"SO POTENT ART": MAGIC POWER IN MARLOWE, GREENE AND SHAKESPEARE

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Merlin, the legendary wizard of Arthurian romance, has neither Ph.D. nor library. His knowledge of magic does not derive from books, nor is it the fruit of academic study. His forecasts of the future are prophecy, not lectures. He is a prophet, after all, not a professor. Professors rarely live in caves or in the woods, where Merlin makes his home, a wild and – according to Robert de Boron – inordinately hairy creature. Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* reports that Merlin was begotten by a devil with a virtuous maiden. (Griscom 1929, 381).[1] The learned Faustus, more the professorial type, has a more prosaic family background. We read in Marlowe's Prologue that he is descended from "parents base of stocke." Not until after he "was grac't with Doctors name" did he team up with the Antichrist and dabble in magic. As magicians, the difference between Merlin and Faustus can be summarized thus: Merlin is a natural talent, Faustus is not. Faustus is an academic.

From medieval romance to Renaissance drama, the figure of the magician undergoes a transformation. The half-devil becomes fully human. The Merlin of the romances was Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban all in one, but the magician of Elizabethan drama, no longer endowed with innate magical gifts, approaches the world of magic as a scholar, a scientist, an explorer. And just as the explorer's urge for knowledge, in the age of a Columbus, a Ralegh, a Pizarro or a Drake, aims at conquest and domination, so is the magician's curiosity inseparable from his will to power. In staging the magician's "fortunes good or bad", the

[1] The devil in question belongs to the category of "spiritus, quos incubos demones appellamur." For a detailed survey of the various strands of the Merlin tradition see (Loomis 1959).

Elizabethan dramatists, contemporaries of Francis Bacon, devise test-cases for the axiom that knowledge is power. Within the hierarchical framework of their society, the magician's claim to power is an anomaly, even a transgression. Justified by neither birth nor office, it rests on nothing but his knowledge or – the word most frequently used in the plays – his "art". He shares this rather precarious position with that other practitioner of art, the playwright. The analogy between magician and dramatist is one of the commonplaces of criticism of *The Tempest*[2] but has rarely been explored with reference to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* or Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. The point I wish to argue is that in all of the three plays[3] the figure of the stage magician can be read as a portrait of the artist, especially of the artist in society. His scope and limitations reveal themselves in the power hoped for, or actually wielded by, the magician. And just as this magical power turns out to be a highly problematical asset, the position of the artist-magician vacillates between grandeur and social isolation, between visions of unlimited upward mobility and total failure.

At the beginning of Marlowe's play, Faustus' entrepreneurial optimism knows no limit: "All things that mooue betweene the quiet poles/Shal be at my commaund", (A-text; i, 86f). In euphoric anticipation he abandons himself to a vision of boundless power that will raise him above any worldly potentate:

> *Emperours and Kings,*
> *Are but obeyd in their seuerall prouinces:*
> *Nor can they raise the winde, or rend the cloudes:*
> *But his dominion that exceedes in this,*
> *Stretcheth as farre as doth the minde of man.*
> *(A-text, 1.87-91)*

[2] Cf. Berger 1977; Ettin 1977; Kernan 1979.

[3] Quotations are from the following texts: *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus 1604-1616* ed. by W.W. Greg (Marlowe 1950); Robert Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, ed. by Daniel Seltzer, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (Greene 1964); William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Stephen Orgel, The Oxford Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1987).

Greene's "frolic friar"[4] is no less boastful in his claims. He too means power when he speaks of his magic. And so does Prospero, at whose command even graves

> *Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth*
> *By my so potent art.*
> *(5.1.49)*

Disregarding their obvious differences for the moment, we can say that the three magicians strongly resemble each other in emphasizing power as the main benefit of a knowledge of magic. Before examining the nature and scope of this power more closely, it is enlightening to note that the scholar or scientist is given a leading part in the Elizabethan theatre only as a magician. Only when his curiosity transcends the boundaries of legitimate pursuit of knowledge, only when his chances of gain and loss assume horrendous proportions, does the stage take any interest in the character of the academic.[5] The dry pedant, the puny bookworm must make a quantum leap from the harmless to the dangerous to become a figure capable of captivating an audience.[6] But it is not his entertainment value alone which qualifies the scholar-turned-magician for the stage. The fascination goes deeper. Reaching beyond the limits imposed by law and convention, he becomes, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, 'a man who stands in symbolic relations to

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[4] For a discussion of Greene's portrayal of Roger Bacon in comparison with his main source, *The Famous Historie of Frier Bacon*, in (Thoms [1907]), c.f. Daniel Seltzer, "Introduction", (Greene 1964).

