As Looks the Sun, Infinite Riches, Valorem: The Economics of Metaphor in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Doctor Faustus*

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The Economics of Metaphor in Three Plays by Marlowe

Abstract

The following essay represents an attempt to apply the literary theory and philosophical investigations of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida to three plays by the sixteenth century English playwright Christopher Marlowe. Deconstruction, as it is has come to be known, is presented as a particularily caustic analytic tool for the interpretation of literary and philosphical texts and more specifically for the critique of the ideological givens or partis-pris which animate intellectual discourse. The three plays chosen, Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta and Doctor Faustus, are read as examples of the impulse, present in much of Western thinking, toward the establishment of an unproblematic connection between thought, language and reality. In each case, the apparently straightforward material or ideal referentiality of the text is disrupted by the very language used to express it.

Résumé

Cette thèse constitue une tentative vers une application de la théorie littéraire et des recherches philosophiques du philosophe français Jacques Derrida à trois pièces de théâtre du dramaturge anglais du siezeième siècle Christopher Marlowe. L'auteur presente la deconstruction, titre donné depuis plusieurs années aux méthodes d'analyse de Derrida, comme outil diagnostique de haute précision pour l'interprétation du texte, et plus particulièrement pour la critique des partis-pris socio-intellectuels et des formations idéologiques de la production culturelle. Les trois pièces choisies, Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta et Doctor Faustus, servent bien d'exemples du désir fondamental animant la plupart des discours occidentaux. Ce désir vise à établir et maintenir une relation non-problématique entre la pensée, le langage et le réel. En tout moment, la référentialité matérielle ou idéale qui se presente d'une manière apparemment stable et clair, subit des perturbations causées par le langage même qui l'exprime.

They all amount, at one moment or another, to a subordination of the movement of *différance* in favour of the presence of a value or a *meaning* supposedly antecedent to *différance*, more original than it, exceeding and governing it in the last analysis. This is still the presence of what we called the "transcendental signified."

(*Jacques Derrida in conversation with Julia Kristeva in* Positions)

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Introduction

As Jacques Derrida has demonstrated, etymology is perhaps not the most rigorous method available to us for the investigation of metaphor.1 It does however serve as a useful introduction to the

1 see Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology", especially 5-17. Derrida suggests that over-emphasis on etymology gives one both a false sense of security (the earliest, often sensory meaning is taken to be the origin of subsequent transformations) and privileges diachronic over synchronic investigations; in

theoretical material which informs the readings of Christopher Marlowe's plays in this essay.

Economics, according to the Greeks, from whom we derive the term, concerned the proper and industrious management of household affairs. It was, in essence, the art of governing potentially errant materials (livestock, slaves, spouses) in such a manner as to ensure the continuance of a (natural) rational order- and of course a plentiful harvest.2 The imperative which informed economics was, paradoxically, to actively participate in the construction and maintenance of an order which *should have existed* without human intervention. The Greek male, through economic regulation, supplemented what according to definition (*natural, rational*) should have been fully present before his arrival on the scene. This notion of economics as the supplemental management of material which, incomprehensibly, has the potential to deviate from what the subject has ordained to be its natural state is what I would like to retain in my discussion of the *economics* of metaphor, its relation to what we now call "deconstruction" and their relevance to Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta and Doctor Faustus.

Keeping in mind the etymological root of the term, a provisional definition of the economics of metaphor could run as

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words, history over system.

2 The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. "Economic": < L *oeconomic(us)* < Gk *oikonomikos* relating to household management, equiv. to *oikonom(os)* steward (*oiko(s)* + house + *nomos* manager). See also Michel Foucault's discussion of Greek "economics" in L'Usage des Plaisirs, 159-203.

follows: the stewardship of semantic and axiological exchange.3 Such an economics, as practised by each of us in writing and speech, like that of Greek household management, aims at the institution and maintenance of a rational (read unproblematic, solid, sure) ordering of linguistic events. The art of governing metaphor seeks to reduce the potentially unlimited *economy* of metaphoric exchange, which is language itself, to a limited - and atleast in the mind of the subject, agential- *economics*.4

A limited economics of metaphor is what a subject devises in order to fulfill his own desire for stable and grounded signification. The limited economics of a text is the strategic game plan initiated by its author to circumvent the discomfort of a language which always surpasses and confuses the borders between proper and figurative meaning and hints at the possibility of an unlimited figurality just beyond the pale of the solid, present referent- and a radical polysemy under the surface of the unitary reading. The text is made to operate under a restricted play of signification. Metaphor, metonymy, synechdote are all permitted to function, but only within a field

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3 Cf. Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology", 17.

4 The distinction I am making here between *economics* and *economy* is readily apparent in the etymology of the terms. Both refer to household management and in more recent times, the regulation of the production and distribution of goods. However, the former as I have already suggested, retains in it a notion of agency that the latter does not. An economics implies a certain instrumentality- a conscious or semi-conscious intervention by the human subject in the regulation of a system. An economy, on the other hand, functions on its own, without- or even in spite of- the subject's will and intention.

governed by an element which remains outside the game. *Outside* the text, at the *inside* limit-point of the text, the borders are closed and "the permutation and transformation of elements is forbidden."5 This *garrisoned* area appears to function as both the production and regulation centre for the rest of the text while simultaneously maintaining a distance from textual play, and a preferential status in relation to the "real" or the "ideal". The aleatory effects of "errant semantics" (perhaps the most common definition of metaphor6) are suppressed or relegated to a textually marginal position, marked as derivative or incidental events. But like the improperly buried ancestor, they return to haunt the centre in ways which put into question its pretensions to self-sufficiency and fundamental control.

These effects have already been exhaustively catalogued by Jacques Derrida in his various essays on Western philosophy; I will concentrate on those which bear directly on my readings of

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5 "Thus it has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it." Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, tr. Alan Bass, 279.

6 Aristotle's definition marks the beginning of this tradition:

> Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transfer being either from genus to species or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy. (Poetics 1475b).

For a complete survey of the history of the definition of metaphor see Mark Johnson, Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor, especially 3-48.

Christopher Marlowe's work.

Most importantly, for this essay, is the power of metaphor to disrupt the institution of an autonomous and stable referentiality, sensible or ideal. Figurality undermines the regime of the auto-determinant Signified, which posits itself as the origin of its own meaning, independent of the language used to "express" it (it is no accident that God in Christianity is *ineffable*). It does this by re-implicating it *in a general economy of signification:* the autogenous, self-present element (God, the Idea, Speech, Reason) is shown to have never escaped its own status as one piece of language among others; and consequently, it must take up its inescapable position within a larger system of meanings, all of which sabotage any notion of originary, *sui generis* signification. Even as privileged a term as "God" can only have meaning within the tissue of signification Western theology has woven around it: God is "the father", "the breath of life", etc., a series of metaphors and metonymies without referential foundation, without epistemological end. The element which seems to inform and *inseminate* the text is revealed to be as dependent upon its apparent product as its product was upon it. Reference depends upon the sign and not its own "non-linguistic" status:

> Sign will always lead to sign, one substituting the other (playfully, since "sign" is "under erasure") as signifier and signified in turn...Knowledge is not a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found. It is rather the field "of *freeplay*, that is

> to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble."7

Nietsche's anti-metaphysical polemic, if we avoid its implicit bias in favour of the body as a source of metaphor, best describes the philosophical implications of the inability of literal proper meaning (the transcendental *referent*) to escape the general economy of the figure8:

> What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic, binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten they are illusions...9

Language's rampant figurality also problematises what Derrida argues is the Western tradition of the subordination of language to "thought". In much of Western philosophy, language is characterised as a wholly accomodating form into which thought, conceived of outside the vagaries of history and the slippage of the word, may be poured. The relationship is a hierarchical one in which thought, like referential meaning, occupies the superior intiatory position, with language there

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7 Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, tr. Gayatre Spivak, xix.

8 The problem with theories of metaphor which situate "original" meaning in the body (i.e. the senses) is that they are unable to deal with *non-sensory metaphors*, or worse, falsely reduce them to a set to physical phenomena.

9 Quoted in Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology", 15.

only to *facilitate* the former's journey to meaning. The "law of metaphoric value", as Derrrida calls it, forces thought back into the language fray, exactly where it claims it should not be: in the context of other terms, dependent upon their difference from each other and from itself for any meaning whatsoever.

This notion of the interdependency of meaning is what Derrida calls *différance*, a neologism which expresses what he sees to be the fundamental characteristics of signification: difference and deferment:

> The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without reference to another element which itself is not simply present...
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> *Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other.10

He argues that all meaning is constructed in a manner analogous to Saussure's definition of the components of speech as *differentially interdependent*, one phoneme having meaning only in relation to every other one. No meaning is ever present unto itself. The plenitude of the sign is the result of a forgetting of the differential structure of language, a happy by-passing of the play of *differance*, which has the appearance of truth, if not

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10 Jacques Derrida, Positions, tr. Alan Bass, 26-7.

the substance. Deconstruction is the exposure of the "cover-up" in much of Western discourse of this state of affairs. In place of the uncomfortable suspension of unitary, stable meaning, we install compensory regimes which limit its effects. Key words, concepts, ideas drop out of the signifying chain and the game of differing-deferring and resurface as self-defining or auto-significant elements around which all others then turn. These are the target of the deconstructive reading, which uncovers the trace of the "metaphysical" term's flight from language:

> We could thus take up all the coupled oppositions on which philosophy is constructed, and from which our language lives, not in order to see opposition vanish but to see the emergence of a necessity such that one of the terms appears as the *differance* of the other, the other as "differed" within the systematic ordering of the same (e.g. the intelligible as differing from the sensible, as sensible differed; the concept as differed-differing intuition, life as differed-differing matter, mind as differed-differing life, culture as differed-differing nature).11

The belief in the status of thought and reference outside of or preceeding language is inevitably linked, in Western conceptions of language to an ideology of the subject as fully present to and conscious of the products of his desire to signify. Enlightenment rationality in particular states unequivocally the fundamental (and necessary) unity between

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11 Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 18-9, quoted in Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, tr. Gayatri Spivak, xxix.

