

## Screening the Metatheatrical: Jan Švankmajer's *Faust* as Marlovian Adaptation

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Despite its prominent position in the literary canon and its history of poetic, narrative and dramatic appropriation, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is a play with a limited cinematic tradition: the only well-known film adaptation of the play remains the 1967 movie directed by Richard Burton and his tutor at Oxford, Nevill Coghill, and starring Burton alongside his then-wife Elizabeth Taylor. This film was described in a contemporary *New York Times* review as being "of an awfulness that bends the mind," which may suggest a reason why it has provoked little interest from literary critics (Adler 1968).<sup>1</sup> A more recent -- and, as I hope to demonstrate, more interesting -- appropriation of *Doctor Faustus* is the 1994 film *Faust*, by the surrealist Czech animator and filmmaker Jan Švankmajer. Švankmajer's film combines live action with stop motion animation, Claymation and hand-operated wooden marionettes, and blends elements of Marlowe's play, Goethe's *Faust*, Christian Dietrich Grabbe's *Faust and Don Juan* and German and Czech folk puppet tradition.

Švankmajer's *Faust* has attracted some attention from film critics, but the nature of its relation specifically to Marlowe's play remains as yet largely unstudied.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, this is understandable: the film is, after all, not a conventional adaptation of Marlowe's play, appropriating as it does material from a variety of sources, and it is also notably liberal in its treatment of the material it uses. As such, while the film does insist on its Marlovian heritage

at key moments, the proportion of it that can be identified as direct adaptation of material from the play is relatively small. Nonetheless, this essay will argue that, even in its scenes which deviate most clearly from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Švankmajer's *Faust* persistently amplifies thematic concerns and dramaturgical techniques that critics have identified in the play.<sup>3</sup> It will consider how the film's splicing of modern live cinema with self-consciously archaic puppetry engages with Marlowe's own blending of medieval and early modern modes of representation.<sup>4</sup> And, building on recent work which equates Faustus's magic with theatrical performance, it will argue that the film explores and develops a metatheatrical aspect of Marlowe's play, situating an apparently real Faust in a world that becomes increasingly artificial and theatrical as his investment in the diabolic becomes more complete. Švankmajer's film, I aim to show, represents an adaptation of and commentary upon Marlowe's play of which discussion is long overdue.

### **Švankmajer's *Faust***

The career of Jan Švankmajer, born in Prague in 1934, extends back to the 1960s. His output predominantly comprises enigmatic short films which favor symbolism over linear narrative. Švankmajer's films demonstrate a preoccupation with texture and tactility, and manage to communicate a sense of this through the use of techniques such as exaggerated sound and extreme close up. These techniques are also used to intensify the viewer's attention to the body and to bodily functions: great focus is often applied in Švankmajer's films, for example, to the process of eating. All of this is achieved using a range of visual media. Some films, like *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982), rely heavily on stop motion animation and Claymation. Others engage with the strong Czech tradition in puppetry: Švankmajer's first film, *The Last Trick of Mr Schwarzwald and Mr Edgar* (1964), makes use of large marionette heads worn by actors, while *Punch and Judy* (1966) depicts hand puppets performing barbaric acts of

violence upon one another while also competing for the affection of a live guinea pig.

Elsewhere, as in *The Garden* (1968), his films rely on conventional live acting (put, it should be added, to unconventional uses). Also notable in Švankmajer's work is a tendency to adapt from literary sources -- his oeuvre includes *Don Juan* (1970), *Jabberwocky* (1971), *Castle of Otranto* (1977), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1980), *The Pendulum*, *The Pit* and *Hope* (1983) and *Alice* (1988).

All of these techniques and preoccupations are interwoven in Švankmajer's second feature-length film, *Faust* (1994). While a familiarity with Marlowe's play is assumed, it will be useful to provide here a brief account of the film. *Faust* situates its action in 1990s Prague, and casts the protagonist not as a great scholar with an Icarian desire for knowledge, but as an unremarkable middle-aged man whose briefcase and raincoat suggest, as Pavel Drábek and Dan North put it, "a regular white-collar worker, anonymous and undistinguished" (Drábek and North 2011, 526). This Faust is apparently aimless as well as undistinguished; Richardson rightly notes that he "appears to enter into the diabolic pact not from any great desire, but out of boredom," and because he "can't be bothered to resist" (Richardson 2006, 133).