[5] Cf. *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, 2.46-51:

> Resolve you, doctors, Bacon can by books
> Make storming Boreas thunder from his cave
> And dim fair Luna to a dark eclipse.
> The great arch-ruler, potentate of hell,
> Trembles, when Bacon bids him or his fiends
> Bow to the force of his pentageron.

[6] Arguing along similar lines, György E. Szőnyi points out that the legitimate pursuit of knowledge can never satisfy the illimitable desire of the Renaissance imagination as represented by the figure of Faustus. Cf. Szőnyi 1991, 2.

the art and culture of his age',[7] an emblem for its most optimistic beliefs as well as its deepest fears.

The credo of man's unlimited power and potential for self-realization, that centrepiece of Renaissance humanism, is nowhere more enthusiastically expressed than in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's famous introductory speech to his nine hundred theses, *De hominis dignitate* (1486). "That we are what we want to be" is the message of this tract, in which Pico has God Himself address man and explain to him his place in the world.

> *O Adam, I have given you neither a determined place nor a single physiognomy, nor any specific gift, since the place, the physiognomy, and gifts which you wish for you shall have, according to your wish and will. As for the others, their defined nature is ruled by laws which I have prescribed; while you are not limited by any barrier but your own will, in which power I have placed you so that you determine your own nature. I have installed you in the middle of the world in order that you examine there most comfortably around you all that exists in the world. I have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, master of yourself and having as it were the honor and duty of fashioning and modeling your own being, you will compose it in the form which you prefer. You can degenerate into lower forms, which are animal, or you can, by a decision of your spirit, be regenerated in higher forms which are divine (Garin 1942).*

Man created by God is given god-like creative power to shape his own being. On the basis of this notion the artist gains a hitherto inconceivable prestige, exemplifying as he does man's distinctive feature in its purest essence: that of maker, of *poietés*. This line of argument is most forcefully pursued in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*:

> *The Greeks called him 'a poet', which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word poiein, which is 'to make': wherein I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him 'a maker': which name, how*

[7] Wilde says of himself in *De Profundis*: "I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age" (Wilde [1966] 1969, 912).

> *high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by my partial allegation (Sidney 1965, 100).*

While Sidney describes the working of poetic invention as a kind of creative alchemy turning nature's brazen world into a golden one of his own making, we must go back to Pico for an explicit statement on the nature and function of magic. Following his teacher Ficino, whose Latin translation of the *Corpus hermeticum* provided Renaissance occultism with one of its key texts,[8] Pico recommends magic as "the most perfect highest wisdom" and a means of rising to the level of the divine. Like the other Neo-Platonist admirers of magic, he is at great pains to distinguish beneficial "mageia" from its evil counterpart "goeteia", or black magic.[9] This "most deceitful of all arts" turns its adepts into "slaves of the powers of darkness". (How true this is, Faustus must learn at his own cost.)

The appearance of the figure of the magician on the Elizabethan stage may be said to bear witness to the continuing impact of what Jacob Burckhardt called one of the noblest legacies of the Renaissance, Pico's treatise on the dignity of man. The aspirations of a Faustus, a Bacon, a Prospero clearly presuppose the humanist background. But it is no less clear that the dramatists' presentation of the learned conjurer/magus contains a critique, a revision of Piconian idealism. For Pico's praise of man's unlimited potential has quite important limitations, ignoring as it does both the physical and the socio-political determinants of human existence.[10] As his own creator and creation, Pico's philosophical *Übermensch* embarks on his journey towards spiritual perfection unimpeded by obstacles arising from his physical nature or from the world around him. Pico's work triumphantly bears witness to that brief historical moment when Renais-

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[8] For two fairly recent accounts of Neo-Platonic occultism cf. Vickers 1984 and Mebane 1989.

[9] For a discussion of this and other distinctions and their (doubtful) applicability to specific dramatic texts cf. Szőnyi 1995, 110-114.

