2005

The Devil and Capitalism in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and Milton's Paradise Lost

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THE DEVIL AND CAPITALISM IN MARLOWE’S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* AND

MILTON’S *PARADISE LOST*

By

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A Thesis submitted to the
Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of the Arts

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2005
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my major professor, Daniel Vitkus, for his feedback, guidance and encouragement. Also, I feel fortunate to have had committee members who were such good, and challenging, readers as Bruce Boehrer and Nancy Warren. And, of course, I am grateful to my husband.
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ABSTRACT

In The English Usurer, or, Usury Condemned (1634), John Blaxton writes of the “usurer,” “Every Bond he takes of others, enters him onto a new obligation to Satan: as he hopes his debtors will keepe day with him, the divell expects no lesse of himselfe. Every forfeit he takes, scores up a new debt to Lucifer: and every morgag’d land he seizeth on, enlargeth his dominion in hell” (44). In Doctor Faustus, Lucifer’s aim is to “Enlarge his kingdom” (2.1.39), and he does so by sending Mephistopheles out to acquire the capital of human souls he needs. After his successful temptation Eve in the garden of Eden, Milton’s Satan remarks off-handedly, “A world who would not purchase with a bruise?” (10.500). This thesis explores representations of devils as capitalists and capitalists as devils in texts ranging from Thomas Wilson’s anti-usury treatise, A Discourse Upon Usury (1571) to Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus and Milton’s Paradise Lost.

Anti-usury authors inveigh against “usu ry”—by which was meant a broad range of what we now would call capitalist practices—and ascribe its existence and its detrimental effects to the devil. As capitalism emerges in early modern England, the anti-usury authors are not alone in their anxious treatment of the quickly changing economic milieu. This anxiety, I argue, makes its way into Marlowe’s drama and Milton’s epic as well. Marlowe’s play warns against bourgeois social-climbing and the tendency, created by capitalism, to commodity everything—including the soul itself. Milton’s epic similarly casts Satan as a capitalist—and capitalism as satanic. Milton also offers faint intimations of a divine economy which requires of the postlapsarian faithful productive labor with a grateful mind; Milton reminds the reader to have faith in “the meaning, not the Name” (7.5).

Drawing on the economic theory of Marx, as well as current scholarship that is concerned with the interconnections between early modern religious thought and emergent capitalism, I demonstrate that Renaissance subjects perceived the rise of capitalism with apprehension. The texts I examine are fraught with anxiety; I read them as expressions of a culture’s fear that early modern England, with its burgeoning capitalist economy, was indeed the devil’s playground.
INTRODUCTION

“ON BOLD ADVENTURE TO DISCOVER WIDE THAT DISMAL WORLD”: READING CAPITAL IN DOCTOR FAUSTUS AND PARADISE LOST

In Doctor Faustus, Mephistopheles proposes, “I shall wait on Faustus whilst he lives, So he will buy my service with his soul” (2.1.31-2). In Paradise Lost, Satan flippantly describes his conquest in Eden: “A World who would not purchase with a bruise” (10.500). For Faustus and Satan, it appears that souls and worlds are commodities that can be traded or purchased; they are things that have exchange-value. The tendency to commodify is a profoundly capitalistic one, and it is clearly demonized in Doctor Faustus and Paradise Lost, as are capitalist values and practices in general.

Economic language and concepts at work in Marlowe’s drama and Milton’s epic sparked my interest in doing a study of representations of emergent capitalism in these texts. I am interested in Doctor Faustus and Paradise Lost in particular because of their many similarities. Numerous linguistic parallels have been noted by John Cox and Neil Forsyth, who suggests that when Milton was writing Paradise Lost, “[he] was no doubt thinking especially of Marlowe’s Protestant morality play, Doctor Faustus, the hero of which, like Luther and Hamlet, is from Wittenberg, and which seems to be quoted more than once” (60). Forsyth believes that Milton deliberately drew on the language of Faustus and Mephistopheles in his characterization of Satan and also on Marlowe’s depiction of Faustus as a human character who elicits sympathy from the audience. It is my contention that both Faustus and Satan represent an anxiety that accompanied early modern sentiments about the changing economy—fear in the face of capitalism. The early modern configuration of the devil qua capitalist—the literal demonization of capitalism—pervades Renaissance texts, even ones that do not ostensibly enter into economic discourse. Marlowe’s play and Milton’s epic are two particularly fraught examples, and I will show that, while Marlowe’s drama offers little hope for the capitalist—as Faustus is torn asunder by the devils—Milton reveals an economic path of
righteousness for the postlapsarian faithful trying to navigate their way through Satan’s economy.

Richard Halpern’s *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* and David Hawkes’ *Idols of the Marketplace* have inspired a historicist and Marxian approach to this economic and literary subject matter. Halpern’s discussion of early modern schools, and his general reminder for the perhaps jaded reader about what is helpful and ever pertinent about Marx, as well as Hawkes’ remarkable consideration of idolatry, commodity fetishism, and the emergence of capitalism in early modern England have been influential. Marx’s *Capital* plays an important role in my argument, in particular, “The Secret of the So-Called Primitive Accumulation” and “Commodity Fetishism and the Secret Thereof,” as well as Marx’s general definitions of value, labor, labor relations, and the products of labor. Significantly, Marx, like the early modern writers, often situates his discussions of capitalism in a spiritual milieu, elucidating capitalist characteristics by analogy to religion. Marx’s tone is often sarcastic and incendiary, and his deployment of spiritual language and Christian references undercut his reader’s comfortable assumptions about both God and the free market. Yet while his aims are different, Marx carries on the tradition of the early modern writers who discuss economic change in religious terms, suggesting that, in some way, discussions of capitalism must be couched in spiritual language, and that capitalism is itself actually a spiritual thing—a consequence of our postlapsarian state. In *Capital*, Marx writes, “In order… to find an analogy [to commodity fetishism], we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world” (83). David Hawkes’ clarifies and corrects Marx’s vision: “Marx here refers to an ‘analogy’ between idolatry and commodity fetishism, but this assumes a relationship between distinct ‘spheres’ of experience, and this assumption is anachronistic for the seventeenth century” (*Idols* 52). *Doctor Faustus* and *Paradise Lost*, with their conflations of religion and economy, are demonstrative of just such a homology.

In chapter 1, “Satan’s Tabernacle: The Usurer, The Devil, and Early Modern England,” I demonstrate, through myriad examples from primary texts, that the depiction of the early capitalist as a devil was a trope employed by anti-usury authors from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By usury, early modern writers meant not only
the lending of money for profit, but also a whole variety of what we now call capitalist practices—cunning in the market, sale of faulty goods, monopolies, buying cheap and selling dear, and so on. Such practices were against charity, and therefore against God. The anti-usury tracts I refer to span approximately sixty years: Thomas Wilson’s *A Discourse Upon Usury* (1571), Robert Fenton’s *A Treatise Upon Usury* (1611), and John Blaxton’s *The English Usurer, or, Usury Condemned* (1634); these texts are representative of the genre.

Important to my understanding of early capitalism is its connection in the early modern mind to idolatry. David Hawkes defines idolatry as a separating of the sign from the thing signified, and I argue that Marlowe and Milton represent idolatry in this sense as a specifically capitalist, and satanic, tendency, and as a result of the Fall. Renaissance subjects, shaped by Christian beliefs, would have explained idolatry, as Hawkes writes, “not merely [as] a theological problem but rather an all-encompassing view of the world. It involves a fatal materialism—an unhealthy, irrational orientation towards the things of this world and the pleasures of the flesh—and it fosters the twin addictions of covetousness and sensuality” (*Idols* 6). That the early modern English projected their fears of the changing economy onto the devil is a sign of their more holistic worldview, in which economy and religion have not been separated into different spheres. While many cultures transfer their fears onto the figure of the devil, the characteristics of the specifically Protestant devil of the Renaissance had signifying power that was intertwined with the burgeoning culture of capital. The depictions of the devil as usurer considered in this chapter enable us to situate *Faustus* and *Paradise Lost* within a contextual framework of early modern perspectives of the devil and capitalism.

In the second chapter, “‘Oh what a world of profit and delight’: Commodification, Contracts, and Capital in *Doctor Faustus,*” I argue that, in *Faustus,* Marlowe gives us devils who are economically driven. Lucifer, Mephistopheles, and Faustus are all capitalists, and Faustus’ inability to extract himself from this milieu is his undoing. Examining at length the contract scene in the play, I demonstrate that Faustus’ pact with Mephistopheles is a usurer’s contract. Luke Wilson’s recent scholarship on contract law and Marlowe’s play offers some insightful commentary on early modern contract law, and his reading of the contract in *Faustus* supports my conclusion that Faustus does not
comprehend the value of his soul as he offers it up as though it were a commodity or a coin. The blame, however, must lie with Mephistopheles, who does know the value of Faustus’ soul. In the economic discourse of early modern England, the matter of intention played an important role in deciding whether a transaction was usurious. Anti-usury authors defined “mental usury”—which occurred when the lender simply intended to gain above the principal, even if there were no written stipulation—to make clear that cases such as those of Faustus and Mephistopheles would not escape condemnation.

The reading in this chapter of Faustus as a subject who has been ideologically interpellated through his years of attending school and university is founded on Richard Halpern’s discussion of the early modern school as Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus. After years of schooling in Wittenberg, Faustus conjures Mephistopheles to be his next tutor. As teacher and student, Mephistopheles and Faustus are engaged in the Subject/subject relationship Althusser describes, and their relationship is mirrored in Faustus and Wagner, with Faustus taking on the role of teacher/Subject, and Wagner and Robin, with Wagner in turn positioning himself as Subject. The presence of spectacle and the function of mimesis are significant factors in the interpellating process, and I emphasize several instances in the play where these are at work.

The third chapter, “‘Such joy ambition finds’: Satanic Capitalism and the Divine Economy in Paradise Lost,” offers a thorough-going look at the visions of economy, both satanic and divine, presented in Paradise Lost. The introduction to this chapter considers the shift in economic thought that had taken place by the time Milton publishes his epic in 1667. Economic theorists of the seventeenth century, like Culpepper, Malynes, Mun, Misselden, and, towards the end of the century, William Petty, discuss political economy with a modern, capitalist sensibility—what proponents of the free market would call “practical” rather than “superstitious.” In Milton’s socio-economic circumstances, capitalism is nearing fruition. Hence, the poet’s overt concern with an economy which nurtured values antithetical to proper Christian living. Milton’s text is an expression of his doubt and consternation in the face of the excesses of consumption and accumulation of his contemporaries. In Paradise Lost, Satan is indeed a capitalist figure. In fact, Satan is many things: he is a schizophrenic, shape-shifting demon who, like Faustus, struggles with his own identity, in part because he, like Faustus, is flying
aimlessly through the world of capitalist exchange that is the hell into which he has been hurled. He is also, simultaneously, the father of capitalism, bringing it into the world via the temptation and the Fall. Invoking Stanley Fish’s reader response method, I suggest that Milton portrays Satan as a capitalist in order to surprise the reader with the sin of her own capitalism. *Faustus* shows signs of a similar project, but it is Milton who sees it through (and he can see it through more clearly than Marlowe because the seventeenth-century economy—and thus his audience—are more clearly capitalistic).

The final section of this chapter explores the economic path of righteousness towards which the reader is led by and through the epic. Milton’s divine economy remains shadowy and inaccessible to the fallen reader, but through productive labor and right-mindedness, he can maintain his inward light despite the world, the flesh, and the devil. The question of God is a vexed one for students of Milton; from the Romantics, followed by Empson, and, more recently, Neil Forsyth, to Milton’s Christian readers like Lewis and Fish, God is the subject of much debate, which boils down to questions of his goodness. But where God’s critics (proponents and adversaries alike) often fail is in their tendency not to see God within the larger economic context of *Paradise Lost*. God is, as Uriel calls him, the “great Work-Maister” (3.696), and labor is what defines the nature of his relationships with his creatures. In addition, the quality or nature of labor itself is dependent on the state of mind, or one’s intention, as one does it—in particular, God demands “a grateful mind,” as Satan tells us in one of his more lucid moments (4.55). Removing God and his economy from within the reader’s reach—which accounts for God’s besmirched reputation—in order to emphasize the reader’s entrenchment in the satanic system, Milton offers only a vague hint to the reader who is willing to read and be educated by the poem.

