

of *Faversham* to Shakespearean authorship as well as opening *The Spanish Tragedy* and the *Henry VI* plays to renewed scrutiny.

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**Christa Knellworth King. *Faustus and the Promises of the New Science, c. 1580–1730*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2008. Pp 216.**

In this study Christa Knellworth King attempts the very intriguing project of tracing the significance of the Faustus myth from the chapbook sources for Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* to the debased versions of the tale in the farces and harlequinades of the early eighteenth century. The various texts covered will be of great interest to anyone interested in the ideological transformation of the myth in question. However, the relation of this narrative to the emergence of scientific thought and practice in western culture — that is, to the 'promises' indicated in the second half of King's title — remains finally a rather vexed question, partly (perhaps) because the relation between magic and science remains so vexing historically.

What is always clear to the reader is enunciated pointedly at the end of the study: 'the creative energy that radiates from the depiction of Faustus' adventures suggests that all versions discussed here were on the side of Faustus, even if the arguments in his favour are expressed in parallel with those of the prophet of doom' (186). From the chapbooks on, King argues persuasively for a sympathetic reading of the hero's aspirations; the 'subversive' meaning consistently stands out even when the 'ostensible purpose' is 'a cautionary tale' (184). In addition to this persistent demystification, King's argument heightens critical interest by showing how 'the Faustus narrative ... turns into a study of human attempts to deal with responsibility and moral self-determination' (185). I was particularly intrigued by King's suggestion that the comedy of the later, farcical versions of Faustus is not simply gratuitous since such versions 'celebrate the protean hero whose elusive appearance guarantees his success in an upwardly mobile society, which is to say he illustrates the aspirations of his period's increasingly powerful middle classes' (168). To increase a sense of critical continuity, this aspect of King's argument might be linked more closely to Marlowe's own hero, born 'base of stock' but hugely

ambitious, even though theological scruples certainly waned over time as 'a secular disregard for the metaphysical significance of [the myth's] symbolic space[s]' (180) emerged in the late seventeenth century. The tension in the later comedies between the 'desire for intellectual knowledge' and the 'desire for sexual knowledge' (164) might also be related interestingly to some seminal (masculine) anxieties expressed in Marlowe's sixteenth-century version. Occasionally, the plot structures, contexts, and cultural references of some of these lesser known works, such as Shadwell's *Virtuoso*, could be expanded and clarified to enhance the reader's comprehension.

The ideological and artistic 'contexts' established in the Introduction and in King's treatment of the sixteenth-century chapbook versions of Faustus also remain sometimes elusive, if highly suggestive. King's opening discussion abruptly turns from the 'inner world of a sensitive scholar' (6), 'the introspective gaze' attempting to 'fathom the hidden potentials of the self' (7), to the more obviously scientific impetus to explore the *external* world (through the example of Bacon's *Novum Organum*) in a way that leaves the actual relation or connection between the two unclear. She proposes that her study will contrast 'the process of legitimating scientific curiosity with a more basic craving for a harmonious union with nature' (25), but I'm not sure that the Faustus myth, in spite of its impulse towards cosmic exploration that King goes on to emphasize, exactly realizes a 'harmonious union with nature'. Certainly the scientific impulse itself (as in Bacon) often assumes the form of a kind of penetration or violation of nature's secrets. The German and English Faust Books may in part be traced to 'Lutheran tracts against insubordination' (30), and they certainly evoke the 'world of fear' (33) characteristic of Reformation constructions of absolute dependency on grace and hence of arbitrary predestination and damnation. But, through a paradox that King might emphasize more directly, the protestant lack of mediation actually increases personal responsibility and human agency. King suggests that the authors of the Faust Book 'must have been aware that the Bible forges intimate links between God and the devil' (42). Such 'awareness of the fault lines in the conception of Satan must have gone hand-in-hand with the attempt to conceal a whole array of theological incongruities'. This conclusion leads King, in a fairly remarkable logical (and historical) leap, to the suggestion that '[c]ritical analyses of cultural projections could not fail to draw attention to the man-made qualities of metaphysical agents' (42). Maybe the chapbook authors anticipated the peculiarly subversive speculations that many (including myself) perceive in Marlowe, but I think one

needs to argue more carefully than simply to assert that the English Faust Book 'heightens the comic potential of the devils and, thus, exposes them as figments of the imagination' (59). This particular position appears to contradict King's concurrent argument that the excised incantatory formulae that Spies draws attention to in the Preface to the German Faust Book would be familiar to its readership since they appear, restored, in a conjuring pamphlet of 1609, which suggests a popular attempt 'to continue an older tradition according to which magic and Christianity could exist side by side' (47). In that case, magic would appear more than imagination after all?