[10] For a different view of Pico's attitude toward man's physical existence see Barkan 1975, pp. 32-33. According to Barkan, Pico does not ignore the body but considers it, "as only one element in man's chameleon-like condition", with a "mixture of celebration and fear".

sance optimism asserted itself unchecked,[11] while the plays belong to a later period full of doubts, reservations and misgivings.[12] But also the nature of drama itself precludes the unimpeded spiritual progress envisaged by Pico. Drama, simply, must place obstacles in the hero's path to be dramatic. The stage necessarily adds those factors that the philosopher is at liberty to leave out: society and the body.

The case of Prospero, Duke of Milan, is instructive. He is not left in peace to reach the highest stage of spiritual perfection. Neglecting his state duties, "all dedicated to closeness and the bettering of my mind" (1.2.89), he is rudely forced from his esoteric seclusion by a brother, driven not by Pico's "sacred ambition" but by a much more worldly thirst for power. Pico's vision proves to be incomplete, unrealistic: Prospero cannot, after all, escape being a *zóon politikón*, a political animal. Only after he has learned how to use magical knowledge – which he initially employed only for self-improvement – to manipulate others does the deposed duke regain his lost place in society.

In Robert Greene's play man's subjection to the frailty of his body is made evident with the didactic simplicity of a moral exemplum. Bacon's most cherished creation is a brazen head with prophetic powers. Just before the head comes to life to utter its long-expected prophecy, Bacon is overcome by fatigue and must leave his observation post to Miles, his dim-witted factotum. Miles, predictably, wastes the precious magic moment. All he can report to his master afterwards is that the head has spoken the words: "Time is. Time was. Time is past" (scene xi). The ability to see "what is, what will be, and what has been" is one of the marks of perfection distinguishing Pico's ideal man. Greene gives us a mocking echo of this ultimate achievement by showing the powerful magician frustrated by a banal, yet basic human need, the need to sleep.

Marlowe too leaves us in no doubt that his magician is a being of flesh and blood with not only a soul to lose but a body as well. Faustus' body turns into a protean trick object which can be dismantled and reassembled. In one scene a torn-out leg, in another (in the B-text) even his severed head is miraculously re-

[11] Although Pico, of course, was checked by the church authorities who prevented his grand scheme for a synthesis of Christianity, Judaism and classical Greek philosophy by placing him under the ban.

[12] Arnold Hauser's monumental study *Der Manierismus* (1964) is still one of the best accounts of this shift.

stored. Pico's idea of man as his own creator and creation is parodied here in a crude black farce anticipating the devil's threat to tear Faustus to pieces. ("Reuolt, or Ile in peece-meale teare thy flesh"; A-text; 13.1335).

On the inner stage of humanist theorizing, man appears god-like in his freedom to make his own destiny. Drama confronts him with forces beyond his control, subjecting him to a dialectics of intention and achievement, fantasy and reality. The humanist ideal of self-determination finds its dramatic correlative in the protagonist's wish for self-transformation. Faustus takes up magic because it promises to enable him to rule the world. The difference between the Elizabethan magus and his medieval predecessor is clearly recognizable. When Merlin changes King Uther into the likeness of Gorlois and himself into Bricel, this transformation is a mere disguise, a courtly stratagem to gain access to Tintagel castle and help Uther rendezvous with the fair Igerne.[13] Faustus wants a much more fundamental transformation, hoping to become what Merlin already is: a magician. His urge for power suffers no delay. He wants everything at once, no matter what the cost. "This night Ile conjure though I die therefore" (A-text; 1.199). The same rashness that leads him to discard the whole of his academic learning after a cursory and highly distorted summing-up of the main tenets of each discipline characterizes his approach to magic.[14] Like Tamburlaine, he chooses "the shortest cut" to power. Patient study is definitely not his forte. Rhetorically, he behaves like another Scythian world-conqueror. Given his conviction that, being human, he cannot escape sin and hence damnation, his headlong rush towards magic is inspired by a vision of magical omnipotence that surpasses anything his 'colleagues' Bacon and Prospero ever attempt or envisage.

Greene's "frolic friar" intends to surround England with a protecting wall of brass. The project, which remains unrealized, resembles Faustus' fantasizing in its megalomaniac proportions. However, it differs from the German doctor's plans in two important aspects. First, it confines itself to a large, but limited territory: England. Secondly, and more importantly, it is intended to serve the community of which Bacon sees himself a part. Bacon's magical authority does

[13] Cf. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, chap. 19.

