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IN THE SHADE OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE: MARLOWE AND CALDERÓN

Wm. Lewis

Juxtaposing *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* and *La gran comedia del mágico prodigioso* may seem an idle attempt to compare the proverbial apples and oranges. Such comparison has rarely been made in a work of any length. The most salient common element of the two plays makes it inevitable, however, that some comparison of them be included in a work entitled "Chapters on Magic." Therein Samuel M. Waxman asked:

Does Calderón's Cypriano resemble Doctor Faustus in any way? No. Faustus is a wandering scholar, the loose-living conjurer of the Renaissance; Cypriano is the pagan philosopher on the threshold of Christianity. He makes a pact, it is true, to gain possession of a woman, but we are not concerned with his conjurer's tricks as is the case with Faustus . . . Cypriano and Faust have nothing in common but the devil pact, a pact introduced into the legend by Calderón and suggested by a seventeenth century version of the Theophilus story, which is in all probability the source also of the pact in the Faust legend. Once we take out of consideration this devil pact which probably goes back to a common source, all analogy between Faustus and Cypriano ceases.¹

Because his is a study of necromancy rather than of dramatic form, Waxman neglects to mention that, while Doctor Faustus is damned, Cypriano is saved, that in Christian terms, Marlowe's play ends unhappily, Calderón's happily. There is in fact another analogy that is outside the sphere of Waxman's enquiry, but is central to mine, namely, that both plays, on the surface at least, are morality plays dealing with a basic Christian theme, the Fall of Man. Furthermore, through the presence in them of a diabolical tempter, both plays presuppose an earlier fall, that of Lucifer. Harry Levin has written that "all tragedy, of course, could be traced to that original fall; it was the overplot that adumbrated all subsequent plots . . . Just as the conjurations of Dr. Faustus are parodied by the antics of the clowns, so his destiny is prefigured by that of the Eternal Adversary. And just as the relation of the underplot to the main plot is parodic, so the relation of the overplot to the

main plot is figurai — a glimpse exemplifying some grander design, an indication that the play at hand is but an interlude from a universal drama performed in the great *theatrum mundi*.² In Christian terms again, the universal drama that Levin speaks of must be classified, not as tragedy, but as comedy, divine comedy. Christ, through His incarnation, death and resurrection, has redeemed fallen man. In the drama of the Middle Ages, the Fall of Man continued to be played out in the Mystery cycles, but the Adam play yielded, as inevitably as one pageant cart to the next, to the Harrowing of Hell. Miracle plays almost invariably portrayed — as in the Theophilus stories mentioned by Waxman — not the fall alone, but the redemption and salvation of sinners. In the Moralities, Everyman is saved.³ *El mágico prodigioso* fits neatly into that tradition. Not so, *Doctor Faustus*.

There is a post-Hegelian consensus that posits the incompatibility of Christianity and tragedy. It is most memorably embodied in I. A. Richards dictum: "tragedy is only possible to a mind which is for the moment agnostic or Manichean. The least touch of any theology which has a compensating Heaven to offer the tragic hero is fatal."⁴ Granted that to be so, logic *á la* Cipriano and his diabolical debating partner would seem to establish that for the tragic hero, whose own actual destiny is what is most urgently at stake, the loss of that compensating Heaven constitutes tragedy — Christian tragedy. Faustus loses, Cipriano wins that heaven. *Sic probo. Faustus* is a tragedy, *El mágico* a comedy. Both bear out their titles (*comedia* is of course more encompassing than comedy) and we can move on to the examination of real problems. But willy-nilly, I am reminded of W. H. Auden's remark that, while at the end of a Greek tragedy we say, "What a pity it had to be this way," at the end of a Christian tragedy, our reaction is, "What a pity it had to be this way when it might have been otherwise."⁵ In *Doctor Faustus*, the Old Man urges:

O stay good Faustus, stay thy desperate steps
 I see an Angelí houer ore thy head,
 And with a vyoll full of pretious grace,
 Offers to poure the same into thy soule . . .⁶

We credit his vision since clearly he is himself on the verge of death and, as he says, "hence I flie unto my God." (1386). We recall too Faustus' "See where Christ's blood streams in the firmament, / One drop would save my soule, halfe a drop ..." (1463-64). On the other hand, according to Calderón's Demon,

ya es tarde, ya es tarde
 para hallarle tú, si juzgo (con rabia)
 que siendo tú esclavo mío,
 no has de ser vasallo suyo.⁷

Thus, until the last moment, Faustus might yet be saved, Cipriano damned.