The work I’ve undertaken here is at its heart an expression of my desire to understand how the transition to capitalism was felt by early modern subjects and how these experiences shaped texts like Marlowe’s play and Milton’s epic. While my focus is on the demonization of capitalism as an articulation of what I perceive as fear and anxiety about what, to many, did seem like evidence of the devil’s triumph in England, it is important to recognize that these texts convey a sense of ambivalence—they reveal the (satanic) temptations and freeing possibilities of the burgeoning economy.
The texts explored here reveal my interest in reading not only “literature” but other cultural artifacts as well. I believe that the analysis I’ve done of the anti-usury texts is an example of the productive inclusion of non-canonical, “non-literary” texts. Reading such primary texts alongside “literature” problematizes, complicates, and generally broadens our understanding of the multivalence of language in canonical works, while also illuminating the various discourses in which works participate—what they shape and are shaped by. Of the literary texts themselves, Faustus has not been the subject of such an explicitly economic reading as I have given here; it has been left to languish in the realm of religion. Even materialist critics have not attempted a serious analysis of the economy at work in Marlowe’s play. Economic issues in Paradise Lost, on the other hand, have been discussed, and brilliantly; however, it is specifically my discussion of God’s economy that I feel adds something new to the dialogue. The notion that discussions of capitalism require recourse, as Marx suggests, to the realm of religion is one that I find especially provocative—that the secret of capitalism is that it indeed a magical, unearthly thing. That it is springs, like its father, from the fiery depths of hell, is demonstrated clearly in Doctor Faustus and Paradise Lost.
A myth of capitalism is that it has always existed. Capitalism’s “always-already” sense of itself suggests that there was no time before capitalism, no pre-history. Its ethos is supposedly embedded in human nature, its practices already being enacted and only lacking certain necessities or being constrained by certain “obstacles” before coming to fruition. The notion of capitalism’s “latent existence” (Woods 28) implies that its realization is progress or development. This manner of thinking is found even in the determinism of early Marx, particularly in *The Communist Manifesto*. In *Capital*, however, Marx moves from the fatalistic and general to the historically specific in his discussion of the origins of capitalism:

> In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capitalist class in course of formation; but, above all, those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and “unattached” proletarians on the labour market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods. In England alone, which we take as our example, has it the classic form. (787)

This passage in “The So-called Primitive Accumulation” elucidates two significant points. The first is that primitive accumulation, and therefore capitalism, is dependent on the expropriation of the worker. Because capital is defined by social property relations,
the accumulation of capital is contingent on the transformation of social property relations into those that “generate capitalist ‘laws of motion’: the imperatives of competition and profit-maximization, a compulsion to reinvest surpluses, and a systematic and relentless need to improve labor-productivity and develop the forces of production” (Woods 36-7). In other words, accumulation of wealth alone does not lead to capitalism. The second item of importance is the historical specificity of the rise of capitalism in England. Capitalism, Marx suggests, is realized in other areas in different circumstances and in different forms; the classical form emerged in a particular context in England—it was not pre-determined, inevitable, or always already present.

Neither did it seem pre-determined for the early modern subject witnessing its birth in England. Renaissance texts, both literary and polemical, artistic and official, illustrate the shocking nature of the economic transition England was undergoing. A common reaction among authors was to decry “usury,” by which they meant a wide range of capitalist practices. Whereas usury in its strictest sense means specifically “pure profit,” during the Renaissance, it encompassed everything from illegitimate contracts, to buying cheap and selling dear, to simply hoping for a gain above the principle, to accepting a gift in return for a loan. Such practices are inveighed against in anti-usury polemics and state documents, and authors express feelings of anxiety and apprehension, ascribing capitalist practices and their consequences to the workings of the devil. Anti-usury authors, writing about the cardinal sin of covetousness in general and showing at length that the love of money is indeed the root of all evil, saw parallels between usurers (early capitalists) and whores, sodomites, and Jews, as well as Lucifer. Such sentiments come across in early modern drama and poetry as well, as I will demonstrate with Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus and Milton’s Paradise Lost. For many, capitalism was a sign not of development but rather of decline, evidence of Antichrist taking over the world. The symptoms of capitalism were not typically regarded as “progress” by those experiencing them in the early modern period.

The latter half of the sixteenth century saw an increase in usurious loans, owing, in part, to the revival of the “Act Against Usury.” Following a debate in the House of Commons in 1571, an act permitting usury “not exceeding ten percent” was passed (Tawney et al 2: 160). The bill, a revival of 37 Henry VIII, c. 9, was passed not to
condone usury, but rather to prevent excessive usury, often called “biting” usury—a term Renaissance people derived from the Hebrew neshec, to bite (Fenton 7, Wilson 275). Prior to the passing of the 1571 act, usury was not permitted at all according to 5 & 6 Edward VI, c. 20, but the interdiction led to illicit transactions in which usurers extracted high interest rates from borrowers. Because Edward’s act was difficult to enforce, as borrowers out of desperation willingly agreed to keep silent even in the face of horrendous interest rates, often to their detriment, 13 Elizabeth, c. 8 was passed to protect the borrower, rather than to aid the lender. The act outlawed the types of usury in which, for example, a lender would give a borrower a quantity of goods, rather than money. In such transactions, the borrower accepted the goods, agreeing to pay the lender a price for them usually much higher than their actual worth; the borrower then would do his best to sell the goods at a market, rarely getting the price he himself had agreed to. These kinds of “shifts” or “chevisaunces,” if found out, resulted in forfeiture, even if the borrower had not yet paid the usurer. Finally, a clause towards the end of the act explains clearly how it is meant to be understood:

And be yt further enacted, That the sayde Statute nowe revyved shalbe most largely and strongly construed for the repressing of Usurie, and agaynst all persons that shall offend agaynste the true meaning of the said Statute by any Way or Devyce dyrectly or indyrectly. (Tawney et al 2: 162)

However innocuous its intention, the act legitimized money-lending. Now, legally, one could be a professional money-lender and make a very good living at it. In “A Description of England, or a briefe rehersall of the nature and qualities of the people of England and such commodities as are to be found in the same” (1587), William Harrison writes,

the third thing [the people] talk of is usurie, a trade brought in by the Jewes, now perfectly practiced almost by everie christian, and so commonlie, that he is accompted for a foole that dooth lend his monie for nothing. In time past it was Sors pro sorte, that is, the principall onelie for the principall; but now… [it is] that which is above the principall, commonlie called Usura… (Tawney et al 3: 71-2)
The popular dissemination and acceptance of a practice that church fathers, humanist authorities, and the Bible itself condemn was not a little troubling to people like Harrison.

In addition to his comment on the widespread practice of usury, Harrison also considers the changes in the markets of his day. In the section of his tract entitled “Of Fairs and Markets,” he gives a telling look at unfair practices of buyers and sellers. Harrison decries capitalist practices of surplus accumulation, buying cheap and selling dear, and monopolizing the market, and he comments on their detrimental effects on the community. Originally begun “for the benefit of the realm,” markets and fairs are, in 1577, “too too much abused: for the reliefe and ease of the buier is not so much intended in them, as the benefit of the seller” (73), and it is the unfair dealings of the sellers, who hoard grain and who buy up all the supplies from poorer small sellers, that are the “cause of dearth and scarcitie in time of great abundance” (73). Harrison goes on to illustrate how the larger and wealthier sellers will ruin a small seller who offers either a better product or else larger portions of the products, either spreading rumors or else strong-arming him out of the market altogether (73). In his observations on corn-hoarding, Harrison describes the molding and rotten state the grain often is in by the time the hoarders bring it to market. And because that is the only grain available, for the sellers have made sure that it is, people have no choice but to buy it (76-9). After also noting the employment of false weights and measures in the market, Harrison finally mentions the practice of shipping grain overseas and selling there for a better price. The description of these capitalist practices in the so-called free market makes clear that it is not in fact free. Small sellers are free to compete with large ones, but they will lose every time. People are free to go to market and spend their money how they list, but at times they will have no choice but moldy corn and small portions of it at that.

John Wheeler’s oft-quoted lament from *Wheels of Commerce* (1601) is a similar utterance of foreboding:

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all the world choppeth and changeth, runneth and raveth after Marts,
Markets and Merchandising, so that all things come into Commerce, and
pass into traffic… this man maketh merchandise of the works of his hands,
this man of another man’s labor, one selleth words, another maketh traffic
of the skins and blood of other men, yea there are some found so subtle
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and cunning merchants, that they persuade and induce men to suffer
themselves to be bought and sold, and we have seene in our time enowe,
and too manie, which have made merchandise of mens soules… (Wheeler
231)

Wheeler writes specifically about commodity fetishism and the commodification and
objectification of labor that occur under capitalism, and the “subtle and cunning
merchants,” the early modern capitalists, might as easily be Marlowe’s Faustus,
Mephistopheles, Milton’s Satan, or the fiendish usurers described in anti-usury polemics.

Thomas Wilson’s anti-usury tract, *A Discourse Upon Usury* (1571), written in
response to the debate in the House of Commons over the act permitting lending at ten
percent, catalogues myriad practices that were usurious, and the author is especially
concerned with openly practiced schemes like the ones taking place in Harrison’s market
that were ostensibly legitimate and yet unethical. The cunning usurer was a master of
appearances; he could usually work the system so as to appear innocent. Thus, Wilson
lists instances of apparently legitimate transactions, and he also includes a clause defining
“mental usury” to safeguard against loopholes:

> Bee it that a man lendeth an hundred pound freely, and hopeth assuredlye
to have some thankfull recompence at the yeres end… undoubtedlye the
same man is an usurer before god, and thys is called *Mentalis usura*, an
usurie of the mynde, when one hopeth for gayne although no contracte be
made. (292)

In 1634, John Blaxton offers a similar definition of “mental usury,” but he also goes on to
explain why it is a sin: “the Law of God being spirituall, doth not onely restraine the
hands, and outward man; but also the intent and purpose of the heart: insomuch, the
morall actions though in shew good, are to be judged evill, if they proceed from an ill
intent” (5). But how was one to judge intention? Often, judges, ecclesiastical and
secular, simply looked for corrupt contracts. Norman Jones explains,

> For usury to occur, then, the borrower and lender had to agree on terms for
a loan that were corrupt, meaning outside of the tolerance of the statute.
The bargain had to be one in which the lender took no risk, and it had to
be the lender’s intention to take excessive interest. If the bargain and
intention could be proven, the lender was guilty of usury, even if the money due was never received. (120)

The court officials’ awareness of such dealings increased as usurers found ways to make profits larger than ten percent, but as long as there were people desperate enough to make such transactions, these money men had no trouble getting such borrowers to agree to their terms. Thus, Wilson, Blaxton, and another anti-usury author, Robert Fenton, all emphasize Christian charity, that virtue of virtues, and appeal to money-lenders’ desire for gain, suggesting that they give to the poor and lend to those in need for no interest, for the greater reward in heaven:

that supernaturall usurie which passeth betwenee God and man: where sometimes man paieth the Usurer, lending unto God, by giving to the poore that he may receive an hundred fold… He lendeth in that kind to the Lord, who is mercifull to the poore. Our God (saith S. Augustine) who forbiddeth thee to be an Usurer, he commandeth thee to be an Usurer. For it is said unto thee; Lend unto the Lord upon usurie. (Fenton 14 author’s italics)

The “supernatural” usury Fenton recommends illustrates the role played by the notion of the “divine economy” in the anti-usury tracts. Significantly, the concept of “God’s economy,” including the Christian tropes of sin, debt, and redemption, is not new to the Renaissance; what is new, however, is the cultural milieu in which this concept is being called upon. The polemicists employ traditional tropes for an audience whose ideas of religion and economy, and the relationship between the two, are undergoing a major transformation.

Because the Reformation and the emergence of capitalism transpired during roughly the same time period—though capitalism didn’t come into its own until the latter part of the seventeenth century—and because the two are clearly interconnected in the early modern “world view,” it becomes important to consider the nature of the relationship between the two. But this is no easy task. Whether Protestantism paved the road for capitalism¹ or vice versa, or whether capitalism and Protestantism worked

¹ Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is responsible for the idea that Protestantism led to capitalism, that the two are linked causally.
symbiotically, each providing for the existence of the other—these matters have been of concern to economic historians. Christopher Hill’s position on the matter is one which I am most inclined to accept:²

men did not become capitalists because they were protestants, nor protestants because they were capitalists. In a society already becoming capitalist, protestantism facilitated the triumph of the new values. There was no inherent theological reason for the protestant emphasis on frugality, hard work, accumulation; but that emphasis was a natural consequence of the religion of the heart in a society where capitalist industry was developing. ("Protestantism" 36)

Protestantism originated in large part in Luther’s disdain for the allegedly idolatrous Papacy, with its selling of indulgences and commodification of communion. Luther’s and Calvin’s ideas, however, led to a religious ideology that shoved aside the hegemony of Rome and preached that God could be found in one’s own heart; thus, the best policy was to check, not with another fallen man, but with one’s own conscience when making decisions. The anarchical potential of Protestantism lay in its shifting of moral authority from the church to the individual. An apparently usurious transaction could then be a case in which a money-lender was genuinely trying to help his fellow Christian, and the decapitation of a king might really be the defeat of Antichrist. Wilson’s and Blaxton’s appeals to the conscience and their attempts to foreclose the possibility that usurious transactions might be deemed acceptable or legitimate—even if they were permitted by the state—suggest a tacit fear in the face of Protestantism’s radical possibilities.

