"The stars move still": Haste, Delay, and Doubt in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*

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Christopher Marlowe's Faustus exists in a tenuous, even at times tortuous, relationship to time. In this essay, I will be exploring *Doctor Faustus*'s relationship to impatience and delay in the context of its pacing and its poetics, particularly its use of metre, considering these formal elements in relation to the play's engagement with doubt and unknowability, which has led many to refer to *Doctor Faustus* as "a skeptical play."[1] After briefly discussing the religious and critical context for these themes in the play, I will read a series of key moments in the play, from the conjuring scene to the play's final scenes in both the A- and B-texts. My discussion of poetic delay is in conversation with scholarship on delay in the context of performance and to what scholars have referred to as Faustus's theatricalization and "self-dramatisation" in addition to historical work on post-Reformation uncertainty, particularly Calvinist predestination, in England during the early modern period.[2] Protestant theologians like John Calvin draw an explicit connection between suspension and doubt, and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* makes use of metrical suspension—metrical pauses and caesurae, for example—in ways which resonate with themes of religious doubt. In my analysis of *Doctor Faustus*, I am particularly interested in how this connection between suspension and doubt manifests formally in the poetics and performance of a play that is conceptually interested in the epistemological uncertainty which followed the Reformation. An analysis of poetics and performance will necessarily be somewhat speculative and incomplete, given that we cannot know how closely the texts aligned with what Edward Alleyn and other actors performed, or how exactly they interpreted the metre. However, it is notable that in many cases the metre of the text seems to resonate with the character of Faustus, his oscillation between haste and delay, his performance of suspension, and the irony of his predicament. This oscillation resonates with the contradictions embedded in the play, contradictions which are themselves reflective of cultural tensions and doubts in England in the period. Andrew Duxfield has

[1] William M. Hamlin, "Casting Doubt in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41, no. 2 (2001): 257, https://doi.org/10.2307/1556188.
[2] David C. Webb, "Damnation in *Doctor Faustus*: Theological Strip Tease and the Histrionic Hero," *Critical Survey* 11, no. 1 (1999): 41, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41556876. See also Swapan Chakravorty, "Being Staged: Unconcealment through Reading and Performance in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Bharata's Nātyaśāstra," *Philosophy East and West* 66, no. 1 (2016): 48, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43831282.

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highlighted influence of the tension between "the established religious order, centred upon faith, and the newly flourishing humanism," while scholars such as Chloe Kathleen Preedy and Lisa Hopkins have focused on Faustus's indecision as it related to religious tension—between competing secular and religious commitments and between Catholicism and Protestantism, respectively.[3] In this article, I seek not to resolve these tensions, which are crucial to understanding both *Doctor Faustus* and its context, but to preserve the states of uneasy suspension which the play conjures. The tension, such as that between haste and delay, damnation and salvation, and different schools of thought, only heightens the sense of uncertainty and instability which permeates the play. This uncertainty is perhaps part of what made the play, according to some accounts—such as the Exeter anecdote, in which there was doubt among the actors about whether there were "one devil too many amongst them"—potentially "unsettling" for early modern playgoers.[4]

John Calvin highlights the connection between suspension and doubt in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, arguing that the Scripture is necessary if humans are to have true knowledge of God, making the foundation of the belief in the Scripture essential.[5] Without this foundation, the Scripture which is the means of understanding the Divine is left in "perpetual suspense."[6] Without the necessary belief, the Scripture, and by extension the believer, is left in a state of suspense. (The Latin and French versions read "suspensa"[7] and "en suspens,"[8] respectively, while Thomas Norton's 1599 English translation uses the phrase "hanging in doubt") .[9] The word suspense can also be applied to plot, and I will be using the word to discuss suspension at the level of plot in Marlowe's drama. While this kind of suspense is different from suspension insofar as it is more specific, I think they are productively related. Suspense at the level of plot can connote a kind of tension or anxiety

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[3] Andrew Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify* (Ashgate 2015; repr., Routledge, 2016), 71; Chloe Kathleen Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism: Politic Religion and Post-Reformation Polemic* (Bloomsbury, 2012), 185; Lisa Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe: Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008): 164.

[4] Noam Reisner, "The Paradox of Mimesis in Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (2010): 348, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43492434.

[5] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, ed. Benjamin B. Warfield (Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 82.

[6] Calvin, *Institutes*, 93.

[7] John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* (Genevae: Oliua Roberti Stephani, 1559), 16, https://archive.org/details/institutiochrist1559calv/page/16/mode/2up.