The tension is maintained, the potential alternate ending is suggested and held in reserve.⁸

If the destinies of Faustus and Cipriano remain in doubt throughout most of their respective plays, and if their souls remain *en jeu* until the resolution of the main plots which they dominate, the audience may well be expected to concentrate its sympathetic concern on the unravelling of those destinies. After all, the destiny of the archfiend of the overplot has long since been settled, and the destinies of the personages of the underplot are scarcely to be taken seriously. But the very presence of a figurai failure like the devil "above" and of inconsequent clowns and *graciosos* "below" exerts a kind of gravitational force on the contestants in the psychomachia.

It is undeniably true that the subplots of both plays parody the main plots.⁹ Faustus conjures up the devil; so too do Wagner and then the two clowns. Cipriano falls in love with Justina; Moscón and Clarín with Livia. Clarín later tries vainly to duplicate his master's pact. But while, in the working out of the protagonists' destinies, Faustus progressively descends to the level of the underplot — Acts III and IV portray him as a sort of social climber-down, from the Pope to the Emperor, to the Duke of Vanholt, thence to the horse courser, carter, and clowns — in Calderón, it is Clarín who is drawn into the main plot when his curiosity gets the better of him (1874), thence into the arms of Cipriano (. . . sale Clarín huyendo, y abrázose con él Cipriano [2549]), and who — with Moscón — ultimately pronounces the valediction. In both plays, the Devil, when conjured up by the underplotters, exhibits nothing but disdain for them. Mephostophilis, recalled from Constantinople by Robin and Dick, turns them into ape and dog (III. iii. 1154ff); the Demon, similarly distracted by Clarín, is less imaginative, but equally indignant at the impertinent demand on his time and talents. "Ya digo que me dejes / y que con tu señor de mí te alejes." (2161-62). Perhaps Clarín speaks for them all when he says "sin duda que me tienes por seguro," (2166) but whatever may be the eternal fate of Marlowe's clowns, in the end it is clear to Clarín that Cipriano "ha sido / el mágico de los cielos," (3139) and Moscón has the final word (however double its significance), "al Mágico prodigioso / pedid perdón de los yerros." (3142-43).

Just as the *graciosos* have parodied their master's deeds throughout the play, herein they are emulating the anagnorisis that Cipriano has earlier experienced:

Esqueleto. Así Cipriano, son
todas las glorias del mundo. (2548-49)

Faustus, wavering between his Good and Bad angels ("I do repent and yet I doe despair' [v.i. 1844]), has vacillated so much that it is difficult to know when he experiences a revelation similar to Cipriano's (similar dramatically, that is, not theologically), but I would put it at his exchange with Mephostophilis that goes:

Meph. Thou traytor, Faustus, I arrest thy soule
 For disobedience to my souereigne Lord
 Reuolt, or I'll peece-meale teare thy flesh.

Faust. I do repent I e'er offended him.
 Sweet Mephasto: intreat thy Lord
 To pardon my vniust presumption,
 And with my bloud againe I will confirme
 The former vow I made to Lucifer. (V.i. 1847-54)

Santayana would have it that Marlowe (with Goethe) was thoroughly on the way towards reversing the Christian philosophy of life.¹⁰ Certainly, Faustus has thoroughly reversed all Christian values, and is now so thoroughly identified with evil that, whereas Cipriano had made of Justina, in A. A. Parker's words, "the good he . . . desires above all else, ... as he puts it, the God he is searching for,"¹¹ Faustus' God is now Lucifer, and to him he addresses the very theological terms (repent, offend, intreat, pardon, presumption, vow) that a Christian or a Cipriano would reserve for the deity.