II. THE DEVIL INSIDE

Until the birth of the “free” market economy, the natural function of money was exchange; it was a medium. “Money’s proper purpose,” David Hawkes writes, “its telos, is to facilitate the exchange of goods that are useful in themselves” (Idols 31). With the increase of commerce and exchange, money itself was commodified and sought after.

² See also R.H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism; Norman Jones, God and the Moneylenders; and Benjamin Nelson, The Idea of Usury for perspectives on the coincidence of Protestantism and capitalism.
This abuse of the telos, the taking for an end what is a means, and what Marx terms commodity fetishism, is what an early modern person would call idolatry. As Hawkes makes clear, the term, like usury, had a wide range of application in early modern texts, and the Renaissance definition of idolatry comes primarily from Biblical usage of the term. The idol, or fetish-object, is, Hawkes writes,

a radically false object: It cannot possibly be what it claims to be. This is what Paul means when he observes “We know that an idol is nothing in the world” (1.Cor. 8:4). The Greek word used here is not “eikon,” which refers to the material object of the fetish, and thus obviously does have a real, worldly existence. It is “eidolon,” which refers to the false mental image that the idolater imposes upon the material icon. Eidolon … is best understood as an unreal objective representation of a real subjective phenomenon. This definition … applies equally well to such seemingly disparate concepts as ghosts, religious idols, and money… (Idols 58).

The term “covetousness” was often coupled with, or used synonymously with, idolatry; like idolatry, covetousness meant a desire for worldly objects as ends in themselves. This passage from John Blaxton demonstrates awareness that his audience understands the inherent connection between idolatry and covetousness:

The usurer sinneth by idolatry. For seeing the roote of usury is covetousnese, (which is the roote of all evill) it cannot be denied; but that every usurer is covetous; and every covetous man is an idolater… And a servant of Mammon… And therefore no true Servant of the Lord… for covetous persons and idolaters, there is no inheritance in heaven. (24)

Wilson, too, emphasizes the connections among covetousness, idolatry, and usury:

Alas, what goodness can bee in them that are covetous, who have made money there god, and committed therwith idolatry, as S. Paule saieth in an other place? What mind can he have of heavenly thinges, that is wholly drowned in worldly desires, will sell hys soule for money? (220)

Employing poststructuralist concepts to elucidate early modern thought on idolatry and usury, Hawkes explains that idolatry (or commodity fetishism) means that value is placed in the sign itself rather than the thing signified. This tendency is both capitalistic and, I
argue, satanic. For the descendants of Adam, the separation of the sign from the thing signified is the result of the Fall:

When Adam in Paradise did first give names unto things, they were so significant and expressive, as if nature herself had spoken. But since the fall, a liberty [remained] in the sons of Adam to term things as it pleased them to conceive… names [now have] no definitions. (Fenton 4)

The mistaken placement of meaning in mere names, or signs, the worshipping of idols, the fetishization of commodities—these are all different manifestations of the same general inability of the devil and man (the devil in man) to understand the true value of a thing. Thus, Milton’s epic voice admonishes the reader: “So little knows/ Any, but God alone, to value right/ The good before him, but perverts best things/ To worst abuse, or to their meanest use” (Paradise Lost 4.201-4).

Idolatry is at the heart of many of the frightening questions that were raised by capitalist practices. How, anti-usury authors wonder, can one sell time? How can one get something from nothing? How can money beget money? “And will these idle men sell the sun, the ayer, and the tyme for their proper gayne? Howe can hee bee of god that so dothe?” (Wilson 288). Usury appeared to be an impossible thing, and it was unnatural and ungodly because it was an impossible thing that happened in any case. Michael Taussig observes a similar fear among peasant cultures just beginning to experience the effects of capitalism:

the commodity form has truly subjugated the consciousness of persons who are endowed with a long capitalist heritage, but not, it would seem, the consciousness of those peasants with whom we are concerned—persons just beginning to experience capitalism. Instead they are anthropomorphizing their subjugation in the figure of the devil, redolent of the power of evil. (28)

Like the peasants Taussig describes, Renaissance subjects also projected their fears of emergent capitalism onto the devil. The powerful signifying force of the devil was embedded in the Christianity of early modern England. And while the devil figure might typically embody a culture’s fears, the specifically Protestant devil of the Renaissance signified in ways which were intertwined with the new-born culture of capital.
In his influential discussion of Protestant providentialism in *Radical Tragedy*, Jonathan Dollimore sees the early modern subject in a state of overwhelming religious dilemma. According to Dollimore, this type of Calvinistic religious thought places the subject in an aporetic position between faith and doubt, hope and despair, as God demands faith even while damning all but the elect to hell. The Providentialist God was as capable of divine intervention as he was of harsh retribution and inflexible justice: “the idea of specific intervention,” Dollimore writes, “[involved] a punitive action by God or one of His agents” (87). In addition, the devil was loose in the world and might, at one moment, be the source of temptation and, at another, acting as one of the aforementioned agents in punishing those who were hardened of heart and committed to their lives of sin (Dollimore 103-6, 111). That the devil was summoned in the usury tracts was a function of his ubiquity in early modern religious ideology, and anti-usury authors like Wilson attempted to harness the power of Lucifer in order to persuade the audience of the evils of usury in particular and covetousness in general.

In a conspicuous demonstration of, on the one hand, the interchangeability of the usurer and devil, and on the other, the usurpation of the devil’s throne by the wily usurer, Wilson creates a binary opposition between God and the latter:

> God geeveth, and the usurer is straite handed; god is free, and the usurer is harde. God lendeth life and living for love, and the usurer gaineth al that he maye for lone, yea hee taketh mens hartes (as I might saye) out of theire bodies. So that I may well avowe, that light and darknes, white and blacke, trueth and falshood, heaven and hell, are not so contrarye and so distant, as god and the usurer. (288)

Wilson, Fenton, and Blaxton consistently employ such rhetoric. That these pieces are spread out over the course of sixty years—Wilson’s *Discourse* in 1571 to Blaxton’s *English Usurer* in 1634—suggests that the demonization of usury by linking it to the devil was a customary way of dealing with nascent capitalism. People projected their fears about the cunning, covetous usurer, who was not always immediately recognizable, onto the old familiar figure of Satan, and conservative Protestants who believed that the world truly was the devil’s playground saw Lucifer dressed in merchant’s robes, writing
corrupt contracts, waiting to ruin the unfortunate people who borrowed from him. Here, Blaxton depicts Satan out-using the usurer:

> But the usurer is mad; for his sinne at once buds, blossomes, and brings forth the fruit of vengeance. Every Bond he takes of others, enters him onto a new obligation to Satan: as he hopes his debtors will keepe day with him, the divell expects no lesse of himselfe. Every forfeit he takes, scores up a new debt to Lucifer: and every morgag’d land he seizeth on, enlargeth his dominion in hell. (44)

Blaxton’s statement situates capitalism in hell, making Satan the ultimate usurer. Interestingly, both God (in the passage from Fenton above) and the devil are depicted as usurers; the image is of God in heaven and Satan in hell, the two working together as it were, keeping a tally of those who engage in usury and those who give with charitable good will. This is evocative of Dollimore’s reading of *Doctor Faustus*: “God and Lucifer seem equally responsible in [Faustus’] final destruction, two supreme agents of power… co-operating in his demise” (111).

The following passage from Blaxton expresses another aspect of the sinful nature of usury:

> This is no small difference betweene God and the divell. The divell in shew, biddeth us, love our selves, doe all for our selves, and we are so simple as to believe him and thinke that we doe so; whereas the event proves that we doe all for him, and to our owne ruine: for he is the plaine image of usurers, who live by the sweate of other mens browes, and cunningly grow rich by undoing others… (20)

Blaxton suggests that just as the devil induces people, like usurers, to damn themselves and do his work for him, so the usurer lives by the sweat of other men’s brows, performing no legitimate labor for himself. Both the devil and the usurer gain at the expense of others, and the usurer’s gain is ultimately the devil’s. The devil is the image of the usurer—not, interestingly, the other way around, again suggesting the interchangeability of the early capitalist and the devil in the rhetoric of the polemicists.

In other passages that similarly demonize the capitalist, authors portray the devil dwelling within the usurer. In this catalogue of fairly standard negative comparisons
(which I quote at length to give a broader idea of the kinds of tropes authors would call upon), Wilson portrays the capitalist as the devil’s domicile:

Mark, I pray you, to how many things the covetous man is compared. First, he is like Hell, that is never satisfied. Next he is like death, that devoureth all things; then to the Sea, that never swellith the more, although all the other ryvers and fluddes do runne into it; after that hee is resembled to a dog, that lying in a heymowe will neyther eate heye himselfe, nor yet suffer other cattell to eat by hym; to a moul, that casteth earth upon himself; to a spyder, that is entangled in his own copwebb; and last of all he is compared to a sack that hath no bottom, that put in it whatsoever you wil, the same stil goeth out straight wayes, and is never filled…you may well be assured that the dyvell dwelleth tabernacled in such a monster. (220)

After showing through various similes the usurer’s excessive appetite, his uncharitable disposition towards his neighbors (the dog in the “heymowe”), and his own self-destructive tendencies (a mole that buries itself), Wilson suggests that the usurer has the devil within him. Blaxton offers an image of the devil toiling away in the heart of Judas: “[he] entered into the heart of Judas, and put in him this greedinesse, and covetousnesse of gaine, for which he was content to sell his master. Judas heart was the shop, the Divell was the fore man to worke in it…” (14).

The attribution of covetousness and ambition to the devil took place prior to the Renaissance. Commenting on medieval dramatic predecessors to Faustus, John Cox notes that the early plays “emphasize covetousness as the devil’s principal means of acquiring the soul” (“To Obtain” 39). Yet in an age when covetousness abounded more than ever, and in new and powerful forms, ascribing its new manifestations to the devil made him more current, and more secular. The devil who was before involved in a battle with God was now present among the worldly wise merchants and usurers. It was previously left to the common person to avoid Lucifer’s, and God’s, wrath; now, the devil was literally on his doorstep, demanding payment on his loan. The depictions of the capitalist as a devil in the anti-usury tracts and of the devil as a capitalist in Marlowe and Milton are symptomatic of the anxiety felt by the early modern subject experiencing
the ill effects of emergent capitalism. And the effects they felt were not only of domestic practices in their local markets. Importantly, the changing economy could be linked to the devil not only because it was viewed as evidence of an evil presence in England; capitalism, we know, is also devilishly tempting. Like the devil, it aspired to greatness, promised freedom, appealed to worldly appetites and desires, and rewarded personal ambition—all of which was as attractive to Renaissance people as it is to modern subjects, and perhaps even more so because some of these possibilities were so new.

During Elizabeth’s reign, England began extending its gaze out into the world around her. The dawning of the age of capitalism and the Reformation coincided with an increasing interest in overseas trade and expansion. Such interests would lead to colonization and modern slavery abroad and an increasing value placed on accumulation and consumption at home. It is the fetishization of exotic goods; the establishing of the exchange and the concomitant realization that coins had no inherent value; and the selling of men, as well as the capitalist practices taking place in the domestic market, that early modern subjects perceived as the temptations and triumphs of the devil.

III. SECRETS

That works spanning a century project capitalist traits onto the devil suggests, to recall Michael Taussig’s observation above, not only that the early modern subjects were, like Taussig’s peasants, anthropomorphizing their fears. It also suggests something more profound about the nature of capitalism itself. In his discussion of “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” Marx writes, “In order, therefore, to find an analogy [to commodity fetishism], we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world” (Capital 83). Indeed, Marx’s work is fraught with such analogies, and the interesting feature, as in this quotation, is that the discussion of capitalism seems to require it: “we must have recourse,” he writes. In other words, there is something supernatural about capitalism itself. Marx’s description of the “magic and necromancy that surrounds products of labor” (87) comes to life in Faustus. The secret of capitalism is its mystical and demonic nature; it is, as Paul says of the idol, “nothing in the world.”
Marlowe’s primary source for Doctor Faustus, the English Faust Book, contains a prose narrative version of every scene in the A text of the play, and numerous others that Marlowe excluded. In the EFB, however, economic issues are addressed more explicitly than in Marlowe’s version. In particular, several episodes of the EFB portray Faustus as a usurer, accruing small sums at others’ expense. The first and most significant of these scenes is entitled “How Doctor Faustus Borrowed money of a Jew and laid his own leg to pawn for it” (152). Faustus borrows the sum, cuts off his leg (his “pound of flesh”) for the Jew as pawn, on condition that when he repays the loan his leg will be returned. The Jew, not wanting the leg to decay in his house, tosses it into a ditch. Naturally when Faustus returns three days later with the full amount of the loan and demands his leg, the Jew

fell to entreating, promising him to give him what money he would ask, if he would not deal straitly with him, wherefore the Jew was constrained to give him 60 dollars more to be rid of him, and yet Faustus had his leg on, for he had but blinded the Jew. (2060-64)

The Jew is, of course, a usurer himself; thus, this scene is an interesting amelioration of the Jew in the face of a more frightening, more insidious other: Faustus the necromancer who, here, out-uses the usurer.