[8] John Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne*: *Nouv. ed. soigneusement rev. et corr. sur l'éd. française de 1560*, ed. Frank Baumgartner (Genève: E. Beroud, 1888), 37, https://archive.org/details/institutiondelar00calvuoft/page/n7/mode/2uphttps://archive.org/details/institutiondelar00calvuoft/page/36/mode/2up.

[9] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1599), 55, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ia.ark:/13960/t78s4z58b&seq=55&q1=8.

relating to uncertainty, namely, uncertainty regarding what is going to happen in the story. Such uncertainty makes the word appropriate, I think, in conversation with this description of anxiety without the certainty of the promise of grace. In the context of salvation, we might understand it in relation to plot, broadly defined; fear of death or damnation is in some sense a fear of the unknown, of what is going to happen next. I use suspense in a similar way when thinking about the plot of *Doctor Faustus* from the audience's perspective. Tension in the play is generated by the uncertainty, both with respect to what will happen to Faustus and the question of how much control he has over his fate. But this is also a kind of suspense from the perspective of the character of Faustus himself and his own future. He anticipates and fears what will happen next; even when he is most convinced that he is damned, he is not sure what form his damnation will take. The A-text foregrounds the role of uncertainty in this respect, while the B-text leaves less to the imagination, but the relationship between suspense and uncertainty is, to my mind, important to consider when thinking about suspension in relation to drama, as it is relevant not only to poetics but to plot as well.

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* explores the connection between doubt and faith, certainty and uncertainty, and haste and suspension through its plot, its poetics, and its characterization of its titular character. Faustus seeks knowledge in his haste but his soul, the status of which is ostensibly in doubt for much of the play, hangs in the balance. In the wake of the Reformation, such uncertainty concerns not only Faustus but the play's audience as well. The question of the extent of the pervasiveness of Calvinist predestination in early modern English society is of course a matter of debate, but there is an argument to be made that its influence extended beyond official theological doctrine, and that its implications were no doubt on the minds of many. As Lucy Bates writes,

> The lengths to which the state, the church, and individual preachers went in order to avoid pronouncing on that most divisive doctrine are well documented, and yet predestinarian thinking was far-reaching and pervaded faith, charitable works, and repentance, exerting "a power when unspoken as well as spoken." The finding that predestinarianism was the elephant in the early modern room suggests that the doctrine permeated more of society than the theological disputations of learned divines. Questions surrounding their soul's salvation affected the vast majority, yet equally for most predestination posed such serious practical problems that it was best left alone.[10]

[10] Lucy Bates, "The Limits of Possibility in England's Long Reformation," *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 (2010): 1062, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40930369.

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* raises these anxieties through the figure of Faustus and the rhythms of the play. While Faustus's case, given his overt and ostentatious impiety, is extreme, Calvinist predestination paradoxically suggest that fates are simultaneously fixed and yet, from our vantage point, uncertain until the clock strikes, and the play comes to an end, placing utmost importance on grace. The play tempts its audience at multiple points with the notion that, no matter how far Faustus goes in pursuit of his damnation, there is always the theoretical possibility he could be saved. He frequently laments that he cannot repent but, not knowing the mind of God and the state of his salvation, the audience may wonder at any point whether he still can. At the same time, the inverse is also potentially true: no matter how upright a life one has led up to this point, one never knows the true status of his soul. Whatever Marlowe's audience might feel, Faustus's anxiety with respect to salvation and the state of his soul is not consistent throughout the play; he oscillates between being cavalier about signing away his soul and being in terror of coming damnation. This is one of many forms of oscillation which Faustus performs throughout the play, which speaks to his being "caught between belief and disbelief," as Preedy puts it, as he goes from telling Mephistopheles himself that he does not think hell exists to pleading with all powers for the delay of his damnation.[11] In any case, salvation was a crucial question for Marlowe's audience. The play's, and Faustus's, oscillation between haste and delay, certainty and uncertainty, confidence and anxiety, movement and suspension, only augments tensions and anxieties with respect to questions of salvation. We can hear it in its rhythms: its poetics, its dramatic pacing, and in Faustus's performance of wavering.

Timothy Rosendale has argued against those who would overstate the importance of Calvinism in the play, particularly those who would claim that Faustus is damned from the start. As Rosendale points out, the B-text has been interpreted as coming down more strongly on this side, while the A-text remains more ambiguous. Additionally, there is ambiguity in the B text as well, as Rosendale has shown with his reading of the line describing how the heavens "conspired" Faustus's overthrow.[12] Much of my reading in this essay focuses on the A-text, given its relative ambiguity and my engagement with uncertainty, though I will consider a passage from the B-text as well later on. While I agree with Rosendale that the play, in both texts, does not definitively conclude that Faustus is damned from the start, I also

[11] Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*, 185; Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*: *A Two-Text Edition*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Norton, 2005), A.2.1.23; A.5.3.75-81. All subsequent quotations from the play refer to this edition.

