

Could Faustus Repent?

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty  
Of Saint Meinrad College of Liberal Arts  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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May, 1971.  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus is Christopher Marlowe's greatest achievement.<sup>1</sup> Its contribution to English dramatic literature includes the first really mature tragic vision on the Elizabethan Stage.<sup>2</sup>

The actual date of the play is not known. Marlowe may have written it as early as 1588 or 1589, or shortly before his death in May, 1593.<sup>3</sup> More and more scholars are coming to favour a late date of composition. The main argument for this late date rests upon the assumption that Marlowe relied for his source upon an English book which was not printed until 1592.<sup>4</sup> This book was The Historie of the Damnable Life, and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus, translated by an unidentified P. F. Gent, from the German Historie von D. Johan Fausten, or "Faustbuch" first published at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1589.

The story of Faustus, based on a legend that goes back to the early Middle Ages, was well known by the audiences of Marlowe's time. Marlowe, once he had decided to present the Faustus story and end it in the traditional way, had to damn Faustus. His audience

expected that. But they needed interest, suspense. To supply this, Marlowe exhibited characters and instances to transform this simple story into a drama--a battle of choosing between heaven or hell. Marlowe's audiences believed that a person could repent right up to the last moment before death,<sup>5</sup> and Marlowe used this belief for his play. That is the supposition on which the present thesis is based, and it is through an examination of Marlowe's dramatic construction that a greater appreciation of his craftsmanship may be gained. The question: "Could Faustus repent?" is merely a device for focusing upon the chief element of dramatic suspense.

This paper will examine three areas of concern. In chapter one the aim will be to present a short summary of the plot of the play and apply this plot to the tradition it was written in and to the expectations of the audience viewing this play in the time of Marlowe. In chapter two comments on what previous scholars have written about the possibility of Faustus repenting will be presented. In the third chapter actual lines in the text that pertain to the problem of repentance will be observed.

The text of Doctor Faustus used in this paper is based upon the work of Sir W. W. Greg. He has taken the two corrupt quartos, one from 1604 and another from 1616, and from them he has made a conjectural reconstruction of the original play.<sup>6</sup> From this work will be drawn all quotations from Doctor Faustus that appear in the following chapters.<sup>7</sup>

## CHAPTER I

Doctor Faustus is a spiritual morality play, ending in tragedy. Faustus sells his soul to Lucifer in return for having Mephistophilis as his servant, to heed his every command for twenty-four years. The play spans these twenty-four years, presenting characters that periodically wrestle over Faustus' soul, trying to lure him on the way of the devil or to attract him to the way of repentance and God. In the end Faustus despairs, and hell overrules.

The play springs from a man of boundless pride and passionate ambition,<sup>8</sup> illustrating the tragedy of the human being who will not surrender, in return for the promise of salvation, those heroic attributes--the cravings for knowledge, wealth, power, and delight.<sup>9</sup>

Faustus wants to know everything, to have everything; a book in which he can behold all herbs and trees which grow upon the earth; another in which shall bring him constellations and planets; another which shall bring him gold when he wills it, and 'the fairest courtezans:' another which summons 'men in armour' ready to execute his commands, and which holds 'whirlwinds, tempests, thunder and lightning' chained at his disposal. He is like a child, he stretches out his hands for everything shining; then grieves to think of hell, then lets himself be diverted by shows. He is conducted, being invisible, over the whole world: lastly to Rome, amongst the ceremonies of the Pope's court. Like a schoolboy during a holiday, he has insatiable eyes,

he forgets everything before a pageant, he amuses himself in playing tricks, in giving the Pope a box on the ear, in drinking, <sup>10</sup>feasting, filling his belly, deadening his thoughts.

Simply, Faustus' hope is to enlarge the ordinary scope of human life on earth to equal that of God he envisages in heaven.<sup>11</sup>

The plot of the play is not concerned primarily with character developments. Doctor Faustus basically concerns itself with only one character, and this character, because the play does not present any details, personal traits, eccentricities or habits, is not clearly defined.<sup>12</sup> The source of the play then stems not from a character, but rather from an idea placed in a predicament.<sup>13</sup> This idea in Faustus is the idea of loss, the loss of heaven.<sup>14</sup>

The basic plot of Doctor Faustus can be divided into three movements.<sup>15</sup> First there is Faustus' choice that begins the action and sets the movement of the play toward the climax. This choice springs from a realization of Faustus' own limitations as a man, and the syllogistic conclusion he arrives at marking his death through sin already implicit:

Stipendium peccati mors est. Ha! Stipendium, etc.  
The reward of sin is death. That's hard.  
Si peccasse negamus, fallimur  
Et nulla est in nobis veritas.  
If we say that we have no sin,  
We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.  
Why then belike we must sin,  
And so consequently die.  
Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

(I.i.39-47)

The syllogism is a false one, for Faustus does not read farther into the Scriptures to see that salvation is possible through the mercy and grace of God. Faustus' God is one singularly without love, a

God of terrible justice without mercy. Viewing the Scriptures and God this way, Faustus feels that Christianity can offer him nothing but sin and death, so he turns to Mephistophilis and necromancy. This brings the play to the second movement. Faustus' deterioration begins: his questions about the universe and heaven are avoided; he abandons his heroic aspirations for knowledge, wealth, and power; he becomes involved in petty trickery; and he begins to regret his bargain with Lucifer. The final movement of the play shows the last stages of Faustus' deterioration. His encounters with the Old Man are of no avail to him, and he turns to Helen. Finally, he sees his own destruction and the realization that he has gained nothing from his bargain made twenty-four years previously.

