MAGICIAN OR WITCH?: CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE’S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Michelle M. Matthews

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Committee:

Dr. Simon Morgan-Russell, Advisor

Dr. Audrey Becker
In this project, I look closely at the play *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe and its relationship to the witchcraft and magic debates that occurred in Early Modern Europe. Europe was alive with witch crazes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; witches were considered a manifestation of diabolical evil, and accusations of supernatural power being used for the purposes of evil spread quickly as tortured captives, attempting to save themselves, agreed to implicate others as their cohorts. This same period saw a Neoplatonic revival among humanists who believed that by dedicating their lives to contemplation and humility with an overriding faith in God, they could access benevolent magic in order to improve the world. Even though there was a thriving debate among the elite population on what constituted a witch and the powers a witch possessed, humanists who promoted benevolent magic were often accused and condemned for witchcraft, their reputations never recovering. *Doctor Faustus* is unique in that it presents the dreams of the Neoplatonist philosophers for a benevolent magic at the same time as it portrays the behaviors associated with witches by both the general and elite population. By looking closely at the text and comparing it to orthodox treatises, popular beliefs, and the Neoplatonic writings, I argue in this paper that Faustus turns his back on God by committing sins such as signing a pact with the devil, uniting with a demon, mocking Christianity, and performing *maleficium*. Ultimately, this paper concludes that because of his heretical actions, which coincide with many of the Early Modern ideas about demonology, Doctor Faustus is a witch and not a magician.
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INTRODUCTION

When people hear the word “magician,” they often associate it with the image of an old man stroking his long white beard, who although a little absentminded is always trying to help people. This magician is often the great Merlin from King Arthur’s court or Professor Dumbledore from the Harry Potter series. On the other hand, the term “witch” conjures up a completely different image. It is often associated with an old hag dressed all in black with a cat, a broom, and warts. These witches are typically evil and only looking to cause trouble. Probably the most recognized witch is the Wicked Witch of the West from The Wizard of Oz. What these stereotypes mean for a modern reader of the play *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe is that their opinion of this great scholar will be very different if he is a witch or a magician, but for a the Renaissance audience these stereotypes did not yet exist.

For those who watched the play in the Renaissance, some would have found the distinction between witch and magician just as indicative of Faustus’s personality as modern readers, but for others it was not as clear. This is because during the sixteenth-century the stereotypes of witches and magicians that we are familiar with were being formed and their definitions were complicated by a belief that witches existed and were a threat to society. Generally speaking, the basis for our understanding of magicians can be found in the writings of a group of Renaissance men mostly from the elite classes who believed they could wield a form of magic that was aided and sanctioned by heaven. Others believed, however, that any type of magic was a direct communication with demons or Satan; therefore, the men who practiced “benevolent” magic were actually witches. Our understanding of witches is mostly derived from the massive and popular witch-hunts that often ended with an execution of an elderly woman, but in the Renaissance, a group of commoners who practiced magic based on nature called “cunning
“folk” were accepted and employed to hunt down witches or identify witchcraft as the cause of sickness. Due to these blurred lines between good and evil, magic and witchcraft, discovering whether or not a person was a witch or magician was not an easy task. Since witches were considered a real danger to the community, knowing if a person was working magic for good or evil was necessary to decide if he or she should be executed or ostracized.

By discovering Faustus’s true nature in the play, one might eventually be able to decide if he is a threat to the community but also if enough information exists to begin determining answers to important questions such as the following: does Faustus deserve his fate at the end of the play? Does he possess an evil side? Is he to blame for his ineptness or is he a victim? Before these questions can be answered, however, we must establish if he is a witch or a magician. This project will take an in-depth look at the beliefs surrounding both magic and witchcraft during the Renaissance to establish guidelines that can be used to evaluate Faustus and his behavior. After looking at what constituted a witch and a magician in the Renaissance, a close analysis of the play *Doctor Faustus* will be conducted by tracing Faustus’s actions and what they imply. Ultimately, we will see that Faustus participates in the important events of a witches’ sabbat such as sealing a pact with the Devil, mating with a demon, mocking Christianity, and surrendering his body. Also, Neoplatonic philosophers did not want to be considered a threat to society, so they drew a clear line between witchcraft and magic in their treatises. They were adamant that only certain people should attempt the art and even then the aspiring magicians should be aware of the dangers of failing. Faustus falls into witchcraft because he is unable to see the dangers connected with heavenly magic, and because of his obsession with worldly matters, he cannot achieve the aspirations laid out by occult philosophers. Finally, Faustus harms his neighbors and performs *maleficium* proving yet again that he is a witch. With all of this evidence, we will
conclude that Faustus truly did possess the ability to be evil and deserved his fate, but we will also find that like most witches he was a victim of Lucifer’s and Mephistopheles’s scheming. It is the culmination of all of these events and actions that will prove that Faustus is a threat to society, deserves his fate, and is most definitely a witch and not a magician.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* is shrouded in mystery with two significantly different texts in existence (both of which may be completely different than the original play), questions of when the play was actually written, and concerns about which parts of it were constructed by Marlowe, a collaborator, or were later additions by Birde and Rowley. Because of these questions and debates, it is no surprise that the entire discourse surrounding *Doctor Faustus* is often multifaceted and hard to navigate. Our understanding of Marlowe’s own relationship to the debate on magic and witchcraft beyond his play is subject to the same concerns because *Doctor Faustus* plays a key role in those opinions. However, John Mebane in his book *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age* points out that there are three typical responses to the “subversive currents of thought which are evoked in the play” (115). The first response is by those who believe Marlowe uses Faustus and Mephistopheles to rebel against “traditional ideas and institutions.” The second group sees Marlowe’s extensive use of orthodoxy as an indicator of his rejection of Faustus’s magic, and finally, Mebane identifies a third group of scholars who consider Marlowe’s views on magic to be ambivalent (115-117). I would add a fourth response to Mebane’s list which, although similar to those who see the play as ambivalent, argues that the contradictions in *Doctor Faustus* are a positive conversation about magic.

In his article “Marlowe and the Metaphysics of Magicians,” Gareth Roberts does not see Marlowe as rebelling against or conforming to orthodox beliefs of magic, but he does not see the play as ambivalent either. Instead, Roberts claims that Marlowe’s play is full of competing views of magic which show the complexity of the time period. Roberts points out that *Doctor Faustus* utilizes ideas of high magic in the scenes with Faustus and uses popular understandings of magic in the comic scenes. He also indicates which scenes allude to Renaissance orthodox texts on
demonology. Ultimately, Roberts concludes that “We must accept a heteroglossic plurality of magic belief and opinion in Doctor Faustus, observe the orthodoxy that tries to police and regulate that plurality, and the plays contestations over discourse and language, especially the language of religion” (73). Although he does not take a stance on what Marlowe was trying to do with his text, Roberts makes it clear that the play is an example of an intersection between that numerous discourses on the subject of magic that were competing with each other for validity in early modern England. It is this expression of complexity which creates space for discourse, something John Mebane sees in the text as well.

Mebane’s views place him outside the typical responses he identifies because, like Roberts, his argument purports that Doctor Faustus is a place of positive interaction between discourses. Mebane believes that the contradictions in the play that cause people to see it as ambivalent if viewed as “controlled artistry” can actually enhance the play. To him, the play becomes an interesting intersection between competing views on magic, and he demonstrates this intersection after he establishes that “Dr. Faustus suggests that because human beings are creatures in whom good and evil are tragically intermingled, the process of purification which the magicians described is impossible. The human aspiration to attain a godlike status and to exert benevolent control over history is almost inevitably corrupted by selfish desires for wealth, sensual indulgence, and political power” (135). Mebane points out that the play entices the audience to understand and agree that Faustus has aspired too high and is too proud, but at the same time they are inspired by his (and the philosophers of the time) dreams of using benevolent magic for the good of the world. If we take Mebane’s argument a step further, we can see that in addition to Roberts’ suggestion that the discourses were competing for validity, the contradiction
between condemning and following Faustus opens up a unique space for people to discover how the discourse of magic in early modern England was full of emotion and problems.

Like Mebane, I find it appealing to both condemn and approve of Faustus, but the play’s contradictions are much more interesting than this. As suggested by Roberts it is the heteroglossic nature of the play that opens up a discursive space for understanding the complexity of Early Modern Europe. This same complexity helps us see the difficulties in identifying a person as a witch in England, and although I am not prepared to make a stand on whether or not it is Marlowe’s purpose, I will be arguing that the texts support a reading that for all of his dreams of being a Neoplatonist philosopher, Faustus is a witch. As mentioned earlier, whenever discussing Marlowe’s views and opinions on witchcraft and magic, concerns with textual corruption, dates of origination, and even our lack of knowledge about much of Marlowe’s life and death make it difficult to conclude what the goal of Doctor Faustus may have been. For these reasons, I am abstaining from remarking on Marlowe’s motives. Instead, this essay focuses on how the text itself fits into the competing discourse on magic. My interpretation begins with the idea that the Doctor Faustus presents a positive discourse about the numerous aspects of demonology as suggested by Roberts and Mebane, however, I will show that Faustus is ultimately damned for his witchlike actions. Much of the evidence that Faustus is a witch will be drawn from the orthodox treatises on demonology, but even though the basis of what makes a witch is orthodox (meaning all magic is sinful), the play itself is not overtly so. In fact, Doctor Faustus does not overtly condemn magic; Faustus becomes a witch partly because of his failure to become a benevolent magician.

Barbara Traister in her book Heavenly Necromancers takes this same stance. She argues that Faustus is a witch who is controlled by Mephistopheles, but the scholar does not know this
fact or even intend for it to happen. Traister believes that Faustus attempts to practice the theurgic magic of the Neoplatonists, but unlike those who think Faustus’s behavior is an orthodox interpretation of magic, she feels Faustus deviates from those traditions as well. She does not know if Faustus’s failure is caused by his hastiness or the simple fact that theurgy does not work. Traister concludes that *Doctor Faustus* could have critiqued theurgic magic as evil; however, the play criticizes Faustus’s actions and decisions not the magic he hoped to attain. To her, Faustus is a magician in the eyes of those he amuses, but on the inside, he is a trapped witch.

In complete agreement with Traister, I intend to further her argument. Whereas she focuses on documenting Faustus’s downfall and slow conversion into a fool who cannot complete any of the magnificent tasks he sets up for himself at the beginning of the play because he is ruled by Mephistopheles, I intend to focus on the actions that not only make Faustus a fool but identify him as a witch. I will also expand on Traister’s argument by comparing Faustus, as she did, to the Neoplatonist philosophers such as Pico della Mirandola, Cornelius Agrippa, and magicians that appeared in early English literature and drama, and I will add to this discussion the popular views of witchcraft as well as the traditional orthodoxy as discussed by Paul Kocher. By combining all of these definitions of magicians and witches, I will further prove that Faustus is indeed a witch and not a magician.

Paul Kocher’s “The Witchcraft Basis in Marlowe’s ‘Faustus’” has laid the major groundwork for considering *Doctor Faustus* in terms of witchcraft. Using the traditional orthodox treatises on magic, he came to the conclusion that Faustus is a witch. Kocher argues that although Marlowe drew on the ideas of the German *Faust Book* which was translated to English in 1592, “Faustus is also in important respects the product of Marlowe’s own wide familiarity with Renaissance, medieval, and classical ideas about witchcraft … Marlowe has
endowed him with much of the motive and behavior commonly believed to be typical of those who had signed the compact with Hell” (9). Written in 1940, Kocher’s argument predates much of the discussion on Doctor Faustus’s relationship to witchcraft and magic, and since he is the first to take on this subject, my work will be founded on his but will move beyond it. In his article, Kocher uses William Perkins’s broad definition of a witch: anyone who consents to use the assistance of the devil in working wonders (10). Although this is an appropriate definition for the Renaissance, I intend to expand this definition from Perkins’s elite view to also include popular definitions of a witch.

In the same spirit, I will expand on Kocher’s primary sources, the orthodox treatises on witchcraft. Kocher’s opinion is that Doctor Faustus owes much to contemporary witchcraft beliefs. Through close readings of Renaissance treatises on demonology he attempts to demonstrate Marlowe’s understanding of and relationship to not only English magic and witchcraft beliefs but also those from continental Europe. Kocher compares these writings to the text indicating how Faustus possesses the mannerisms of a witch, but he excludes portions of the text that directly correlate to the Faust Book or can be attributed to Marlowe’s collaborator. This is because Kocher attempts to explain authorial intention or knowledge. I, however, am much more concerned with what the text itself conveys. In order to do this, I look at the orthodox views already explored by Kocher as well as the popular beliefs on witchcraft and the influences from the realm of demonology on Marlowe’s inspiration the German Faust Book. This new direction of investigation is important because the parts of the story that Marlowe did not create still add to Faustus’s reputation as a witch.

I will not be the first to investigate the influences of witchcraft on the Faust legend. Frank Baron takes on this project in “From Witchcraft to Doctor Faustus.” Baron does not discuss
Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*; but he goes into detail about how the Faust legend and more specifically the *Faust Book* have been molded by the witchcraft debate. He investigates the trial of a scholar named Deitrich Flade and his death as a result of being condemned as a witch. Baron sees Flade’s story as a precursor to the Faust legend, and after considering this scholar’s fate, Baron discusses other influencers on the *Faust Book*. He explains that Martin Luther “represents the strongest single influence shaping this book” and the physician Johann Weyer was the first person to officially associate Faustus with witchcraft in his book *De praestigiis daemonum* (12). Because of this close look at influences on the Faust legend, Baron’s work is a useful starting point for looking at Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* in more detail than Kocher’s analysis; it helps demonstrate that the scenes in the play which are taken directly from the *Faust Book* were not immune to beliefs in demonology.

Other than Kocher, no one has tried to establish if Faustus is a witch or magician textually, and in comparison to debates on Protestantism and Calvinism in *Doctor Faustus* this project has received little attention from scholars. These authors have in some way tried to solve the mystery of *Doctor Faustus*’s relationship to witchcraft and magic, but there is another debate conducted by scholars that inform and can be informed by my work. Since 1946 when Sir Walter Greg published his article “The Damnation of Faustus,” scholars have debated the timing in the play when Faustus is irreversibly damned and for what sin he is ultimately condemned; to some, Faustus is damned when he unites with Helen because she is a succubus or female demon. This discourse is closely linked to the discussion of whether or not Faustus is a witch because many treatises and popular beliefs revolving around witchcraft and pacts with the devil included some form of intercourse with a demon or Satan.
Nicolas Kiessling in “Doctor Faustus and the Sin of Demoniality” briefly explains the debate on Faustus’s condemnation. He says it all began with Greg’s groundbreaking article in 1946 in which he takes the stance that Faustus is damned when he unites with the succubus Helen of Troy. J.C. Maxwell quickly responded to Greg’s view stating that it was not Faustus’s indulgence in sensual diversions that damns him because these are mere distractions; instead Faustus’s sin is pride. Kiessling indicates that despite some objections such as Maxwell’s, Greg’s views on Faustus’s damnation took root in the scholarship and have informed the way people view *Doctor Faustus*. Those who agree with Greg see Faustus’s damnation brought about because of his intercourse with Helen. As their justification for this interpretation, they state that just as Mephistopheles offers Faustus a “hot whore” when he truly wants a wife and when Faustus warns others that the shades of Alexander and his paramour cannot be touched, Helen is a shade or a demon. Kiessling, however, explores the objections to Greg’s argument, but places himself as presenting yet another. He believes that “even if Faustus did engage in ‘demoniality’… that sin was not necessarily ‘ultimate’ or ‘beyond repentance’” (207). His support for this opinion is how alleged relationships with demons in the Middle Ages were not necessarily damning. In the end, Kiessling asserts that Faustus is not concerned about his relationship with Helen as his major sin; rather he attributes his downfall to his books and wants to burn them.