[12] Timothy Rosendale, *Theology and Agency in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 104.

do not think it is entirely definitive about the fact that Faustus acts with complete freedom. As Rosendale acknowledges, there is the possibility that Faustus's very nature is not entirely a matter of his choice, that his inability to understand and accept grace is actually a result of his not being a member of the elect. While Rosendale argues that such a God cannot be found in the text, Faustus's presentation of his own predicament as one trapped brings up at least the notion of it, particularly when he refers to his heart being "so hardened" that he "cannot repent" (A.2.3.18). Additionally, lines like the ones which Rosendale discusses in the B-text at the very least open up multiple possible readings regarding Faustus's fate.[13] Whatever we think about the reality of the state of Faustus's soul, it is I think important that Faustus often describes himself as if his fate is inescapable. We can choose to read this as disingenuous, but I think it is also possible to take it seriously to some extent, both in the way that Preedy reads it, in relation to feeling bound to a contract, and in a more theological sense.[14] Whether or not it is true, the fact that Faustus may feel it to be true, or the fact that Faustus performs as if it is true, is relevant for the audience. My aim is not to argue for one interpretation over the other with respect to the role of Calvinism and the question of fate and will, but to consider these possible readings in suspension. In fact, I hope to argue that doing so is partly what the play leads us to do. As Duxfield puts it, "The play itself is shot through with ambiguity."[15] Similarly, my aim is not to characterize Faustus as damned from the start or as an agent of will, but to argue that it is Faustus's performance of oscillation between damnation and salvation, between being an example of radical human will and a victim of fate, that is central to the play's engagement with suspension and doubt. Like Faustus, the play itself tempts its audience with multiple interpretive possibilities in order to create a space of doubt. While, as Duxfield argues, "no intermediary possibility" is an option for Faustus, his oscillation, his fragmentation, his "bifurcation," creates this possibility for critics. While this "failure to unify" in Faustus has led to so many "divergent critical responses to the play," the critic does not necessarily have to unify the disparate strands of Faustus but can rather hold them up together in their contradiction for a fuller picture of the fragmented whole.[16]

The fragmented figure of Marlowe's Faustus is defined by impatience at the outset, but by the end of the play this characterization is not only subverted but also inverted. The almost contrapasso-like twist of the finale of the play is that, when his time of damnation is

[13] Rosendale, *Theology and Agency*, 97.
[14] Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*, 185.
[15] Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe*, 71.
[16] Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe*, 86.

coming, all Faustus can ask for is delay. (He repeatedly laments that he cannot ask for forgiveness.) Repeatedly, Faustus asks for more time, though his desire for delay is coupled with the fevered anticipation of the moment, which seems inevitable. Heightening this irony is the fact that when Faustus asks for pause, for suspension, for patience, he still exhibits the impatience of his past self. As before, he is looking ahead, anticipating the future even as he dreads its coming. He is unable to live in the present when the moment is near; even when he no longer wants the future to arrive, he is still living in the future. This is emphasized not only by the tolling of the clock, but also by Faustus's need to constantly talk about the moment's impending arrival. Webb sees this theatricalization as central to the teasing suspense of the play, one which knowingly tempts the audience with hope even when things are inevitable.[17] Swapan Chakravorty argues that Faustus enacts wavering "in the absence of genuine choice" and that "the ethical is manifest only in show," emphasizing the extent to which this wavering resonates with the aforementioned anxieties relating to Calvinist doctrine.[18] While the extent to which Faustus acts without choice is a subject of debate, the notion of Faustus as a character who plays various roles in order to open up space for thinking through theological anxiety is worth considering. We might say that rather than existing in a state of suspension, Faustus performs suspension. His suspension manifests as a kind of back and forth between haste and delay, as well as what T. McAlindon calls "his oscillation between redemptive hope and damning despair."[19] Time speeds up and slows down with Faustus's performance of wavering.