[14] Faustus impatience has been a matter of much debate among commentators. Cf. West 1974; Ettin 1974, 280-281; Blackburn 1978; Traister 1984, 93-96.

not compete with the lawful authority of the king, which is also very much in evidence in the play. Instead of a struggle of rival 'charismas', which Stephen Greenblatt has taught us to recognize as the ubiquitous secret agenda of Elizabethan drama,[15] Greene's play demonstrates a separation of powers. Bacon's magic does not encroach upon, but supports the legitimate authority of the king, thus securing legitimacy for itself. This is in accordance with the ambitions of contemporary practitioners of the occult, people like John Dee, Robert Fludd, or Simon Forman. Never quite safe from the threat of church reprisals or mob violence, none of them would have dreamt of aiming higher than service to the crown (in the role of court astrologer, for instance).

This falls far short of Faustus' ambition. His megalomaniac vision knows no limit. The power he craves "stretcheth as farre as doth the mind of man". It is entirely egotistical, anti-social, and, in its absoluteness, a direct challenge to the legitimate authority of the monarch. What Faustus desires clearly goes beyond even the power of a Prospero, whose control over nature and a household of ever-ready spirits confines itself to the *locus conclusus* of a remote island and finds its strategic *telos* in the regaining of a dukedom, that is, the restitution of legitimate rule over a limited territory.

The decisive difference between Faustus and Prospero and Bacon is, of course, that Faustus does not get what he wants. His dream of power eludes him like a fata morgana. The depth of his tragic fall can be measured by the gap between wish and fulfilment. His progress from would-be emperor to the devil's serf, like the progress of a Macbeth or Brutus, is lined with dramatic ironies. His first success, ironically, is a failure. He conjures. Mephistophilis appears. Faustus rejoices. For a moment, the beginner deludes himself into thinking that he has reached the pinnacle of black art, exclaiming: "Faustus, thou art Coniurer laureate" (A-text; 3.276). But Mephistophilis drily curbs his self-congratulatory en-

[15] Cf. Greenblatt 1988, 94-128. The socio-historical groundwork for Greenblatt's argument is to be found in Keith Thomas' comprehensive study *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971).

thusiasm: there had been no compelling force in Faustus' words; the devil has appeared more or less by accident.[16]

The pact confirms Faustus' powerlessness. Magic, he had hoped, would miraculously annihilate the difference between thinking and doing, opening up a paradise of unrestrained wish-fulfilment.

But just as the witches' prophecies in *Macbeth*, while seeming to guarantee the usurper's invulnerability, only augur his downfall, Faustus' grandiose vision of world rule, ironically, turns out to be true in a most devastatingly literal way. "As farre as doth the minde of man" – defines the true extent of Faustus' realm. Confined to his imagination, it stretches not a jot beyond his mind. It is a utopia in the literal sense of the word: a 'no place', a nowhereland, a portable paradise whose seductive glamour soon fades away. The topography of Marlowe's play allows Faustus' utopian vision no place to realize itself, no room to inhabit, no territory to colonize. There is simply no free space left.

When Faustus asks Mephistophilis where hell is, he gets the famous answer: "Why, this is hel nor am I out of it." Hell is, in fact, everywhere.[17] In comparison with that other Marlovian overreacher, Tamburlaine, this reveals a crucial difference. In *Tamburlaine* the stage represents those territories which the protagonist subjects one by one to his rule. At first his realm too, like Faustus', is nothing but a vision. But soon this powerful vision occupies the entire performance space. Faustus, on the other hand, loses what little space he can call his own. Through his subjection to the devil, even '*his* study' is swallowed up into the universal locality of hell. When Faustus returns from his wanderings, the study he once set out from is not a last sanctuary but a trap. The final soliloquy completes the tragic reversal. In the beginning, Faustus had set himself up to be "a mighty God." Now he vainly tries the opposite route, praying to be changed into an animal in order to avoid the eternal torture only human souls must suffer.

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16 FAU. Did not my coniuring speeches raise thee? speake.
ME. That was the cause, but yet per accident,
(A-text; 3.290f.)