Taking this basic plot and placing it in the traditions of the time, two areas of concern arise: how the Elizabethans viewed the concept of learning, and the Christian outlook that existed. The concept of learning for the Elizabethan was to grasp everything possible that would contribute to happy living.

These principles included the pursuit of self-knowledge, faith in man's spiritual destiny, the acceptance of responsibilities to society, and proof in wisdom and conduct. In brief, the end of learning was to prepare individuals for better service to both God and the state.<sup>16</sup>

The second area, the scheme of values of Doctor Faustus, concerns the fundamental Christian outlook which prevailed in Europe from the decline of Roman secularism to the disintegration of the dogmatic tradition long after Faustus was written.<sup>17</sup> The spiritual sphere of a person contains two realms, the realm of God and the realm of Satan; and the most important question in examination of oneself was

whether his soul was of the one realm or the other.<sup>18</sup>

Marlowe took these two popular ingredients and transformed them into something new.<sup>19</sup> The audience witnessed and was appalled at the use of magic to aid in Faustus' search for complete knowledge; and through these means they clearly saw the state of Faustus' soul. They did not see Faustus as a fool, for if they did, there would be no true tragedy.<sup>20</sup> The audience was horrified by his doom, but they agreed with the verdict imposed, because Faustus deliberately let his will be controlled by his appetite instead of by his knowledge; and instead of calling on God's mercy to aid his soul's condition, he despaired of salvation and went to hell.<sup>21</sup>

The audience knew Faustus would go to hell. They knew this before the play began. Marlowe's task was to take this known fact and rework it into a drama to keep the play interesting for his audience. He does this by seemingly offering Faustus a way to reverse his intended doom. However, does Marlowe present a Faustus that made a free choice in choosing hell? To some people, Faustus' free will has posed no problem, but some critics have questioned the possibility of such a choice. The comments of recent critics deserve examination.



## CHAPTER II

A study of the comments of modern critics is a useful step and an accepted method for making a judgment about Marlowe's craftsmanship. The purpose of looking at these comments is to benefit from the thought of these scholars--even when they disagree. Because, in this case, the critics disagree, the study presents a special challenge.

Beginning with Sir Walter Scott, in 1797, there are records of comments, criticisms, and reviews on Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. Through the nineteenth century, much material has been maintained dealing with the play. In a search for what these early scholars had to say concerning Faustus' free will, no direct comments were uncovered on this point. It is not until the twentieth century that scholars have begun to dwell on this point.

To Marlowe's contemporaries and the nineteenth-century critics, the question, "Could Faustus repent?" did not seem to pose a problem. Scholars of the twentieth century, however, do see an area of controversy on this question. While many come to an agreement that Faustus had a free will in his actions and destiny, the

resolution is not unanimous.

Paul H. Kocher, in Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character (1946), writes that "the answer given by the drama is unmistakable. Faustus has free will, free capacity to repent. It is his own fault that he does not, and he goes to a con-dign doom."<sup>22</sup> Kocher supports these statements with interpretations of quotations from characters in the play, and with a refutation on the one line in the play that he sees as a possibility of showing that Faustus was predestined to eternal doom. This line is from II.ii.18. Faustus speaks, "My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent." Kocher explains this line in terms of the expression of the hardening of the heart of a sinner "found time and again in Scripture, especia in Exodus, where Paraoth's obstinacy against Moses is in question."<sup>23</sup>

For the Calvinists these Scriptural passages were interpreted that the process of hardening initially came from God; while for Catholics and Protestants, they meant something different. To explain this different meaning, Kocher refers to a sermon written in the 1560's by Henry Bullinger:

In the same sense, God is said to harden man. For when the Lorde calleth man, and hee resisteth, making himselfe unworthie of the kingdom of heauen, he doth then permit him unto himselfe; that is, hee leaueth man unto his owne corrupt nature, according unto which the hart of man is stonie, which is mollified and made tractable by the onely grace of God: therefore the withdrawing of Gods grace is the hardening of mannes hart: and when wee are left unto our selues, then are we hardened.<sup>24</sup>

To be consistent with other indications of the play, Kocher believes that Faustus' words should be interpreted in accordance with the explanation of the process of hardening from Bullinger, and not from

the C

the Calvinist (for up to 1592, the latest date credited for the writing of Doctor Faustus, the Calvinistic ideas on predestination were not widely known in England).<sup>25</sup> Granted this, Faustus was free from predestination to eternal death.