Faustus's initial impatience is apparent from the opening scene when he quickly dismisses all traditional realms of scholarly thought. Throughout the beginning of the play, Faustus often claims he will brook no suspension or delay. "Resolve me of all ambiguities," he says (A.1.1.80). His desire to be rid of uncertainty is in turn highlighted by his haste, his desire to be rid of suspension. It is notable that he frames his desire for knowledge the other way around. Rather than asking for knowledge, he asks for ambiguities to be resolved. He asks to be removed from the state of suspension that is living in doubt, in uncertainty—he asks for an escape from the suspension of judgment which attends uncertainty. He is like the believer who seeks to know for certain the answer to the question "Am I saved?" rather than

[17] Webb, "Damnation in *Doctor Faustus*," 31–32.
[18] Chakravorty, "Being Staged," 47. See also G. M. Pinciss, "Marlowe's Cambridge Years and the Writing of *Doctor Faustus*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 33, no. 2 (1993): 260, https://doi.org/10.2307/450998.
[19] Tom McAlindon, "The Ironic Vision: Diction and Theme in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," *The Review of English Studies* 32, no. 126 (1981): 140, https://www.jstor.org/stable/514131.

leaving it in the hands of God, treating faith as the immediate resolution of all ambiguities or true knowledge of one's own salvation. Although Calvin's notion of the elect is a source of anxiety, and although he attributes great importance to the foundation of certainty in the Scriptures, Calvin cautions in his Commentaries against such doubting, offering not certainty but faith, albeit a faith which is rooted in Scripture:

> Againe because manie intangle themselues in doubtfull and thornie imaginations, whiles that they seeke for their saluation in the hidden counsel of God, let vs learne that the election of God is therefore approued by faith, that our minds may be turned vnto Christ, as vnto the pledge of Election, & that they may seeke no other certaintie, saue that which is reuealed to vs in the Gospel: I say, let this seale suffice vs, that whosoeuer beleeueth in the onely begotten sonne of God, hath eternall life…[20]

Yet, in the context of Marlowe's play, believing, turning toward God, is something Faustus can at least apparently choose as an act. His Good Angel exhorts him to "read the Scriptures" (A.1.1.73), and says "repent; yet God will pity thee" (A.2.3.12). He repeatedly implores Faustus, who responds, "My heart's so hardened I cannot repent" (A.2.3.18). The angel gives hope, if not to Faustus, to Marlowe's audience, preserving the suspense, even as Faustus insists there is no hope. Yet there is still the lingering idea that Faustus's oscillation between haste and delay, his performance of damnation and repentance, is a proliferation of movement concerning something which is unmoving: God's will. Chakravorty writes that "Calvin had spoken of salvation as a *decision*," but, crucially, the decision is "solely God's," going so far as to claim that Faustus's performance of decision and indecision could even be read as "blasphemous."[21] At the same time, the success of the play's suspense, the success of the play as a drama, depends in part on the audience's uncertainty regarding whether and at what point Faustus can be saved. Therefore, their hope that Faustus's fate is to some extent in his hands is essential. The play demonstrates a keen awareness of the tension inherent in this problem, as it both encourages this hope while repeatedly dashing it at the same time, a rhythm we see reflected even in the metre of *Doctor Faustus*.

It is at the beginning of scene three, when Faustus first attempts to conjure, that we see his initial haste reflected formally, when he begins to conjure the spirit who will, he hopes, resolve all ambiguities.[22] The scene begins:

> Now that the gloomy shadow of the earth,

[20] Calvin, *The Commentaries*, 327.
[21] Chakravorty, "Being Staged," 47.
[22] Andrew Sofer, "How to Do Things with Demons: Conjuring Performatives in *Doctor Faustus*," *Theatre Journal* 61, no. 1 (2009): 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40211155.

> Longing to view Orion's drizzling look,
> Leaps from th'Antarctic world unto the sky
> And dims the welkin with her pitchy breath,
> Faustus, begin thine incantations (A.1.3.1–5).

Of the first five iambic pentameter lines which set Faustus's conjuration monologue into motion, ending with his call to himself to begin his incantations, four of them begin, not with an iamb, but with a trochee. The prevalence of trochaic substitutions encourages a performance in which the syllables tumble from the tongue in a hurry after the inversion of the first foot, thanks to the two unstressed syllables which immediately follow the opening stress. The rhythm of the lines creates a rushed, falling sensation. The stressed first syllable being followed by two unstressed syllables in the movement from trochee to iambic rhythm resembles for a moment the dactyl, which, in English in particular, is often described as creating speed, as the two unstressed syllables often create a similar rhythmic effect to that of one syllable. This phenomenon is discussed by George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie*. In one case, he writes that a metrical moment in a line is, "like a *Dactill*, and carries the two later sillables away so speedily as it seemes but one foote in our vulgar measure, and by that meanes makes the verse seeme but of eleuen sillables." In another, he describes the trochee of the word "render" thus: "This word [*render*] bearing the sharpe accent upon [*ren*] makes it long, the sillable [*der*] falling away swiftly & being also written with a single consonant or liquide is short and makes the *trocheus.*"[23] While metre can no doubt be interpreted in a variety of ways, Puttenham's characterization suggests that it is quite possible that a contemporary reader of Marlowe would have experienced the metrical variation in a similar fashion. And while a trochaic substitution is certainly a common irregularity, it is notable in Marlowe whose verse is fairly regular, and it stands out against the regular iambic rhythm which flows throughout the rest of these lines. Thus, each of the lines creates speed in the beginning with a succession of unstressed syllables and falls back into a regular rhythm again, only for the speed to increase again with the trochee that opens the following line. Given the number of trochaic substitutions in this passage, Marlowe's use of this variation becomes a pattern within the pattern of his pentameter.