intention and articulation. The path travelled from the desire to say what one means to the ability to mean what one says is clear of any obstacles. Language remains the faithful mimic of the speaker's intent; nothing is lost or gained in the transference. Most importantly, no "errant semantics" get in the way of a successful communicative event. However, the potential of language, once spoken, to perform exchanges unwished for or unthought of by the subject (to yield in other words, the unspoken double of his desire) suggests that he is not completely in control of meaning. An unlimited economy of signification essentially liquidates the subject as conscious agent of his *vouloir-dire*. In the place of the subject fully aware of the teleology and implications of his discourse, Derrida introduces the subject conditioned by his inability to completely master the field on which he plays. Like the Freudian unconscious, Derridean language effects undermine the privileged terms of our understanding of what it means to be a subject. Consciousness and intention are conditioned by their negatives: within the conscious gesture lies the unconscious motivation; alongside purposeful action runs the potential for play.12

The deconstructive reading replaces a confident hermeneutics of recovery (the humanist proposition), with its belief in both the ability of the text to say only what it means and the text's

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12 For a detailed discussion of deconstruction and its relation to the Freudian project of the unconscious see Jacques Derrida, "The Mystic Writing Pad" in Writing and Difference, tr. Alan Bass, as well as Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface", in Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, tr. Gayatri Spivak, xxxix-L.

interpreter's ability to faithfully transcribe it, with a doubtful hermeneutics of *discovery*:

> ...the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely...the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that the critical reading should *produce*.13

It is the task of the "deconstructor" to open the borders of the text and initiate a generalisation of its metaphor economics, to move in other words from a limited economics to a unbounded economy of signification through the retracing of the effaced connections between the derivative, the incidental and the essential, between the apparently self-sufficient, self-contained base value (or centre, as Derrida terms it) and the "secondary" metaphorics employed to make it appear. The deconstructive gesture re-implicates the centre in the entire movement of signification from which it has sought to distance itself. This *retracement* may be considered as a close transcription of the dissemination of meaning in the text.

In Derrida's own writing this often takes the form of a reversal, an up-ending of what the text has privileged as sacred

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13 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, tr. Gayatri Spivak, 158.

linguistic material. Thus in his reading of Rousseau, writing, rejected by Rousseau as a paracite on the body of speech and indicative of the decadent imposition of culture on nature, returns to haunt the "natural condition" of language he wants to argue exists in certain "primitive" societies and in some forms of modern communication. It becomes, paradoxically, the condition for the production of speech, the supplement which *should not have been necessary*- but is:

> Derrida...pursue s that strange graphic of supplementarity" which weaves its way through Rousseau's text. What emerges is the fact that language, once it passes beyond the stage of a primitive cry, is "always already" inhabited by writing, or by all those signs of an "articulate" structure which Rousseau considered decadent...The supplement is that which both signifies the lack of a "presence", or state of plenitude forever beyond recall, and *compensates* for that lack by setting in motion its own economy of difference.14

Speech, defined as the originary form of language, the privileged term in the equation of human communication, is necessarily dependent upon what is characterised as a derivative phenomenon: writing. The presence of the spoken word can only be defined in the context of the trace of absence of writing which runs alongside it. The very characteristics of writing which Rousseau considers to be deletorious to the human subject (its distance from the "presence" of vocality, its "dead letter" quality, its second order nature) are what must be acknowledged as essential

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14 Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, 36-7.

for any meaning at all.15 Derrida uses this same strategy of recuperation of the derivative in his essays on Husserl's distinction between indicative and expressive language and Heidegger's wholesale abandonment of language as inexpressive of Being. (These reversals of what often turn out to be binary pairs (speech/writing, nature/culture, presence/absence) are not necessarily the only deconstructive strategy. They simply follow the lines of what is already written in the text. An exemplary paracite, deconstruction takes up the task of interpretation using the material the text provides, then recombines it to form a new and often contradictory reading of the text's logic of signification.)

This is why it is dangerous to speak about a methodology for the production of a deconstructive reading, especially within the strongly institutional context of North American academic writing with its tendency to turn any interpretive method into an interpretive regime. As Derrida's influence has grown, so has the number of naively "Derridean" readings of texts. Often what Derrida envisaged as a guerrilla vocabulary for a particular reading of a particular text has been hypostatised into a new canonical critical vocabulary applicable to any and every text without regard for the uniqueness of each production. Derrida has warned of the pitfalls inherent in the reification of his vocabulary into a set of universal critical tools. In fact, he

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15 Jacques Derrida, "...That Dangerous Supplement..." in Of Grammatology, tr. Gayatri Spivak, 141-64.

has done his level best to avoid such a development in his own writing by coining then dropping the terms required for each particular piece of writing. Like the close transcription of a language, the good Derridean reading tends to make due with what is there in the first place. Thus, for example, the pharmakon arises out of its use in Plato's dialoque. The supplement takes shape within the textual analysis of Rousseau. Terms arising out of the reading, but not directly out of the text, usually do not last more than a few readings. *Differance* is almost wholly absent for his more recent work.

This is not to say that there are not certain guiding "principles" and strategies in reading deconstructively. No critical project as elaborate and extended as Derrida's functions without a general teleological thematics. I have already touched on what seems to me to be its most important aspect above: the necessity of rooting out the "metaphysical" pretensions of the text through the revalorisation of incidental material and the re-examination of the those terms which function as autoparthenogenic signifieds. If deconstruction seems to emphasis freeplay, seriality, absence, the signifier, it is only because much of the writing with which it deals hypostatises their opposites. Moreover Derrida would not deny that his own writing is at some level caught in the same metaphysical closure as Western philosphical texts. If there is any other law in Derridean critique apart from the law of metaphoric value, it is the law of the inevitability of closure, of the limiting of the

economy of language to a partial economics.

Deconstruction's attempt to free-up the economic system of the text have often come under fire from a variety of sources as either intellectual nihilism and anarchism (as if the two terms were synonymous) or bourgeious quietism characterised by a retreat from the politics of engagement. Not surprisingly, the former originates in the bastions of American institutional literary criticism, the latter from sections of the political Left in France, England and to a lesser extent, the United States.

The conservatives of the literary establishment see in deconstruction a threat to the comfortable aesthetic and ethical interpretations of texts they have been producing since the twin (although not simultaneous) discoveries of Leavisitism and the New Criticism. Its willingness to adopt "perverse" interpretive strategies (the focus on "derivative material") and allow for a certain necessary margin of error in results, its willingness, in other words, to go against the canonical criteria of the humanist reading, labels deconstruction in the eyes of people like M.H. Abrams and Gerald Graff as a black sheep interpretive strategy, not interested in "advancing" our knowledge of literature and society and behaving in a quite "ungentlemanly" fashion toward those who are.16

The political Left's argument against deconstruction focuses

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16 see for example, M.H. Abrams, "How to Do Things with Texts" or Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society.

on its apparent lack of direct political thrust. It is seen as being just too caustic, too sceptical to be of any value in the actual struggle against reactionary forces in modern society, and in some cases, the accusation is levelled that it is really nothing more than a particularily convoluted form of those very same forces. The argument runs that since deconstruction refuses to acknowledge the primacy of the material referent (the essential component of the Marxist dialectic) and instead concentrates on the general "textuality" of human thought (i.e. the suspension *the real*) it removes itself from *the real* struggle and is content with the politically ineffectual manipulation of texts. What such an argument fails to understand is its own inability to break out of the *conservative* bourgeious paradigm of realism. Less sophisticated Marxism commits the very same errors it points out in bourgeious liberalism: the belief in a "real" outside of our rhetorical construction of it and the necessity of a simplified teleology of the "progress" of man.

As more adventurous Marxists have recognised, deconstruction is perhaps the most powerful *political* tool available to them for the analysis of bourgeois ideology in that it best avoids reproducing the very rhetorical structures it wishes to critique.17 The point of attempting to transcribe the movement

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17 See for example Michael Ryan, Marxism and Deconstruction. Ryan goes even further in his equation of political analysis with deconstruction to argue that some of Derrida's vocabulary is applicable to a renewed, "decentred" Marxism, more in keeping with Marx's original ideas than the "state" communism espoused by conservative theorists.

of a text, the vibrations of signification and the lines they follow is not to destroy meaning and claim the institution of an empire of nonsense but rather to trace the movements through which order comes to be- not a dishonourable goal. And one which has great potential as a truly sceptical discourse on discourse, a kind of metapolitical analysis which goes beyond even the most cogent ideology critique in its refusal to acquiese to a sure ground and a ready interpretation of events.

Of course deconstruction's implementary or instrumental effects are not the same as those of more "constructive" interpretive methods. But the question to be asked is, why must textual interpretation always advance a monolithic plan of action of its own? The caustic analysis of a text, one which damages its ability to pass off rhetoric as reality, does not imply that such a manner of interpretation must exist across the board or that actual poltical action (organising a political party, demonstrating against low wages) is invalid. As Christopher Norris says, one could not live in a deconstructive universe. A certain amount of "metaphysics" or "forgetting" is necessary for us to be able to function in the world, but this does not mean that high level analysis should deliberately produce more. Derrida argues that given the immense weight of metaphysical presuppositions at work in Western philosophic and literary discourses, the most useful and the most powerful strategy is refusal. A deconstruction, an endless critique instead of the rehabilitation or reconstruction of fundamentally biased ways of

thinking is the elaboration of this refusal.

Such a stance of permanent or hyper-critique is the one I will adopt in the readings of Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta and Doctor Faustus which follow. This critique will have as its background my own notion of what an economics of metaphor is and how it operates in a text as well as the extended discussion in Derrida's "The White Mythology" of the "coinage" of metaphoric value and the impulse in Western thinking to control the exchange of representations through the construction of a base "Value" around which transformations can occur in an orderly and controlled fashion, while maintaining an unproblemmatic sense of true worth.18

I am obviously not dealing with what would usually be implied by economics (that is to say what we now take to be economics: the study of the regulation of the production and distribution of goods and services). To do so would be to produce readings more in line with the new historicism than deconstruction, in which Marlowe's plays would "represent" in a direct or not so direct fashion the social phenomenon of "economics" in the Early Modern Period.19 Thus, for example, The

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18 To a certain extent, Derrida's reading of the status of metaphoric value in Western thinking is analogous to Marx's analysis of the fetish quality of money in the capitalist system. Gold and silver tend to be taken as values in themselves instead of relational elements in an economic system.

19 Even the sophisticated Marxist historicism of Pierre Macherey and those who follow him, while making considerable progress beyond a simplistic notion of literature as a transparent representation of society, still finds itself interpreting texts as dependent (however subtly) on "social

Jew of Malta would be a litmus paper upon which the mercantilism of Western Europe had left a particular imprint. The value of such a method of interpretation is beyond question. Its only failing, it seems to me, is its tendency to treat literary production as nothing more than the *representation* of society, a signifier for the signified of culture practices, without entering into the peculiar and unique logic of textual practices themselves.