17 Cf. Ricks 1985; Hugo Keiper (1992), points out that the play's topography differs significantly in the A- and B-versions of the text.

Or better – because smaller – still:
Oh soul, be changde into little water drops,
And fal into the Ocean, nere be found
(A-text, 14.1502f.)

Yet this transformation is no more a success than the first one. It, too, remains a mere fantasy. Throughout the play Faustus' "art" is essentially the working of his overproductive imagination. Thus Marlowe's learned magician may be properly called an artist in a far more literal sense than he himself is aware of: someone who is, in the words of Sidney's *Apology*, "lifted up with the vigour of his own invention" (Sidney 1965, 100). Andrew Ettin illustrates Faustus' urge for instant mastery by quoting Sartre's observation that "the act of imagination is a magical one. It is an incantation destined to produce the object of one's thought, the thing one desires [...]. In that act there is always something of the imperious and the infantile, a refusal to take distance or difficulties into account" (Ettin 1974, 280). But the passage serves equally well to corroborate the close affinity between magician and poet. It seems no accident, then, that Faustus should describe himself after the first, seemingly triumphant, manifestation of his newly acquired art as "Coniurer *Laureate*" (A-text; 3.276)

For all his self-aggrandizement, Greene's "frolic friar" is more moderate in his claims than Faustus. This is due to the design of Greene's comedy as much as to Bacon's fundamental Englishness. The monodramatic structure of Marlowe's play sets the protagonist off against a gallery of shadowy background figures, but Bacon's progress takes place in the framework of a comedy plot. In the love triangle involving Prince Edward, Lacy, and Margaret, the fair maid of Fressingfield, he has an important but subsidiary part to play. Unlike Faustus, he never presumes to grasp for political power. Even when he boasts of being strong enough to subdue ten Caesars, this does not mean that he entertains any hopes of becoming a ruler ten times as powerful as the Roman statesman. Rather, he speaks as an English patriot who wants to protect his country against foreign aggressors.

And I will strengthen England by my skill,
That if ten Caesars liv'd and reign'd in Rome,
With all the legions Europe doth contain,
They should not touch a grass of English ground.
(2.58-61)

Although the means by which Bacon wants to achieve this end may be wrong – a protective brass wall would, after all, be hardly in the interest of an expanding seapower – the patriotic end in itself is never discredited in the play. While Faustus, too, initially intends to do some good for his fellow academics and for his country,[18] Bacon is actually shown to act as England's champion in a spectacular public contest with his foreign competitor, Vandermast, which doubtless won him much favour with Elizabethan audiences.[19] Throughout Greene's play, the magician's mighty egotism is tempered by his containment in two overlapping social contexts: the scholarly community at Oxford and the romance-setting of a distinctly pre-modern, feudal England.

This containment makes his art both less absolute and more effective. For all his boasting, Faustus hardly ever interferes with the course of other peoples' lives.[20] Bacon, on the other hand, does so on several occasions, and with striking results. He invents a "prospective glass" in which far-off people and events appear to be present. These 'live broadcasts' affect both watcher and watched. Thus Edward espies his friend Lacy who, instead of pressing the prince's suit with Margaret, is about to marry her himself. Bacon uses his magical remote control to stop the ceremony by paralyzing Friar Bungay's arms. This may still be a relatively harmless prank. But when two students, young Lambert and young Serlsby, stab each other to death after watching their fathers die in a duel fought over the fair Margaret, Bacon realizes that his magic is out of control. He too, proud know-it-all that he is, must learn his lesson – albeit a much less severe

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[18] Cf. A-Text, 1.120-125:

> Ile haue them wall all *Iermany* with brasse
> And make swift *Rhine* circle fair *Wertenberge*:
> Ile haue them fill the publike schooles with skill.
> Wherewith the students shalbe brauely clad:
> Ile leuy souldiers with the coyne they bring,
> And chase the Prince of *Parma* from our land ...

[19] James D. McCallum (1920) first suggested that this scene may have been based on Giordano Bruno's celebrated visit to Oxford from April to July 1583. For a discussion of the patriotic element in the play, see Ardolino 1988.