Kocher does not stand alone in his theory of Faustus' freedom. Another scholar, Joseph T. McCullen, writes in his article appearing in the Modern Language Review, in 1956, "Doctor Faustus and Renaissance Learning,"<sup>26</sup> that Faustus was a free man and his fate was not finally determined till the very end of the play, for:

if it were certain that Faustus could and would follow only a path that leads to the destruction of his soul, his subsequent career would not inspire the tragic emotion and sympathy for which the play is memorable. He would, instead, be remembered merely as a creature of monstrous opinions and actions dashing through a series of melodramatic episodes. The effect produced by his role is different because, in spite of his evident folly and evil, his spiritual welfare remains in doubt till the final scenes of the play. It is not his pact with Lucifer that constitutes his unpardonable sin, and, though he has already thought of despair, there is nothing inescapable about the hold it as yet exerts upon him; hence the exciting rhythm of his alternating moods which establish and maintain the pattern of his inner tragedy.<sup>27</sup>

McCullen examines this pattern of alternating moods by citing passages from the play, as Kocher did to support his argument. An example in the play is the scene where Faustus shifts the blame for his evil from himself to Mephistophilis. Faustus refuses to accept the responsibility for his actions, and through this McCullen maintains that Faustus has not absorbed sufficient knowledge of spiritual principles.<sup>28</sup> Faustus is sincere in his desire to inherit heaven, but this sincerity alone is inadequate as an atonement for his sins. To save himself, Faustus must bow before God in humility

and offer sincere penance rather than evasive rationalization. But Faustus is lacking in adequate knowledge of himself as a sinful man and of Christ as the merciful redeemer, and therefore refuses to recognize himself as an essentially human being with a need for humility before God because of his sins.

As was mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, not all scholars believe that Faustus was a free man. Two of these are Irving Ribner and Ariele Sachs. Ribner, in 1962, wrote in an article, "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse,'" that Faustus pleads "for escape from what the play has revealed cannot be escaped."<sup>29</sup> Ribner believes that Faustus pleads for mercy, but Marlowe's stern God of justice will not show any. To Ribner, the play presents the terror of futility of the human condition with no compensating hope of any kind.<sup>30</sup> Ribner writes there was no hope for humanity presented in Faustus. He furthers this thought in his article, "Marlowe and Shakespeare," written in 1964. In this article Ribner writes that Faustus had no alternative to the damnation he must suffer.<sup>31</sup> For Faustus to have repented, "would have to deny those very aspirations to rise beyond the state of ignorant and impotent man which had led him to pledge his soul to Lucifer, and which have lent him the heroic stature which renders him a tragic figure."<sup>32</sup> For Ribner, Faustus would not accept the limitations of humanity, and consequently there is only despair and frustration ahead for such a man.

Ariele Sachs is not as decisive as Ribner in his views. In "The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus," published in 1964,<sup>33</sup> Sachs attacks a book written in 1953, by F. P. Wilson.<sup>34</sup> In the

book, Wilson quotes from The Damnable Life, stating that this represents without distortion Marlowe's conception of the theme of Faustus. It is: "give none the blame but mine own self-will, thy proud and aspiring mind, which both brought thee into the wrath of God and utter damnation."<sup>35</sup> From this, Wilson concludes that without a doubt Faustus' will was free. Sachs believes Wilson's statement to be overconfident.<sup>36</sup> He maintains that while predestination may not be explicit in the play, there is not one line "that would conclusively show its contrary, the protagonist's free will."<sup>37</sup> And, since there is not a single line illustrating conclusively the protagonist's free will, Faustus emerges for Sachs "as a man utterly seduced by the prospect of his own damnation, hypnotized by it, made incapable of salvation by the fascination of his own doom."<sup>38</sup>

Thus far, four scholars have been presented, two leaning toward a Faustus capable of repenting, and two proposing a predestined Faustus. The final scholar that will be acknowledge is Susan Synder. In her article, in 1966, "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus as an Inverted Saint's Life," she realizes the significance in Faustus' Wittenburg background, and therefore relates the hardened heart passage to the Lutheran emphasis on the bondage of the will with its belief that man has no power to initiate his own repentance.<sup>39</sup> Viewing this alone, there seems to be a sense of tragic inevitability. However, in studying the speeches of the Good and Bad Angels, the Old Man, and Faustus himself, Synder is convinced that repentance is a constant possibility. The speeches play against the overly deterministic first element and balance of initiative between hero and opposing

force important to the tragic effect. Faustus is caught between desperate pleasure-seeking and remorse, but he is not lost until the final moment.

