the commonly accepted opinion that there “is nothing more probable than the conformity and relation of the body to the soul.”

Unfortunately Montaigne’s skepticism was not the prevailing mode of thought and physical deformities were read as conclusive evidence of witchcraft as can be surmised from a 1646 pamphlet titled *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcraft* by preacher John Gaule. While Gaule confirms the existence of witches, he warns his readers that “every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furr’d brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye...is not only suspected but pronounced for a witch....” Gaule’s caution that often an embarrassing physical defect in a woman is mistaken for a witch’s mark and results in her misidentification as a witch, indicates that by the mid-seventeenth century, witches were popularly imagined as aesthetically aberrant subjects. Elizabeth Sawyer, the eponymous of Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s play, *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) complains:

...Why should the envious world

Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?

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'Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,
And like a bow buckled and bent together...
...Some call me witch;

Dekker et al closely followed the trial of Elizabeth Sawyer, and in particular the records of Henry Goodcole, who had recorded the trial in 1621, proposing to provide an authentic narration of events leading to Sawyer’s execution, since this sensationalized case had attracted much attention, and had lent itself to popular imagination and literature, in not just the play, but also as Goodcole states, in “most base and false Ballets, which were sung at the time of our returning from the Witches execution”, none of which are extant. Goodcole was a chaplain of Newgate prison, Sawyer’s “continuall visiter.” According to him the trial was a mere formality, “slight and ridiculous, yet it setled a resolution” of Sawyer’s collusion with the devil, who allegedly had marked her body, providing an overt proof of her moral culpability. Though the apparent purpose of his conversations with Sawyer had been to find evidence to convict her, even before her trial and confession, the blazon of her physical deficiencies that Goodcole provides would have been enough to condemn Sawyer as a witch:

Her face was most pale & ghoast-like without any bloud at all, and her countenance was still deicted to the ground.

Her body was crooked and deformed, euen bending together, which so happened but a little before her apprehension.


That tongue which by cursing, swearing, blaspheming, and imprecating, as afterward she confessed, was the occasioning cause, of the Diuels accesse vnto her, euen at that time, and to claime her thereby as his owne...\textsuperscript{105}

Goodcole was not unique in holding prejudices against physically marred women. In the much celebrated case of the Lancaster witches, recorded and published as a pamphlet by Thomas Potts, the inquisitor assumed that the accused was culpable because of her unseemly appearance:

This odious witch was branded with a preposterous mark of Nature, euen from her birth, which was her left eye, standing lower than the other; the one looking downe, the other looking vp, so strangely deformed, as the best that were present in that Honorable assembly, and great Audience, did affirme, that had not often seen the like.\textsuperscript{106}

Sawyer’s trial, while extremely popular in its time, was also typical in its form, so unremarkable that it can serve as a paradigm of other witch trials, argues Julia Garrett.\textsuperscript{107} However, as Keith Thomas has pointed out, there were in reality not as many trials as there were witch executions.\textsuperscript{108}

Early Modern laws on witchcraft were based on humanist aesthetics about the body, which in its unmarred perfection was thought to reflect spiritual purity. Conversely, physical

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Thomas Potts, \textit{The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster}, with introduction and notes by James Crossley Esq. (Manchester: Charles Simms and Co., 1745). Potts was a much sought after recorder of events. “Vpon the Arraignment and trial of these Witches at the Last Assizes and Generall Gaole-delivery, holden at Lancaster, wee found such apparent matters against them, that we thought it necessarie to publish them to the World, and thereupon imposed the labour of this Worke vpon this Gentleman, by reason of his place, being a Clerke at the time in Court, imploied in the Arraignment and trial of them.” No pp. numbers.

deformity represented moral turpitude. Early modern witch hunting therefore grew around the identification of specific kinds of deformities – witches’ marks, warts etc. through which the accused was thought to have given access to the devil. The witches’ entente with the devil was construed as treason against god, and by extension the state. Humanism makes witchcraft a civil matter by changing the grounds on which a witch could be indicted – by making a witch the victim of demonic agency, rather than its source. James I believed that witches were capable of perpetrating evil. His *Demonologie* (1597), however, foregrounds treason as the ground for punishment of witches. The popularly circulated anti-witchcraft manuals, reports of witchcraft trials, and pamphlet literature on witches, re-iterate, at least partially, the language of the humanist early modern legal treatises, like Jean Bodin’s *The Demon-Mania of Witches* (1560). Though there was a potent fear of witches even in the medieval times, as is evident from the fear-mongering treatise *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) by Kramer and Sprenger, the key shift in the early modern conception of witches is that witches began to be understood as essentially deformed subjects. The medieval witch was alluring, an agent for perpetrating evil, and was to be punished for causing palpable harm. The early modern witch, in contrast, was marred in the course of her association with the devil, who used her body only as an instrument for effecting evil. The witchcraft enactments therefore sought to punish witches on account of their treasonous association with the devil, rather than an act of evil. Since the perceived malevolent agency shifted from the individual to the devil, the indictments of early modern witches were based on proving the relationship of the accused with the devil, and physical deformity began to be understood as the conclusive proof of this association.

I discuss the indictment and execution of Elizabeth Sawyer in the context of early modern law and village politics. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, Sawyer, the woman accused of and burned at the stake for practicing witchcraft is the typical marginalized woman – old, deformed, poor, and kin-less, who is barely able to eke out a living, and is the subject of derision within the village. Often abused, and even called a witch, she is arraigned only after she drops a hint that she might have some conclusive knowledge about the landlord, Sir Arthur Clarington’s sexual misdemeanour. This ensures her indictment by Sir Arthur, who was earlier apparently indifferent to the subject of witchcraft. In spite of its title, witchcraft is deliberately a sub-plot in the play, since punishing the witch fulfills the necessary, but peripheral function of the symbolic need for retribution, which enables the otherwise corrupt political hierarchies to remain in place, and ensures civic order. The destruction of the crooked body of the witch is the carnivalesque token of return to order.

The fundamentally deformed body of the witch was the subject of portrayal in prints, engravings and popular literature. Manuals and pamphlets on witchcraft, reporting the numerous discoveries of witches, and plays about witches, accessible in cheap quarto and cheaper octavo volumes, were invariably prefaced by frontispiece illustrations of women essentially matching Gaule’s description. The illustration of the title page of *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (1618), for example, shows three women, two of them crooked, and bent. These women, obviously the ones accused of witchcraft, are accompanied by an owl, a cat, and a mouse.\(^{109}\) Popularly circulated images of ideal femininity

\(^{109}\) *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, Daughters of Joan Flower neere Beuer Castle: Executed at Lincoln, March 11. 1618*. Who were especially arraigned and condemned before Sir Henry Hobart, and Sir Edward Bromley, Judges of Assise, for confessing themselves actors in the destruction of Henry L Rosse, with their damnable practices against others the children of the Right Honourable Francis Earle of Rutland.
are in striking contrast. Richard Braithwaite’s exemplary woman in *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), the first manual of manners for a specifically female audience, is illustrated a modestly attired woman, holding a lily, the symbol of purity, in her right hand, and a book in her left. Braithwaite’s illustration not only highlights modesty and gentility as the guiding principles for a woman, but also presents desirable womanhood as a series of performances that emphasize female functionality. The illustrations of witches in contrast, are almost always of women, who are physically so deformed that it would be virtually impossible for them to be socially or economically productive. The image of the witch as physically malformed and distorted was replicated not only in print but also in the theater – Mother Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton* is gnarled and hunch-backed, and bends painfully on a cane in the 1621 edition of the play.

Since the early modern witch was constructed as essentially misshapen, witchcraft trials were based, as we have seen, on the assumption that the outward appearance reflected a person’s spiritual condition. The witch, however, had not always been a blemished creature. In contrast, the medieval witch was beautiful and seductive. In *Malleus Maleficarum, The Hammer of Witches*, arguably the bible of writing on witchcraft, Henricus Institoris (Kramer) and Jacobus Sprenger famously depict the witches as amoral, attractive sirens, who do not flinch at the prospect of causing physical and material harm to the unsuspecting man. The witch’s sexual congress with the devil, from whom she derives her power, does not necessarily taint her physique. The devil in *The Hammer* works “secretly, and the losses and devices for sorcery that

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Together with several examinations and confessions of Anne Baker, Joan Willimot, and Ellen Greene, witches in Leicestershire. (London.: Eld.for I Barnes, dwelling in the long walke neere Christ-Church,1619). No pp. numbers.

are found give an indication of the deed.” Contrary to being deformed, the witches in The Hammer are frequently alluring enough to make men enamored of them. In an incident involving a certain bishop from Germany, for example, Kramer and Sprenger record that the bishop fell in love with a young sorceress who inflicted him with a disease, of which he was cured after further magical ministrations. In The Hammer, the witch is indispensible to the perpetration of evil. The devil, according to Kramer and Sprenger, “can produce no effect among the lower entities without sorcerers...and since a demon can have no contact with bodies since he has nothing in common with them, he uses some instrument, instilling in it the virtue to cause harm through contact.” The devil, then, requires the collusion and the active agency of witches in order to cause evil. The witch, argue Kramer and Sprenger, should be punished because of causing material harm like killing livestock and preventing procreation. The writers of Malleus Maleficarum insist that witches are able to “inflict real illnesses”, “impede the power of procreation”, “remove male members”, “change humans into the shapes of animals”, and either kill babies or offer them to the devil. In the context of Malleus Maleficarum, the witches constitute an essential connection between the demonic and the material world, and the evil they perpetrate is an integral part of their nature. The early modern witch, however, is spiritually ignorant, and therefore liable to being duped by the devil in pledging her soul to him.

111 Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, Malleus Maleficarum, edited and translated by Christopher S Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 35

112 Ibid., pp.356-7

113 Ibid., 35. The more active agency of witches in Malleus Maleficarum also extends to bad midwives, who in turn get associated with witchcraft. For a fuller discussion of this, refer to Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate, Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991)
modern ecclesiasts believe that the alleged witches were in fact powerless to effect evil, except with the help of the devil.

A brief review of enactments against witchcraft in early modern England illustrates the gradual change in attitude towards witchcraft, culminating in the enactment of 1604, according to which Sawyer was punished. An Act Against Conjurations, Witchcrafts, Sorcery, and Enchantments (1541/2) conceptualized witchcraft as a felony:

...yf any persone or persones...use devise practise or exercise, or cause to be used devised practised or exercised any Invocacons or Conjuracons of Sprites witchcrafts encahuntements or sorceries, to thatent to get or fynde money or treasure, or to waste consume or destroy any persone in his bodie members or goodes, or to pvoke any persone to unlawfull love, or for any unlawfull intente or purpose... dygge up or pull downe any Crosse or Crosses...or... take upon them to tell or declare where goodes stollen or lost shall become, that then all and evy suche Offence and Offences...shalbe demyde accepted and adjudged Felonye...

And thoffender and offenders ...shall have and suffre such paynes of deathe losse and forfaytures of their lands tenetes goodes and catalles....

This enactment does not essentially deviate from The Hammer in its definition of witchcraft.

However, unlike in The Hammer, the state assumes the responsibility of punishing those it finds guilty of practicing witchcraft. An Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcraft (1563) besides retaining the provisions of the act of 1541/2, also recognizes that using magical

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knowledge could be seditious, and cause “great Infamye and Disquietnes of this Realme.”\textsuperscript{115} An Act Against Conjuration, Witchcraft and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits (1604), enacted during the beginning of the rule of James I, which indicts Sawyer, substantially changes the definition of witchcraft because of its “provisions against the keeping of evil spirits, as opposed to merely conjuring them, and the use of dead bodies in magic. Maleficium was no longer the only concern...It was easier to prosecute witches, since theoretically all that was needed was a witness to assert that the witch kept spirits or the suspect to confess that s/he did so.”\textsuperscript{116} The act specifies that:

\begin{quote}
...if any person or persons...shall use practise or exercise any Invocation or Conjuration of any evil or wicked spirit, or shall consult covenant with entertain employ feede or rewarde any evil or wicked Spirit to or for any intent or purpose...or shall use practise or exercise any witchcraft Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie, wherebie any person shalbe killed destroyed wasted consumed pined or lamed in his or her bodie, or any part thereof; that then everie such offender or offenders, theire Ayders Abettors and Counsellors, being of any the said offences dulie and lawfullie conviected and attainted, shall suffer pains of deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall loose the privilege and Benefit of Clergie and Sancturie....\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

This enactment not only broadens the definition of witchcraft, but also emphasizes the witch’s association with the devil, rather than actual acts of maleficium. Subsequent writings on witchcraft emphasize the witch’s spiritual failure as she allows the devil to possess her. Records

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 6.
of witchcraft trials were frequently accompanied by a philosophical and theological reflection about the spiritual decline of people who became witches as well as the clever machinations of the devil and his devious methods for obtaining the souls of the morally weak. *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Joan Flower* has a similar explanation for the existence of witches:

... this Diuell, though he be Gods instrument, yet worketh altogether by deceit: for as he was a lyer from the beginning; so let no man trust him, because he aymeth at the confusion of all Mankinde. Fithly, the wicked, (howeuer they may thrive and prosper for a time) yet in the end are sure to be payed home, either in punishment in this life or in the life to come, or both, as a final reward of monstrous impiety.\(^{118}\)

This marks a shift to a more Providentialist discourse, in which the devil can only have agency because God allows it as part of his Providential Plan. So all agency finally devolves from God. In the institutional context, the king was considered representative of God on earth, and therefore his authority was to be deferred to. Swearing one’s allegiance to the devil, then, becomes a treasonous action, since the temporal authority of the monarch is undermined when his subject succumbs to the authority of the antichrist. Since the ground for punishment of those accused of witchcraft was not the perpetration of evils, but association with the devil, the witchcraft trials concentrated on “proving” this relation before drawing out a confession from the accused. Those executed on charges of practicing witchcraft were guilty because, as John Gaule points out, “here

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\(^{118}\) *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (op.cit.)
is God Renounced and defied; and the Divell embraced and adored.” Since the early modern witch had no efficacy of her own, her culpability could only be determined by proving her relationship with the devil. Moreover, early modern witchcraft trials were based on the assumption that the devil’s presence in a body necessarily marred its beauty, and was the sign of moral depravity.

*The Witch of Edmonton*, which loosely follows the events of Goodcole’s narrative, presents Sawyer as a dupe of the devil, who initiates contact with her while she curses her abusers. The devil, who meets Sawyer in the form of Dog, initially claims her for his own because he finds her cursing. Sawyer, however, does not immediately give in to what Dog tempts her with – “just revenge against thy foes.” (II, i, 128). It is only after Dog threatens to tear her “body in a thousand pieces” (II, i, 136), that Sawyer relents to the demands of the devil. Sawyer, in fact, feels compelled to open herself to the devil’s access for self-preservation: “Then I am thine, at least/ So much of me as I can call mine own.” (II, i, 141-2). The play also emphasizes that the evils resulting in Sawyer’s pact with the devil (sealed with blood with the theatrical trope of accompanying thunder and lightning to signify this defection to evil), are the ones that the devil decides to perpetrate and not the ones that Sawyer requests of him. He does not comply with Sawyer’s desire for the death of Old Banks, because he “cannot/ Though we have power, know, it is circumscribed,/ And tied in limits.” (II, i, 158-60). Instead, he decides “His Cattle/ And corn I’ll kill and mildew.” (II, i, 162-3). Sawyer’s delusion lies in the fact that she is unable to apprehend that the devil is powerless to deprive her of her life, and though her submission to

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119 John Gaule, *Select cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcrafts* (op. cit.)

the devil is at best reluctant, she does get cozened by him into thinking that he can cause her a painful death otherwise. The devil also manages to entice Sawyer with false promises of bringing misery to her abusers at her beck and call: “For proof, command me. Instantly I’ll run to any mischief, goodness can I none.” (II, i, 146-7). Sawyer is not necessarily amoral, or a disbeliever in God to begin with. “Contaminetur nomen tuum”, she says, recognizing well that contact with the devil has contaminated her spiritually. However, the invocation of Latin at the crucial moment when Sawyer becomes a witch is especially significant within the newly Protestant context, which openly vilified the Popish tongue. The seventeenth century English theater audience would understand Sawyer’s use of Latin as her descent into a mire of superstitious beliefs and rituals – the popularly portrayed essentials of the much vilified Catholic faith.

Unlike the powerless Elizabeth Sawyer, the medieval witch was the chief perpetrator of evil. Her culpability could be initially determined by the following methods, suggest Kramer and Sprenger: “The first proof is the evidence of the deed, for instance that he preached heresy publicly....Next...comes the method consisting of lawful proof through witnesses, or, third, that of her own confession.”  

While the standard early modern procedures for finding out whether or not a witchcraft accusation was true – ducking the witch, burning the thatch of her cottage – punitive in themselves, the initial indictment often drew upon the physical appearance of the accused. Early modern books and manuals that participated in the literary replication of the contorted witch’s body, drew their material to a large extent from witchcraft treatises like Jean Bodin’s The Demon-Mania of Witches, which deals with the specifically legal problem of identification and punishment of witches rather than just the fear mongering of

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treatises like the *Malleus Maleficarum*. While Bodin recreates some of the basic premises of the earlier medieval treatises like *The Hammer*, it is perhaps surprising that his is in contrast a decidedly humanist text that helped pave the way for seventeenth century skepticism and ultimately the decline of witch belief. Bodin’s foremost concern is humanist – maintaining the integrity of the state, and a predecessor of the act of 1604, he understands witchcraft to be a treasonous action. The key shift here is that unlike Kramer and Sprenger, Bodin argues that witches have no agency to effect evil, but are the dupes of the devil, and that they should be punished for pledging their troth to the devil, an action by which they undermine the authority of both the church and the state. That the state and the community are the chief foci within which witchcraft is understood also explains, as I will also illustrate, why the play is presented as a comedy in spite of the vividness of Sawyer’s suffering and ill-treatment by the other characters, and why in spite of the title of the play, the witchcraft incident appears only as a sub-plot.

Given the inextricable ways in which the authorities of the Church and the State were related in early modern culture, ecclesiastical concerns, like witchcraft were part of state concerns. In fact, after 1580, most witchcraft trials took place in secular courts. This movement also marks a shift in how witches were understood within a medieval context in comparison to an early modern one. Early modern ecclesiastical and legal discourses regarding witchcraft were unequivocal in denying witches any agency of maleficium – a definite shift in perception from what Kramer and Sprenger propose. For the early modern lawgivers and ecclesiasts like Jean Bodin, the witch has no agency of her own, and “without the pact with Satan, though a man had all the powders, symbols, and witches’ words, he could cause neither
man nor beast to die.” Popular English anti-witchcraft pamphlets, like George Gifford’s *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593) echoes Bodin’s treatise in condemning the accused witches for forging a pact with the devil. Gifford, “minister of God’s word in Maldon,” was unequivocal on the witch’s lack of agency, but insist that the witches should be put to death because “they haue familiaritie with deuils, which are the blasphemous enemies of God...if they deale with deuilles they ought to die for it.” The witches, according to Gifford, are fooled by the devil, “subtill and full of craft,” into believing that they have the power to cause any harm at all, because “the power of the deuils is in the hearts of men, as to harden the heart, to blind the eies of the mind....” The witches alienate themselves from the “light of Gods heauenly word”, and those who “refuse to loue his trueth” well deserve the punishment that is meted out to them.

Though disavowing that witches had the intrinsic agency to perform maleficient actions, a witch, according to Bodin, should be punished especially for renouncing God and paying homage to the devil. In a long section, titled “On the Punishment that Witches Merit”, Bodin enumerates fifteen reasons stating why a witch should be punished, which are in effect the various ways the witch betrays God and the authority of the Church (like giving away the unborn, and un-baptized child to the devil) as well as nurturing the devil with bodily fluids, and literally harboring evil in her body in defiance to the authority of the Church. Defiance of ecclesiastical authority and by extension the authority of the state was deemed treasonous and

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123 George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes. In Which is Laide open how craftely the Duell deceiuethe not onely the witches but many other and so leadeth them awrie into many great errours*. [EEBO], No pp numbers.
therefore liable for punishment. Giving away an unborn child to the devil, for example robs the 
church of a follower as also it robs the state of a faithful subject, and humanists like Bodin were 
chiefly invested in creating productive subjects for the state. James I, in *Demonologie* shows 
much investment in punishing witches because by having a willful association with the devil, the 
witch commits a two-fold crime:

> the sin against the holie Ghost hath two branches: The one a falling backe from the 
whole service of GOD, and a refusall of all his preceptes. The other is the doing of 
the first with knowledge, knowing that they doe wrong against their own 
conscience and the testimonie of the holie Spirit, having once had a tast of the 
sweetnes of Gods mercies.\(^{124}\)

Given the elision between the authority of the church and state in Protestant England, the 
punishment of witches becomes essential, at least symbolically, to reestablish state control over 
its subjects. In the Reformed context, moreover, the human subject best respects his covenant 
with God by being a good subject of the state, and fulfilling his social responsibilities. In *The 
Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), one of the most comprehensive texts laying down the 
precepts of the ideal Protestant existence, John Calvin, emphasizes that man is essentially social 
and that his natural instinct should be to preserve the social structure and maintain “civil probity 
and order.”\(^{125}\) According to the Calvinist conception, it is especially necessary for man to be 
subjected to church and state laws since his will is essentially corrupt. In “Summary of the

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Christian Life” in *The Institutes*, Calvin exhorts the true Christian to believe that he is completely subjected to God, and that he should suppress his own will, since compliance with their own inclinations leads men most effectually to ruin, so to place no dependence on our own knowledge or will, but merely to follow the guidance of the Lord, is the only way of safety.\(^{126}\)

Within a well organized society, the will of God literally translates to the laws of the State: “all associations of men ought to be governed by laws...Hence that perpetual consent of all nations, as well as all individuals, to the laws, because the seeds of them are innate in all mankind.”\(^ {127}\) Dissenters, according to Calvin, “contend against reason”, a faculty that humanists, and especially the Neo-Platonists held in the highest esteem. Since humanism, as I have illustrated in chapter one, was invested in maintaining the integrity of the state, any threat to its authority had to be dealt with sternness, and even a death penalty. James I also concurs with the idea that subjects are meant for the service of the state. According to *Demonologie*, the devil deflects the witches from fulfilling their responsibility towards the state, and instead, perswades them to addict themselues to his service: which being easely obteined, he then discouers what he is vnto them to renounce their God and Baptisme directlie...\(^ {128}\)

In the English Protestant context, the renunciation of God is construed a crime against not only the church, but also the state. A pact with the devil, then, invariably results in the detriment of

\(^{126}\) Ibid. p. 619.

\(^{127}\) Ibid., p. 245.

\(^{128}\) *Demonologie* (op.cit.), no pp. numbers.
the polis, and witchcraft, in effect becomes a crime against the state rather than remain merely an ecclesiastical concern. That is why the Act of 1604 emphasizes the requirement for punishing anyone who is seen to consort with the devil. At a time, when there was no distinct separation between the power of the church and that of the state, witchcraft increasingly becomes a problem to be dealt with by the state. Brian Levack points out that most witchcraft trials, especially those after 1580, when the most intense period of witch-hunting began, took place in the secular courts, which administered justice in kingdoms, principalities, counties and towns. Ecclesiastical courts had taken a major role in witch-hunting during the fifteenth century, and they continued to conduct some prosecutions after that time, but many of those trials were for practicing lesser forms of magic and superstition. Cases involving serious *maleficia*, such as causing illness or death of a person, were usually held in the secular courts, which had a more clearly defined jurisdiction and greater procedural latitude.¹²⁹

It is crucial to re-state here that Elizabeth Sawyer, accused for having caused Anne (Agnes, in Goodcole’s record) Ratcliffe’s madness, was incarcerated at the Newgate prison, where, petty criminals, thieves and murderers were also held for trial, and that her trial and examination, was conducted by the officers of the state rather than an exclusively religious community. While much scholarly attention has been expended in exploring the religious language used by the law-givers in the witchcraft trial procedures, little has been said about the investment of the state, which employed personnel who conducted the witchcraft trials for the punishment of the witches.