I do not see myself entering this debate to discuss when Faustus is damned, but I do see Helen as a demon, and even though Kiessling and others do not see Faustus’s damnation as a result of his relationship with Helen, I believe it is a key factor. Having said that, I must clarify by saying that Faustus’s behavior throughout the entire play indicates that his sin is heresy or turning his back on God and embracing Lucifer. Faustus actually follows a process of damnation
that is wrapped up in the typical behaviors of a witch including a pact with the devil, a physical relationship with a demon or Satan, and an unwillingness or inability to repent. Throughout this project, I do not hope to prove whether or not Marlowe was trying to be orthodox or rebellious in his portrayal of magic. Instead, I will show that Faustus behaved like a man who hoped to be a great Neoplatonist magician but who failed miserably which resulted in his rejection of God and Christianity and his embracing of witchcraft and Lucifer.
MAGIC IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

During the Renaissance, Europe began to reevaluate the works of the Ancient Greeks and Romans and thus began to think about their own lives differently. This era saw the rise of the Humanists who believed that human beings had the ability to change the world because of their inner powers and rationality. Many scholars in the Renaissance applied the ideals of Humanism to magic, thus expanding its definition. According to Barbara Traister in *Heavenly Necromancers*, there was originally a distinction between demonic and natural magic that centered on the fact that demonic magic was “performed with the aid of spirits” whereas natural magic was not. She attributes the widening of the term natural magic to a group of “Italian philosophers who revived Neoplatonism during the latter half of the fifteenth century” (5). The Neoplatonists combined the Jewish Cabala with Christianity and believed that through ceremonies heavenly spirits could be contacted that would help them improve the world. The beliefs of these men, who also became known as occult philosophers, describe a power that Doctor Faustus attempts to wield throughout the play. This chapter will analyze the beliefs of the Neoplatonists especially Cornelius Agrippa as well as the literary tradition of magicians in order to later decide if Faustus lived up to their beliefs therefore earning himself the title magician.

Neoplatonism and Occult Philosophy

Neoplatonism was revived by numerous philosophers who believed by dedicating their lives to contemplation and humility with an overriding faith in God, they could “lift [themselves] above the concerns of the sublunar world and participate in the knowledge of cosmic affairs” (Traister 6). This new philosophical occultism expanded on the humanists’ idea that humans could control the world and themselves. According to John Mebane in *Renaissance Magic and...*
the Return of the Golden Age, those who believed in philosophical magic in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries believed that “humankind should act out its potential in the free exercise of its powers on the social and natural environment; moreover those who explored ‘natural magic’ often asserted that the quest for truth should not be limited by traditional religious, political, or intellectual authorities” (3). These men also believed that human nature could be perfected and that people had the responsibility to try and improve the world around them. They felt they were motivated by piety and love and in line with the natural order (Mebane 7). According to Mebane,

The crucial difference between the magician and other Renaissance ‘artists’ (to use the term in its broadest sense) is that the occultists accepted no limits whatsoever: they proclaimed that the human mind could unite itself fully – and in this life – with the mind of its Creator, [they] … proclaimed that God had chosen them personally to eliminate all traces of corruption from human society. (12)

Some may have claimed to have been chosen, but others believed that all men had an innate power. Marsilio Ficino believed that a person’s desire to embrace God was not an act of grace but was rather based on a “free decision of the individual soul itself,” and Pico della Mirandola argued that though God did create man in His own image, it was up to human beings to realize and act on the potential God gave (Mebane 11).

Each philosopher had his own understanding of what the natural order was and how men could connect with it, but they all felt that it was humans who took the first step into the divine world. Pico della Mirandola in Oration on the Dignity of Man and Giordano Bruno in On the Infinite Universe and Worlds focus on these ideas (Traister 6). Most Neoplatonists felt that they needed to bring the “planetary spirits” to them, and turned their attention to achieving this goal.
Marsilio Ficino actually “developed theories of how to attract planetary daemons (to be carefully distinguished from ‘demons,’ evils spirits) by the use of music, particular words to similar incantations, special colors, and perfumes” (Traister 7). As Edward Peters points out in The Magician the Witch and the Law, these aspiring magicians were disregarding the Church’s position that there were only two types of spirits: angels and demons. It was also maintained that any contact with a spirit even if it appeared to be a heavenly one was actually contact with a demon. Since the Church was powerful, “no Christian … could easily disagree.” It is because of this knowledge that throughout the sixteenth-century many Neoplatonists took great pains to separate their ideas into two kinds of magic as seen by Ficino’s differentiation between daemons and demons (Peters 163). Cornelius Agrippa made his distinction not in types of spirits, but instead between natural and ceremonial magic. To him ceremonial magic consisted of specific rituals, but he also warns that there are two types of ceremonial magic. The first type is goetic magic which calls up evil spirits, and the second form is theurgic magic which calls on angelic and planetary spirits (Traister 7-8).

Overall, the Neoplatonists separated themselves from the rest of the Humanists because they praised contemplation and they were invested in “abstract speculation.” They were, however, still very concerned with what humans could achieve in both the cultural and political realms and often discussed in their writings how a man could descend from contemplation of higher matters into action in the physical world (Mebane 17).

Cornelius Agrippa

Gareth Roberts explains that a close look at the manuscripts on magic reveals that many of the conjuring books borrowed from or were heavily based on Agrippa’s instructions. This
shows that his “works were actually read for practical instructions on how to conjure” (“Necromantic” 152). With this in mind, the reference made by the aspiring scholar in Doctor Faustus to the Neoplatonist Cornelius Agrippa is not unexpected. By taking a closer look at Agrippa’s works, we will be able to understand what form of magic Faustus has in mind as he contemplates turning to necromancy. Agrippa wrote two major works De vanitate scientiarum which argues that man’s pursuit of knowledge is in vain and that all of the sciences (including occult science) are empty. Closely modeled after Erasmus’s Praise of Folly, each chapter of Agrippa’s De vanitate focuses on a different science explaining its problems. The book finally proclaims that all learning is vain except the Scriptures or the word of Christ. Agrippa wrote this after his other work De occulta philosophia, which is dedicated to the occult sciences, but surprisingly De vanitate was published first (Yates 40-43).

Typically, De occulta philosophia is referred to as “the handbook of Renaissance occult sciences.” It contains three books and in each book the three worlds of the universe are described. The first book discusses natural magic, the second mathematical magic, and the third theological magic. According to Agrippa, each level is influenced by the one above it making everything connected (Yates 44-45). A close look at this influential work will show that Agrippa subscribed to the common beliefs of the Neoplatonists. He felt that magic was possible only through virtue, humility, and the quest for knowledge, but he also believed that not all people could achieve this magic and they must be wary of evil spirits. To Agrippa, magic had the ability to create good in the world. He explains that magic contains the knowledge of all of nature, and while it is mysterious it can instruct man on how to produce “wonderful effects, by uniting the virtues of things through the application of them one to the other, and to their inferior suitable
subjects, joining and knitting them together thoroughly by the powers, and virtues of the superior bodies” (5).

According to this occult philosopher, an aspiring magician needed to possess certain qualities in order to succeed in his quest for knowledge. A man who wanted to study magic must possess knowledge in three main subjects, philosophy, mathematics, and theology. Philosophy was important because it taught a man the “qualities of things” and the “occult properties of every being.” Mathematics are necessary because a man needs to know about the “figures of the stars, upon which depends the sublime virtue, and property of everything,” and finally, a man needs to know theology for then he will know about the “immaterial substances, which dispense and minister all things.” He will not be able to “understand the rationality of magic” (6).

Knowledge in certain subjects was necessary for Agrippa, but he also felt that magicians needed to practice self-control in order to obtain communion with the celestial world. Agrippa explains that a man needs to meditate on two things. First, “we should leave carnal affections, frail sense, and material passions.” Secondly, a man needs to have natural dignity which is acquired by perfecting two things: being accomplished in the three faculties mentioned above and applying “his soul to contemplation” (448-449). These are qualities that will be especially important if Faustus is to succeed in wielding heavenly magic.

Once an aspiring magician has become accomplished in the required disciplines and has devoted his life to contemplation, he will have access to the wonders of the three worlds described by Agrippa in the *De occulta*. In this same book he begins to delve into the mysteries of magic by describing how the three worlds interact. Specifically, he explains how magicians are able to manipulate the world. To him, “the superior binds that which is inferior, and converts it to itself, and the inferior is by the same reason converted to the superior, or is otherwise
affected and wrought upon.” He continues to explain that just like these forces “any man when he is opportunely exposed to the celestial influences, as by the affections of his mind, so by the due applications of natural things … binds and draws the inferior into admiration, and obedience” (210).

The power to bind the inferior to him is what all aspiring magicians’ desire, but Agrippa does not promise this result to everyone. Just like the other occult philosophers, he explains that there are dangers to men who are not fully purified and ready for communing with the divine. He states, “No man is ignorant that evil spirits, by evil, and prophane arts may be raised up … [and] are manifest [to] witches and mischievous women.” While it is possible for a man to conjure an evil spirit if he is not cleansed, it is also possible to contact other spirits. He says “no man is ignorant that supercelestial angels or spirits may be gained by us through good works, a pure mind, secret prayers, devout humiliation, and the like” (114). Because of this recognition of the dual nature of magic and the risks that men take in order to practice magic, he consistently gives warnings throughout his work. He explains that magicians must continue to have faith and devote themselves to contemplation of God. “religion is a continual contemplation of divine things, and by good works and uniting oneself with God and the divine powers through worship and is a necessary part of ceremonial magic. Whosoever therefore neglects religion … and confides only in the strength of natural things, are very often deceived by evil spirits” (450).

If a man is able to follow all of the guidelines and advice described by Agrippa, the rewards of his dedication and purity are apparent for he will be able to commune with the celestial world. All of the hard work will pay of as:

our mind being pure and divine, inflamed with a religious love, adorned with hope, directed by faith, placed in the height and top of the human soul, doth attract the truth,
and suddenly comprehend it, … we, though natural, know those things which are above nature, and understand all things below … Hence it comes to pass that though we are framed a natural body, yet we sometimes predominate over nature, and cause such wonderful, sudden and difficult operations, as that evils spirits obey us, the stars are disordered, the heavenly powers compelled, the elements made obedient; so devout men and those elevated by these theological virtues command the elements, drive away fogs, raise the winds, cause rain, cure diseases, raise the dead … (455)

At this point, the magician has reached his goal and can use the powers that have been granted to him from the Creator to change the world for the better. By following Agrippa’s advice, a man should be able to accomplish these wonderful feats, and it is Faustus’s goal to manipulate the world and become famous just as has been explained here.

Magicians in Medieval Literature

By looking at Agrippa’s views and beliefs concerning magic, it is easy to see that he felt the magician’s life was one of dedicated study and contemplation. It was a quiet life. Barbara Traister recognizes that this lifestyle did not give authors and dramatists a great deal to work with. Because Marlowe was participating in the literary world as well as the social world, Traister’s discoveries can help us understand Faustus’s motivations and actions. She says, “[w]hat contemporary magic could not have provided, however, was much for the magician to do. Philosophical magicians did not, after all perform tricks, heal the sick, or assist those in trouble. They read, they meditated, often they advocated severing all ties to the world around them” (21). Since the “practicing” magicians were not good subjects for plays, Traister immerses
herself in the depiction of magicians in the medieval traditions of the romance narrative to find the inspiration used by dramatists for their onstage magicians.

Early in the genre of narrative romances, “magicians generate their own magic; they have no need to employ spirits or to perform elaborate ceremonies” (Traister 22). Also, the magicians in these stories are mostly just plot devices. They move the story along, often are the enemy, and provide spectacular effects. The most obvious example of a romantic magician is Merlin. He not only entertained King Arthur’s court, but he also had the ability to shape change. For Traister, “the production of surprising effects and spectacle, as well as of disguises, has implications that are carried further in dramatic literature. The disguises, of course, are associated with role-playing; in many ways the magician is an actor. Even more, however, he is a director, a presenter of spectacular shows for the discomfort, edification, or entertainment of spectators” (Traister 23-24). These are the two main roles of the magician that are carried into Renaissance drama. Often magicians are under disguise or performing shows for the entertainment of others including Doctor Faustus.

Despite these static qualities of magicians, Traister documents how the magicians in literature and drama began to be influenced by the philosophical ideas that have already been explored. This influence is noticeable when the story lines and magicians begin to incorporate a dependence on spirits or demons for power (27). She points out that Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene refers to legions of sprites that are put into service and that Merlin in Orlando Furioso “calls up a parade of demons.” This newfound dependence on spirits for power really expands the possibilities for literary characters because “if his magical ability comes from study and if his magical acts are actually performed by spirits, then the magician can be human” and not a spectacle himself (Traister 29). It is the fallible magician that begins to appear in
Renaissance drama. *Doctor Faustus* is no exception, and the question that will be addressed is if this aspiring magician fell into witchcraft.

**How Magic Began to Become Witchcraft**

Just as the goal of this work is to decide if Faustus is a witch or a magician, the goal of many scholars in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was to discover if there truly was a difference between the two. This debate was the culmination of a long history in which the distinctions between magic and witchcraft were collapsing. Peters points out that magic was identified with heresy as early as the fourth-century, and over the years most heretical acts became associated with witches especially by Inquisitors (155-157, 164). This in turn made heresy and magic part of witchcraft. Peters summarizes the collapse from the beginning. He says before the twelfth-century Christians consistently denounced practitioners of magic, but it was only in the twelfth-century that revivals of these beliefs took hold and expanded their definitions of magic to include heretics and a much larger group of magicians. In the thirteenth-century, magic was attacked at a higher rate by theologians and philosophers as well as some spiritual courts, and “As the inquisitorial process took shape, magic began to come within the purview of the Inquisition, and many of the distinct terms once used to designate learned magic … were applied to not only to learned magicians, but to other practitioners of ‘superstitious’ and ‘idolatrous’ acts” (165).