These lines suggest a rhythm of rushing forth and slowing down, only to charge forth again. The characterological implications of this are complex and not without potential ambiguity, but they resonate with Faustus's performance of wavering. One might hear in this

[23] George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie* (London: 1589), STC 20519.5. *Early English Books Online*. sigs. K4v, Pv.

rhythm, for instance, a reflection of Faustus's impatience, but also of his doubt. At times it is as if Faustus is working up the courage to commit to the act. There is even something anticlimactic, perhaps ironic, in the way that, after the powerful trochees disrupt the even rhythm, the verse falls so easily back into an iambic pattern with little variation. Metrically, temporally, the lines start and stop, speed up and slow down, break the rules and fall into them again. Faustus's performance of wavering, while not a perfect mirror for theological uncertainty, resonates with theological anxieties and themes of doubt which permeate the play. And it is not only in what he says but how he says it, in the poetics of his performance.

Marlowe's breaking of the metre stands out especially because his otherwise fairly regular verse, thereby making it easier for such breaking to be heard by the audience. By contrast, when I consider the rockier metres of a poet like John Donne, for instance, I often note moments of surprising regularity. I also emphasize this metrical variation in Marlowe, because, in addition to highlighting Faustus's haste, the metre resonates with his blasphemy. An inversion of the traditional iambic rhythm which typically begins a line of pentameter, a trochaic substitution is not uncommon. However, Marlowe's insistence on it here calls attention to the substitution's potential symbolic affordance as an inversion. The metrical inversion resonates with Faustus's conceptual inversion of Christian prayer and devotion in this passage. Jehovah's name (in addition to the names of the saints) is twisted, "Forward and backward anagrammatized," called upon as in prayer but in this case only in order to call upon devils (A.1.3.8–9). Moreover, as Preedy has argued, Faustus's "demonic contract" is in some sense an "inverted version of the heavenly covenant."[24] Furthermore, the association of blasphemy with Faustus's haste suggests a corresponding association of devotion with a state of suspension. If Faustus's blasphemy emerges as a result of his thirst for knowledge which is beyond the bounds permitted by the Creator, then we might associate suspension here with a kind of piety. Trusting in God is after all one way of being content with uncertainty. This notion of suspension is one which Faustus rejects in his haste, when he calls for the resolution of ambiguity. If piety can be read as a kind of suspension, the devotee akin to a planet orbiting the object of devotion, then Faustus's haste is suspension's opposite, and Faustus may be said to resemble one of the "erring stars," the planets which he draws in his summoning circle "By which the spirits are enforced to rise" (A.1.3.12–13). If these erring stars are those by which devils are made to rise, Faustus is implicitly likening himself to a planet which has deviated in its orbit in this scene, since it is he who is summoning them.

[24] Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*, 176.

Faustus's desire for certainty differs from Calvin's, for Calvin seeks knowledge only of the truth of God's word, and yet both figures see suspension as a potential source of anxiety. There are perhaps two sides to suspension which are at play here, just as there are two sides to uncertainty, one which is more positive and another which can be a source of extreme religious anxiety. Often, these two aspects coexist in a devotional context. Marlowe's Faustus reflects similar anxieties on stage as he shifts between haste and delay.