In the film's first shot, intercut with flashing images of early modern woodcuts depicting scenes of infernal torment and accompanied by a chorus from the first act of Gounod's *Faust* (1859), Faust emerges via an escalator from the "underworld" of the Prague Metro — the first of the film's many motifs of ascent and descent -- onto a street where two men (Valdes and Cornelius, it turns out) are distributing leaflets which specify a location and which are headed by an alchemical symbol. Faust initially discards his leaflet, but after a bizarre experience at dinner involving the discovery of an egg baked into his loaf of bread, the cracking of which occasions a gale-force wind and the onset of night, he becomes (understandably) more inquisitive. Seeking out the location, Faust finds himself in the

deserted back streets of Prague, and ultimately in a dilapidated building where he discovers first of all a theatrical dressing room and later an alchemical laboratory.<sup>5</sup> Here, he dons a costume that has been left at the makeup desk, and from this point the film begins to operate on various disorienting layers on which the distinction between artifice and reality becomes increasingly hazy. Discomfited by finding himself onstage in a theater faced by a modern audience, Faust cuts his way through the stage backdrop and enters a world of a different order, populated by wooden marionettes that speak in stilted rhymed verse and that are operated -- with a touch of Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* -- by visible hands. Here he is solicited by marionettes representing the good and bad angels, and, in a comic subplot loosely derived from the Robin and Rafe scenes in Marlowe's play, a jester makes use of a magic book by tauntingly summoning and dismissing chattering demons from within the safety of a pentagram. In the film's most overtly Marlovian moment, Faust (who in this scene becomes "Faustus") takes an occultist kitbag given to him by Valdes and Cornelius and heads up a set of rickety, collapsing stairs to an attic where he proceeds to summon Mephistopheles, whose head bursts through the wooden floorboards (at first Mephistopheles is represented as a grotesque clay demon, but soon takes on the appearance of Faust, albeit rendered through pixilation -- a process of animation whereby a live subject is filmed using stop-motion techniques). Here the dialogue is lifted directly from Marlowe's conjuration scene and stands in stark contrast to the doggerel spoken by the film's puppet characters.

When it comes to signing the deed, the film moves on to another plane of representation, as a giant wooden marionette's head is lowered onto Faust's shoulders, and he too begins to be controlled from above by a puppeteer's hands. This is the form Faust predominantly takes during his escapades with Mephistopheles, until the film shifts back in the direction of realism (if not quite reaching that destination) as the contract is called in by Lucifer; Faust, by this point human, attempts to flee his punishment and suffers the

bathetically mundane -- and also distinctly Czech -- fate of being run over by a Škoda. It should be added that these shifts between different modes of representation and levels of reality are not as neatly compartmentalised as the above account may imply. Claymation sequences are interspersed in live action sections of the film, and during the period of his diabolic powers Faust is able to remove his marionette shell and interact as a human with the wooden and clay characters around him; this he does when debating with Mephistopheles in his dressing room, and most notably in the key scene when he discards his costume to pursue Helen of Troy. As such, the film makes no comforting distinctions between what is real and what is not, or, at least, where those distinctions appear to be being made they are soon undermined.

### **Surrealism and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus***

*Faust's* employment of various representative media to trouble the real/unreal binary is very much of a piece with Švankmajer's broader interests as a filmmaker. Peter Hames, for instance, notes among his persistently reoccurring themes "[t]he concern with reality and unreality (making the real imaginary and the imaginary real)" (Hames 2008a, 36). Particularly worthy of note in this respect is Švankmajer's dedication to surrealism as an intellectual framework for his work; in 1970 he became an active member of the Czechoslovak surrealist group and a member of the editorial board for its academic journal (Richardson 2006, 122). Richardson argues that Švankmajer's work offers the purest of filmic manifestations of surrealism, stating that he "holds a unique position [among film makers] in that his surrealism can be described without any qualification" (Richardson 2006, 134). This is important to note, as Richardson is also keen to stress that surrealism does not simply denote artwork that is bizarre or, for that matter, "surreal." Rather, he suggests, surrealism refers to a mode of thought with a specific set of tenets; it is not an artistic style or quality,

but an intellectual movement Richardson 2006, 2-3). Underpinning that intellectual movement is an interest "almost exclusively in exploring the conjunctions, the points of contact, between different realms of existence" (Richardson 2006, 3). André Breton, known as the founder of the movement, notes in the opening to his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* that:

Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, cease to be perceived as contradiction. It would be in vain to see in surrealist activity any other motive than the hope of determining this point. (Quoted in Rosemont 1978, 43)

That *Faust* represents an artistic manifestation of this project seems clear, since it so persistently juxtaposes and intermeshes different registers of reality.