The subsequent “horse-courser” chapter, which made its way into the play, is an example of the sale of a faulty good for a large sum of money, a usurious transaction by all early modern accounts. In both the EFB and the play, the horse-courser loses the horse, “but Faustus kept his money” (2083-4). Another episode in the Faust Book, “How Doctor Faustus sold five swine for six dollars apiece” is similar to the horse-courser
story; Faustus sells five hearty pigs for six dollars each, warning the buyer not to drive them into the water. Of course, the buyer does drive them into the water where they change into bundles of hay and Faustus keeps his money (2125-2133).

These episodes in the Faust Book enable us to see clearly Faustus as a usurer himself. While Marlowe’s Faustus less obviously engages in early capitalist practices, the play nevertheless operates within the same economic discourse found in the anti-usury polemics: Marlowe reproduces the popular rhetoric of the usurer as inspired by and ruled by the Devil. By revealing Faustus’ tendency to mirror his “teacher,” Mephistopheles, Marlowe’s play offers up a vision of Faustus as an interpellated subject under a burgeoning capitalist ideological regime. Faustus’ goals are trivial: he asks for twenty-four years, he delights in tricking the poor horse-courser and coming away with only eighty dollars. He talks of empire and world domination but settles for silly tricks and small gain. The suggestion is that Faustus, lost in the disorderly, fluctuating world of exchange, cannot clearly gauge the value of a good. Marlowe’s Faustus, I argue, is far more than an early modern morality play; it plays a significant role in the discourse of early modern capitalism.

Marlowe’s devils do recall those of medieval drama; at the same time, however, as John Cox writes, “Marlowe’s devils are the second major change in the history of early modern devils” (Devil 110). Cox suggests that, through his devils, Marlowe criticizes the “secularization of English life” (110); notably, it is Faustus’ ambition that leads to his downfall: “Where Faustus is concerned,” Cox continues, “one might even say that what nourishes and destroys him is his competitive ambition itself…” (110). Cox insinuates that Faustus’ ambition is itself a timely representation of the bourgeois social-climbing fostered by economic change during the Renaissance. Thus, while the typical associations of the devil with covetousness, avarice, idolatry, pride, and ambition found in medieval drama are a source for Marlowe’s representations, that Faustus himself comes across, like Milton’s Satan, as a character with whom the audience might identify and sympathize, suggests on a broader level the social and economic changes informing

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3 See David Bevington, From Mankind to Marlowe and John Cox, The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama for significant readings of Faustus within the tradition of morality drama.
Marlowe’s ideas of what, for his audience, ambition and aspiration mean and how Faustus’ thoughts and deeds will signify.

One significant factor in Faustus, reflective not only of the problematic position of the subject within Protestant ideology, as Jonathan Dollimore argues in Radical Tragedy, but also of the consequences of emergent capitalism, is the commodification of Faustus’ soul itself. Graham Hammill considers “the objectification and exchange of the soul to be what is most disturbing about Marlowe’s play” (328). The commodification of the soul calls to mind John Wheeler’s lamentation: “we have seene in our time enowe, and too manie, which have made merchandise of mens soules” (Wheeler 231). The ability to commodify the soul—the inability to see its real value—is a symptom of capitalism itself, under which value becomes arbitrary and signs are confused with things signified, as the anti-usury authors feared. “Faustus’ renunciation of the theological situates him both in the world of the literary… and in the world of capital, the world of goods valued for their exchange,” Hammill writes (331). He continues, “the literary suspends any Good outside the production of goods, by which one could sufficiently judge the value of goods” (331). Hammill’s article is suggestive; however, his remark that “Faustus… examines the effects of commodification, although the play conceptualizes exchange and its effects not by way of the cunning of the market, but through its considerations of the literary” (330) effaces the spiritual market in which souls are for sale, the very market Wheeler describes, present in the play. Through Faustus and his devils, Marlowe is a spokesperson for a culture wary of the emergence of a new economy, one in which even a soul can become a commodity.

II. FAUSTUS AND THE CONTRACT

In Faustus, the protagonist commodifies his own soul, “hazarding” it for Mephistopheles’ service. Mephistopheles explains that Faustus must “buy my service with his soul” (2.1.32) by signing a contract:

But Faustus, thou must bequeath it solemnly
And write a deed of gift with thine own blood,
For that security craves great Lucifer.
If thou deny it, I will back to hell. (2.1.34-7)

Subsequently, as Faustus draws blood and prepares to write the contract, Mephistopheles reminds him once more to “Write it in a manner of a deed of gift” (2.1.59). It would seem that this is not a “purchase” at all. It is my argument that in fact this fiendish pact is a usurer’s contract, and that Marlowe is consciously drawing on the tradition of devil-as-usurer in his depiction of Mephistopheles.

The “deed of gift” is not present in the English Faust Book. In that text, a contract is written out and contains several articles which both parties must fulfill in order for the contract to be valid. In addition, both Mephistopheles and Faustus keep a copy to prevent any confusion. The “deed of gift” is Marlowe’s invention, and he emphasizes the phrase by including it three times in the scene, twice by Mephistopheles and once in the contract itself. The question for scholars is how to take this deed of gift and, specifically, whether or not this contract is valid and binding: “Whereas we are given no reason to think that the Good Angel and the Old Man are liars, we have every reason to suspect that Mephistopheles lies when he claims the pact to be irrevocable” (Cox “To Obtain” 40).

Cox’s reasoning is not so clear, however, when the contract is situated in a broader context. Specifically, it is not at all clear that God would be willing to forgive a repentant Faustus. Ceri Sullivan suggests that once Faustus has signed the contract, forgiveness is no longer possible: “Damnation occurs where the sin is mortal, not venial. For sin to be mortal, the act must be of grave matter and involve a deliberate turning away from God. This, say the catechisms, asks for as full a knowledge of the consequences as the sinner is able to comprehend” (49-50). While Faustus scoffs, “Come, I think hell’s a fable” (2.1.128), suggesting that he has an incomplete knowledge of the consequences of his sin, Mephistopheles is honest in his disclosure of the nature of hell and the fall of Lucifer, and the contract makes clear what will happen to Faustus at the end of twenty-four years; thus, by the standards Sullivan describes, once Faustus has signed the contract he has committed a mortal sin and is damned. Contrary to Cox’s assessment, the Good Angel and the Old Man may indeed be lying, however unintentionally.

To consider early modern contract law is helpful here, and Marlowe solicits the audience’s attention to contract law in the beginning of the play. In Faustus’ opening soliloquy, he scoffs at the Justinian’s legal code, just as he rejects biblical law. The two
Latin quotations pertain to Faustus’ situation. The first: “If one and the same thing is bequeathed to two persons, one of them shall have the thing, the other the value of the thing” (1.1.28-9), might easily be referring to Faustus’ soul, as R.W. Ingram suggests: “Faustus’ soul might conceivably be this ‘thing,’ and the value of it, a value Faustus is never properly able to assess, is what he barters away” (76). Indeed, although Ingram notes that this reading may “strain the meaning a little,” the economic valence of the quotation is strong. Halpern contends, “In distinguishing the thing itself from its worth, Faustus … produces something like the Marxist distinction between use value and exchange value” (“Marlowe’s Theater” 470). The quotation, it seems, is included for the benefit of the audience. For, while Marlowe very likely means for the audience to recognize that the “thing” in question is the soul, Faustus is solely concerned with exchange-value, which conceals use-value; in other words, the distinction between use- and exchange-values may be clear to us, but it is not, the play demonstrates, clear to Faustus. The second quotation, “The Father cannot disinherit the son unless—” (1.1.31) evokes the theological idea that “divine” inheritance awaits good children while prodigals who disobey their father receive nothing and are cast out into darkness; it also resonates with earthly economic concern with primogeniture. Metatheatrical and self-referential, these quotations point to Marlowe’s attention to contract law when writing the play.

Luke Wilson’s reading of the play in terms of early modern contract law provides some useful details that are suggestive for my purposes. Pointing out there is always some risk, implied in the verb “to hazard,” involved in a contract (resolving Cox’s question of whether of not the contract is irrevocable), and that contracts are “executory,” or pending fulfillment, he writes, “either or both [parties] cannot know whether they’ll get what’s due them. The ‘contraction’ of contract represents not only a ‘meeting of the minds’ in the agreement itself, but also an imaginary temporal construction in which promise and performance are linked together…” (197). In other words, it is a fiction to think that any contract is irrevocable, a necessary lie that the parties buy into; it is a suspension of disbelief in the knowledge that, since the condition and terms of the contract have not yet been fulfilled, any number of things could happen to alter it. Uncertainty was always certain; the contract as contract is always both in a state of being fulfilled and in danger of never being fulfilled. With the contract in the play, the
uncertainty would seem to lie in whether Mephistopheles will fulfill his end of the deal; he would not, it seems, be required to. Yet, Mephistopheles aside, “Oh, what will I not do to obtain his soul?” (2.1.72) paired with his anxiety over Faustus’ possible inclination to repent might be expressions of real uncertainty, calling into question any rash conclusions about the destination of Faustus’ soul. Faustus’ and Mephistopheles’ uncertainty may, in fact, be mutual.

The reading of the contract is further complicated when we consider Luke Wilson’s suggestion that, when it comes to the contract, Faustus appears to be offering something to the devil that he simultaneously assumes already belongs to the devil, “that what he withholds as a bargaining chip is already in possession of the other party” (206). The term bargaining chip is apt; as Faustus rejects God, and in doing so, effaces the traditional theological idea that the soul is “on loan” from God, and thus not his to give away (Wilson 209), Faustus converts his own soul into capital: “Faustus’ soul is the gift of which the deed disposes. The common law had no provision for gifts of souls. The only things that could be given were real property and chattels, and Faustus seems to suppose his soul falls under the latter category” (208). Halpern writes, “In order to become a commodity, the soul must not only supply a use-value to the purchaser but it must be alienable by the seller. It must, that is, be a form of property” (“Marlowe’s Theater” 461). Because godhead is Faustus’ goal, a trifling matter like the eternal soul is merely a commodity or a coin to be exchanged for what he wants, which is precisely how he means to use it when he asks, frustrated at the staying of his blood, “Is thy soul not thine own?” (2.1.67). Arguably, “No” is the answer to Faustus’ question; however, Halpern notes, “he appears to succeed in selling it, so we must assume that he does in some sense own it after all” (“Marlowe’s Theater” 461).

Although Faustus offers his soul to Mephistopheles, the latter might still, according to early modern thought, have been committing usury. The usurer’s contract lacked precise definition, as MP and anti-usury author Thomas Wilson’s Discourse Upon Usury (1571) makes clear. Delineating “divers contracts and bargaynes that are used to avoid [the appearance of] usurye” (289), Wilson argues that even the giving of gifts is a form of usury if the person receiving the gift intends to gain interest above the principal (292). Mephistopheles tells Faustus to “Write it in a manner of a deed of gift” (2.1.59),
setting up a contract in which he gives Faustus twenty-four years of his service in exchange for Faustus’ eternal soul. This is clearly not a quid pro quo; possession of Faustus’ eternal soul is excessive interest in relation to the twenty-four year principal. That the contract must be written as a “deed of gift,” which Mephistopheles anxiously reiterates, reflects the devil’s effort to guard against any language suggestive of usury which might void the contract. If Faustus is giving his soul to the devil, then he does this of his own accord; thus the soul, Mephistopheles hopes, will not be construed as interest. And while Thomas Wilson argues that any taking of interest above the principle, even in the form of a gift, is usury, Robert Fenton, another anti-usury author, allows for gift-giving: “From giving [usury] is distinguished, because a gift is forever: loane is only for a time. Both are a free passing over of use and propertie: but that one is temporall, the other perpetuall” (16). This sort of thinking is exactly what Mephistopheles anticipates; if Faustus gives the demon his soul, then it is forever, and it is not usury.

But Mephistopheles is a usurer. Guilty of what anti-usury authors called “mental usury” or “usury of the heart,” in his desperate aside, “Oh, what will I not do to obtain his soul?” (2.1.71) Mephistopheles points to something beyond his concern about whether or not Faustus is going to commit to the dark side. He is exposed as a usurer who has a vested interest, of the financial sort, in the acquisition of this commodity. If Lucifer wants to “Enlarge his kingdom” (2.1.39), then Mephistopheles is the merchant whose trade expertise and cunning in the market lead to more capital, to more commodities, and to an empire of damned souls. Faustus is one such, and Mephistopheles does not want to lose on this deal. Thus, the “deed of gift” ensures that Mephistopheles will get his good at the end of the day.