Since colluding with the devil was the reason a person ought to be punished, early modern legal procedures were more concerned about establishing a connection between the witch and the devil rather than the discovery and proof of a maleficient action that the witch might have committed. Since the devil is literally thought to inhabit the body of the witch, the body becomes the site of examination. According to Bodin, the witch copulates with the devil as well as nurtures him with her bodily fluids, participating in an unending incestuous cycle – an idea anthropomorphized by Milton in his description of Sin in the second book of *Paradise Lost*. The warts and the protuberances of the witch’s body therefore, can be read as overt signs of her relationship with the devil. Physical perfection was a reflection of the condition of the spiritual state, especially for Calvin, who strenuously argued that the reflection of divinity could be seen in the perfect human form. Anatomical aberrations then also had an added spiritual cadence. A witch was identified by not only her deformity, but also her inability to perform normal bodily functions. This is why Bodin points out that a witch is typically unable to shed tears, signifying not only a lack of compassion but also the disintegration of the perfect physique. Goodcole’s foregone conclusion of Elizabeth Sawyer’s culpability because of her contorted body was typical because in the early modern context, while perceived malevolent actions initiated a witch hunt, the legal proceedings against and punishment of witches was predicated on what was considered the proof of an overt defection to the devil’s party.

Humanist aesthetics equated physical comeliness with spiritual beauty. Theologically, the idealized body and the emphasis on the perfection of physical form as a reflection of the divine

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130 On a similar note Gail Kern Paster, in *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), says that performing a non-normative bodily function often denoted a spiritual culpability. She cites an anecdote from Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* in which a woman “betrays her witchcraft” with her incontinence, “needing to make water” at the wrong time, p. 45.
was Calvinist. John Calvin treated the creation of man as “the most noble and remarkable specimen of the Divine justice, wisdom and goodness...”¹³¹ According to Calvin, since man was created in the image of God, his external forms and especially his soul reflected divine glory. The divine image was preserved, albeit with deformities, after the original sin. Any further deformities therefore were read as spiritual lapses. “What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like and angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals” (Hamlet, II, ii), exclaims Hamlet as he appreciates the human form. Renaissance painters and sculptors, like Da Vinci and Michelangelo, persistently tried to depict the perfect human body. Reformist theologians also believed that God’s image was preserved in the perfect form of man. Calvin asserted that God’s image pervaded not only man’s soul but his entire being, and that there was no part human, “not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.” Indulgence in sinful acts, however, could mar this perfection. In Certain Secret Wonders of Nature (1569), E. Fenton opines that monsters “show us the works of Nature, not only turned arsiverie, misshapen and deformed, but (which is more) they do for the most part discover unto us the secret judgment and scourge of the ire of God.”¹³² Physical deformity was symptomatic of spiritual degeneracy, argues Julie Crawford in Marvelous Protestantism, where, among many

¹³¹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, translated by John Allen. (Philadelphia: Presbytarian Board of Publication and Sabbath-school work, 1911), p. 170. The excerpt is from Book 1, Chapter xv, “The state of Man at his creation, the faculties of the soul, the divine image, free will, and the original purity of his Nature.”

illustrations of monsters, a headless one that prefixes a translation of Erasmus shows “inespeciall of the spiritualitie how farre they be from ye perfite trade and lyfe of Criste.”

The overt presence of an aberrant form had to be explained away within the ever-pervasive spiritual vocabulary of Reformed life. The Devil, moreover, was thought to be seductive and “hath power/ T’assume a pleasing shape” and therefore can beguile those who finally become witches. In *Milton and the English Revolution*, Christopher Hill refers to Tintoretto's seduction of Christ by the devil. In this painting, the devil appears as a cherubic figure, far more attractive than Christ. Similarly, in *Surprised by Sin*, Stanley Fish furthers Blake’s premise by pointing out that the reader is allured by the devil’s speeches in the initial books of *Paradise Lost*, and is only able to perceive their inherent corruptibility only after they perceive the gradual degeneration of the devil’s speech. The devil is able to gain the witch’s obeisance by not only his allurements, but also by false promises. John Stearne, assistant to Matthew Hopkins, the witch finder, argues that religious preaching may have induced many to embrace Satan – many witches had been drawn to the devil "by some sermon they have heard preached; as when ministers will preach of the power of the Devil, and his tormenting the wicked and such-like..." The devil promises the ignorant that he might save them from the hell fires to gain their allegiance. Once the devil has control over the witch’s body, the latter is doomed to bear the mark of the spiritual corruption since it lacks the malleability of the former.

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133 Ibid., p. 4.
In a culture in which the grotesque was perceived as the antithesis of Godly, witchcraft indictments and trials centered to a very large extent on the appearance of the accused. Given the Early Modern obsession with the body, it is not surprising that the plays and ballads about witches detailed the ugly body with as much enjoyment as censure. This was especially true for female bodies, which bore the added expectations of providing nurture as well as erotic pleasure. Gail Kern Paster illustrates that the lack of physical beauty in women, especially of the newly eroticized breasts, indicated moral turpitude in a society that engaged continuously in discussions about the humorally well-balanced idealized body. Paster draws upon Albrecht Durer’s representation of Avarice with her wrinkled breasts, as well as Spenser’s description of Duessa’s flaccid breasts in *The Faerie Queene* and argues that culturally, female desirability and the erotic potential of the female body came to be considered more important than the nurturing functions of that body. The often-replicated wrinkled body of the witch, however, could provide neither erotic pleasure nor nurture. Public punishment of the infertile body, then, became necessary. *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1633) by Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, which was also based on a witchcraft trial, is unique because the witches depicted in the play are neither ugly nor dispossessed. They are, in fact, wives of prosperous householders, and Mistress Generous, the first of the witches to be apprehended, is even described as beautiful. Here, it is crucial to note that though the witches in this play participate in covens, and practice necromancy, they are not overtly punished at the end of the play. The play in fact ends at a point when the alleged witches await the final judgment. In spite of their obvious culpability, as depicted in the play, there is no retributive justice. King Charles I, in fact acquitted all seventeen convicted for witchcraft.

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138 Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed* (op. cit.), pp.205-6
Mother Sawyer, on the other hand, is completely harmless, except for her acrid tongue. She is however, economically, as well as physically disempowered. Her deformity and not her deeds is the cause of her indictment. It is theatrically essential for Mother Sawyer to verbally draw attention to her bent and deformed body with her initial appearance on stage, to accentuate the visual experience.

In *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, Christina Larner points out that “the commonest ordeal for discovering witchcraft was pricking for the witches’ mark. The devil was believed to leave an insensible mark on the person of the witch which would not bleed when pricked...” and that a whole profession grew around the hunting of witches. The witch’s mark was the orifice through which the devil found access to and drew nourishment from a witch’s body. Paster argues that the pervasive social gaze on the female body extended to witchcraft trials, especially in the detection and discussions around the presence of the witch’s mark. The witch’s relationship with the devil, moreover, was seen to extend more than in the presence of a mark. Once permeated by evil, the witch became incapable of normalized bodily functions. Goodcole’s examination of Elizabeth Sawyer abounded in invasive questions about her intimacy with the devil, seeking details about how Sawyer came to know the devil, how often they met, where and how the devil drew nourishment from her body, and whether such congresses were painful to her. The procedure was blatantly voyeuristic, argues Paster, and Sawyer’s answers to Goodcole’s questions make her “the vehicle for a comic exposure of female

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139 Christina Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, edited with a foreword by Alan Macfarlane (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 76. Arthur Kinney, in his introduction to the play (op.cit.), refers to a review of the play by R.V. Holdsworth for the *Times Literary Supplement*, 1981, and points out that many of the crucial events in the play – Ratcliff’s madness, Sawyer’s witch’s teats – which determine the subsequent actions are possible only because of the lack of medical knowledge at the time it was written. p. xxxi.

140 *The Wonderfull Discourie of Elizabeth Sawyer* (op.cit)
bodiliness.” Once Goodcole establishes Sawyer’s collusion with the devil, and draws out a confession, he denounces her as a traitor to God, and in a pedantic conclusion, enjoins upon the reader to

Stand on your guard and watch with sobrietie to resist him, the Diuell your aduersary, who waiteth on you continually to subuert you that so you, that soe detest her abhominable wordes, and wayes, may neuer taste of the cup nor wages of shame and destruction, of which she did in this life: from which and from whose power, Lord Iesus saue, and defend thy little flocke.

Though predicated on Goodcole’s narrative, *The Witch of Edmonton* is more inclusive of the politics of the village of Edmonton. In the play, the plot about the indictment of the witch runs parallel to that of a civic crime. The two plots of the play – the story of Frank Thorney and that of Elizabeth Sawyer converge in the similarity of procedures that bring them to justice. Though their crimes are of a very dissimilar nature, the village authorities, Sir Arthur Clarington and the Justice stand in judgment about whether or not they ought to be punished. In the first story, Winifred, pregnant with the illegitimate child of Sir Arthur Clarington, her employer, names Frank Thorney as the father. Frank secretly marries Winifred, but later gives in to his father’s pressure and marries Susan Carter, the daughter of a rich yeoman, to restore the family fortunes. Torn between his loyalties, however, he ends up killing Susan Carter. While Frank Thorney is unequivocally a criminal, having committed bigamy and murder, Elizabeth Sawyer’s “crime” does not seem so well defined at all. Elizabeth Sawyer’s story foregrounds her marginality within the community of Edmonton, and highlights her persecution. Indignant at

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141 *The Body Embarrassed* (op.cit.), p. 255.
this, she often curses her abusers. On one such occasion, the devil, in the form of Dog, claims her allegiance, promising to bring misery to her persecutors in return. Dog, however, does not keep his word, and Elizabeth Sawyer does not actively perpetrate any evil.

While the villagers comment on Sawyer’s foul tongue and accuse her of being a witch because of her hurried presence as they burn the thatch of her cottage – a standard Early Modern procedure for detection of witches, the heated exchanges that follow are not very different from those in the beginning of the play between Sawyer and Old Banks. When she finds that some of the villagers, led by Old Banks is burning the thatch of her cottage, Sawyer is, quite naturally outraged, and cries out, “Diseases, plagues; the curse of an old woman/ Follow and fall upon you.” (IV, i, 22-3). Her infuriated cries, however, do not result in her indictment as witch. The Justice, in fact, expresses his sympathy for Mother Sawyer’s predicament:

Alas, neighbour Banks, are you a ringleader

In mischief? Fie, to abuse an aged woman!”

...firing her thatch? Ridiculous:

Take heed sirs what you do.

Unless your proofs come better armed,

Instead of turning her into a witch,

You’ll prove yourselves stark fools. (IV, i, 33-44)

Even Sir Arthur Clarington is dismissively tolerant of Sawyer, until she hints at Sir Arthur’s secret sexual liaison with Winifred. Sawyer suggests that many men have exploited their positions to gain sexual favors from unwitting, innocent girls:

Dare any swear I ever tempted maiden

With golden hooks flung at her chastity
To come and lose her honour? And being lost,
To pay not a denier for’t? Some slaves have done it. (IV, i, 148-151)

Having impregnated Winifred, Clarington immediately goes on a defensive mode, as he fears exposure of his wantonness. A scandal like this would have cost Sir Arthur his social position, and so he vociferously indicts Sawyer for practicing witchcraft. Sawyer’s punishment and annihilation becomes imperative when her presence comes to be seen as a threat to the authority that the community of Edmonton defers to. Sir Arthur dismisses any further speech of hers thereafter and from then her fate is sealed: “By one thing she speaks,/ I know now she’s a witch, and dare no longer/ Hold conference with the fury.” (IV, i, 154-6). The subsequent trial and punishment of Sawyer, seemingly restores the equilibrium of the community of Edmonton, as the authorities, though corrupt, (as signified by Sir Arthur), and ineffective, (as signified by the character of the Justice), retain their places within the community, and Edmonton goes back to functioning within a hierarchical structure that the perceived devianace of Sawyer had seemed to threaten.

It is crucial to note here, that in spite of Sawyer’s undeserved execution, the play is self-professedly a tragi-comedy. The comedic elements in this play derive from the apparent restoration of order with the almost ritualistic purgation of what appears to threaten the cohesiveness of the community. For the villagers of Edmonton, it is logical to perceive Sawyer as the concrete reason for the inexplicable mishaps, because Sawyer’s overt deformities and her defiance of the ideal feminine behavior – chaste, silent, and obedient – make her the easiest scapegoat. Once Sawyer is established as the anti-thesis of the ideal of femininity, every action of hers is made to comply with what is considered deviant. In Goodcole’s narrative, for example, when Sawyer resists the three women who are appointed to conduct a thorough search of her
body, her claim to modesty is dismissed, and she is instead accused of behaving “most sluttishly.”

The play is sympathetic to the fate of Mother Sawyer – the appellation of “Mother” accords her rightful claim to the respect that the other characters of the play do not give her. From the very beginning, the play highlights her poverty and helplessness, and in fact, seems to share the skepticism of Reginald Scot, who in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) delineates the predicament of old, deformed, economically unproductive, and isolated women – the easy preys to witchcraft accusations. In the last act of the play, as Mother Sawyer awaits her fate, she piteously calls out for Dog, the supposed devil, who apparently has been responsible for her indictment, because he has been her only companion through her loneliness. Dekker et al, however, are aware that skepticism has no place, especially in a rural community, where people are all too willing to concede to the efficacy of witchcraft, and the power of the devil. The disturbing, very physical presence of Dog, the embodiment of the devil, in fact, foregrounds the unequivocal acknowledgement of the potency of evil within the community of Edmonton. While the perceived source of corruption, the witch, is punished, the corruption that inheres the civic structure, continues to be perpetrated. Arthur F. Kinney and David Atkinson argue that the root of the problems of the community of Edmonton can be traced to the corruption of the feudal authority of the village, Sir Arthur Clarington, as well as to the tyranny of paternal authority of Old Thorney. But, neither of them are the recipients of any punishment. The part comedic ending is possible because the people in the village of Edmonton get back their sense of security.

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142 Arthur F. Kinney in his “Introduction” to *The Witch of Edmonton* (op. cit.) speaks at length about Sir Arthur’s lack of responsibility and the break-down of the manorial system within a village economy. Also see, David Atkinson, “Moral Knowledge and the Double Action in *The Witch of Edmonton*” in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 15 No.2, pp. 419-37, where Atkinson parallels the results of the tyranny of both paternal authority and Clarington’s authority with that of the devil in the two plots.
and peace at the end of the play, with the execution of Sawyer. The community claims a temporary sense of peace and order by making Sawyer the scapegoat and subsequently purging her from its midst. David Nicols sees the ritualistic enactment of the solidarity in the village community in the episode of the Morris dance, where the village gathers “to grace/ The nimble-footed youth of Edmonton.” (III, iv, 1-2)\textsuperscript{143} Arthur Kinney in his introduction to the play points out that Morris dance in the villages was akin to the controlled celebration of misrule, as is understood from Phillip Stubbes’ \textit{Anatomie of Abuses}.\textsuperscript{144} Such celebrations typically give way to eccentricities and frivolities – “light wanton colour”, “scarves, ribbons and laces hanged all over with gold rings”, “devil’s dance” — within spatial and temporal limits, a controlled venting of subversive social energies, so that they do not spill on to society at large.\textsuperscript{145} In spite of the elaborate preparations for the Morris dance, the celebratory spirit is dampened by a malfunctioning fiddle before constables arrest Warbeck and Somerton, two of the major participants of the fest, wrongly accusing them for the murder of Susan Carter; and so the dance is cancelled. The interruption of the carnivalesque celebrations, especially by governing and punitive authorities, whose power the nature of celebrations in a Morris dance seeks to challenge, the episode can be seen as a dramatic foreshadowing of the interruption of peace within the village community. This peace finally needs to be restored by excluding the apparently dissonant characters. Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer, both of whom seemingly challenge the social


\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., pp. xxviii-xxix  

\textsuperscript{145} For a fuller, theoretical discussion on the significance of such events, Bakhtin terms the carnivalesque, refer to Mikhail K. Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World} (1968), translated by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
hierarchy of Edmonton, have to be executed. This is especially true in case of Elizabeth Sawyer because, as Karen Newman argues, “witches threatened hegemonic patriarchal structures precisely not through their bodies but through their representational powers: as cultural producers.”\textsuperscript{146} The witches’ bodies, however, remained useful cultural signifiers of their perceived subversive powers as is seen in the pervasive obsession about their aberrant physicality.

Given its title, while \textit{The Witch of Edmonton} is expected to concentrate chiefly on the character of Elizabeth Sawyer and follow her fortunes, an expectation the Prologue also furthers:

\begin{quote}
The Town of Edmonton hath lent the Stage
A Devil and a Witch, both in an age.
To make comparisons it were uncivil,
Between so even a pair, a Witch and Devil.
But as the year doth with his plenty bring
As well a latter as a former Spring;
So has this Witch enjoyed the first, and reason
Presumes she may partake the other season.
In Acts deserving name, the Proverb says,
Once good, and ever; Why not so in Plays?
Why not in this? Since (Gentlemen) we flatter
No Expectations. Here is Mirth and Matter.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{147} \textit{The Witch of Edmonton} edited by Arthur F Kinney (op. cit.), p. 5.
It seems to indicate that the play is primarily about the witch and the mirthful tone of the lines, as well as hope for the commercial success of the play, gives no hint to the suffering and trials of the witch or the dark over-plot of bigamy and murder. Though Elizabeth Sawyer’s deformed hobbling could result in slapstick humor, her subsequent abasement and annihilation could hardly generate any mirth at all. Though the structure and plot of the play seems to belie the expectations laid out in the beginning, the generic attribution of the play and the prevailing tone of mirth are essential for establishing the status of the witch within the community and to justify her ultimate exclusion from it.

Though the play contains all the essential elements of a standard witchcraft narrative, and follows the sequence of events as can be strung together from Goodcole’s pamphlet, it is important to keep in mind, as it has often been pointed out, that the witchcraft incident appears as a sub-plot in the play. In spite of the title of the play, the Mother Sawyer episodes – her pact with the devil, her indictment and punishment appear only intermittently; and Sawyer neither begins nor ends the play. The plot of Frank Thorney’s bigamy and his murdering of Susan Carter and subsequent punishment is the determining action of the play. While Edward Sackville West questioned the unity of the play on the seeming disjointedness of the two events, subsequent scholarship has tried to reconcile the two plots and to explain the mutually overlapping themes.  

David Atkinson explores the theme of how moral knowledge works for both Thorney and Sawyer.  

Dennis Kezar talks about the legal proceedings in the play and the representation

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149 David Atkinson, “Moral Knowledge and the Double Action in The Witch of Edmonton” in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring 1985), pp. 419-437. “While the two plots of The Witch of Edmonton are tenuously connected by subject matter, it should be evident that the roles of a large section of the community of Edmonton, not to mention the Dog, are determined in accordance with their
of “the persecution and execution of witches.” Todd Butler concentrates on the “legal and performative power of words” in the two plots. He argues that the play illustrates that words, in a legal context, as well as the social context have a transformative power. Arthur Kinney, in his introduction to the play argues that the breakdown of the manorial system results in the tragedy in both the main plot and the sub-plot of the play, and that the play is ultimately concerned with the preservation of community, at the cost of the individual. Helen Vella Bonavita explores the familial relationships in the play and explains how the two plots are interrelated in being aware of the problems of “illicit marriage, the single woman and linguistic ambiguity...” Julia M Garrett argues that the two plots are related in exploring what was understood as deviant within a community. Though the two plots undoubtedly complement each other, structurally, the witch’s story can only work as a sub-plot, given the marginal status of the alleged witch within the socio-economic life of a village community. The marginal becomes visible only occasionally and the moment of the visibility of the marginal is also usually one of its annihilation. To have given the Elizabeth Sawyer story more textual space than it already has would have been an awareness of the moral dimension, helping to bind the play together into a thematic whole. Most importantly, the two main strands gain a structural unity from their complementary treatment of the theme of the knowledge of good and evil.”


152 Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley, The Witch of Edmonton (op. cit.)

153 Helen Vella Bonavita, “Maids, Wives and Widows: Multiple Meaning and Marriage in The Witch of Edmonton”, Parergon, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2006, pp. 73-95. Bonavita draws on Viviana Comensoli’s argument that the ones accused of practicing witchcraft and therefore excluded from the community were often the ones who were unassimilable in society. Viviana Comensoli, Household Business: Domestic Plays of Early Modern England (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
unrealistic portrayal of the community that Dekker et al had set out to depict. Besides, even in the title of the play, it is not the character of Elizabeth Sawyer but the community of Edmonton that is foregrounded. The witchcraft indictment serves only to maintain the structure of that community. Comedies generically conclude with the re-establishment of communal harmony – the ending of the play ritualistically endorses the furtherance of the traditional, albeit corrupt community of Edmonton. Atkinson et al try to explain the importance of the Elizabeth Sawyer plot in the context of the play, arguing for a thematic cohesiveness. It is important to note that all unexplained evils and fears within the life of Edmonton, though seemingly unrelated, concentrate on a person accused of practicing witchcraft. This chapter has attempted to explore Sawyer’s deformity – literal, representational, and metaphorical, within the larger religious, intellectual, social and legal context of understandings of witchcraft, and illustrates that the play enacts the ritualistic purgation of what is perceived as evil within a village community. The plot of the play exposes the failure of the legal machinery, and ends at a point when the cohesiveness of the community continues to remain under threat. There is no doubt at any point in the play that the real culprit is Sir Arthur Clarington. However, given the conservative village politics and Sir Arthur’s position at the apex of the village hierarchy, he is not brought to justice. The community therefore has to choose to scapegoat Sawyer, who, in spite of her sharp tongue, has no voice at all.

The above studies, moreover, while exploring important themes in the play, do not relate the play to the genre of writing about witchcraft per se, in which the accused has very little to say, except concur with all that is said about his or her association with the devil. Newman traces

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the etymology of the word “maleficium” to its Latin root *facio*, literally, to make, and argues that the witches were constructed as makers of meaning, given the perceived representational processes they participated in (wax images etc) for the effecting of maleficium.\textsuperscript{155} Their projected personae, as makers of meaning, however, is paradoxical to the witches’ silence in the historical records as well as their lack of expression, even as their characters, morals and intentions get socially and legally constructed, many a times resulting in the annihilation of their existence. The perceived creators of meaning lent themselves completely to the discourses around witchcraft. This is why one witchcraft trial is so much like another and the different confessions by the witches are so similar both in form and content, irrespective of the geographical distances separating them, as the records of the witchcraft trials illustrate. The uniformity of records, in fact, conforms to generic writing about witchcraft – accusation, examination, confession, and finally moralization by the author. Witchcraft pamphlets, were often the sensationalized records of legal proceedings, and were not necessarily faithful to the reality. Many a time those accused did not have a chance to acquit themselves at all.

Popular writings about witchcraft were largely anecdotal and presented the concerns and fears of the community at large. They were not particularly sympathetic to the sufferings of the individual, or the reasons for which the individual had turned against the community, nor were they invested in giving the individual a voice. In Dekker’s play, however, Elizabeth Sawyer is clearly presented as a victim of social circumstances, the recipient of arguably meaningless persecution by Old Banks at the beginning of the play, even as she tries to scrape together the

\textsuperscript{155} *Fashioning Femininity* (op. cit.), p. 66
bare minimum for her existence. Sawyer’s persecution is part due to, as well as exacerbated by her impoverished circumstances.

As Sawyer first hobbles on to the stage in the beginning of the second act, gathering rotten wood with which she intends to make a fire to warm herself, she cuts a pitiable figure. Her soliloquy further draws out the pathos of her condition: “Why should the envious world/ Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?/ ’Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant./ And like a bow buckled and bent together...Some call me witch:/ And being ignorant of myself, they go/ About to teach me how to be one: urging/ That my bad tongue (by their bad usage made so)/ Forespeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,...And in part/ Make me to credit it.” (II, i, 1-15). This speech echoes the skeptical views of Reginald Scot held regarding witchcraft. Scot points out that the women, who are accused of witchcraft, are usually the socio-economically disadvantaged of the population. Unable to defend themselves, they fall an easy prey to social injustice and their appearance is often the cause of unjustified accusations of witchcraft:

- women who are commonly old, lame, blear-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles;
- poore sullen, superstitious...They are lean and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces...They are doting, scolds, mad, devilish...