But it is worth considering why Švankmajer might have been drawn to the Faust myth -- or more specifically to Marlowe's *Faustus* -- in order to make such a film. The Faust myth is clearly important to Švankmajer. *Faust* is not his first artistic engagement with it, since his first credit came as a puppeteer in *Johannes Doktor Faust*, a short film of 1958 by Emil Radok (Drábek and North 2011, 525). In a playful preface to the published screenplay of the film, Švankmajer suggests that his personal attachment to the myth goes beyond the artistic, offering a striking account of a diabolic encounter during his college years:

Whilst still a student I agreed with a friend (under the influence of reading gruesome horror stories) that one day we would call up Mephisto at midnight. We knew no magic formulae or magic incantations. We did not have a magic circle or any of the

other necessary props. We just went into a newly-cut field and ran over the stubble calling to Mephisto. And he came. (Švankmajer 1996, vi)

The nature of Mephisto's arrival is sufficiently ambiguous to leave available a number of explanations: in the account, a gust of wind blows the two students into a ditch and then a car stops nearby, its door opening apparently in invitation. The two "did not doubt for an instant that it was Mephisto," but the effect of the encounter was to provoke questions about its nature: "Was it only a hallucination of an over-agitated imagination, or just some strange chance? Or was someone making fun of us? I don't know. We definitely experienced it as a terrifying reality which we had provoked ourselves" (Svankmajer 1996, vi).

How seriously we are meant to take Švankmajer in this para-textual account is unclear. We are left to ask -- as the film maker claims to have done after his putative encounter with Mephisto -- whether a trick is being played on us. But the point here seems to be that the myth facilitates for Švankmajer an interplay between different orders of reality: whether the encounter is the result of a trick or not, as far as the collective perception of the two students was concerned, Mephisto's arrival was experienced as reality. Indeed, the experience is at its most interesting, from a surrealist perspective, if it *is* the product of trick, since in that case it entails multiple realities existing simultaneously: Mephisto both has and has not appeared. It is significant that the state of mind required for this experience is facilitated by indulgence in literature (they are still "under the influence of reading gruesome horror stories"), especially as the account appears as an adjunct to a discussion of artistic creation being a negotiation between the registers of conscious planning and the "abyss of the unconscious" -- between, as Richardson puts it in his identification of the surrealist focus, quoted earlier -- two different realms of existence.

The notion that art or storytelling has the capacity to bring into contact different orders of reality is especially applicable to the Faust myth, since it is itself so concerned with interactions between the diabolic and the terrestrial worlds. This is particularly true of Marlowe's *Faustus*, in which the subject of the spatial relationship between earth and hell is raised in debate between Faustus and Mephistopheles:

FAUSTUS: Where are you damned?

MEPHISTOPHELES: In hell.

FAUSTUS: How comes it then that thou art out of hell?

MEPHISTOPHELES: Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.

(1.3.75-78)<sup>6</sup>

In this famous passage, which is one of the few parts of Marlowe's play to be reproduced verbatim in Švankmajer's film, hell and earth not only encounter one another but are depicted as coterminous; as Mephistopheles later states, "all places shall be hell that is not heaven" (2.1.129).

Marlowe's *Faustus* begins to look more like a proto-surrealist text, and its protagonist like a proto-surrealist, when one considers another statement by André Breton, made in his *Surrealism and Painting*. Breton declared that the ambition of surrealist art should be to

encompass the whole psychophysical field [constituted by] unfathomable depths [in which] there reigns the absence of contradiction, the relaxation of emotional tensions due to repression, a lack of the sense of time, and the replacement of external reality by a psychic reality obeying the pleasure principle. (Quoted in Richardson 2006, 5)



The correlation is approximate, but each of the elements mentioned by Breton can be said to feature to some degree in Marlowe's play. Obedience to the pleasure principle is precisely what seems to govern Faustus's actions during the third and fourth acts of the play, between the sealing of the bond and his return home on the eve of his damnation, as he hedonistically squanders his twenty-four years of earthly power. The play is in one sense structured around a very clear sense of time -- twenty four years is the specific earthy duration Faustus's adventures are given -- but, as Joseph Candido has noted, its treatment of it is remarkably fluid, with the period of the bond elapsing in a seeming moment before the play culminates in Faustus's final hour which, marked by the sounding of a clock's chimes, speeds up as it progresses (Candido 2009). Just as Švankmajer can write of a reality in which he encountered Mephisto irrespective of whether Mephisto was really there or not, the play dramatizes conflicting yet co-existent orders time, on one level as the regular constant that is measured by a clock, and on another as the fluctuating and intangible force experienced by a human subject; for Candido, the play, and particularly the scene that dramatizes Faustus's final hour,

masterfully depicts the ironies of time as human beings tend to experience it -- i.e. the paradox that time can seem virtually interminable during a period of relatively short duration and, alternatively, often seem to slip by unnoticed during a period of much greater length. (Candido 2009, 137-38)

Finally, Breton's urging of surrealist art to encompass "unfathomable depths [in which] reigns the absence of contradiction" calls directly to mind Faustus's desire to be resolved "of all ambiguities" (1.1.82) and his declaration that

Emperors and kings

Are but obeyed in their several provinces,  
Nor can they raise the winds or rend the clouds;  
But his dominion that exceeds in this [magic]  
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.