Once more, Marlowe's Faustus ardently rejects suspension, desiring immediacy, which is tied to his desire for knowledge and his pride. When he calls on the spirits in Latin, a language, incidentally, well-suited to syntactical delay given its inflected nature, he demands of them, simply, in the shortest of his Latin sentences: "*Quid tu moraris?* [Why do you delay?]" This question is immediately linked to prayer, or Faustus's inversion of prayer: "*et per vota nostra* [and by our prayer]" (A.1.3.19–21). Of course, this insistence is not without the persistent presence of doubt, which Faustus, for all his haste, cannot escape; for him, all ambiguities have not been resolved. The rhythm of the scene's opening lines suggests this lingering uncertainty as well; no matter how forcefully the lines break the pattern, they fall back into it, noncommittal in their own rebellion. Faustus must tell himself, "fear not … be resolute" (A.1.3.14). This wavering only further ironizes Faustus's haste and his learning, which remains stubbornly within human bounds despite his efforts, as he learns there are things even Mephistophilis cannot reveal to him. When Faustus asks Mephistophilis to tell him who made the world, Mephistophilis responds "I will not," adding "Think thou on hell, Faustus, for thou art damned" (A.2.3.65–70). *Doctor Faustus* tempts its audience with knowledge and with possibility, both of Faustus's salvation and with the possibility that he was potentially damned from the start, keeping uncertainty and anxiety alive. The play keeps Faustus's soul apparently hanging in the balance until the very end, its ultimate fate uncertain, while also tempting its audience with the idea that such suspension was illusory all along. In doing so, it plays on its audience's potential epistemological anxieties in order to heighten the suspense.

We see further instances of Faustus's nagging doubt when he first signs Mephistophilis' contract with his blood. He must remind himself again later in his study, to "be resolute," to not go "backward" (A.2.1.6). He asks himself, echoing his words to the devils, "Why waverest thou?" (A.2.1.7). Encouraged by his Evil Angel and Mephistophilis, he presses on, even when his own blood delays by congealing (A.2.1.62). Before calling on Mephistophilis, he tells himself, "Cast no more doubts" (A.2.1.26). Later, when the Old Man gives Faustus a final warning, another moment in which the plot keeps the audience in

suspense, he asks explicitly for him to delay—"stay thy desperate steps"—without success (A.5.1.52). He does not ask him to go back yet, only to wait, to give himself more time. And in the play's finale, the ironic reversal of Faustus's former haste comes full circle. It is a contrapasso by which the man who was all haste, all impatience, asks for nothing but delay, suspension. Furthering the irony is the reason he asks for suspension; in a sense, it is because he got what he wanted, an apparent certainty regarding the fate of his soul. Whether or not he can truly repent at this point, Faustus himself believes he has achieved knowledge the absence of which is a source of anxiety for many in the audience who may be aware of Calvin's ideas of predestination. The only fate which awaits him if time goes forward is damnation, and therefore the only hope he has is suspension. The scene cruelly draws on yet denies him. The scene delays but does not suspend Faustus's fate; time's restless course, like that of Faustus earlier in the play, presses on. Marlowe twists the knife further by means of the clock's regular striking of the half hour, potentially replicated onstage, which punctuates the scene. The clock both draws attention to the passage of time and slows it down. Similarly, Faustus's soliloquy goes on for some time. As Faustus says earlier in the same scene, "now I die eternally" (A.5.2.4). It is almost as if he has succeeded in delaying the inevitable, though this state of suspension, a constant anticipation of death, is almost worse than death itself. Like the knowledge he attains, this suspension is ironized, hollow. Faustus asks repeatedly, "Comes he not?" (A.5.2.4–5), his anticipation having shifted from impatience to dread.

The inversion of the conjuring scene, in which Faustus draws depictions of the planets (those erring stars with whom he is associated), the transformation of his desire for haste into a desire for suspension, and by extension, the ironic twist of his desire for knowledge, for ambiguities to be resolved, are all completed in his final speech. Faustus asks for the suspension of time and motion, specifically of the spheres which house those same erring planets: "Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven, / That time may cease and midnight never come!" (A.5.2.64–65). Time, in Faustus's imagination, becomes something that can be latched onto, corralled, physically held back, if only one has enough power. This physicality is further emphasized by the spondaic substitution at the beginning of the line; metrically, the spondee of "Stand still" reflects what it describes and takes on the solidity of a stone against the current of the otherwise iambic rhythm. But, again, Faustus is denied. "*O lente, lente currite, noctis equi* [Run softly, softly, horses of the night]" he asks, in what is both a demonstration of the humanist knowledge which is linked to his damnation and a plea; in spite of this, the stars "move still, time runs, the clock will strike" (A.5.2.70–71). The pun on "still," which both communicates that the stars move ceaselessly and also evokes the idea of

stillness, further illustrates the extent to which impatient anticipation and suspension are simultaneously operating in the figure of Faustus. To the end, he wavers.