In 1583, Johann Weyer’s largest edition of *De praestigiis daemonum* was published. In this work he continues to blur the lines between magic and witchcraft. He does so by condemning occult philosophy. He criticizes the works and beliefs of Pythagoras, Democritus and Plato among others who he says supposedly dealt with natural magic because he felt that they mixed it
up with sorcery and theurgy making it too hard to extract the good qualities. He does say, “But as regards the thorough exploration and understanding of the hidden things of nature—true philosophy in other words, and magic of a more hallowed sort—wise men should accept and pursue this course with a solemn approval, and I do not here make light of it or wish to detract from it in the least” (Weyer 103). The interesting things about this statement is that most of the Renaissance philosophers who advocated natural philosophy based their beliefs on these ancients who had mixed up sorcery and “hallowed” magic. So even though Weyer felt that good magic existed, the Neoplatonists were not practicing it. In fact, in his definition of a magician, Weyer describes quite accurately the neoplatonists but with a negative view.

I call ‘magician’ anyone who willingly takes instruction from a demon or from other magicians or from books, who employs a formula of known or unknown exotic words …or who employs magical signs, or exorcisms and dreadful execrations, or ceremonies and solemn rites, or many other practices in an illicit attempt of his own volition to summon forth a demon for some deluding, deceiving, or otherwise mocking task, so that the demon will reveal himself in some visible assumed form, or make himself known in some way, and respond to questions by voice or whisper or by pictures or marks or in an other manner. (Weyer 98)

One can see the references to Neoplatonism in Weyer’s mention of books, ceremonies, and a form of Agrippa’s binding, but we can also see how Weyer assumes that any spirit contacted by the magician is a demon.

Weyer’s opinion that all spirits were demons is not unique. According to Frances Yates in *Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Pico della Mirandola and Cornelius Agrippa believed Cabala (Jewish) Magic made weaker magic stronger and kept it safe from black
influences (angelic not demonic). Jean Bodin, however, in his work *Démonomanie or Demon Mania* begins his attack on witchcraft by referring to the beliefs of Pico and Agrippa. He believed that Cabala was not to be used as magic. If a person did so, he was wicked. To Bodin, the magicians who tried to practice philosophical magic had opened doors for the demons who created the rise in witchcraft (Yates 68-69). Bodin’s belief that prayer and Cabala were sacred and should not be used for magic was grounded on a history of such statements. In 1398, the faculty at the University of Paris created a document entitled the *conclusio*. This text contained twenty-eight articles explaining what actions should be condemned as idolatry. Included in the list was using Christian prayer and liturgy for magic (Peters 144). The conditions that magicians had been charged under for centuries now began to apply to others accused of heresy. Because of this Peters suggests that the “figure of the learned magician” and the witch of the sixteenth-century were much closer than many studies of witchcraft suggest (165).

In the end, Peters explains the predicament faced by most magicians around the turn of the seventeenth-century in the eyes of men such as Weyer and Bodin when he stated, “As Aquinas once said, it was a magic hallowed by *miracula* and divine providence; all else were *mira*, simply wonders and illusions, created by sporting and deceptive demons. No matter how learned the magician, the same process of demonic illusion that deceived a simple witch deceived him as well. And the magician was the greater fool and the greater sinner” (167). By looking closely at how Faustus behaves throughout the play we will discover if he has been deceived like the common witch or if perhaps as Peters suggests he is an even greater fool. In order to decide if he is a magician trying to save the world or if he is a deceived witch, we need to understand what defined a witch in early modern Europe.
For about two centuries, Western Europe was caught in the throes of massive witch-hunts. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, witches were considered a manifestation of diabolical evil, and accusations of supernatural power being used for the purposes of evil spread quickly as tortured captives, attempting to save themselves, agreed to implicate others as their cohorts. The propagation of this witch-craze was aided by strong religious beliefs on the part of the European population; those who believed in God also believed in the Devil. Because of these beliefs, witches were considered tools for the Devil’s work just as priests served God, and they were thought to use their power from Satan to harm those around them by damaging property, injuring their neighbors, or even committing murder. This chapter will investigate the stereotypes of witches and sabbats which (just like “Magic in Early Modern Europe”) will act as a guideline for helping us decide if Doctor Faustus is a witch or a magician.

The Great European Witch Craze has been assigned many different dates, and the countries that gave in to the fear and suspicion of witches did not necessarily participate in the witch craze at the same time, but the most commonly accepted dates indicate that the craze began in the fifteenth-century, peaked in the late sixteenth-century, and continued into the late seventeenth-century. In Europe’s Inner Demons, Norman Cohn explains that the witch craze affected portions of Europe differently because Eastern Orthodox Christianity did not give credence to witchcraft and therefore remained untouched by it. In other parts of Europe, however, Protestant, and Roman Catholic states both prosecuted witches, but the prosecution was not on equal levels in each nation. Mass prosecutions tended to occur in places where the political authorities supported witch-hunts, allowed torture as a part of the judiciary process, and where local witchcraft beliefs included the sabbat or a heretical meeting of witches. Spain, the
Italian Peninsula, Poland, Sweden, and the Low Countries experienced massive witch-hunts but in specific places for limited periods of time. Mass witch-hunts were also intensely carried out in Scotland, France, the German states, and the Swiss confederation. England in contrast saw little mass witch-hunting at all (Cohn 253). Despite their closeness, the intensity of the witch craze differed between England and Scotland; however, the timing of their main prosecutions was the same. The first great Scottish witch-hunt began in 1591 and lasted until 1597 (Lee 72). The peak of accusations in England occurred during Queen Elizabeth’s reign at the end of the sixteenth-century, but declined rapidly after 1605. For the English, the worst years for suspected witches were from 1570 to 1600 (Macfarlane “England” 72, 200). Since Doctor Faustus first appeared on the stage in 1594, it is easy to see that the audience would have strong opinions about the action of the play.

What Makes a Witch?

It is important to establish the amount of power a witch was supposed to have before detailing what they could do. Macfarlane points out that when looking at the dates of the witch craze, one would expect to see an increase in the number of prosecutions during the years of plague because illness and death was often attributed to witchcraft. Contrary to that expectation, however, there does not appear to be a connection between the volume of prosecutions and physical illness (Macfarlane “England” 179-80). Macfarlane expands on his own idea in “Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex” when he says, “Witchcraft explained only individual misfortunes, not a general phenomena such as major climactical changes or the burning down of a whole town” (Macfarlane “Essex” 12). This limitation of powers explains why witches were not blamed for all problems experienced by a community. Although witches did not have the
power to bring about catastrophes, the understanding of their power and characteristics did change over time.

One of the earliest examples of mass witchcraft trials came from the people of Switzerland in 1428 and began to define the attributes of a witch. During these trials, it was decided that someone accused of witchcraft by more than one person must be arrested, tortured for a confession, and burned depending on the strength of the confession. Because of this chain of events, these particular witch-hunt confessions included the first appearance of the “flying devil-worshipping witch:” images which were used later in the Great Witch Craze. People who refused to confess often died after ruthless torture in these hunts, and others who could not stand the pain of torture made confessions that reflected popular beliefs in magic. There were two common confessions made by alleged witches. The first confession was based on the Devil’s attempt to undermine the power of the Church and was much more concerned with matters of Christianity than incidents between neighbors. In this confession a witch normally professed that she had abandoned God and pledged herself to the Devil. She then gave him a yearly tribute of a sheep, lamb, or other animal, and she often had agreed to surrender one of her limbs to the Devil when she died. The second confession made by alleged witches indicated that the Devil had given her powers for the purpose of harming people, animals, and crops. Even though the Devil was included in this confession, it focused on *maleficium* or harmful acts and secular matters as opposed to the Devil’s relationship with the Church as described in the first example (Cohn 226).

Although the beginnings of the confessions that appeared in later witch-crazes appeared in these early trials there were some key differences. The Devil or demon in these early trials did not appear on his own accord to the soon-to-be witch like he did in future witch hunts: the Devil had to be invoked. Because of this lack of agency on the part of the Devil, witches were not
considered victims of diabolical illusions. A further difference in these early trials was that a male could be a witch just as easily as a female; however, in the later craze, those accused of witchcraft were typically female (Cohn 227).

Starting with these trials, continental beliefs were repeated often enough that stereotypes of witches and their actions were soon created. The formation of a common stereotype helped the witch craze expand and continue for long periods of time in Europe. Similar to the early trials, there were two important stereotypes. The first stereotypes were circulated by popular legend as opposed to authorities and did not mention the Devil. Instead, they indicated that a witch was a married or widowed woman between the ages fifty and seventy. The belief held that the older a witch was the more power he or she could harness. According to this folk stereotype, witchcraft often ran in a family, so if a woman’s mother was executed as a witch, she became highly suspected as one as well. Women became known as witches for many reasons, but it was usually because they possessed a personal peculiarity. If a woman was solitary, eccentric, bad tempered, or quick to scold and threaten her neighbors, she might earn the label of a witch. If she had an odd or frightening look such as extreme ugliness, red eyes, a squint, or pockmarked skin she also ran the risk of being viewed as a witch (Cohn 251-252). These stereotypes, like the early ones, focused on a witch’s duty to wreak havoc and contained accusations of the use of maleficium, which included harmful storms, sickness in men and beasts, and even impotence. As a precursor to maleficium, cursing was considered one of the most important methods supposedly employed by witches to injure their victims (Macfarlane “Essex” 15). Folk stereotypes also maintained that witches were cannibals and specialized in killing babies and small children because the young flesh supposedly contained supernatural powers. Midwives and practitioners of old medicine were sometimes victimized by this particular stereotype of witches because
witches were supposed to kill babies; midwives were likely candidates because of their accessibility to newborns (Cohn 249). Mostly the folk or popular stereotypes were concerned with the relationships neighbors had with each other. If someone had trouble living in a community, he or she was ostracized through these beliefs.

The second stereotype of witches dealt with how a witch gained her power. In most cases, the prevailing belief was that the Devil made a pact with the witch. Before the witch trials, there was a belief that a person could enter into an agreement with Satan, but these earlier tales about demons and pacts with the Devil were not connected to witchcraft. In the fifteenth century, however, the role of the demon changed from being passive as it was in Switzerland to controlling. Now, people were giving the demon homage through kissing, written compacts, having sexual intercourse or being branded with a “devils mark” (Cohn 223). This stereotype also contained the added problem of turning one's back on Christianity by making a pact with Satan. Most of the previous stereotypes did not include heresy, which defined by St. Thomas is "a species of infidelity in men who, having professed the faith of Christ, corrupt its dogmas" (Catholic). Making a pact with the Devil was an acknowledged rejection of Christianity which made it heresy.

Witchcraft as a form of heresy was considered the inversion of Christianity, and only former Christians could achieve it. These former Christians made a conscious decision to turn from the righteous path and worship the devil. King James I of England believed the Devil attracted people to him “by promising unto them greate riches, and worldlie commoditie.” Those who were rich “yet burnes in a desperat desire of reuenge, hee allures them by promises to get their turne satisfied to their hartes contentment” (Stuart 32). This new ideology reflects the change in the role of the Devil. Now, the human was the victim of diabolical illusions and
promises. Typically, the person conned by the Devil into witchcraft was usually an individual who had been rejected by his or her neighbors. Once the decision to abandon Christianity was made, however, it was believed that a ceremony was held to convert a person to witchcraft. At this ceremony the demon demanded a permanent renunciation of Christ by converts spitting on the cross or some other symbolic gesture. Sometimes the “convert’s” children were to be sacrificed, and often the person was forced to mate with the Devil to seal the contract. After the ceremony, the new witch had to remain obedient to her master even when the money that was promised never appeared and the mating was painful (Cohn 99-101).

Common beliefs maintained that this initiation ceremony was often enveloped in a much larger ceremony that mocked Christianity called a “sabbat.” A sabbat was supposedly a nocturnal event that ended at midnight or at cockcrow, and the common stereotype indicated that witches were required to meet locally. Three to four times a year “ecumenical sabbats” were also held at great distances and were attended by witches from far and wide. The events believed to occur at these sabbats began a whole new set of generally accepted stereotypes in Western Europe. Local meetings were typically held at a churchyard, crossroads, or at the bottom of gallows, while the ecumenical ones convened at the summit of a famous mountain.

The Devil was said to preside over the sabbats in the form of a creature consisting of half-man, half-goat parts including horns. In *Daemonologie*, King James states that “witches oft times confesses not only his conueening in the Church with them, but his occupying of the Pulpit” (37). The ceremony began when “the witches knelt down and prayed to the Devil calling him Lord and God” (Cohn 101). Worshippers renounced Christianity and kissed him on his left foot, genitals, or his anus. After this sign of allegiance, the witches reported for punishment. They would confess their sins, which commonly included attending church or not performing
enough maleficium. For their punishment, the Devil would whip them. Next, it was believed that the Devil would preach a sermon against Christianity and promise his followers a paradise better than heaven. He would receive offerings from the faithful before the ceremony continued with a parody of the Eucharist that contained something tough and hard to eat. This parody was followed by a meal of horrific foods such as rotting meat and wine like manure droppings. The end of the sabbat was the wildest part; the witches performed an erotic dance. This dance was structured with one witch bent over in the middle of a circle with a candle in his or her anus for light. The rest of the group would dance around this person and perform sexual feats; anything was permissible at this time including sodomy and incest. The dance would not be over until the Devil had copulated with every man and woman present (Cohn 101-102). In the end, despite performing maleficium on their own, the heretical actions that occurred at a sabbat brought witches together in a community. They were bound to each other and the Devil through the ceremonies and their duty to wreak havoc (Cohn 234). This of course sounds outrageous to our ears, but a belief in some form of a sabbat was accepted as true occurrences among the general populace in England as well as Europe. The most important aspects of the sabbat for our analysis of Doctor Faustus and his dealings with magic include the sexual relationship with the Devil as part of ritual, the diabolical pact signed in blood, the presentation of a limb, and the insistence on mocking Christianity. Faustus’s participation in these events will help us decide if he is a witch.

According to Cohn, the idea of humans mating with demons was not a new phenomenon. Thomas Aquinas who died in 1274 taught that witches existed among men, but he also believed that demons could act as incubi and succubi. He believed “that a demon can take on a form of a man or a woman, and in that form, have sexual intercourse with a human being” (Cohn 174). More simply, an incubus was a demon that had sexual relations with a woman and a succubus a
demon that mated with a man. Although this belief was widespread and hard to trace, the Bible provides one example in Genesis 6:4 which can be seen as an attack on the Roman and Greek Gods: “The Neph’ilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.” The ancient myths depicted their gods as chasing women, and for this action, early Christian theologians considered them demons. Tales about demons and pacts with the devil were not originally connected to witchcraft, but as the powerful devil stereotypes began to form the witches became puppets and were forced to obey (Cohn 234-237).

For the most part we have seen how the popular stereotypes of witches ranged from women who did not fit into a community to those who purposefully rejected Christianity and became the slaves of the Devil even in terms of their sexual relationships. What the intellectual debate said about witches reflected many of the same beliefs but tended to focus more on the Devil’s power over a deceived witch.