(1.1.59-63)

As I have discussed elsewhere, Faustus's intellectual project is built on a foundation of occult hermetic philosophy that states as one of its central goals the achievement of a state of being where contradictions become meaningless (Duxfield 2015, 65-88). The *Pimander*, the central text of hermetic philosophy, states that in order to achieve complete and divine knowledge, one must

Become higher than all heighth, lower than all depths, comprehend in thy self, the qualities of all Creatures, of the Fire, the Water, the Dry, and Moyst; and conceive likewise, that thou canst at once be every where in the Sea, in the Earth ... Thou shalt at once understand thyself, not yet begotten in the Womb, young, old, to be dead, the things after death, and all these together (Trismegistus 1657, H6r-H6v)

*Dr Faustus*, then, with its blending of contradictory yet co-existent worlds, its protagonist set on the undermining of conventional intellectual distinctions and its evocation of a state of mind unencumbered by binary oppositions, has already in place a set of dramatic effects and intellectual associations that render it fertile source material for a surrealist film maker.

Another important aspect of Marlowe's work as a source for Švankmajer is its status as a work specifically conceived for, and performed in, the public commercial theater. In this performance context, *Dr Faustus* seems to have been a play with a unique capacity to trouble

the distinction between world and play-world; this much is indicated by the notorious anecdote included in William Prynne's *Histriomastix*, among other places, which told of

The visible apparition of the Devill on the stage at the Belsavage Play-house, in Queen Elizabeth's dayes (to the great amazement both of the actors and the spectators) while they were prophanely playing the History of Faustus (the truth of which I have heard from many now alive, who well remember it) there being some distracted with that feareful sight. (Quoted in Chambers 1923, 423-24)

This story seems to have gained currency as a myth, as another early modern account tells of a performance in Exeter during which the acting company received an unwelcome addition to its personnel: "as Faustus was busie in his magicall invocations ... they were all perswaded, there was one devell too many amongst them" (quoted in Chambers 1923, 424). Whatever credence one pays to these accounts (and Prynne's, appearing as it does in a work of puritanical antitheatrical persuasion, would seem to have a clear motive to associate the performance of the play with the real appearance of the devil), they bespeak an anxiety about this specific play's potential to occasion contact between "real," theatrical and diabolical realms. Andrew Sofer has elegantly attributed this power to the relationship between *performance* and *performativity*: since a conjuration is a performative speech act -- that is, an utterance which performs an action (e.g. "I declare this store open") -- its utterance, whether in earnest and in private or as part of a theatrical performance on a public stage, carries the threat of being successful in its designated purpose. "For Elizabethans," Sofer suggests, "the power to conjure inhered in the utterance itself ... rather than in the will or intention of the speaker" (Sofer 2009, 4). For that reason, the play was able to create a heightened state of

receptivity to other-worldly experience which again recalls Švankmajer's Mephistophelean encounter:

It was precisely the potential for *inadvertent* magic on the part of the players -- the belief that Faustus's spells might operate independent of actor and character -- that thrilled and alarmed Elizabethan audiences, causing them to see devils that were not literally there. (Sofer 2009, 2-3)

If, as Richardson suggests, surrealism's central focus is on "the conjunctions, the points of contact, between different realms of existence," then there could hardly be richer source material than *Doctor Faustus* (Richardson 2006, 4).

### **Magic and Artifice: Švankmajer's *Faust* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus***

Having established some commonalities between the broader surrealist film-making project and the dramatic and intellectual world of *Doctor Faustus*, the rest of this essay will consider in detail the ways in which Švankmajer's *Faust* appropriates, manipulates and reinvents specific aspects of Marlowe's play. In particular, I wish to examine the uses that Švankmajer makes of a metatheatrical strain that numerous critics have identified in the play.

As tends to be pointed out, *Doctor Faustus* is a play full of performances. Lucifer and Mephistopheles stage them at crucial times in order to divert Faustus's attention when it seems possible that he might turn to God. Thus, at the moment when the inscription "*homo fuge*" appears on Faustus's arm in the act of signing the deed, Mephistopheles stages a dance of devils "somewhat to delight his mind" (2.1.81-82), and later, when Faustus appears to be on the brink of repentance, Lucifer introduces the pageant of the seven deadly sins, inviting his victim to "mark this show" (2.3.105). Faustus later becomes a director of theatrical

spectacles himself. The conjuring of Alexander the Great and his paramour for the entertainment of the Emperor Charles V is a case in point. Before summoning Alexander, Faustus offers Charles an honest account of the nature of the spectacle he is about to witness:

But if it like your Grace, it is not in my ability to present before your eyes the true substantial bodies of those deceased princes, which long since are consumed to dust ... But such spirits as can lively resemble Alexander and his paramour shall appear before your Grace in that manner that they best lived in, in their most flourishing estate (4.1.47-56)

By drawing attention to the artificiality of his own staged spectacle, Faustus also momentarily underscores the artificiality of the larger performance of which it is a part: the audience is not about to see a spirit in the likeness of Alexander, but an actor representing a spirit in the likeness of Alexander. Faustus's insistence on the theatricality of his show takes on a tragically ironic dimension later in the play, when he is unable to discern the same artificiality in Mephistopheles's summoning of Helen of Troy: it is at this point in the play that Faustus's embrace of illusory pleasures becomes complete.

Sara Munson Deats has noted the play's association of magic with theatrical performance, both with respect to the episodes just mentioned and in terms of its vocabulary. She points out that "the theatrical terms *art*, *show*, *perform*, and *shadow* are linked with magic to accentuate the similarities between these two arts that employ fantasy and illusion as their media" (Deats 2008, 22). For Deats, the play's equation of theatrical performance with magic represents an engagement with similar associations made in puritan anti-theatrical rhetoric, and ascribes to the theater some of the moral and theological taint associated with Renaissance occultism. As such, the play reveals an ambivalence on the part of the

playwright towards the profession to which he belonged. But the relationship also works in the opposite direction. When magic and theatre are associated in this way, the artificiality of theater -- so often self-reflexively foregrounded by its most prominent practitioners -- serves as an analogue of the illusoriness of any success, fame or achievement derived from the earthly practice of magic or the pursuit of diabolical alliances. Faustus's apparent failure to understand this at the point of the Helen of Troy episode makes a central contribution to his downfall.

The association between occult magic and theatrical performance is, if anything, insisted upon to an even greater extent in Švankmajer's film than it is in Marlowe's play. When Faust follows the directions on the map given to him by Valdes and Cornelius, he discovers at the marked destination a theatrical dressing room. Apparently already aware of the action that the situation requires, Faust sits at a dressing table and assumes the costume of a Renaissance nobleman, complete with skin-whitening makeup, a wig and a bushy false beard (a suggestion of the magician is added by a starry cape). Here, the ordinary, white-collar Faust engages in the kind of imaginary social mobility that so alarmed early modern anti-theatrical writers.<sup>7</sup> What is striking about this scene is how unfazed Faust is by suddenly assuming the role of an actor; as Shera observes,

initially drawn ... into a theatre, Faustus proceeds to behave as though he is vaguely familiar with the demands of this new world. He knows where to find the key to enter the dressing room and, later, he almost automatically applies his costume and stage makeup. With all the skills of a character in a dream, Faustus prepares for his impending theatrical role as though it were strangely routine. (Shera 2001, 137)

Shera makes this observation as part of a reading of the film as engaging with the psychoanalytic concept of the uncanny, implying that Faust's assumption of his new role in some way represents a return of the repressed. This is a reading which takes on an added dimension when considered in relation to the cyclical nature of the Faust story that the film implies through a series of episodes that initially seem to be incidental. Firstly, while perusing his map on his way into the theater Faust encounters a man fleeing the building in a state of terror. Secondly, Faust crosses paths on a couple of occasions later in the film with an elderly and apparently destitute man carrying a severed leg wrapped in newspaper. These scenes find their significance in the film's *dénouement*, when Faust, attempting to escape the devils that have come to collect his soul, runs from the theatre and, in a reversal of the earlier scene, passes another man entering with a copy of Valdes and Cornelius's map. Shortly after, when Faust is mowed down and killed by a driverless car, the elderly man arrives at the scene and furtively carries away his leg, which (like that of his Marlovian forebear) has been severed in the collision. The implication is clear: everything that has happened in the film has already happened before and is already happening again. Thus, Faust appears familiar with his actorly role because he -- or at least previous incarnations of him -- has already played it countless times before.

Equally, though, Faust's familiarity with his new role is consistent with other metacinematic techniques that the scene employs. As the camera positions itself behind Faust and directs the spectator's gaze towards his reflection in a mirror, the composition incorporates an effective screen-within-a-screen. Once he has finished putting on his costume, a new camera angle produces a close, front-on view of Faust's face (presumably still in the mirror, although by now its frame is outside the frame of the shot), at which point his gaze fixes directly on the camera and he sticks out his tongue. The deployment of mirrors and the direct gaze at the camera are both identified by Sarah Hatchuel as techniques through

which cinematic adaptors of Shakespearean drama have sought to reproduce or transpose the effect of metatheater onto the screen, making the spectator aware of the presence both of the camera and of the actor (Hatchuel 2004, 94-126). As such, the audience sees in this moment not just Faust-as-actor, but actor-as-Faust-as-actor; with this effect in mind, the cosy familiarity with the theater dressing room setting makes sense, particularly Petr Cepek, was primarily known for a distinguished career in Czech theater.