Whether or not one can make a connection at some level of generalisation between the economic use of metaphor in Marlowe's texts and the economic climate of the Renaissance is outside the scope of this essay. Obviously, texts which are replete with references to gold, jewels, acquisition and exchange are concerned in some way with economics in the usual sense of the term. My own interpretation does not preclude a "new historicism" approach, but I think it does offer a more precise analysis of exactly what is going on in Marlowe's texts, not at the level of social economics but at the level of textual production and exchange. Both strategies are valid. Derrida himself, in response to his critics, has argued that deconstruction is not the only way to do interpretation and that his detractors betray the same yearning for unitary explanation and control of the entire field of play which characterises so much of Western thinking about language, interpretation and

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practises" for their meaning. The question is not whether or not such practices play a part in literary production but rather the status of the part they play.

meaning. My readings will inevitably be partial readings. But while they may not be able to "sum up" and finalise the *meaning* of Christopher Marlowe's plays in the manner of a New Criticism reading, they do, I think, offer insight into *how* they mean.

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As looks the sun

The will to domination in Marlowe's Tamburlaine, parts one and two, has been well documented in previous readings of the play.[20] Whether in the the context of Renaissance imperialism or psychoanalytic theory, Tamburlaine and a good number of his

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20 See for example Marjorie Garber, "Infinite Riches in a Little Room" in Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, ed. Alvin Kernan, 3-21.

allies and enemies partake of a seemingly endless desire to conquer others and in doing so, institute themselves as autocratic, despotic rulers over a greater and greater expanse of territory. Nor does the impulse to extend territory and expand the representational *value* of their proper names come to a halt before civilians, be they women, nuns or children. Theirs are not gentleman warrior battles, but strikingly modern wars of total destruction. The imaginary landscape of the play is littered with the corpses of those slaughtered on the way to "the fruition of an earthly crown."[21] Tamburlaine's son Amyras provides the play with an image *en abyme* of its own events:

> And I would strive to swim through pools
> of blood
> Or make a bridge of murdered carcasses,
> Who arches should be fram'd with bones of Turks,
> Ere I would lose the title of a king.[22]

Even the "weakling" king Cosroe, despite his inability to fully articulate the exact contours of his desires (he uses a surrogate rhetorician in the person of Mycetes), remains a full player in the one-upmanship battle for another victory and another country, if not an equal one.

The failure of any one character in the play to complete his drive to "infinite rule", and in particular the failure of

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21 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 2.VIII.29. The imagery bears an amazing resemblance to that in Elias Canetti's analysis of the campaigns of carnage waged by various despots since the fall of the Roman empire. See Elais Canetti, Crowds and Power.

22 Tamburlaine: Part Two, 1.IV.92-6.

Tamburlaine himself, has also been recognised by most major critics. Tamburlaine ends his journey across the map of the world only to find that much of it remains unconquered, vaste territories "...westward from the midst of Cancer's line/Unto the rising of this earthly globe,..." have evaded his grasp.23 There always seems to be *one more* people to massacre and enslave, *one more* piece of ground on which to mark the passage of the conquerer's progress. Only death stops Tamburlaine's unending campaign; and even then, through the transfer of his "vital" substance to his sons, he believes he has created the conditions for the continuance of the war:

> Tam: Here, lovely boys; what death forbids
> my life,
> That let your lives command in spite of death.
>
> My flesh, divided in your precious shapes,
> Shall still retain my spirit, though I die,
> And live in all your seeds immortally.24

But of course the *play* must end somewhere, and considering the amount of territory left to be covered (all of North America), better it be with the end of one generation of conquerers than with conclusion of all conquerers' geopolitical aspirations. Besides, as I will suggest below, it might be that the impulse to dominate has no such definite conclusion. One can imagine Tamburlaine, if he had lived, having to reconquer old victories in rather the same circularity as the earth he travels on. To be

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23 Tamburlaine the Great: Part Two, 5.III.147-8.

24 ibid. 5.III.160-1, 173-5.

God's Scourge demands that one find lands upon which to visit destruction, *eternally*.

This desire for and failure to achieve mastery tends in most readings to be reduced to the content structure of the play, the events in other words: Tamburlaine *fails* because he becomes ill and dies; the various instances of victory and defeat come about according to the logic of plot alone and must be interpreted at that level. While it would be absurd to discuss any piece of literature without reference its "plot", the reading I propose to offer here concentrates not so much on *what happens*, but *how it happens*. At issue is not whether or not Tamburlaine is a play about domination and the failure to dominate. That, it seems to me, is both obvious and ultimately uninteresting. Rather it is a question of the way in which one goes about demonstrating how those themes are articulated within the literary production.

To read Tamburlaine deconstructively is to produce a critique of the language economics indisolublely linked to its presentation, to examine, within the context of the linguistic effects of the play, how Tamburlaine fails, perhaps *must fail*, in his bid to become the sole and premier "lamp of heaven" and why his failure is inevitably a consequence of the semantic rhetoric of the play and not simply the linear presentation of events therein.

What I would like to argue is that the will to mastery of others, and related to this, the institution of the self as the reference point from which both power and victory flow in

Tamburlaine are disrupted by the very strategies employed to mark their appearance. This disruption is constant and unceasing, and accounts for the episodic, non-developmental structure of the play, the sense we have of living the same battle, the same victory over and over again, no matter who is involved, no matter where it takes place. Even what might otherwise by a crucial event in the unfolding of the plot (I am thinking here of Zenocrate's death) does not really alter the course of Tamburlaine's conquests; it at best increases their frequency and ferocity. All the of warrior successes in Tamburlaine are partial ones- and not simply because of the brute fact of more territory to be conquered and people to be subjugated, but rather because the logic of the rhetorical effects of the text demands that each victory require a supplement to itself *ad infinitum*. Each and every time Tamburlaine declares his own plenitude and self-sufficiency in the metaphors he uses, in the images he constructs, those very same enabling devices scuttle the autogenous "Value" they were meant to produce, and oblige him to (ineffectually) repeat the gesture. Each and every time he produces the metaphor of the sun, the image of the conquered foe stooping before his rise to the throne, and the other figures used to refer to his autonomy and infinite power, the metaphor falters, the slave problematises the hierarchical relation by suggesting that he is a necessary element (the image of the other) in the construction of the selfsame, the *figure* indicates representation and difference and not first order referentiality.

I will deal separately with each of the elements suggested above in the following pages and then attempt to connect them to the general problem of the status of a *centre*, a *value* which textual economics demands should *appear outside of the differential constructs of language*, but which textual economy allows only to be *represented* in it.

In the psychic cosmology of the West, before and after Copernicus, the sun holds the distinction of being the centre towards which all other bodies turn. Heliotropes, all of us, we search out the sun as the final reference point for our position in relation to time and space, and the natural world in which these are said to occur. Its light is the supremely *natural* phenomenon, an exemplar of Nature's bounty and her largesse. It *illuminates* that upon which it shines (so that we may see the truth of things, their "actual" appearance) and maintains a regular, uninterrupted cycle of departure and return. Most importantly, the power which is the sun is conceived of as self-generated, independent of external factors for its continued existence. The celestial centre is both the source, the producer and the dispenser of its own being. In discourse we turn to solar metaphors to invoke a wide range of desires for stability, clear referentiality and uncontestable truth. "The clear light of day" is more than an expression. It suggests what the sun always brings: clarity, direct apprehension, an absence of obscurity. The defining character of the sun is its long history of metphoric reproduction in the philosophical and literary

discourses of our society. Like Derrida's "metaphysical" privileged term (the centre, the transcendental signified, Value) the sun appears to operate without the need of language to mark its passage.

The long history of metonymic associations with the sun ranges from the light of truth outside of Plato's cave, the light of religious conversion and faith in Augustine to the solar power of the sovereign king who, like the sun, was the source of the strength for the body politic, its energy source and rallying point. So powerful was such a sovereign that he could not be present in the same room with his or her neighbouring rulers, the danger being that like two atoms occupying the same space or two magnets vying for contiguous positions, the two rulers would be thrown apart, with irreparable damage to both themselves and their kingdoms. (Hence the necessity of intermediaries, representatives of the representative of the sun, who like holders of promissory notes, could negotiate if not with the ruler's actual value, then atleast with a reasonable facimiles thereof.)

The dissemination of the metaphor of the sun in Tamburlaine is an extensive strategy by which characters, especially the protagonist, if we may call him that, are alotted almost superhuman (and perhaps extra-linguistic) powers and capabilities. The sun helps to establish Tamburlaine's god-like status through a transfer of certain of its qualities onto his person and into his actions. It appears at numerous points in

the text, in the hyperbolic speeches of Tamburlaine himself and his baronic supporters and the equally exagerated posturings of his opponents. Moreover, the exact marks of its appearance vary from one case to another. What arises is a complex set of *sub-*metaphors which indicates various aspects of what we take to be the sun: its role as centre and source of power, it ability to "illuminate" (produce the state of appearance of things), its quality of endurance and cyclical movement, its *autogeneity* (like that of a perpetual motion machine, it requires no external energy source).25

Tamburlaine implicitly adopts the traditional definition of metaphor as a relation of similarity between two things, one of which usually belongs to the nature world.26 The relation of similarity arises out of the ability of man to imitate natural, to produce an analogy between it and some aspect of himself. Thus "He is a lion" indicates not only "strength" and "bravery", but the successful recognition by the speaker or writer of the mimetic relationship between a part of man (he) and a part of nature (lion).

The mimetic quality of metaphor, arising out of the traditional definition, allows Tamburlaine to become the sun's *representative*; a state of almost "mystical" communion exists

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25 "Autogeneity": the quality of being self-producing.