In fact the study offers at times a bewildering *mélange* of arguments and counterarguments seemingly operating on multiple, and sometimes competing, levels. The uncertain direction(s) in the arguments treating the chapbooks proliferate in King's handling of Marlowe's famous play. While her argument that Marlowe's literary works 'indict Christianity for its crippling restraints on human growth and development' is plausible, it does not follow logically that his most famous hero is 'indicted for the *simple* possession of intellectual brilliance' (75, my emphasis). King interestingly considers Calvin's dismissal of a 'too optimistic' (80) Manichaeic interpretation of the human soul as an extension of the substance of God, but Marlowe's (presumably) anti-Calvinist position does not justify the supposed parallel between Faustus and Christ that King traces in both the chapbook and Marlovian versions of the myth. This critical move, in my opinion, takes the story's subversiveness in the wrong direction, towards transcendental aspiration rather than secular (and manly) assertion.

An issue recurs here that underlines a key problem in the book's critical strategies. King asserts fairly eloquently that '[t]here is a deep and unalienable relationship between mind and matter which exceeds the powers of human comprehension. Along with the natural scientist of the present day and age, Faustus can therefore be seen to be looking for a sense of interconnectedness between humankind and nature, organisms and mechanisms, mind and matter' (87). My first response to this claim is categorical rejection, since Faustus seems to me pointedly afraid of, or alienated from, nature (and potentially his own sexuality). If I concede that my response lacks the subtle consideration that King's claim may very well warrant, I may at least object that her argument is never related clearly or persuasively enough to specific moments in Marlowe's text. King's claim obviously relates to the 'harmonious union with nature' identified in her Introduction and quoted above, as well as to the 'magical quality of nature' (184) whose enchantment the new

science threatened to eradicate, underlined briefly at the end of the study. But about the only way Faustian magic can be ideologically married to the practices of the new science seems to me, ironically, through its peculiar alienation from, not its secret affinity with, the 'harmonies' of nature.

The emergence of what might more clearly be described as actual scientific endeavor is treated in the book's fourth chapter, 'The Alternative Worlds of the New Science: Burton, Milton and Fontanelle'. This section is the book's most problematic for various reasons, not least of which is the fact that King does not actually discuss Burton at all, but periodically (though not consistently) confuses him with Sir Thomas Browne: 'When Burton published his *Religio Medici* in the 1640s ...' (147). I was actually disappointed that Burton's work went unaddressed, since such a treatment might help to map out more clearly the tension between the external or 'scientific' and the internal or 'psychological' explorations identified in the Introduction. King's version of Browne is recognizable when she asserts that he 'takes for granted an essential goodness underlying the creation of man and world' (118), but less so when she writes that '[w]e will never find out to what extent he used Christianity as a convenient façade. His circuitous and indirect formulations ... suggest an uncomfortable attitude towards Christian belief' (115). There in fact seems little in Browne's complacent, self-satisfied equanimity that resembles Faustus. King attempts a surprising comparison between Milton's 'poetic visions' and Fontanelle's 'polite but rational portrayal of the social reception of new theories of astronomy' (114). The comparison is partly a contrast, for while Milton was strongly affected by the discoveries of the new science his work suggests that 'there is something at the core of rationality that radically escapes from' the dictates of scientific investigation (122). King struggles interestingly to define and place the 'rational mysticism' that influenced Milton, although the ideological connection she traces between Milton and Boehme potentially over-emphasizes the 'mystical' side of the epic poet. In contrast to Milton's, Fontanelle's writings reveal a kind of ideological progress since in them the human 'creating mind takes over the role of the biblical God who is not otherwise mentioned' (145); unlike Milton, Fontanelle offers no 'confirmation of an authoritarian godhead' (147), although the Miltonic flights of imagination seem also to have been repressed. The relation of this section to the Faustus myth remains unclear, especially since King offers no direct explanation as to *why* the actual Faustus storyline in a sense goes underground before its re-emergence in the later, more farcical versions.

The book's major line of argument goes in and out of focus in ways that will discomfit the reader. It juxtaposes moments of confusion and contradiction, even moments where one feels the logic will not bear close scrutiny, with eloquent and deeply perceptive passages. In spite of these structural problems, the book will likely be influential since King links texts in highly original and provocative ways which deserve further attention. Her analyses are full of fruitful speculations that will be difficult for those interested in her subject to resist, even though a great deal of clarification of critical questions, and of subjective responses to both magic and science (and even theological strictures) across time, remains to be performed.

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**Edel Lamb. *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies (1599–1613)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Pp xii, 189.**

Edel Lamb's first book opens by identifying the absence of critical attention hitherto paid to the 'complex and various implications of what it means to be a child' in the early modern children's playing companies (10). *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre* proceeds to examine the repertoires of the Children of Paul's and the Children of the Queen's Revels in an effort better to understand how conceptions of childhood identity might have been produced through the practices of early modern theatre companies. The range of approaches here impresses; close textual analyses of a wide range of less well-known plays, thoughtful considerations from a performance perspective of what children's bodies might have signified onstage, and a focus on the marketing practices of individual child actors and the theatre companies to which they belonged all work to support Lamb's proposal that in early modern England there was an 'identity particular to the *child player*' (12).

Perhaps the book's most significant contribution is the close attention it pays to the ways in which playwrights enabled their boy actors and their audiences actively to engage with the phenomenology of a theatre in which children were attempting to 'mould' their bodies into the 'cast' of the adult