Harry Levin has analysed *Doctor Faustus* in terms of *libido sciendi*,¹² and Parker bases his reading of *El mágico prodigioso* on the Calderonian use of the term "ignorancia." Like Adam, who has the right to eat of every tree in Paradise but one, Faustus is introduced as the master of all knowledge save that to be won through the black arts; Cipriano too has mastered all knowledge, arriving even at a theoretical concept of the "suma bondad, suma gracia, / todo vista, todo manos, infalible . . ." (286-88) who is God — a knowledge that needs only divine grace to be complete. It is noteworthy that, while Faustus conjures up the devil with complete deliberation, Cipriano only discovers the identity of his adversary when, having failed to fulfill his part of the pact, the demon cries:

y porque
 desesperen tus discursos,
 quiero que sepas que ha sido
 el demonio el dueño tuyo. (2710-13)¹³

Faustus educes the exposition of the diabolical overplot from Mephosto-philis himself, who here as generally tells the unvarnished truth — as to why he has come —

For when we heare one racke the name of God . . .
 We fly in hope to get his glorious soule;
 Nor will we come vnlesse he vse such meanes,
 Whereby he is in danger to be damn'd. (I.iii. 273-77)

— and to the question, "what are you that liue with Lucifer?" —

Vnhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer,
 Conspired against our God with Lucifer,

And are forever damn'd with Lucifer. (I.iii. 296-98)

— and protests:

Why this is hell: nor am I out of it. (I. iii. 301)

— all to a Faustus who, in an amazing example of vincible ignorance, proclaims:

This word Damnation, terrifies not me,

For I confound hell in Elizium. (I.iii. 284-85)

Mephostophilis lies about only one issue, Faustus' fate.

. . . now thou hast no hope of heauen,

Therefore despaire, thinke onely upon hell. (V.ii. 1983-84)

The Demon too has made a premature and erroneous statement of that sort: "ya es tarde . . ." (see n.7), but then he almost invariably lies, or so he says.

Esta es la verdad, y yo
la digo, porque Dios mesmo
me fuerza a que yo la diga,
tan poco enseñado a hacerlo. (3126-29)

So too, his figurai overplot is recounted in something other than the literal truth. He appears in his second disguise (the first time, he was "de galán"), this time, "mojado, como que sale del mar" (s.d. 1243) and launches into a lengthy exposition that is allegorical and, as such, true: "Yo soy, pues saberlo quieres, un epilogo, un asombro . . ." (1292-1357) (he soon abandons the truth as he proceeds to tempt Cipriano). In a later scene, the Demon will reluctantly tell Cipriano all that the magician needs to know in order to arrive at a knowledge of the Christian God, and in the first scene in which he figures, the Devil expresses that universal truth on which A. A. Parker bases his enormously useful reading of the play. "Esa es la ignorancia. / a la vista de las ciencias / no saber aprovecharlas." This is a pointer also to what will be his intervention in the play: the Devil will act according to what he is, and his aim will be to try to make Cyprian like himself — to induce him not to stretch out to the knowledge he is within sight of"¹⁴ The relevance to the overplot of this insight should not be missed. Lucifer and the bad angels sinned, not as man would by taking as good something that was bad, but by using their free will to turn towards their own good without being guided by the divine will; this is the Thomistic consequential ignorance of wrong choice. Thus, in explaining how he comes to be in sight of Antioch and yet not able to find his way there, the Demon had already given the brief version of his overplot. That he, and Mephostophilis as well, seek to realize in the fates of Faustus and Cipriano the doom that is figured in their overplots is the *primum mobile* of the main plots. In this

attempt, they are merely trying to rehearse the original temptation and fall of man. A recollection of Genesis might not be out of place at this point:

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. [He then warned Adam:] "You are free to eat from any of the trees . . . except the tree of the knowledge of good and bad." [But the serpent,] the most cunning of all the animals that the Lord God has made tempted Eve "You certainly will not die: No, God knows well the moment you eat of it you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it.¹⁵

Such is the original sin, the original fall, the original myth.

The world of *El Mágico*, while assuredly Christian, is at many removes from this Eden. El Demonio would tempt Cipriano to sin as he himself had done, not in pursuit of forbidden knowledge, but through the ignorance of wrong choice, and so offers him, instead of the *suma bondad*, Justina. For Parker, "Here is the distraction that can immobilise his reason in voluntary ignorance within sight of knowledge . . ."¹⁶ The devil fails because his knowledge cannot stand up to the free will of Justina, who enlightens him: "Sabiéndome yo ayudar / del libre albedrío mio" (2313-19), and the grace of God, as the Demon admits, "Un dios, que a su cargo tuvo / a Justina" (2659-60). Closer to the world of Genesis — and commensurately removed from the world of the schoolmen — is *Doctor Faustus*.