To Synder, Faustus' course throughout the play is directed by the interaction of pride and despair.<sup>40</sup> Faustus longs to repent for having made the diabolic pact, but his pride in reason and justice blinds him to the mercy that lies beyond them. "Faustus is by turns anguished, hysterical, remorseful--but never humble."<sup>41</sup> Synder admits that grace to repent is offered, but Faustus personally blocks his own escape to it by despairing, and thereby causing the dual view of God--tyrannic antagonist as well as loving father--to become distorted, allowing only the tyrannic antagonist to become visible.<sup>42</sup> Faustus was free to repent, but he was too overwhelmed with pride and despair to humble himself to repent.

This concludes the study into the way scholars have interpreted Doctor Faustus and his ability to repent. These five scholars illustrate a synthesis of the study already done on the repentance controversy in Doctor Faustus. While Ribner and Sachs question the fact that Faustus had a free will, the conjectures made by the other scholars seem more valid. Ribner's views seem to reflect the notions of the 1960's, not of the 1580's. Sachs' arguments are valid against the assumption of Wilson; however, what Kocher, McCullen, and Synder have presented in their research goes a step beyond Sachs, and offers a deeper and more correct insight into the play, primarily because in their research they study more than the play as a whole. They interpret also the meaning of individual

lines, keeping in mind, at the same time, the culture and traditions of the time. Sachs and Ribner, in contrast, make a judgment that views the play as a structure removed from the culture of Marlowe's time.

In responding to the question, "Could Faustus repent?" the actual text has to be confronted and interpreted. Kocher, McCullen, and Synder employ this method of confrontation and interpretation. Kocher explains the disputed line of the "hardening of the heart" in the context in which he conceives it was written. McCullen studies Faustus' lack of knowledge of himself in thinking he is damned, and he explains why it is necessary for Faustus to have a free will in order for the play to inspire the tragic emotion and sympathy for which the play is memorable. Synder considers what relationship the Wittenburg background may have had on Faustus' ability to repent, assuming that since Faustus goes to Wittenburg, Marlowe may have used the Lutheran thought on freedom of repentance as a basis for his play. She also studies how the interaction of the course of pride and despair in the play blocks Faustus to humble himself in repentance.

Therefore, the crux of the question, whether Faustus is able to repent, lies in the interpretation of the lines of the play in the context of Marlowe's culture. This is the method of Kocher, McCullen, and Synder; and through their research, they have concluded that Faustus was free to repent.

### CHAPTER III

The play opens with Faustus alone in his study. He reveals, in this first scene, his attitude toward what he is about to do. He states that, once the contract is made between Lucifer and him, he is damned: "This night I'll conjure, though I die therefore." (I.i.167) Yet Faustus feels he is damned even before the pact is signed, because of the Scripture passages from Romans 6:23 and John 1:8, and because he has already made contact with Lucifer. He considers himself beyond return to God in heaven, so he turns to a new God: "The Goddthou serv'st is thine own appetite." (II.i.11)

At this point the Good and Bad Angels enter, and here the first mention of repentance is made:

Bad Angel. Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art.  
Good Angel. Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.  
Faustus. Contrition, prayer, repentance--what of these?  
Good Angel. O, they are means to bring thee unto heaven.  
Bad Angel. Rather illusion, fruits of lunacy,  
That make men foolish that do use them most.  
Good Angel. Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things.  
Bad Angel. No Faustus; think of honor and wealth.  
(II.i.15-22)

In this discourse, Faustus is impressed mainly by the words of the



Bad Angel; and with the lasting thought of wealth and honor, Mephistophilis enters. Faustus signs the pact.

The scene of the signing of the contract illustrates that Faustus is not predestined to damnation. When Faustus finds the inscription, "Homo Fuge," on his arm, Mephistophilis says, "I'll fetch him somewhat to delight his mind." (II.i.81) This line denotes, for the first time, the thought that runs throughout the play. Faustus in the subjective position thinks he is now finally damned. He has done God wrong and there is no turning back. However, objectively, Faustus could repent. This is seen by the constant course of Mephistophilis. He is not to let Faustus dwell on the thought of changing his mind but, rather, distract Faustus from these thoughts with "Homo Fuge!" If Faustus were damned at this point, there would be no need for Mephistophilis to avert Faustus' thoughts and try to keep him from attempting repentance, for he would already be numbered among the damned.

In the opening lines of the next scene, Faustus is pictured pondering over thoughts of repentance.

Faustus. When I behold the heavens, then I repent

And curse thee, wicked Mephistophilis,

Because thou hast deprived me of those joys.

Mephistophilis. 'Twas thine own seeking, Faustus; thank thyself.

But think'st thou heaven is such a glorious thing?

I tell thee, Faustus, 'tis not half so fair

As thou, or any man that breathes on earth.

Faustus. How prov'st thou that?

Mephistophilis. 'Twas made for man; then he's more excellent.

Faustus. If heaven was made for man, 'twas made for me.

I will renounce this magic and repent.

