



From the Romans to the Normans on the English Renaissance Stage

Lisa Hopkins



EARLY DRAMA, ART, AND MUSIC

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by
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Chapter 2

Profit and Delight? Magic and the Dreams of a Nation

THE PRE-CONQUEST PERIOD SAW Britain converted to Christianity, but to Catholicism rather than to the Protestantism which prevailed in the early modern period. The resulting tension is one explored in a number of plays including *Grim the Collier of Croydon, or The Devil and his Dame; with the Devil and St Dunstan*, featuring St. Dunstan, the tenth-century British bishop famous for defeating the devil in a fight, and the lost *England's first happines, or, the Life of St Austin*, one of three plays entered on the Stationers' Register in 1640 by the printer John Nicholson. This must have described the seventh-century career of another bishop-saint, St. Augustine of Canterbury, who converted England to Christianity, and its title indicates that it was a celebration. Also possibly in this category are the lost *Warlamchester* and James Shirley's *The Tragedy of St Albans*, also lost, either of which might have described the martyrdom of St. Alban; *A Knack to Know a Knave*, where, again, St. Dunstan appears as a character; and Rowley's *A Shoo-maker A Gentleman*. There is also William Drury's 1619 *Aluredus, sive Alvredus*, translated by Robert Knightley as *Alfrede, or Right Reinthron'd*, in 1659, in which Alfred is aided by St. Cuthbert, who delivers a Prologue to the play in which the opening lines are:

Who this deny's, that heav'n a pious care
Retains for humain things, that saints appeare
Cal'd to th'assistance of affaires below,
Must cruelness ith'Deity allow.¹

Effectively the saint declares that the age of miracles is not past. Finally there is a group of plays which put religion in dialog with magic and which explore the issue of strength of faith and the point at which it becomes in itself a danger to the state and its defense, and it is these which I explore in this chapter.

In stories involving magic, the most common use of it is to give people what they want. In this chapter, I want to explore the extent to which magic in the plays I shall be considering gives people what they want, and what is at stake in so doing. On the one hand, to stage plays in which dreams come true by magic might seem to be (literally) the ultimate in vicarious wish-fulfillment. On the other, playwrights in Renaissance England could hardly hope that the censor would let pass anything that seemed actually to advocate the usefulness and desirability of practicing a forbidden art: in the end even a white magician such as Prospero must be seen to renounce his art, and magicians any less white invariably had to be punished. If magic is to be seen to deliver results, it is simplest and safest for it do so within a firmly comic structure, perhaps the best example of this being *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the pity which Oberon feels for Helena ultimately results in her receiving her heart's desire and everyone else, with the possible exception of Egeus, ending the play happy and satisfied. The magic in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, is distinctive in several respects. Perhaps most importantly, there are no books involved: the only visible instrument of the fairies' power is a flower, aligning the play closely with folk practices and herb-based medicine of the kind which Shakespeare's own son-in-law Dr. John Hall might later have endorsed.² At the same time, though, this folk-like remedy is notably *not* administered by a wise woman, and so is free from the taint of witchcraft which attaches so readily to figures such as Lyly's Mother Bombie or Mother Sawyer in Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton*. Both Oberon and Puck thus neatly sidestep the two principal stereotypes of book-learned magician and lore-wise witch, a fact which combines with the festive, liminal atmosphere of the woods to situate their magic within the associative, transformative logic of dream rather than that of the world which the audience inhabit in their waking hours, and hence obviates the need for any curb on their activities to be invoked.

In other plays, however, such safeguards are not in place, and the question of what characters want becomes less dreamlike and more politicized. I want to discuss seven such plays, including *Doctor Faustus*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, *The Birth of Merlin*, *The Virgin Martyr*, *St Patrick for Ireland*, *The Seven Champions of Christendom* and, briefly, *The Tempest*. *The Birth of Merlin* is, as the title suggests, set in Arthurian England, *St Patrick for Ireland* in pre-Christian Ireland, *The Virgin Martyr* during the Roman Empire, and *The Seven Champions of Christendom* in a rather vaguely conceived but presumably Dark Age past; all of these plays thus

sit comfortably within the parameters of my project, but it might perhaps be objected that the other three have no place in it. However, *Doctor Faustus*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, and to a perhaps lesser extent *The Tempest* are essential to a discussion of early modern plays about magic because they effectively establish the terms of the genre, and also because they speak so evocatively of what the past meant to the present. I shall argue that what people want in them are four things which fall into two linked pairs: immediately, direct contact with the classical past coupled with an assurance of an imperial (and implicitly colonialist) future; and ultimately and consequently, national security coupled with religious certainty. Collectively, I will argue, these plays offer a fantasized version of an England confident about both its past and its future, secure from both external invasion and internal disagreements about religion, and proud of a firmly established classical past which authorized an expansionist agenda. Together, they take the pulse of the most urgently-felt fears and hopes of early modern England, allowing us to see both what it most dreaded and what it most wanted. At the same time, though, they disguise their own import in that they sidestep serious representational and doctrinal issues by drawing attention to the paradoxical simplicity of many of the theatrical effects involved. For both the darker political purposes of the tenor and the lightening effect of the vehicle, magic provides a crucial and versatile lexicon.