Stuart Clark illustrates, however, that Scot’s views were unique for his time and the ideas presented in The Discoverie of Witchcraft, “were condemned in orthodox demonology.”157 Clark further asserts that though the Protestants discredited the possibility of miracles, they firmly believed in the existence of demons, and so Scot’s skepticism about the supernatural “were far


too subversive of the prevailing intellectual patterns and habits of mind” to have found any acceptance at all in society.\textsuperscript{158} Drawing on multiple examples from Shakespeare’s plays, Greenblatt reminds us that Early Modern England reveled in language related to witchcraft, and that skepticism was mostly discredited, culminating in the burning of Scot’s \textit{The Discoverie of Witchcraft}.\textsuperscript{159} The very beginning of James’s \textit{Demonologie} discredits the skepticism of Reginald Scot and Johann Weyer of Germany:

\begin{quote}
...presse thereby, so farre as I can, to resolue the doubting harts of many; both that such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practized, & that the instruments thereof, merits most severely to be punished: against the damnable opinions of two principally in our age, whereof the one called SCOT an Englishman, is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther can be such a thing as Witch-craft: and so maintaines the old error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits. The other called WIERVS, a German Phisition, sets out a publike apologie for al these craftes-folkes...\textsuperscript{160}
\end{quote}

Not only did skepticism not find political support, but also in the socio-religious context expressing disbelief in witchcraft was tantamount to adopting a heretical stance. Not believing in the existence of witches indicated a disbelief in the agency of the devil, who apparently worked through the witches, and refuting the devil automatically indicated disbelief in the supreme goodness of God. The concept of the supernatural, argues Stuart Clark, is a relative one and is

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 211-12.

defined in relation to the prevalent beliefs within a culture. Clark illustrates that the effects that the demons were thought to produce were more material than moral. In early modern epistemology, the philosophical, and the inexplicable physical manifestation (what we term supernatural effects), were not completely distinguishable, and so it was not possible to discredit the supernatural.161 Basing his observations on Clark’s monumental work, David Nicol argues that *The Witch of Edmonton* is not at all skeptical of the phenomenon of witchcraft. On the contrary it very clearly stages Sawyer’s entente with the devil, albeit one in which the witch is more a dupe than a heretic or the primary perpetrator of evil.162 It is unlikely then that the average London theatergoer would share Scot’s skepticism about the existence of witches. On the contrary, they might have been all too willing to concede the efficacy of demonic presence and afraid of it. The prologue then, is not only aware of the comedic structure of the play, but also the potency of laughter to ward off evil. It conscientiously invites the audience to laugh, since “laughter was a defence mechanism that attempted mastery of the sources of fear by turning them into a joke,” as Indira Ghose argues, as she points out that homilectic “medieval drama reverberates with laughter at horror, death, and the devil.”163 Even as the play concedes the lack of skepticism to its audience, it is undoubtedly sympathetic to the character of Elizabeth

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160 *Demonologie* (op.cit.)


Sawyer, and indeed provides a justification for her propensity to enter into a pact with the devil. Not only is she physically infirm, but she is also completely destitute. While in Goodcole’s narrative, Sawyer was resentful of the villagers of Edmonton because “her neighbours where she dwelt, would not buy Broomes of her”, in the play she is completely destitute and reduced to gathering rotten wood for warmth. \(^{164}\) She is effectively excluded from the economic structure of the community till, as Bonavita points out she has the use of her charms, which is when she is, at least representationally, able to cause harm to livestock and crops. \(^{165}\) Frances Dolan points out that many historians concur in believing that “in England, the phenomenon of witch persecution was neither “a spontaneous expression from below” nor a “lawyer-led campaign from above”...the formal prosecution of witches resulted instead, from “a complex series of transactions between elite and popular elements,” producing what Ginzburg describes as a cultural “compromise formation” combining elements from above and below.”\(^{166}\) Dekker’s play presents the tensions within the village community and the class distinctions that engender and abet animosities, as well as how these animosities are allayed in the process of identifying a common enemy. The representational practice of witchcraft did not necessarily merit punishment as is illustrated in the case of Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616), a play that overtly stages witchcraft. Here, the witches attend covens, dance around cauldrons, are able to fly and they even cook infants; but despite their deviance, they, unlike Mother Sawyer, are not representationally

\(^{164}\) *The Wonderfull discourie of Elizabeth Sawyer* (op.cit.)

\(^{165}\) Helen Vella Bonavita, “Maids, Wives and Widows” (op. cit.)

persecuted. Though Middleton’s witches are flagrantly perverse, and their witchcraft is deliberate, arising out of complete amorality, rather than ignorance, they are able to integrate themselves within the economic life of their community, operating more like charlatans, dispensing with love charms, and making themselves indispensible, as they cater to the irrational needs of the community, even as they inhabit the social margins. Sawyer’s aberrant form, on the other hand, extends to her aberrant socio-economic presence, though seemingly through no fault of her own, even before she is taken by the devil, and begins practicing witchcraft. In the newly Protestant social set-up, based on Calvinist precepts, non-participation in economic life of the community was reason enough to be excluded by the community. It is only with aesthetic representation of her punishment that the witch of Edmonton is able to participate in the economic matrix.

The Early Modern theatergoer was well acquainted with the theatrical charlatan, as well as merry-making witches. The burgeoning genre of city comedies saw a host of mountebanks, reflecting the reality of urban London. The popularity of Shakespeare’s Macbeth and of Middleton’s The Witch (1616) had ensured that the audiences were attuned to theatrical witches, who in turn also acted as the cunning folk, predicting futures and selling charms. The Witch of Edmonton, however provides the theatergoer a unique theatrical experience since it showcases the reality of witch persecution, especially in the rural community. The story of the witch of Edmonton had generated much sensation, as Goodcole records, with the publication of “most base and false Ballets, which were sung at the time of our returning from the Witches execution.” Some of this was exaggerated sensationalism, grumbles Goodcole as he was

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shamed to see and heare such ridiculous fictions of her bewitching Corne on the
ground, of a Ferret and an Owle dayly sporting before her, of the bewitched
woman brayning her selfe, of the Spirits attending in the Prison: all of which I
knew fitter for an Ale-bench then for a relation of the proceeding in Court of
Justice. And thereupon I wonder that such lewd Balletmongers should be suffered
to creepe into the Printers presses and peoples eares\textsuperscript{168}

Goodcole claims that he felt compelled to author the pamphlet, which faithfully records the
events of the trial, and the testimony of Sawyer. Any deviation from the stark truth, according to
him, would have taken away from the moral of the story about the witch, and the solemnity of
the court proceedings. The play, however, does not concede any of the sensationalism that
Goodcole complains about. In fact, it hardly deviates from Goodcole’s narrative of Sawyer, and
fantasy is present at a bare minimum in the play. The play provides the Jacobean audience the
unique experience of watching village politics in all its anti-pastoral bareness, and the
victimization and execution of an old, infirm woman. Repeated performances of the play “Acted
by the Princes Servants, often at the Cock-pit in Drury-Lane, once at court, with singular
Applause” and its subsequent publication in as late as 1658, attests to its popularity.\textsuperscript{169} It is
precisely because of the sparseness of the plot and the ring of truth because of the documentary
nature of the play that audiences were drawn to the play. The deformity of the body politic and
the ritualistic amputation of Sawyer in as the symbolic cleansing of the body politic found an
eager London audience.

\textsuperscript{168} The Wonderfull Discourie of Elizabeth Sawyer (op.cit).

\textsuperscript{169} Arthur F. Kinney, “Introduction” to The Witch of Edmonton (op.cit), p. xxxiv
Chapter 3
False Pretenders to Knowledge: A Discussion of Mountebanks in Giordano Bruno’s Il Candelaio and Ben Jonson’s The Alchemist

In 1582, less than two decades before Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake in 1600, he wrote his Italian play Il Candelaio (The Candlebearer) – his only comedy, while he was in Paris under the protection of Henri III. Well-known for his work on the art of memory, Bruno was a doctor of Theology from Naples, and was on the run because of charges of heresy against him. In Il Candelaio, the “most remarkable comedy” of the second half of the sixteenth century, Bruno depicts the characters of a false necromancer (Scaramure), a cheating alchemist (Cencio), and a pompous pedant (Manfurio), all of whom embody the various ways in which knowledge can be misappropriated. These characters convincingly adopt the scholarly rhetoric, and manage to dupe the vulnerable characters of the play, who represent the follies of covetousness, greed and lust. The argument of the play delineates three distinct narrative strands in the plot – “the love of Bonifacio, the alchemy of Bartolomeo, and the pedantry of Manfurio.”

This play is intended for closet reading – moot scenes, for example, Carubina’s discovery of Bonifacio’s infidelity, are reported rather

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than staged. Gino Moliterno moreover points out that Bruno did not dedicate his play to a monarch or pope, but to an unknown woman, Morgana. “This strongly suggests that, in spite of its great sense of theater and stage business, the play may have been written less with a specific stage-performance in mind than as a performance in the mind, as a literary exercise to be read and played on the stage of imagination.”¹⁷³ In keeping with the Plautine tradition of comedy, which gives the confidence trickster much advantage, Scramuré and Cencio take advantage of the follies of Bonifacio (as he attempts to gain the favors of the courtesan Vittoria, while he cheats on his wife Carubina) and Bartolomeo (who directs all his energies at discovering a way of making gold, as he neglects all other responsibilities and his household falls to ruin). In this complex matrix of deception, the plots resolve themselves in Bonifacio and Bartolomeo being punished for their gullibility, while the charlatans go scot free to perpetrate their deceptive tricks elsewhere. Bonifacio is doomed to be the perpetual cuckold in his own house and Bartolomeo loses much wealth. While trickster figures have literary antecedents in Plautus and Chaucer, Bruno’s charlatans specifically misuse what was considered esoteric knowledge, and misrepresent scholarly rhetoric to dupe the gullible. Thereafter, English city comedies of the early seventeenth century, especially those by Ben Jonson, like The Alchemist (1610), and Bartholomew Fair (1614) portray itinerant mountebanks, who are well-versed in scholarly rhetoric, which they use for nefarious purposes. In this chapter, I explore why an intellectual like Bruno, or a well-read scholar like Ben Jonson would choose to write about confidence tricksters, who invariably get the better of their social and intellectual superiors, and often with little retribution.

Bruno had a strong influence on the English humanist scholars, especially Sir Philip Sidney, whom he had befriended during his visit to England between 1583-5. While he was in England, Bruno had also lectured at Oxford, where the first edition of *Il Candelaio* is housed at the Bodleian library. Bruno’s play is concerned with confidence tricksters, who misappropriated what the early moderns understood as natural magic. Seventeenth-century London had its fair share of mountebanks, who claimed to provide love potions, transform substances and even find common thieves by the means of charms and spells, while drawing upon the elevated rhetoric of the scholar. Scholarly jargon could often be misleading, as one sees in Bruno’s play, where Manfurio, the pedant, quotes the Classics and regurgitates Latin, often out of context and with little meaning. Scaramuré claims to be a magician, with the ability to provide charms and spells to induce love, as many early modern books of magic as well as housewives secret herbal concoctions claimed. Cencio, the cheating alchemist of Bruno’s play claims to have the knowledge to produce gold from baser materials, and to convince Bartolomeo of his scholarship, he enumerates the alchemical properties of substances – information that could easily be accessed in the numerous books and pamphlets on alchemy that flooded the early modern literary marketplace – for example, *Morieni Romani, quondam eremita Hierosolymitani, De transfiguratione metallorum, & occulta, summaque antiquorum philosophorum medicina, libellus, nusquam hactenus in lucem editus* (1559), *The Mirror of Alchimy* attributed to Roger Bacon (1597), *Secreti Diuersi et Miracolosi* by Falloppio Gabriele (1572), *De Capricci Medicianli Dell’ ecclente Medico, & Cirugico* by Fioravanti Leonardo (1565), and so the information possessed by Cencio can hardly be considered esoteric. Margaret Healy argues

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174 A cursory search on alchemy in the Hamnet catalogue of the Folger Shakespeare library gives a fair idea of the popularity of materials on the subject in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
that the philosophy of alchemy was not only popular, but also fashionable among European intellectuals and that even Shakespeare incorporated this thought, especially in his sonnets, in an aesthetic appeal for religious toleration.\footnote{Margaret Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination: The Sonnets and A Lover’s Complaint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).} The charlatans of *Il Candelaiò* have all the characteristics of the ones in the later English city comedies like *Volpone*, and *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson and *The Wise Woman of Hognsdon* (1604) by Thomas Heywood, to name a few. But why would Bruno, reputed as a scholar of the Hermetic tradition, concern himself with talking about cheats and false scholarship? Could this play be read as one that expresses concerns of scholars regarding popular misconceptions regarding scholarship?

Bruno was not unique among intellectuals in writing about the various forms of misappropriated knowledge. Erasmus’s 1524 colloquy, *De Alcumistica*, is a dialogue between Philecous and Lalus. They discuss the story of an itinerant mountebank, claiming to be a priest. This charlatan promises to teach Balbinus, the dupe, the art of making gold, and in the process extracts large sums of money from him.\footnote{Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus: Colloquies*, translated and annotated by Craig R. Thompson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 545-56.} Balbinus, is a “much esteemed gentleman,” and is revered for his learning, but, is immediately taken in by the way in which he is flattered by the self-proclaimed priest. As Lalus describes the devious way in which the so-called priest gains Balbinus’s confidence, employing clever rhetorical strategies, Philecous exclaims, “You’re describing a rhetorician to me, not an alchemist.” Having gained Balbinus’s trust, the swindling priest then claims to have made much effort to learn the “sacred science” of transmutation. Balbinus ends up paying the priest a lot of money to learn the arts of “longation and curtation,” which he is told are indispensible to the making of gold. The money is intended for the required...
supplies – “pots, glasses, charcoal, and other equipment needed for the laboratory. This money our alchemist squanders enjoying on whores, dice, and drink.” The so-called alchemist cleverly stalls Balbinus’s queries by making flimsy excuses and continues to extract increasing amounts of money from him. “After he had made a fool of that man for quite a while by tricks of this sort, and fleeced him of no mean sum of money, the affair finally came to the ears of one who had known the rascal from boyhood. Readily surmising the fellow was doing the same thing in Balbinus’ house ...explains what kind of ‘expert’ he shelters in his house...” Balbinus, instead of handing him over to the authorities for punishment,

    gave him travel money imploring him by everything sacred not to blab about what had happened. And in my opinion he was wise to prefer this to having the story become the talk of the town, and, in the second place, to risking confiscation of his property. The imposter was in no danger. He understood the ‘art’ about as well as an ass does, and in an affair of this kind swindling is regarded leniently.

Besides, if charged with theft, benefit of clergy would have saved him from hanging. Nor would anyone willingly be at the expense of keeping him in jail.177

That Erasmus’s colloquy about the cheating alchemist had gained much popularity, especially in England, is illustrated by its inclusion in Reginald Scot’s The Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584), known, and often vilified for its skeptical opinions on magic. Scot, however, omits the last part of the colloquy, which summarizes the reasons it would have been fruitless, even counterproductive to want to punish the charlatan. His conclusion instead is a cautionary epilogue to the incident, like the ones that pamphlets on the subject of magic, generically used:

177 Ibid.
By this discourse *Erasmus* would give us note, that under the golden name of Alcumysterie there lieth lurking no small calamitie; wherein there be such severall shifts and sutes of rare subtilties and deceipts, as that not onlie wealthie men are thereby manie times impoverished...even wise and learned men hereby are shamefullie overshot, partlie for want of due experience in the wiles and subtilities of the world, and partlie through the softnesse and pliablenesse of their good nature, which cousening knaves doo commonlie abuse to their owne lust and commoditie, and to the others undooing.\(^{178}\)

Only an astute person, according to Scot, can identify rogues and protect himself, but even the learned can sometimes be gulled, he admits, because of their inherent goodness. Early modern intellectuals were only too concerned about the misappropriation of knowledge since confidence tricksters, such as the ones portrayed by Bruno and Erasmus gave extremely credible performances of scholarship, which resulted in imputations of hypocrisy against bona fide scholars. In spite of the series of comic events in *Il Candelaio*, Bruno enjoins upon his readers to not derive unalloyed amusement from the actions: “*In tristitia hilaris; in hilaritate tristis,*” he points out to his readers in the epigraph to the title, underlining the serious intent of the play even though the plot is overtly humorous. Moliterno emphasizes that this play was “written not by an aspiring dramatist but by a renegade priest-philosopher, this outrageous and rambunctious comedy also displays signs of being highly philosophical, paradoxically dark and brooding, even at its most ribald and obscene.”\(^{179}\) Erasmus’s conclusion and Bruno’s epigraph moreover,


\(^{179}\) Gino Moliterno, Introduction to *Candlebearer* (op. cit.), p. 13.
underline the concern of the scholars that charlatans, in spite of their deceptions, face little by way of consequences, and that even well-educated men are often vulnerable to the practiced performance of an imposter and having been duped once, thereafter become skeptical of esoteric knowledge, that of the philosophers. This brings into question the status of genuine scholarship and the credibility of bona fide intellectuals.

Given the very convincing performance of the swindlers, distinguishing a spiritual magician from a quack became a problem, and popular stories often made charlatans out of scholars. For example, biographical details of Doctor Faustus, a German scholar, give much credit to his learning. One such biography, popularly known as *The English Faust Book*, translated from German in 1592, applauds Faustus’s scholarly achievements at the University of Wittenberg:

Faustus continued at study in the university, and was by the rectors and sixteen masters afterwards examined how he had profited in his studies; and being found by them, that none for his time were able to argue with him in divinity, or for the excellency of his wisdom to compare with him, with one consent they made him doctor of divinity...  

These scholarly attributes, however, are at odds with stories about his prowess, which are made more prominent in popular books and pamphlets. These stories gradually reduce Faustus to a confidence trickster. Literary depictions, notably Christopher Marlowe’s play continue to perpetrate Faustus’s frivolity to the point of raising questions about the validity of his

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knowledge. An extant seventeenth century quarto, for example, dedicated to stories on popular magicians, contains a story of Faustus as he plays a parlor trick on his inebriated friends:

*John Faustus* among a sort of his companions, who when they were half drunk, importuned him to play some of his pranks; and the feat must be a Vine full of Grapes, as the greater novelty now in the winter season. *Faustus* consented to satisfy their curiosity, upon this condition, that they should keep silence, and not stirre out of their places, nor offer to pluck a Grape till he bad, otherwise they might pluck their own perill. The praestegious sight is presented, and everyone had his knife drawn and hold of a branch, but not to cut till he spake the word. But having held them a while in suspense, all suddenly vanished, and every man appeared to have hold onely of his own nose, and ready to have cut it off, if the word had been once given.\(^{181}\)

This narrative about Faustus’s hypnotic prowess is one among the many stories that make him variously into a charlatan, tricking people to part with their purses (as is a seen in an incident in Marlowe’s play in which Faustus tricks a horse-courser out of forty dollars), and a popular magician entertaining crowds (as when in Marlowe’s play Faustus conjures up the spirits of Alexander and his paramour at the request of an emperor, or produces fresh grapes to sate the cravings of a pregnant duchess).\(^{182}\) Popular stories like the above made even genuine scholars susceptible to charges of fraud, and the authentic magus had little to defend himself with. I read

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\(^{181}\) From *A Collection Out of the Best Approved Authors, Containing Histories of Visions, Apparitions, Prophecies, Spirits, Divinations, and other wonderful Illusions of the Devil wrought by Magick or Otherwise. Also of divers Astrological Predictions, shewing As the Wickedness of the former, so the vanity of the latter, and folly of trusting to them. London: Printed for Joshua Kirton, in his shop at St. Pauls Church-yard, at the sign of Kings-Arms. 1657.*

\(^{182}\) All references to *Doctor Faustus* in this chapter are from *Doctor Faustus* edited by David Scott Kastan (New York: Norton, 2005).
the works of Giordano Bruno and Erasmus within this context. Elite intellectual culture does not invariably inform popular culture. On the contrary, in this chapter, I argue that the stage does not simply enable an inversion of power hierarchies in the Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque, but that the popular depictions of marginal figures in fact influence the works of elite Humanist intellectuals.

Since learned rhetoric could so easily be counterfeited, the apparent distinctions between scholarly knowledge, derived from philosophical cogitations and an advanced knowledge of natural magic, and what was popularly understood as magic, were so few that they could easily be confused with one another. An example of this is the grimoires or the books of magic, which were the repositories of early modern popular magical knowledge. Though most of these books were destroyed, a surviving copy of a practical handbook for practitioners of magic, The Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits, etc. 1577-83 [Folger MS Vb26] provides a charm for catching a thief, among other spells:

...to this experiment thou must take a Litarge of silver that is to say, the purifieinge of silver, that goldsmithes make & bray him small, & grind it vppon marble stone & distemper it with the white of an egge, & when it is tempered make an eye on the wall or in parchement, & stick him one the wall...I coniure all the lokers on this eye, & all them that in this thinge be guitye of..., & all they that behold this eye so faste, strike it on his eye, by the vertue of the holy names of our lord Iesus Christe...as I smite this naile one this place that we may beleue that all vertue that is in these wordes aforesaid, may torne to paine & to Confusion, & whille thou smitteste saye Rabat, Rabas, selarinum Reatonay, selire Reatony facite
appere qui illam Rem, furatus sine dequaquerimus, & thou shalt se the righte eye
water & if water not smite the eye againe with the hammer & begin this so ofte till
thou hast tidinges of the thefte....

MS Vb26 is a typical book of magic or grimoire, and though it has some fantastic recipes like the
above, it also derives a lot of its material from more scholarly texts, and besides spells, it
contains almanacs and even extracts from the bible, particularly the psalms. Grimoires were not
only books about magical knowledge, but were in themselves thought to possess magical
powers, mostly evil, and that is why they were often confiscated from village healers and burned
in large numbers.\textsuperscript{183} The notable thing about the above spell is that the recipe it presents could be
comparable in its empirical accuracy to some of the recipes that alchemists and natural magicians
note in their journals, resulting in the popular imputations that the alchemists dabbled in evil.
Though popularly considered otherwise, grimoires were not necessarily outside the scope of
orthodox Christianity. For example, the invocation of Christ at the very beginning of what is
extant of MS Vb26, as well as the reiterated acknowledgement of the holy trinity consciously
marks it as belonging within the theological structure. The English translation of the Psalms in
The Book of Magic, moreover, places it within a specifically Protestant context, and the
profusion of Latin in MS Vb26 marks it as a scholarly text. The overt markers of scholarship of
the learned or white or spiritual magician, also known as the magus in the context of the
Renaissance, were then replicable and could be performed in a manner that could cause
confusion. There was then bound to be a popular elision between the scholarly practice of

\textsuperscript{183} For a more detailed discussion on grimoires, refer, Owen Davies, Grimoires: A History of Magic Books (Oxford University Press, 2009).
alchemy and divination, and the rhetorical performance of common cozeners and mountebanks, as Bruno illustrates in his play.

Manfurio, in Bruno’s play misuses scholarly rhetoric, and yet he passes as a scholar. He peppers his speeches with Latin and contorts his expressions to the point of making them unintelligible. The “Proprologue” of the play, which introduces the chief characters, elaborates on the rhetorical exercise of pedants like Manfurio:

...to have some Latin in a passage of Italian, some Greek in a passage of Latin; and never to let a page go by without adding some little saying, a brief line of verse or some wayward and eccentric conceit! Why they restore my very life when, either in speaking or writing, by hook or by crook, they drag in a shred of Plato or Demosthenes in the original Greek to gloss a line of Homer or Hesiod. How easy it is to see upon whose head exclusively Saturn had pissed down his wisdom and the nine handmaids of Pallas have unloaded their verbal cornucopia, so it is most fitting that they should parade their prosopopeia with grave steps, erect body, unmoving head and eyes in an attitude of modest and yet proud circumspection.... (p. 71).