Good Angel. Faustus repent; yet God will pity thee.

Bad Angel. Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee.

Faustus. Who buzzeth in mine ears I am a spirit?

Be I a devil, yet God may pity me;

Yea, God will pity me if I repent.  
Bad Angel. Ay, but Faustus never shall repent.  
(II.ii.1-17)

In the lines of Mephistophilis here three points become apparent. Faustus had a free will and acted on it in drawing up and signing the contract with Lucifer. Secondly, Mephistophilis is pictured again trying to distract Faustus from thinking about heaven and repenting, as he did in the previous scene when Faustus saw the "Homo fuge" inscription on his arm. He does this by saying that Faustus himself as a man is more fair than heaven. The third point is the reply to Faustus' question, asking Mephistophilis to prove that man is more fair than heaven. Mephistophilis answers by saying that heaven was made for man and therefore cannot be greater than man. The logic is specious, and an audience is expected to recognize it as such.

On hearing that heaven was made for man, Faustus wants to possess it; he says he will repent. These words call forth the Good and Bad Angels. The Good Angel, supposedly telling the truth, urges Faustus to repent, adding that God will pity him. The Bad Angel, traditionally telling lies, asserts that Faustus is "a spirit who cannot change his mind as men do. Faustus recognizes this argument, and so does an audience familiar with traditional teaching about angels and devils. But Faustus is obviously not a devil; he uses the subjunctive mode, as in a condition contrary to fact: "Be I a devil."

In the next words of Faustus, this thought is stressed further. Faustus speaks, "yet God may pity me," indicating that there is still

hope for him. God can pity the devil as well as man; but man has an advantage over the devil, because he can reverse his situation with God, and the devil cannot. In these words of Faustus, the God-pitying-man component is portrayed by the word "may." God may pity Faustus, because he is able to benefit from the pity.

This thought that Faustus is not a spirit is emphasized more in the next line of the Angel. If Faustus were already damned without hope, the angel could restate the line saying, "Ah, but Faustus never can repent." Yet the angel does not say this. Rather, he says, "...never shall repent," indicating that the proud Faustus will never humble himself to repent.

Faustus has said that God will pity him, if he will repent. However, immediately following these lines, Faustus declares that he cannot repent--not because he is a spirit, but, because his "heart is hardened":

Faustus. My heart is hardened; I cannot repent.  
Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven.  
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears;  
'Faustus, thou art damned!' Then swords and knives,  
Poison, guns, halters, and envenomed steel  
Are laid before me to dispatch myself;  
And long ere this I should have done the deed,  
Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair.  
Have not I made blind Homer sing to me  
Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death?  
And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes  
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,  
Made music with my Mephistophilis?  
Why should I die then, or basely despair?  
I am resolved; Faustus shall not repent.

(II.ii.18-32)

The meaning of the first statement is explained in the lines that follow it. Faustus feels that he cannot repent because his heart

is hardened. Who caused his heart to be hardened? Predestination? No. Faustus' heart has been hardened because of the "sweet pleasure" that has conquered him. Faustus is the cause for the hardening of his heart against God. By his constant pleasure-seeking, he has drawn more and more away from God; and he has no real ambition to turn back. At the times when he does ponder the thought of salvation, faith, or heaven, fear of what Lucifer might do to him penetrates his mind. This frightens Faustus, so he reverts again to pleasure-seeking, hardening his heart against repentance even more.

Farther into this second scene, II.ii.67-84, the notion of repentance again appears. Here Faustus begins by teasing Mephistophilis, invoking Mephistophilis to relate to him who made the world. Mephistophilis refuses to answer, and Faustus again beseeches him: "Sweet Mephistophilis, tell me." But Mephistophilis once more declines to reply. In turn, Faustus tries to bully him: "Villian, have not I bound thee to tell me any thing?" At this, Mephistophilis taunts Faustus with hell and brings on the regret: "Ay, that is not against our kingdom. / This is. Thou are damned. Think thou of hell."

Faustus now tries to think on God that made the world. He commands Mephistophilis to leave him, blaming the messenger for damning his soul. Afterwards, Faustus asks himself if it is too late to be saved, and the Good and Bad Angels enter. The Bad Angel speaks, "Too late," while the Good Angel utters, "Never too late, if Faustus will repent." To this the Bad Angel remarks: "If thou repent, devils will tear thee in pieces." In these words of the

Bad Angel, the possibility of repentance is clearly marked by the condition, "if." The motive of the angel is to instill fear in Faustus, as was done in the previous sections. But the Bad Angel's intention is defeated by the interjection of the words of the Good Angel: "Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin." At these words Faustus does call on Christ for help: "O Chríst, my Savior, my Savior, / Help to save distressed Faustus' soul."

Faustus is near repentance. To show the closeness of Faustus to repenting and also to strengthen the credibility that Faustus was able to repent, Marlowe presents the infernal powers themselves as fearing Faustus' repentance. Marlowe brings Lucifer himself on stage for a second time, picturing him as necessary to enter and distract Faustus with fear to keep him from calling on Christ.