The first of the things desired by many of the characters in the plays is something that we who study them may also wish for, and something too that is arguably at the heart of historical drama as a genre. "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" says Stephen Greenblatt in the opening sentence of his groundbreaking *Shakespearean Negotiations*,³ and it seems to be a desire shared by many in the Renaissance, for it is something often asked of magicians. In *The Birth of Merlin*, Proximus, at Aurelius' request, conjures up the ghosts of Achilles and Hector.⁴ In *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, which shows us an England in which memories of the classical world remain strong—Bacon refers to "here where Brute did build his Troynovaunt" (5.3.43)—one of the shows offered is Hercules in his lion's skin breaking some branches off a tree (3.2.92). In *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus causes Alexander and his paramour to appear for the Emperor; and in *The Tempest* Prospero startlingly recalls that "graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, ope'd and let 'em forth"⁵ and presents simulacra of classical deities to the young lovers. What is notable about all these cases is that it is not just the dead in general but the classical dead in particular

who are brought back. A glance at the repertoire of Elizabethan theaters clearly indicates the popularity of classical subjects, with several plays on stories such as those of Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Antony and Cleopatra; along with exotic locations, classical personages seem to have been one of the sure-fire ways of filling a theater, not least because either the representation or the supposed resurrection of a classical character is something that is remarkably easy to stage: all that is needed is an actor and a costume sufficiently suggestive of the required period. These plays go one step beyond with a metatheatrical flourish which teases us with the possibility that we may briefly, and dangerously, believe that what we are seeing is more than merely a show.

More importantly, though, they also pack a political punch, for stories of the classical past, particularly those centered on the supposed founding of Britain by descendants of the *ur*-colonizer Aeneas, were often seen as authorizing an expansionist future, and many of these plays explicitly or implicitly relate the past to the future in ways which suggest such logic at work. In *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, fears about a secure succession are allayed in a prophecy made by Bacon to Henry III about the future which is in itself, as Brian Walsh points out, a resurrection of the classical past in that such prophecies have their origin in Virgil;⁶ in *The Birth of Merlin*, Merlin prophesies to Uter that his daughter will be a queen in Ireland, “of whom first springs / That Kingdoms Title to the Brittain Kings,” and that his son will be even more famous:

all after times shall fill their Chronicles with fame of his renown,
whose warlike sword shall pass through fertile France and Germany,
nor shall his conjuring foot be forc't to stand, till Romes Imperial
Wreath hath crown'd his fame with Monarch of the West, from
whose seven hills with Conquest, and contributory Kings, he back
returns to enlarge the Brittain bounds, his Heraldry adorn'd with
thirteen Crowns. (G1r)

This moves beyond the discourse of national defense which has previously dominated the play to one of national expansion, asserting England's problematic claim to Ireland and prodigally promising thirteen further crowns, in a wild orgy of imperialist expansion.

The second pairing was of national defense and religious certainty. “Pray, sir, resolve me, what religion's best / For a man to die in?” asks Flamineo in Webster's *The White Devil* of the ghost of the recently dead Bracciano, presumably on the grounds that this is both the first

thing a dead man will have found out and also the thing that a living one most needs to know.⁷ Flamino's choice is between Protestantism and Catholicism, but those were not the only possible configurations of the decision. At the end of the early modern prose narrative *The famous history of Fryer Bacon*, Friar Bacon finds himself torn between the opposing poles of magic and the church:

At the time that Fryer Bacon kept his chamber, he fell into divers meditations: Sometimes into the vanity of Arts & Sciences: then would he condemn himself for studying of those things that were so contrary to his Order, and souls health, and would say, that Magick made a man a Devil; sometimes would he meditate on Divinity; then would he cry out upon himself so for neglecting the study of it, and for studying Magick sometimes would he meditate on the shortness of mans life, then would he condemn himself for spending a time so short, so ill as he had done his: So would he go from one thing to another, and in all condemn his former studies.⁸

He therefore has a cell constructed within the actual wall of the church and lives out his life in that liminal space, crossing from the tainted terrain of magic to the sanctified ground of the church. The official position of the Protestant church was that the age of miracles is past, but in the semi-mythical past which many of these plays evoke, maybe it is not quite fully past: thus in William Rowley's *A Shoo-maker a gentleman* Alured says "My lifes but lent to bid you shun your deaths, and in that too / Heavens mercy is miraculous."⁹ The charged and contested boundary between miracle and magic is traced in a number of early modern plays, often in ways which bear specifically on the differences between the two confessions, and the liminality emblemized by Friar Bacon's cell characterizes a number of significant examinations of the relationship between workers of magic and workers of miracles. Many of them indeed focus on actual physical boundaries, a recurring motif, to which I shall return, being the involvement of a magician in erecting a wall, and even when they do not divisions of other sorts are at stake: in William Haughton's *Grim the Collier of Croyden* the spirit of St. Dunstan declares:

had I liv'd, the Danes had never boasted
Their then beginning Conquest of this Land;
Yet some accuse me for a Conjurer,
By reason of those many miracles
Which Heaven for holy life endowed me with.¹⁰