The narrator of the English Faust Book states that Faustus’ “mind was so inflamed that he forgot his soul and promised Mephistopheles to hold all things as he had mentioned them: he thought the devil was not so black as they used to paint him, nor hell so hot as the people say, etc.” (97). Similarly, in the play, Mephistopheles “fetches him somewhat to delight his mind” (2.1.81). Marlowe’s Faustus, however, does not need this “somewhat;” he has already professed his delight in necromancy, and “This word ‘damnation’ terrifies not him,/ For he confounds hell in Elysium” (1.3.60-1). Faustus is

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4 As John Cox worries in “To Obtain his Soul: Demonic Desire for the Soul in Marlowe and Others” (29).
the knowing, willing borrower, then, rather than a poor gull, desperate to gain knowledge no matter what the cost. But this is wrong; it is not that the cost does not matter, it is that Faustus is unable to judge the value of the commodity he gives in exchange for twenty-four years of demonic service. While Mephistopheles and presumably most people in the audience, not to mention God, all know that the eternal soul is worth more than twenty-four years of service, Faustus does not. Precisely because the soul can be commodified, Faustus concludes that it cannot be so valuable. He has no use for this thing, this soul, that he has completely detached from the eternal life it signifies. Caught up in visions of empire, “Of power, of honor, of omnipotence” (1.1.56), Faustus rejects the actual deity, maker of his soul, in an attempt to become godlike himself. He separates the soul from its telos, and judges this commodity not according to its use-value or the labor that produced it, but rather according to its exchange value. Once the soul has become an exchangeable commodity, there is no basis upon which to judge its proper value; Faustus thus realizes on a cosmic scale the fears of the anti-usury authors that once the value of goods or coins was judged according to exchange, value would become completely arbitrary, fluctuating at the whim of the market. The ascription of value according to the market rather than the labor that produced goods or their use-value leads to an acceptance and purveyance of capitalist traits: commodity fetishism, objectification, the divorcing of labor from the products of labor, the signified from the sign. The tendencies are satanic as they are capitalistic.

III. THE s/SUBJECT IN FAUSTUS

Through his depiction of Mephistopheles as a usurer, Marlowe demonizes the agents of capitalism. He also anticipates the dissemination of capitalist values and demonstrates their long term damning effects through the pattern of spectacle and mimesis in the play. In The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation, Richard Halpern invokes Althusser for his discussion of early modern schools. Tudor schools, he suggests, were sites for the reproduction of the dominant social order (Poetics 22), and the schools (or those who funded them) achieved their ends primarily through an education grounded in mimesis (29). In the funding of schools, “merchant’s capital played the leading role”
(22), and thus, schools were “an economically productive investment, providing both discipline and the technical skills necessary for the reproduction of merchant’s capital” (23). In particular, students who attended such schools learned valuable skills like double-entry book-keeping, cartography, and surveying (23). Halpern refers to the humanist pedagogical tradition, noting that the grammar schools above all employed the tactics of mimetic education, thus “interpellating” or “hailing” the students, to use Althusser’s terms, who would become subjects who would then “freely choose” their own subjugation (29-30). Althusser names the school the “one ideological State apparatus [that] certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent!” (Althusser 1494). While late capitalism is the subject of Althusser’s theories, rather than the stirrings of a new economy in early modern England, his description of the school as the dominant ISA is applicable to the Renaissance, as Halpern successfully demonstrates.

Althusser writes that schools perpetuate different levels of social hierarchy, so that the workers, the managers, the “agents of repression,” and the “professional ideologists” (1495) are all produced by schools, learning the “virtues” each class ought to possess, including, for the bourgeoisie, “cynicism, contempt, arrogance, confidence, self-importance, even smooth talk and cunning” (1495), all “virtues” manifested by Faustus. The subject acquires these characteristics and becomes a “free subject” by mirroring a Subject: “We observe that the structure of all ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is speculary, i.e., a mirror-structure, and doubly speculary: this mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning” (1507). As Halpern notes, in the early modern classroom, the teacher is the Subject, and the students are subjects, taught to mirror the teacher-Subject (Poetics 29). Methods of imitation and repetition paired with a frequent threat of violence had profound shaping effects on students. They are thus interpellated, seeing themselves in the teacher and the teacher in themselves; they are recognized by the Subject and recognize themselves through this recognition. The result is the assimilation of ideology whereupon the subject “chooses” his own subjection. This is how ideology produces itself, and how it produces s/Subjects who will reproduce it.
While Faustus is an “erring star” (1.3.12), he also can be read as an ideologically interpellated subject. By this reading, scholarly pursuits are clearly demonized in the play; it is plain from the beginning that Faustus’ academic achievements are the first of several steps in his aspiration to power and his progress towards perdition. In the prologue, education is conceived of in terms of profit, learning in terms of consumption:

… so he profits in divinity,
The Fruitful plot of scholarism graced,
That shortly he was graced with doctor’s name,
Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes
In heavenly matters of theology;
Till, swoll’n with cunning of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And, melting, heavens conspired his overthrow.
For, falling to a devilish exercise,
And glutted more with learning’s golden gifts,
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy;
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss. (Prologue 15-27)

Faustus’ scholarly excesses—he is “glutted” with knowledge—lead to an immoderate will to rise ever higher, and this ambition is only encouraged by his next tutor, Mephistopheles, who apparently has a vested interest in his subjects’ capacity to learn. Faustus is a valuable subject because he is an educated bourgeois; as Emily Caroll Bartels points out, Faustus is “embedded and renowned in mainstream culture, a figure of learning… who is watched and followed by a fan club of scholars” (126). Bartels argues that the devils are attracted to Faustus because he is popular: “To provoke and contain his transgression would be to create an unforgettable spectacle of power. And this is precisely what Lucifer does” (127). Lucifer does not create the spectacle, however, until Faustus, the interpellated subject, has successfully interpellated others. As Mephistopheles is Faustus’ teacher, and the ultimate Subject for Faustus, the latter responds to the spectacles Mephistopheles produces, and mirrors Mephistopheles by creating spectacles for others, thus assimilating the Subject and becoming the s/Subject.
That Faustus has a “fan club” means that he is potentially the model whom they will mirror. Just as Faustus imitates Mephistopheles, Wagner mimics Faustus, and Robin the Ostler wants to be like Wagner. Marlowe creates a chain of subjects and Subjects, lining an avenue to hell, and Lucifer’s plan to “enlarge his kingdom” is enacted.

Criticism is directed towards education in the play not only through this interpellatory mirror chain, but also, specifically, in Faustus tormented speech when he is on the brink of death:

But Faustus’ offense can never be pardoned. The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus … Though my heart pangs and quivers to remember that I have been a student here these thirty years, oh, would that I have never seen Wittenberg, never read book! And what wonders I have done, all Germany can witness… for which Faustus hath lost both Germany and the world … and must remain in hell forever. (5.2.15-25)

Faustus here seems to make a connection between his libido dominandi and his education. His final lines in the play reinforce this idea: “I’ll burn my books. Ah Mephistopheles!” (5.2.120), Faustus wails. The notion that his love of books is somehow a cause of his damnation suggests Faustus’ awareness of the powerful shaping effects of the years of schooling and tutoring.

The passage above also suggests something about Faustus’ bourgeois upbringing. Coming from meager beginnings, “his parents of base stock” (Prologue 11), Faustus is sent away presumably to live with wealthier family members who can support him and send him to school: “Of riper years to Wittenberg he went,/ Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up” (12-13). The English Faust Book offers greater detail:

John Faustus, born in the town of Rhode, lying in the province of Weimar In Germany, his father a poor husbandman, and not able well to bring him up: but having an uncle at Wittenberg, a rich man, and without issue, took this Faustus from his father and made him his heir, insomuch that his father was no more troubled with him, for he remained with his uncle at Wittenberg, where he was kept at university in the same city to study divinity. (20-26)
If the schools Faustus attended were sites of ideological production, then Faustus leaves them as an interpellated subject. Ambitious, social-climbing, occasionally pathos-ridden, nouveau riche, intent on displaying his wealth and power—Faustus exhibits many of the negative characteristics typically associated with the bourgeoisie. Thus, his anguished wish to never have stepped foot in Wittenberg, a wish to have remained with his “parents of base stock,” points a finger, not only at the educational system through which Faustus was interpellated, but also at the bourgeois values and lifestyle maintained by Faustus’ relatives in Wittenberg.

Through his years of education, Faustus has been produced to respond to the visual, to the Subject he can see. Because he depends upon visual signs, Faustus has trouble conceiving of God, the soul, and hell. He cannot fathom that Mephistopheles is actually in hell even while he is in the room with Faustus. And by the time Faustus does see “where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament” and woefully cries out that “One drop would save [his] soul, half a drop” (5.2.75-6), he is so deeply entrenched in the system of commodification and exchange that he commodifies what could have been his salvation, quantifying the drops, attaching meaning to the visual display, the sign rather than the grace and salvation it signifies. Even a divine intervention cannot undo Faustus’ tendency towards idolatrous worship of the sign—from Mephistopheles’ perspective, he has been a good pupil.

In the course of his “education” under Mephistopheles, the demon sees that Faustus connects with and depends upon the spectacular, and he uses this repeatedly to distract Faustus, to “delight his mind” (2.1.81). From the devils who bring him gifts when his blood stays (2.1.81-2), to the pageant of the seven deadly sins, where Faustus exclaims in anticipation, “That sight will be as pleasing unto me as Paradise was to Adam the first day of his creation” (2.3.103-4, italics mine), Faustus is consistently fascinated and taken in by visual displays. Even his paramour, the succubus disguised as Helen, functions as a spectacle to enthrall him:

Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air,
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appeared to hapless Semele (5.1.103-6)
The allusion to Semele and Jupiter intimates the annihilating effects of spectacular display. Mephistopheles puts on shows for Faustus, cultivating the latter’s idolatrous proclivity to appearances, to the *eidolon*:

Plato associates Helen with the seductive power of mimesis and with a kind of ontological vacuity. People who pursue false pleasure, Socrates asserts, “aren’t filled with that which really is”… The phantom Helen … returns us precisely to the ontological dilemma of the *on kai me on*, being and not-being, that Faustus occupied in his opening monologue. As phantom… Helen represents pure seeming without being, and she is therefore the privileged embodiment of the void…In the Augustinian sense (and in a Platonic sense as well), the *eidolon* is evil, which is to say, non-being. In cleaving unto her, Faustus abandons the fullness of God for an emptiness. (Halpern “Marlowe’s Theater” 487-8)

Because Mephistopheles actually appears when Faustus conjures him, Faustus gives him credit immediately. His purpose in conjuring the demon is, in part, to augment his learning; he hopes Mephistopheles will “Resolve him of all ambiguities” (1.1.82). Part of the “service” Faustus requires of Mephistopheles is that the demon teach him, answer his questions, and debate with him. He has apparently long since surpassed the other scholars in his skills; naturally the devil is the next choice for teacher and rhetorician. Directly after Faustus signs the contract, Mephistopheles, establishing himself in the role of teacher-Subject, says, “Now, Faustus, ask what thou wilt” (2.1.116). After inquiring about hell (and not believing Mephistopheles’ response), Faustus suggests later that they “dispute again/ And argue of divine astrology” (2.3.33-4), and it is as a result of this conversation that Lucifer, Beelzebub, and Mephistopheles visit Faustus to menace him and then to enthrall him with the pageant. After the play is over, Faustus, delighted, exclaims, “Oh, this feeds my soul!” (2.3.162); he literally consumes the visual display he has come to rely on for self-definition. The irony, is, of course, as the Jupiter/Semele allusion insinuates, it is the spectacle that consumes Faustus.

Just as Mephistopheles provides visual entertainment for Faustus, Faustus revels in producing spectacles for the Emperor and the Duke. Summoning the spirit of Alexander the Great for the Emperor (4.1.62-67) and importing grapes for the Duke’s
pregnant wife (4.2.12-19), Faustus is concerned with garnering the approval of those who are of higher social status than he. His visual displays are a function of his social ambition. They also confirm the way he defines himself through spectacle. And it is telling that when Faustus “repents” from having been “tempted” by the Old Man, he commands Mephistophales to “Torment, sweet friend, that base and crooked age/ That durst dissuade me from thy Lucifer,/ With the greatest torments that our hell affords” (5.1.75-7). The devils, Faustus suggests, should pull out all the stops on an infernal torture demonstration, not realizing that such a spectacle is useless because it is done to torment something (the Old Man’s body) that is itself valueless—again exposing Faustus’ inability, because he is grounded in the visual, to see the thing signified behind the sign.