Fittingly then, Faustus asks for haste, but such haste as would speed past his deadline, leaving him unscathed: "Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make / Perpetual day." Finally, he asks for something more modest, but still impossible: not that midnight may never come, but for more time, evoking the Old Man's warning, his use of the word "stay": "let this hour be but / A year, a month, a week, a natural day, / That Faustus may repent and save his soul!" In this final moment, the play tempts its audience once more with the hope of salvation. For a second, it seems as if he can be saved (this, too, draws out the scene): "O, I'll leap up to my God!" Yet this line is immediately undermined by what follows: "Who pulls me down?" (A.5.2.66–73). As Duxfield says, this is another instance of the "motif of bifurcation… sustained throughout the play," another example of what Duxfield calls the failure to unify for Faustus, the doubt which persists despite his striving toward complete knowledge.[25] This back-and-forth, which is tied to Faustus's continued doubt, can also be read as one final example of the way in which the play's temporal suspense is linked to religious doubt. Faustus's doubting of the possibility of the kind of grace which Calvin describes, combined with the play's suspense with respect to Faustus's ultimate fate, may lead its audience to ask: Can Faustus be saved, despite everything? What exactly prevents him from accepting grace? Can *I* be saved? This moment of suspense and doubt, as before, is emphasized by Marlowe's poetics, for a caesura marks the pause separating "I'll leap up to my God" and "Who pulls me down." Faustus's apparently oscillating fate hinges on this metrical moment of suspension, this pause. As if to (finally) remove any doubt about his ability to leap up to his God, after saying that just one drop of Christ's blood, which he sees in the sky, could save him, Faustus then calls, not on God, but on Lucifer for mercy: "O, spare me, Lucifer!" After soliciting Lucifer, he asks the mountains and the hills to hide him from God's wrath, and then asks the stars to bring his soul to heaven (A.5.2.77–90). It is a sign perhaps not so much of repentance as of looking for a way out, regardless of who or what provides it. His final temporal request is for his suffering to not be eternal, for hell to have a temporal limit, via metempsychosis or some other means. The most frightening thing for Faustus is, in the end, the ultimate form of suspension, eternity, which, rather than being associated with doubt as it was before, has become associated with its opposite, that which Faustus had been seeking, absolute certainty. In a sense, Faustus's punishment is what he

[25] Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe*, 86

sought, knowledge regarding the status of his own salvation, normally beyond the reach of humans. The play's central ambiguity has finally been resolved. And yet, for all its finality, this resolution does nothing to relieve the audience of their own anxieties, the "doubtful and thorny imaginations" which may stubbornly arise in spite of Calvin's warnings.[26] If anything, Faustus's performance plays upon and aggravates them.

And yet it is not in doubting that Faustus finds damnation; it is when ambiguity has been resolved, when he meets with absolute certainty. Faustus' damnation comes from a specific kind of doubt, not the kind of doubt which is open to possibility but rather a kind of distrust, his doubt regarding God's grace and possibility of salvation. It is notable that Calvin points to John 3:16 when he offers the "only certainty" which is available to those doubting their status among the elect—faith is necessary.[27] The presence of uncertainty, the suspension of judgment, a contentment with the unknown, when accompanied by faith in God, can be an important part of devotion. For Faustus's damnation is associated with his haste and his desire for absolute knowledge. At the same time, faith in the possibility of salvation is essential, and the one thing Faustus never stops doubting—the bounds of God's love (Faustus says, "[turn] to God? He loves thee not" after he asks himself "Why waverest thou?"; A.2.1.7–10)—is the most important thing in which to trust. Hamlin writes, that while "casting doubt is dangerous," it is nevertheless true that "doubting—wavering—is valuable, valuable precisely because it functions as temporary detachment from dogmatic positions, thus enabling the possibility of change, and of growth."[28] This positive side of doubt, of wavering, of uncertainty is important for Faustus, for it is sometimes when he wavers that he seems closest, at least from the audience's perspective, to potentially being saved. His damnation is tied to his resolute distrust of God's love, in its own way presented by the play as a kind of dogmatism. Earlier in the play, Faustus meets his wavering, not with doubt, but with the conviction that he is lost to God and that he must hasten forward, practically talking himself into despair:

> Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned,
> And canst thou not be saved.
> What boots it then to think of God or heaven?
> Away with such vain fancies and despair.
> Despair in God and trust in Beelzebub.
> Now go not backward; no, Faustus, be resolute.
> Why waverest thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears:

[26] Calvin, *The Commentaries*, 327.
[27] Calvin, *The Commentaries*, 327.
[28] Hamlin, "Casting Doubt," 266–67.