26 See Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology", esp. 42-6. Through-out the essay Derrida discusses the tendency to treat metaphor as a correspondence between man and nature.

between them. His qualities mimic those of the sun with amazing consistency. And given that we accept those qualities as inherently part of the sun's *proper* meaning, the metaphor seems to work: the communion advances, as does Tamburlaine. Like the sun, he produces "fire", not only for the production of the appearance of things on earth, but for the very invigoration of the stars:

> Tam: For I, chiefest lamp of all the earth,
> First rising in the east with mild aspect,
> But fixed now in the meridian line,
> Will send up fire to your turning spheres,...27

Like the sun, a repository of value, Tamburlaine has the power to confer worth onto the world, to make it in an sense a result of the exercise of his own will for it to be ("For *will* and *shall* best fitteth Tamburlaine,..."). Zenocrate, Tamburlaine's concubine, is the only other character in the play who is consistently associated with this power to define the phenomenological world through the exercise of one's own gaze:

> Tam: Now, bright Zenocrate, the world's
> fair eye,
> Whose beams illuminate the lamps of heaven,
> Whose cheerful looks do clear the cloudy air,
> And cloth it in a crystal livery...28

In fact, so complete is the identification of his own being and that of his concubinal adjunct with the power and intensity of

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27 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 4.II.36-40.

28 ibid. 1.IV.1-4.

the light of the sun that a second order exchange takes place in which the energy they originally received metaphorically from the sun, is borrowed back by the celestial body from the earthly bodies of its representatives. Tamburlaine's encomium to his own stature which I quoted above ends with the suggestion that the sun may borrow back some of what he has delivered to the stars: "And cause the sun to borrow light of you." Zenocrate too holds the power to empower the sun:

> Tam: May never such a change transform
> my love,
> In whose sweet being I repose my life;
> Whose heavenly presence, beautified with health,
> Gives light to Phoebus and the fixed stars;
> Whose absence makes the sun and moon as dark
> As when, oppos'd in one diameter,
> Their spheres are mounted in the serpent's
> head,
> Or else descended to his winding train.29

This is surely one of the best examples of the hyperbolic quality of speech which permeates all of Marlowe's work: the sense that even the most extreme comparison (sun>man) must be surpassed and superseded. Harry Levin's title for his major exposition of Marlowe's work, The Overreacher, couldn't have been better chosen.

The most striking quality of the sun which Tamburlaine adopts is the ability to reflect or confer a sensible light ambiance on surfaces and objects. Here is is not so much the power of the sun which is being shot forward, but rather the

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29 Tamburlaine the Great: Part Two, 2.IV.47-54.

product or *indication* of that power: illumination- or in Tamburlaine's case illuminatory warning. Just as the sun may reflect the power of its nature on earth (sunlight is a contracted possessive) Tamburlaine *reflects* his emotional state on the city of Damascus according to the colour-coding of his camp (everything from clothing to tents and horses is included):

> Mess: The first day when he pitcheth down his tents,
> White is their hue, and on his silver crest,
> A snowy feather spangled white he bears,
> to signify the mildness of his mind,...
> But, when Aurora mounts the second time,
> As red as scarlet is his furniture;
> Then must his kindled wrath be quench'd with blood,...
> But, if these threats move not submission,
> Black are his colours, black pavilion;
> His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, his plumes,
> And jetty feathers, menace death and hell,...30

With an uncanny clarity, if you will forgive the pun, Tamburlaine takes the ability of the sun to confer a sensible light ambiance on surfaces and transfers this to the emotional workings of Tamburlaine the character. As he prepares to invade and slaughter the inhabitants of Damascus, we are treated to the image of his "reflective signifiers" and the implications of the pale they cast:

> Tam: Now hang our bloody colours by Damanscus,
> Reflexing hues of blood upon their heads,
> While they walk quivering on their city walls,

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30 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 4.II.50-3,55-7,59-62.

Half for fear before they feel my wrath.31

There are many other instances in the play of the use of the sun as a comparison figure for Tamburlaine. Most of them fall within the two categories described above: Tamburlaine is either the source of power, like the sun, or the source of illumination. Both sub-metaphors suggest Tamburlaine's immense weight as a character and as the centre point for the elaboration of domination and victory in the play. I will leave off cataloguing all of them- except for this final one. It occurs on the occassion of Tamburlaine's last battle before his death:

> Tam: Thus are the villains, cowards fled for fear,
> Like summer's vapours vanish'd by the sun;...32

and with simple elegance, establishes that Tamburlaine is truly sun-like, able to exhaustive the powers of others through the natural extension of his own.

By entering into a communion of similarity with what is perceived to be the driving force behind nature and the heavens, Tamburlaine demonstrates his own force in the play as the "Scourge of God" and "Solar Representative." Tamburlaine operates *around* and through its main character. If one were to map out the lines of force running through-out the play, one would find that, atleast according to the textual economics of its production, they all originate in Tamburlaine. Like the sun,

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31 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 4.IV.1-4.

32 ibid. 5.III.116-7.

he envigorates the textual landscape with his larger than life posturings and victories. If the sun is indicative of true value, the centre around which lesser powers gain their strength and from which reality in general gains its being, then the characterisation of Tamberlaine as the sun's metaphorical equivalent, its mimetic double, obviously means to convey on him a great deal of "value" as a originary mark within the textual tissue of the play. Yet each time his identity with "trascendental" elements is established, whether through the praise accorded him by others or his own verbal self-agrandissements, something obliges him (and the play) to move on to *another* confirmation in the form of another battle, another poetic invocation of self-identity and communion with an Absolute (or transcendence of it).

The question is one of the purpose or necessity of the serial structure of the play. A moral or ethical interpretation might concentrate on Marlowe's interest in cataloguing the absurd repetitiveness of war and violence or demonstrating that bloodshed simply engenders more bloodshed. Other interpretations would deal with the historical antecendents to the play in the form of chronicles and their episodic structure.33 What I would like to suggest however, has more to do with the linguistic materials of the play used to produce "Tamburlaine the conquerer" than with ethical or strictly historical data. Perhaps the seeming inablility of Tamburlaine to finish he endeavours, leave

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33 See David Bevington, From Mankind to Marlowe, 199-217.

off his speechifying and end the war, is directly related to the manner in which these have been presented, that is to say, to the poetic speech used to establish their existence.

Derrida's notion of *differance* as well as his long essay on metaphor "The White Mythology" offers an interpretation of metaphor and particularily metaphors of the sun in western discourse which may provide an explanation for the seemingly obsessive quality of Tamburlaine, the instinct to repeat gestures of domination and to voice to oneself and to others one's analogous relationship to a metaphyically conceived cultural object, the sun. As I suggested above, Tamburlaine's metaphorical relationship to the sun is based on a particularily western understanding of metaphor as a relationship of similarity. Such a understanding is part of a pattern in our discourse of using relations of identity (similarity, specularity, selfsameness) to establish unproblematic connections between ourselves, language and the world. Yet in order for metaphor to exist at all, similarity can only be one part of a bipartite definition. Metaphor must also express a certain dissimilarity between the elements involved in the equation so that they may be in *some* way distinguishable one from the other.34 In fact, not only metaphor, but other semantic devices as well require that meaningful elements retain the trace of *differance* in order that they may appear at all. Derrida extends the argument advanced in some of his other work, which disallows

34 Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology", 34-46.

the purely specular representation of signified by signifier, to include metaphor. The unity which supposedly results from a tropic relation between two elements is only possible if difference is suppressed.

Tamburlaine's serial repetition of events is the result of that supression. His impulse towards the establishment of a pure specular identification with "Value" in the form of the sun is doomed to failure. Each time a metaphor is coined, an analogy created, he simultaneously moves toward and away from a relation of equivalence, and is in a sense left where he began (one step forward, one step back): in a world of language in which no equation of similarity can exist without its double intervening in the process, in which presence and unity (in this case, unity with a kind of referential absolute: God/sun/centre/value) are constantly disrupted by the spectre of absence and dissimilarity. Troping carries within it both a turning towards similarity and a turning away from it- a detouring, as it were, which harbours the potential for non-identity: the opaque surface of a blackened mirror.

In a different way, Tamburlaine's impulse to establish himself as a "Signified", independent of his relation to others, through a connection to "Value", is also compromised by the introduction of what should be absolute value (the sun) into the exchange system of the text:

> We have long known that value, gold, the eye, the sun and so on, belong to the development of the same trope. Their in-

> terchange is dominant in the field of rhetoric and of philosophy...It reminds us that an object which is the most natural, the most universal, the most real, the most clear, a referent which is apparently the most external, the sun- that this object, as soon as it plays a role in the process of axiological and semantic exchange (and it *always* does), does not completely escape the general law of metaphorical value: "The value of just any term is accordingly determined by its environment; it is impossible to fix even the value of the signifier 'sun' without considering its surroundings...35

The trope which we are to recognise in value, gold, the eye, the sun is, ironically, the *trope* of absolute meaning and transcendental referentiality: meaning outside of language, meaning which operates, like gold in the capitalist economy, as a fetishistic indicative of plenitude and cornucopic wealth. What Derrida wants to argue is that no term no matter how apparently central to the elaboration of a system is truly independent of the differential effects of that system. Every element in a structure is *en jeu*, or as Derrida's translator has so eloquently puts it, *at stake in the game*. The singular, proper sun *in itself* never appears in the Tamburlaine text. Only the plural can function in a textual economy: there are many *suns* in Tamburlaine, all of which gain their meaning from multiple systems of signification. The sun's strength, its quality of endurance, its lustre are all products of other semantic events. Is not the "lamp of heaven" already a metaphor, and what about

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35 Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology", 17.

Phoebus?

> If the sun is already and always metaphorical, it is not completely natural. It is already and always a *lustre*: one might call it an artificial construction is this could have any meaning in the absence of nature.36

It is not simply that Tamburlaine cannot reach value, as if it existed somewhere out of his reach, but rather that the whole notion of value itself, meaning outside language is an impossibility. Whatever gesture is made toward the sun, the centre, gold etc. is made toward what is already a simulacrum, a copy or image without an original. The dual bind is that he is both unable to directly mimic a sun which isn't really the sun anyway, but a figural construction thereof.