But his dominion that exceeds in this,
Stretcheth as farre as doth the minde of man.
A sound Magician is a mighty god:
Heere Faustus trie thy braines to gaine a deitie. (83-93)

"You will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad."

Faustus who confounds Hell in Elysium, ends, as we have seen, by confounding the good with the bad, the divine with the diabolical. Descending to the level of his clowns, he also lowers progressively the objects of his *libido sciendi*. Once the pact has ensured him of the unlimited services of Mephostophilis, and bidden to ask that evil genie anything he wilt, Faustus immediately asks "where is the place that men call Hell. (ILL 508) Being told, he dismisses hell as an old wives tale, then procedes to ask — surprisingly chaste — for a wife. While there is no woman in *Doctor Faustus* to correspond to Justina, there is — finally — Helena, who corresponds in fact to the

skeleton. It is indicative of Faustus' total reversal of Christian values, his total identification with his "sweete Mephasto" and his total confounding of good and evil that, in the famous Helen scene, knowing full well that his paramour is no more substantial than the shadows that he had identified as such to the Emperor (IV.ii. 1304), he asks Mephostophilis for Helen "to glut the longing of my hearts desire (V.i. 1864), just as in the scene of the first pact, the Devil had fetched a "shew" of devils "to delight his minde." (ILL 470). The tempted has become the self tempter, and he has done so precisely because he has undergone his anagnorisis, has recognized that his God is Lucifer. The contrast with Cipriano's anagnorisis could not be more marked. Hearing from the divinely inspired skeleton that "Así . . . son todas las glorias del mundo," his natural inclination is to proceed to the perfection of such knowledge as he had already attained, a knowledge upon which there is no hint of a divine prohibition.

Among the many mansions of the Christian kingdom, is there room for the worlds of both Marlowe and of Calderón? Behind the mask of Melpomene is there a place for either of them? R. H. Bowers has written of a theological conflict that raged¹⁷ in Spain in the late sixteenth century. Liberal Spanish Jesuits argued that grace is efficacious through the active consent of the human will, and conservative Spanish Dominicans that grace is efficacious *per se*, not dependent on the weakened, erratic human will. To Bower's knowledge (and indeed to mine), the Church has never taken a final official position in the matter. The other side of the coin of grace is, of course, the absence of grace, or predestination to damnation. While Calderón would seem to be a "Jesuit" in his glorification of the *libre albedrío*, Marlowe is hardly a thoroughgoing "Dominican." The world of *Doctor Faustus*, as I have read it, contains both grace and free will. The Old Man is the real counterpart of Justina, and he is saved, just before the damnation of Faustus, because as Mephostophilis truly allows, "his faith is great, I cannot touch his soule." (V.i. 1860) It is the Old Man whom we have seen assuring that grace was at hand for Faustus too (see n. 6). Faustus has free will as well, but he has freely, progressively surrendered it, just as he has progressively descended by every conceivable measure of man. To use his free will in order to save himself would be to deny as well the bond, much more than a legal pact, which he has formed with Mephostophilis, a figure admirable in many respects and paradoxically the embodiment not only of forbidden knowledge but of Christian truth.

If we think for a moment of Greek tragedy, which I take it, is the touchstone of the tragic, we can describe a common condition analogous to a physical suspension, a condition in which contradictory elements coexist without intermingling and forming a new substance; these elements in tragedy are necessity and choice.¹⁸ Christened, they become predestination (including the allotting of grace) and free will. In presenting a world in which the stress is on free will, Calderón remains within the broad confines of not

wholly definable Christian orthodoxy; in leaving the precise relationship of grace and free will in suspension, Marlowe is equally orthodox. He also produces what is manifestly a tragedy, and one that is fully tragic only in terms of the Christian myth in which it is embodied. Aristotle casually suggested that "tragic" is a comparative term when he called Euripides the most tragic of the poets.¹⁹ Perhaps just as the Greeks had no choice but to designate as tragic any serious play, we should be equally latitudinarian and recognize that, in introducing the menace of eternal death, the potential "otherwise," Calderón too has come within the broad confines of the tragic, the Christian tragic.