[...un discorso latino in mezzo all’italiano, un discorso greco in mezzo al latino; e non lasciar passare un foglio di carta dove non compaia almeno una frasetta, un versetto, un concetto, un concetto di carattere e lingua esotica. Povero me che mi rovino la vita quando, forzatamente o deliberatamente, parlando e scrivendo, fanno cadere a proposito un versetto d’Omero, d’Esiodo, uno stracetto greco di Platone o Demostene. Come dimostrano bene che essi sono gli unici a cui Saturno
ha pisciato il guidizio in testa, le nove damigelle di Pallade gli hanno scaricato tra la pia e dura madre una valanga di vocaboli...] (p.35)

In his discussion of the structure of the play, Alan Barr illustrates that Manfurio’s convoluted language accentuates the comic element of the play: “The humor is effective and clear; Manfurio’s excesses have blocked his urgent desire to communicate. His opacity is so marked that Barra begins to wonder if ‘he talks that way so we can’t understand him.’”

Though he embodies the wrong type of scholarship, since his so-called scholarship is limited to the use of elevated language devoid of meaning, Manfurio is referred to as the *dominus magister* (master teacher) throughout the play – he is popularly perceived to be a scholar. In spite of his ludicrous and arguably peripheral presence in the play, Manfurio carries out the function of the protagonist, and also catalyst of the plot. Ridiculed, robbed and disrobed, Manfurio concludes the play, and solicits the approbation of the audience:

> I say to you, oh most noble spectators – *quoru, omnium ora, atque oculos in me video esse coniectos* – since I finding myself at the end of my tragic subject, though without hands, clothes and purse, *corde tamen, et animo Plaudo* so, and with better reason, you, *meliori hactenus acti fortuna* who have been joyous and happy spectators of our troublesome and importunate circumstances, *Valete et Plaudite*. V, xxvi (p. 192)

[Per cui dico a voi nobilissimi spettatori – dei quali vedo tutti i volti e gli occhi fissati si di me – siccome io mi ritrovo al fine orevisto del mio essere tragico; se non con mani, borsello e abiti, tuttavia col cuore e con l’animo pludo: così, e

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Though Manfurio’s pedantic proclamations serve to obscure meaning, and his scholarship is unsound, this pathetic ending brings home the point that those perceived as scholars are popularly ridiculed. The scholar is moreover at the mercy of patrons and can only ask for remuneration for having provided amusement, and so he is expected to perform his scholarship—a performance that is easily appropriated by the reckless. In his depiction of Cencio, Bruno demonstrates that the clever use of words that roughly indicate scholarly knowledge often serves to further the purpose of a charlatan. Cencio, the false alchemist of *Il Candelaio* professes to have the ability to make gold, an art that even the learned were not unequivocally skeptical about. Cencio backs up his claims with learned alchemical excerpts, and in a long speech accurately describes the properties of metals, especially mercury, thought to be an essential ingredient in the making of gold, while mentioning the works of Hermes Trismegistus, Avicenna, and Albertus Magnus, all of whom were well-reputed for their scholarship in natural philosophy:

That’s how this work needs to be conducted, according to the doctrine of Hermes and of Gerber. The underlying matter of all metals is Mercury; lead belongs to Saturn, tin to Jupiter, iron to Mars, gold to the Sun, bronze to Venus, silver to the Moon. Quicksilver is linked especially to Mercury, though it is to be found in all other metals; this is why he is called the messenger of the gods, being male with male and female with female. I, xi (p. 86).
Così bisogna eseguire questo compito, secondo l’insegnamento di Ermete e di Gerber. La sostanza di tutti i metalli è Mercurio; a Saturno appartiene il piombo, a Giove lo stagno, a Marte il ferro, al Sole l’oro, a Venere il bronzo, alla Luna l’argento. L’argento vivo si attribuisce in particolare a Mercurio e si trova nella sostanza di tutti gli altri metalli; perciò si dice nunzio degli dei, maschio con i maschi e femmina con le femmine....] (pp. 55-6)

Cencio, very convincingly draws upon popular knowledge regarding the properties of metals and minerals, an integral part of the learned discourses of the time. The list of ingredients that Cencio demands in the play, resonates with the common substances that alchemists often required: “lead oxide, aluminum, quicksilver, red sulphur, copper, ammoniac...” (V. ii, p. 147) His performance gulls Bartolomeo, who, in spite of being miserly opens his purse strings to fulfill each of Cencio’s very expensive demands. Scaramuré, the cheating magician, is extremely clever with his words and is able to dupe Bonifacio, as he promises the latter a potent love charm, which involves charming a wax figure and reciting spells over a fire. When the love charm fails to produce its promised effect, Scaramuré provides flimsy excuses for its failure that however convince the superstitious and stupid Bonifacio – the latter had given the magician a strand of hair belonging to his wife, rather than the courtesan, whom he had intended to woo.

The theatrical cozeners of Bruno’s play had cultural parallels in early modern England. The so-called cunning folk, who professed to heal the sick and the bewitched, induced love, identified thieves, told fortunes, and in other ways practiced magic, were apprehended and often incarcerated for practicing charms like the one in MS Vb26. In England, their crime, however, was construed as civil rather than ecclesiastical, and they were not only imprisoned along with petty thieves and criminals in places like the Newgate prison, but also tried mostly by civic
authorities. In a well documented case of 1375 a certain John Chestre was prosecuted for having failed to discover a thief, though he claimed to have often successfully “exercised that art.”

The court however ruled that Chestre had been deceitful to the public and that he would never make claims to be an able practitioner of magic in future. Chestre’s case is one of several extant documented cases. A couple of centuries later William Wycherley, a tailor, in an ecclesiastical examination in 1549 declared that “there be within England above five hundred conjurers as he thinketh...and especially in Norfolk, Hertfordshire, and Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.”

These charlatans were often indispensable to both the rural and the urban economic structure. The eponymous in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* summarizes the functions of the charlatans as she enumerates her various activities:

Let me see how many trades have I to live by: First, I am a wise-woman, and a fortune-teller, and under that I deale in physicke and fore-speaking, in palmistry, and recovering of things lost. Next, I undertake to cure madd folkes; then I keepe gentlewomen lodgers, to furnish such chambers as I let out by the night: Then I am provided for bringing young wenches to bed; and, for a need, you see I can play the match-maker. Shee that is but one, and professenth so many, may well be termed a Wise-woman, if there bee any. (III, i)

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186 Ibid. 5

187 Thomas Heywood, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* [Source EEBO, no pp.numbers]
The Alchemist refers to a certain Simon Read, a Southwark doctor, who was given a pardon for having invoked three spirits in order to discover a thief (I, ii, 17).\textsuperscript{188} Besides the people who claimed to be conjurers in the shires, London had its share of charlatans, who were ever ready to dupe the gullible. The stage especially is the more appropriate venue for the mountebank, given the essential theatricality of the character of the mountebank, and that is one of the reasons for the presence of a host of mountebank figures in seventeenth century English drama.

Not only were these events well-documented, as well as made popular by their inclusion in the more popular and iterated forms of literature like ballads, they also find resonance in the widely circulated pamphlet literature of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. The introduction to one of the “discourses,” about astrological quacks in a 1688 pamphlet titled, Curious Inquiries Being Six Brief Discourses, attests to their presence in large numbers in England:\textsuperscript{189}

I Hope, no Learned Artist in the Noble Science of Astrology, will be offended if I tell an Innocent, Harmless Story (not much varying from the Truth) of an Impudent, Illiterate Intruder into it; for it’s well known, the Nation swarms with this sort of Caterpillers.

The story that ensues is in the form of a dialogue between an enquirer (the author of the pamphlet) and the “quack,” claiming to be an expert astrologer, who also “Calculateth Nativities, and Cureth all manner of Diseases in the Bodies of Men, Women, and Children.” By his own


\textsuperscript{189} Curious Enquiries Being Six Brief Discourses Viz. I. Of the Longitude. II. The Tricks of Astrological Quacks. III. Of the Depth of the Sea. IV. Of Tobacco. V. Of Europes Being too Full of People. VI. The Various Opinions
For most of those that come to us, if the answer suit not their Fancy, go Home dissatisfied, calling us Rogues, Cheats, and telling their Neighbours, we can answer a Question no more than the Post, and then away to another, and another Astrologer, till they find one that pleases them: Then him they cry up, and fill his House full of Customers presently, though perhaps the first might speak truer than the last.

Indeed, the enquirer does not hold any great opinion of the book that the pretend-astrologer commends, and can see through the astrological bombast that the latter spews in order to sound scholarly. A 1673 pamphlet titled, *The Character of a Quack Astrologer: or, The Spurious Prognosticator Anatomiz’d*, provides a humorous summary of the intrinsic characteristics of a swindler pretending to be a soothsayer:

A Quack Astrologer is a Gypsy of the upper Form, a Wizard unfledg’d, Doctor Faustus in swadling Clouts; the fag end of a South-sayer, or the Cub of a Conjurer not lick’d into perfection; one that hath heard o’th’ Black Art, but his fingers Itch to be dabling in’t, but wanting Courage to meet the Divel at a personal Treaty, chuses to deal with him obliquely, by way of a cheat, rather than by the direct Negotiation of a Familiar.  

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190 *The Character of a Quack-Astrologer: or The Spurious Prognosticator Anatomiz’d*. With Allowance. (London: printed, and are to be sold at booksellers shops, 1673) [Source: EEBO] No pp. numbers.
The charlatan depicted here is essentially harmless and even comic – a cowardly cheat, whose wiles are all too apparent. Like the introduction, the rest of the pamphlet also has an almost-indulgent, if mildly cautionary note about quack astrologers. The pamphlet recognizes that this role is necessarily a performance, one that the charlatans of Bruno’s play excel at:

All this mischief he performs by the mysterious art of canting, and the help of his lousy rhetoric, that cheats people into an opinion of his abilities; having purloyned some shreds of Latine, he lards there with his dry discourses, and Greek comes to him (as other Brutes have their knowledge) by instinct, for he writes it before he can distinguish one letter of the Alphabet...To conclude, his certainty in declaring future events, is like the predictions made to Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey, or that of Bardury to the thrice noble Captain, who all, notwithstanding the promises of such blandishing Hypocrites of Long-life and prosperity, fell by the stroaks of a violent and untimely fate. To avoid the scandal whereof, he commonly studies ambiguous expressions applicable to every time, Prince and Nation.

While Bruno’s master-teacher Manfurio epitomizes the misuse of a learned language, both Cencio and Scaramuré excel in using learned concepts with much ambiguity. A 1676 pamphlet titled, The Character of a Quack-Doctor, or the Abusive Practices of Impudent Illiterate Pretenders to Physick Exposed, treats the subject of illegitimate physicians with more severity, as they are described as “one of the Epidemical Diseases of this Age.” Since the pamphlet proposes to expose how the fake doctors gain credence, it elaborates on their modus operandi:
At first he deals as a private Mountebank, and makes every blind Alehouse he comes in his Stage, where he tells Thousand Lies of his miraculous Cures, and has his Landlady at his Elbow to Vouch them: he bribes all the Nurses he can meet with, and keeps a dozen Midwives in Pension to proclaim his skill at Gossipings...and by these Arts he grows Famous and Rich, and buyes him the worshipful Jacket, and takes state upon him, and defies Authority that should suppress his insolency, and at last purchases a Title...

In a post-script to the pamphlet on quack doctors, the author insists that his purpose is not to Bespatter the noble Art of Healing, or any of its Learned or Honest Ingenious Professors, or to undervalue the most pleasant and useful study of Chemistry, or gratify monopolies in learning, or stinted methods of formal Ignorance; tis the illiterate frontless and dangerous Pretender he would expose to deserved contempt...

The above pamphlets amply demonstrate a concern over the proliferation of quacks in early modern London. With their able performance, these swindlers would easily pass off as learned, and with this advantage they would claim to achieve more than what even genuine scholars could possibly profess. Culturally there was no doubt about the validity of astrological knowledge or the science of healing, but there certainly was much contention regarding who could be trusted. Given that pamphlets like the ones discussed above were printed as cheap quarto editions and sold at various bookshops in London, they were easily accessible and their contents were well disseminated. The subject of pamphlets like these complemented the representations of mountebanks in broadside ballad woodcuts, which were generically more
These woodcuts, variously titled *The Skilful Doctor; or the Compleat Mountebank*, *The Mountabanck Doctor and his Merry Andrew*, *Infallible Mountebank, or Quack Doctor*, all published in the seventeenth century also prove that the presence of mountebanks, who pretended to have some kind of specialized knowledge, was a common subject of discussion across London. In spite of this, there was a proliferation of swindlers, as the extant court cases testify. Such a phenomenon, argues Simon During, is inevitable, because “magic has helped shape modern culture...not...” real and potent magic” – but rather the technically produced magic of conjuring shows and special effects....from the moment that they were widely tolerated and commercialized, magic shows have helped provide the terms and content of modern culture’s understanding and judgment of itself.”

Seventeenth century Europe is considered “early modern,” since its practices anticipate what we understand as modernity, and is characterized, among other things, by increasing commercialization. One of the aspects of commercialization in early modern England was the wide dissemination of books in print that gave people access to what was till now considered “occult” or hidden knowledge and was the property of a privileged few. The mountebanks and quacks gave the common people the option of accessing the benefits of this specialized knowledge for a fee. It was therefore inevitable that the swindlers, who claimed to employ the benefits of this specialized knowledge for a fee, would proliferate. Surprisingly, even the learned did not completely dismiss the potency of alchemy. In his biography of Jonson, Ian Donaldson points out that in 1618 Francis Bacon, who mostly denounced the practice of alchemists, had in

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192 Internet Source. URL: [http://www.bpi1700.org.uk/research/printOfTheMonth/sepember2008.html](http://www.bpi1700.org.uk/research/printOfTheMonth/sepember2008.html)

fact approved a patent to Sir Giles Mompesson “to make gold and silver lace with copper in a new ‘alchymistical’ way.” There was no clear distinction between empirical pursuits and magic, as Deborah E. Harkness emphasizes:

> A wide range of Elizabethans used the collective term *science* to describe their interest in properties of the natural world or their efforts to manipulate and control those properties. In works published or republished during the age of Elizabeth, Leonard Digges used the mathematical sciences to identify the contemporary interest in astronomy, astrology, instrumentation, arithmetic, and geometry, as did John Dee, John Blagrave, and William Bourne. The queen voiced her support for “all good sciences and wise and learned inventions....”

Since London harbored chemical experts, scientific instrument makes and surgeons, it was the natural home for an alchemist, argues Harkness. Moreover, the popular elision between empirical knowledge and magic resulted in the proliferation of mountebanks in seventeenth century London, which early modern theater depicted in all faithfulness. Besides their presence in pamphlet literature, pretend-astrologers and false healers were popular subjects of city comedies. One of the more popular plays in the seventeenth century that depicts charlatans, is Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist*. In this play, the various tricks played on the dupes by Dol, Face and Subtle, are not unique in themselves. Literary charlatans, like the ones in Plautus (*Mostellaria*), and Chaucer (*Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*) have long provided popular entertainment. But what is unique about Jonson’s charlatans is that they, like Bruno’s characters in *Il Candelario*, are deceptively scholarly. In *The Alchemist*, Lovewit goes away from his house in London to Kent

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so that he can avoid the London plague. Lovewit’s clever butler Jeremy, also known as Face, takes the opportunity of the absence of his master to bring Dol Common, a prostitute and Subtle, a con-man into the house, so that the three of them can make some money by swindling others. Face, pretending to be a Captain, solicits and secures the various customers by creating credible personae for Subtle and Dol, and bringing them “home” to Subtle “to work on” (I. iii. 104). Subtle poses as a “Doctor”, and is referred to as “the cunning man” (I. ii. 8) by Dapper, one of the people he cons. Like the bawd, the wise woman of Hogsdon, he takes on the various roles of astrologer, alchemist, necromancer and even match-maker. Dol Common takes on various roles as the situation demands, pretending to be – the queen of fairies, a disembodied spirit, and a mad noblewoman, at various times during the play. Jonson’s gulls, Aristophanean in their conception, are the literal embodiments of follies, very much like Bruno’s dupes, Bonifacio and Bartolomeo, who represent promiscuity and greed respectively in Il Candelaiio. In The Alchemist, all the characters – the swindlers (Face, Subtle, Dol Common) as well as the dupes (Dapper, Drugger, Epicure Mammon) are named according to what essentially characterizes them in the play, akin to the characters in a Morality Play.  

Though Jonson did not have the distinction of being a University Wit like his literary predecessors, notably Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe, he was well acquainted with humanist texts, given his rigorous education at Westminster School under the headmastership of

196 Anne Barton in “Names in Jonson’s Comedies,” Ben Jonson: Dramatist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 185-93, argues that “naming in The Alchemist is often “elusive”, especially when it comes to the cheaters. They have the ability to assume various personae as the situation demands. The gulls however live up to their names.
William Camden, where in “the lower division...the boys were trained essentially in the principles of grammar, while in the upper division they concentrated primarily on the rules of rhetoric.” In his biography of Jonson, Donaldson notes that the typical curriculum included the works of Classical scholars like Ovid, Aesop, Cicero, Plutarch, Horace, Livy, Virgil, Demosthenes, Homer, and Seneca, as well as those of Humanist scholars like Juan Luis Vives’s Latin exercises and Erasmus’s Colloquies. The better scholars of the very competitive school often went up to further studies at Christ Church, Oxford, or Trinity College, Cambridge. Jonson then, had the advantage of a basic humanist education, and was well-versed in the Classics, especially since he appraises Shakespeare as someone who knew “little Latin and lesse Greek” in the prefatory poem of the latter’s First Folio (1623). He was also a popular playwright, who often had scrapes with authorities because of incisive critiques of contemporary polity in many of his plays. This is noted in the celebrated cases following the performances of Eastward Ho! and The Isle of Dogs (now lost). Jonson’s work then marks the unique intersection between the scholarly and the popular. Jonson was a conscientious playwright, who undertook to publish a folio edition of his work in his lifetime (1616), which underscores the fact that he took his work seriously and considered them of some social import. It is also worth noting here, that Jonson conscientiously selected his opus, omitting certain plays so that he could ensure that the best and the most compelling of his work would survive. The Alchemist, like his other plays are replete with contemporary references. Most noted are his jests at the expense of John Dee, who was a reputed practitioner of magic in England and of whom Jonson was extremely skeptical. The “bogus laboratory that Subtle and Face install in the house resembles the more serious laboratory that the

197 Ian Donaldson, Ben Jonson (op. cit.), p. 75.
learned Dr. John Dee had set up in his house at Mortlake for alchemical experimentation in 1571." In his biography of Jonson, David Riggs emphasizes that Frances Yates had persistently argued that Jonson had written *The Alchemist* in conscious opposition to a perceived alliance between magic and imperial Protestantism. “*The Alchemist* was itself only the first, glorious battle in Jonson’s lifelong quarrel with the wizards. The magicians whom he derides in his published works include Dee, Kelley, Simon Forman, Sir Christopher Heydon, Thomas Bretnor, Edward Gresham, Abraham Savory, and Robert Fludd. During the years ahead he would write comedies that lampoon witch-hunting magistrates and amateur demonologists, and masques that burlesque alchemy and Rosicrucianism.”* The Devil is an Ass, The Magnetic Lady, Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court, and The Fortunate Isles are some of Jonson’s works where he expresses his skepticism about magic. In spite of his disbelief in the potency of magic, Jonson was well-read and aware of astrology and related subjects, especially having made use of the library of his friend William Drummond, which had many books and manuscripts on astrology, and even possessed a copy of *Liber sacer*, a book on ritual magic that had been previously in Dee’s possession. *Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden* (Edinburgh, 1711) are notes that Drumond had made about Jonson in the course of their friendship. In these notes Drummond says that Jonson “can set horoscopes, but trusts not in them.” (234)

Given the depth of Jonson’s scholarship and the richness of his reading, it is not surprising that much of the fraud in *The Alchemist*, is strongly grounded in learned references

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198 Ibid., p. 246.  
and makes use of scholarly concepts. The play refers to numerous scholarly treatises on alchemy, metallurgy, and medicine, as well as references to scholars of various disciplines. Subtle, for example is no mean cozener. He is unique in his facility with scholarly texts. C. H. Hertford and the Simpsons and Edgar Hill Duncan have pointed out that The Alchemist makes references to Arnold of Villanova’s *Rosarium Philosopharum*, Martin Del Rio’s *Disquisitiones Magicae* (Louvain 1599-1600), and Robertus Vallensis’ *De Veritate & Antiquitate Artis Chemical* (Paris, 1561: printed in Lazarus Zetzner’s collection, the *Theatrum Chemicum* of 1602). 201 Sometimes Jonson’s references are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, for example, when Subtle defends alchemy and its processes to Surly and Sir Epicure Mammon, he also makes definite references to Martin Del Rio’s *Disquisitiones Magicae*, which condemned all forms of magic including alchemy and astrology as essentially devilish practices. 202 Here Jonson seems to have the confidence that his audience and readers will be amused as they identify this irony. This could only have been possible if there was popularly a certain level of acquaintance with the ideas about alchemy because of the abundance of books and pamphlets on the subject. In this speech, Subtle makes poetic platitudes about alchemy, and thereafter refers to the apparently quintessential alchemists’ argument that every metal has the potential to be transformed into gold, just as ova contain the potential of life. He then goes on to describe the properties of minerals the process of alchemy, which entails purification of heavier metals, ridding them of gross substances and humidity, so


that the ultimate result is gold, which was all part of alchemical discourse. This is achieved by the gradual transition of substances:

Of that airy,

And oily water, mercury is engendered;

Sulphur o’ the fat, and earthy part: the one

(Which is the last) supplying the place of male,

The other of the female, in all metals....

But, these two

Make the rest ductile, malleable, extensive.

And, even in gold, they are; for we do find

Seeds of them, by our fire, and gold in them:

And can produce the species of each metal

More perfect thence, than nature doth in earth. (II. iii. 159-170)

The classification of minerals as masculine or feminine, and the elaboration of their natures, resonates with the early modern understanding of natural philosophy, and Subtle’s explications are similar in content to Bruno’s false alchemist, Cencio’s shenanigans to convince Bartolomeo. Contrary to the expectation that the ones to be duped were probably not conversant with scholarly conception of alchemy, Epicure Mammon exhibits a relative facility with the subject. The many pamphlets that discussed alchemy, made it a popular subject of discussion, and consequently it became easier for the reckless to hoax those who had only a passing acquaintance with the subject. Supriya Chaudhuri points out that Sir Epicure Mammon’s speech in II, i, where he tries to convince Surly of the antiquity of the art of alchemy, refers to a preface to a collection of treatises entitled *De Alchemia*, which was published from Nuremberg in 1541
and 1545. It was written by Chrysogonus Polydorus, who speaks about how Classical poets might have mystified the philosopher’s stone in fables and gives an alchemical interpretation of the myth of Jason’s fleece. As Mammon explains the symbolic significance of Jason’s story with much rhetorical proficiency, his language is reminiscent of Manfurio-like scholarly cogitations.

...I have a piece of Jason’s fleece, too,

Which was no other, than a book of alchemy,

Writ in large sheepskin, a good fat ram-vellum.

Such was Pythagoras’ thigh, Pandora’s tub;

And all that fable of Medea’s charms,

The manner of our work: the bulls, our furnace,

Still breathing fire; our argent-vive, the dragon;

The dragon’s teeth, mercury sublimate,

That keeps the whiteness, hardness, and the biting;

And they are gathered, into Jason’s helm,

(Th’alembic) and then sowed in Mars in his field,

And thence, sublimed so often, till they are fixed.

Both this, th’Hesperian garden, Cadmus’ story,

Jove’s shower, the boon of Midas, Argus’s eyes,

Boccace and his Demogorgon, thousands more,

All abstract riddles of our stone. (II, i, 89-104)

But, in spite of being better learned than the other dupes of the play, Epicure Mammon is as vulnerable to false enticement of alchemy as the other less-educated members of society are. Hugh Plat in *The Jewel House of Art and Nature* (1594) warns those susceptible to the fake promises of alchemy in his comments on the deceitful practices of those who profess it. The lay person, irrespective of which social class he belongs to, is all too exposed to the machinations of quacks – the Balbinuses and the Simon Formans:

....let every man that is besotted in this art...take heed also of all false and double bottoms in crucibles, of all hollow wands or rods of iron, wherewith some of these varlets do use to stir the metal and the medicine together: of all Amalgames and powders, wherein any gold or silver shal be craftily conveyed; of Sol and Luna first rubified, and then projection made on it, as it were on Venus herself: but specially of a false back to the chimney or furnace, having loose brick or stone. Closely jointed, that may be taken away in another room by a false Simon that attendeth on the Alchemists hem, or some like watch-word, who after the medicine and the Mercury put together in the crucible, entertaineth Balbinus with a walk, and with the volubility of his tongue, until his confederate might have leisure to convey some gold or silver into the melting pot....