Tamburlaine's drive toward the establishment of himself as a value in itself, with no need for reference to others occurs in more than just the imagery of the sun in Marlowe's play. Running alongside the specular identification of Tamburlaine with the sun are the images of domination exemplified in the captivity of Bajazeth and Sabina and the forced labour (they must serve as Tamburlaine's steeds) of the Asian kings. These are repeated through-out the play with the same regularity as the solar trope. The desire to conquer others in Tamburlaine is not simply a matter of taking control. Rather it is the representational value of the victory which is of importance. The capture of one's enemies allows them be to displayed as the signifiers of

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36 Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology", 53.

one's own infinite power and plenitude: "But yet I'll save their lives, and make them slaves,..."37 Thus Tamburlaine, for a good part of both parts of the play, holds Bajazeth and his wife captive and on display, available for the production of "figures" of his own worth ("Thus am I rightly the scourge of highest Jove;/And see the figure of my dignity,/ By which I hold my name and majesty!").38 The image of the "footstool" is the most striking:

> Tam: Base villain, vassal, slave to Tamburlaine,
> Unworthy to embrace or touch the ground
> That bears the honour of my royal weight,
> Stoop, villain, stoop! Stoop, for so bids he
> That may command thee piecmeal torn,
> Or scatter'd like the lofty cedar-trees
> Struck with the voice of thundering Jupiter.39

When Bajazeth brains himself on his cage and his wife kills herself in grief, Tamburlaine must find new "slaves" to typify his god-like power. These he harnesses to his chariot so that they may drive him, Phoebus-like, over the fields of battle and on to victory:

> Tam: Holla, ye pamper'd jades of Asia
> What, can ye draw but twenty miles a day,
> And have so proud a chariot at your heels,
> And such a coachman as great Tamburlaine,
> But from Asphaltis, where I conquer'd you,
> To Byron here, where thus I honour you?
> The horse that guide the golden eye of heaven,...

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37 Tamburlaine the Great: Part Two, 3.V.63.

38 ibid. 4.III.25-7.

39 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 4.II.19-25.

> Are not so honour'd in their governor
> As you, ye slaves, in mighty Tamburlaine.40

Even the female players dream of the moment when they can force their enemy to enact the image of their own subjugation:

> Zeno: Thou wilt repent these lavish
> words of thine
> When thy great basso-master and thyself
> Must plead mercy at his kingly feet,
> And sue me to be your advocate.
>
> Zab: And sue to thee! I tell thee, shameless
> girl,
> Thou shalt be laundress to my waiting-miad.
> How lik'st thou her, Ebea? Will she serve?41

Tamburlaine's rivals suggest some of the same images of domination that their nemesis actually produces, as this quote of Bajazeth's concerning Tamburlaine shows:

> Baj: By Mohamet my kinsman's sepulchre,
> And by the holy Alcoran I swear,
> He shall be made a lustless eunuch,
> And in my sarell tend my concubines;
> And all his captains, that thus stoutly stand,
> Shall draw the chariot of my emperess,...42

Yet once again we are faced with a situation in which the accomplishment of one's desire (Bajazeth is caged, the Asians are forced by draw Tamburlaine's carriage) does not seem to be enough; more people must be conquered, more slaves must be found to feed the desire for the recognition of one's power and

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40 Tamburlaine the Great: Part Two, 4.III.1-7, 10-11.

41 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 3.III.172-78.

42 ibid. 3.III.75-80.

majesty.

Tamburlaine's use of images of domination to express the absolute power of its protagonist suffers from the same type of problem as does the Hegelian development of self-consciousness which takes the form of an *Aufhebung*, a dialectical sublation of one element in another.43 What Tamburlaine wants to express, through the creation of images of slavery is what the master in the Hegelian dialectic also wants to express: his own self-sufficiency and the derivative nature of the slave. Yet the derivative nature of the slave figure is necessary for the appearance of the master. It functions as a mark of difference which brings into being the apparently self-referential master term. The dominator requires something to dominate, something with which to mark his difference and his singularity. The slave fulfills this role, but in a movement of aufhebung, translated only with difficulty as *sublation*, is both recognised and suppressed at the same time. Without the slave, the one who pulls the carriage or, for Hegel, the one who occupies himself

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43 Obviously the equation I am making between *aufhebung* and the strategy by which Tamburlaine uses figures of the slave to elaborate his own self-sufficiency cannot be taken *à la lettre*. Hegel is developing a very complex argument for the primacy of the spiritual over the sensible, self-presence over absence, unity over disunity within the context of a full-blown metaphysics of the phenomenolgical self. Tamburlaine, while perhaps indicative of the *general* outlines of his project, isn't Hegel in disguise. However, the impulse to mark as derivative what is in reality absolutely necessary is certainly an "Hegelianism" of a sort. For a more detailed treatment of Hegel's metaphysics of consciousness see Ivan Soll, An Introduction ot Hegel's Metaphysics, esp. 7-40 and Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve" in Writing and Difference, tr. Alan Bass.

with the external, sensible material (work) the master considers unworthy, the dominant term in the equation loses its sense of identity. The figure of the dominated is essential for the production of the apparently unfigural, literal value of the dominator, the conquerer, the sun.

The general thematics of my reading of Tamburlaine involves the inability of either the characters or the play to produce and maintain a notion of absolute value or a direct ontological relationship with what is taken to be that value. The impulse to domination and the accompanying desire to exchange the merely metaphorical worth of one's name for a literal, absolute worth, to be as, Tamburlaine suggests, autoparthenogenic, sprung from nothing, is disrupted by the only means the play has of depicting it: language and its structure of difference. "Value" always seems to be one step beyond its elaboration in speech. Once it appears in the dissemination of meaning, it loses its absolute quality, it is put *in play* in a system of meanings.

Tamburlaine unknowingly acknowledges this in his encounter with the fleeing king Mycetes in which the question of the value of the king's crown (already a facimile of "real" power) is debated. Mycetes naively assumes that value can still have force even if it is hidden (i.e. unrepresented, out of circulation)) and consequently buries his crown to hide it from his enemies and thus preserve his own representative quality as holder of the crown:

Myc: Therefore in policy I think it good

> To hide it close; a goodly stratagem,
> And far from any man that is a fool.
> So shall I not be known; or if I be,
> They cannot take away my crown from me.
> Here will I hide it in this simple hole.44

Tamburlaine demonstrates to him that his crown has no worth *in itself*, but is simply a metaphor for the strength of arms and the control of the field. Just as Value can only have meaning within a system of meanings designed to produce it, just as gold can only have worth in the context of the relations of production between people, the crown must remain in circulation in order for it to have any force at all. And once in circulation it becomes subject to the same laws as other "representations": any element is dependent upon surrounding elements for any meaning whatsoever.

Tamburlaine cannot be true non-metaphoric value because he has always already appeared on the theatrical scene of the battle and the play. He is already a "representative" of power, not its originary point of production. This is made clear in the play when one considers the baronial structure implicit in the victories of all the "central" leaders. Power is a circular affair in which the figurehead of the army invests his "power" in his troops while his troops invest him with the "power" of their number and readiness. The exchange does not have a terminus or a originary point except in the textual economics which seeks to establish a limited exchange of linguistic material. Even

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44 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 2,IV.10-16.

Tamburlaine requires the support of a league of armies to continue his conquests, so that his "investment" of Cosroe as ruler:

> Tam: Hold thee, Cosroe; wear two imperial crowns.
> Think thee invested now as royally,
> Even by the mighty hand of Tamburlaine,
> As if as many kings as could encompass thee
> With greatest pomp had crown'd thee emperor.45

is already conditioned by his own "investment" as leader of his own men.

Marlowe's Tamburlaine both moves toward and away from the search for unrepresented value and the "Grail" of true worth. The "naturally" aberrant effects of metaphor and synechdote and the differential construction of language force the play into a double game of desire and frustration, the only end of which is the death of the main character, ostensibly due to having burned the Koran, but most likely from the futility of his "quest": pure being, pure mastery, absolute power, absolute control. An impossibility.

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45 Tamburlaine the Great: Part One, 2.V.1-5.

3

Infinite Riches

If Tamburlaine may characterised as a play about the will to absolute domination, The Jew of Malta could perhaps be described as a play about the will to infinite possession. The dramatic space presented to us is no longer the uncircumscribed territories of the "world" but the very precisely circumscribed space of the Mediterranean city of Malta; but at the centre of

this port city is a character as vigorously active in the execution of his desires as Tamburlaine was in his.

The Jew of Malta can be interpreted according to a variety of critical methods and ideologies. The focus may be on the anti-Semitic overtones of Marlowe's depiction of the "userer Jew" which thus labels the play itself as a potential promoter of racial hatred, or on the reverse of this strategy which demonstrates the hypocrisy of the Christian rulers of Malta in their dealings with Barabas and his own status as victim of the socio-historical conditions of the Renaissance. My own reading tends to follow the same lines as that offered by Stephen Greenblatt in his book Renaissance Self-Fashioning, but reconstituted at the level of language and rhetorical effects rather than that of socio-historical determinations. Greenblatt's emphasis on the impulse to create the self (self-fashioning) in all of Marlowe's characters as well as the differential nature of identity in general move his reading in the direction of a truly caustic analysis of how Barabas both governs and does not govern his own appearance in the text, but stops short of its goal in his confident assumption of the authorial intention of Marlowe himself, his ability to fully govern the economy of signification of the text and his tendency to reduce The Jew of Malta to a mere representation of more "substantive" Renaissance themes concerning the self and social reality.

The impulse toward the establishment of an absolute value,

free from the confines and necessities of language, operates in The Jew of Malta according to the unique conditions of appearance dictated by its own textual economics. This economics does not entail, as it did in Tamburlaine, the inscription of a privileged specular analogy between the protagonist and what is taken to be Value. Tamburlaine gains ontological weight through the metaphoric "incorporation" of plenitude: the qualities of the sun are internalized and then presented as natural products of the *sine qua non* conquerer. In The Jew of Malta, Barabas increases his ontological weight not through the induction of value by means of a "metaphysical" use of metaphor, but rather through the repeated acquisition of wealth as a fetish object. Crisis in Tamburlaine comes about despite the analogy between the main character and a central value; the crisis in The Jew of Malta forces its way on stage despite the attempts of Barabas to benefit from a possessive relation with essential worth. The game of the absolute shifts from a direct ontological correspondence with the the being of the protagonist in Tamburlaine to an indirect "holding" relation with the protagonist in The Jew Of Malta.