Despite Faust's apparent comfort in the dressing room environment, he soon shows himself to be anxious at the prospect of performance before an audience. In another scene which encourages an alienating recognition of the mechanics of the filmic medium, Faust, now fully regaled in costume, wanders around the wings of the theater and finds his way onto the stage. Peeping through the curtain, he sees (and, since at this moment the camera adopts his viewpoint, the audience also sees) people in modern dress filing into an auditorium, with the usual hum and chatter that constitutes the aural build up to a theatrical performance. What needs to be noted here, though, is that this generic auditorium might as easily be that of a cinema: while Faust is ostensibly looking out from the curtain onto the audience in a theater, any audience that happens to be watching *Faust* in a cinema is confronted at this point with what might be taken as a reflection of itself approximately fifteen minutes earlier, preparing to engage in the act of watching the film itself.

If this reflection jolts the audience members into awareness of their status as spectators, the sudden awareness of being spectated upon seems to disturb Faust, whose response is to produce a penknife from his pocket and cut a vertical slash into the theatrical backcloth, through which he then escapes. In retreating from a confrontation with the "reality" of the theatre/cinema audience, Faust moves into another order of reality that exists behind the stage or screen. In this realm, Faust's awareness of illusion, like that of Marlowe's Faustus before him, seems to melt away, as he engages with clay figures and with wooden



marionettes without betraying any understanding of their artificiality. However, as a general rule (although, as I have already mentioned, there are complications to this generalization), the further Faust progresses in his commitment to magic, and the less *he* seems aware of the nature of the illusions around him, the more the film seems to advertise its artifice to its audience. The most striking manifestation of this occurs, in another correlation with Marlowe's play, at the utterance of a performative speech act. Immediately before the signing of the deed, Mephisto (in one of the few passages -- each of which is concerned with the summoning of Mephistopheles and the completion of the deal -- to quote Marlowe directly), threatens to return to Hell if Faust will not formally hand over possession of his soul. At Faust's response -- "Stay, Mephistophilis! / Aye, Mephistophilis, I give it thee" -- a giant, wooden marionette's head lowers onto the head of Faust, and the rest of the scene, like several subsequent scenes, is performed in the medium of puppetry (Švankmajer 1994, 57:40-58:30). Once this transformation has taken place, both the content and the delivery of the verse also becomes distinctly wooden, with undue emphasis and metrical irregularity drawing attention to the clumsiness of the rhyming verse. As tiny good angels repeatedly break the quills with which Faust attempts to sign the deed, the following dialogue is delivered with self-conscious bombast:

FAUST: A mystery, as you *see*

My quill lies snapped in two upon the floor.

MEPHISTO: Do not prevaricate, you've plenty more.

You cannot now deny what we've agreed

So with your blood come sign the deed!

FAUST: Look, Mephisto, stranger still:

Again you see upon the floor a broken quill.

MEPHISTO: Faustus, you try my patience sorely

Take another quill and sign the deed:

My acolytes stand ready and this time you'll succeed.

(Švankmajer 1994, 58:40-1:00:20).

The contrast with the sonorous Marlovian blank verse spoken only moments before is stark.

This heightened artifice is also evident in episodes equivalent to the two scenes Marlowe's play discussed above, namely the entertainment of Charles V and the liaison with the succubus Helen of Troy. In the first of these equivalent scenes, again performed in the medium of puppetry, Faust travels to Portugal, where he has heard that the King is celebrating a birthday. Like Charles, the king requests to see a show -- in this case not Alexander and his paramour, but the slaying of Goliath by David. After Faust very audibly calls for Mephisto's help (Marlowe's Faustus is much more careful to conceal his secondary role in the production of his illusions), cardboard cut-out figures representing the biblical personages are raised in modest puffs of smoke, and are visibly held up from behind by wooden puppet devils. The already obvious ruse disintegrates entirely when Goliath is dropped by his operators, and the King, after some initial amazement at the scene, raises the alarm, occasioning the destruction of his kingdom at Faust's orders. In the film, as in the play, Faust later becomes the victim rather than the orchestrator of one of these diabolical illusions. In the film's most disturbing scene, Faust, on the point of repentance, is presented with Helen, which in this case is one of the devil puppets seen regularly in the film, disguised with the addition of a doll-like mask and wig, a white gown and an imitation vagina created by the means of a hand drill and a pubic wig. Faust removes his marionette's mask and pursues the puppet Helen in his human form, as if the exchange were happening on the plane of reality (although, crucially, the puppeteer's rod remains fixed to the top of his head). Only after

chasing the succubus into the crypt of a ruined cathedral and having intercourse with it does Faust realise his error; catching sight of the devil's red, wooden shell underneath the disguise, his instinctive response -- to vomit -- highlights the difference between his own fleshy, visceral body and the grotesque, chattering, wooden puppet with which he has just copulated. As Hames puts it, "the episode joins the real and the imaginary in a tangible, nauseous and disruptive manner" (Hames 2008b, 92).