Greed fuels the malpractice of alchemy. David Bevington illustrates that almost all social classes are represented in *The Alchemist*, with their various ambitions for upward mobility and material gains – Drurger, representing “the bourgeois world of mercantile London,” with his ambition for

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setting up a small tobacco shop; Dapper, the lawyer’s clerk wishes to be a proficient gambler with the help of a spirit; and Sir Epicure Mammon, the knight craves exotic luxuries.\textsuperscript{205}

Besides the authority of popular alchemical texts, Jonson’s characters cite reputed scholars of the subject to make a point. In his conversation with Ananias, Subtle refers to scholars like Raymond Lull (1235-1315), who had devised the mnemonic sciences and had written about alchemy, and George Ripley (fifteenth century), the author of \textit{The Compound of Alchemy}, who had popularized the works of Lull in England (II. v. 8), and whose works were very much part of early modern scholarly circles.\textsuperscript{206} He cites the different stages of the alchemical change that Ripley enumerates, “Of the pale citron, the green lion, the crow./ The peacock’s tail, the plumed swan,” (II, ii, 25-6). Ripley’s \textit{The Compound of Alchemie} employs a similarly vivid imagery in explaining the changes in appearance of the chemical substance during its gradual transformation:

\begin{verbatim}
Pale, and Black, wyth falce Citryne, unparfyt Whyte & Red, Pekoks fethers in
color gay, the Raynbow whych shall overgoe
The spotted panther wyth the Lyon greene, the Crowys byll bloe as lede;
These shall appere before the parfyt Whyte\textsuperscript{207}
\end{verbatim}

Subtle’s references to actual alchemical reactions, “Putrefaction,/ Solution, Ablusion,
Sublimation,/ Cohobation,/ Calcination, Ceration, and/ Fixation…Vivification…Mortification” (II. v. 21-5), and the use of clever Latin phrases and expressions like, “\textit{ultimum supplicum auri}”


\textsuperscript{206} Ben Jonson, \textit{The Alchemist}, edited by Elizabeth Cook (op.cit.), p. 65.

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., p. 42
(last penalty gold) (II. v. 29) convincingly gives the impression of esoteric knowledge of alchemy. Sometimes Subtle quotes verbatim from texts on alchemy. “To the trine circle of seven spheres,” he quotes from Paracelsus, as he explains the philosophy of alchemy to Ananias. The original texts reads: “Know, too, that no solution will take place in your electrum unless it thrice runs perfectly through the sphere of seven planets.”

208 The litany of names that Subtle advises Abel Drugger to post on the various sides of the latter’s tobacco shop to attract good luck: “on the east side of your shop, aloft/ Write Mathlai, Tarmiel, and Baraborat;/ Upon the north part, Rael, Vevel, Thiel....” is akin to those found in grimoires, notably MS Vb26, which invokes lists of spirits to help achieve a purpose. Subtle’s list, however, has a more scholarly source in Heptameron, seu Elementa magica Pietri Abano Philosophi, which was appended to Cornelius Agrippa’s De Occulta Philosophia. Subtle’s adroit knowledge of scholarly texts, ones that were arguably part of the early modern academic curriculum, gives him the intellectual advantage of the scholar. Naturally, the scholar, who would be at a loss to detect any deficiency in the dexterous scholarly performance of a swindler with Subtle’s effortless command of scholarly content, would be concerned about protecting the apparent sanctity of his scholarship.

Like Bruno’s cheating alchemist Cencio, and the false magician Scaramuré, as well as Erasmus’s character Balbine in De Alcumistica, Jonson’s characters do not end up getting punished in any substantial manner. While Dol and Subtle have to leave behind their ill-gotten gains at the end of the play and are probably excluded from London, Face, the housekeeper, the chief culprit in all the machinations, is taken back in his role of a servant to the household, which


209 The Alchemist (op.cit.), p. 32.
he had misused. Face has the added benefit of enjoying the profit from the “venture tripartite” (I, i, 135) along with Lovewit, and consequently his position in the household becomes stronger.

*The Alchemist* begins with the comedic requirement of an initial disturbance – one that Peter Holland and William Sherman point out reflects the putrefying plague of London, and which is emphasized in the quarrel between Face and Subtle in the opening scene. “Plague, the quintessential miasma, spread, the early modern physicians thought, by airborne putrescence, was supposed to be cured by ridding the city of decay and rotting food and by purifying the air through burning ‘virtually anything combustible’, turning the whole city into ‘a smelly smoky furnace.’ The city itself becomes part of the (al)chemical experiment, but Subtle’s laboratory is full of precisely the same kind of stinking.”

Since the play is representative of all social classes and their aspirations, and is replete with references to the “streets and taverns, churches and suburbs, places and sights of London,” Lovewit’s house, the site of the elaborate con-game can be understood as microcosmic London, one that is temporarily cured with the master’s return, argue Holland and Sherman. This cure however is tenuous since Dol and Subtle can begin their career in cozening again. The play fails to fulfill the classical generic closure of the definite re-establishment of order and the re-installation of authority at the denouement of a comedy, in spite of the return of the master of the household. Lovewit, instead of punishing his servant, enjoys the fruits of the misappropriated wealth and even gets married to the wealthy widow, whose brother Face had contrived to cheat. Face/Jeremy’s continued unapologetic presence within the household, and the financial power he is left with, destabilizes the promise of order.

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very much in tune with the unpunished tricksters of Bruno and Erasmus. On the contrary, in his epilogic conclusion to the play, Face summarizes how he was able to get the better of all the other characters of the play in what Robert Weimann calls a platea moment.\textsuperscript{211} He directly addresses the audience and says:

My part a little fell in this last scene,
Yet ’twas decorum. And though I am clean
Got off, from Subtle, Surly, Mammon, Dol,
Hot Ananias, Dapper, Druger, all
With whom I traded; yet I put myself
On you, that are my country and this pelf,
Which I have got, if you do quit me, rests
To feast you often, and invite new guests.

Though The Alchemist adheres to all the Classical precepts of formal construction and is self-professedly decorous, this meta-theatrical moment is the key to the comedic, and by extension the commercial potential of the play. Face ensures the entertainment of his audience, who are urged to witness the theatricality of the swindling practices of mountebanks that were aplenty in the newly urbanized London, as the various enactments against swindlers and records of court cases prove. Though Jonson’s is a later work, sixteenth and seventeenth century ballads, coney-catching pamphlets, plays and poems often reference charlatans, many of whom often go unpunished, as Jonson’s own experiences testify. Drummond in Informations notes that Jonson had himself cheated a woman by impersonating “an old astrologer in the suburbs”: “and it was

himself disguised in a long gown and white beard in the light of a dim-burning candle, up in a little cabinet reached unto by a ladder.”  

While the conclusion of the play accentuates the subject of charlatanism and the internal threat that it poses, Face’s nudge to the audience, invites them to be not just spectators but also actors in the process of the enactment. In this moment, Jonson conscientiously departs from the Classical dictates of theatrical conventions so that he can fulfill the pedantic function of the author that classicists advocated, a role which he took seriously. His plays, notes Donaldson, “prompt and guide his audiences’ responses to his work through prologues, epilogues, choruses, inductions, epistles, and specially inserted or appended scenes; to point out beauties, novelties, precedents, and authorial intentions.” Jonson, then, reconsiders the classical strictures in destabilizing the classical comedic closure, in the concluding epistle of The Alchemist in the interest of the contemporaneous appeal of the play, and the urgency of the threat of the charlatan in London. The platea moments of Jonson’s comedies, where he exhibits awareness of the theatrical space, are places where he intends to not only guide the audience’s reaction, but also the crucial moments where he takes up the educational role of the author that the classical masters conscientiously cultivated. Early modern Aristotelians like Sir Philip Sidney believed that the author had to fulfill the social role of a teacher. In An Apology for Poetry, Sidney argues that literature is essentially educational in nature, providing a lesson even as it delights, and is therefore able to convey the educational element in a more effective manner in comparison to the disciplines of either philosophy or history. Jonson takes this role seriously and seems willing to

212 Ian Donaldson, Ben Jonson: A Life (op. cit.), p. 61.

213 Ibid., p. 19.
make concessions for the subject at the expense of letting go of what is apparently decorous. No rules should be so binding as to obscure the subject matter, according to Jonson:

A man should so deliver himselfe to the nature of the subject, whereof hee speaks, that his hearer may take knowledge of his discipline with some delight: and so apparell faire, and good matter, that the studious of elegancy be not defrauded; redeeme Arts from their rough, and braky seates, where they lay hid, and over-growne with thornes, to a pure, open, and flowery light: where they take eye and be taken by hand...I know Nothing can conduce more to letters, then to examine the writings of the Ancients, and not to rest in their sole Authority, or to take all upon trust from them; provided the plagues of Judging, and Pronouncing against them, be away; such as are enuy, bitternesse, precipitation, impudence, and scurrile scoffing. For to all the observations of the Ancients, wee have our owne experience: which, if wee will use, and apply, we have better meanes to pronounce. It is true they open’d the gates, and made the way that went before us; but as Guides, not Commanders... 214

Jonson’s reverence for the classical traditions of dramaturgy then is tempered by his need to convey the extent of the menace that charlatans pose most effectively, and to reach out to his audience. In this chapter, I have illustrated that intellectuals write about charlatanism because of their concern about the popular misappropriation of scholarship by greedy pretenders, which earns genuine scholars a bad repute. Jonson, Bruno, et al address the lay person, and ask him to be wary of the confidence trickster, because he is liable to be duped by the latter’s shenanigans.

214 Ben Jonson, Timber: or Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter: As they have flow’d out of his daily readings; or had their reflux to his peculiar Notion of the Times, London, 1641, (The Bodley Head Ltd.: London, 1923), p. 9.
In their plays therefore, those professing false knowledge – Manfurio and Face, get to speak the final words in the epilogue, thereby assuming narrative authority. In the case of *The Alchemist*, Face’s wink to the audience members serves to emphasize their complicity in being gulled even as they willingly participate in the enactment of their own duping in the course of the theatrical production. Jonson, like his predecessors, Erasmus and Bruno disregards the rules of a classical closure, and gives authority to the voice of the swindler to bring home the inherent threat of charlatanism in the city London.
Chapter 4

“The Devil is an Ass”: The Devil as an Early Modern London Mountebank

The initiation of the Honorable Nicholas Raynton as the mayor of London in 1632 was celebrated in a pageant titled *Londini Artium & Scientiarum Scaturigo. Or, Londons Fountaine of Arts and Sciences*, written by Thomas Heywood. *Scaturigo* was typical of the spectacular annual pageants held in late October for celebrating the inauguration of the office of the new Lord Mayor, as he sailed on the Thames for his investiture at Westminster Abbey. The texts of these shows were written by successful professional playwrights, including Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker, Anthony Munday, Thomas Heywood, John Taylor and John Webster.\(^{215}\) With its rich classical allusions, *Scaturigo* presents London as the reservoir of erudition. Significantly, the longer title of the play prominently includes the information that “all the charge and expense of the laborious projects both by water and land,” are “the sole undertaking of the Right Worshipfull Company of the Haberdashers.” Raynton, a member of the company of haberdashers, was among a long list of London mayors, who were chosen from among the members of merchant guilds. It is crucial to note here that London was administered by the merchant guilds, and the often very elaborate and expensive pageants, seemingly unmindful of the essentially Christian virtues of frugality and simplicity, were funded by the various guilds. These shows glorified the city as chiefly a center of learning, rather than simply a commercial

polis. This celebration of prosperity in the pageants was the key to the construction of the myth of London as the new Troy, but one that was meant to remain standing. Travelers to England, like Horatio Busino from Padua and Thomas Platter from Basel, for example, have left journals that highlight the commercial as well as cultural aspects of the city. In his lucid depiction of the vibrant city culture, Platter assiduously highlights the brisk trade that takes place both within the city and internationally:

Most of the inhabitants are employed in commerce; they buy, sell and trade in all the corners of the globe, for which purpose the water serves them well, since ships from France, the Netherlands, Germany and other countries land in this city, bringing goods with them and loading others in exchange for exportation.

On the other hand, humanists recognize London as a cultural center, its material prosperity providing an ideal abode for the confluence of intellectuals. In his letter to John Colet, on 12 June, 1506, Erasmus articulates precisely this aspect of the city:

...there is no land on earth which, even over its whole extent, has brought me so many friends, or such true, scholarly, helpful, and distinguished ones, graced by every kind of good quality, as the single city of London.

The city, because of its commercial prosperity, is able to play a vital role in the furtherance of scholarship by extending patronage to centers of learning and enabling intellectual collaborations. Humanists astutely recognize mercantile prosperity of the city as the key to the

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stability of legislative, judicial, and even religious institutions. John Colet and Thomas More, both London citizens, were members of the powerful Company of Mercers. They wielded enormous intellectual influence, and at the same time were deeply involved in the commercial aspect of the city. More, especially, excelled in both diplomatic and commercial negotiations. “As early as 1511 More was reported to be meeting frequently with the Chancellor and was speaking for the guilds before the House of Lords and the Bishop of Norwich...” More’s involvement with the city becomes apparent in his writings as well. His Utopia is geographically similar to England, and the civic administration of its chief city, Amaurot, very similar to that of London, but one that “resolves the contradictions of contemporary England.” Material London, ca. 1600, edited by Lena Cowen Orlin amply demonstrates that an understanding of London as an urban, commercial metropolis provides a historically more accurate picture than isolated discussions of Shakespeare, or the royalty. Humanists were more invested in the everyday realities of material life than what most of early modern literary criticism seems to be engrossed in. “By identifying England’s renascent culture with the urban sphere of London,

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220 Ibid., p. 31. Hythloday, who describes Utopia praises Amaurot and tells More that “its eminence is acknowledged by the other cities, which send representatives to the annual meeting there...” Amaurot is sustained by the river Anyder, which is utilized in a manner similar to the way in which London makes use of the Thames. Sir Thomas More, Utopia, translated and ed. by Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 37.

Erasmus was implicitly reinforcing the common connection between the literary and pedagogical ideals of humanism and its civic aims and bias...,” points out Lawrence Manley.²²²

Scaturigo does indeed highlight how material prosperity must necessarily precede cultural and intellectual advancement:

How many Grammer schooles have beene by her and her indulgent children erected...to the propagation and advancement of Learning, to the furnishing of the Accademies with Students, and from them, the foure flourishing Kingdomes...with profound Theologists, expert Philistines, learned Philosophers, skilfull Mathemati[...]ians...
²²³

The merchant guilds not only commissioned and approved of pageants that eulogized the intellectual life of London, but they also created histories and genealogies of poets and intellectuals, who were the residents of London. “The Great Chronicle of London, probably compiled “for the honour of this Cittie”...by Robert Fabyan, linked the names of several younger contemporaries – Skelton, William Cornish, and Thomas More – with those of Ralph Strode, Gower, Chaucer, and Usk, in order to claim for London an illustrious succession of “poettis of...fame.””²²⁴ Both the merchants and the scholars recognized the reciprocal relationship between the institutions of learning, and those of commerce, and the forum of London enabled this relationship. Merchant guilds recognized that it was important to enhance the reputation of

²²² Manley, Literature and Culture (op. cit.) p. 28.

²²³ Thomas Heywood, Londini Artium & Scientiarum Scaturigo. Or, Londons Fountaine of Arts and Sciences Exprest in sundry triumphs, pageants, and showes, at the initiation of the Right Honorable Nicholas Raynton into the Maiorty of the famous and farre renowned city London. All the charge and expense of the laborious projects both by water and land, being the sole undertaking of the Right Worshipfull Company of the Haberdashers. London, 1632. Source: EEBO

²²⁴ Manley, Literature and Culture (op.cit.), p. 27.
London as a center of learning to attract international trade. Humanist scholars, on the other hand, also understood that the success of commercial ventures was the key to the advancement of the institutions, including royal, legal and educational ones, they were so invested in.

In this chapter, I emphasize humanist investment in the commercial aspects of London, and my reading of Ben Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) is informed by an understanding of the reciprocity between intellectual and commercial enterprises. Humanists, though ambiguous about the underlying morality of some of these commercial ventures, support them nonetheless. So the devil, inextricably associated with certain kinds of economic malpractices, has to be made into an active but ineffectual participant within the polis – a domesticated presence, rather than simply the moral scourge of medieval literary representations. In spite of his ludicrous representations, given Christ’s unequivocal victory in the cosmic antagonism with him, the medieval stage devil represented a potent threat to mankind. He provided a condemnatory comment on the corruption of man, rather than participate along with him in corrupt activities.

The incorporation of the early modern devil within the economic system is an inevitable result of the shift in perception of morality because of the exigencies of newly revised business conventions, and his defeat signifies the movement towards the secularization of the very institutions that humanists were taught to cherish. In his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5), Weber argues that Protestantism was a secularizing force that legitimized the accumulation of wealth for investment, which ultimately fostered capitalism.\(^\text{225}\)

The defeat of the devil in the early modern London of Jonson’s play signals this shift towards

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secularization, as commercial interests take precedence over moral censure of economic ventures. The chief humanist concern, as I have strenuously argued in chapters one and two, was the preservation and perpetration of institutional authority, and as I have argued in chapter three, the acknowledgement of the validity of humanist knowledge, in spite of its various misappropriations. The conception of the humanist scholar inhered in contradictions – as the peripherally situated intellectual, as well as one who was deeply entrenched within educational, legislative and judicial institutions. In this chapter, I shift my focus to the humanist conception of these institutions within their urban commercial context.

In the opening scene of The Devil is an Ass, the vice Iniquity conjures up the imaginary space of London within the confines of the theatrical space. Landmarks like Tottenham Court, Whitechapel, the Royal Exchange, Custom House, Westminster Hall, referred to by Iniquity highlight the various ways – legal, social, and commercial – in which London had become the seat of corruption. This corruption is not just tolerated but also normalized as a response to and in conjunction with the redefinition of the urban material culture. The understanding of the inevitability of corruption, in part, initiates the secularization of the devil, as he is incorporated in the corrupt commercial culture of the city. In Jonson’s play, the minor devil Pug, who had intended to spread moral scourge is ineffectual and his failure “becomes an index of a whole society’s trivializing of evil and abandonment of moral and theological standards.”

The Early Modern devil of popular literature, following the tradition of the devil of the Morality plays, is a comic character – much like a charlatan – his shenanigans ranging from farcical to pathetic. He is Nashe’s corrupt merchant in Pierce Penilesse (1592), one who conducts the brisk business of

lending money on the surety of human souls, so that he can increase his dominion of “Hel”, which is as prosperous as the newly-urbanized London. The redefinition of the devil’s role as a cheating trader and money lender, the down-playing of his erstwhile role as the anti-Christ, and his normalization within the economic structure is essential within an emergent urban culture. Fun-loving seventeenth century stage devils, as in the anonymously authored *Merry Devil of Edmonton* (1608), and Thomas Dekker’s *If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is in It* (1612), both of which Jonson acknowledges, conjure the festive atmosphere of hell only in order to condemn corruption. These plays follow the Morality trope of punishing corruption and rewarding the morally good. The presence of the devil in Jonson’s play, in contrast, does not accompany any moral commentary, or even punishment of the obviously culpable. Instead, it ends with an ignominious exit of the devil. The defeat of Jonson’s devil represents the secularization of the urban space. This in turn legitimizes mercantile practices like usury, which were previously thought to be inherently sinful. Absorbed in the new urban matrix, the devil becomes more of a participant than a threat. In Jonson’s play, with its Plautine sensibilities, the minor devil, Pug, unable to better the machinations of the morally dubious characters of the play, in spite of his connivances, finds himself incarcerated at Newgate along with petty criminals, in order to be punished by the civic authorities.

Jonson’s involvement with what the city represents is akin to many of his scholarly precedents, and contemporaries, including Thomas More (1478-1535) and Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). Though not strictly a humanist since he did not formally attend university, Jonson was not only well-read in humanist texts, but was also well acquainted with scholars, as I have illustrated.

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in chapter three, and he shared some of the humanist concerns regarding art, as is testified by
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Timber: Or Discoveries*, where he makes scholarly observations on classical authors and
authorship.\(^{228}\) A conscientious author, Jonson, with his Aristotelian sensibilities believes in a
faithful depiction of life, and emphasizes that the

true Artificer will not run away from nature, as hee were afraid of her, or depart
from life, and the likeness of Truth; but speake to the capacity of his hearers.\(^{229}\)

While *The Devil is an Ass* foregrounds the predicament of the devil, it is actually a commentary
on London – its material prosperity, its inhabitants and its vices. In this play Jonson illustrates his
engagement with the urban culture, and the travails of the devil serve as a comment on the
changing commercial scenario of the city of London, and the revision in the traditional
perception of evil that these changes compel. While historical analyses of the play have
emphasized that it contextualizes itself within its political context, with its many references to
events at the time of its authorship, I shift my focus to discuss the locus of its authorship – the
moral and material context of the city.

Leah Marcus and Robert C. Evans, for example, illustrate that the play is extensively
alludes to contemporary political and cultural events, and make an elaborate historical study of
the often-referenced Overbury case, in which Thomas Overbury was killed because of his loyalty
to Carr and his opposition of the latter’s marriage to Frances Howard.\(^ {230}\) I extend their analyses
to argue that the contemporaneous references in the play are not limited to specific events, but

\(^{228}\) Ben Jonson, *Timber: Or Discoveries, Made upon Men and Matter: As they have flow’d out of his daily
Readings; or had their refluxe to his peculiar Notion of the Times*, London, 1641 (London: The Bodley Head, 1923).

\(^{229}\) Ibid, p. 33.
the overall political, religious, judicial, and especially commercial atmosphere of early
seventeenth century London. Jonson specifically situates the play in London, and sets the tone by
a picturesque description of its commercial centers, brings to attention the city itself, and
emphasizes that there was a gradual shift of focus from the aristocrats to the merchants. As the
commercial culture gains more prominence, it becomes possible for the materially well-off to
acquire aristocratic titles and privileges. Though he is foolish to do so, the redefined material
sphere allows social mobility, and makes it possible for the squire Fabian Fitzdottrel to aspire to
the title of the “Duke of Drowned Lands.”

As the focus shifts from the aristocracy to the merchants as the emerging class with
financial as well as executive power, buildings like the Royal Exchange become the center of
attention. Not only are the merchants the ones to wield financial power, merchant guilds become
responsible for the civic administration of London. Lawrence Manley traces the history of
London administration to the consolidation of the Twelve Great Livery Companies (1523-38).
The Lord Mayor, and the Court of Aldermen (the wealthiest of London to hold office for life),
which was London’s chief governing body was invariably chosen from among the members of
these guilds. The importance of the position of the Lord Mayor, especially, cannot be
emphasized enough – upon the death of the monarch, he became the highest ranking officer of
the kingdom, since all offices were held in abeyance at the time of the sovereign’s death.231

230 Robert C. Evans, “Contemporary Contexts of Jonson’s The Devil is an Ass,” in Comparative Drama, Vol. 26.,

231 Manley, Literature and Culture in Early Modern London (op. cit.), p. 29.
“London,” concludes Manley, “was thus a self-governing merchant community, with its own laws, police, courts, militia, and welfare system.”

The extravagance of the pageants, in fact, put on display the economic power of the guilds, in the same way that the opulence of royal entertainments and public progresses displayed regal power. This was important to perpetrate and enhance the complex web of newly-emergent economic relations that sustained London, redefined its geographical position, and made it into a metropolis. Thomas Milles highlights the changing commercial aspect of London in *The Customer’s Alphabet* (1608):

> Our trades do meet in Companies, our Companies at halls, and our halls become monopolies of freedom, tied to London: where all our crafts and Mysteries are so laid up together, that outrunning all the wisdom and prudence of land, men live by trades they never learned, nor seek to understand. By means whereof, all our creeks seek to join one river, all our rivers run to one port, all our ports join to one town, all our towns make but one city, and all our cities but suburbs to one vast, unwieldy and disorderly Babel of buildings, which the world calls London.