NOTES

1. "Chapters in Magic in Spanish Literature" *Revue hispanique*, XXXVIII, December 1916, 386.
2. *Shakespeare and the Revolution of the Times*, New York (Oxford University Press) 1976, p. 88.
3. There were of course late morality plays, like Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest* and *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, and in Spain, *El condenado por desconfiado* in which the antagonist was damned. None of these plays, however, is so generally esteemed a tragedy as is *Doctor Faustus*.
4. *Principles of Literary Criticism*, New York (Harcourt Brace) 1930, 4th éd., p. 246.
5. "The Christian Tragic Hero," *New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 16, 1945, quoted by Richard B. Sewall in *The Vision of Tragedy*, New Haven (Yale University Press) 1959, p. 57.
6. W. W. Greg, ed., *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus*, 1604-1616, Parallel Texts. Briefly, the 1616 text is the fuller and, at present, the basic text. The 1604 text, however, contains many passages that are missing or are corrupt in the later text. I have followed current usage and my own taste in using the 1616 text except where the 1604 text seemed superior. I have followed Greg's Act and Scene division, applied to the 1616 text only. Subsequent references that include Act, scene, verse (numbered not by scene but consecutively from beginning to end) refer to the 1616 text; references giving verse only refer to the 1604 text.
7. Calderón, *El mágico prodigioso*, Bernard Sesé, ed., Paris, (Aubier) 1961, verses 2698-2701, p. 212.. This edition is based upon the first edition of 1663, and takes into account Alfred Morel-Patio's edition of the 1637 manuscript. (Paris-Madrid, Heilbronn, 1877). I have consulted two other editions of the text in order to avoid using idiosyncratic readings. References are made to the Sesé edition because of serial numbering of verses, which is independent of *jornadas*.
8. Neither of our subject plays could be amended so readily as was Nathaniel Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience*, which in its original form concluded with:

O doleful news which I report and bring into your ears:
Philologus by deep despair hath hanged himself with cord.

which within months became (in a second edition):

O joyful news which I report and bring unto your ears:
Philologus, that would have hanged himself with cord,
Is now converted unto God, with many bitter tears.

I have not examined this text, but rely upon Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play*, London (Routledge et al.) 1975, p. 125.

9. This subject has recently been taken up by Katarzyna Mroczkowska, "L'Analyse Comparée de l'emploi de la parodie et du mélange du tragique et du comique dans *El mágico prodigioso* de Calderón et *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* de Marlowe" *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny*, XXI, 4/1974, 499-505.
10. *Three Philosophical Poets*, 1910 (Doubleday Anchor ed.) no date, p. 135.
11. "The Devil in the Drama of Calderon," *Critical Essays on the Theatre of Calderón*, ed. Bruce Wardropper, New York (New York University Press), 1965, pp. 20-21.
12. *Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher*, Cambridge, Mass. 1952, rpt., London (Faber & Faber) 1961, pp. 129-159 *passim*.
13. Cipriano may be presumed to have reached the additional theoretical knowledge of the devil's existence; his *gracioso*s certainly had done so. They had even known Lucero by the smell of sulphur, and on second meeting, Clarín could declare: "El tal huésped es el diablo." (1874).
14. "The Devil in the Drama of Calderón," *op. cit.*, p. 19. In the following passage, I have paraphrased Parker, using his own terminology as much as possible.
15. *New American Bible*, New York, (J. P. Kennedy) 1970, Gen. 2:8-9 to 3:4-6.
16. "The Devil . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 20.
17. "Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Tirso's *El Condenado por Desconfiado* and the Secret Cause," *Costerus*, 4, 1972, 13-14. I have paraphrased him as closely as possible and continue to do so in what follows. In spite of a papal commission charged to settle the matter (the Congregado de Auxiliis), under Pope Paul V the two orders were left free to defend their respective positions, which were both within the broad confines of orthodoxy.
18. These elements may be induced from a reading of individual tragedies. For an authority, see Aristotle, *Poetics*, necessity, XV, 10 (1454a); choice, VI, 24 (1450b) and *passim*.
19. *ibid*, XIII, 10 (1453a).

Note: I am further indebted to Professors Harry Levin and Stephen Gilman for all that I have gleaned from their suggestions. The phrase, "the broad confines of orthodoxy", may be in the public domain, but I have taken it from R. H. Bowers, "Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* . . .," *op. cit.* (see note 17).