According to the Johann Weyer, those who are open to attack from the Devil are the ones who will readily give themselves to the devil in return for “special inducements.” These people tend to be those “without faith in God, the impious, the illicitly curious, the people wrongly trained in the Christian religion, the envious …” (180-181). For Weyer it was people who had a weakness that could be exploited by the Devil that became witches, and this coincides with the popular beliefs that witches were ruled by demons in the later witch-hunts. Weyer continues this discussion by explaining how a person is deceived.

These persons (as being fitting instruments) the Devil waylays however he can, in his own time and place. He approaches, follows, and entices each in some special manner, since he knows from sure indications the interests and feelings of every heart. He may
assume some attractive form, or variously agitate and corrupt the thoughts and the
imagination, until finally these people agree to his proposals, give way to his persuasion,
and believe whatever he puts into their minds … They think that everything he suggests is
true, and they are devoutly confident that all the forms imposed by him upon their powers
of imagination and fantasy exist truly and ‘substantially.’ ” (181)

Weyer stresses that the Devil controls the witch to the point that she begins to see whatever
illusions the Devil places before her.

Weyer’s ideas are not unique when he felt that anyone could be subjected to the Devil’s
powers. Mebane suggests that Cornelius Agrippa in his *De vanitate scientium* felt the same way:
“Despite the complexity of Agrippa’s treatise and the varying responses of some Elizabethan
readers, it must have been uncomfortably clear to many of them that Agrippa felt it much more
likely that the devil would possess the heart of a king than the soul of a humble peasant” (101).
“Interestingly, [Bodin] also emphasizes that the devil has loyal subjects in all estates, and popes,
emperors, and princes have at times fallen under Satan’s dominion” (Mebane 99).

Bodin expands on the argument that witches are people who have been deceived to focus
on those who think they are contacting heavenly spirits (or the occult philosophers). He says, “to
show that the greatest minds, and the saintliest persons are very often deceived, and that the most
powerful witchcraft takes on a fine veil of piety, it will be shown below that the invocation of
devils … is full of prayers, fastings, crosses and consecrated hosts which witches use in this”
(66). To Bodin, however, there is a difference between being deceived by the devil and placing
oneself in his control. He states, “the most detestable witches are those who renounce God, and
His service … in order to give themselves to the Devil, by express agreement” (112). This view
was a prevalent one among the elite, but not necessarily the common populace.
Elite and Popular Views of Witchcraft

As has already been indicated, the witch crazes are of interest because they had two different facets: the popular and the intellectual. What is even more curious is how these two different views of witchcraft informed each other. The intellectual debate over witchcraft included opinions ranging from disbelief in their existence as in Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* to the belief in witches and discussion of their characteristics as in *Démonomanie* or *Demon Mania* by Jean Bodin and *Daemonologie* by King James VI and I. The intellectual debate also focused a great deal on the differences between magic and witchcraft. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, Neoplatonism or occult philosophy was promoted among many scholars, but the men who wrote about and practiced it such as Cornelius Agrippa soon became suspected of witchcraft. John Mebane, author of *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age*, gives us a clue as to why this happened when he states, “Studies of the witchcraft persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have often suggested that the witch-hunts were a means of suppressing virtually all forms of heresy and social deviation, including those generated by attempts at radical religious and social reform” (96). Mebane connects this suppression with natural philosophy by connecting Professor Christina Larner’s argument to the Neoplatonists. Larner argues “that the persecution of witches was a form of social control; the witch-hunts attempted to eliminate any form of social deviation and to demonstrate the presumed efficacy of the authorities in morally cleansing society.” The Neoplatonists needed to be cleansed according to Mebane:

> there is considerable evidence that accusations of witchcraft were also used to suppress innovations in natural philosophy, especially when those innovations were perceived as being allied with subversive religious or political beliefs. To Jean Bodin, Martin Del Rio,
and King James I, the religious, intellectual, and scientific ferment of the Renaissance was a sign of an increase in monstrous alliances with Satan. Numerous authorities agreed that while some witches were motivated to ally themselves with the devil out of greed, lust, or a desire for revenge upon their enemies, others were prompted by a damnable intellectual curiosity. (Mebane 98)

The “intellectual curiosity” that causes witchcraft for these men is what separates the intellectual debate from popular beliefs. As Mebane points out the intimate relationship with natural magic and the intellectual witchcraft debate made many elites hostile toward white witchcraft saying that all attempts at magic were evil and were based in pacts with the devil or evils spirits.

Jean Bodin was a leader in the elite crusade against “white” magicians. “Bodin had many predecessors and contemporaries who similarly argued that the quest for occult wisdom was the epitome of intellectual pride and inevitably led to a pact with Satan” (Mebane 100). Even though Agrippa’s other work *De Occulta Philosophia* promotes natural philosophy and magic, Mebane points out that Agrippa’s *De vanitate* was one of the most “influential documents in the English Renaissance in promoting the idea that magic is a natural consequence of excessive intellectual pride and that it leads the practitioner to fall into the clutches of the devil” (100). This is because Agrippa “describes his own misguided and sinful involvement in occult sciences as the product of his vanity, greed, and social ambition” (Mebane 100). The link between white magic and the devil was expressed at the intellectual level, but not at the popular level.

Among the elite, scholars who believed in natural philosophy or good magic were attacked for witchcraft whereas cunning folk who were in danger of accusations from the general public were more often asked to help find witches. Cunning folk often practiced white magic in an attempt to heal the sick, but they were in danger of being accused of witchcraft because some
felt if a person could heal maladies, he or she could have caused the original problem to gain business. This idea propagated easily especially if a victim was not healed (Cohn 249). Although at risk for being considered witches themselves, cunning folk were often used as a form of counter-action to witchcraft. Alan Macfarlane in *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* discusses how cunning folk were viewed as impartial and objective judges of people’s relationships; most villages were within ten miles of a cunning man, though some people traveled out of the county to seek help. There were three main reasons to consult these professionals. First, a victim could not obtain help from elsewhere and needed relief from severe torment. Second, many people had sought and received successful treatment from cunning folk, and third, they could help at little to no cost compared to a true physician. These people could not only provide a remedy from physical pain, but they also presented possible explanations as to why the pain and suffering had occurred. They, of course, often confirmed the cause of their problems was witchcraft (Macfarlane “England” 120-122).

Modern scholars have examined the connection between cunning folk and witches in order to discern what variation between the two made witches evil and cunning folk a necessary step for good. Cunning folk were separated from witches and not persecuted as often because they used power already at work in the universe and channeled it for good use, but with witches, the power lay within themselves (an evil source). Another difference between witches and cunning folk was motive. At times, cunning folk worked for money whereas witches did things for power and revenge. Some cunning folk, however, refused payment, and others left it up to clients to leave them a reward for their work. Overall, the primary motives for becoming a cunning man were glory, fame, and prestige (Macfarlane “England” 126-7). From the difference in attitudes toward “white magicians,” it is easy to see that the elite and the general populace
held very different views on what made a witch or a magician. Despite this disparity, however, the two areas of debate did inform each other.

The elite or clerics who possessed beliefs that focused on diabolical pacts took an active role in trying to manipulate the popular sentiment. They hoped to achieve this dissemination by using writings such as treatises tailored to simple people. In fact, dramatists and ballad makers were considered allies in this process even if they were not the ideal vessel for spreading knowledge (Holmes 28-29). Popular belief eventually subsumed the idea of the pact with the devil and its importance, but it was not completely accepted for two reasons. First the witchcraft statutes never changed to accommodate the pact and because some cunning folk and “magicians’ received patronage from other elites (Holmes 36, 39). These attempts by the clerics and elites to modify popular belief demonstrate how the two spheres of experience were not completely isolated from each other in England, but as much as the elite views infiltrated the popular views, popular sentiment was actually stronger.

Three main ideas that were held by the general populace were adopted by the intellectual realm. First, the gender of a witch switched as it was acknowledged that “the Bible’s witches were the ‘wise men of this world’ rulers, priests, philosophers, by contrast to their modern counterparts”; second, the idea that there was a matrilineal kinship connecting witches, so if a girl’s mother was a witch, she was more likely to be one, and finally, the idea that animals played a key role in witchcraft (Holmes 30-31). One instance of compromise between the two understandings of witchcraft was the inclusion of the devil’s mark as a sure indicator of a diabolical pact (Holmes 34). Overall, popular understandings of witchcraft combined with the concerns of the elite created a criminal proceeding unique to England (Holmes 25). In trials the popular beliefs were present throughout the process, but these beliefs were consistently
controlled by a machinery of the elite. This meant that those elites who were skeptical of witchcraft (such as Scot) could impact the outcome of a trial just as easily as magistrates who firmly believed in the idea of a diabolical compact (such as Bodin) (Holmes 25-26). What these compromises indicate is that the lines between popular and elite, magic and witchcraft are often blurred and overlapping.

The differing definitions of what made a witch as have been outlined here will be important as we move into the discussion of *Doctor Faustus*. Throughout the play we will see moments in which Faustus possesses attributes of witches in terms of the elite views such as signing a diabolical pact, but he also reflects popular beliefs by performing *maleficium*. In the next chapter, Faustus’s behavior will be weighed against the definitions presented in this and the previous chapter on magic to decide once and for all if he is evil or benevolent, a witch or a magician.
BECOMING A WITCH: FAUSTUS’S DOWNFALL

Accused of witchcraft, Dietrich Flade, a doctor of law at the University of Trier, was tried and executed in 1589. At the beginning of the trial, Flade voiced his innocence by claiming that his accusers could not have seen him at a witches’ sabbat; instead, they must have seen a “phantom representing him.” This was unacceptable for the court, and with the threat of torture, he made some concessions. He “confessed that he had been in bed with a virgin, who was, in reality, only an apparition.” Continuing to claim his innocence, Flade explained that the devil must have considered him faithful because of this affair, and therefore represented him at the witches meetings. Despite these confessions, Flade was tortured until his trial digressed into a typical witchcraft trial. He surrendered and confessed to deeds that were normally attributed to witches such as the diabolical compact and sexual intercourse with a succubus. What made him different than other witches, however, was his learning and the fact that “he had succumbed to curiosity – “curiositas sciendi” – and to the desire to satisfy it.” Because of his learning, it also was claimed in the trial that Flade was a leader among witches and therefore more evil. Flade was sentenced to death by fire, and as he mounted the platform, he warned the crowd not to fall into the trap of the devil. Out of mercy the executioner strangled him. When the reports of the trial were published, he was depicted as a king of witches, or at the head of a table; “Flade is also seen sitting at his desk surrounded by books on magic … If we compare this illustration with other pictures of the witches Sabbath, we are struck by the emphasis on books and learning in the Trier witchcraft picture. Books dominate the entire foreground.” According to Frank Baron Flade’s “trial shows in a concrete way the kind of creative reorientation required to prosecute a learned man rather than an uneducated woman” (Baron 6-9).
As the story of Dietrich Flade demonstrates, accusations of witchcraft against learned men were different than common trials during the witch crazes, but they existed and paved the way for Marlowe’s tragedy about one such man. Frances Yates points out that *Doctor Faustus* “was written to be produced in the popular theatre, with horrific diabolical effects, to audiences working up into hysteria. In fact, as already remarked, it belongs to the atmosphere of the contemporary witch crazes in which the building up of Cornelius Agrippa into a black magician played a significant part” (119). Ultimately, this chapter will prove that Faustus’s behavior throughout the entire play indicates that his sin is turning his back on God and embracing Lucifer by participating in a twenty-four year long witches’ sabbat and performing *maleficium*. This is a result of his inability to achieve the principles of Neoplatonic philosophy. Faustus’s story and that of Dietrich Flade coincide in many ways, including their supposed diabolical pact and their sexual relationships with demons. These elements of witchcraft, which were enough to condemn Flade, are scattered throughout the twenty-four years of the play, and at the end of their lives, both Flade and Faustus warn others to avoid making the same mistakes as them. Finally, both of these scholars’ lives end violently. With all of these similarities we can see how closely related the two stories are. However, the biggest difference between the two men is that although Flade, a real man not exaggerated in legend, was probably innocent, Marlowe’s Faustus is truly a heretic and witch.

When conducting a close study of *Doctor Faustus*, one must first decide which text to analyze: the A-text which is dated 1604 and the B-text which is dated 1616 and slightly longer. There are seven scenes that appear in the B-text but not in the A-text: the rescue of Bruno the rival pope; the introduction of Frederick, Martino, and Benvolio; Benvolio’s revenge and Faustus’ retaliation; the clowns in the tavern and the interruption in Vanholt; Lucifer, Beelzebub,
and Mephistopheles talking about Faustus’ downfall; the Good and Bad Angels’ visions of hell; and the discovery of Faustus’ body. Since all of the scenes that occur in the A-text are consumed by the B-text and the B-text presents more material for analysis, this study will closely examine the B-text. The shared scenes are similar enough to allow the same examination of both texts with one exception. At the end of the play, the B-text emphasizes the idea that Faustus is a victim under the control of a devil. This occurs when Mephistopheles takes credit for manipulating Faustus. He admits to deceiving Faustus by saying,

‘Twas I that, when thou wert I’the way to heaven,
Dammed up thy passage. When thou took’st the book
To view the Scriptures, then I turned the leaves
And led thine eye (5.2.92-95).

This confession shows that Mephistopheles is the one who made certain Faustus went to hell by making him misinterpret the Scriptures. By being led in the wrong direction, Faustus is definitely a victim of the devil in the B-text, but without Mephistopheles’s confession, Faustus is not necessarily a victim in the A-text. Other than this thematic difference, the A-text and the B-text both characterize Faustus in ways that prove he failed at becoming a Neoplatonic philosopher and became a witch instead. With these issues in mind, it is time to see what the text has to say about the scholar who wanted more.

Aspirations to Occult Philosophy

Faustus embraces occult philosophy, or what he calls necromancy, at the beginning of the play and expresses his hopes to one day have enough power to change the world. While trying to accomplish these aspirations, however, Faustus becomes too hasty or misinterprets what he
should be doing at the beginning of the play foreshadows his downfall. In the famous opening scene, Faustus is found sizing up the major subjects of study. He discards them all as unworthy or narrow and focuses his attention on necromancy. Faustus’s discussion of each main subject of scholarship is the first indicator that he is aspiring to Neoplatonic philosophy because it reflects Cornelius Agrippa’s *De vanitate scientiarum*. Frances Yates notes this similarity and points out that Agrippa came to the conclusion that all forms of learning are vain unless they bring a person closer to God. Faustus, in contrast, finds that all learning is vain except necromancy, which is the subject matter of Agrippa’s other book *De occulta philosophia* (117). Agrippa is not the only humanist to size up the subjects of learning. In fact, Agrippa modeled his *De vanitate* after Desiderius Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* (Yates 43). Since this style of weighing subject matters was well-known among the humanists, it is easy to conclude that Faustus considers himself a part of the humanist traditions and puts his faith in the abilities of mankind.