Moreover, in virtually all the instances I examine here, the struggle for meaning centers on a moment or moments when a deceptively simple theatrical effect is revealed as susceptible of two quite contrasting onstage interpretations, one of which sees it as the product of magic and the other of which sees it as the product of miracle; while at the same time the audience always knows, as with the staging of the classical dead, that the true explanation lies in a piece of obvious stage trickery, so that an epistemological boundary as well as a literal one is also being negotiated.

I want to start with *Doctor Faustus*, because not only does it speak loudly of the scars of religious warfare, with its references to the bridge at Antwerp and the Prince of Parma, but the fact that it touches specifically on conflicts between Protestants and Catholics also raises the vexed question of magic versus miracle. Moreover, not only is the tension between the idea of magic and the idea of miracle particularly apparent in that play, but its expression there is particularly influential, not least because it chimed so closely with some of the period's most urgent anxieties about this question. In his account of the antics of the supposed demoniacs of Denham (whom we might now term hysterical but whom Elizabethan Catholicism read as possessed) the Protestant Samuel Harsnett, who scathingly referred to the account of the supposed exorcisms at Denham as "the *Miracle Book*," regarded those involved as calculatedly fraudulent; he prefaced his account of the affair with references to witches and to Simon Magus.¹¹ The official Protestant position being that the age of miracles was past, Harsnett is forced to collapse the distinction between miracle and magic which provides the structuring logic of so many stage plays. Barbara L. Parker argues that *Doctor Faustus* works in a similar way: she thinks that "anti-Catholic satire is the play's governing concept, Faustus's demonic new religion being a parody of Roman Catholicism and virtually the entire play consisting of variations of the Mass" and that "Central to the identification of Catholicism with diabolism was the element of magic," though she also thinks that "*Faustus* repudiates both Catholicism and Protestantism."¹² For Parker, then, *Doctor Faustus* is like Harsnett in claiming that there is no difference between miracle and magic and that all apparent (good) miracles are really the result of (bad) magic. However, Andrew Duxfield, arguing that "Striking parallels ... exist between Marlowe's *Faustus* and key passages from the writings of Hermes Trismegistus," suggests that "Faustus's pursuit of knowledge through occult practices can, in the context of hermeticism, be seen paradoxically

as an attempt to ascend to a state of divinity,"¹³ in which case magic would not only be virtuous in itself but would in fact come very close to miracle.

At the same time, though, the miracle is exposed as fundamentally mundane. Though the uncertainties attending the existence of two such different texts make the details unclear, it is certainly obvious that broadly speaking Faustus fritters away his energies on cheap gimmicks which are theatrical only in the pejorative sense. Moreover, the figure who opposes him as representing the pole of sanctity is the Old Man, who relies wholly upon language:

Ah, stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate steps!
I see an angel hovers o'er thy head,
And, with a vial full of precious grace,
Offers to pour the same into thy soul.
Then call for mercy and avoid despair.

Neither we nor, apparently, Faustus himself see this particular angel, but the Old Man's verbal evocation of it is sufficient to move Doctor Faustus: "Ah, my sweet friend, I feel thy words / To comfort my distressed soul."¹⁴ Soon after, the Old Man says:

Satan begins to sift me with his pride;
As in this furnace God shall try my faith,
My faith, vile hell, shall triumph over thee.
Ambitious fiends, see how the heavens smiles
At your repulse and laughs your state to scorn!
Hence, hell! For hence I fly unto my God. (5.1.112–17)

Once again we cannot see what he sees, "how the heavens smiles"—indeed it is hard to imagine what it would look like if we could—but again his statement of it is impressive. In one sense this simply reflects the Protestant preference for the word, but it is also possible to see a theatrical sensibility as well as a religious one at work, in the shape of an aesthetic and indeed ascetic preference on the part of the artist of the mighty line for a verbally created effect rather than a visually created one. The real magic, it seems, lies in the power of words and of the imagination on which they act. This laying bare of the device has the subsidiary effect of destabilizing the idea of an underlying truth and underlining instead the extent to which an individual and potentially aesthetically-grounded act of choice may be at work: put crudely, in terms of interpreting effects as magic or as miracle you pay your money and you take your pick, with the potential impli-

cation that individual choice of confession might be viewed with similar indulgence as being the product of preference rather than of error.