Rhetorically, London here is made akin to Rome, as the metropolitan confluence of the people of different nations – an aspect that both Thomas Platter and Busino also highlight. In *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner argues that the rapid urbanization, open markets, greater social

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232 Ibid., p. 3.

233 Richard Halpern, in *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) writes, “the power of sovereignty works primarily by making itself visible; it promulgates and extends itself through public progresses, entertainments, and propaganda, on the one hand, and overt force or threats of force on the other.”, p. 3.


mobility, and “sustained, frequent...communication between strangers” are the pre-requisites for the formation of nation-states.235 “London,” with its facilities for exchange and recombination and its varied and mobile population, “by birth for the most part a mixture of all the countries” of the realm, was not only the underpinning of the new Tudor state, but also the place where the possibilities of an English nation were most visible, “the spectacle of the whole realm whereof all other cities and places take example.”236 The newly-conceptualized, diverse urban landscape of London enforces a fresh set of hierarchies based on the commercial practices that contribute to the stability of social structures. The economic practices that would at an earlier time or in a non-urban context provoke condemnation are now legitimized, so that alternate hierarchies can be maintained.

While on the one hand London is the idealized locus for merchants, Jonson critiques London, as Gail Kern Paster argues, “as a predatory trap,” which is “shadowed by conflict.”237 It is extremely important to note here that in spite of every conceivable kind of corruption depicted in *The Devil is an Ass*, none of the swindlers are punished at the end of the play. Jonson, otherwise conscientious about meting out punishment in his earlier plays, displays a gradual tolerance towards moral miscreants. In *Volpone* (1605-6), Volpone is stripped of all his zealously guarded worldly possessions, and faces public censure. In *The Alchemist*, (1610) while the main swindler, Face, goes unpunished, and indeed ends up richer, and with a more consolidated position in his master Lovewit’s household, as I have demonstrated in chapter three, his accomplices, Dol and Subtle flee, leaving behind their immediate gains, but remain free to ply

their trades elsewhere. In comparison, there are no apparent consequences for the cozeners in *The Devil is an Ass*. This is because, in spite of their dubious motives, the spirit of enterprise that Merecraft and Engine represent was indispensible to the growth of urban London. Though seemingly fantastic, the reclamation of land ("drowned lands") was a common practice, and for the success of such seemingly bizarre schemes, the Fitzdottrels of London needed to make speculative investments. Justice therefore could not possibly penalize those who would ultimately benefit the city.

Irrespective of the workings of the devil, every kind of vice finds a place in the play. It begins with the minor devil, Pug’s ambitious plan to wreck havoc in London, a plan of which Satan is skeptical. The subsequent plot justifies Satan’s skepticism about Pug’s efficacy in London. In spite of Satan’s warning, after Pug takes up employment with Fitzdottrel, a greedy, uxorious, eccentric and foolish squire, he finds that his employer covets a cloak that Wittipol possesses. Wittipol, who wishes to seduce Fitzdottrel’s wife, agrees to give Fitzdottrel the cloak if the latter allows him to converse with Mistress Fitzdottrel for fifteen minutes. Meanwhile Fitzdottrel asks his wife to be silent during the conversation. When Wittipole finds that Mistress Fitzdottrel would not speak with him, he answers for her and succeeds in impressing her. On the other hand, Merecraft, preys upon Fitzdottrel’s greed and tempts him with many schemes, apparently bizarre, but ones which promise easy wealth. Of these, the one that most entices Fitzdottrel is the project of raising "drowned land" – reclaiming swamps for agricultural use being a widely used practice of the time. Merecraft convinces Fitzdottrel that this scheme, besides yielding large financial gains, will also enable him to be elevated to peerage as the Duke

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of Drowned Lands. In anticipation of social mobility, Fitzdottrel also agrees to hire a “Spanish
woman” – Mererack’s accomplice in disguise – to train Lady Fitzdottrel in courtly manners.
Wittipole manages to impersonate this “Spanish woman” so that he can have easy access to
Mistress Fitzdottrel. Meanwhile, Pug, who wants to engineer a situation in which Mistress
Fitzdottrel cheats on her husband, is mistaken by her as one employed by her jealous husband to
keep watch on her. In this confusion, she complains against Pug, who is beaten up by Fitdottrel
on his wife’s insistence. Mistress Fitzdottrel, taking advantage of her proximity to Wittipole in
disguise, comes close to cheating on Fitzdottrel. Pug, instead of encouraging the situation,
thwarts it so that he can prevent her amorous felicity. Since by now Wittipole has a chance to
witness the virtuous nature of Mistress Fitzdottrel, he helps her take charge of her husband’s
estate so that the latter cannot squander his wealth on fruitless schemes. In her discussion of the
play, Helen Ostovich argues that in choosing to remain chaste, though not necessarily silent or
obedient, Frances Fitzdottrel presents an agency that few women were thought to possess.238
Wittipole’s sympathy towards Frances Fitzdottrel is an example of the blurring of the boundary
between unadulterated good and unqualified evil. “Jonson’s mature comedies had been [able] to
create an urban environment where vice is indistinguishable from virtue, argues David Riggs in
his biography of Jonson.239 Outraged at having lost control over his estates, Fitzdottrel, on
Meercraft’s instigation goes to the court of Paul Eitherside, and pretends to be bewitched by his
wife. In the meantime, Pug, who is incarcerated at the Newgate prison on false charges, has to
summon Satan, who has to rescue him from prison by blasting a wall of Newgate. Unnerved at

238 Helen Ostovich, “Hell for Lovers: Shades of Adultery in The Devil is an Ass” in Refashioning Ben Jonson:
Gender Politics and the Jonsonian Canon, edited by Julie Sanders, with Kate Chedzgoy and Susan Wiseman

having discovered Pug’s true identity, and much to the chagrin of Merecraft, Fitzdottrel reveals his deception, and Mistress Fitzdottrel’s reputation is redeemed. In the end, surprisingly, though all the characters are present in a court of justice, no punishments are meted out, as the judicial machinery stands a mute witness to all the deception. In spite of all the swindling, the play can hardly be “the further adventures of Face and Subtle,” as Anne Barton calls it, since there is no censure at all for moral laxity.\textsuperscript{240} The lack of judicial, moral and social censure is characteristic of a city, which is able to forgive much more than a small rural community is willing to overlook. It is inevitable then, that the devil, earlier thought to be able to wreck havoc with the help of a vice, in the now obsolete context of the Morality plays, becomes ineffective in the city. Even though he remains a potent threat in the rural sphere – in Edmonton, for example – the city has no space for him and so he has to make an ignominious exit. The ineffectuality of the devil in the urban context of the play is not merely a choric comment on the corruption of the city. On the contrary, the defeat of the devil is necessary because commercial practices (like usury that \textit{The Merchant of Venice} condemns so strongly, for example) which were earlier considered sinful had to be appropriated and normalized.

The secularization, even the domestication, of the devil (employed as he is as a servant in the Fitzdottrel household) is ideologically essential in the context of a growing urban economy. He no longer wields the power that can intimidate an unsuspecting person, like Elizabeth Sawyer. He has to depend on his wits to get the better of humans. The devil, then, gradually transforms into more of a secular character, not only in Jonson’s play, but also in earlier literary forms. The devil is Thomas Nashe’s corrupt merchant, for example, in \textit{Pierce Penilesse}, rather than a theological scourge. While literary depictions of the devil were often funny, and he was

often perceived as a swindler, out to cheat the unsuspecting man to part with his soul, as I have illustrated in the records of witchcraft cases in chapter two, the devil’s defeat in Jonson’s play is not brought about conscientiously by the efforts of other characters of the play, or by moral and religious uprightness. In a newly-Protestant country, the devil was often presented to be on the Catholic side, and the defeat of the devil signified the unwavering faith of the Protestant man. In an anonymous anti-Catholic pamphlet titled, *A wonderful relation of a strange appearance of the devil; in the shape of a Lion* addressed to a Popish novice near Hertfordshire, and published in London, the author narrates the tribulations of a certain Michael Beynon, who was on his way to take up the position of a tutor within a Catholic knight’s household. Before he visits the knight, however, he is forced to take up residence in an inn. There for three consecutive nights, the devil visits him variously as a light, a beautiful child and as a lion. The first two nights he calls upon the Virgin Mary and all the saints, but on the third,

when he was so sorely pressed upon, and had no relief from his Prayers, his heart failed him, and he cried out to *Jesus Christ* for Help and Deliverance, so that after a little time he had the confidence, that he told the LION (the DEVIL) that he should have no power over him, neither should he stay until daylight; He further told him, if he had anything to do with any Sinner, let him do it, for *Jesus Christ* had pardoned his Sins...Thus he continued until morning, then the Appearances left him, according to his expectation. After his deliverance out of the paw of this *Lion*, he burn’d his Pardons and his Beads; and at his return he burn’d a Book, much
esteemed by him before, which is affirmed that he himself brought from Rome, and
entirely renounc’d the Communion of the Whore of Babylon.\textsuperscript{241}

Pug, however, has no such agency. In fact, the devil goes unacknowledged throughout
Jonson’s play, and his actions are at best peripheral to the plot. Even the mischievous, but
defeated devil, Belphagor, the eponymous of Machiavelli’s story (sixteenth century), who
assumes the name Roderigo, and like Jonson’s Pug, aspires to wreck havoc. Matteo, a poor
laborer acknowledges Roderigo’s potential power, and has to exercise utmost intelligence in
order to get the better of him. The devil, Belphagor is sent to earth to ascertain if the misery of
the greater part of mankind can be attributed to their wives. He starts living in Florence with the
assumed name of Roderigo, and marries Onesta, who is from a poor but well reputed family. The
recipient of much indulgence from Roderigo, Onesta develops bad temper and along with her
family manages to squander much of Roderigo’s wealth. Roderigo escapes and finds refuge with
Matteo, a laborer, whom he promises to make rich because of his hospitality. Twice Roderigo
possesses the daughters of noblemen, but with the approach of Matteo, leaves the bodies of the
women, who are cured. This brings Matteo riches as well as the reputation of being an able
exorcist. Roderigo then advises Matteo to keep out of his way. But the king of France sends for
Matteo, when Roderigo possesses the princess, and enjoins upon him to cure his daughter on the
threat of death. Roderigo, predictably is much peeved when he sees Matteo. The latter however,
is able to chase away Roderigo telling him that the latter’s wife is in the vicinity and on a look

\textsuperscript{241} A wonderful relation of a strange appearance of the devil; in the shape of a Lion, To a Popish Novice, not far from Redborn in Hertfordshire (London, Printed in the year 1680). No pp. numbers.
out for him. 242 “Belphagor,” however, recognizes the efficacy of the devil, and the battle of wits between Matteo and Roderigo is very much in tune with traditional ideas on demonology, and the generic requirements of the Morality tradition, where only the morally astute man is able to save himself from the mischief of the devil. In this context, the defeat of the devil in fact underlines man’s piousness.

Jonson is well aware of his literary precedents, yet, in his play the devil is truly powerless. 243 Ironically, Fabian Fitzdottrel, who wants to conjure the devil so that he can access hidden treasures, pointedly refuses to acknowledge the authenticity of the devil he unwittingly employs in the beginning of the play. The devil, according to Fitzdottrel, ought to have cloven hooves. But, Pug, who uses the body of a dead thief, has a very human presence, which is contrary to Fitzdottrel’s ideas, which he possibly gleans from popular grimoire literature. The idea that one could obtain wealth with the help of spirits one conjured up, was not an uncommon one in early modern culture. The Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits, etc. 1577-83 [Folger MS Vb26], a typical early modern grimoire that makes a list of all the spirits that one might conjure up and their various functions. The spirit Annabath, who is attributed the power to grant hidden treasures to his conjurer, is described as follows:

This spirit is vnder Eym kinge of the North, & is one of the 12 noblest of his nomber, his office is to make one marvalous cunninge in necromancie & to showe hidd treasure & to tell whoe are the keepers, & if he or they be of the North he can


243 For a detailed discussion on Jonson’s acknowledgement of the history of the genres that he writes in, refer to Ben Jonson and the Politics of Genre, edited by A. D. Cousins and Alison V. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
drive them awaye. He can tell of divers straunge thinge & appeareth like an armed knighte.²⁴⁴

Pug’s ordinary looks do not impress Fitzdottrel, since grimoires popularly provide a fantastic images of the conjured spirits. Unlike the devil in *Doctor Faustus*, Jonson’s devil does not have a choice of assuming a pleasing shape. He has to make do with whatever is available to him and only what his ingenuity can afford – the discarded body of a hanged thief, and stolen clothes.

Though the idea of the devil and the possibility of conjuring him for personal benefits was part of popular lore, the devil no longer remains central everyday life. Moreover, while devilry is parenthetically present in the opening and closing scenes of the play, the role of the devil as well as his presence on the stage is minimal, and conscientiously so. In the early modern context, as I illustrate in chapter two, the devil hardly has any agency at all. Indeed it would have been heretical to concede any agency to the devil within theological discourses. All of the devil’s actions, even the apparently evil ones, were thought to be part of an inscrutable divine scheme. In the record, which notes the proceedings of the trial of Phillip and Margaret Flower, indicted for witchcraft, the author concludes that “the Diuell is the mere seruant and agent of God, to prosecute whatsoeuer hee shall command rather than giue leaue unto; limiting him yet thus farre in his own nature, that he can go no further then the bounds within which he is hedged.”²⁴⁵

The concept of the devil then, has to be renegotiated and redefined within its context – the newly apprehended commercial space of urban London. This is a space that provides infinite

²⁴⁴ *The Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits, etc.* 1577-83 [Folger MS Vb26], Folio 168 (transcription mine).

opportunities of education. Gilthead, the goldsmith, a successful tradesman of London, in *The Devil is an Ass*, tells his son Plutarchus that the latter will learn more as a London apprentice to Sir Paul Etherside than at universities:

Here i’ the town; and dwelling, son, with him

You shall learn that in a year, shall be worth twenty

Of having stayed you at Oxford, or at Cambridge,

Or sending you to the Inns of Court, or France. (III, i, 5-8)

Given the increasing importance of the city of London, the theatre also began to appropriate the representation of London. Jean Howard points out that while prior to 1598, plays like *Richard III*, and *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* had some scenes set in the city, in *Englishmen for my Money* (1598) by William Haughton, and the early comedies of Ben Jonson, “did not treat London as an abstract landscape populated with allegorical figures, nor did they set the occasional scene within the city; rather they luxuriated in “place realism”, that is, in the depiction of a particular cityscape and its contemporary inhabitants.” In her discussion of Haughton’s *Englishmen for my Money*, the “first English comedy that we know of to dramatize a number of specifically named London spaces, such as the Exchange, St. Paul’s, and various streets and neighborhoods,” Crystal Bartolovich points out that the play “deviates from earlier plays in the representation of London’s extant topography as enacted space,” and argues that the theatrical depiction of the prominent locations of London facilitates the normalization of

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changing spatial relations within the city. The Devil is an Ass begins with a faithful depiction of the confusing commerciality of London, as the Vice Iniquity leads Pug along with the audience through easily recognized landmarks of the city.

From the top of Paul’s steeple to the Standard in Cheap:
And lead thee a dance through the streets without fail,
Like a needle of Spain, with a thread at my tail.
We will survey the suburbs, and make forth our sallies
Sown Petticoat Lane, and up the Smock Alleys,
To Shoreditch, Whitechapel, and so to Saint Katherine’s,
To drink with the Dutch there, and take forth their patterns.
From thence we will put in at Custom House Quay there,
And see how the factors and prentices play there
False with their masters; and geld many a full pack,
To spend it in pies at the Dagger, and the Woolsack...
...I will bring thee to the bawds and the roisters,
At Billingsgate, feasting with claret wine, and oysters,
From thence shoot the bridge, child, to the Cranes i’the Vintry,
And see there the gimlets, how they make their entry!
Or if thou hadst rather, to the Strand down to fall
’Gainst the lawyers come dabbled from Westminster Hall,
And mark how they cling with their clients together,

Like ivy to oak, so velvet to leather – ... (I, i, 56-75)

Iniquity ironically begins at Paul’s steeple, the central locus of London as well as the monument celebrating English Protestantism, from where he flits to various locations of London, juxtaposing the disreputable locales of Petticoat Lane, Shoreditch, and Whitechapel – all notorious for their prostitutes, with the commercial and judicial centers – Custom House Quay, a building used for the collection of customs duties, therefore epitomizing international trade and Westminster Hall, where the law courts were located, including the King’s Bench, the Court of Common Pleas, and the Court of Chancery. Iniquity shows Pug an all-inclusive urban culture, which incorporates even poor apprentices and cheating employees, who are barely able to make a living. Isabella Whitney’s London is not corrupt either, but a cornucopia, harboring different social classes.\textsuperscript{248} Though pecuniary circumstances force out of the city, her “cheap English language, black letter octavo not only invites a far broader readership, but it depicts utopia as a claim on the city by the dispossessed, like her persona, from below, declaring to them that the city could be “at your wyll.””\textsuperscript{249}

Iniquity, in fact is the basis of an urban set-up, whose diversity extends to the audience of Jonson’s play. The microcosmic theatrical world that symbolically contains the corruptions of London had attracted much criticism, mostly because it was thought to abet debauchery. Conscientious playwrights, however, saw the theatrical culture as a hallmark of London and crucial to its identity. In An Apology for Actors (1612), Thomas Heywood writes:


Now if you aske me why were not the Theaters as gorgeously built in all other Cities of Italy as Rome? And why are not Play-houses maintained as well in other Cities of England, as London? My answere is: it is not meet euery meane Esquire should carry the part belonging to one of the Nobility, or for a Noble-man to vsurp the estate of a Prince. Rome was a Metropolis a place whither all the nations knowne under the Sunne, resorted: so is London, and being to receiue all Estates, all Princes, all Nations, therefore to affoord them all choyce of pastimes, sports, and recreations.250

While the theatrical culture was seen as deeply entrenched in the identification of London as a metropolis, as Heywood claims, the theater attracted and was dependant for its existence on the same cross-section of the London populace that it chose to critique. Indeed Jonson solicits the approbation of the audience in the prologue to the play. In the meta-theatrical moment of the epilogue, Jonson underlines the essentially commercial venture of playwriting, and that the success of the play determines the playwright’s sustenance.

Thus the projector here is overthrown.

But I have now a project of my own,

If it may pass: that no man would invite

The poet from us to sup forth tonight,

If the play please. If it displeasant be,

We do presume that no man will: nor we.

In spite of the learned nature of the playwright, or the litterateur, he is ultimately subject to the literary marketplace, and has to cater to popular demands so that he can achieve commercial success. The epilogue presents this vulnerability of the playwright, who can face complete impoverishment if he fails to please his audiences – the inhabitants of London, none of whom will ask him to supper if the play does not live up to their expectations. It is crucial to note here that the epilogue does not make a reference to the play but to the playwright. The prologue characteristically solicits the audience’s attention and enjoyment:

.....If you’ll come

To see new plays, pray you afford us room,
And show this but the same face you have done
Your dear delight, ‘The Devil of Edmonton’.
Or if, for want of room, it must miscarry,
’Twill be but justice that your censure tarry
Till you give some. And six times you ha’ seen’t,
If this play do not like, the devil is in’t. (Prologue, 19-26)

By the epilogue, however, this cheery optimism is replaced by a tentative hope of finding approbation for the critique of London and its denizens that the play presents. After having authored *The Devil is an Ass*, as Jonson finds a patron in King James I, he severs his connections with the playhouse with all its vagaries. David Riggs points out that for “the remaining decade of James’s reign, Jonson’s project would consist entirely of court masques, occasional poems, and scholarly works.”251 There are instances in the play where Jonson, the recipient of royal patronage, holds up and praises regal authority. In his biography of the playwright, Ian
Donaldson points out that in the final scene of *The Devil is an Ass*, Jonson applauds James I’s astuteness in pardoning five women accused of witchcraft – the people of the city are less vulnerable to the deception of the devil than the credulous country-folk.  

In the opening act of Jonson’s play, there is an elision between the loci of London and the stage, which indeed contains all that characterizes the city, including a cross section of its inhabitants. Given that injustice and depravity was characteristic to each of the locations that Iniquity and Pug visit, the Vice figure becomes theatrically redundant as he no longer needs to induce corruption among mankind. Pug, therefore, has to travel London by himself and use his ingenuity if he is to cause any mischief at all. Satan is skeptical about the success of Pug’s scheme from the very beginning. Satan does not doubt that Pug can have some effect in rural England, causing minor problems, leading to a possible witchcraft indictment, and the execution of poor, hapless women:

...You have some plot now  
Upon a tuning of ale, to stale the yeast,  
Or keep the churn so that the butter come not  
Spite o’ the housewife’s cord or her hot spit?  
Or some good ribibe about Kentish Town,  
Or Hoxton, you would hang now for a witch,  
Because she will not let you play around Robin?  
And you’l go sour the citizen’s cream ’gainst Sunday:  
That she may be accused for’t, and condemned

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251 David Riggs, *Ben Jonson* (op.cit.), p. 245.  
By a Middlesex jury....

...You would make, I think,

An agent to be sent, for Lancashire

Proper enough; or some parts of Northumberland...(I, i, 12-33)

The small, close-knit almost homogenous rural community, with a definite hierarchical structure, operates differently from a city, with its many centers of power. Village communities therefore allow for the efficacy of the devil. With Satan’s belief that Pug could have caused minor mischief in far-flung village communities, Jonson reveals an urbane skepticism similar to that of Reginald Scot’s regarding witchcraft accusations in rural England, where petty household problems become the focal point of discussions among the village community, and crave to be redressed, even if symbolically. In play written half a decade later, Thomas Dekker demonstrates a skepticism similar to Jonson’s about witchcraft indictments, which were chiefly directed towards poor, deformed women with no families. *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) is unequivocally sympathetic to Elizabeth Sawyer’s persecution. However, the acknowledgement of the disturbing presence of Dog, the embodiment of the devil, is necessary in the rural context of the play because Dekker is aware that village communities believe in the presence of the devil and the potency of his powers.

There are, however, too many hierarchical structures in a metropolis, as Iniquity illustrates – judicial, religious, commercial, theatrical, and monarchical. Given the many centers of power, there need be no special place for the operation of the supernatural. Indeed, as I have pointed out in chapter two, Elizabeth Sawyer, accused of and executed on charges of witchcraft, was imprisoned at Newgate (also Pug’s place of incarceration in the final act of the play), where petty criminals were usually confined. Pug’s subsequent experiences as a servant in Fitzdottrel
household makes him aware of his ineffectuality in the urban context, as his aspiration to be the
perpetrator of evil is thwarted. In the urban context, the devil can be acknowledged only within
its economic practices. L. C. Knights argues that “the play provides more than a succession of
satiric comments on the first period of intensive capitalistic activity in England; it formulates an
attitude towards acquisition.”

In his pamphlet, *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Diuell*, Nashe describes the
devil as a well-adjusted merchant, as corrupt as a growing economy would allow, as well as the
all-powerful ruler of hell, bartering material benefits for souls, so that he can populate hell:

> I was informed of late dayes, that a certaine blind retayler called the Diuell, vsed
to lend money vpon pawnes, or any thing, and would lette one for a neede haue a
thousand poundes vppon a Statute Merchant of his soule: or if a man plied him
thoroughly, would trust him vppon a Bill of his hande without any more
circumstance. Besides, he was noted for a priuy Benefactor to Traitors and
Parasites, and to advuance fooles and Asses far sooner than any, to be a greedy
pursuer of newes, and so famous a Politician in purchasing, that Hel (which at the
beginning was but an obscure Uillage) is now become a huge Cittie, whereunto all
Countries are tributary.

Nashe’s city of Hel is very similar to London, which was increasingly becoming important
especially in the international context, and its population had increased from 35,000 people in the
beginning of the sixteenth century, to about half a million in the late seventeenth century.