> "Abjure this magic, turn to God again!"
> Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.
> To God? He loves thee not. (A.2.1.1–10)

The play puts forth the idea to the audience that doubt, or wavering, could have saved Faustus. We can hear the uncertainty in the poetics of the lines themselves, particularly in the metrically unfinished line, "And canst thou not be saved," which ends where a caesura would conventionally fall, where there should be a pause. The pause where the rest of the line should follow leaves one final place of doubt, an ambiguity as to what, if anything, pervades the silence. But we are left to wonder—is it grief, despair, uncertainty, or something else, which completes the line, following the caesura, after Faustus asserts that he cannot be saved? Is it further doubt, another example of wavering which manifests in the empty space? All we know is what follows in the next line, but the empty space is just as rich with potential meaning; like a space of doubt, it remains open to many possibilities. There is a similar silence where a caesura could be at the end of the three-foot line, "To God? He loves thee not," and there is a similar ambiguity here of Faustus's tone. The line "He loves thee not" could be performed in several ways—emphasizing bitterness, anger, defiance, despair, sadness, resignation, helplessness, or some combination of these. In any case, this silence, this moment of suspension, once again aligns with a moment of uncertainty. For all the anxieties which doubt brings, particularly powerful in a post-Reformation English context, it remains a space of suspension, and therefore a space of possibility. Yet in the end Faustus does not so much doubt as despair.

I would like to turn to one additional scene on the theme of Faustus's separation from God in the B-text, the passage added at the ending which generally makes things more explicit. As Preedy points out, the ending literalizes Faustus's internal division.[29] And as Leah Marcus argues, this literal fragmentation in the B text imbues the play with more ritual significance given its evocation of "conservative eucharistic doctrine" and "the denial of the sacrament," whereas the A text emphasizes to a greater extent the psychic fragmentation Faustus experiences.[30] Metrically, the scholars' speech follows a ploddingly regular iambic pattern, but this metrical regularity and evenness could also be read as part of what Marcus has pointed out, imbuing the play with the controlled regularity of performed ritual repetition. However, the regularity is such that the return of trochaic substitutions in the ending shared

[29] Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*, 185
[30] Leah Marcus, "Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: The Case of *Doctor Faustus*," *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 12, http://jstor.org/stable/41917246.

by the A and B texts, which recalls the substitutions of the conjuring scene, is quite striking, even more so in the B text due to the contrast: "*Cut is* the branch that might have grown full straight" (B.Epilogue.1, my italics). The physical punishment of Faustus's dismemberment also makes the question of Faustus's damnation, which is still in suspension and left to the imagination at the end of the A-text, into something which is brought to a final close, even as it evokes Faustus's inner fragmentation.[31] Despite this, and despite the fact that there is not much in the way of what we might call metrical suspension in this B-text passage, one moment stands out to me. The medial caesura in line six calls back to the caesurae I just discussed from the A text, and it likewise highlights metre's capacity to communicate indirectly. Just after Faustus's desperate pleas and after the First Scholar has described the shrieks heard at night at the beginning of the scene, the Second Scholar says, "O, help us heaven! See, here are Faustus' limbs, / All torn asunder by the hand of death" (B.5.3.6–7). The break of the caesura, which stands out given the syntax, literally separates Faustus from heaven and from the "us" who can expect to receive help from heaven, and it is followed by the regular iambic line describing his limbs being torn asunder. The caesura again emphasizes Faustus's separation from God, but where there was ambiguity before in Faustus's tone, here there is finality. The metrical break from heaven echoes the lines from the Good Angel earlier in the B text, "O, thou hast lost celestial happiness," lamenting the "resplendent glory" which is inaccessible for Faustus forever (B.5.2.107–11). Whether or not Faustus damns himself or is damned, this separation, reflected in the metre in both versions of the play, invests these scenes with significant pathos. As I have said, the tragedy lies in part in his inability to embrace doubt, possibility. He lacks both doubt and faith; he lacks faith in God's grace, in the passage which Calvin points to as the only certainty which humans are afforded with respect to Divine election, an escape from the anxieties of doubt, but he is also insistent in shutting down moments of doubt and wavering, when he is offered hope. In a sense, doubt and faith go hand and hand, for both are concerned with possibility. Faustus is only able to see doubt as a source of anxiety, something to be eliminated, and yet he rejects the affordances posed by uncertainty by embracing the certainty of damnation, almost as if compelled. It is perhaps this complex tension with respect to doubt which leads Faustus to say, "Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven," and yet for much of the play Faustus seems to act, whatever we may think of the true status of his soul, as if it is already too late (A.5.2.64). His performance is of one who believes himself to be damned, despised by God. A formal analysis of

[31] Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*, 185.

Marlowe's Faustus provides the opportunity to highlight this aspect of the tragedy in several key poetic moments in the play as well as the ways in which anxieties about salvation, time, and doubt are elaborately intertwined in a post-Reformation conception of faith. Marlowe's work, here as elsewhere, resists easy answers but remains just as affecting amid uncertainty.

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