Faustus’s analysis of academic disciplines is followed by further proof of his intention to achieve the goals of occult philosophy. He exclaims, “O, what a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honour, and omnipotence / Is promised to the studious artisan!” (1.1.53-55). Since the Neoplatonists felt that with pious contemplation and dedication they could commune with good spirits and manipulate the world, Faustus is subscribing to their beliefs. This scholar, however, feels that he has contemplated enough, and it is this self-confidence that leads him into trouble. Faustus’s misunderstanding of the lesson that all learning is vain except that which brings a man closer to Jesus represents his first failure as a Neoplatonic philosopher, but Marlowe does not let the audience give up on Faustus that easily.

Emily Bartels points out that Faustus is characterized as a “careless scholar, taking a course of action whose consequences he does not fully see.” She explains that Faustus does not
see the disciplines as they are but he reduces them to a “finite, static irreducibles’ and misunderstands their real purpose. Faustus is looking for “a kind of immediate use-value such studies generally resist” (128). By misconstruing the subjects he puts forth and discards, we are not sure if he is purposefully trying to find faults with them or if he really does see them as narrow. It is also important to recognize that Faustus does not necessarily discard divinity for magic, but rather, as will be shown throughout this discussion, he attempts to bring divinity into his magical endeavors. He either does not understand or ignores that these two subjects are incompatible (Bartels 129). Since it is hard to distinguish if Faustus is willfully mistaking the meaning of the disciplines and how to practice benevolent magic, the audience is able to maintain hope that if his ignorance is eradicated, Faustus may yet be saved.

The audience may also refrain from condemning Faustus after his initial speech not only because we can hope for his enlightenment, but also because we join him, excited about his aspirations. John Mebane explains that while it may be tempting to see Marlowe condemning the Hermetic/Cabalist doctrine since their dreams are expressed by a man who will sell his soul to the devil, “the poetry of these lines communicates the exciting appeal of the magician’s vision.” Instead of shutting out the possibility of a man striving beyond the limits of human nature, Faustus leads the audience to “wonder whether the individual does, after all, have the right to make his or her own decisions concerning philosophical, scientific, or religious truth” (124). While Faustus has already abused and misunderstood the humanist and Cabalist traditions, he has not yet made himself a witch or irreversibly failed to achieve the goals of occult philosophy; the audience can still hope that he will recover from his mistakes.

Soon after inspiring the audience to sympathize with him in his crusade, the two angels enter to give Faustus advice on how to handle the necromancy he has chosen to follow. These
characters are staples of morality plays and have often been discussed in those terms, but a different interpretation can link them to the witchcraft and magic debate. In fact, their role can be understood as a commentary on the precariousness of attempting to wield Cabalist magic. Each angel can represent either success or failure. This is because it was believed that an occult philosopher who communicated with and controlled benevolent spirits had achieved his goal, but he who was unworthy contacted and was controlled by evil spirits. Since Faustus has attracted both angels, it is safe to assume that there is still hope for his future salvation, but there is a clue that he will ultimately fail hidden in the Bad Angel’s advice: “Be thou on Earth what Jove is in the sky” (1.1.75). Throughout the play, Faustus’s greatest downfall which keeps him from succeeding as a Neoplatonic philosopher is his inability to contemplate the world beyond the physical state. Paul Kocher says, “Faustus is animated by longing for wealth, honor, knowledge of hidden things, pleasure, imperial sway, godhead. So, according to prevalent belief, were the men who turned witch” (17). It is Faustus’s preoccupation with physicality that shows how “Being impure of heart he has attracted a bad angel. His magic cannot be a white magic” (Yates 117). Although Faustus intends to practice benevolent magic, within the first few minutes of the play, he has misunderstood the humanist conclusion that all is vain except what will bring a man closer to God, and right after he speaks with the angels that represent the fine line an occult philosopher walks, he soliloquizes about all of the great deeds he will accomplish: deeds which are based on the Bad Angel’s advice for focusing on earthly matters such as flying to “India for gold” or ransacking “the ocean for orient pearl” (1.1.81-82). Kocher discusses Faustus’s dreams in detail in “The Witchcraft Basis in Marlowe’s ‘Faustus’” pointing out that most of these dreams can be accounted for in treatises on witchcraft, such as changing the placement of the moon or drying up the oceans to retrieve the treasure from the wrecked ships. The fact that these
dreams can be applied to both the Neoplatonists’ hopes and to the powers of witches
demonstrates that Faustus continues to walk a fine line between good and evil.

While Faustus dreams of the abilities magic will bring him, his servant Wagner fetches
the German necromancers Valdes and Cornelius. Kocher continues his investigation of
witchcraft treatises and their influences over the speeches presented by the necromancers
discovering that many of the powers they discuss are also attributed to witches. He cites King
James VI, Reginald Scot, and Thomas Cooper among others, proving yet again that Faustus’s
dreams could come from evil or good spirits (12-16). Barbara Traister feels that Kocher’s focus
on finding the witchcraft sources for Faustus’s speeches and his elision of magical treatises
misses out on the irony of his decision to make a pact with the devil. After all, “none of
Faustus’s reliance on intellectual achievement, proper qualifications, or elaborate incantation is
necessary for contact with demons if Faustus merely wishes to make a demonic pact, to become
a witch. The concerns he expresses suggest that he is preparing to command spirits, as Agrippa
asserted man might do” (Traister 93). I believe that by having this overlap between the power of
witches and the power of magicians, it is much easier to understand Faustus’s failure as difficult
to guard against as well as fitting for the rhetoric of the Neoplatonists. Faustus’s love of the
power he can wield in the physical world can be accomplished at the end of both paths which is
why it is harder for him to realize that he is becoming a heretic. It is in this first scene that
Marlowe sets the audience and Faustus up for a tragic struggle between aspirations of good and
the performance of witchcraft *maleficium*.

Cornelius and Valdes, the necromancers that come to guide Faustus as he begins to
practice magic, become foils to what Faustus will become later in the play: a common witch.
Gareth Roberts points out in “Necromantic Books: Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* and
Agrippa of Nettesheim” that it is telling that one of Faustus’s friends is named Cornelius. Since Cornelius Agrippa was heralded as one of the greatest magicians of his time, it seems proper that Faustus should be associated with him. He even says he “Will be as cunning as Agrippa was, / Whose shadow made all Europe honour him” (1.1.111-112). Faustus hopes to succeed in benevolent magic the way he imagines Agrippa and implies Cornelius and Valdes already have. What is even more interesting about Faustus comparing himself to Agrippa, however, is that he focuses only on Agrippa’s positive reputation of deserving respect, but as Agrippa’s life progressed, he was accused of dark magic. Yet again, we see Faustus’s inability to recognize the repercussions of his actions which foreshadows his failure to succeed in occult philosophy.

Despite the foreshadowing of Faustus’s failure, the conversation between the veteran necromancers and Faustus revolves around the ideas of the benevolent magic of Christian Cabala. This connection is apparent when Cornelius tells Faustus he should have no trouble with magic because Cornelius assumes Faustus possesses the qualities necessary to become a magician such as being “grounded in astrology, / Enriched in tongues, [and] well seen in minerals” (1.1.32-33). He says that magic will make Faustus “vow to study nothing else” (1.1.31). These are directly related to the things laid out by Agrippa in De occulta philosophia. As previously discussed in “Magic in Early Modern Europe,” Agrippa explains that a man must be accomplished in theology, philosophy, and mathematics (or astrology) among other things in order to make a good magician, talents alluded to by Cornelius.

The necromancers and Faustus continue to place their understanding of magic within the Neoplatonic tradition when Valdes tells Faustus to “… bear wise Bacon’s and Albanus’s works, / The Hebrew Psalter, and New Testament; / and whatever else is requisite” (1.1.148-149). Valdes’s inclusion of the Hebrew Psalter is important because most of those involved in occult
philosophy had drawn some of their fundamental beliefs from Hebrew Cabala. This connection aligns Valdes and Cornelius with the occult philosophers, but their other suggestions to Faustus for works to consult indicate that they are following the treatises of the Neoplatonic philosophers and trying to connect to God through knowledge.

Even though these two men appear to be advocating the proper way to perform the magic of occult philosophy, Faustus shows signs of straying very early on. Just as the two German necromancers enter, Faustus claims “T’is magic, magic that has ravished me” (1.1.104). This statement indicates his deviation from Neoplatonic ideals. Typically, religious relationships with God were described in terms of ravishment. Since Faustus indicates that he has been ravished by magic and not God, it is safe to assume that in some ways he has neglected religion. As stated in the magic chapter, Agrippa warns against losing sight of religion. He states, “Whoseover therefore neglects religion … and confides only in the strength of natural things, are very often deceived by evil spirits” (450). As before, we are faced with the unwanted foreshadowing of Faustus’s fall because he has placed importance on earthly matters. Gilian West in “The Ravishing of Faustus” continues this discussion of ravishment to indicate that not only is Faustus turning his back on God, but he could be already experiencing what the devil has in store for him. She explains that the term ‘ravished’ can also describe being torn to pieces by an animal. Several of the comedic scenes in the play are based on the dismemberment of Faustus, and she connects them to the Greek myth of Acteon and Diana that is referred to when Faustus gives horns to a knight in the A-text and Benvolio in the B-text. She argues that Faustus’s ravishment in the beginning is an allusion to a fate that is much more gruesome than can be expressed at the end of his life by the sparse lines of the scholars. She explains, “for the allotted time the devils cannot hurt Faustus. They threaten to tear his flesh piecemeal, but he has them under control …
But on the last night the hunter becomes the hunted,” and devils drag Faustus off the stage. West indicates that this in Marlowe’s own embellishment on the Faust story. In “the Damnable Life” Faustus is beaten as well as torn, but in Marlowe’s play we only hear about or witness the result of the tearing (West 223-224). Because Faustus does not follow the prescription of ceremonial magic guidelines as laid out by Agrippa and other Neoplatonic philosophers, he will not be ravished in a positive, spiritual way through religion and Godly love, instead, his physical body will be torn apart since he cannot let go of worldly matter.

As the first scene comes to a close, Cornelius indicates that the process of harnessing nature and magic will take some time. He discusses Faustus’s training with Valdes saying, “first let him know the words of art, / And then, all other ceremonies learned, / Faustus may try his cunning by himself” (1.1.152-154). Agrippa’s De occulta as well as other Neoplatonic writings dwell on the ceremony of conjuration. They all have their own ideas on how the conjuration should work, but they agree that there should be an unhurried and thoughtful ceremony. Even though Cornelius and Valdes indicate that this path requires time and contemplation, Faustus does not heed their advice. Faustus’s last line of the scene shows that he is unwilling to accept that the path he has chosen is slower paced. Once again, he fails to follow occult philosophy. The same day he sees Cornelius and Valdes he states “This night I’ll conjure, though I die therefore” (1.1.160). Throughout this scene and as his last line implies, Faustus’s hastiness and unwillingness to look closely at the doctrines of occult philosophy foreshadows his fall from great heights into the realm of witchcraft which can give him the same power on earth, but instead of ravishing him spiritually and positively, it will tear him to pieces.

Soon after Faustus indicates that he cannot wait to begin practicing magic, we find him preparing to conjure spirits. This conjuration scene again shows Faustus’s dedication to occult
philosophy for when the Christian Cabalists laid out instructions or described the ceremonies they performed to conjure spirits, they incorporated numerous aspects of divinity. Gareth Roberts explains that high magic ceremonies were wrapped in piety and devotion, and they depended on “a reverent mobilization, through rehearsal and reminiscence in the words of the conjuration, of the power contained in divine names, epithets, and events … adjurations of spirits are in earnest when they use the names of God, recall events in the life of Christ, invoke his mother’s virginity, and echo the liturgy” (“Marlowe” 60-61). Faustus performs a conjuration ceremony in this scene in which he uses Jehovah’s name and explains how the heavens and signs will be incorporated in the action. Roberts looks closely at Faustus’s behavior in “Necromantic Books” in order to show how closely Faustus follows the ideas of Agrippa. He explains, “In Agrippa’s scale of the number twelve can be found containing twelve cabalistic anagrammatizations of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton IHVH (“Jehovah’s name forward and backward anagrammatized”) to produce new names of power” (“Necromantic” 155). This is extremely poignant because Faustus states “Within this circle is Jehovah’s name / Forward and backward anagrammatized, / Th’abbreviated names of holy saints …” (1.3.8-10). At this point, Faustus attempts to incorporate the beliefs of the Neoplatonic philosophers in his magic by using divinity as well as the power of the stars and heaven, but just as he only partly understood the vanity of academic disciplines, Faustus fails to remain faithful to the long and thoughtful ceremonial magic described by Agrippa and others. Yet again, he is hasty and narrow-minded. Both Kocher and Traister have noted Faustus’s failure to practice ceremonial magic properly. Kocher explains “Theoretically, the wizard is still on the side of the angels. Marlowe casts aside this pretence and makes the ceremony a dedication to Satan from the beginning” (23). Traister on the other hand blames Faustus’s failure on his impatience which “effectively makes impossible the purification, the ritual preparations,
recommended by magical handbooks” (Traister 93). She continues by saying that Faustus’s main mistake is his attempt to control spirits with only words and signs, but the magic handbooks actually suggest using “ritual preparations, special clothes for the magus, selected perfumes, music, and various pieces of magical equipment as helpful to proper conjurations” (Traister 106). Again, it is the fine line between witchcraft and magic that makes this a dangerous situation for Faustus. By conjuring inadequately and hastily, he opens himself up to evil spirits, so it is not surprising that who he ultimately attracts is a scheming devil: Mephistopheles.

Mephistopheles first appears to Faustus in the form of a dragon, but finding it unacceptable, Faustus orders him to leave and return in the form of a Franciscan friar. Frances Yates suggests that this can be a parody to the Neoplatonist Francesco Giorgi who was a friar in Venice (118). If it is true, Faustus’s command continues to demonstrate how he feels he is following in the footsteps of the occult philosophers and will eventually achieve the powers they described. Agrippa states “any man when he is opportunely exposed to the celestial influences … if he become stronger in solary virtue, binds and draws the inferior into admiration, and obedience” (210). Since Mephistopheles obeys him, Faustus believes he has succeeded. His hopes are quickly dashed, however, when Mephistopheles explains to him that devils only appear to conjurors if they believe he or she is about to reject God. Mebane explains that “the devil complies with the requests of the conjurer only insofar as such compliance enables Satan to ensnare the soul of one so foolish as to imagine that he or she can attain superhuman power” (Mebane 122). In this case, Faustus comes near to rejecting God and Christianity through his misuse of theurgic magic, so Mephistopheles responds. Again we see Faustus’s obsession with the worldly as he expresses his disbelief in heaven and hell to this demon, and even though Mephistopheles delivers his famous line “Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it” (1.3.73), Faustus
continues on this worldly path. Since witches at their sabbats expressly mocked and rejected Christianity, this discussion begins to build up expectation for Faustus’s later blasphemies.