One of the specific actions that Faustus initially proposes but subsequently abandons is to surround Germany with a wall of brass (5.1.89), this being effectively a byword for invincibility: in Anthony Brewer's play *The Love-sick King*, which has a quasi-miraculous moment when Cartesmundā's beauty roots Canutus where he stands, Canutus laments that "In vain I shoot against a wall of brass, that sends mine own shafts back upon my self";¹⁵ in the anonymous *Wily beguilde* we hear of "the brassen walls of Plutoes court";¹⁶ in Geoffrey, one of Merlin's prophecies is of "the Man of Bronze [who] for long years shall guard the gates of London upon a brazen horse";¹⁷ Elysium in *The Spanish Tragedy* has a tower with "walls of brass";¹⁸ and Richard II's image of immortality is "As if this flesh which walls about our life / Were brass impregnable."¹⁹ In Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, the motif recurs. Burden has heard that Bacon intends "To compass England with a wall of brass,"²⁰ which Bacon himself confirms will "rin[g] the English strand / From Dover to the market-place of Rye" (1.2.65–66). The reason why England would benefit from such a wall is made clear when Henry III greets the Emperor and the King of Castile as

Great men of Europe, monarchs of the West,
Ring'd with the walls of old Oceanus,
Whose lofty surges like the battlements
That compass'd high-built Babel in with towers. (2.1.1–4)

Other nations, it seems, already have walls which have been provided by nature, something confirmed by Castile when he speaks of "The Pyren Mounts swelling above the clouds, / That ward the wealthy Castile in with walls" (2.1.14–15). England, by contrast, lies open and vulnerable to invasion, something that would have resonated very strongly since Greene was writing in the immediate aftermath of the Armada. Barbara Howard Traister argues that:

England is already walled with the ocean, and the trip from Spain to England has been a difficult surmounting of a series of walls for the visitors. England's glory can best be served not by shutting her off from the rest of the world with Bacon's wall but rather by allowing her communication and interchange with other countries ... there is no need for, but rather danger in, England's withdrawal behind brass walls.²¹

However, at a time when armed invasion had so recently been a very real possibility—a time which the name of Castile actively recalls—an impenetrable defensive wall was calculated to appeal to audiences as something they wanted very much indeed.²² (It is also, of course, something that there was no risk of the theater company being required to stage.)

William Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin* recalls both *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and *Doctor Faustus* in a number of ways, not least when Lucina prophesies of Merlin that "his Art shall stand / A wall of brass to guard the Brittain Land" (E1r), and it too deals with the question of magic granting desires. National security is again high on the agenda: Merlin has to help Vortiger build his castle, and the issue is perhaps also glanced at in Edwin's remark that "my Conscience tyes me to repair the worlds losses in a new succession" (A3r and v), though he ends the play unmarried after his prospective bride goes into a convent. The play also pits the idea of magic and of miracle directly against each other in a way which bears directly on the question of which religion was best for a man to die in. Toclío announces that "there's here arriv'd at Court, sent by the Earl of Chester to the King, a man of rare esteem for holyness, a reverent Hermit, that by miracle not onely saved our army, but without aid of man o'erthrew the pagan Host, and with such wonder sir, as might confirm a Kingdom to his faith" (A3v). However, although the Hermit goes "arm'd with his cross and staff" (A4v), his sanctity is by no means a foregone conclusion: the second Saxon lord speaks of his "hellish charmes" (B2r), and the issue is openly debated by Ostarius and Aurelius, with Ostarius attributing the hermit's success to "hellbred magick" and Aurelius countering that "it was the hand of heaven, that in his vertue gave us victory" (C2v).

Piqued by the Hermit's triumph, Ostarius encourages a magic competition between him and his own magician Proximus. Richard Levin, tracing the history of magic contests back to biblical and classical origins, notes that "Although this episode may look at first glance like an abbreviated version of the magic contest in Greene's play, there are some very important differences that bring it much closer to the contests in the Bible, and these differences all turn on the role of religion here."²³ The Hermit may be firmly identified by the majority of the characters with Christianity, but this is not quite enough for the play, which is very careful to dissociate the Hermit from the taint of a particular brand of Christianity, Catholicism. It is to this end, I think, that it digresses into one of its most potentially disruptive episodes, the decision of the sisters Modesta and Constantia not to marry their respective suitors but to become nuns instead. Monika

Karpinska notes that “Modesta’s and Constantia’s dual vow of virginity is problematic in terms of a lack of precedent in early modern drama,”²⁴ but Megan Lynn Isaac suggests a possible reason for it in:

[the playwright’s] complicated strategy of comparison, which deconstructs the dichotomy of good and bad, moral and immoral. He represents a variety of situations in which stereotypically virtuous choices are shown to have unexpectedly corrupt or problematic consequences in order to suggest antithetically that stereotypically wicked choices may similarly have surprising, which is to say rewarding, results.²⁵