Wagner inherits Faustus’ legacy, receiving both his material goods and his lot in hell. Just as Faustus is subject to and mirrors Mephistopheles, Wagner mimics Faustus, and the play exposes how subject-hood is determined in the agreement between Wagner and Robin the Ostler. Wagner seems to be imitating Faustus when he enjoins Robin to be his servant. In the scene when Robin attempts to return Wagner’s money to avoid being conscripted as his apprentice, Wagner threatens to summon “Balioll and Belcher” (1.4.45). After he does, in fact, summon them, Robin agrees to serve Wagner, but not before he asks, “If I should serve you, would you teach me to raise up Banios and Belcheos?” (1.4.58-9). This humorous, metatheatrical scene within the play has serious implications. Not only does it “render explicit what Faustus’ contract with Mephistopheles makes implicit: the reduction of the soul to a commodity by means of its exchange for other material goods” (Halpern “Marlowe’s Theater” 460); it also reveals the ways subjection is enacted through the spectacle of conjuring demons. Ideological interpellation, the play suggests, is a type of necromancy. In the English Faust Book, interpellation through necromancy clearly takes place as Faustus actually bequeaths Wagner his own spirit, Akercock, who will serve him, provided Wagner publish Faustus’ history (2710-17)—another critical connection to learning and books. The EFB envisions Wagner becoming the next Faustus, having successfully completed his apprenticeship.

The theme of interpellation in the play, particularly its manifestation in the Wagner/Robin scene, functions on a broad level to show not only how Lucifer enlarges his empire, and how capital increases its might; it also illuminates the temptations of the
free market for the Renaissance audience, the so-called “world of profit and delight” now available to all. Thus, the vision of capitalism in *Faustus* is portentous. Marlowe portrays both the alluring nature and the damning effects of capitalism on the individual through his protagonist. That Faustus is, in many ways, an everyman, particularly in his bourgeois traits and values, his inability to recognize the value of things, and his psychological torment in the face of this confusing world of demonic capitalism, evokes a grave vision of the early modern subject grappling with the changing economic milieu. Whether Faustus is the object of the reader’s blame (as an agent who freely chooses his actions) or pity (as a victim of an unjust system which has ideologically produced him to function in the way he does), he is, in any case, representative of some of the nastiest consequences of capitalism—and the most disturbing for Renaissance subjects. The text speaks to us as an utterance of dismay, an unwillingness to embrace this yet nameless thing, telling us to call *it* the devil and send it back to hell.
CHAPTER 3

“SUCH JOY AMBITION FINDS”: SATANIC CAPITALISM AND THE DIVINE ECONOMY IN PARADISE LOST

I. CAPITALISM AND MILTON

By the time Milton published Paradise Lost in 1667, England’s economy was more fully capitalistic than it had been in the late sixteenth century when Marlowe was writing. To a greater degree than they had in Marlowe’s day, English subjects accumulated and consumed commodities, like silks, “Orient pearl,” and “spicie drugs,” imported from the East and West Indies. As England engaged in trade and colonization, turning her gaze ever outward, literary works such as Dryden’s Annus Mirabilis, published the same year as the first edition of Paradise Lost, disseminated visions of an English empire spreading over all the land (Hoxby 136-49). In Paradise Lost, Milton inscribes dreams of empire as well, but they are satanic dreams that function as both temptation and condemnation, revealing the infernal origin of the English imperial fantasy. Milton’s treatment of capitalism—and the concomitant phenomena of trade, colonization, consumption, accumulation, ambition—register as a warning to the postlapsarian reader. Just as Adam and Eve are “sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.99), so Milton’s reader must cautiously choose his economic course in the postlapsarian world.

While Christian wisdom was invoked by the anti-usury authors discussed earlier, other writers, particularly those who had professional ties to East Indies Company or the Exchange, for example, avoided such rhetoric. What might be called the first political economists turned their attention to addressing practical matters and to considering how England could make the increasingly global market economy work for her. Thus, the opening lines of Sir Thomas Culpepper’s A Tract Against Usurie (1621) express pragmatically the author’s aim:

To leave the proofs of unlawfulness of Usurie to Divines, wherein a number, as well Protestants as Papists have learnedly written; here is onely
to set down some arguments to shew how great the hurt is it doth to this
kingdome which hath no gold or silver mines but plenty of commodities,
and many and great advantages of trade to which the high rate of Usury is
a great prejudice and decay. (3)

Dismissing out of hand the argument that usury is ungodly, Culpepper focuses his energy
on demonstrating to Parliament why high interest rates, even the accepted ten percent, are
injurious to England’s economic well-being. Concentrating on the Dutch as his example,
Culpepper argues that the Dutch, with their lower rates and trading expertise, will surpass
England in economic power, if they have not already, and that if England wants to
compete, then she had better think about catching up with the times. Culpepper’s
contemporaries, Malynes, Mun, and Misselden, similarly address economic issues in
practical terms, not religious ones. These three, Norman Jones writes, “stand out as the
fathers of the new economic literature” (160); nearing the end of the century, Sir William
Petty would engage in the most modern discussion of the economy of his time. The shift
in rhetoric, from religiously-founded interdiction, to practical-minded discourse, suggests
that more people were increasingly accepting of the capitalist economy as normal, less
inclined to reject it outright. Indeed, the idea that economic ambition could be for God
evolved out of this shift: “‘Seek not riches for themselves but for God,’ Thomas Taylor
suggests in 1653 (qtd. in Hill “Protestantism” 33). In her essay on Milton and Protestant
meliorism, Catherine Gimelli Martin cites Stephen Foster: “‘Precisely because men
labored for God and not for gold (or status or honor), they had to continue working in
their callings constantly: material needs or even desire for riches might be satisfied at
some finite point, God never’ (111).

Milton everywhere rejects this “Protestant work ethic,” as Martin, David Hawkes,
Marshall Grossman, and David Urban argue. As Martin observes, he places the ethics of
accumulation and ambition “in the mouths of the demons, and removes [them] from the
mouth of the re-educated Adam” (110). Similarly, David Hawkes contends that a poet as
profoundly religious as Milton could not, at the end of the day, buy into capitalist
ideology and the market economy: “it would have been inconceivable and impossible for
Milton to ‘put his faith in the market’ (“The Concept” 69). Hawkes’ sentiment comes in
part as a response to Blair Hoxby’s argument that Milton saw early modern capitalism as
a liberating force: “liberty, whether spiritual, intellectual, or economic, could exist only where there were no monopolies” (Hoxby 35). Clearly taken aback by Hoxby’s misreading of Milton’s *Aeropagitica*, Hawkes concludes that “[Hoxby’s] enthusiasm for the market goads him into making claims that students of Milton ought to recognize as satanic: ‘the market is a means by which imperfect men may, in the long term approximate the wisdom of God’ (“The Concept” 67). The idea that one might aspire to and reach the summum bonum is indeed one possessed by the fallen angels. It is aspiration to godliness that leads to Lucifer’s fall, as well as to Eve’s and mankind’s— “[approximating] the wisdom of God,” in other words, leads downwards, not up.

Whereas Hoxby is unconvincing is his reading of *Aeropagitica*, his interpretation of *Paradise Lost* acknowledges Milton’s overt demonization of capitalism. “Milton had prized the processes of trade initially because they promised to generate truth and wealth, through the free, open, and fully informed exchange of ideas and goods,” Hoxby suggests, but Milton’s faith in the liberating force of the free market turned to disillusionment and disgust with the Restoration of Charles II (158). In *Paradise Lost*, Hoxby see Milton writing *contra* the vainglorious polemics that valorize England’s aspiration to empire:

[Milton] reverses that procedure by which poets like Dryden had elevated, and endowed with scriptural significance, England’s ambition to build a trade empire. As Satan sees ‘in narrow room Natures whole wealth’ (4.207), and thus mentally converts the blessed seat of unfallen man into little more than a warehouse in an entrepot, the drive of many contemporary poems and paintings to map the world in terms of its products, to catalog its commodities and display such infinite riches in a little room, is revealed as profoundly fallen. (157)

Hoxby rightly emphasizes the nature of Milton’s condemnation of capitalist enterprise—like Sin and Death, it exists in the world because of Satan.

It is easy to discuss Milton as someone with whom we are intimately acquainted, someone whose ideas and intentions have been made known to us—and this tone is present in much Milton scholarship. To the contention that the real Milton did not espouse the sentiments or views that I (or any Milton scholar) describe it should be said
that whether or not Milton the man felt strongly about economic changes—and I believe he did—the anxiety I describe is nevertheless present in the text. Although we have been theoretically free from having to resurrect the author and his intentions since the New Critics, it is difficult, especially in the case of Milton, to recall the distinction between the author and the work and to remember that ideas, hopes, and fears might be articulated in the latter without our having to attach the voice to the former, per se. The anxiety of an age is embodied in *Paradise Lost*; so, too, are some contradictions. While I feel that Milton consciously inscribed anti-capitalist sentiments into his epic, the reading of the demonization of capitalism in the epic is not contingent on authorial intention.

II. MILTON’S SATAN

In Book One of *Paradise Lost*, Satan stirs after the fall, gauges his new surroundings, and addresses Beelzebub, saying,

> If he whom mutual league,
> United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
> And hazard in the Glorious Enterprize,
> Joynd with me once, now misery hath joynd
> In equal ruin… (1.87-91)

This is one of the first moments in which Satan’s language is suggestive of commercial enterprise. The term “hazard” could mean to take a chance, in this case a financial risk; “hazard” also denotes the placing of bets, on a game of chance of the same name, or perhaps on travel ventures (*OED* s.v. “hazard”). “Equal ruin” suggests a shared financial loss, as well as a fall from great heights, figuratively and literally, into a state of privation (*OED* s.v. “ruin”). Satan the merchant engaged in a business venture; the other fallen angels were his investors, or as he later calls them, “Th’associates and copartners of our loss” (1.265). They all lost on the deal—were financially ruined.

*Paradise Lost* is filled with the language of capitalism—from credit and debt, to trade and colonization—and Satan in his many avatars is always a cunning capitalist. Intertwined with early modern capitalism was the birth of “modern” slavery (Blackburn 260-1), and Milton also grapples with issues of slavery in the poem. As Maureen
Quilligan writes, the epic function to “mediate the contradictions … of a slave economy (213). In Book Twelve, Michael and Adam discuss postlapsarian slavery, and Michael describes Nimrod as a type of Satan:

… one shall rise
Of proud ambitious heart, who not content
With fair equalitie, fraternal state,
Will arrogate Dominion undeserv’d
Over his brethren
…
Hunting (and Men not Beasts shall be his game)
With Warr and hostile snare such as refuse
Subjection to his Empire tyrannous (12.24-32)

Educated by the poem at this point to recognize images and language associated with Satan, the reader recognizes Satan in Nimrod—especially through the harrowing parenthetical clarification, recalling a vision of Satan hunting for Adam and Eve in the garden. Michael elicits a “fatherly displeas’d” (12.63) response from Adam:

O execrable Son so to aspire
Above his Brethren, to himself assuming
Authoritie usurpt, from God not giv’n:
… Man over men
He made not Lord; such title to himself
Reserving, human left from human free. (12.64-71)

Slavery and tyranny “must be” after the fall, says Michael, “though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse” (12.95-6). The tyrannical ruler—or slave-master—has no excuse for assuming reign over other men; yet, it is a condition of man’s fallen-ness that monarchies and slavery exist (and for Milton, being subject to a monarch who, unlike the Son, did not “by merit” gain the throne, was like being a slave). It is one of the brilliant turns of the poem that Adam learns of the sins of his sons before any of this comes to pass: Adam is now fallen, and Michael says to him, “Well, you may as well know that your children are going to do some terrible things.” But Michael, as the messenger of God, never suggests that these things must happen or that fallen-ness is ever a good excuse. Man, though
fallen, is still “sufficient to stand” but is now free to fall further, and slavery is an instance of the fallen falling further.

Slavery is conspicuously linked to the devils early in the epic. Beelzebub portrays the devils as conquered slaves in the deep, saying they

… do [God] mightier service as his thralls
By right of Warr, what e’re his business be
Here in the heart of Hell to work in Fire,
Or do his Errands in the gloomy Deep (1.149-52)

But although he uses the language of slavery, Milton would surely have us remember that, unlike enslaved humans, the devils chose—and will continue to choose—their conditions. Thus, Satan is able to cast off the fetters Beelzebub has imagined when, immediately following that demon’s lament, he assumes the role of taskmaster in his oft-quoted reproach:

Fall’n Cherube, to be weak is miserable
Doing or Suffering: but of this be sure,
To do ought good never will be our task
…
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil

(1.157-65)

Unwilling to accept Beelzebub’s pitiful characterization of the devils as errand-boys, Satan, with commanding emphasis (never, must), sets himself up as ruler and work-master of the fallen angels. Prescribing their new work, Satan’s plan is to exact labor from the demon workers to further his own ambition. If the fallen angels are slaves—self-enthralled and self-enslaved—their overseer is Satan. Rising from the deep at his order (“Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen” (1.330)), the devils build Pandemonium and rally around Satan who presents himself as their democratically elected leader, but is both their monarch and their enslaver (again demonstrating the closeness of the two in Milton’s mind).