As Faustus sends Mephistopheles to tell Lucifer that he is willing to trade his soul for magic, he indicates that he wants to have these powers for twenty-four years. Robert Coogan discusses the importance of the number twenty-four. He says that Agrippa links the number with the twenty-fourth letter in the Ionic alphabet: omega.” He then explains that this particular letter recalls Revelations 1:8 when the Lord claims he is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. To Coogan, “These passages related to twenty-four foreshadow Faustus’s doom as well as create for the audience a link to his rejection of philosophy and, perhaps, of God.” Coogan also discusses that the *De mystica numerorum significatione opusculum* by Jodocus Clichtov suggests another significance of the number twenty-four that can be found in Revelations 4: the vision of the throne of God. In this chapter “The ancients, the twelve prophets from the Old Law and the twelve apostles from the New, represent the redeemed in heaven triumphing with Christ their king … we are to follow their example and not to busy ourselves in raising curious questions; we are to be humble and cast down and are not to take on ourselves any godly power.” Coogan believes that Marlowe wants the audience to acknowledge Faustus’s “lack of theological discernment” (Coogan 265-266). We find that Faustus is not as knowledgeable as he appears at the beginning of the play because he does not understand theology as implied by his request for twenty-four years of life and botches the ceremony that should have brought him in contact with heavenly spirits. His aspirations to be a great and benevolent magician are clear, but he is already failing; soon he will start the process of becoming a witch.
The Path to Witchcraft

The first we sign receive that Faustus will choose the path of evil and witchcraft comes from a comic scene. Traister points out that “To fill a large portion of his play, Marlowe chose conventional magic, the sure audience-pleasers, provided by the English Faust book.” (102). There are many ideas about how to understand the comic scenes in Doctor Faustus; some believe they are not Marlowe’s work whereas others feel that they are valuable in understanding Marlowe’s motivations for writing the play. Since this project’s goal is to discuss how Faustus is characterized as a failed magician and witch, the authorial intent is not as important as what occurs in the story. Instead, these scenes can be understood as mirrors to the main action concerning Faustus and his ultimate damnation, but they are much more than simple reflections of Faustus’s interactions with magic. They act as a discursive space in which the elite ideas of witchcraft interact with the popular views of witchcraft; they tie Faustus’s “magical” feats to those of common witches, and end up emphasizing Faustus’s true character. Although he does not discuss the witchcraft aspect of the play, Roberts also sees the comic action as a discussion between high and low culture. He explains “Popular ideas of magic might be voiced in Doctor Faustus’ comic scenes. It is a critical commonplace that these parody the protagonist’s career. Similarly their ‘low’ comedy is matched by their representation of ‘low’ magic and popular believes” (Roberts 67). Since Faustus’s actions in the other scenes appear to be trivial but not harmful, these scenes help to show that he is truly performing maleficium like most witches and not acting as a benevolent magician.

This first comic scene precedes and foreshadows what will happen when Faustus makes a diabolical pact with Lucifer. In it we find Faustus’s servant Wagner binding Robin into servitude. What occurs in this scene is an obvious connection to what will occur in the next scene
when Faustus signs a demonic pact, but the way Wagner forces Robin into the pact with threats is much more reflective of common ideas of why witches entered into agreements with the devil. As discussed in the “Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,” it was originally believed that men and women were in control of the devils, but by the time of the Renaissance, the devil had become the instigator of evil, not man. In the next scene, Faustus continues to hold onto his Neoplatonic ideals and believes that he is in control of the pact and to an extent Mephistopheles, but we can see in this scene that Wagner is in complete control and has bound Robin to him for seven years. Since Faustus is the one who has a time limit placed upon him in the next scene, it is safe to assume that Mephistopheles and Lucifer will be the ones in charge, not the aspiring magician.

Finally, this scene includes some discussion of the powers that were attributed to witches through popular beliefs such as turning people to animals. Bodin states “it is clear that men are sometimes transmuted into beasts while their human shape and reason remain” (128). The first animal that is mentioned by Robin is a dog. This is a significant choice considering Agrippa was rumored to take that shape when his reputation was linked to dark magic and witchcraft. Even though we are supposed to believe Faustus is trying to follow the benevolent books of the Neoplatonists, the fact that Wagner has most likely stolen his conjuring book from Faustus indicates once again that Faustus is walking a fine line between good and evil.

Immediately following the binding of Robin to Wagner, the play moves into the conjuration scene in which Faustus begins to embrace the idea of making a pact with the devil in order to gain the powers he imagines. Here he advances past simply making a pact with the devil and begins to desire the actions that are performed at a witches’ sabbat. He begins,

Despair in God and trust in Beelzebub
The god thou serv’st is thine own appetite,
Wherein is fixed the love of Beelzebub.
To him I’ll build an altar and a church,
And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes. (2.1.5-13)

The witchcraft chapter outlines the occurrences at a witches’ sabbat, and here Faustus begins to perform those actions. In one line, Faustus rejects God and Christianity and like a witch at a sabbat turns to the Devil. He also reveals what the motivation is for turning his back on God: earthly desires. Finally, he explains that to show his earnestness he will build an altar and a church in order to sacrifice new born babies. Once again, these actions reflect the common beliefs of what occurred at a witches’ sabbat. After denouncing God, witches would give sacrifices to Lucifer. The popular belief that witches desired the blood of newborns is also explained in the witchcraft chapter, and since Faustus wants to perform these actions for the Devil, he makes it clear that he wants to behave like a witch. Paul Kocher also acknowledges this connection between Faustus and witchcraft when he states, “This is a queer mingling of classical or Hebrew methods of sacrifice with the widely circulated Renaissance superstition that witches were especially eager to kill unbaptized infants” (26-27). With these words, we can see that Faustus has already begun to embrace witchcraft.

Following this opening, where we can see Faustus getting ready to take the plunge into witchcraft, the angels reappear in order to remind him that there are two paths an occult philosopher can take. Already in the mindset that witchcraft is necessary to gain power, he demands of the angels: “Contrition, prayer, repentance – what of these?” (2.1.16). The Good Angel explains that they can get him to heaven and by saying so expresses the Neoplatonic
beliefs. Agrippa states, “our mind being pure and divine, inflamed with a religious love, adorned with hope, directed by faith, placed in the height and top of the human soul, doth attract the truth, and suddenly comprehend it” (455). So if Faustus heeds the advice of the Good Angel not only would he reach the metaphysical heaven that is spoken of by all Christians, but he could also achieve control over and understanding of the world. The Bad Angel, however, wins the fight for Faustus as the scholar turns his mind to wealth and honor as suggested by the darker spirit.

At this point Faustus enters into a pact with the devil. As discussed in “Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,” the elite population would have considered this an overt act of witchcraft. Faustus gives away his soul saying,

Faustus hath cut his arm, and with his proper blood
Assures his soul to be great Lucifer’s,
Chief lord and regent of perpetual night.
View here this blood that trickles from mine arm,
And let it be propitious for my wish. (2.1.54-58)

Faustus has committed himself to being Lucifer’s minion just as witches at a sabbat swore an oath to reject Christianity and embrace the dark lord. Unlike the witches in the typical sabbat who knelt and kissed the devil in various places as a sign of allegiance, Faustus uses his signature in blood to seal a contract which stresses his learned nature. He has committed heresy and purposefully turned his back on God in order to embrace Lucifer.

As discussed previously, when witches chose to abandon God, they performed Christian traditions in reverse or in mockery. Faustus does just this when he finishes signing the pact. He uses the same words as Christ: “consummatum est” or “it is finished.” Since, Faustus is in some ways turning himself into a Christ figure he is reversing the purpose of the words. While they
can be seen as representative of Christ’s love for man, for Faustus the words represent his rejection of that love. After the overt abandonment of Christianity, the witches’ sabbat burst into a celebration of sorts, the witches all danced around the new recruit and copulated with the devil. Jean Bodin explains that “there is no assembly carried on where [witches] do not dance” (120). In Faustus’s case, there is no copulation at this time, but Mephistopheles summons some devils to amuse Faustus and keep him from thinking about the heresy he has just committed and God’s warning “Homo, Fuge” by dancing around him.

When the dancing is done, the scholar and the demon return to the subject of Faustus’s pact with Lucifer. The clauses in this pact contain important indications of Faustus’s mindset, and when he reads it to Mephistopheles we once again see how he is still trying to follow Neoplatonic ideas such as having the ability to control spirits. This particular aspiration was apparent when Faustus conjured the devil, but it is repeated when he states, “Lastly, that [Mephistopheles] shall appear to the said John Faustus at all times in what shape and form soever he please” (2.1.102-103). Even though there are moments of Neoplatonic ideas in this reading of his pact, there are also obvious allusions to the deals made by witches. The scholar says, “I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, Doctor, by these presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer …” (2.1.104-105). This is significant because like in the witches’ sabbat, the new witch presents Satan with a gift. Typically it was the witch’s child or one of his limbs. This part of the pact implies that Faustus is willing to give up more than just a limb, but his entire body in order to gain power. This is later reiterated when Mephistopheles refers to the pact saying “for here’s the scroll in which thou hast given thy soul to Lucifer” (2.1.130-131). Faustus responds, “Ay, and body too” (2.1.132). In the end, it is his pact which really starts Faustus on a downward spiral. He still clings to the ideas of the occult philosophers, but they have begun to overlap even more
with the powers and behaviors of witches than his original dreams. This is especially obvious when Mephistopheles gives Faustus a book that will help him perform magical feats including raising storms. Bodin also points out, “of all the actions which witches attribute to themselves, there is scarcely any more conspicuous than to make lightning and storms, which the law treats as an established fact” (Bodin 135). Since many of the popular beliefs concerning witchcraft revolved around a witch’s ability to perform maleficium to harm her neighbors, giving Faustus this ability, the chances of Faustus using his powers for good instead of evil are not promising. He is on his way to embracing true witchcraft.

Just after Faustus is given a book that will aid him and his magic, Robin enters with a conjuring book. This juxtaposition reminds the audience that the comedic scenes are commentaries on Faustus’s behavior. Robin then meets up the hostler Dick and is confronted about needing to accomplish his work. In response, Robin practices what is in the conjuring book and threatens to send Dick off “with a vengeance” which means to curse him (2.2.14). This is important behavior because as discussed in the chapter on witchcraft, one of the main characteristics of witches was cursing others with that curse actually coming true. As a precursor to maleficium, cursing was considered one of the most important methods supposedly employed by witches to injure their victims (Macfarlane “Essex” 15). Since, we find Robin using a conjuring book like the one Faustus was just given, we can see that Faustus will be using the spells within it to harm others. Faustus’s future maleficium is even alluded to as Robin and Dick discuss cuckoldry and giving others horns. Although they are speaking in terms of the Renaissance concern that men would be cheated on by their wives, we can also see this is an allusion to Faustus’s behavior toward the Knight or Benvolio when Faustus gives the man horns for not believing in him.
Even though the scene with Robin and Dick shows that Faustus is embracing witchcraft, we next see the scholar trying to repent. Emily Bartels explains what effect this has on the audience. She states, “… interiority complicates rather than clarifies identity. Though Faustus seems sure of his ability to know himself and his fate, we are not … In constantly reiterating his resolve to be resolved, Faustus himself casts doubt on what he is doing and what he knows about what he is doing” (Bartels 115-116). During his inner struggle, the angels return to demonstrate that he still has a chance to choose the right path. Instead of following through with repentance, however, Mephistopheles asserts his control and diverts Faustus’s attention to questions about the heavens and planets. Faustus falls easily into this discourse because the heavenly sphere was one of the preoccupations of the occult philosophers, and much of Agrippa’s *De occulta* is dedicated to explaining astrology. Since Faustus still believes he is on the right track for theurgic magic, he does not consider repenting any longer, and once again, we see Faustus’s desire to focus on the physical world as opposed to his metaphysical standing. Although he expresses his desire to repent a second time in this scene, as Bartels points out he does so only in response to Mephistopheles not giving him the information he wants about the world’s creator. “His resistance there, as before and thereafter, is as short-lived as it is shortsighted” (Bartels 132-133).

Faustus’s anger toward Mephistopheles’s refusal to tell him about creation shows his obsession with the physical world, but it also proves who controls their relationship. Once again Bartels explicates the action by indicating that Faustus is not his own master but instead he emerges as the subject of a discourse dictated from without by those who have more of a stake in his soul than he, a subject whose fortunes are framed by and within the self-authorizing displays of the devil. Though he attempts to create and sustain the illusion
that he is writing himself into a knowable position of knowledge and power, it is not he but Lucifer’s agent Mephistophilis who acts ‘of [his] own accord. (116)

As was discussed in the comic scene with Wagner and Robin, Faustus’s role in the pact makes him the subservient partner, but he does not realize it. Faustus yells at Mephistophelies as if he is in control saying, “Ay, go, accursèd spirit, to ugly hell! / ‘Tis thou hast damned distressèd Faustus’ soul” (2.3.74-75). This sudden loss of agency was recognized as a common experience for witches. The witchcraft chapter of this project discusses how the witch was often presented as a victim, and Faustus plays right into this stereotype as his protests remain unanswered.

Mephistopheles does leave, but he soon returns with Lucifer and Beelzebub. Under so much pressure, once again Faustus rejects Christianity in order to follow the devils. When he signed the pact with Mephistopheles following this rejection of Christianity, Faustus was part of a dance to distract and amuse him. This time, another spectacle follows his dedication to Lucifer reiterating that the scholar has involved himself in a witches’ sabbat: the Seven Deadly Sins. His previous pact is strengthened not only with another promising of his soul and celebration, but there is another presentation of a conjuring book which will allow Faustus to perform more deeds that were attributed to common witches: this time it is shape changing. This reaffirmation of Faustus’s desire to keep his power, even if it comes from a demonic source instead of a heavenly one, is stressed in the last line spoken by the scholar is a repetition of the same line in his first pact scene when given the power to perform maleficium: “This will I keep as chary as my life” (2.3.161-162). Faustus has now begun to stray even further from the ideals of the occult philosophers, and his future looks grim as he loses more power to the devils as shown by his willingness to give up his soul twice.
Further Descent into Witchcraft

When we reach the third act of the play, Faustus has already completed the first task in a witches’ sabbat, twice. He has given his soul to Lucifer and celebrated that fact with dancing and masques. Now it is time for him to continue with the ceremony of becoming a witch, but first he must try to be an occult philosopher one last time. During the Chorus’s interlude we find that Faustus has taken a trip to the heavens in order to inspect the planets. They also relate how he journeys around the world looking at geography. Once again, Faustus’s actions indicate that at heart he is trying to be a Neoplatonic philosopher. In Agrippa’s *De occulta*, a great deal of time is spent on mathematics or the study of the planets and stars, and since Faustus shows interest in these matters he is still holding on to his dreams of magic for the good of humanity. Unfortunately, this is also the last time we see these dreams for as he descends from the heavens, he also leaves behind his aspirations of heavenly magic.