However successful in other respects, this does have potentially damaging consequences for the characterization of the Hermit: Rebecca Brackmann notes that the Reformer William Lambarde condemned the “Monkische Persuasion of Chastitie” which led St. Cuthbert to take holy orders.²⁶ It is these consequences which the author must negotiate by making it clear that the sisters’ choice is not of his instigating and by associating him anachronistically but firmly with an instinctively Protestant position on marriage:

Edwin. O reverent sir, per[s]wade not her to leave me,
Hermit. My Lord I do not, nor to cease to love ye,
 I onely pray her faith may fixed stand.
 Marriage was blest I know with heavens own hand.
Edwin. You hear him Lady, ’tis not a virgins state but sanctity of life,
 must make you happy. (Dr4r-v)²⁷

The two girls do eventually go into a nunnery, but their decision is not condoned and it is indeed made clear in Modesta’s case that her decision is essentially the product of what we would now consider depression, being induced by “The contemplation of a happy death, which is to me so pleasing that I think no torture could diver[t] me” (D4v). As well as being thus dissociated from Catholicism, the Hermit is also distanced from the idea of magic, because it is a term which he himself uses of somebody else: when he realizes Aurelius is in love with Artesia he demands to know “what magick could so linck thee to this mischief” (B2r), echoing a number of other characters who see Artesia as a witch.

The undoubted practitioner of magic in the play is Merlin, and he introduces a rather different emphasis, for he is associated above all with the theatricality of magic, and provides a classic example of the lightness of the vehicle of a metaphor being used to modify and mask the seriousness

of its tenor. The element of theatricality is first introduced through his father the devil rather than through Merlin himself: after a stage direction “*Enter the Devil in mans habit, richly attir’d, his feet and his head horrid*” (D2v) the Clown demands “Slid who’s that talks so? I can see no body” (D3r). Like Oberon’s cheerfully crude declaration that “I am invisible,”²⁸ this scene clearly depends on confident acting rather than any form of prop or trick. Later the Clown first asks “have we run through the Countrey, haunted the City, and examin’d the Court to finde out a Gallant with a Hat and Feather, and a silken Sword, and golden Hangers, and do you now bring me to a Ragamuffin with a face like a Frying-pan?” and then immediately afterwards says “How’s this? do you juggle with me, or are mine eyes matches? Hat and Feather, Sword, and Hangers and all, this is a Gallant indeed sister, this has all the marks of him we look for” (E2r). Since there is no time for a change of clothes I think we can assume that although there is a trick involved here, it is a very old and simple one: the actor is wearing a costume which is different on its right and left sides,²⁹ so that he can transform his appearance by turning in one direction or another. Even the more ambitious effects are well within the comfort zone of Renaissance stage trickery,³⁰ as the play effectively admits when the Clown says “Me thinks I see something like a peel’d Oionon, it makes me weep agen” (G1r).

The family situation of *The Birth of Merlin*’s subplot of a father and two daughters prefigures that of another play which both directly recalls *Faustus* and directly pits the language of overt and self-conscious theatrical artifice against the possibility of genuine miracle, Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr*. The play gestures openly toward a positively bewildering number of generic affiliations and precedents: indeed John Wasson claims that it “could ... have been written in 1520 as easily as in 1620,”³¹ while Holly Crawford Pickett notes that “In the last two acts, the play increasingly begins to resemble a medieval saint’s play.”³² The morality tradition in particular is, as Nova Myhill argues, heavily in evidence.³³ There is an evil spirit, called Harpax, and a good one, called Angelo, who both counsel Spungius and Hirpius, in a classic morality structure; and as would be expected, Harpax is the more obviously tempting. The play also remembers a specific if highly ambiguous scion of the morality genre, *Doctor Faustus*. Theophilus challenges Dorothea, if she actually reaches heaven, to “send me some / Small pittance of that curious fruit you bost of” (K1v) as proof that her religion was the best to die in, recalling IV.ii of *Doctor Faustus* where Faustus has fruit brought for the pregnant Duchess of Vanholt. Later, Theophilus recalls Faustus again when he speaks of “all

the riches of the sea increasd / By violent shipwrackes,” (I4v). This echoes Cornelius’ promise to Faustus that “The spirits tell me they can dry the sea / And fetch the treasures of all foreign wrecks” (1.1.146–47). The stage direction “*Enter Harpax in a fearefull shape, fire flashing out of the study*” (L1r) also recalls the staging of the devil scenes in *Doctor Faustus*, while Spungius when he prefers Harpax to “any infected Lord, whose rotten life hangs betweene the 2 Poles” (I2r) echoes Faustus’ “All things that move between the quiet poles” (1.1.58).