The bringing together of live acting and puppetry, of realist representation with deliberately archaic and alienating types of performance, is part of the film's engagement with the surrealist project of examining the points at which different orders of reality meet. While this might seem like a particularly modern -- or perhaps postmodern (although Švankmajer would likely reject the application of the term to his work)<sup>8</sup> -- device, it has a model in Marlowe's play. As I have noted elsewhere, critics writing on *Doctor Faustus* have tended to observe the coexistence of dual generic frameworks in the play, noting its capacity to be read either as a tragedy depicting the fate of a flawed but admirable Renaissance hero whose resistance to theocratic dogma goes a step too far, or as a medieval morality play at the centre of which is a clear admonition against wondering at unlawful things (Duxfield 2015: 65-74). This generic commingling does not simply make available multiple responses to the play's central character, but brings together, as Švankmajer's film does, approaches to representation that are associated with distinct historical moments and that differ on a conceptual level. In her influential study of the early modern subject as realized on stage, Catherine Belsey distinguishes between two modes of staging: the emblematic, associated with medieval drama and characterized by figures standing as abstractions, and the illusionistic, which was emergent on the early modern stage and which aimed to give the impression of human characters with interior lives. In Belsey's terms, "While emblematic staging displays the signified, makes meaning visible, illusionism reproduces the referent,

replicates what is already visible, already known" (Belsey 1985: 24). For Belsey, it is key that the illusionist mode is only emergent and not yet entirely dominant during the heyday of early modern English drama -- both modes of representation coexist on the stage throughout the period. Darryl Grantley makes a similar point with specific reference to Marlowe:

It could be argued that what we see in Marlowe ... is effectively a simultaneity and coexistence of what might be termed the figural impulse, i.e. towards dramatic persona as paradigm or discursive category, and the subjective impulse, i.e. towards interiority and psychological integrity, in short that dramatic *persona* in Marlowe operates as *both figure and character* (Grantley 1996, 227)

Thus Faustus's agonising over the destination of his soul is staged both emblematically by devices such as the presence of good and bad angels competing for influence over his actions, and illusionistically through features such as the great final soliloquy, which gives the impression of a psychologically complex human subject anguished by the realization of his fate. What is important with respect to the current discussion is that the emblematic mode, though still present in Marlowe's theatre and in particular in *Faustus*, is by this time well into the process of becoming outmoded. This juxtaposition of recognisably older forms with strikingly new modes of representation gives those older devices a metatheatrical quality. Grantley writes that

The very outdatedness of the devils as a dramatic device underlines their identity as theatrical mechanisms, in a sort of alienation effect and this is further underlined by the fact that Marlowe pulls out all of the theatrical stops: they enter with thunder and lightning, and on occasion with fireworks. (Grantley 1996, 234)

To an Elizabethan audience, then, the play's more medieval, more emblematic aspects might have had a similar effect to that which the puppetry sequences in Švankmajer's *Faust* have on a modern viewer: they stand out as self-consciously theatrical, nakedly artificial and oddly anachronistic. Indeed, Švankmajer encourages this effect in his film by giving his puppets a chipped and battered appearance that invests them with a sense of antiquity; these devils seem to be from another time as well as another world.

Finally, as Joel Altman has noted, the emblematic mode of representation has implications for the autonomy of the central character (Altman 1978, 381-82). When Faustus deliberates over the direction of his studies at the beginning of the play, the audience is given the impression of a subject with an interior life, and with the capacity to make choices. When, however, his interior deliberation is represented emblematically -- when his thoughts are dramatized by the opposing persuasions of the good and bad angels -- Faustus is deprived of any sense of agency, becoming instead the object of a conflict between external opposing forces. A similar effect is produced by Švankmajer's puppetry, although here it is more explicit. A puppet, after all, requires a puppeteer. When Faust promises to give his soul to Mephisto and the marionette's head is lowered onto his shoulders, he not only enters into a different order of reality but also visibly cedes control of his being, as his movements are operated in these scenes by a clearly visible pair of hands. Faust may have entered an illusory world, but his loss of self-determination is all too real.