Nashe’s devil is very similar to London merchants, who besides being prosperous were also the

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Source: EEBO
patrons of poor artists and scholars. Driven by penury that is almost characteristic of a scholarly existence, Pierce goes in search of the devil because it “is the lamentable condition of our Times, that men of Arte must seeke almes of Cormorantes, and those that deserue best, be kept vnnder Dunces, who count it a policie to keepe them bare...” In spite of his devious practices, Nashe’s tone cannot be unequivocally condemnatory of the devil, since his protagonist, Pierce (a thinly disguised persona for Nashe) hopes to be benefitted by the latter because of his epistolary appeal for funds. Nashe, a university wit, having attended the University of Cambridge (1582-88), had enjoyed the favors bestowed on him by Lord Strange. Besides being aware of the impoverishment of scholars and their dependence on patronage, as his pamphlet illustrates, Nashe also conscientiously highlights the commercial value of his writing in the London literary marketplace. In this venture Nashe was extremely successful, as Pierce went through five editions in three years, and Nashe earned the nickname of Pierce among his admirers. In the pamphlet, Pierce’s search for the devil also leads him to important landmarks of London.

...to Westminster Hall I went, and made a search of Enquiry, from the blake gown to the buckram bagge, if there were any such Sergeant, Bencher, Counsellor, Attorney, or Pettifogger, as Signor Cornuto Diabolo, with the good face. But they al...affirmed, that he was not there: marry whether he were at the Exchange or no, amongst the rich Merchantes, that they could not tell: but it was likelier of the two, that I should meet with him, or heare of him at least in those quarters I faith....Without more circumstances, thither came I; and thrusting my selfe, as the

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manner is, ... I asked (as before) whether he were there extant or no? But from one to another, *Non noui Damonem* was all the answer I could get.

It is hardly a coincidence that the institutions visited by Pierce and Pug are the same ones – they encounter the legal hierarchies of the Westminster Hall and the international market of the Exchange – the seat of lawyers and merchants respectively. It is pertinent to note here that while law and mercantile practices, though both earlier associated with devilry, the devil cannot be found in seat of either of the professions, much to the chagrin of Pierce. Pierce, however, chances upon the devil, all of a sudden, as he walks through the London streets. While Pierce’s chance encounter testifies to the omnipresence of the devil, it also indicates that devilry gradually ceases to be associated with the kind of spiritual degeneration that *Doctor Faustus* presents. Instead, the devil becomes quite common, mingling with the common people and cozening them. This devil is even vulnerable to confinement and punitive actions, as we see in Jonson’s play.

Not only have some of the morally dubious practices been normalized within a re-defined understanding of material culture, the places that harbor these practices are made into institutions. The very buildings served to define London in its contemporary context. As Janet Dillon argues,

The Royal Exchange was not just a place for display; it was also a place of display. Though the necessity for a building was prompted at one level by the inconvenience of the Lombard Street arrangement, the conception of the building was not primarily functional but grounded in a different kind of necessity: the
need to construct a visible marker of the power and international prominence of London’s market.\textsuperscript{256}

Dillon further illustrates that the pageants, even the ones in honor of royalty were, in fact, invested in showcasing the majesty of the city, and in turn the contributions of the mercantile practices, since these pageants were funded by the merchant guilds. She argues that James I’s welcome pageant, authored by Dekker, (1604) was deferred so that London could be presented in its best glory to not only the king and royal coterie, but also to all who inhabited the city space of London – its citizens, the foreign merchants and visitors. While rhetorically the majesty of the city was posited as only a copy of that of the king’s, the former was indeed the focus of the pageant:

...the king himself was at once chief spectacle and chief spectator. The range of pageants aimed to include numerous specific groupings within the community and to celebrate especially symbolic locations across the city, its boundaries, its central streets and conduits, its institutions and monuments ancient and modern. The relatively new Royal Exchange, for example, is celebrated in a pageant organized by Dutch merchants...Though a general tendency to prioritize the king over the city is visible throughout the entertainment, the Sopher Lane End Pageant reveals an undertow of resistance to this from within the city, which bore responsibility for commissioning, sanctioning and paying for all the pageants

within its boundaries except the two erected by foreign merchants on this occasion.\textsuperscript{257}

The symbolic power of royalty, and the spectacle it presented was gradually subsumed by that of the city, to the extent that James I had to defer his royal display in the city pageant so that it would be perfect, and do justice to the aspirations of the merchant guilds that funded it. This is the city that nurtured humanist scholars, who, in turn expressed much support for the commercial venture, and demonic ingenuity came to be constructed as just one aspect of business, albeit one subject to humanist critique. For the city to receive foremost attention, the spectacle of the devil, like the spectacle of regal power, gradually diminished in proportion, and in this context the devil became ineffective, no more than a fetish object, to be “worn in a thumb-ring” (Prologue). The fire and brimstone wielding, soul-torturing, scourge spreading devil, is relegated to a myth of the pulpit. In the theatrical marketplace, he is reduced to being a trope to attract an audience – “the devil is in’t” (Prologue), even though his role is minimal and his bombast, possible only in the confines of Hell, is downsized to monosyllabic utterances in the play world of London.

\textsuperscript{257} Ibid., pp. 140-1.
Chapter 5

“I’ll drown my book”: Shakespeare’s Scholarly Duke of Milan

Niccolo Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (1513), originally dedicated to Giuliano de Medici, has a “highly specific note of warning” beneath its “surface generalities.”258 The Medici had been reinstated in Florence in 1512, after eighteen years of exile. Neither Giuliano, nor his nephew Lorenzo, to whom Machiavelli rededicated *Il Principe* in 1516, devoted enough time in the supervision of the city. Given the current situation in Florence, Machiavelli, at the beginning of chapter xii warns that “a prince must lay strong foundations, otherwise he is bound to come to grief. The chief foundations on which all states rest, whether they are new, old, or mixed, are good laws and good arms.”259 As he enumerates the various rulers who had recently lost power (chapter xxiv) – the king of Naples and the Duke of Milan, among others, Machiavelli argues that imprudent governance on the part of these rulers had resulted in the loss of their power:

Thus these princes of ours, who, after holding power for many years, finally lose it, should not blame fortune, but rather their own sloth; they never thought, during quiet times, that things could change (and this is a common failing of men: they never think of storms so long as the sky is blue). Then when the tempest breaks, their first thought is to run away, not to defend themselves.....(p. 69)260

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260 Emphasis Mine
Responsibility and authority, according to Machiavelli, cannot remain separated for too long, and the good prince does not lay his trust on anyone. “The only good, safe, and dependable defenses are those that you control yourself with your own energy [virtù]’’ (p.70), he argues. For Machiavelli, as for Shakespeare, the tempest is a metaphor for political instability, a situation that can jeopardize the well being of a state. Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1611) begins with a tempest, one that represents the dubious condition of Milan, which is reduced to the vassalage of Naples. In the play Milan loses its absolute sovereignty as Antonio with the help of the King of Naples usurps his brother’s position as the duke. Like the inept prince of Machiavelli, Prospero, the duke of Milan, confident in the prosperity of Milan, and the integrity of his brother does not anticipate the political upheaval that is to ensue, and so does not take any measures at all to reinforce his position and strengthen his credibility as a ruler. It is inevitable then that Prospero loses his dukedom, since by his own admission, he relegates the administrative responsibilities of his duchy to his brother, Antonio, and instead prefers to spend his time in scholarly isolation. His indifference towards the welfare of Milan would have earned him the unanimous censure of...

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humanist scholars, including Machiavelli. Shakespeare’s play is able to achieve a seemingly harmonious resolution, I argue, only because Prospero effects the political strengthening of Milan by arranging the marriage of his daughter with Ferdinand, the son of the King of Naples. This marriage is not just a comedic trope, but central to the plot of the play and should be read in the contemporary political context.

Machiavelli’s work on the prince is contemporaneous with Erasmus’s *Institutio Principis Christiani*, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), as well as Guillaume Budé’s treatise *De L’institution du Prince* (published 1546, after his death), all of which contain elaborate discussions on polity and the ruler’s responsibility regarding the maintenance of the integrity of a state. These humanist philosophers agree that the education of a prince should be such that it enables him to become a good administrator. While *Institutio* compiles all of Erasmus’s thoughts about the education and responsibilities of the prime state authority, his earlier works, especially *Encomium Moriae* (1509, printed 1511), also make references to the correct exercise of state authority. Erasmus was much invested in the practical aspects of the *Institutio*, and was confident of the effectiveness of the ideas it propounded. He personally sent a copy to Henry VIII in 1517. In 1518, Erasmus reworked his treatise and presented it to Prince Ferdinand, who according to Erasmus’s letter to Nicolaas Everaerts, dated 26 July, 1524, had it “by heart.”

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The *Institutio*, as typical of humanist treatises, makes elaborate references to Classical scholars like Isocrates, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch among others, known for their thoughts on polity, and their unanimous advocacy of the interests of the state over that of the ruler. Erasmus’s work was originally meant for and dedicated to Prince Charles (the future Charles V), Erasmus states that the primary consideration for the education of a young prince should be to make him proficient in statecraft. A few excerpts from his work are enough to summarize how the prince should conduct himself and what his education should equip him for.

Let the good and wise prince always so educate his children that he seems ever to have remembered that they were born for the state and are being educated for the state, not for his own fancy...The prince should choose for this duty teachers from among all the number of his subjects – or even summon from every direction men of good character, unquestioned principles, serious, of long experience and not merely learned in theories....

The ideal prince, according to Erasmus has to be so educated that he has a philosophical bent of mind, and a single-minded appreciation of truth. Here Erasmus is emphatic about not giving too much importance to empirical studies, but to an understanding of the polity to the advantage of his subjects:

You cannot be a prince, if you are not a philosopher; you will be a tyrant....I do not mean by philosopher, one who is learned in the ways of dialectic or physics, but one who casts aside the false pseudo-realities and with open mind seeks and

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follows the truth....Only those who govern the state not for themselves but for the
good of the state itself, deserve the title “prince”...(150-161)
A good prince is unfailingly altruistic and uncomplainingly diligent when it comes to affairs of
the state, even at the cost of his own convenience – injunctions that Prospero does not pay heed
to, preferring to work towards the betterment of his own intellectual capacities and indulging his
scholarly trait rather than work for the advancement of Milan. Erasmus asserts that a prince who
does not willingly bear his administrative responsibilities should not aspire to the privileges that
authority brings, and neither should he have any claim to the title of a ruler:

   He must give his thought to the best advantage of others and neglect his personal
   interests. He must always be alert so that others may sleep. He must toil so that
   others may rest. He must exhibit the highest moral integrity, while in others a
general appearance of uprightness is enough. His mind must be divested of all
personal emotions. He who is carrying on the offices of the state must give his
attention to nothing but that....If these conditions are not to your liking, why do
you desire the burden of ruling?....What should bring more enjoyment to the
prince than the contemplation of his country, improved and more flourishing as a
result of his efforts? (182-185)

The Institutio was a much awaited opus. Only days after John Froben, the Basel printer,
had intimated Erasmus that the book was off the press (17 June, 1516), the English Humanist,
John Colet, commended Erasmus for this work in a letter dated 20 June, 1516:

   You have done well in writing on the instruction of a Christian prince. How I
   wish Christian princes would follow good instructions. Everything is upset by
their mad follies. I am very desirous of having this book, for I am sure that like everything else of yours, it will turn out perfect.²⁶⁵

Colet’s enthusiasm about the work was obviously shared by sixteenth century scholars, as testified by the publishing success of *Institutio*. Froben published three editions of it in 1516, and the next two decades saw eighteen complete editions and several translations. *The Boke named the Governour* (1531), Thomas Elyot’s English treatise, which also dealt with the education those in power, expresses indebtedness to Erasmus’s work for its content.

Given the general consensus about the qualities that an ideal prince ought to possess, and the popularity of the ideas propounded in these political discourses, Prospero would hardly qualify as a desirable ruler. As he relates the history of his reign in Milan and his subsequent banishment to his daughter, Miranda, he admits to being indifferent to not only his ducal responsibilities but also to his subjects:

My brother and thy uncle, called Antonio...

...he whom next thyself

Of all the world I loved, and to him put

The manage of my state, as at the time

Through all the signatories was the first

And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed

In dignity, and for the liberal arts

Without a parallel; those being all my study,

The government I cast upon my brother

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And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies... (I, ii, 66-77)  266

Lynn Magnusson notes that in Prospero’s account, the structure of his speech reflects the complex problem of the situation: “grammatical subjects are repeatedly forgotten in the proliferation of circumstantial detail. The result of this anacolutha is an impression of directionlessness.”  267

Though Prospero is proficient in bookish knowledge, he does not realize that being the Duke of Milan, his primary responsibility is to look to the welfare of his duchy. As he grew “stranger” to his state, and alienated himself from his subjects, he did not comprehend that the separation of de facto and de jure powers invariably leads to confusion and divided loyalties.

Having privileged his scholarship over his responsibilities, Prospero made his kingdom unstable – with Antonio as de facto ruler, while Prospero enjoyed authority de jure. Antonio carried on all ducal responsibilities:

Being once perfected on how to grant suits,
How to deny them, who t’advance, and who
To trash for overtopping, new-created,
The creatures that were mine, I say, or changed ’em
Or else new-formed ’em; having both the key
Of officer and office, set all hearts i’th’state


To what tune pleased his ear, that now he was

The ivy which had hid my princely trunk
And sucked my verdure out on’t.

.....He being thus lorded,

Not only with what my revenue yielded,

But what my power might else extract....(I, ii, 79-99)

Antonio’s greater visibility enabled him to usurp the duchy of Milan by winning over the loyalties of the Milanese. Writing almost half a century later, Gabriel Naudé, “accounted one of the most celebrated genius’s ...for his knowledge of men and books,” emphasizes that the prince must at all times take care to maintain appearances, if he is to earn the approbation and the good will of his subjects. His work, classically allusive, has much practical wisdom:

....these contrivances have not always been without their use, seeing Scipio
practising them with Judgment among Romans, acquired the Reputation of a great and good Man, and was sent to conquer Spain, though he was not then of the Age of four and twenty: Livy speaks thus concerning him...Scipio was not only admirable for his true Politicks, but likewise for his artificial contrivances, transacting many things with the Populace, as proceeding from Nocturnal Appearances...So likewise many other Princes...contented themselves with something else, that they thought might contribute to the Lustre of their Actions. ’Tis for this reason Tacitus says, that Vesperian...had a certain Art of setting off all he said and did with a sort of Ostentation...besides his wisdom and Experience,

(Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2013) underlines that it is essential to understand the complexity of Shakespeare’s language in order to enjoy his plays.
he made even trifling appearances become prevalent...Princes should direct all their Actions to the obtaining a Reputation...

It is significant to note here that Prospero is reinstated into his correct hierarchical position, and his right to the duchy of Milan is recognized only after he has performed the extent of his powers before the shipwrecked courtiers as especially before Ferdinand. The essential theatricality of his actions enables him to gain an unequivocal acknowledgement of his claims as a learned man.

The books that prevent Prospero from being a good duke, in effect, symbolize his powerlessness. It is significant that Prospero is exiled with his books – codified knowledge that he has valued over his obligations as a ruler. In the end of the play, Prospero is redeemed, and is able to resume his former position as the duke of Milan, because he forges a politically advantageous marital alliance between the heirs of Milan and Naples. Erasmus and other political philosophers believed that the most important responsibility of a prince was to keep peace within his kingdom.

A good prince should never go to war at all unless, after trying every other means, he cannot possibly avoid it...The really Christian prince will...think over how earnestly peace is to be sought and how honorable and wholesome it is; on the other hand...how disastrous and criminal an affair war is and what a host of all evils it carries in its wake even if it is the most justifiable war – if there really is any war which can be called “just.” (249)

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Though skeptical that marital relations could achieve this end (“If the mutual alliances of princes would give peace to the world, I should wish each of them to have six hundred wives” 242), Erasmus even advocated marriages between princely households, if it were the only way of forging peace. The accord that Prospero achieves in the play is especially significant in the light of sixteenth century context, in which Milan and Naples had a history of long standing disputes and wars. Prospero’s efforts in bringing about amicable relations between the two states is accompanied by his relinquishment of scholarly pursuits – the promised drowning of his book, which presumably means that he would henceforth value the affairs of his duchy more than his tomes. I argue that the underlying theme of this play is kingship and the responsibilities that come with it, especially because it was first performed, not in a theater but at court before King James on “Hallowmas nyght” (November 1), 1611. While this play has elements of romance and fantasy, typical of court performances like masques, the underlying meaning however is pertinent to the power play between kingdoms, as it thematically makes referential nods to contemporary European politics, fraught with treachery.

Antonio had been able to supplant Prospero as the duke, only with the help of the king of Naples, to whom he continues to pay tribute. Treacherous alliances, however, always contain the potential of more bloodshed, and the threat of usurpation, as is seen in Sebastian’s foiled attempt to kill his brother, the king of Naples on the instigation of Antonio. Prospero engineers the conversation between Antonio and Sebastian by magically keeping them awake when the storm-tossed courtiers are asleep. Just as Sebastian is about commit fratricide, Gonzalo, the good courtier (who had given Prospero a safe passage as he fled Milan), magically wakes up and

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counters the plot. Though the immediate danger is averted, this incident exposes the omnipresent threat of usurpation and serves to underscore the fragility of familial as well as political ties, and the need to create relations that are more dependable and can provide a greater political stability. The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda has the promise of not only peace, but also the ultimate unification and therefore the consolidation of the two states, with Ferdinand as the heir to both of them. This is important because Ferdinand has the promise of being a better ruler than Prospero. The play bears this out as he is shown to have the ability to command respect and loyalty, in this case Miranda’s, in a greater measure than Prospero might have achieved. It is important for Prospero to be recognized as the rightful duke of Milan, so that Miranda and Ferdinand are the rightful heirs to the duchy after him.

Though Prospero’s island is of imprecise geographical location (it could be argued that the island is either Mediterranean or Patagonian, part of the Bermudas, or even Ireland), making it a rather romanticized landscape, there is nothing imaginary or haphazard about the countries mentioned in the play. Though Coleridge makes a case for *The Tempest* being a romantic fiction only, the states of Milan and Venice have definite histories and complicated dynastic relations, with much bearing on contemporaneous European politics. Crystal Bartolovich reads the “spatial ambiguity” of Prospero’s island of exile in the context of newly emergent urban London, and argues that the indeterminate locus of the island is conscientious, indicating a “Nowhere” that is “actually closer to the space of the “boundless market” that the space of London had come to signify. “Scholars may dispute the location of *The Tempest*’s diegetic island, but no one has

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270 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Notes on *The Tempest*,” from *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, collected and ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: W. Pickering, 1836), 2: p.92. Quoted in *The Tempest* ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (op. cit.), p. 121. Here Coleridge says that “*The Tempest* is a specimen of the purely romantic drama, in which the interest is not historical, or dependent upon fidelity, or portraiture, or the natural connexion of events, -- but is a birth of the imagination..."
disputed that it was performed in the capital city of a wholly locatable island in the moment of its emergence.” Because of the emerging economy of London, it began to house many cultures and had become the confluence of many languages. “Capitalism encourages delocalization in several ways: first, in vastly increasing the specialization, fragmentation and combination of labor, it increases dependencies among peoples, whether separated by a few feet or thousands of miles.” Because of the exigencies of capitalism, “events and decisions in one place have material effects on numerous ‘local’ economies.” Bartolovich points out that there is an ideological obscuration of capitalist interests, which enforces interconnections among people, and that is why though “the plot of The Tempest is framed by a trans-national exchange of women (first Claribel and then Miranda), references to specifically financial circuits of world trade – which either a Mediterranean or Atlantic location for The Tempest’s island would call to mind for a period audience – and even ‘local’ references to commerce, are virtually absent.” Besides commercial relations, the definite locales mentioned in the play have a history of political struggles and wars of succession, and so a denouement can only be achieved in an indefinite, borderless locus. David Scot Kastan especially advocates an understanding of The Tempest and its incipient colonial undertaking within the context of seventeenth century European politics: “The colonial activity if seventeenth-century Europe must itself be understood in relation to the politics of the great European powers.” The play, Kastan argues is engaged with its own historical moment and

the “romance action is to rescue Milan from vassalage to Naples and yet still allow the merging of national interests that James’s fantasy of European peace and coherence would demand.”

The play begins at a point when the courtiers of Milan and Naples are on their way home from the wedding of Claribel, the daughter of the king of Naples, with the king of Tunis. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish monarchy and the Ottoman Empire fought over the control of Tunis. The Hafsid Sultan, Mulai Hassan, who had lost his kingdom to the Ottomans led by Barbarossa Hyreddin, solicited the help of Charles V, the king of Spain. Charles reinstated Hassan on the latter’s acceptance of Spanish suzerainty. Though the Ottomans finally captured Tunis in 1574, Spain continued to have an interest in the territory. Given this history, Claribel’s marriage in the play would have immediately been interpreted as a political rather than a romantic alliance, that would unite the power of the Ottomans with that of Naples, and in opposition to Spain, which controlled large parts of Naples.

The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda would have been more important in the context of politically astute marriages, as it represents amity between Milan and Naples, given their long and troubled history. Even Machiavelli begins Il Principe with a reference to the legendary rivalry between the two states. The Habsburg-Valois wars or the Renaissance wars (1494-1559) were the result of dynastic disputes, especially between the duchy of Milan and the Kingdom of Naples, led by Ludovico Sforza and Alfonso II respectively. These wars involved much of Western Europe, especially Spain, France and England, as well as the Ottoman Empire, and were characterized by a struggle for power and territory among its many participants. Since these disputes created much discord across Europe, Machiavelli especially advocated the unification of

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the powers of the eight Italian city states. The politically inflected marriages envision the consolidation of Italy and the establishment of peace.

The history of the various contemporary political struggles and the marriages of Miranda and Claribel that seemingly resolve the conflicts become especially significant in the context of the second performance of the play at court on May 20, 1613, as part of marriage festivities of King James’s daughter Elizabeth Stuart with Frederick, Count Palatine of the Rhine. Elizabeth Stuart’s marriage was similar to the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda in that it was an astute political alliance. This marriage was popularly celebrated as a love match, most famously, in John Donne’s poem *Epithalamion, or Marriage Song* (1612), where the union of Elizabeth and Frederick is eulogized as “Two Phoenixes, whose joined breasts/ Are unto one another mutual nests.” It was generally understood, however, to be a marriage that went a long way in consolidating Protestant powers in Europe. This was a well-deliberated match, since Fredrick’s ancestors included the kings of Aragon and Sicily. King James, however, especially, saw the marriage as “one step in a larger process of achieving domestic and European concord,” since Ferdinand was “regarded as the future head of Protestant interest in Germany.”  

It is pertinent to note here that Spain had a troubled relation with England since Henry VIII had obtained a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The Anglo-Spanish wars between 1585 and 1604 were based largely on religious differences. Since Spain represented a strong Catholic node, one of the ways to resist Spanish power would have been to build strong Protestant dynastic ties.

Though it foregrounds the romantic aspect of the Ferdinand/Miranda relationship, the play, at every point, underscores the theme of political marriages, and is deeply invested in their

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success as means for forging dynastic amity and peace. The courtship scene between Ferdinand
and Miranda,(III. I) is not only structurally central, but also the focus of the plot. Though this
courtship ends with the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda, they are hardly on an equal footing.
Ferdinand’s courteous diplomacy is in sharp contrast to Miranda’s honest, even naive declaration
of emotions. Ferdinand, a man of the world, speaks the language of the courtier, his real
emotions, if any, kept severely in check, are hardly typical of the effusions of an ardent lover.
Instead he resorts to hyperbole, with the intention of winning her heart:

.....Admired Miranda!