Lucifer. Chríst cannot save thy soul, for he is just.

There's none but I have interest in the same.

Faustus. O, what art thou that look'st so terribly?

Lucifer. I am Lucifer,

And this is my companion prince in hell.

Faustus. O, Faustus, they are come to fetch thy soul.

Beelzebub. We are come to tell thee thou doest injure us.

Lucifer. Thou call'st on Christ, contrary to thy promise.

Beelzebub. Thou shouldst not think on God.

Lucifer. Think on the devil.

Beelzebub. And his dam too.

(II.ii85-95)

Lucifer has Faustus once more in his grasp. Faustus has not aborted the bargain. Lucifer has said that God is just and cannot save Faustus for what he has done. Faustus heeds these words and submits, never to call on Chríst again.

Faustus. Nor will I henceforth. Pardon me in this,

And Faustus vows never to look to heaven,

Never to name Godd, or to pray to him,

To burn his Scriptures, slay his ministers,

And make my spirits pull his churches down.  
(II.ii.96-100)

To pull Faustus away from his thoughts of God, Lucifer now calls for a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, as Mephistophilis called for a dance and gifts when Faustus began having second thoughts after seeing, "Homo fuge," written on his arm.

The next instance signifying the possibility of repentance is in the words of Faustus in Act IV.

Faustus. What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?  
Thy fatal time draws to a final end.  
Despair doth drive distrust into my thoughts.  
Confound these passions with a quiet sleep.  
Tush! Christ did call the thief upon the cross;  
Then rest thee, Faustus, quiet in conceit.  
(IV.v.33-38)

Here Faustus is pictured despairing and deteriorating. He remembers that Christ saved the thief on the cross and that there is a glimmer of hope for him also. But the hope serves only to suggest a restful sleep for Faustus. He puts off repentance until later. The possibility remains.

In Act V, the Old Man enters the play. He speaks with wisdom, saying that repentance is still possible, for sin has not grown into Faustus' nature.

Old Man. O gentle Faustus, leave this damned art,  
This magic that will charm thy soul to hell  
And quite bereave thee of salvation.  
Though thou hast now offended like a man,  
Do not persevere in it like a devil.  
Yet, yet, thou hast an amiable soul,  
If sin by custom grown not into nature.  
Then, Faustus, be still; repentance is not too late; yet,  
Then thou art banished from the sight of heaven.  
No mortal can express the pains of hell.  
It may be this my exhortation  
Seems harsh and all unpleasant; let it not,

For, gentle son, I speak it not in wrath  
Or envy of thee, but in tender love  
And pity of thy future misery.  
And so have hope that this my kind rebuke,  
Checking thy body, may amend thy soul.  
(V.i.38-54)

But Faustus is despairing and does not listen to the words of the  
Old Man. The Old Man then speaks again to Faustus:

Old Man. O stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate steps.  
I see an angel hovers o'er thy head,  
And with a vial full of precious grace  
Offers to pour the same into thy soul.  
Then call for mercy and avoid despair.

These words bring comfort to the soul of Faustus. He begins to ponder the thought of repentance, but his acceptance of grace depends upon his assertion of faith, an assured hope and confidence in Christ's mercy. With this confidence he could realize that true faith brings knowledge and happiness, but without such faith, his action depends upon whatever knowledge he can muster. That he is without the attributes of spiritual wisdom may be seen at a glance because of his fear of the physical torture used to dissuade Faustus' thought from contrition:

Faustus. Accursed Faustus, where is mercy now?  
I do repent, and yet I do despair.  
Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast.  
What shall I do to shun the snares of death?  
Mephistophilis. Thou traitor, Faustus, I arrest thy soul  
For disobedience to my sovereign lord.  
Revolt, or I'll in piecemeal tear thy flesh.  
(V.i.70-76)

Faustus repents, but he repents out of fear for having offended Lucifer, instead of God. Faustus has now reversed values. Lucifer is his God, and the Old Man is a tempter to defile Lucifer.

Faustus. I do repent I e'er offended him.

Sweet Mephistophilis, entreat thy lord  
 To pardon my unjust presumption,  
 And with my blood again I will confirm  
 The former vow I made to Lucifer.  
 Mephistophilis. Do it then, Faustus, with unfeigned heart,  
 Lest greater dangers do attend thy drift.  
 Faustus. Torment, sweet friend, that base and aged man  
 That durst dissuade me from thy Lucifer...  
 (V.i.77-85)

Even though Faustus does detest God in these lines, he is still capable of salvation. His sins are still by custom and have not grown into his nature. But Mephistophilis' aim is to make sin a part of Faustus' nature. He progresses in his aim by arranging a meeting with Faustus and Helen. The encounter is a triumph for Mephistophilis, because sin becomes more of a habit for Faustus, and despair sets in.