The absolute value Barabas wants so desperately to possess takes the form of "precious" metal and stone. Their presence reigns over the his character as luminously as does the sun over Tamburlaine. Gold and jewels are the counters by which Barabas designates his worth:

Bar: Give me the merchants of the Indian mines,

> That trade in metal of the purest mold;
> The wealthy Moor, that in the eastern rocks
> Without control can pick his riches up,
> Receive them free, and sell them by the weight!
> Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,
> Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,
> Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,
> And seld-seen costly stones fo so great
> a price,
> This is the ware wherein consists my wealth;...46

Even the worth of his daughter, both to him and to Lodowick, is is defined within the context of a precious stone. Abigail is the diamond Barabas offers his daughter's suitor. Of course he has no intention of actually parting with such a "jewel sure" but simply uses Abigail as an enticement in the plot to frame a duel between the latter and his competitor, Mathias:

> Lod: Well, Barabas, canst help me to a
> diamond?
>
> Bar: O, sir, your father had my diamonds.
> Yet I have one left that will serve your turn.
> (Aside) I mean my daughter; but, ere he shall
> have her,
> I'll sacrifice her on a pile of wood:...47

Not only his "worth" but his very sense of being is dependent upon the possession of value hypostatised in gold. As he waits below the balcony of his former house, which has been converted in a nunnery, he voices the fundamental necessity of his connection to the coins and stones hidden in the floorboards for which Abigail has become a nun to retrieve:

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46 The Jew of Malta, 1.I.19-28.

47 ibid. 2.III.50-4.

> Bar: Now I remember those old women's words,
> Who in my wealth would tell me winter's tales,
> And speak of spirits and ghosts that glide by night
> About the place where treasure hath been hid.
> An now methinks that I am one of those;
> For whilst I live, here lives my soul's sole hope,...48

Like a ghost, Barabas hovers over the site of his future redemption. Only wealth can return him to the full presence of being and the world of the living. Until then he is incorporal; a half-being condemned to the memory of past wealth. When Abigail does appear with his money bags in her hands, Barabas' ecstasy is apparent. Gold, happiness, strength, power, even paternity are thrown together as if each were both the origin and product of the other. Gold however rises about this potentially unending exchange and is praised as being the original mover of his bliss, the *primus motor* after which all other elements follow. All the terms are simultaneously linked to Barabas through the repetition of the possessive pronoun:

> Abi: Here. Hast thou't?
> There's more, and more, and more.
>
> Bar: O my girl!
> My gold, my fortune, my felicity,
> Stength to my soul, death to mine enemy!
> Welcome the first beginner of my bliss!...
> O girl! O gold! O beauty! O my bliss!49

Barabas is not only "worth his weight in gold" as the saying

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48 The Jew of Malta, 2.I.24-8.

49 ibid. 48-53, 57.

goes, he places his very being in the possession of it. His own status is equivalent to the status of accounts in his counting house, and especially those accounts which have been paid in the base term of the exchange system of Malta: gold. "Paltry silverlings" are "trash" which weary the fingers with "telling" it, something that "men of judgement" should avoid in favour of "infinite riches" enclosed "in a little room."50 Only gold holds the sastisfaction of true value and only the possession of it in massive (infinite) quantities is sufficient to maintain that satisfaction.

Moreover, the possessive relation with gold and jewels is not a static one. Infinite for Barabas is *quantitative*, not *qualitative*. One's stock of wealth must always be added to, supplemented, kept in a constant state of growth. The constant replenishment of the coffers and the precise accounting of new *meanful material* play a large part in Barabas' psychic economics of value. The counting of wealth is Barabas' means of expressing the plenitude of value of the fetishised commodity object. This emphasis on the *quantitative* aspect of value is apparent through out the play. Whenever Barabas is confronted with the decrease or increase of his estate, it becomes an occasion for the detailed reckoning of accounts, an analysis of the *discrete* elements of his loss or gain. The play of course begins with Barabas in the counting house "telling" the results of his latest mercantile venture:

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50 The Jew of Malta, 1.I.47.

> Bar: So that of thus much than return was made;
> And of the third part of the Persian ships
> There was the venture summ'd and satisfied.51

After Ferneze has relieved him of his fortune to pay Malta's outstanding tribute to the Turks, Barabas consoles his daughter with the news that not all his wealth was stolen, that in fact a great number of jewels and gold coins lay hidden as insurance against just such a turn of events:

> Bar: Besides, my girl, think me not so fond
> As negligently to forego so much
> Without provision for thyself and me.
> Ten thousand portagues, besides great pearls,
> Rich costly jewels, and stones infinite,
> Fearing the worst of this before it fell,
> I closely hid.52

Barabas compulsively enumerates the elements which make up the general category of wealth as if *more* and *different* coins and gems would somehow surpass what he already conceives of as an *infinite* value, as if the distribution site of wealth were in constant need of supplementation.

Along with this impulse to analysis the exact composition of his wealth, Barabas is constantly involved in the comparison of relative worth, something with which all of Malta seems obsessed. His notion of his own value is intimately dependent upon its difference from that of the rest of the town. His fate at the hands of its Christian government is according to him,

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51 The Jew Of Malta, 1.I.1-3.

52 ibid. 1.II.246-52.

quantitatively different from that of the Old Testament figure in which his fellow merchants suggest he find comfort:

> Bar: What tell you me of Job? I wot his wealth
> Was written thus: he had seven thousand sheep,
> Three thousand camels, and two hundred yoke
> Of labouring oxen, and five hundred
> She asses; but for every one of those,
> Had they been valu'd at indifferent rate,
> I had at home, and in mine argosy,...
> As much as would have bought his beasts and
> him,
> And yet would have kept enough to live upon...53

His original wealth gone, Barabas requires little time before he has multipied his estate beyond the bounds it first occupied. Again, its worth is relative to that of another character:

> Bar: In spite of these swine-eating
> Christians,...
> Am I become as wealthy as I was.
> They hop'd my daughter would ha' been a nun;
> But she's at home, and I have bought a house
> As great and fair as is the governor's;
> And there, in spite of Malta, will I dwell,...54

Other characters are equally as involved in the comparison of "possessions" to ascertain their exact position within the acquisitional hierarchy. Mathias and Lodowick cross swords over what is essentially perceived to be a question of who will possess the "jewel" of Barabas' paternity and thus increase his possessional worth beyond that of his rival:

> Mat: What greater gift can poor Mathias have?
> Shall Lodowick *rob* me of so fair a love?

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53 Jew Of Malta, 1.II.185-91, 193-4.

54 ibid. 2.III.7,11-15.

My life is not so dear as Abigail. my italics 55

When their dual has been played out and both lie dead, their respective parents forestall emnity between themselves by agreeing that their "losses" are equal:

> Fer: Come, Katherine; our losses equal are;
> Then of true grief let us take equal share.56

The comparative value of profits and losses are it seems the one thing upon which all Maltese can agree. A web of exchange and differential comparisons surrounds Barabas: the Governor must pay a massive quantity of gold in exchange for peace; Ithamore and his rag-tag co-conspirators use extortion (pay the equivalent of the knowledge we have that will damage you) to finance their pleasures; Barabas agrees to save the town and reinstall Ferneze in power in exchange for coin.

The paradigms then of Barabas' interest in gold as a "hyperbolic" value object are reiteration of its value *in itself*, its absolute quality, through the counting of its discrete units, and the circulation of that value within a comparative economy of worth.57 Repetition and difference are the defining marks of the value Barabas has established as both the origin and production point of "bliss." Only through the continual exercise of both

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55 The Jew of Malta, 3.I.351-3.

56 ibid. 3.III.38-9.

57 The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. "hyperbole": <Gk *hyperbole* excess, exaggeration, throwing beyond,...

does the fetishistic exchange value retain its absolute power.

Everything in Malta works on the principle of relative exchange worth. And in the middle of this *economy*, perhaps in contradistinction to it: the absolute *economics* of Barabas. The question is which has precedence. Can there be an centripedal value system inscribed within a general economy of exchange? And more specifically, are the strategies Barabas uses in the construction of such a system *sufficient* for its maintenance or do they actually participate in its deconstruction? I would like to argue for the latter. The methods employed by Barabas in the establishment of gold and precious stone as value *itself* and his privileged relation to it, are also what disrupt the entire self-defining strategy. This disruption hinges upon the catchphrase Barabas coins early in the play and to which I have already made reference. I repeat it here in its entirety:

> Bar: And thus methinks should men of
> judgement frame
> Their means of traffic from the vulgar trade,
> And, as their wealth increases, so inclose
> Infinite riches in a little room.[58]

Barabas wants to argue that gold is analogous to the possession of *infinite* riches: pure plenitude, absolute value. Like the ore hidden in the bowels of the earth, these riches are hidden ("in a little room"), closed off from the actual circulation of material which characterises the social management of value or "the vulgar trade.". Moreover, this wealth which plays no part

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58 The Jew of Malta, 1.I.34-7.

in the derivative exchange economy of Malta is also undifferentiated (there are not discrete units) and unquantifiable (one cannot count an infinite value). These riches are in-finite in the sense that they occupy a position outside the second order system of exchange in which all other value is constructed, having neither quantifiable nor comparative worth. They exist, or should exist, *sui generis*.59

Yet strategies of quantification and comparison are exactly what Barabas uses to make his "absolute" value (fetishised gold) function as such. These are his *economics*. Gold and jewels are accumulated and compared, exchanged and bartered ostensibly to reflect their inherent value. Yet in being treated as counters for other forms of worth they fail to live up to the exclusionary definition of absolute value. They always exist within an already constructed differential system of value in which no one element has precedence over others. The emphasis on the fetish quality of gold in The Jew of Malta requires the suppression of its inability to function outside a general economy of exchange. The "infinite riches", Barabas so desperately wishes to possess must always remain "in the earth", unexchangeable and uncounted, hidden from sight. Like the "transcendental signified" which preoccupies Derrida, infinite riches, once released into the

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59 It is not suprising that in the history of the term "infinite" it is linked with other self-producing, self-defining referents like God and Reason. Various definitions of "infinite", to be found in any dictionary, also relate it to qualities of unboundedness, limitlessness, indeterminacy and *absolute being* (as in the *infinite* wisdom of God).

circulation system of elements which makes up both our linguistics and our economies, becomes just one element among others. All qualities of plenitude and presence are replaced with the general law of metaphoric value: definition is a contextual affair. Absolute value, as in Tamburlaine, can never really appear in the text: only a simulacrum in the form of precious metal can participate in the economy of difference which is the defining characteristic of Malta's financial and commodity system.