The devils conceive of service to God in heaven as a type of slavery as well. For example, Mammon proposes,
… Let us not then pursue
By force impossible, by leave obtain’d
Unacceptable, though in Heav’n, our state
Of splendid vassalage, but rather seek
Our own good from our selves, and from our own
Live to our selves, though in the vast recess,
Free, and to none accountable, preferring
Hard liberty before the easie yoke (2.249-256)

The devils, formerly laborers on a feudal manor, now become a rising middle class. Mammon’s argument should look familiar to the Protestant social climbers in the audience. Of the demonic proposals in the debate in Hell, Martin writes,

Mammon’s role in the debate is thus central because he at once improves upon and shares the delusions of the previous speakers (Moloch and Belial)... Like the god of worldly ambitions that he is, he improves upon Belial’s pseudo-Stoicism by cloaking its self-aggrandizing aims in a pseudo-Christian work ethic. (121)

While Milton was at one time himself a regicide, the idea that man could self-govern his way to the top was, for him, as fraught with problems as monarchy. Mammon’s appealing “freedom” speech closely resembles the kind of dangerous ambition Milton condemns among his contemporaries.

In addition to ascribing bourgeois aspiration to Mammon, Milton also attributes to him postlapsarian man’s lust for gold bullion (“by his suggestion taught” (1.685)), and “precious” materials in general. The epic voice admonishes the fallen reader: “Let none admire/ That riches grow in Hell; that soyle may best/ Deserve the precious bane” (690-92). Explicitly condemning the idolatry (commodity fetishism) surrounding the accumulation and hoarding of bullion and the ravaging of the earth that takes place in the process, Milton points a finger at his acquisitive contemporaries. In no uncertain terms, Milton demonstrates over and over again the materialism of the devils, and their own association and fascination with luxuries from overseas. Satan’s throne surpasses the wealth of “Ormuz and of Ind,/ Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand/ Showrs on her Kings Barbaric Pearl and Gold” (2.2-4). Clearly, Milton demonizes the supposed
excess of the East and displays of wealth in general. Daniel J. Vitkus points out the
demonization of the East in much of early modern literature: “Milton’s description… of
the greatest demon of all draws upon the Europeans’ traditional demonization of Eastern
power: Milton gives us Satan as Sultan, a puissant oriental despot exhorting an evil horde
of millions to wage war against God” (218). Vitkus demonstrates that Milton’s
characterization of the East as evil was not uncommon in the seventeenth century.
Instead, depicting Satan and the devils as impious Orientals would have called to the
early modern mind the established iconography of Orientals as devils/devils as Orientals.
An efficacious trope, then, Milton’s Eastern imagery sets up the Good/West versus
Evil/East binary the reader would have embraced as familiar.

But Milton constructs this binary only to break it down, to problematize the
reader’s comfortable association of himself with the Good/West side. As Stanley Fish
has famously written, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton “harasses” the reader into an awareness of
her sympathy and complicity with the devil:

Milton’s countermands [are not] gentle; we are not warned (‘Do not be
carried away by this fellow’), but accused, taunted by an imperious voice
which says with no consideration of our feelings, ‘I know you have been
carried away by what you have just heard; you should not have been; you
have made a mistake, just as I knew you would’; and we resent this
rebuke… We are angry at the epic voice, not for fudging, but for being
right, for insisting that we become our own critics. (9)

Through the experience of reading the poem, Fish avers, the reader is made to repeat the
Fall and so to realize his own fallen-ness. I assert that the reader’s identification with
Satan results not only from the devil’s persuasive rhetoric, but also, and significantly,
because he is a capitalist. Satan engages in enterprises that are, the reader thinks,
courageous, praise-worthy, and productive. Trade, travel, adventuring to unknown
territories, refusing to give up after the battle in heaven—Satan exhibits the valor, the
cunning, and the “unconquerable will” the English reader will admire. The poem teaches
the attentive reader that Satan’s—and the merchant adventurer’s—travails are hardly
heroic. Through the suggestive words and deeds of the devils, *Paradise Lost* compels the
reader to recognize that she herself is far from godly and implicitly calls for a reexamination of beliefs about the exotic Other.

While Satan is undoubtedly associated with the East in the poem, he is also depicted in many other ways: he is a shape-shifter, after all. He can change forms physically, and the personae he assumes are multifarious as well. Named “Prince” and “Chief of many Throned Powers” (1.128), military leader (1.272) and “General” (1.337), “great Sultan” (1.348) and “great Emperor” (1.378) in Book One, the language Satan speaks is alternately that of tyrannical ruler and merchant adventurer. In Book Two, an epic simile has Satan as a merchant with the East India Company:

As when farr of at Sea a Fleet descri’d
Hangs in the Clouds, by Æquinoctial Winds
Close sailing from Bengala, or the Iles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence Merchants bring
Thir spicie Drugs: they on the Trading Flood
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
Ply stemming nightly toward the Pole. (2.636-642)

Just as the merchant brings in exotic goods for the whetted English appetite, so Satan will succeed in tempting Eve to consume a forbidden “drug” in Eden. Milton suggests that just as Eve doesn’t need the fruit in the garden—she and Adam have plenty—the English consume foreign luxuries to their detriment. The excess involved in consumption of foreign goods is damnable in itself, and the desire for exotic “drugs” (which could mean everything from spices to sugar to chocolate) opens England’s gates to the sinister temptations and invisible contagions lurking outside. Eden, a protected feminine space (4.130-145), is not open to intruders, and Satan’s entry is a type of rape. England and her people, on the other hand, have welcomed Satan; they have developed a taste for the foreign forbidden fruit. The images of Satan as “prowling Wolf” (4.133), a thief robbing a “rich Burgher” whose preparations should not have allowed any breach (4.188-90), and as cormorant (a traditional emblem of voracious appetite, evocative of avarice and usury) perched high in a tree forming his grim plans (4.195) are all suggestive of the violent force waiting to enter a protected space. Milton prompts the early modern reader to
question why he is welcoming such dangerous outside influences into his garden, to see
that the merchant trader brings the temptations of the devil with him.

Satan is a merchant, an oriental trader, an explorer setting out for the new world, a
slave master, and a monarch in Hell. He is also a common thief and a confidence
trickster, as one of Flanagan’s notes (4.593) points out. The Son hints at the latter when
he asks if man should be doomed “by fraud” (3.152), and in Book Nine, the temptation is
called “fraudulent” (531). After offering Eve praises, Satan attempts to convince her that
the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is a valuable commodity that all the
other animals in the garden are trying to get their paws on, and that if she wants some,
she had better get it quickly:

…I would me soon,
For high from ground the branches would require
Thy utmost reach or Adams: Round the Tree
All other Beasts that saw, with like desire
Longing and envying stood, but could not reach. (9.589-593)

Eve, like a smart shopper, replies, “Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt/ The virtue
of that Fruit, in thee first prov’d” (9.615-616). Of course, Satan succeeds in hawking his
wares in the garden in what is perhaps one of the most explicit (and most Marxist)
critiques of the capitalist system in the poem: like the fruit itself, the spirit of ambition
and accumulation is insidiously irresistible.

The temptation scene is especially provocative when we think about Satan’s
idolatrous worship of Eve, the tree, and the fruit. For, on the one hand, his worship of the
fruit and of Eve may be guileful tricks to entice her to eat; but there is another possibility.
What if Satan is a victim of capitalism as much as he is its purveyor? What if, instead of
hardening the devils’ hearts (“[The Son’s] hapless Foes but stood obdur’d” (6.785)), God
gives them a system under which they will no longer be able to conceive of a thing
signified? By default, the devils become both idolaters and idols; they teach their human
subjects to fetishize the commodity, to worship the signifier—because for them, God is
already out of the picture. If the result of the fall, and a defining characteristic of
capitalism, is that commodities, like idols, become mystical things not of this world,
things separated from both use-value and the labor that made them, then Fish’s argument,
that the poem ultimately instructs the reader “that the only defence against verbal manipulation (or appearances) is a commitment that stands above evidence of things that are seen” (21), is particularly apt.

Thinking of Satan as both victim and agent of capitalism, it becomes possible to read his shape-shifting as symptomatic of the identity crisis that results from the objectification and alienation of labor under capitalism. Moving from God’s divine economy to the hellish capitalist one, Satan tries to make a go of it in a world of capitalist values—values that one could easily argue he himself has fathered. All the same, capitalism, like Satan, won’t be controlled by its creator. In addition, if Satan can’t pin himself down, this is because he is fallen, and it has become extremely difficult for him to define himself in relation to his creator. Like a former feudal tenant turned wage laborer, Satan’s alienation accounts for his repeated need to affirm who he is (and why this changes all the time). Arguably, both the angel Lucifer and the fallen Satan define themselves in relation to God, and this relationship is itself defined by labor: Lucifer worked for God; Satan works to destroy God’s works (“Our labor must be to pervert that end” (1.164). But this, we find, is actually hard work for Satan. In the Niphates speech, his first soliloquy, Satan expresses a profoundly human regret, and the monologue elicits feelings of both identification and pity from the reader. As Neil Forsyth notes, “Whatever his moral stature, a soliloquy brings the hero close to the audience, for whom… the speech is really delivered” (150).

The soliloquy in Book Four can be compared to Faustus’ psychomachia, with its vacillation between repentance and willful transgression. Forsyth suggests that it “manifests an inner depth we have come to expect in literature, at least since Faustus, or since Hamlet (another Lutheran product of Wittenberg)” (150). Satan wavers, reveals the slippage in his commitment to his plan of destruction, and demonstrates that he does understand his sin:

… Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
Warring in Heav’n against Heav’ns matchless King:
Ah wherefore! he deservd no such return
From me…

…
… nor was his service hard. (4.40-45)

His soliloquy is directed at the reader, and Satan for the first time reflects on his deeds with regret:

What could be less then to afford him praise,
The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,
How due! …

…I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burthensome still paying, still to ow;
Forgetful what from him I still receivd,
And understood not that a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharge; what burden then? (4.46-57)

The economic language in which this part of the monologue is couched illuminates Milton’s concept of heavenly debt and payment. That “a grateful mind by owing owes not” seems contradictory and inconceivable, like so much of the heavenly economy, especially to the postlapsarian reader. This paradox that turns on gratitude alienates Milton’s melioristic readers who think they can work off their debt. Satan (then Lucifer) had wanted to be out from under the burden of debt (not unreasonably, the reader may think), not understanding that by simply being grateful, “the easiest recompence,” he “owes not.” Forsyth suggests that during the soliloquy, “Satan remembers enough to tell the language of the money economy from the other system, the heavenly and unified one, in which debt and payment are the same. But since the soliloquy represents what it is like to be denied ‘grace,’ he cannot any longer enjoy a ‘grateful’ mind” (222). In other words, because he operates within the infernal economy and can no longer access the divine, Satan cannot do anything with this knowledge—it is not a revelation yielding a transformation in character. Yet, he at least seems to see that his punishment is a result of his overreaching. Further in the soliloquy, in case the reader is unclear about the consequences of ambition, Satan unequivocally expresses what “joy” results:
… Ay me, they little know
How dearly I abide that boast so vaine,
Under what torments inwardly I groane;
While they adore me on the Throne of Hell,
With Diadem and Scepter high advanc’d
The lower still I fall, onely Supream
In miserie; such joy Ambition findes. (4.86-92)

In Satan’s second soliloquy, however, we find no such wavering and no such regret. After fetishizing man’s virtue, “… Growth, Sense, Reason, all summ’d up in Man” (9.113), his language is first that of a liberator of the fallen angels (a Cromwell) who has freed them from “servitude inglorious” (9.140-142). It then becomes that of an aristocrat (as it will be in Paradise Regained) filled with contempt for the middle class usurpers of land and power: “creature[s] form’d of Earth…/ Exalted from so base original,/ With Heav’nly spoils, our spoils…” (9.143-151). Prior to the temptation, then, Satan conceives of himself as rightful owner who has been wronged and whose territory is being seized by these social climbers. Of course, we have already seen Satan himself as a social climber; indeed, that is one way to think of his original sin. Conveniently forgetting the envy and ambition that cost him his place in heaven to begin with, Satan here is the bad bourgeois who feigns an aristocratic blood line, portrayed as the middle class turned gentry who now looks down upon and takes advantage of those of “base original.”