In keeping with this open acknowledgement of literary affiliations, Massinger and Dekker repeatedly show themselves fond of laying bare the device underpinning theater of this sort, as with the almost absurd simplicity of the sudden appearance of the basket of fruit which Dorothea sends via a sort of celestial Interflora service. For all of its exposure of its own theatricality, however, *The Virgin Martyr* does appear to take seriously the possibility of miracle: indeed John Wasson notes that the play “contains some fifteen major and minor miracles.”³⁴ Particularly noteworthy is the profound ambiguity attending the dramatization of some of the most spiritually charged moments in the play. Theophilus may ask “how can stone smile, / Or wooden Image laugh?” (K4v), but he wards off Harpax with a cross of flowers from the basket which Dorothea sends from Heaven (L1r), and at the end a stage direction reads “*Enter Dorothea in a white robe, crownes vpon her robe, a Crowne vpon her head, lead in by the Angell. Antoninus, Caliste and Christeta following all in white, but lesse glorious, the Angell with a Crowne for him*” (M1r). All of these effects are strikingly simple to achieve, in a way that smiling stones or laughing images certainly and pointedly are not, yet that is far from meaning that they will lack theatrical power. Julia Gasper notes that “Dorothea herself says when Sapritius is struck down, ‘I can no myrales worke,’” but argues that Massinger and Dekker were “aiming to present a type of story, one that was open to contemporary and metaphorical interpretation.”³⁵ What could have been magic might thus transcend itself to appear genuine miracle.

Shirley’s *St Patrick for Ireland* is so close to *The Virgin Martyr* that Massinger and Dekker’s play has in fact been suggested as its principal source.³⁶ It too has obviously stagey miracles: when Dichu declares that Patrick blasphemes he suddenly announces that he feels himself grow stiff and cold and subsequently converts;³⁷ there is a bracelet which makes the wearer invisible, which Rodamant uses to perform tricks reminiscent of those of Faustus mocking the pope; a lustful prince pretends to be a god in order to rape his brother’s beloved; and when the queen and her daugh-

ters deck the altar of the gods with garlands and a song is sung, “the Idol that presented Jupiter moveth” (D1r) and subsequently speaks, though once the credulous king has left the stage the others congratulate themselves on successfully deceiving him. In each of these cases, the effect can be achieved with laughable ease. The play does, though, also offer a real miracle, when the king offers Patrick poisoned wine and Patrick not only proves immune himself but revives someone who does succumb. It may however, be worth noting that the play seems not to have proved popular, for though we are told in the Prologue that “if ye / First welcome this, you’ll grace our Poets art, / And give him Courage for a second part,” none is known to have ensued.

A play which seems to have pleased its audience rather better was *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, published in 1638 with an ascription to John Kirke and a note on the title page that it was “Acted at the Red-Bull in St. Johns Streete, with a generall liking.” This tells the stories of St. George, St. Anthony, St. James, St. Andrew, St. Patrick, and St. David, though St. George is securely at its center. The play opens with him as a young orphan in the care of the witch Calib, who has killed his parents, the earl and countess of Coventry. She intended to kill George too but instead has grown fond of him and brought him up with her own son, the clownish Suckabus, whose father is the devil Tarpax. The ghosts of George’s parents reveal his true identity and he turns on Calib, who is taken down to hell by Tarpax. George liberates the other six champions, whom Calib had taken prisoner, and accompanied by Suckabus heads off in quest of adventures, including the killing of a dragon and a lion by Andrew and Anthony, an encounter with the giant Ormandine and his enchanted garden for David, and various chivalric encounters for James, Denis, and Patrick, while George saves a princess from a dragon and finally rescues all the rest when they have been trapped by the villainous Brandron, who has also turned the daughters of the king of Macedon into swans. When the king converts to Christianity the daughters are restored to their proper shapes and George gives them as wives to Anthony, David, and Patrick before departing in quest of further adventures.

Throughout this complicated narrative, the play shows itself very aware of the ways in which its effects are created. It opens with the stage direction “*Thunder and Lightning: Enter Calib the Witch.*” Leslie Thomson, identifying *The Seven Champions of Christendom* as “the play with the most directions for thunder and lightning,” explains that “*thunder and lightning* was the conventional stage language—or code—for the

production of effects in or from the tiring house that would establish or confirm a specifically supernatural context in the minds of the audience";³⁸ here, however, its meaning is unfixed, for Calib orchestrates the thunder by crying "lowder a little," suggesting that it is responsive to diabolical command, but later George interprets the same phenomenon very differently when he says "This messenger assures me Heaven's pleas'd."³⁹ Having thus destabilized the meaning of its own stage effects the play subsequently proceeds by restraint: when in the second scene the action moves to Trebizond, St. Andrew and St. Anthony fight a lion and a dragon, but we don't see it happen, and on the same principle a stage direction requires "*The day cleares, inchantments cease. Sweete Musicke*" (G4r). Here what is important is the *cessation* of all effects, except for the music, and this is something which the play has in common with *The Tempest*, a play which it has been read as being influenced by⁴⁰ (and which has itself been read as influenced by *Faustus*) and where uniquely in Shakespeare the entire first scene invites us to believe that we have seen something which, it turns out, we cannot possibly have done, for Miranda's "O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer" (1.2.5–6) is flatly quashed by Prospero's "Tell your piteous heart / There's no harm done" (1.2.14–15). Indeed *The Tempest* is a play in which the more elaborate the effect, the less reliable it is, the illusion of the masque being entirely debunked by Ariel's open acknowledgement of its status as performance—"When I presented Ceres / I thought to have told thee of it" (4.1.167–68)—while Richard Levin points out that Prospero's victory over Sycorax is the exact opposite of the usual format, which normally involves imprisonment in a rock or similar whereas Prospero releases Ariel from one,⁴¹ and, moreover, does so offstage. In *The Tempest*, then, the underlying structural logic would seem to say that what audiences want is *not* to see, and the unreliability of what they actually do see is openly drawn attention to in what has become one of the play's most famous speeches:

These our actors,
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and
 Are melted into air, into thin air;
 And - like the baseless fabric of this vision -
 The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind.

(4.1.148–56)

As with *Doctor Faustus*, the audience is invited here to share a sophisticated awareness of both the limitations of the visual and the power of the verbal.

Questions of seeing, in the shape of the debate about the primacy of the word versus the image, are of course central not only to the masque form to which *The Tempest* is so obviously related but also to the difference between the two confessions,⁴² and that is an issue which appears to be important in many of these plays. In *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, Tarpax tells his son the Clown that “Thou art by birth Duke of Styx, Sulpher, & Helvetia” (B3r). Helvetia—Switzerland—might seem an unlikely presence in this list until one remembers the close association of Switzerland with Reformers, which seems to have been an influence on the choice of the name Helvetius for the Lady’s father in *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy*. *The Tempest*’s odd reference to “Mistress Line” (4.1.236) has been read as an allusion to a Catholic martyr,⁴³ while Prospero’s epilogue might also seem to have a Catholic flavor. *St Patrick for Ireland* displays an openly Catholic sensibility, not least in its evocation of the famous pilgrimage site of St. Patrick’s Purgatory at Lough Derg in Ireland. *The Birth of Merlin* may be set a millennium before Luther but it is still, as we have seen, acutely aware of the tension between Protestantism and Catholicism. The confessional politics of *The Virgin Martyr* have been a matter of intense debate; as Nova Myhill notes, the play has been read as both Protestant and Catholic in its sympathies,⁴⁴ but Louise George Clubb has demonstrated the possibility of a Catholic reading⁴⁵ and Julia Gasper argues for a Catholic source.⁴⁶ One would inevitably be much more cautious about attributing advocacy of any particular position to *Doctor Faustus*, but there can certainly be no doubt that the play is steeped in the language of religious debate. In all these plays, then, magic could in fact be seen as functioning not so much in contrast to miracle but as providing a smokescreen by means of which the idea of miracle can be negotiated both more safely and more probingly, and while raising fewer hackles, than it could otherwise have been.

In all these plays, magic offers a basic visual stimulation which on a deeper level also induced in audiences a flattering sense of the sophistication of their own levels of awareness and apprehension. It holds out a dream of national security at a time of great danger and threat and renews the sense of a link with the past which spoke of a proud Trojan heritage which also worked to legitimize the idea of nationalist and imperialist expansion, gestured at by Merlin in *The Birth of Merlin* and actualized in the figure of

Prospero. And perhaps most importantly of all it provided a space of freedom and experiment which even in an age of Protestantism could at least imagine the presence and reality of miracle, in ways which might take the heat out of the difference between the two confessions and allow, however briefly, for a fantasy of religious unity colored with the tint of nostalgia, as Britain's past is imagined as holding out a hand to its present.

NOTES

¹ William Drury, *Aluredus, sive Alvredus* (1619), trans. Robert Knightley (as *Alfrede, or Right Reinhron'd*, 1659), ed. Dana F. Sutton for the Philological Museum, 2014, <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/aluredus/>

² See for instance Joan Lane, *John Hall and his Patients* (Stratford-upon-Avon: the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 1996), p. 201, for some of the herbs which Hall was accustomed to use in his specifics.

³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 1.

⁴ William Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin* (London: Thomas Johnson for Francis Kirkman and Henry Marsh, 1662), sig. C3r.

⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 5.1.48–49.

⁶ See Brian Walsh, "‘Deep Prescience’: Succession and the Politics of Prophecy in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 23 (2010), pp. 63–85, p. 68.

⁷ John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. John Russell Brown (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 5.4.130–31. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition and reference will be given in the text.

⁸ Anonymous, *The famous history of Fryer Bacon* [1627] (London: M. Clark for T. Passenger, 1679), sig. C2v.

⁹ William Rowley, *A Shoo-maker a gentleman* (London: J. Okes for John Cowper, 1638), sig. B1v.