I argued in the reading I gave of Tamburlaine that the serial, endlessly repetitive quality of the play was not simply an accident of the plot but an inevitable consequence of the rhetoric and the failure of the rhetoric of the absolute conquerer, the seat of power sui generis. It seems to me that something of the same sort in going on in The Jew of Malta. It too seems to advance with little sense of development. Barabas loses his wealth to Malta's government; he gains it back only to lose it once again- along with his life: it seems more important to be involved in the active pursuit of wealth than in its actual possession. The Christians are thwarted; the Turks gain the upper hand then the Christians return to power. The cycle of revenge increases to a greater and greater pitch as we near the "climax" of the play, but it never really changes in quality. Barabas' will to violence and revenge is as absolute as he believes is the gold he amasses through the course of the play. It extends beyond "legitimate" revenge against those who have

wronged him to include everyone with whom he comes into contact:

> Bar: Know, Calymath, I aim'd thy overthrow:
> And, had I but escap'd this stratagem,
> I would have brought confusion on you all,
> Damn'd Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels!60

In fact near the beginning of the play Barabas makes it quite clear that his ideal would be the destruction of everyone except his daughter (who, its turns out later is not really that important), himself and his wealth:

> Bar: Why, let 'em come, so they come not
> to war;
> Or let 'em war, so we be conquerors.
> (Aside) Nay, let 'em combat, conquer
> and kill all.
> So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth.61

As he prepares for the destruction of Calymath and his men, this same desire to be totally alone, in solitary communion with his possessions is equated with life itself:

> Bar: For, so I live, perish may all the world!
> Now, Selim Calymath, return to me word
> That thou wilt come, and I am satisfied.62

Just as Tamburlaine's strategies for establishment of his own sui generis power are disrupted by the double which runs alongside their positive "constructive" power, Barabas too is forced to use materials for the construction of absolute value

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60 The Jew of Malta, 5.V.88-91.

61 ibid. 1.I.153-6.

62 ibid. 5.V.11-13.

which in the end destabilise the construction, forcing him to constantly supplement it through repetition. His counting of gold, instead of expressing his relation to an absolute, disallows any such thing. The gold and jewels Barabas amasses are never wealth in the absolute but simply quantitative *representations* of wealth. Once expressed in the exchange economy of relative worth, they to becomes relative, one set of metaphoric representations among many. Such wealth is always defined against other wealth. And of course other wealth is always the property of other people. His desire to exist one his own, with only his wealth and himself present is the extreme reaction to the differential economy which continually disrupts his absolute economics of value. In a last ditch attempt to establish the rule of infinite value outside the need for repetition and difference, Barabas seeks to be quite simply outside of any economy whatsoever. If difference in the form of others and their comparative wealth can be eradicated, then true value can be permitted to come out in the open, out of the earth, out of the "little room". The seemingly *illogical* vehemence of his reponses to those around him is entirely *logical* within the context of the search for absolute value and the plenitude of undifferentiated meaning. Of course even if he were to succeed in instituting a "world of his own" this would not bring into being "Absolute Worth." His own position as subject, marked off from the object he wishes to possess would maintain the inescapable separation of the absolute into a discrete value. He

would possess once again only a comparative object of his desire and not the thing itself.

The Jew of Malta is an example of the impossibility of instituting a central value without that value being implicated within a general system of signification. Just as Marx argued that gold's fetishistic quality was an illusion based on the need of capitalism to suppress the actual elements of the mode of production of wealth, a deconstructive reading of The Jew of Malta suggests that that same fetishistic quality in the play is indicative of the need to suppress the discomforting effects of language and institute a regime of stability, pure referentiality and plenitude of meaning. The inevitable destabilisation of such thinking occurs within the tissue of the text. The double of presence and the signified haunt the economics of Barabas' textual landscape, both expressing and conditioning the course of its development. Plenitude remains underground. A "Value" to be searched for but never truly found.

4

Valorem

In the sky: a solar trope; under the ground: the massy entrails of the earth; the noumenal value in all its brilliance and lustre never appears, never can appear, within the differential economy of our means of expression: language. It is always *elsewhere*. The search for the thing itself, self-producing, self-defining never turns up anything but a simulacrum, a copy for which the

original is absent, a copy defined by its own contextual position within the articulation of its necessity. Tamburlaine not only fails to identify himself with the sun, but fails the establish the existence of such a plenitude of power in the first place. Omnipotence and ontological surety fall before the neurotic necessity of more conquests and more solar "specularisms" *ad infinitum*. Barabas is condemned to the endless repetition of the accumulation of material in the (doomed) hope that his supplementation will somehow produce that which should not be supplemented: the absolute plenitude of worth outside the derivative system of spacing and temporal intermittancy of signification (one step forward, two steps back). In each case, the necessities of language (difference, division, discrete units) disrupt the desires that animate it. Movement toward the pure centre of meaning is also movement away from it: not so much the work of Sisyphus as that of the Danaides for whom the action of filling is also the action of emptying, a productive supplementation, an endless lack.

Doctor Faustus is no exception to "the general law of metaphoric value" nor to the impulse to circumvent that law through the introduction of economic "amendments" to limit its effects. Like those in Tamburlaine and The Jew of Malta, the *notwithstanding* clauses in Doctor Faustus both suggest and deny the absolute element which they were designed to produce. Below the surface (textual, psychic) of the confident assumption of victory over unmanagable material runs a counter-proposition half

hidden, half articulated which suggests the impossibility of control and the irreducible distance between desire's object and the will to make it appear.

The question is, what conditions the will to the absolute in Doctor Faustus or conversely, what is the particular nature of the absolute Faustus aims to establish? One of the most common responses in the interpretive criticism of the play has been *knowledge*.[63] A will to *absolute* knowledge. Faustus is characterised as the Icarus figure who in search for ever and ever greater revelation falls harder and further than those who remain at a lesser altitude of thought. My reading of the play retains this general category of a search for knowledge but sets it going within the context of a deconstructive reading which argues that the elements used for the production of absolute knowledge are the very things which block the endeavour. The kind of knowledge to which Faustus desires to have access is unavailable within the confines of a language which disallows the appearance of the noumen, the thing in itself, whether it be knowledge, being or worth. Once the absolute is introduced into language, it gains specificity and (differential) definition and loses the very mystic quality for which it is sought. Moreover, in Doctor Faustus, the derailment of the protagonist's project is an inevitable consequence of the *relationship* he wishes to establish between himself and his "absolute knowledge." Not only

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63 see for example Harry Levin, The Overreacher or J.P. Brockbank, "The Damnation of Faustus" in Marlowe, Clifford Leech ed.

does Faustus fail to bring complete knowledge into being but the anguished logic of his own status demands that this be so. Faustus wants to contemplate the whole of understanding in much the same way as Barabas wanted to consciously possess the whole of value. His goal is to erase the differences between himself and knowledge while simultaneously maintaining the subject/object division which allows him to recognise it as something other than himself. Knowledge must be everything yet something particular, all-encompassing yet encompassed. Depending upon which side of the equation he choses, Faustus is forced either to lose his own sense of being and become part of a knowledge which is indescribable and thus unknowable (both to him and to us) or create a substitute for the absolute which by its own incompleteness forces him to constantly supplement its weight. Loss of self through union, or eternal recognition of self through difference, this the dilemma which is played out in Faustus' oscillation between the desire for knowledge of God and knowledge of Lucifer.

At the beginning of the play we find Faustus in his study reckoning the comparative worth of various scholarly subjects in much the same manner as Barabas reckons his profits and losses in the counting house at the beginning of The Jew of Malta:64

> Fau: Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin
> To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess.65

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64 Harry Levin, The Overreacher, 113.

65 Doctor Faustus, 1.I.1-2.

Moreover Faustus, like Barabas, is in the grip of a general dissatisfaction with the worth of the results of his endeavours. Each subject, no sooner embraced as the "greater miracle" is cast aside as a partial, derivative art, unfit for "Faustus' wit":

> Fau: Sweet Analytics, 'tis thou hast ravished me.
> *Bene disserere est finis logices.*
> Is "to dispute well logic's chiefest end"?
> Affords this art no greater miracle?...
> Be a physician, Faustus: heap up gold
> And be eternized for some wondrous cure...
> Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man.
> Couldst thou make men to live eternally,
> Or being dead, raise them to life again,
> Then this profession were to be esteemed...66

With logic and medecine banished as incomplete subjects Faustus goes on to try the wisdom and power of law and divinity:

> Fau: Physic, farewell. Where is Justinian?
> *Exhaereditare filium non potest paterm, nisi-*
> Such is the subject of the institute
> And universal body of the law.
> This study fits a mercenary drudge,
> Who aims at nothing but external trash,...
> When all is done Divinity is best...
> Yet we must die, an everlasting death,...
> Divinity, adieu!67

No matter what subject Faustus turns to, it reveals itself to be "nothing but external trash" unworthy of Faustus' abilities. Each is a deficient form of knowledge, a part-knowledge unable to produce the infinite knowing which is characterised by the

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66 Doctor Faustus, 1.I.6-9,14-15,23-6.

67 ibid. 1.I.27,31-5,37,46,48.

erasure of all differences and the infinite extension of thought. Only necromancy promises the "world of profit and delight" Faustus desires, one which, according to him, "Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man:..." and "Resolve s me of all ambiguities,...":68

> Fau: These necromantic books are heavenly,
> Lines circles, scenes, letters and characters:
> Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires...
>
> Philosophy is odious and obscure.
> Both law and physic are for petty wits.
> Divinity is the basest of the three.
> Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible and vile.
> 'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me.69

Faustus' pact with Lucifer through his intermediary Mephostophilis provides him with the quality of knowledge (and the power that goes with it) that no other discipline can provide, not simply external trash, knowledge differentiated and finite, but a knowledge so powerful, so all-encompassing in its being that it has the ability to fulfill all desires, to make one desire *quite simply nothing*:

> Cor: Then tell me, Faustus, what shall we three want?
>
> Fau: Nothing, Cornelius. Oh, this cheers me soul!70

And the end of desire is also the institution of absolute

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68 Doctor Faustus, 1.I.60,79.

69 ibid. 1.I.49-51, 105-9.

70 ibid. 1.I.147-8.

knowledge ("Now will I make an end immediately.").71 Faustus willingly gives his soul for the ability to progressively eradicate the space between himself and the totality of knowledge he seeks to find. In the limited span of twenty-four years, he attempts to accumulate the hidden secrets of the phenomenological world in the hope of finally possessing the ability to say, with completely surety "sic probo" on each and every subject. These range from natural science and astronomy to ontology and metaphysics. What most characterises Faustus' relation to Mephostophilis is the incessant flow of information from the latter to the former. Faustus is very much the inquisitive scholar:

> Fau: Stay, Mephostophilis, and tell me
> What good will my soul do thy lord?72
>
> First I will question with thee about hell.
> Tell me, where is the place that we call hell?73
>
> Now would I have a book wherein I might see
> all the characters and planets of the heavens,
> that I might know their motions and dispositions.74
>
> Nay, let me have one book more, and then I
> have done, wherein I might see all plants,

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71 Doctor Faustus, 1.V.71. See also Edward Snow's intepretation of the play in Renaissance Mythmakers, ed. Alvin Kernan, in which "making an end" is linked in a more directly pyschoanalytic fashion to Faust's desire for the elimination of the phenomenological (temporal, spatial) character of the self and its replacement by a pre-Oedipal unity with the external world.