At the end of their journeys as described by the Chorus, Faustus and Mephistopheles stop in Rome and decide to visit the Pope. Mephistopheles tells Faustus that he hopes the magician will take part in the Holy Communion while they are in Rome. Although this can be seen as Mephistopheles trying to bait Faustus into fighting against his fate, it is also the introduction of the next step Faustus will take to become a witch. As outlined in the witchcraft chapter, the witches’ sabbat included numerous blasphemous acts such as signing a diabolical pact, which Faustus has already done, and mocking Christianity by performing a fake Eucharist with tough food to eat. This understanding of a sabbat complicates Mephistopheles’s meaning when he tells Faustus to enjoy communion because the audience does not know if he is urging Faustus to mock or return to God. This dilemma is soon erased as Mephistopheles discusses that he and Faustus will make fools out of the Pope and other priests. It is at this point in the play that Faustus loses
sight of the Neoplatonic ideals. As has been discussed, the occult philosophers believed that piety and dedication to God was the key to the mysteries of the universe. Faustus, however, turns his back on God and religion as he and Mephistopheles decide to free the Pope’s rival, Bruno. In the B-text, Faustus commands Mephistopheles to “Follow the cardinals to the consistory, / And as they turn their superstitious books / Strike them with sloth and drowsy idleness …” (3.1.113-115). The two then take on the pretense of cardinals in order to free Bruno. Their actions not only harm the cardinals who they are impersonating, but their deception in general is a common characteristic of witches. Overall, this is a turning point for Faustus, he no longer cherishes the idea of performing wonderful deeds for mankind, but he embraces *maleficium*, and he rejects Christianity in the form of the Pope. Faustus continues to reject Christianity and embrace the role of witch when he orders Mephistopheles to make him invisible so he can steal the Pope’s wine. Since he steals wine from the table, we can now see a distinct mocking of the Eucharist and Mephistopheles’s ambiguity when they arrive in Rome is no longer apparent. They now blatantly mock Christianity by stealing and disturbing the peace which would normally be characterized as *maleficium*. This is a much more overt rejection of all things Christian and Faustus’s behavior in Rome indicates that he has completed the next step in the witches’ sabbat: affirming his loyalty to Satan by “spitting on the cross” or in Faustus’s case stealing the wine and setting the Pope’s enemy free. From this point forward in the play, Faustus embraces the behavior attributed to witches by both the elite and common populations; he is no longer trying to be an occult philosopher.

Again the importance of Faustus’s behavior is reiterated at a level that connects it overtly to *maleficium*. Robin and Dick steal a goblet from a Vintner just as Faustus stole form the Pope. Faustus’s behavior in the last scene is not necessarily what the common population would
understand as *maleficium*, but by having Robin and Dick perform the same general task as Faustus without the supernatural abilities, they are able to make the connection that although Faustus is behaving badly in different arenas, his actions are still wicked in nature. He is using the power from the devil in order to wreak havoc; in this particular case, he is doing so through theft. Since one of the many accusations against witches was destruction of property and theft, Faustus is once again proving to be a witch. The two commoners do not just connect Faustus to common thievery, but they also demonstrate yet again Faustus’s lack of control. They do this by conjuring Mephistopheles. The demon is irritated by his summoners and changes them into a dog and monkey. The demon’s disgust and actions against the men demonstrates that magic in the hands of fools can hurt them for they will be controlled by evil spirits. We learn from their misfortune that Faustus is in danger. He has completed two major aspects of the sabbat, and has begun to enjoy harming others through *maleficium*; just like Dick and Robin, Faustus will not be able to stop his fate.

Performing *Maleficium*

Now that Faustus has established himself as a witch who performs *maleficium*, he begins to perform this evil magic in public, but first we learn of another power Faustus possesses, that of producing spirits who look like historical figures. We next find the scholar in the court of Charles V. Upon the Emperor’s request, he presents the shades of Alexander the Great, Darius his enemy, and Alexander’s paramour. When the Emperor has watched the dumb show he goes to embrace the legendary soldier, but Faustus warns him to keep his distance for “These are but shadows, not substantial” (4.1.103). The Emperor responds “O, pardon me. My thoughts are so ravishèd / With sight of this renownèd emperor / That in mine arms I would have compassed
him” (4.1.104-106). John Manning delves into the reasons behind Faustus’s conjuration of spirits of the dead. He explains, “Marlowe’s contemporaries .... may have recognized in Carolus’s and the students’ wish to see before them the likeness of the famous men and women of history, a common academic, scholarly preoccupation, which had some laudable aspects to it (154). He compares Faustus’s demonstration to publications of the Icones Illustrium in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when there appeared several stories showing how the aristocratic readers were interested in spectacles similar to Faustus’s dumb show (Manning154). Even though the appearance of these figures can be seen as a standard scene in magical stories, there is an even stronger importance to this event. When the Emperor expresses his desires to embrace Alexander the Great he uses the word “ravishèd.” As has been previously discussed, this particular term implies the fate that awaits Faustus when his pact has run out. The Emperor’s use of that term implies that he would like to be ravished along with Faustus for the physical pleasure of confronting a legend. The Emperor also says that he wanted to embrace Alexander. This is an interesting foreshadow of Faustus’s desire to embrace Helen. Since it is very clear here that the Emperor feels compelled to do more than view the shades that Faustus has conjured because of their magnetism, we will later see that Faustus commits the same fallacy, but has no one to warn him that what he desires is impossible.

Once it is clear that Faustus has the ability to conjure spirits who look like historical figures and that men are physically drawn to these shades, the play returns to continuing Faustus’s career as a witch instead of a benevolent magician. In this scene Faustus is confronted with a non-believer: Benvolio (or in the A-text simply the Knight). The two exchange words, and after Faustus proves his powers by producing the shades of the historic figures, the scholar gives Benvolio horns. Since much of the witch craze was based on community relations, the
relationship between Faustus and Benvolio demonstrates how a witch was named in communities. Richard Bernard, a writer from the early seventeenth-century, explains that it was common in communities that developed witch crazes for the community to buzz with rumors until one person was pinpointed as a witch. He listed eight stages the Devil produces in men to make them believe they have been bewitched in *A Guide to Grand Jury Men*. First, the man is more afraid of the witch than God. Second, if anything bad happens he suspects witchcraft; third, he places this suspicion on a particular neighbor. Fourth, the man begins to share his suspicions with others. Fifth, the rumors against a person begin to be taken as truth. Sixth, the person suspected of witchcraft is begun to be generally disliked and feared and becomes responsible for all the problems in the community. Seventh, the community begins to record the words and deeds of the specific witch in order to accuse him or her, and they share the information among each other, and finally someone becomes so enraged that he must seek revenge against the witch and therefore brings his suspicions to the authorities or attempts to kill the witch (95-97).

The confrontation between Benvolio and Faustus follows these steps as they exchange harsh words and Faustus gives Benvolio horns. Faustus in this case has taken on the role of the witch and willfully harmed another human which creates strife among the two. Benvolio jumps to the final stage laid out by Bernard and swears revenge on Faustus; “I’ll ne’er trust smooth faces and small ruffs more. But, an I be not revenged for this, would I might be turned to a gaping oyster and drink nothing but salt water” (4.1.161-164). After swearing his revenge, Benvolio continues to fulfill the criteria Bernard lists by telling his story to his friends Frederick and Martino. Benvolio as the enraged community member has inspired others to want to harm Faustus, and they seek to kill him. Benvolio manages to decapitate Faustus, but since Faustus is being aided by the devil and has a certain amount of time to live, he does not die. This is the first
time the audience sees the foreshadowing of the dismemberment or ravishing of Faustus that occurs at the end of the play. Although, humans cannot hurt him, the demons will. Faustus continues in his role of witch by retaliating against the men; he sends Mephistopheles to torture them as punishment for trying to kill him. Faustus is no longer harboring any delusions of being a magician who helps the world, instead his powers have become useful only for his own benefit to defeat and harm his enemies.

Faustus does not just perform *maleficium* when he is confronted by Benvolio’s disbelief and insults, but like a common witch, he begins to deceive and harm his neighbors for no apparent reason. He first sells a horse to a horse-courser for forty dollars, but warns the man not to ride it into water. When he takes a nap, the man returns livid because his horse has turned to hay because he had deliberately disobeyed Faustus and ridden the horse through water. Once again, there is a popular tradition behind this particular form of *maleficium*. Often people were accused of witchcraft because of the death of livestock or events such as cow milk turning sour. Bodin records this belief in his book *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* saying “As for livestock, frequently witches cause it to die …” (137). Faustus has not technically harmed this beast, but he has taken the horse-courser’s money for an animal that now no longer exists. Following several scenes that demonstrate Faustus’s mischievousness, this scene continues to prove Faustus is a witch. If he was to report at a witches’ sabbat after his behavior in Rome, at Charles’s court, and with the horse courser, Faustus would have escaped the punishment awaiting those who had performed too little *maleficium*, being whipped by Satan. He has become a proficient witch who has been given demonic power, and he utilizes it in ways that the audience would have easily recognized as a threat to the community. Just to be sure this message is clear, however, the common characters in the play gather around a table discussing the *maleficium* that has been
practiced against them. Like Benvolio they inspire each other to take action, and the group rushes out to confront Faustus.

The next time we see Faustus is he entertaining the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt, and at this point it is obvious that Faustus is not going to accomplish the great feats he had dreamed of at the beginning of the play. This is especially poignant when his great task is simply pleasing the pregnant Duchess by getting her grapes out of season. However, as discussed by Mebane, Faustus’s continued presence in the courts of aristocrats has a purpose. He says, “Satan is thus linked explicitly with ambitious earthly monarchs, and we are brought to realize that the self-aggrandizement manifested by the desire for conquest is the essence of evil. Marlowe has drawn extensively in the play upon the belief affirmed by Renaissance demonologists that the devil’s servants indeed occupy positions of power in this world” (Mebane 131). Even though Faustus at one point had the potential to be a great power for good, he has fallen far from his initial Neoplatonic dreams of bettering the world and is now one of Satan’s emissaries in a powerful position who performs *maleficium* on the weak. To prove this point, the characters from the comedic scenes arrive at the palace to accuse him of his evil deeds. Faustus silences them each in turn to prevent them from divulging his secrets. Since Dick and Robin are a part of this group and they had previously been dealing in the same type of magic as him, Faustus takes on another witchcraft role. Dietrich Flade was reputed to be a leader among witches, but now Faustus definitely controls others who would practice magic. Throughout the latter half of the play, Faustus has converted whole-heartedly to witchcraft by performing maleficium on any who would cross him and even on those who do not deserve it. By controlling others, Faustus presents himself as a threat to society and a powerful witch.
Damnation

As the play nears its end we discover that Faustus has already failed at heavenly magic by turning away from God. He has also performed many of the feats that would identify him as a witch such as signing a diabolical pact, mocking Christianity, and performing numerous acts of *maleficium*. All that remains before he has completed the sabbat is copulating with the devil and surrendering his body to Lucifer. The time of damnation is near.

Earlier in the play, Faustus produced the shades of Alexander the Great, his paramour, and Darius to amuse the court of Charles V. Now, Faustus has Mephistopheles fetch Helen of Troy for the visual enjoyment of some scholars who have decided she must have been the most beautiful woman in all of history. Helen’s presence as a spectacle reminds the audience of Alexander and Faustus’s warning to the Emperor that the historical figures he presents are merely shades that should be left alone. This is of great importance because Faustus will soon break his own rules, but first an Old Man confronts him about his fate.

The Old Man warns Faustus that he must confess his sins or he will be irreversibly damned, Faustus seems to see the error of his ways and begins to imply that he will commit suicide. Mephistopheles even gives him a dagger to hurry the process along. Kocher explains that this was another part of witchcraft. “The books on witchcraft teach that Satan habitually thus tempts witches, particularly when he fears to lose them, since their self-slaughter damns them irrevocably” (Kocher 30). It appears from this connection that even when Faustus tries to reverse his bad decisions, he cannot. Once again he begins to repent, but he ends up reaffirming his pact with Satan. This time, Faustus signs another pact with Lucifer in blood. This, like the spectacle of Helen for the scholars, refers to events that have occurred previously in the play. By re-
signing his pact, Faustus reminds the audience that he has completed the first steps in a witches’ sabbat, and now the path is clear for the process that began twenty-four years ago to be finished.

Before Faustus can finish the sabbat, however, another reminder is needed; the audience sees yet again that Faustus’s downfall from high aspirations to trivial feats was his inability to move beyond the physical world. This reminder comes in the form of the Old Man. After his failed repentance, the scholar sends Mephistopheles to torture the Old Man for causing him to try to repent. Mephistopheles says “His faith is great. I cannot touch his soul. / But what I may afflict his body with / I will attempt, which is but little worth” (5.1.81-83). The power of the Old Man to resist the torture that Mephistopheles will attempt is what Faustus could have had if he had continued along the path of the Neoplatonic philosophers. Instead, Faustus has shown repeatedly throughout the play that he is devoted to his worldly possessions. “Faustus’ speeches continually reminds us that he is a mortal, physical creature, and his language thus underscores the irony of his utilizing magic, which he initially describes as the ultimate spiritual and intellectual attainment, to serve his physical lusts” (Mebane 125). Not only does Faustus hope to satisfy his physical lusts, he is also afraid of pain especially when Mephistopheles threatens him with bodily harm: “Revolt, or I’ll piecemeal tear they flesh” (5.1.70). In sharp contrast to the Old Man who will be physically tortured but saved spiritually, Faustus will not escape unscathed in either respect.

It is finally time for Faustus to finish the sabbat. Just like the other times that Faustus swears his soul to Lucifer, Mephistopheles finds a way to amuse Faustus after signing a pact in blood. Previously he was entertained by dancers and the Seven Deadly Sins, but this time is the most important for he is entertained with a demon in disguise. Helen is brought in and she becomes Faustus’s paramour. As indicated by the previous warnings concerning the historical
figures, she is a demon and by having a sexual relationship with her Faustus has symbolically copulated with the Devil. While Faustus’s pursuit of Helen can be seen as one of the final stages of a sabbat, Mebane presents an idea which shows that even after all of these years Faustus may still be trying to behave like an occult philosopher. He explains,

The idea that the human soul can be ravished by God in a mystical union referred to by Cabalists as the ‘death of the kiss’ was a commonplace of the occult tradition, and its presence in the line ‘make me immortal with a kiss’ seems unmistakable: yet at the moment we recognize this allusion to occult doctrine, we must recall that Faustus is losing his soul through the worship of demons and through excessive indulgence in the physical delight which Helen symbolizes. (127)

Although Faustus may still be trying to behave like a Neoplatonic philosopher, he continues to follow the path of witches. His relationship with Helen, however, can be seen as a turning point or an eye opening experience for Faustus.