¹⁰ William Haughton, *Grim the Collier of Croyden* (London: R. D., 1662), 1.1.20–24.

¹¹ F. W. Brownlow, *Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), pp. 22 and 195.

¹² Barbara L. Parker, "‘Cursèd Necromancy’: Marlowe's *Faustus* as Anti-Catholic Satire," *Marlowe Studies* 1 (2011), pp. 59–77, pp. 60 and 62.

¹³ Andrew Duxfield, "Doctor Faustus and Renaissance Hermeticism," in *Doctor Faustus: A Critical Guide*, ed. Sara Munson Deats (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 96–110, pp. 96–97.

¹⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, A text, in *The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), 5.1.51–57.

¹⁵ Anthony Brewer, *The Love-sick King* (London: printed for Robert Pollard and John Sweeting, 1655), sig. B1v.

¹⁶ Anonymous, *Wily beguilde* (London: H. L. for Clement Knight, 1606), p. 55.

¹⁷ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 172.

¹⁸ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, in *Five Elizabethan Tragedies*, ed. A. K. McIlwraith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 1.1.75.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Stanley Wells (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 3.2.167–68.

²⁰ Robert Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, in *Five Elizabethan Comedies*, ed. A. K. McIlwraith (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 1.2.30.

²¹ Barbara Howard Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), p. 74.

²² For discussion of this see Walsh, “Deep Prescience,” p. 65.

²³ Richard Levin, “My Magic Can Lick Your Magic,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 22 (2009), pp. 201–28, p. 207.

²⁴ Monika Karpinska, “Bawdily Manipulations: Spheres of Female Power in *The Birth of Merlin*,” *Early Theatre* 9.1 (2006), pp. 123–29, p. 123.

²⁵ Megan Lynn Isaac, “Structure, Legitimacy, and Magic in *The Birth of Merlin*,” *Early Theatre* 9.1 (2006), pp. 109–21, pp. 109–10, 116, and 114.

²⁶ Rebecca Brackmann, *The Elizabethan Invention of Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 133.

²⁷ This is again an idea shared with *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* where Lacy imagines that Margaret’s decision to enter a nunnery must have been prompted by a friar (5.1.53–57).

²⁸ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979), 2.1.186.

²⁹ This clearly occurs in the anonymous *The Fatal Marriage*. See *The Fatal Marriage*, ed. Andrew Duxfield for the “Editing a Renaissance Play” module of the MA “Shakespeare and Renaissance” at Sheffield Hallam University, 3.3, <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/ie/mls/renplays/fatalindex.html>.

³⁰ On the pyrotechnic techniques available see Philip Butterworth, *Theatre of Fire: Special Effects in Early English and Scottish Theatre* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1998), particularly the discussion of *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* at pp. 86–87.

³¹ John Wasson, “The Secular Saint Plays of the Elizabethan Era,” in *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), pp. 241–60, p. 253.

³² Holly Crawford Pickett, “Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr*,” *Studies in English Literature* 49.2 (2009), pp. 437–62, p. 438.

³³ Nova Myhill, “Making Death a Miracle: Audience and the Genres of Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr*,” *Early Theatre* 7.2 (2004),

pp. 9–31, p. 25. On the influence of the morality play see also Larry S. Champion, “Disaster With My So Many Joys’: Structure and Perspective in Massinger and Dekker’s *The Virgin Martyr*,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984), pp. 199–209, p. 205.

³⁴ Wasson, “The Secular Saint Plays of the Elizabethan Era,” p. 253.

³⁵ Julia Gasper, “The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*,” *The Review of English Studies* 42 (1991), pp. 17–31, p. 18.

³⁶ Hugh MacMullan, “The Sources of Shirley’s *St Patrick for Ireland*,” *PMLA* 48.3 (1933), pp. 806–14, pp. 806 and 812.

³⁷ James Shirley, *Saint Patrick for Ireland* (London: J. Raworth for R. Whitaker, 1640), sigs. B2v–B3r.

³⁸ Leslie Thomson, “The Meaning of *Thunder and Lightning*: Stage Directions and Audience Expectations,” *Early Theatre* 2 (1999), pp. 11–24, pp. 18 and 11.

³⁹ John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (London: J. Okes for James Becket, 1638), sigs. B1r and C2v.

⁴⁰ John Freehafer, “Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and *The Seven Champions*,” *Studies in Philology* 66.1 (1969), pp. 87–103, pp. 97, 87, 92–93, and 98–99.

⁴¹ Levin, “My Magic Can Lick Your Magic,” p. 213.

⁴² See for instance Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁴³ Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in theatre, religion and resistance*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 201.

⁴⁴ Myhill, “Making Death a Miracle,” pp. 24 and 14.

⁴⁵ Louise George Clubb, “*The Virgin Martyr* and the *Tragedia Sacra*,” *Renaissance Drama* 7 (1964), pp. 103–26, pp. 103, 113 and 118.

⁴⁶ Gasper, “The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*,” p. 18.