## **Conclusion**

I have not attempted to offer a comprehensive reading of Švankmajer's *Faust* in this essay. His is an enigmatic film susceptible to countless interpretations and derived from an eclectic selection of sources, and I make no claim to having arrived at a fixed sense of its

overall meaning (if it can be said to possess such a thing) here.<sup>9</sup> What I hope to have shown, however, are some of the complex ways in which the film engages with its Marlovian source. While the film's playful navigation between different orders of reality and commingling of variant artistic media are characteristic of a markedly twentieth-century set of surrealist interests, on a certain level these are interests which are shared by Marlowe's sixteenth-century play. Where Švankmajer's film sets the puppetry of old Czech tradition alongside realist acting and modern animation, Marlowe's play intersperses the emblematic mode of the medieval theater with the illusionistic mode of the Renaissance and beyond. Where *Faustus* employs metatheatrical techniques to underscore the illusoriness of the fruits of diabolical magic, *Faust* achieves a similar effect through a comparable cinematic self-reflexiveness. The necessary material for a surrealist filmmaker, it seems, is already present in Marlowe's play, and that play, I suggest, has in Švankmajer's film its first and only great cinematic adaptation.

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<sup>1</sup> Renata Adler, in a review of the film, described it as being "of an awfulness that bends the mind"(Adler 1968). Critics who have discussed the Burton/Coghill film include David Bevington (2010, 51), who offers a very brief account of it in his performance history of the play, and Jennifer A. Yirinek (2013), who argues that the film engaged with the late-1960s current of sexual liberation by focusing on lechery as the foremost of Faustus's sins.

<sup>2</sup> Švankmajer's film has attracted some attention in film criticism and cultural studies. Critics to have worked on it include Lorna Fitzsimmons (2000), Peta Allen Shera (2001), Elisa Segnini (2009), and Pavel Drábek and Dan North (2011). While the latter of these sources appears in a literary journal and refers to the film's literary sources, a focused reading on the film's appropriation of Marlowe's play has to date not been carried out.

<sup>3</sup> Švankmajer, in extracts from his diary published with the screenplay of *Faust*, reflects on whether his film is more indebted to Marlowe's *Faustus* or to Goethe's *Faust*, and concludes that the Faust he has created is in important ways unlike those of both of his main sources (Švankmajer 1996, xii). My intention here is not to claim that Švankmajer's film is a direct and unilateral adaptation of Marlowe's play, nor is it to suggest that his debt to Marlowe is greater than his debt to Goethe or his other sources. Rather, I aim to identify and consider the ways in which his film engages specifically with Marlowe's play as a source.

<sup>4</sup> On the play's medieval heritage, see David Bevington (1964), John Parker (2007), Karol Cooper (2014), and Andrew Duxfield (2015).

<sup>5</sup> While Faust ultimately finds his way to the designated spot via deserted back streets and arrives at a dilapidated building, a freeze frame inspection of the map, which only appears on

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screen momentarily, reveals that the destination marked on it actually appears to be the site of Prague's Old Town Hall, the hub of the old town and Prague's most famous building owing to its astrological clock. While there is insufficient space to offer a full consideration of the implications of this here, it is worth noting that, just as Faust's ordinariness lends him the quality of an everyman, the place where he eventually agrees his pact with Mephistopheles is subtly associated with a building that tends to stand symbolically for Prague as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> This, and all further quotations, are taken from the A-text in David Bevington's *Doctor Faustus: A- and B-Texts (1604, 1616)* edition (1993).

<sup>7</sup> Deats remarks of Marlowe's play that "[Faustus's] infernal familiar diverts him from his wavering with a demonic dance and gifts of royal regalia - hollow crowns without kingdoms, robes without offices. In accepting this accouterment, Faustus identifies himself with the much-maligned actor, who frequently dressed in the raiment of his supposed 'betters,' playing the roles of kings and nobles and thus assuming a sartorial position above his station" (Deats 2008, 19).

<sup>8</sup> Michael O'Pray notes of the relationship of Švankmajer's work to postmodernism: "Švankmajer's reputation was firmly established in the West in the 1980s at the same time as the burgeoning of postmodernism. A superficial resemblance exists between his work and this development in the visual arts: they share a zest for the manipulation of historical visual elements in a *bricolage* fashion, and the general disruption of historical and aesthetic coherence and continuity. But, unlike many purveyors of postmodernism, Švankmajer does not embrace its inveterate impotence in the face of humanist themes. On the contrary, his

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stance is essentially radical, always facing outwards towards the world and eschewing self-reflexivity for its own sake" (O'Pray 2008, 42).

<sup>9</sup> In particular the film invites readings in terms of both Czech folklore and the political upheaval experienced in Czechoslovakia throughout the twentieth century, as well as more sustained consideration of its relation to the Czech puppetry tradition, but these are considerations beyond the scope of this work.