72 Doctor Faustus, 1.V.38-9.

73 ibid. 1.V.118-19.

74 ibid. 1.V.172-4.

herbs and trees that grow upon the earth.75

Now tell me, who made the earth?76

In a manner similar to that of Barabas, Faustus attempts to establish his knowledge of the absolute through the accumulation of particular instances, discrete *units* of the absolute, which taken together, summed up, equal the whole. The material for Barabas' desire is fetishised wealth masquerading as noumenal value. Faustus' "desire material" is the knowledge of the phenomenal world which can be provided to him by Mephostophilis. Infinite knowing is to be brought into being by means of a reckoning of events, a counting up of one's knowledge of the movements and origins of things in the sublunary sphere.

Yet, ironically, these seem to partake of the very same "derivative" quality as did the subjects he so distainfully dismissed in his movement toward the discovery of necromancy and magic. Moreover they are the result of action which is directly linked to the human learning he rejected. The pact between Faustus and Lucifer takes the form of the worst kind of "paltry" learning: a legal contract:

> Fau: Lo, Mephostophilis, for love of thee
> I cut my arm, and with my proper blood
> Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's,...
>
> Mep: But, Faustus, thou must write it in
> manner of a deed of gift.77

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75 Doctor Faustus, 1.V.176-8.

76 ibid. 2.I.69.

77 ibid. 1.V.53-5, 59.

one that even takes into account the necessary legal terminology and due custom- including his signature:

> Fau: I, John Faustus of Wittenburg Doctor, by these presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer...and his minister Mephostophilis, and furthermore grant unto them that four and twenty years being expired,...full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood or goods, into their habitation wheresoever.
> By me, John Faustus.78

In exchange for his soul (a legal exchange) Faustus is given access to knowledge which partakes of the "external trash" of which he wished to be rid. Not only does it partake of the derivative understanding of logic, law and divinity, it directly mimics it. With a precise and uninterrupted logic, Faustus spends his twenty-four years establishing the exact same knowledge he already possessed in his study of the philosophy, physic, law and divinity. His queries are answered by Mephostophilis using the same material to be found in the books in his own library:

> Mep: As are the elements, such are the heavens,
> Even from the moon unto the empyrial orb,
> Mutually folded in each other's spheres,
> And jointly move upon one axle-tree,
> Whose termine is termed the world's wide pole...
>
> Fau: But have they all one motion, both *situ et tempore*?
>
> Mep: All move from east to west in four

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78 Doctor Faustus, 1.V.107-14.

and twenty hours upon the poles of the world, but
differ in their motions upon the poles of the zodiac.

Fau: Tush, these slender trifles Wagner can decide.
Hath Mephostophilis not greater skill?79

Faustus' "Oh thou are deceived." epitomises his relation to the information with which Mephostophilis has provided him. A deception has been perpetrated against him. He has not obtained the contrary to the "external trash" of ordinary human learning and cognition, but rather its mimetic double. His search for absolute knowledge was in fact his own lost wanderings among the same derivative material he desired to escape. The union with knowledge turns out to be just another separation of knower from known. Some of the information may be novel but none of it is more than a finite quantity, a partial, objectified cognition and not the plenitude of pure and undisturbed knowing which characterises the absolute.

Faustus' questions about the natural world are easily answered by Mephostophilis whatever their relative worth; those which deal with metaphysics prove to be, atleast for Mephostophilis, of unbearable discomfort, especially when they concern his own Absolute- the one he rejected- God:

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

Mep: Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
Think'st thou that I saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?

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79 Doctor Faustus, 2.I.38-50.

> Oh, Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,
> Which strike a terror into my fainting soul.80

Mephostophilis is not the only one who has difficulty dealing with God and the knowledge of the "joys of heaven". Through-out the play God occupies a strangely powerful yet absent position, a kind of "present absence" which defines all of Faustus' actions. Faustus conceives of his interest in necromancy as a rejection of God, Jove's deity:

> Fau: There is no chief but only Belzebub,
> To whom Faustus doth dedicate himself.81

Yet this rejection does not mean that God is a dead letter, something to be scorned and forgotten. As Faustus amasses his phenomenological knowledge of the world in the vain hope of establishing the reign of absolute knowledge and the destruction of the barrier between himself and its plenitude, God, undefined and absent from the text, a mark without a content, returns as a constant reminder to Faustus that he has given something up, lost the origin of a strong and insistent desire:

> Fau: Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned?
> And canst thou not be saved?...
> Despair in God and trust in Belzebub.
> Now go not backward. No, Faustus, be resolute.
> Why waverest thou? Oh, something soundeth in
> mine ears
> Abjure this magic, turn to God again.
> Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.

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80 Doctor Faustus, 1.III.75-82.

81 ibid. 1.I.56-7.

To God? He loves thee not.82

And each time Faustus confronts himself with the eternal loss of the "knowledge" of God (the defining characteristic of the damned) his response is a perverse refusal to seek salvation, to give up his worldly passions and imbrace the infinite mercy of the deity. Even at the end of his twenty-four years, with the impending horrors of Hell weighing upon his thoughts, he refuses to make that simple gesture of contrition which will absolve him of sin and unite him with the very mystical knowledge for which he has beem searching:

> Fau: Ah Faustus,
> Now hast thou but one bear hour to live,
> And then must thou be damned perpetually...
> Oh, I'll leap up to my God:...
> No, no. Then will I headlong run into earth.83

Faustus is caught between the two equally disturbing and frightening choices: indicate his desire to be with God, to become part of the absolute of God's knowledge and in doing so lose his own position as subject, or continue to reject the suffocating "mercy" of God and embrace the horrors of hell where he will be eternally conscious of the incompleteness of his knowledge and the derivative nature of his own consciousness. He is caught between competing forms of infinity. The infinity of God which exists somewhere outside language and thus outside

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82 Doctor Faustus, 1.V.1-2, 7-10.

83 ibid. 5.II.143-4,156,165.

human consciousness or the infinity of hell in which his desire will continue to be frustrated in its attempt to establish and commune with a knowledge beyond that of the "external trash" of mere human understanding. Hell really is as Mephosotophilis so eloquently describes it:

> Mep: Hell hath no limits, nor is circumcribed
> In one self place. But where we are is hell,
> And where hell is ther must we ever be.
> And to be short, when all the world dissolves
> And every creature shall be purified,
> All places shall be hell that is not heaven.84

Where we are (or where the subject is) is hell: forever cut-off from the "joys of heaven" and eternally conscious of the incompleteness of human knowledge and the differential quality of its production. Hell is the necessity of language which maintains a transitive distance between the subject and the object of its desire, which forever turns the plenitude of meaning of the deity into mere Divinity studies, the empty rhetoric of philosophy and the secondary worth of the law.

Absolute knowledge is cast in the person of the deity, the ultimate "Referent", operating without need of the differential economy of language, yet ironically unable to appear in the text (only the devil and his ministers appear corporally to Faustus) except in the guise of an angel, a mere synecdote of power. Faustus' "tragedy" is the inability to know more than the absolute's synechdote. His apirations for the plenitude of

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84 Doctor Faustus, 1.V.124-29.

knowledge condemn him to eternal recognition of his failure. He really is damned; but it is the inevitable damnation of language and its refusal to sanction the presence of the transcendental deity within its own differential economy. The thing itself remains absent; only its linguistic representation is knowable. Like the second person in Faustus' latin quote concerning inheritance, we are all in the position of having to accept *relative* value and forego *absolute* worth:

> Fau: *Si una eademque res legatur duobus,*
> *Alter rem, alter valorem rei etc.,...*85

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85 Doctor Faustus, 1.I.28. If one and the same thing is bequethed to two people, one of them should have the thing itself, and the other the value of it (principle attributable to Justinian according to J.B. Steane).

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Conclusion

The will to domination. The will to possession. The will to knowledge.86 Behind each "will", the desire for plenitude, the hidden treasure, the end of desire, absolute meaning founded above and beyond the derivative economy of language. In each of

86 This formulation is borrowed from Marjorie Garber, "Infinite Riches in a Little Room" in Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, ed. Alvin Kernan, 3.

the three plays by Marlowe I have discussed in this essay, Tamburlaine the Great, Jew of Malta and Doctor Faustus, the impulse toward the institution of an *economics* of metaphor is also the impulse to legitimate a comforting theory of language, one which allows for the appearance of the "Referent" within the text without its being at *stake* in the game of signification. The general economy of language and the unlimited exchange of semantic material implied therein is suppressed in favour of a centripedal system in which all elements except one are open to alteration and conditioning by others. Their exchange however, may only take place within the orbit and subject to the context (the solar exposure) of that one element which operates according to the metaphysical "rules" of absolute presence and auto-referentiality:

> The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play.87

The deconstructive reading, in a manner similar to a Freudian interpretation of the return of the repressed, retravels the surface of the text to highlight those moments in which the repressed economy of language makes its appearance. The impossibility of specular identification in Tamburlaine arises out of Tamburlaine's use of what should be an analogy-building

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87. Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, tr. Alan Bass, 279.

devite, metaphor, only to find that it carries him away from the sun and not toward it; the forever supplemental quality of wealth in The Jew of Malta is the result of Barabas' inability to establish absolute value outside the general exchange economy of Malta; the denial of communion with absolute knowledge in Doctor Faustus is the only way for the protagonist maintain his own status as subject, yet it also condemns him to the very "external" incommunicative world he wishes to overcome.

In each case the logic of *différance* overcomes the logic of the "Signifier", the centre which seeks to define the periphery as an ancilla to its own power. The regime of the "transcendental signified" never quite establishes the incontestable legitimacy of its rule; but must constantly reiterate, like the Greek household managers I spoke of at the beginning of this essay, its ascendency over fundamentally unrule material. The economics of metaphor, of the text, never fails to attempt to establish order; nor does it ever really succeed.

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