[20] This is true of the A-text. In the Saxon Bruno Episode of the B-text, Faustus does in fact influence the course of European politics.

one than the one his colleague Faustus learns.[21] Full of remorse, he smashes the glass, abjures his dark practices and vows to spend his life thenceforth "In pure devotion, praying to my God" (13.107). Notwithstanding this pious resolution, the play's final assessment of magic is by no means uncompromisingly negative.[22] The grand festive finale restores harmony by reconciling the rivals, Prince Edward and Lacy, and matching them with appropriate damsels in a double wedding. This not only includes Bacon but occasions the most resonant of his patriotic speeches to bring the play to a close. Bacon clearly speaks here with the authority of a magician. Even without his brazen head, he can see into the future. His prophecy transcends the fictional world of the play by connecting the theatrical representation of monarchy with its real life representative: Bacon prophesies the rule of 'Diana', Elizabeth I.[23] The most authoritative statement in the play is thus attributed to the vatic powers of the artist-magician.

> *I find by deep prescience of mine art,*
> *Which once I temper'd in my secret cell,*
> *That here where Brute did build his Troynovant,*
> *From forth the royal garden of a king*
> *Shall flourish out so rich and fair a bud*
> *Whose brightness shall deface proud Phoebus' flower,*
> *And over-shadow Albion with her leaves.*

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[21] The hope denied to Faustus is readily – even instantly – available to Bacon:

> God's mercy.
> Yet Bacon, cheer thee; drown not in despair.
> Sins have their salves. Repentance can do much.
> Think mercy sits where Justice holds her seat,
> And from those wounds those bloody Jews did pierce,
> Which by magic oft did bleed afresh
> From thence for thee the dew of mercy drops
> To wash the wrath of high Jehova's ire,
> And make thee as a new-born babe from sin.
> (13.98-105)

[22] Cf. Crupi 1986, 119: "Greene [. . .] sets two images of Bacon's magic against each other, and neither quite cancels out the other [. . .] The potential for good is genuine, but Bacon must renounce the destructive power of forces that he cannot fully control."

[23] For the mythological symbolism of this passage, cf. Mortensen 1972, 206-207.

Till then Mars shall be master of the field;
But then the stormy threats of wars shall cease.
[...]
Juno shall shut her gilliflowers up,
And Pallas' bay shall bash her brightest green;
Ceres' carnation, in consort with those,
Shall stoop and wonder at Diana's rose.
(xvi,42-50, 59-62)

Faustus is the radical egoist who demands absolute power and reaps absolute dependency; Bacon, with magical powers purified of dangerous side-effects, can be integrated into a romanticized image of England. Prospero represents a third variant of the learned magician. Unlike the other two, he wields both magical and political power. It has been suggested recently (Rosador 1990) that Shakespeare was careful to separate Prospero's two roles in order to avoid any contamination of legitimate monarchic power with its illegitimate competitor, the power of magic. Hence Prospero must cease to be a duke when he becomes a magician and must abjure his magic before becoming a duke again. Likewise, according to this argument, the magician's island had to be separated spatially from the duchy of Milan. The play, it seems however, is not quite as clear-cut in its segregation of the two powers or spheres. Prospero, it is true, changes from duke to magician to duke again, but it is only through magic that he wins his dukedom back. Like the forest of Arden in *As You Like It* and the woods near Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Prospero's island represents that "green world" which Northrop Frye has identified as the centerpiece of the typical tripartite structure of Shakespearean comedy. Within a progression "from normal world to green world and back" (Frye 1948, 58-73), this "green world" may be set apart from everyday reality, yet its influence always extends well into the "normal world". Witness Miranda's marriage with Ferdinand, by which Prospero determines the political future of two states, Milan and Naples. Here, as in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, magic brings about "something of great constancy". Although the action of *The Tempest* – except for I i – takes place entirely on the island, the triadic structure is nonetheless clearly recognizable in the prehistory and posthistory of the dramatis personae. On the island, Prospero reigns absolute, no less so than Faustus in his imaginary nowhereland. But Faustus' unreal kingdom soon fades to nothingness precisely because of its

unreality, while Prospero's island is visited by emissaries of the real world cast up on its shore by a tempest which is nothing more than a magic trick. Magical and political power, like green world and normal world, are not neatly separable in the play.