Mark Burnett argues that the line ‘Sweete Helen, make me immortall with a kisse …’ has too many syllables which would cause an actor to combine the words “me” and “immortal” to give the impression of saying “mortal.” Because of this line, Burnett believes that Faustus has an understanding that he is poised between the illusion that Helen will give him eternal joy and the knowledge that she will bring himdamnation. In the end, “He couples with Helen, but he harbours lingering doubts about the consequences of his satanic union” (Burnett 337). Emily Bartels agrees with Burnett’s conclusion that Faustus is on the cusp of a revelation, but for different reasons. She explains that Helen “signals a change of heart and mind” for Faustus. In fact, he no longer denies the existence of heaven, but instead allows him to see the possibility of
“eternal bliss.” “What comes with that knowledge and the desire it generates is an experience of deprivation that at once puts Faustus in the kind of hell Mephistophilis describes” (Bartels 133).

Martin Puhvel on the other hand sees Faustus’s desire for immortality as another way to deny the existence of heaven. He discusses the belief held by poets that “the passing over of the soul through the kiss to the beloved is often metaphorically referred to as dying, the return through another kiss as restoration to life” (3). This death was sometimes envisioned as real and the lover was able to live forever in the beloved, but he does not think this is Faustus’s goal when he asks Helen to make him immortal with a kiss. Instead, Puhvel remarks that “Faustus does not want his soul to depart; on fancying its taking flight, he pleads for it to be returned. Obviously he is not looking for ‘immortality’ through the survival of his soul in Helen, which would indeed seem an unlikely ambition for an egomaniac like Faustus” (3). At the beginning of the play, Faustus explains that he does not believe in hell, but rather “I confound hell in Elysium. / My ghost be with the old philosophers!” (1.3.57-58). Similarly, Puhvel sees Faustus placing his faith in “classical myth and legend.” For Faustus Helen may in fact be a classical goddess who has the power to “bestow immortality on her human lover” (4). He concludes:

maybe Helen can save him from the dreadful fate in store for him, and as he utters his wistful, rapturous plea for escape through the kind of immortality attained in classical legend, a plea by no means uncharacteristic of the inveterate hubristic self-deceiver and overreacher whose mind seems far more comfortable in the fantasy world of classical myth and legend than that of Christian teaching and doctrine. (Puhvel 4)

Whether Faustus is truly cognizant of the consequences of his actions as suggested by Burnett and Bartels, believes he is an occult philosopher as suggested by Mebane, or continues to place
his faith in classical legends, Faustus has an intimate relationship with a shade from the past that
does not make him immortal but actually continues to damn him.

In his breakthrough essay “The Damnation of Faustus,” Walter Greg presents the idea
that Helen is a succubus. He draws upon the other scenes in which spirits are presented as well as
the change in tone of the old man to prove that “Helen then is a ‘spirit’, and in this play a spirit
means a devil. In making her his paramour Faustus commits the sin of demoniality, that is,
bodily intercourse with demons” (106). With the understanding that Helen is a demon in
disguise, it is easy to see that Faustus has fulfilled the final act of the witches’ sabbat: he has
consummated the terms of the pact. All that remains for Faustus to do before being taken to hell
is to live up to the terms of his deal and give Lucifer what was promised to him: Faustus’s
earthly body and soul.

Now that Faustus has completed the most important parts of a witches’ sabbat, those who
had influenced Faustus along the way re-enter for a last word. The first to appear are Lucifer,
Beelzebub, and Mephistopheles discussing Faustus and his situation. Lucifer says “Those souls
which sin seals the black sons of hell, / ’Mong which as chief, Faustus, we come to thee” (5.2.3-
4). As has been discussed previously, one of the true stories that could have influenced the Faust
legend is that of Dietrich Flade, which makes Lucifer calling Faustus “chief” significant. During
Flade’s trial and the representations of it later, he was considered a leader of witches because of
his education, and he was forced to confess to having a role in the witches’ sabbat. The story that
eventually was accepted was that he held a leadership role over the other witches (Baron 8).
Lucifer’s designation of Faustus in this way further demonstrates how Faustus plays a prominent
role among the other witches and sinners that have been brought to the Devil’s kingdom, a role
reserved for the learned witches.
The next group to enter is Faustus and his friends the other scholars. Faustus finally expresses his concerns to them about his fate, but the greatest revelation is that he blames his downfall on his books. “O, would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book!” (5.2.47-48). This complete reversal from the beginning of the play when he is surrounded by his books helps us see that Faustus has finally recognized his failure as a Neoplatonic philosopher. He knows that he has not ascended to the great heights promised by them, and they have instead led him to damnation. This is the first time he acknowledges the consequences of his actions. He may not express that he is a witch, but he knows he is not a magician.

Just to make sure that Faustus understands his failure, in the B-text, Mephistopheles enters to enlighten Faustus on who has been in control for the last twenty-four years. Throughout the play we have been able to see who has the power, but once again this scene is one of realization for Faustus. He now officially knows that although he believed he was in control of Mephistopheles, he was wrong. As has been discussed throughout, Faustus has succumbed to Satan’s diabolical scheme set to trap men and women into witchcraft; the great deceiver has won. Those who appear last are the angels which represented the two possible paths outcomes to following Neoplatonist philosophy. The Good Angel chastises Faustus for what we have seen him do the entire play: he has loved the world too much and not heaven. He has failed to become the magician he dreamed of, and therefore disappointed the Good Angel who represents all of the great deeds he hoped to accomplish for humanity. The angel states, “Hadst thou affected sweet divinity, / Hell or the devil had had no power on thee” (5.2.103-104). The Bad Angel tells Faustus that he will soon be damned for eternity for “He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall” (5.2.129). Faustus has heard from everyone that he cannot be saved, but he retains hope.
Finally, the vanquished scholar is left alone with his thoughts and inner struggle. While it appears that he may be able to confess his sins and receive God’s forgiveness, Faustus is unable to do so. The fact that Faustus is unable to truly express his emotions and weep for his fate and God’s forgiveness is explained by Kocher through references to the *Malleus Maleficarum* and King James VI’s *Daemonologie*. He says, “An unrepentant witch cannot weep; no tenet of the witchcraft creed is more universal than this. So strong was this belief that inability to shed tears was often held to create a presumption that an accused person was a witch” (31). Faustus does not manage to gain forgiveness, but he finally realizes his sins and reminds the audience that his failing is believable due to his lower origins. He does this by cursing his parents. Faustus ends his soliloquy by crying out “I’ll burn my books” (5.2.185). He now understands what caused his downfall: failing to be an occult philosopher. This last cry is accompanied by Faustus’s death. The final stage of the sabbat that frames the play has been completed, and Faustus’s fellow scholars enter to find his limbs strewn around the room in the B-text. Faustus has presented his last gift to Lucifer: his body and limbs.

The play ends with a warning to the audience: beware of aspiring too high. The occult philosophers warned that trying to perform high magic was dangerous, so the warning of the Chorus for the audience to “Regard his hellish fall” can refer to Faustus’s inability to achieve what a more pious and devoted servant of God could accomplish: unlimited ability to manipulate the world (Ep.4). Faustus lost his way and by completing the sabbat and performing *maleficium* he became a witch instead of a magician: all should take heed of his mistakes.
CONCLUSION

Throughout this project we have looked closely at the debates surrounding witchcraft and magic during the Renaissance in an attempt to discover if Doctor Faustus is a witch or a magician. Two important themes that run throughout the play have been identified which prove that Faustus is a witch. First, we have found that over a twenty-four year period Faustus participates in the key elements of a witches’ sabbat. Second, Faustus may have aspired to be an occult philosopher who would help others, but he ultimately failed in his goals by being too hasty and misunderstanding how he was supposed to behave. This failure on his part caused him to embrace witchcraft and perform the maleficium of common witches.

As described in the chapter “Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,” the witches’ sabbat was the one part of witchcraft lore that was described in detail and extremely important in identifying witches. After all, it was usually a person’s presence at a sabbat that made him a suspect in the first place. There are four main aspects of a sabbat that initiates a person into witchcraft: he must pledge himself to Lucifer and reject God; he must give the Devil a token such as a loved one or a body part; he must participate in mocking Christianity through a variety of means; and finally, a new witch must copulate with the devil before the ceremony is complete. All of these things appear in Doctor Faustus, but because they are spread out from the beginning of the play to the end, it appears as though Faustus lived through a twenty-four year long sabbat. As has been described in the analysis of the play, Faustus pledges his body and soul to the devil at the beginning of the play and repeats this dedication several times. Each time he does this he participates in a celebration, which was another common event included in the depiction of sabbats, or the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins. In the middle of the play, Faustus takes the next step in a sabbat by mocking Christianity. The most apparent instance of his mockery is when he
deceives the Pope by freeing Bruno and stealing his wine. Near the end of the play Faustus “copulates with the devil” by taking the shade Helen as his paramour, but it is not until the final scene of the B-text that Faustus’s sabbat is complete. He finally relinquishes a piece of himself to the devil when his body is dismembered and he is taken to hell by the demons. This overarching frame of a witchcraft sabbat indicates that Faustus is always in the process of becoming a witch from the beginning to the end of the play.

Faustus’s failure to become a Christian Cabalist or Neoplatonic philosopher that leads to use of maleficium also defines his relationship to magic as witchcraft. By falling short in his quest to yield heavenly magic, Faustus ends up embracing witchcraft even if he does so unknowingly. John Mebane points out that “Faustus possesses exactly the same mixture of egotism and genuine desire for knowledge, of intoxication with an expansive vision of human potential and desire for the poet to serve one’s own selfish ends, which Marlowe had observed in such historical figures as Dee, Bruno, Agrippa, and Paracelsus, and in Sir Walter Ralegh …” (122). If Faustus behaves like these men, why does he succumb to witchcraft? Gareth Roberts begins to answer this question when he identifies the extent of high magic references in Doctor Faustus. For him, the magic of the Neoplatonists is only at the beginning of the play before Mephistopheles takes control. Roberts sees the soliloquies and the conversations with Cornelius and Valdes as a place when Faustus can “voice a desire for knowledge and control over nature.” The high magic dreams of the play, however, dissipate after the “dry and disappointing dialogue with Mephistophilis about astronomy” (Roberts 66). Roberts as well as many other scholars have pointed out that the Faustus’s dreams in the opening scenes of the play are not realized by the end. Instead, Faustus is performing trivial magic that can only be characterized as maleficium. By performing maleficium mostly on those who are lower than him in status such as Benvolio.
and the horse-course, Faustus embraces the role of a witch in Lucifer’s dominion and harms his neighbors.

Faustus is incapable of actualizing the magic spoken of by Mirandola, Agrippa, and Dee because he is cannot look beyond the physical world resulting in his acceptance of witchcraft. Barbara Traister succinctly points out that “Though he fails to become the demigod he aspires to be, his mistakes are symptomatic of his humanity. Faustus’s concern is with temporal, worldly matters rather than with eternity. Accordingly, he responds to sensual experiences rather than to disembodied abstractions…Only the tangible interests Faustus” (99). Faustus’s preoccupation with the worldly is consistent throughout the play and is most apparent through illusions and spectacles. The masque of the Seven Deadly Sins and Faustus’s pleasure in it is the type of behavior that sends the scholar “toward a bestial level of existence and ultimately to unite with Lucifer” (Mebane 135). Overall, we can see that Faustus’s speeches are full of language that portrays the objects of the world as indicative of the power of the divine. This is the same thing that occult philosophers pointed out, but Faustus somehow distorts the meaning of these ideas. Instead of seeing the objects as paths to understanding and worshiping the divine, Faustus, chooses to see these objects as all the more valuable. He ends up cherishing the objects of this world more so than the promises of the metaphysical world (Mebane 126-127). Due to Faustus’s inability to achieve the dreams of the Neoplatonic philosophers, it can be further concluded that Faustus is a witch and not a magician.

With these two clear themes indicating that Faustus is a witch, it is safe to make even more observations about the play. We can conclude that Faustus deserves his fate of eternal damnation because he committed heresy by turning his back on God and mocking Christianity. Faustus’s use of maleficium shows that he is a threat to his community and is another reason
why he deserves his fate. This is especially important because how a person behaved in his community was a major concern of those who judged witches during the Renaissance. Although he deserves damnation, we can also conclude that Faustus is not as at fault for this fate as others; he is a victim. As explained in the chapter “Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,” the weaknesses of men and women were often preyed upon by Lucifer in order to mislead them into following him into witchcraft. We can see that Faustus’s weakness was his obsession with earthly matters. Lucifer and Mephistopheles exploited this weakness and created an obedient witch who could not question them.

Other than understanding that Faustus is a victim who still deserves his fate, the knowledge that he is a witch opens new avenues into entering the ongoing debates about the play Doctor Faustus. While the scope of this project does not include entering these debates there are some things we can learn from the fact that Faustus truly is a witch. In the debate concerning when Faustus was irreversibly damned, people often argue that he is damned when he signs the diabolical pact or when he mates with Helen; others feel he is damned during his final soliloquy. Knowing that Faustus is a witch because he participates in the prolonged initiation of a sabbat helps to show that these first two events are only a part of what makes Faustus a witch and it is the entire process that damns him. So even though he may not complete this process until the end of the play, he is well on his way when he contacts Mephistopheles.

Another debate that can be informed by this conclusion is what sin causes Faustus to be damned. Many have argued that Faustus suffers from an abundance of pride and therefore is damned. Knowing that he is a witch helps to show that his greatest sin is knowingly turning his back on God and worshipping Lucifer. We can also see that his sin is not so much pride, but rather his inability to understand that he cannot succeed as a Neoplatonic philosopher. Since
Faustus’s major mistake is attempting to follow the work of the occult philosophers without patience or complete understanding of their ideas, we see a man who is confident and proud, yes, but we also see a man who thinks more of himself than what he actually is. Typically those who fall because they are too prideful are actually proud about characteristics and abilities they possess. Faustus in contrast demonstrates his ineptness.

Finally, those who attempt to discern what Marlowe was trying to prove in *Doctor Faustus* can be influenced by the conclusion that Faustus is a witch. One interpretation that could be made as a result of this information is that because Faustus is a witch who fails to be an occult philosopher, Marlowe agrees with the orthodox view that all magic is evil. This does not appear to be his purpose, however, because he seems more interested in developing Faustus’s character and personal story more so than joining those who held orthodox beliefs. Rather, Marlowe seems to be entering the magic and witchcraft debate in order to endorse the idea that men of all classes can be deceived by Satan and ultimately conned into becoming witches. Although he may not believe that all men who try to follow occult philosophy are witches, he shows that even they may not be able to escape evil. This interpretation is most apparent when we consider how often we see Lucifer and Mephistopheles uses games and dances to distract Faustus from the truth of his situation. By knowing that Faustus is a witch who is a threat to his community and not a benevolent magician, new investigations can be made into a variety of topics, a few of which have been touched upon here. This project, however, has been committed to demonstrating that the convoluted debate over witchcraft and magic was not confined to the treatises of the elite classes, but was played out on the popular stages as well. In the end, Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* depicts the story of a man who deceived by the devil turns to witchcraft and *maleficium*, thus becoming a threat to mankind; in short Doctor Faustus is a witch.
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