In the next and final scene, Faustus has lapsed into deep despair. He is met by three scholars telling him to look upon God's mercy. Faustus says he cannot:

Faustus. On God, whom Faustus hath abjured? On God, whom  
 Faustus hath blasphemed? Ah, my God, I would weep, but the  
 devil draws in my tears. Gush forth blood instead of tears,  
 yea life and soul. O, he stays, my tongue! I would lift up  
 my hands, but see, they hold 'em; they hold 'em.  
 (V.ii.53-57)

Faustus speaks

Faustus speaks of Mephistophilis and Lucifer censuring his speech and holding back his hands from reaching up to God, implying that it is impossible for Him to look on God's mercy and repent. However, the text implies that it was not impossible for him to do so. Rather, Faustus feels it is impossible, because "the devil threatened to tear me in pieces if I named God, to fetch me, body and soul, if I once gave ear to divinity." (V.ii.68-70) Marlowe makes it evident



that Faustus could have repented; however, he was afraid, and now he is despairing.

Faustus feels it is too late, and Mephistophilis urges Faustus into deeper despair. After the scholars leave, Faustus blames Mephistophilis for robbing him of eternal happiness. Mephistophilis admits that he did set Faustus up to read the particular passages he did in the first scene:

Mephistophilis. I do confess it, Faustus, and rejoice.  
'Twas I, that when thou wert i' the way to heaven,  
Damned up thy passage. When thou took'st the book  
To view the Scriptures, when I turned the leaves  
And led thine eye.

(V.ii.89-93)

These lines do not constitute a denial of Faustus' freedom of will. Faustus, immediately preceding these words of Mephistophilis, declares, "'twas thy (Mephistophilis) temptation / Hath robb'd me of eternal happiness." Faustus uses the right words here, "temptation." Mephistophilis arranged that Faustus' eye should light upon a pessimistic text; but this does not mean that Faustus had inevitably to make the choice he did. Despite Mephistophilis' direction of his eye, Faustus could still have made a salutary choice, rejecting what amounts to a devilish temptation by Mephistophilis. Mephistophilis took the initiative and actively helped to bring about Faustus' downfall. Faustus is foolish, and Mephistophilis is clever; and so, Faustus is manipulated by trickery toward perdition. But Faustus was not predestined to damnation, for back in Act II, after he has signed the promises, Mephistophilis says, 'Twas thine own seeking Faustus; thank thyself." (II.ii.4) And before this, in

Act I, Mephistophilis spoke: "O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands / Which strike a terror to my fainting soul." (I.iii.81-82)

This thought is further emphasized in the last passages of the Good and Bad Angels.

Good Angel. Ah, Faustus, if thou hadst given ear to me,  
Innumerable joys had followed thee;  
But thou didst love the world.

Bad Angel. Gave ear to me,  
And now must taste hell's pains perpetually.

Good Angel. O what will all thy riches, pleasures, pomps  
Avail thee now?

Bad Angel. Nothing but vex thee more,  
To want in hell, that had on earth such store.

Good Angel. O, thou hast lost celestial happiness,  
Pleasures unspeakable, bliss without end.  
Hadst thou affected sweet divinity,  
Hell or the devil had had no power on thee.

(V.ii.96-106)

Faustus did not pay attention to the words of the Good Angel when he could have repented. Now Faustus' soul has become too hardened to flee from his sins and despair.

The final hour approaches. Faustus alone now begins his final soliloquy.

Faustus. Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make  
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but  
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,  
That Faustus may repent and save his soul.  
O lente, lente currite noctis equi!  
The stars move still; time runs; the clock will strike;  
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.  
O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?  
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!  
One drop would save my soul, half a drop! Ah, my Christ!  
Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!  
Yet will I call on him. O, spare me, Lucifer!

(V.ii.135-146)

In these lines Faustus still has opportunity to repent, but he does not use it. He asks for more time, but he realizes this request is futile.

futile. He calls upon Christ; but instead of flying to him, he immediately turns to Lucifer and asks him for forgiveness for invoking Christ. This is the mode that leads Faustus to hell. In two more passages he again calls upon God:

Faustus. O God,  
If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,  
Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,  
Impose some end to my incessant pain.  
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,  
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved.  
O, no end is limited to damned souls.  
Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?  
Or why is this immortal that thou hast?  
Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true,  
This soul should fly from me and I be changed  
Into some brutish beast.

(V.ii.162-173)

My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!  
Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while!  
Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer!  
I'll burn my books! Ah, Mephistophilis!

(V.ii.184-187)

Faustus is seen again calling on God, but these passages too lack the one saving element, repentance, that could salvage him. In the first, Faustus pleads, instead of for forgiveness, to be like a creature lacking soul. In the second, he sees God looking fierce on him. He turns from this sight to request again for more time and offers to destroy his books. But his words are of no benefit to him, and he is carried off to hell.