Nor is there any strict moral segregation of the two types of power. In taking possession of Caliban's island by magical force, the deposed duke, it is true, becomes a usurper himself. But such an act of colonialist violence would hardly appear reprehensible to Shakespeare's original audience,[24] and Prospero's ability to establish and uphold his rule on the island is the test he must pass before he can reclaim his former authority and eventually present himself "as I was sometime Milan" (5.1.86). This does not relieve the moral dubiousness of Prospero's island regime. On the contrary, this dubiousness extends beyond the magic circle of the island to the very foundations of the dukedom regained. Prospero proceeds from innocence to experience, from pure to applied magic, from the idealism of bettering his mind to the *Realpolitik* of authoritarian statecraft. Only then is he ready to regain his position as head of state, ready to foil any future designs on his rule by the likes of Antonio and Sebastian, whose evil natures have proved impervious to his "so potent art".

But Shakespeare does not let matters rest here. Instead of 'freezing' the tableau of order restored as the play's final image, he dissolves all magical and political power in a final gesture of resignation. The world of the play cancels itself in Prospero's address to the audience.[25]

The epilogue both recalls and revokes the initial act of magical manipulation, the storm, which landed the shipwrecked travellers from Tunis in a maze of magical illusions and the spectators in a world of dramatic fiction. Now Prospero finds himself shipwrecked "on this bare island" which, the moment he calls it an island, ceases to be one and becomes nothing but a bare stage. Thus the magical power that could raise a storm on this wooden platform is handed

[24] Stephen Orgel lists some of the most important treatments of the colonialist issue in the introduction to his edition of the play (*The Tempest*, p. 24). Montaigne's favourable view, also cited by Orgel, that the cannibals represent a state of prelapsarian innocence is certainly not given much import in the portrayal of Caliban.

[25] *The Tempest* 5.1.319-338. For a perceptive discussion of Prospero's epilogue see Weimann 1991.

over to those whose acceptance had empowered the magic of theatrical illusion in the first place: the spectators.

The epilogue reveals that Prospero's realm, like Faustus', is a mere phantasm. It stretcheth as far – and no farther than – the mind of man. Within their respective fictional worlds, the two magicians Prospero and Faustus could not be farther apart from each other, embodying as they do the extremes of power and impotence, achievement and mere fantasizing. The metatheatrical ending of *The Tempest* cancels this opposition. As creator (and creation) of theatrical make-believe, Prospero turns out to be a close relation of Faustus as well as Bacon – playmakers, illusionists all.

Faustus' magical power just suffices to serve the potentates he had boasted of forcing into submission as an entertainer and provider of quasi-theatrical spectacle. This is nowhere more evident than in his encounter with the emperor, Charles V. "The Emporer shal not liue but by my leave" rants the would-be magician (A-text; iii 355). No trace of such bragging remains in his obsequious address to the ruler:

> *FAUSTUS:*
> *My gratious Soueraigne, though I must confesse / my selfe farre inferior to the report men haue published, and / nothing answerable to the honor of your Imperial maiesty, / yet for that loue and duety bindes me there-vnto, I am con- / tent to do whatsoeuer your maiesty shall command me. (A-text; x, 1052-1056)*

These grovelling civilities resemble in tone and function the flattering dedicatory prefaces which 16th-century poets and playwrights wrote to secure aristocratic patronage. The emperor demands to see a show: Alexander the Great and his paramour, complete with the mole on her neck, as real as if they were alive and yet, as Faustus painstakingly points out, not "the true substantial bodies" but "spirits", "shadows" or, one might say, theatre. Like the stages of Elizabethan London, Faustus' magical theatre is beholden to government authority which restricts it while at the same time securing its liberty. The legislation which in the course of the sixteenth century – most stridently during the first decade of Elizabeth's reign – defined "the place of the stage",[26] its legal

[26] Cf. Mullaney 1987.

and social status within the community, severed those ties with the political and religious issues of the day that had enabled the theatre to serve as a propaganda weapon during the denominational controversies of the 1530s and 40s.[27] Forced by law to refrain from any direct interference in the affairs of church or state, the stage gained the aesthetic freedom to house infinite worlds of the imagination. The emperor's words similarly circumscribe Faustus' magical performance.