Indeed the top of admiration, worth
What’s dearest to the world! Full many a lady
I have eyed with best regard, and many a time
Th’ harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear. For several virtues
Have I liked several women, never any
With so full soul but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed
And put it to the foil. But you, O you,
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature’s best! (III, i, 37-48)

After having eulogized her many qualities, which he says he finds admirable in comparison to
the many women he has encountered, Ferdinand proceeds to mouth the lines characteristic of a
Petrarchan sonneteer, pining for an unattainable mistress:
The very instant that I saw you did
My heart fly to your service, and there reside
To make me slave to it....(III, i, 64-6)

Miranda, in contrast, ignorant of the ways of the world, and “proper” feminine behavior (she offers to carry the logs while Ferdinand rests – “If you’ll sit down,/ I’ll bear your logs the while” IIi, i, 23-4), is hardly the distant Petrarchan mistress, and expresses her admiration openly:

....I would not wish
Any companion in the world but you,
Nor can imagination form a shape,
Besides yourself, to like of.....(III, i, 54-7)

She by-passes all of Ferdinand’s verbal profusions, and instead simply asks: “Do you love me?” (III, i, 68). The courtship, while it lacks ardor on Ferdinand’s part and experience on Miranda’s part, nevertheless ends in a marriage because it is the desirable outcome, and Prospero, the master of ceremonies engineers it. Outside the courtly language, and the trappings of romance, however, Miranda is as much an object of exchange between Milan and Naples, as she is between Caliban and Stephano – Caliban dangles Miranda as a prize if Stephano is able to supplant Prospero as the ruler of the island:

...She will become thy bed, I warrant,
And bring thee forth brave brood (III, ii, 101-2).

It is important to note however, that the courtship between Ferdinand and Miranda follows only after their lineage has been determined. The establishment of legitimacy is crucial to the success of dynastic politics, and Miranda’s legitimacy is established right at the beginning of the play,
underlining therefore her ability to be the mediator of dynastic peace. Stephen Orgel points out that the only occasion Prospero mentions Miranda’s mother is to establish her legitimacy:  

Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and

She said thou wast my daughter, and thy father

Was Duke of Milan, and his only heir,

And princess, no worse issued” (I, ii, 56-9).

Moreover Ferdinand’s initial proposal of marriage to Miranda, even before he has had a chance to witness her charms, and the subsequent courtship is contingent on her being a virgin, therefore ensuring the legitimacy of his future heirs: “O, if a virgin,/ And your affection not gone forth, I’ll make you/ The Queen of Naples” (I, ii, 445-7).

The masque celebrating the impending nuptials is presided over by the goddesses of fertility – Ceres, and Juno, who are also “exemplary mothers.” Ceres, especially is “linked with the physical, psychological, and sociological factors which sustain life.” Orgel argues out that making Ceres and not Hymen as the patroness of marriage, the masque “invokes a myth in which the crucial act of destruction is the rape of a daughter; it finds in the preservation of virginity the promise of civilization and fecundity...This is Prospero’s vision, symbolically expressing how deeply the fears for Miranda’s chastity are implicated with his sense of his own power, how critical an element she is in his plans for the future.” For a marriage that is being celebrated as a love match, Venus, the goddess of love, is conspicuous by her absence. In fact,


275 Ibid.


she is conscientiously barred from the festivities. It is crucial to note here that dynastic lineages
are dependent upon the procreative potential of the royal couple – Ferdinand hopes for “fair
issue” (IV, i, 24), the masque celebrates fecundity in a marital relationship, rather than the
“wanton” love between a man and a woman, and Prospero is concerned that Miranda should bear
legitimate heirs in the marriage and not give in to Ferdinand’s lust. The production of legitimate heirs
is more pertinent in the context of most recent history of England, because the lack of a
direct line of succession in the reign of Elizabeth Tudor had caused much anxiety among her
subjects over the future of England.

The political overtone of the marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda is most apparent
when in the final act they discovered “playing at chess” before being introduced to the courtiers
of Milan and Naples, and are able to obtain the blessings of the king of Naples. The game of
chess is known for its manipulations, and its unfathomable moves are calculated to put the
opponent at a disadvantage. Written more than a decade later, Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at
Chess* (1624), satirizes the relation between England and Spain, with the white and the black
king as James I of England and Philip IV of Spain respectively, and the play concentrates on the
proposed marriage of Prince Charles with the Spanish princess. While in *The Tempest* the game
concedes a kind of equality between Ferdinand and Miranda, each playing the other in a battle of
sexes, it also makes them the very pawns that Prospero manipulates, in order to reclaim his
sovereignty. The play which had begun with political unrest and turmoil within the state – not
just a literal, but also a metaphorical tempest, ends with the restoration of rightful inheritance and
the establishment of amity, as Prospero promises everyone “calm seas, auspicious gales” (V, i,
314) on their return journey – in keeping with the generic requirement of comedies. Even though
there is apparent restoration of harmony and peace, there is an underlying sense of unease in the denouement of the play. Magnusson argues that the goal Prospero attempts to achieve throughout the action of his play – reclaiming his dukedom and securing the future of his daughter and the two kingdoms of Naples and Milan – is at best provisional at the denouement, which is “subject to any moment to disturbance by the ill will of Antonio and Sebastian or the inexperience of Ferdinand and Miranda.”

Besides, in spite of the promise that he would drown his book, Prospero does not prove that he has the potential to be a good ruler. In fact he never had been one. We only have his word that prior to his exile, his Milanese subjects loved him. Even during his exile, Prospero is not successful in learning the art of able statesmanship, and is reduced to ruling over disgruntled subjects – Caliban, Ariel and Miranda. He does not in any way, as an ideal prince should, according to Erasmus, seek the approbation and love of his subjects.

There are two factors, as Aristotle tells us in his *Politics*, which have played the greatest roles in the overthrow of empires. They are hatred and contempt. Good will is the opposite of hatred; respected authority, of contempt. Therefore it will be the duty of the prince to study the best way to win the former and avoid the latter. Hatred is kindled by an ugly temper, by violence, by insulting language, sourness of character, meanness, and greediness; it is more easily aroused than allayed. A good prince must therefore use every caution to prevent any possibility of losing the affections of his subjects...On the other hand, the affections of the populace are won by those characteristics which, in general, are farthest removed

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278 “Interruptions in *The Tempest*” (op.cit.)
from tyranny. They are clemency, affability, fairness, courtesy, and kindliness.

(208-9)
Caliban, moreover, highlights the fact that Prospero had usurped Caliban’s right to assume authority over the island, and this means that Prospero’s actions had been as treacherous as Antonio’s. In fact, though Prospero denounces Caliban for his attempt to violate Miranda, he never disputes Caliban’s claims to the island both because of his prior residence there as well as maternal inheritance:

This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak’st from me. (I, ii, 331-2)

When Prospero had first come to the island, he had been kind to Caliban, “albeit in the patronizing way of a European aristocrat.”

Caliban recalls that he had in a gesture of friendly reciprocity, helped Prospero explore the island:

........When thou cam’st first
Thou strok’st me and made much of me; wouldst give me
Water with berries in’t: and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee
And showed thee all the qualities o’th’isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile. (I, ii, 332-338)

279 Ania Loomba brings the question of gender in her discussion of colonial exploitation. In her discussion of Sycorax, Loomba argues that she is “more than the justification for Caliban’s territorial rights to the island – she operates as a powerful contrast to Miranda.” Loomba also Posits Sycorax as Prospero’s “other,” one who is equally as proficient in the magical arts and whose power persists, in spite of her absence. Ania Loomba, Gender, race, Renaissance Drama (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1989).
Prospero, however dismisses all of Caliban’s memories, and justifies the latter’s subsequent confinement to a rock with the accusation that Caliban had attempted to rape Miranda. Caliban was then made to perform all the menial duties of a slave. “I am all the subjects that you have,” (I, ii, 341) Caliban observes, but Prospero is unable to win the loyalty of even this subject. He punishes the slightest misdemeanor on Caliban’s part with torture, much like the colonizer, who having exploited native knowledge, denies the fruits of it to the native:

If thou neglect’st or dost unwillingly
What I command, I’ll rack thee with old cramps,
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
The beasts shall tremble at thy din. (I, ii, 367-70)

Proposing Ireland as a rich historical analog for the play’s colonial theme, Dympna Callaghan argues that “colonial memory chooses to forget...cultural representations from the perspective of the colonized themselves.”281 This is evident in Prospero’s persistent dismissal of not only Caliban’s memories, but also his linguistic and intellectual acumen, lowering him, at least representationally, to the category of animals. Callaghan emphasizes the lack of Caliban’s indigenous language as a problem of colonial memory. Since language is the “instrument of memory,” Caliban’s articulation in Prospero’s language destabilizes the claims to his memory. Peter Greenaway’s film Prospero’s Books provides the most visual articulation of the problem of memory, as the actor John Gielgud, in the role of Prospero articulates all of the play, overshadowing the voices of other actors, including Caliban.

280 Patricia Seed, “‘This island’s mine’: Caliban and Native Sovereignty” in ‘The Tempest’ and its Travels (op.cit.), pp. 202-211.

The recipient of what he understands as unjustified punishments, Caliban is ready to supplant Prospero at the first opportunity he finds, even if it does not grant him any authority over the island, and even if he has to serve a new master, and carry out for him all the tasks that he does for Prospero. Caliban promises Stephano that he would:

...show thee the best springs; I pluck thee berries;
I’ll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.
A plague upon the tyrant that I serve!
I’ll bear him no more sticks, but follow thee (II, ii, 155-8)

Caliban’s readiness to serve a new master, do all the chores that he does for Prospero, is the result of his extreme abhorrence of latter, born out of years of mistreatment. Prospero’s other subject, visible only to him, is Ariel. Ariel has reasons to be grateful to him. This is because Prospero had freed Ariel from his confinement in a pine tree, where Caliban’s mother, Sycorax had imprisoned him:

This blue-eyed hag was hither brought with child
And here left by th’ sailors. Thou, my slave,
As thou report’st thyself, was then her servant;
And for thou wast a spirit too delicate
To act her earthy and abhorred commands,
Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee,
By help of her more potent ministers,
And in her most unmitigable rage,
Into a cloven pine; within which rift
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain
A dozen years, within which space she died,
And left thee there, where thou didst vent thy groans
As fast as mill-wheels strike....
....Thou best know’st
What torment I did find thee in: thy groans
Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts
Of ever-angry bears. It was a torment
To lay upon the damned, which Sycorax
Could not again undo. It was mine art,
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
The pine, and let thee out. (i, ii, 269-94)

Though Prospero alleviates Ariel’s extreme pain and frees him from an apparently interminable interment, he is unable to ensure Ariel’s willing servitude. Even though Ariel follows all of Prospero’s commands, he longs to be free, and hardly displays grateful loyalty. In fact, Ariel has to be reminded of his previous pains to the last detail and how Prospero had helped him. Here, we once again see how Prospero assumes the power of recapitulation and his narration of the events that led to Ariel’s confinement and his subsequent liberation by Prospero is neither endorsed nor challenged by Ariel. Even then, Prospero can command his actions only with the promise that he would free Ariel in the near future, and even threats of causing as much if not greater pain than Sycorax had caused him:

If thou more murmur’st, I will rend an oak
And peg thee in its knotty entrails till
Thou hast howled away twelve winters (I, ii, 294-6)
Ariel does not overtly resist Prospero’s authority as Caliban does, and hopes to be released from thralldom, if he is able to please Prospero by his actions, as he consistently solicits Prospero’s approbation. Caliban, moreover, assures Stephano that all the spirits that Prospero commands “do hate him” (III, ii, 90).

Prospero’s control over Miranda is more complete – he commands her obedience and attention by admonishing her frequently, magically controls her hours of sleep and wakefulness, and even withholds crucial knowledge pertaining to her birth and inheritance, except when it is convenient for him to let her know. Though she is a princess by birth, Prospero often refers to her as “wench,” dismissively reducing her in social stature. Miranda, on her part, is ready to disregard Prospero’s express command at the first instance, in her dealings with Ferdinand, though Prospero omnisciently knows about her disobedience and approves tacitly.

Since Prospero is unable to keep the very few subjects he has on the island happy, it seems unlikely that he would be able to win the approbation of his Milanese subjects. Prospero’s return to Milan as its duke does not indicate in any way that he would be a better ruler. In spite of all his learning, he fails to apprehend that a successful ruler is one who is able to keep his subjects happy, not by tyranny, but by working for their welfare and winning over their loyalty. Though he has the access to and presumably mastery over much of the codified knowledge that his prized books contain, he is essentially powerless in spite of them, as he refuses to engage with the practical aspects of his learning. Steve Mentz points out that the play begins with Prospero summoning up a storm, and ends with his promise that he would provide calm seas. He makes this promise in spite of the presumed drowning his book, the object that apparently gave him the authority over nature. He argues that Prospero’s “magical displays, including his masque, attempt to control the sea or leave it behind, rather than engaging in its metamorphic
power.”

It is not clear at the end of the play if Prospero would be able to negotiate the new hierarchies of the state of Milan. This is the turbulent state that he had left behind, with Antonio’s usurpation, one that he had regained with the help of magical knowledge. The unarticulated turmoil however remains with Antonio’s silence at the end of the play. It is not enough for Prospero to regain his dukedom—it would only create a new set of instabilities and form a new set of ever-changing alliances that he would have to deal with, not by asserting complete control, but a set of negotiations, a skill that remains to be tested.

The prince is able to rule only at the pleasure of his subjects, and that the prince’s source of power is the loyalty of his subjects and peacefulness within the kingdom, Erasmus repeatedly emphasizes. Prospero, however, privileges his “art” and his knowledge, essentially static, over the problems of his subjects. Crucially, it is not Prospero, but Caliban, who identifies Prospero’s books as the source of his power:

....Remember

First to possess his books; for without them

He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not

One spirit to command...(III, ii, 87-90)

Yet, Prospero’s re-assumption of temporal authority follows the promised drowning of his book, in a dramatic, if unnecessary gesture. The breaking and burying of his magical staff is symbolic enough of the abjuration of “rough magic.” Drowning his book however is a promise that he would attempt to participate in society. Significantly, this is a public gesture, as he invites the courtiers of Milan and Naples to gather around him, so that he can express his gratitude to

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Gonzalo and appeal to the better reasons of the wrong-doers – Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian, in the hope of future amity. This is when Prospero transforms from being a tyrant, manipulator and entertainer to a true prince, even as he assumes the accoutrements of a prince with Ariel’s help. The destruction of his book, then, does not signify his abjuration of knowledge, but his representational transformation into a man of the world.

Caliban’s understanding that Prospero’s books are imbued with a supernatural power is because Prospero has so far mediated his perceptions. Even though Caliban resents Prospero’s authority over him, he cannot deny that he owes the very expressions of resentment to Prospero’s teaching. Prospero had enabled Caliban to speak:

.....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 endowed thy purposes

       With words that made them known....(I, ii, 352-57)

Caliban correctly perceives, however, that having learned the language, and having accepted Prospero’s authority over his mediations, he has irredeemably been enslaved. The only way in which he can resist Prospero’s authority is to reinterpret the uses of this language, to the point of misusing it:

       You taught me language, and my profit on’t

       Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you

       For learning me your language! (I, ii, 362-4)
Nevertheless, he cannot help but attribute power to Prospero’s fetish objects – his books – arguably because he has been granted no access to them. Caliban’s very articulate misapprehension of the power of Prospero’s books has resulted in an unequivocal approbation of Prospero’s scholarship. Even literary interpretations have much privileged the potency of these books, and their content. Barbara Mowat assumes that “among the highly valued books that Prospero brought with him into exile is one book essential to his magic.” Mowat argues that Prospero’s book of magic was similar to the Folger MS Vb 26, which has elaborate instructions for invoking spirits, as well as a wealth of information on herbs and natural medicine – the kind of grimoire that a wise man would be expected to possess. However, it is significant that the promised destruction of Prospero’s book is by drowning and not by burning, as was the common practice with early modern grimoires. This is because his book is intended to signify knowledge and not simply the practice of magic – perceived to be a heretical as well as a diabolical activity, which would have earned him permanent exile, if not execution. Had he been seen as primarily a practitioner of demonic magic, he could not have been accepted back in a position of authority in Milan. The play instead emphasizes his scholarship, and in this context, the promise of drowning his book becomes his promise to keep his scholarship in abeyance, so that he can ably administer Milan.

In his film titled *Prospero’s Books*, Peter Greenaway identifies twenty four volumes that Gonzalo might have thrown into Prospero’s boat before the latter was exiled. These books

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283 Barbara A. Mowat, “Prospero’s Book,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52.1, Spring 2001, pp. 1-33. In an earlier essay, “Prospero, Agrippa, and Hocus Pocus,” *English Literary Renaissance*, 11 (1981), pp. 281-303, Mowat argues that Prospero is hardly the ideal magus. Not only are his actions malevolent, but also his complete relinquishment of knowledge at the end of the play would be contrary to the actions of the scholars of the Hermetic traditions, like John Dee, Agrippa, and Trimethius. While earlier scholars were forced to recant, at least partly, they did so because of the fear of persecution. A true magus could not possibly have dismissed the art of magic as completely as Prospero did.
summarize most of the empirical knowledge that early modern natural philosophers prided themselves for. The film is punctuated by the title and presumed subject matter of these books. These are not ordinary printed volumes that might have been easily and cheaply available, but hand-written, vellum-covered tomes with elaborate illustrations that emerge as tantalizing palimpsests in the film. Given their obvious inaccessibility, these volumes could be thought to contain esoteric knowledge and by the virtue of the myth surrounding them, could be thought magical. The following, according to Greenaway are the books Prospero might have carried with him to the island: The Book of Water, A Book of Mirrors, A Book of Mythologies, A Primer of Small Stars, An Atlas Belonging to Orpheus, A Harsh Book of Geometry, The Book of Colours, The Vesalius Anatomy of Birth, An Alphabetical Inventory of the Dead, A Book of Travellers’ Tales, The Book of the Earth, A Book of Architecture and Other Music, The Ninety-Two Conceits of the Minotaur, The Book of Languages, End-plants, A Book of Love, A Bestiary of Past, Present and Future Animals, The Book of Utopias, The Book of Universal Cosmography, Love of Ruins, The Autobiographies of Parsiphae and Semiramis, A Book of Motion, The Book of Games, and self-reflexively Thirty-Six Plays.284 The books that Greenaway names are not random choices. They are representative of the essential branches of humanist learning – the quadrivium of astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and music; the trivium of rhetoric, logic and grammar, besides books on philosophy, mythology, erotica, history, literature, and natural philosophy. These are approximately the subjects that an average early modern scholar would be proficient in.

In his reappraisal of the politics of reading in the English Renaissance, William Sherman succinctly summarizes the fetish of a private collection of books, one that might have led Prospero to value his books more than the concerns of his dukedom: “The private library has become, by most accounts, diametrically opposite to the “public”; it is a place of isolation, even insulation. Inhabiting this space was the figure of the solitary scholar or the detached reader, retiring from society into repose among books, which are sources of entertainment or catalysts for contemplation.”

The early modern book fetish has a cultural parallel in John Dee’s library at Mortlake. Dee’s private library, which when catalogued in 1583 revealed “England’s largest and – for many subjects, at least – most valuable collection of books and manuscripts.” Mortlake had between three and four thousand titles encompassing every aspect of classical, medieval and Renaissance learning. It had an especially good collection of scientific and historical manuscripts, and breadth of the subjects represented the Renaissance aspiration for total knowledge, the kind that Greenaway attributes to Prospero’s books. Sherman reads early modern anxieties about the print in Caliban’s proposed revenge over Prospero – the seizing of his books followed by a gruesome death. “Renaissance libraries,” argues Sherman, “were powerful sites of intellectual creativity, social status, and political influence. But they were also the focus of anxiety, resentment, and violence. The first age of printing was also the age of book burning. Early modern authorities had, perhaps, more to lose than to gain from the proliferation


286 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
of printed information; and those who commanded that information were at once empowered and endangered by their textual collections and skills.”

Whether the books that Prospero possesses deal with the subject of conjuration of spirits, or natural philosophy, or the humanities – all of these were understood to be branches for serious scholarly pursuits, as I have argued in chapter one. What is crucial here is that Prospero professes to prize these volumes “above my dukedom” (I, ii, 168). Though he proposes to ceremonially drown his book before assuming his ducal responsibilities and returning to Milan, he remains the master of ceremonies, and in control of the subsequent events. This is because the destruction of the book signifies Prospero’s investment in the welfare of Milan and therefore the quelling of the political storm that had rocked Milan. The prime mover of the plot, and in the control of his destiny and that of his city state thereafter, it is only appropriate that Prospero should address his audience in the epilogue. Just as a prince is able to rule only at the pleasure of his subjects, the success of a theatrical entertainer depends on his audience. Prospero recognizes the power of the populace, and Ariel-like begs his audience’s indulgence, whose spell holds him on stage, and solicits their applause. The transformative power of the theater is after all as effective as Prospero’s “art,” but the potency of both the arts have to be acknowledged in order for them to be considered successful.

287 Ibid., p. 51.
Conclusion

However Persuasive one tries to be, one knows that speech and writing never close an issue; they always provoke a new stage, or a repetition of an older stage. Every story leaves out something...

Alan Sinfield (*Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality*), p. 197.

For a dissertation that discusses the various forms of peripheral knowledge – esoteric, demonic, and misappropriated, it is seemingly paradoxical that the two of the most acclaimed stage magi, Doctor Faustus and Prospero – protagonists in two of the more noteworthy early modern plays, *Doctor Faustus* (1592), and *The Tempest* (1611), that span two decades, end the plays with a desired destruction of books – repositories of codified knowledge. I have argued in my dissertation that humanist scholars were more interested in the welfare of the polity than in intellectual abstractions divorced from public life. In fact, the ideal humanist was one who was deeply entrenched in political life and used his scholarship in the interest of institutions – legal, religious, educational etc. The idea of a scholar who had the liberty to withdraw into the seclusion of books in labyrinthine medieval libraries of a monastery (much romanticized by Umberto Eco in *The Name of the Rose*) was long past. With the popularization of the printing press and the proliferation of printed material, books ceased to be symbols of privilege, and neither did they represent hours of painstaking calligraphy. Instead, books became the new

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289 Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) argues that there was a reciprocal relationship between theology and literary practices, and that the printing press enabled this reciprocity, pointing out that the Reformation could not have been possible without the printing press and the consequent proliferation of books.
commercial participants. As books became commoditized, so did knowledge and it was important that the scholar should make himself economically useful, and work within the institutional structures that produced knowledge.

The production and identification of “correct” knowledge was in a state of flux during the Reformation. Though aware that the texts I have chosen to discuss are deeply entrenched in the history of the Reformation, I have conscientiously avoided, where I could, elaborate discussions on Protestantism and the production of knowledge, since it is beyond the scope of the current study. I mean to emphasize instead that within the various contexts of Reformation, urbanization, and humanism, knowledge increasingly became something that had to be made use of, not indulged in for its own sake. The humanist scholar moreover, was invested in maintaining the cohesiveness of institutional structures, and so any deviation from what was delineated as correct knowledge was to be punished by civic authorities. This is the reason that the practice of demonic magic was made punishable as an act of treason by the beginning of the seventeenth century, and an erstwhile ecclesiastical crime transformed into a civil one. An issue that I have not dealt with in my dissertation is a discussion of healers and midwives, who were equally persecuted on charges of witchcraft, as their practices came to threaten the emergent institution of medicine. In this context, Sycorax’s knowledge of herbs and plants would have immediately made her vulnerable to charges of witchcraft, even if Prospero did not condemn her as such.

Though the proliferation of books served humanist interest in the dissemination of correct learning, the popular access to knowledge, and its consequent misappropriation made it difficult for the lay person to distinguish between a genuine scholar and a charlatan, especially at a time when institutions did not flinch at punishing scholars on charges of holding opinions contrary to
the authority of these institutions – Giordano Bruno and Thomas More being the more famous examples of such persecution. The genuine scholar then, was vulnerable to charges of falsehood, and punishment. So scholars like Bruno and Erasmus were vociferous in their condemnation of false scholarship, and had to conscientiously reiterate their own devotion to institutional authority.

I would like to reiterate that my dissertation seeks to emphasize the reciprocity between the elite and the popular. Since humanist intellectuals were extremely invested in their socio-political environment, their work is to be understood within the context of popular literature. Since humanists are our own intellectual predecessors, and the present study of the humanities is predicated on the renaissance intellectual enterprise, I argue for a more active intellectual engagement in the polity, if the correct end of humanism is to be realized.
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