Faustus could have been saved, but he never sincerely calls upon God for forgiveness. At the time when he does invoke God, his thoughts become distracted with the fear of Lucifer and the pleasures of his own appetite. Faustus supposed that at the moment he signed the contract with Lucifer, his soul was damned. However, it has

been shown that Mephistophilis, Lucifer, the Good and Bad Angels, and the Old Man indicated through their lines and their actions that Faustus was able to repent.

## CONCLUSION

In The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, Christopher Marlowe successfully presents a drama portraying a man ending in tragic damnation. This play is a dramatic success because Marlowe is able to present a character who, from the beginning, is known to the audience as a man who will be damned; and yet, at the same time, throughout the play there remain instances of hope that Faustus may not end up damned. Faustus is portrayed in a realistic struggle between the grace of God hovering over his head and the forces of Lucifer supplying fear to his body. As the play progresses, Faustus regresses into a despairing man, but never is Faustus seen by the audience as beyond the help of God. There always remains, up to the time when the fiends enter and carry Faustus to hell, a possibility that Faustus will humble himself in contrition. At times the glimmer of hope almost flames into a triumph over the fears of the powers of Lucifer. But the triumph never comes, and the audience knows it will never come; and yet, the play does not become a simple story of a man who sells his soul to the devil in return for twenty-four years of pleasure, ending in damnation. Rather, Marlowe takes this simple

story and transforms it into a drama--a battle of choosing between heaven or hell. Faustus chooses hell; but he was free to escape, if he so desired.

Hopefully, this paper has demonstrated how Faustus was free to repent repeatedly throughout the play. Through the arguments and reasoning of scholars, Faustus has emerged as having been capable of escape from the hands of Lucifer by repenting. Likewise, through analyses of the lines themselves, characters in the play (Mephistophilis, the Good and Bad Angels, Lucifer, the Old Man, and even Faustus) have given testimony that Faustus was not presented as a predetermined, condemned man.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Irving Ribner (ed.), Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Text and Major Criticism (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1966), p. vi.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Masinton, "Apollo's Laurel Bough: Essays on the Theme of Damnation in Christopher Marlowe," Dissertation Abstracts, (Okla.), p. 2133-A.

<sup>3</sup>M. H. Abrams et al (ed.), The Norton Anthology of English Literature--Revised, Volume I (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), p. 678.

<sup>4</sup>Ribner, op. cit., p. vii.

<sup>5</sup>John C. McCloskey, "The Theme of Despair in Marlowe's Faustus," College English, IV (1942), p. 111.

<sup>6</sup>Abrams, op. cit., p. 679.

<sup>7</sup>Each quotation will be followed by the scene and line number in parentheses which corresponds to the edition of the play in Irving Ribner's Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Text and Major Criticism, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>McCloskey, loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup>Irving Ribner, "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse,'" Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama, ed. R. M. Hosley (Columbia, Missouri, 1962), p. 110.

<sup>10</sup>Hippolyte A. Taine, History of English Literature, Volume I, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1965), p. 394-395.

<sup>11</sup>Ribner, "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse,'" p. 110-111.

<sup>12</sup>Wolfgang Iser, "Doctor Faustus," Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Text and Major Criticism, ed. Irving Ribner, p. 166. op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>13</sup>Nicholas Brooke, "The Moral Tragedy of Doctor Faustus," Marlowe: Doctor Faustus, ed. John Jump (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 104.

<sup>14</sup>Una M. Ellis-Fermor, "Faustus," Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Text and Major Criticism, ed. Irving Ribner, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>15</sup>Ribner, "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse,'" p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph T. McCullen, "Dr. Faustus and Renaissance Learning," Modern Language Review, LI, (1956), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Arieh Sachs, "The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LXIII (1964), p. 627.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 628.

<sup>19</sup> Muriel C. Bradbrook, "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and the Eldritch Tradition," Essays on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Drama, ed. R. M. Hosley (Columbia, Missouri: University of Columbia Press, 1962), p. 90.

<sup>20</sup> Ribner, "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse,'" p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> G. I. Duthie, "Some Observations on Marlowe's Doctor Faustus," Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen, 203 (1966), p. 92.

<sup>22</sup> Paul H. Kocher, Christopher Marlowe--A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Bullinger, Sermons, Decade III, Sermon X, p. 492, as quoted in Paul H. Kocher, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> Kocher, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> McCullen, op. cit., p. 6-16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ribner, "Marlowe's 'Tragicke Glasse,'" p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Irving Ribner, "Marlowe and Shakespeare," Shakespeare Quarterly, XV (1964), p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Sachs, op. cit., p. 625-647.

<sup>34</sup> F. P. Wilson, Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 78.



<sup>36</sup>Sachs, op. cit., p. 646.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 647.

<sup>39</sup>Susan Synder, "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus as an Invented Saint's Life," Studies in Philology, 63 (1966), p. 565.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 567.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 568.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 568.

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