> *... therefore is my request, that thou let me see some proof of thy skil*
> *... and here I sweare to thee, by the honour of mine Imperial crowne, that what euer thou doest, thou shalt be no wayes preiudiced, or indamaged. (A-text; x, 1045-1050).*[28]

"A sound magician is a mighty god" (A-text; i, 92), says Faustus in his opening monologue. The same could be said of the poet and is, in fact, said of him in Sidney's *Apology*.[29] Like Faustus, the magician who turns out to be "omnimpotent", in Constance Brown Kuriyama's apt term (Kuriyama 1980, 95-135), he is both almighty and powerless. As creator of a "second nature", the poet, like Prospero and Faustus, rules absolute in a world of his own making, a heterocosm, which is *like* reality but severed from reality.

Sidney, steeped as he is in classical poetics, has nothing but contempt for the dramatists of his own day, and although he died before the heyday of the Elizabethan stage it is safe to assume that its masterpieces would not have found his favour, either. But it was not just in the abstract realm of Aristotelian poetics

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[27] Cf. Yachnin 1991, 59: "The polemical theater of the early and middle Tudor Period gave way to the recreational theater of Elizabeth's reign." (ibid., 73): "The powerlessness of the stage guaranteed the players a prosperous security because a powerless theater was perceived by the authorities to pose no threat to the established political order." A good example of the earlier polemical theatre is found in the works of John Bale, who designates "players, printers, preachers" as "a triple bulwark against the triple crown of the Pope". Cf. Balslev-Blatt 1968, 131.

[28] This brings up the much debated question of containment versus subversion, which has been one of the major issues of new historicist and cultural materialist criticism. (For a view almost diametrically opposed to Paul Yachnin's article quoted above cf. Kastan 1986).

[29] No consideration of *An Apology for Poetry* should ignore its complex rhetorical ironies. Sidney's facetiousness undercutting his claims for the quasi-divine status of the poet is not all that remote from the dramatic ironies Marlowe employs to deflate Faustus' aspirations. For a perceptive analysis of Sidney's argument, cf. (Levao 1979).

that the contemporary dramatist found himself near the bottom of the scale. G.E. Bentley's ample evidence (Bentley 1971) suggests that socially he fared little better. Society at large held his works – a term never even applied to plays before Ben Jonson's daring Folio-publication of 1616 – in similarly low esteem. Because the plays of Shakespeare and his colleagues have for us become such central texts of early modern discourse we tend to forget their actual marginality. As professional writers, purveyors of a literary commodity the Elizabethan playwrights are the true avant-garde pointing the way towards the literary marketplace of subsequent centuries. But it is their very professionalism in turning a gentlemanly leisure-time activity into a mere trade which discredits them in the eyes of their contemporaries. Even the actors of the licensed companies on whom they depended for their income seem to have been held in higher esteem.[30] Although the young 'university wits' of the 1580s and early 1590s may have embarked on their literary careers with high hopes for advancement through patronage, the realization of these hopes was more the exception than the rule.

Bearing this in mind, the fact that Faustus, Prospero and, to a lesser extent, Bacon are all presented as lonely, isolated figures further emphasizes the kinship between magus and dramatist. From the hubris of his supposed singularity, Faustus undergoes a process of painful isolation culminating poignantly in the lonely agony of his last hour. Knowledge, initially promising total control, has become the tragic awareness of total, irrevocable isolation. Prospero, who towers in solitary superiority above all the other characters, at the end of the play must face his audience alone: no longer the all-powerful ruler but a supplicant asking for mercy. Only Bacon is allowed to pass beyond despair and isolation and return to his place within the community in the grand festive finale.

At a time when the writing of dramatic poetry was becoming a profession and gaining its practitioners the precarious liberty of working freelance, Robert Greene, who in his short life seems to have seen more of the pitfalls than the advantages of this new freedom, nostalgically evokes an idealized version of the older feudal order in which the wizard-poet held his undisputed place near the centre of power, sustained by and sustaining the charisma of the monarch. As

[30] Bentley 1971, 49-50.

Marlowe and Shakespeare conceive him, the learned magus encompassing the extremes of omnipotence and powerlessness, emblematically reflects the new situation of the writer, ruling in god-like absoluteness over a realm of his own invention, yet a marginal, inconsequential figure in the eyes of the world.

With Faustus and Prospero a dichotomy begins to make itself felt which compelled another defender of the 'magical' power of poetry, two centuries after Sidney, Percy Bysshe Shelley, to proclaim that "poets are the *unacknowledged* legislators of the world" (Shelley 1880, 144).

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