Lest the reader be fooled by his constant metamorphosis in both shape and thought, it is important to remember that Milton’s Satan is still and always Satan. That is, he is the great adversary, bringer of evil, father of sin and death. Although his speeches on the periphery of the garden may sound human and thus pitiable to the reader, he is, of course, waiting for the perfect moment to destroy the earthly paradise, to cause the fall of man. In his “victory speech” in Book Ten, Satan has returned to hell to boast of a mission well done:

I call ye and declare ye now, returnd
Successful beyond hope, to lead ye forth
Triumphant out of this infernal Pit
Abominable, accurst, the house of woe,  
And Dungeon of our Tyrant: Now possess,  
As Lords, a spacious World, to our native Heaven  
Little inferior, by my adventure hard  
With peril great atchiev’d. (10.462-9)

Satan is conqueror/colonizer (“Now possess/ As Lords”); the land he has conquered is almost as good as heaven (but not quite). After going on about the pain and suffering he endured in order to gain this new land, he flippantly mentions God’s judgment in the garden: “… I am to bruise his heel;/ His Seed, when is not set, shall bruise my head:/ A World who would not purchase with a bruise” (10.498-500). Now, Satan tells us, that rather than (or in addition to?) conquering the new world, he has purchased it, though he has not paid for it yet. Purchasing is significantly less heroic than conquering when Satan is the buyer. Here, too, is evidence again of satanic commodification, as Flanagan’s note to these lines suggests: the world, like everything else, is something that can be bought; however, it is also implied, ironically, that the world is on loan to him. When the Son comes to collect the payment of the bruise, Satan will not walk away with the world free and clear.

Through economic concepts and language, *Paradise Lost* asks us both to identify with Satan and to see that his rhetoric, actions, and indeed, his fallen identity (slippery as it is) all bear the mark of emergent capitalism. Conqueror, colonizer, slave master, merchant adventurer, confidence trickster, bourgeois aspirant, common thief, and petty usurer, Satan, I argue, is both father of a capitalist economy and its victim. We can read the significant psychological effects of the objectification and alienation of labor in the poem, in the form of Satan’s unstable identity, as well as the warning Milton gives in ascribing commodity fetishism to the devils. Also born of Satan, like Sin and Death, is the fetishization of exotic goods; the idolatrous worship and excessive consumption of goods from the East has its earliest analogue in Satan’s praising and Eve’s eating of the apple.

III. GOD’S ECONOMY
God’s involvement in the economics of the epic is a complicated affair. In relation to satanic capitalism, Milton, rather than leaving the reader out in the cold with little hope for recovery, suggests that there is a divine, albeit shadowy and inaccessible, economy. Although the reader does not have access to this system, through productive labor and right-mindedness, he can do his best to maintain his inward light in a fallen world ruled by the flesh and the devil.

Whereas Milton depicts Satan as a slave-master, God is neither exacting slave-master nor tyrannical monarch. He does, however, demand productive labor of his creatures. In “Milton’s Politics,” Barbara Lewalski argues otherwise: “[God] does not need or want any of Eden’s products but leaves them wholly to the inhabitants, whose labor he requires, not for himself but because they themselves need to control the garden’s prolific growth and take responsibility for their environment” (158). While it is true that God is not the absentee-owner getting rich back home off of the sale of goods produced on his plantation, it is not at all apparent that he does not require Adam’s and Eve’s labor for himself. Lewalski is clearly concerned with God’s besmirched reputation as colonist/slave master/unforgiving monarch, but in her concern, she overlooks explicit references to god as “task Master” in Sonnet 7, and “work-maister” (3.696) in Paradise Lost. In fact, the poem aligns the angels and humans in terms of labor as Raphael tells Adam, “Nor less think wee in Heav’n of thee on Earth/ Then of our fellow servant…” (8.224-5). Adam and Eve are in fact the angels’ fellow servants, although Raphael’s phrasing suggests a simile (you are like our fellow servants) rather than an identification (you are our fellow servants). The humans and the angels serve the same boss, or, as Uriel calls God, “the great Work-Maister” (3.696). Milton has taken special care to define all of the creatures in the poem in terms of their labor relations to God, and even God himself labors in his creation of the world (7.581-93). Although the angels’ labor is easy, as is Adam’s and Eve’s, it is indeed still labor. Eden requires humans’ labor to temper its wanton growth, but there is more to it than this. Adam tells Eve (and the reader),

… God hath set
Labour and rest, as day and night to men
Successive…
Notably, what sets man apart from the other creatures is his labor. While other creatures might labor, for example in building their shelters, in gathering food, and in giving birth, this labor is only for their survival; they are not conscious of it nor does comprise dignity or attract “divine regard.” Were Adam’s and Eve’s labor required only by the garden itself, this would be akin to the “labor” of the other creatures, of which God takes no account. Productive labor, then, requires what Satan describes in his soliloquy: “a grateful mind/ By owing owes not” (4.55-6). In God’s economy, the productivity and value of labor is dependent on the state of mind in which one does it. While one can neither find redemption through good works, nor work off the “debt immense of endless gratitude,” the divine economy recognizes the subject whose labor is productive and whose mind is grateful.

Milton was concerned with the productivity of his own poetic labor, as David Urban suggests. His recent article, “The Talented Mr. Milton: A Parabolic Laborer and His Identity,” considers a Milton who fears being like the “unprofitable servant” in the parable of the talents and who works to align himself with the laborers in the parable of the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). These laborers, unlike the servant who is cast out into darkness for burying the talents, “receive God’s grace and reward in spite of their limited work in their master’s vineyard” (1), much to the dismay of the other laborers who, having arrived early and worked all day, receive the very same reward. This parable, Urban suggests, is the “mitigating factor” that offers hope in the face of a deep-seated anxiety that Milton’s own waxing darkness—his loss of vision—was evidence of God’s ire at his lack of productivity. Urban’s provocative piece reads the historical Milton as a figure anxious about pleasing both his father and God the Father, who was everywhere
concerned with using properly the “talents” both bestowed upon him, and who worked
diligently to settle his debts with both fathers. Examining the divine economy Milton
constructed over the course of his poetic career, Urban concludes, “God’s economy, quite
simply, is not that of humankind, not even that of a prophet-poet who has considered all
his previous labor as service unto God… It is in the end, however, the very thing that can
rescue [the speaker in Sonnet 19], both from his self-hatred and from anger towards God”
(16). Urban’s statement, that “God’s economy… is not that of humankind,” is
exemplified in *Paradise Lost*. In contrast to the capitalist economy of Satan and the
postlapsarian world, God’s economy is dependent on meaning, on things signified, rather
than things themselves. In the former economy, it is standard that by value is meant
exchange-value. In God’s economy, value is accorded by use as well as by the labor that
produced the thing; thus, for God, the right-mindedness of the laborer in performing his
task determines the ultimate value of the thing produced/deed accomplished. “… So little
knows/ Any, but God alone, to value right/ The good before him…” (4.201-3), the epic
voice states. Whereas God recognizes what a good is (a product of labor, a use-value),
Satan and the reader, who are embedded in a fallen world of materialism, recognize
neither the fact of labor behind the product (or, as Marx tells us, the reality that a
commodity is nothing more than congealed labor (45)) nor labor relations behind the
product—relations which are elided by the fetish status of the commodity itself.

Through Adam’s soliloquy in Book Ten, Milton highlights Adam’s inability to
“judge the good before him.” The postlapsarian (and as yet unreformed) Adam, in a
soliloquy strongly suggestive of Satan’s, bemoans the “terms” of his “contract” with God:

… did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me, or here place
In this delicious Garden? As my Will
Concurd not to my being, it were but right
And equal to reduce me back to my dust,
Desirous to resigne, and render back
All I receav’d, unable to performe
Thy terms too hard, by which I was to hold
The good I sought not (10.744-52)

The “good,” his soul, his life, is not “worth” the difficult “terms” of the bargain. Viewing his soul only as a good he did not really want in the first place, Adam can no longer perceive what the soul signifies: eternal life, God’s grace. Like Doctor Faustus who turns his own soul into capital, exchanging it for twenty-four years of infernal service from Mephistopheles, Adam regards his soul in terms of exchange value, as a commodity, suggesting Milton’s awareness that capitalist exchange removes meaning, makes it arbitrary (only God can judge rightly), and throws everything into a state of perpetual, demonic fluctuation. Just as Satan can hardly pin down his own thoughts and feelings, the market makes value an elusive, illusory concept. It also, however, imprints into the mind of the subject a specific system of valuation, thus enacting the mystification of labor and use-value. In other words, in the world of exchange, there is supposedly a clear way to gauge whether or not Adam’s soul is equivalent to his service in the garden, including his promise not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, hence Adam’s assumption that he knows what is “right and equal.” This is what capitalism promises—but it hardly delivers. Instead, the postlapsarian subject is left, like Satan, on the bottom stair of Jacob’s ladder, unable to judge—“each one mysteriously was meant” (3.516)—and, if Milton is successful, exceedingly aware of his “sad exclusion” (3.525) from divine understanding. The path of virtue depends on maintaining a “commitment that stands above evidence of things that are seen” (Fish 21), having faith in “the meaning, not the Name” (7.5), and remembering “… that Great/ Or Bright infers not Excellence” (8.90-1). Milton consistently places the reader (or brings him to an awareness that he is in actuality situated) in the realm of satanic capitalism, auguring, like Marlowe, unfortunate things to come. Unlike Marlowe, however, Milton imbues his epic with faint intimations of a divine economy and prescribes a plan of action: to labor with a grateful mind, to look to one’s inner light, and to have faith in what the eye cannot apprehend.
CONCLUSIONS

“AND WISDOME AT ONE ENTRANCE QUITE SHUT OUT”: COMPLICATING KNOWLEDGE IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS AND PARADISE LOST*

I. TO KNOW BETTER

“To the owner of a commodity,” Marx writes,

every other commodity is, in regard to his own, a particular equivalent, and consequently his own commodity is the universal equivalent for all the others. But since this applies to every owner, there is, in fact, no commodity acting as universal equivalent, and the relative value of commodities possesses no general form under which they can be compared. (98)

Because there is not one commodity that serves as a standard by which to gauge the value of all commodities, value, Marx shows, is completely arbitrary, “accidental and ever fluctuating” (86). Marx’s invocation of Faustus in his description of the experience of commodity owners operating amidst the vacillation of exchange relations is telling: like Faustus, he remarks, “they acted and transacted before they thought” (98). Indeed, commodities seem to do the thinking for people, appearing as they do to be sociable deities “entering into relation both with one another and the human race” (83). The social nature of the labor relations behind commodities is enshrouded by what appears to be the objective nature of their value:

Could commodities themselves speak, they would say: Our use-value may be a thing that interests men. It is no part of us as objects. What, however, does belong to us as objects, is our value. Our natural intercourse as commodities proves it. In the eyes of each other, we are nothing but exchange values. (Marx 95)

In *Doctor Faustus*, even Faustus’ soul is nothing but an exchange value, as we have seen. Imagining along with Cornelius and Valdes all the possibilities of wealth and
worldly pleasure, Faustus seems as first not to consider that he will have to exchange something for the services of the devil he will conjure. In fact, Valdes suggests that by conjuring, they might enslave the spirits, giving nothing in return: “As Indian Moors obey their Spanish lords,/ So shall the subjects of every element/ Be always serviceable to us three” (1.1.123-5). But once Mephistopheles appears, Faustus realizes quickly that a deal must be struck, that one cannot get something for nothing. What he offers, however, is something he supposes he’s already lost: “Seeing Faustus hath incurred eternal death/ By des’rate thoughts against Jove’s deity,/ Say he surrenders to [Lucifer] his soul” (1.3.91-93). But Faustus has some time to reconsider before he actually signs the contract. That he should reconsider is suggested in the dialogue between Robin and Wagner. Juxtaposed with Faustus’ easy placement of his soul on the market is Robin’s indignant (and witty) response to Wagner when the latter insinuates that Robin would sell his soul for food. Robin, who recognizes that his soul is “dear,” is not so rash as Faustus: “How? My soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though ‘twere blood raw? Not so, good friend. By’r Lady, I had need have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear” (1.4.10-12).

Mephistopheles tells Faustus that “The iterating of these lines brings gold” (2.1.161), that a speech act can be exchanged for money—by what measure are these equivalent? The horse-courser gives Faustus forty dollars for the latter’s horse; when it turns into hay, Faustus delights in getting to keep his money, while the horse-courser is left with “a bottle of hay for his labor” (4.1.83-4). Other transactions in Faustus highlight what is most apparent when Faustus barters away his soul: the varying, unstable exchange values of commodities and the effects of the commercial market on the subject’s ability to assess value. Similarly, in Paradise Lost, Satan’s cavalier description of his Edenic conquest, “A World who would not purchase with a bruise” (10.500), reflects his failure to accurately assess the value of either the world or the bruise. Like Faustus’ soul in relation to twenty-four years of demonic service, these two things are not equivalent—but in relations of exchange there is no way of gauging equivalence. Satan’s remark also points out that he has “purchased the world” at the expense of his own existence; he will be vanquished when he receives the bruise. The commodification and
exchangeability of souls and worlds in *Faustus* and *Paradise Lost* point to the supernatural character of commodities as exchange values.

Both Marlowe’s play and Milton’s epic reveal the capitalist subject’s inability to judge the value of things. Nevertheless, the subject, like Faustus, and like Satan, is convinced that she can, certain that exchange value accurately expresses the objective value of a thing. To Faustus’ famous line, “Come, I think hell’s a fable” (2.1.128), Mephistopheles replies knowingly, “Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind” (2.1.129). His remark might be directed not only towards Faustus, but also to Milton’s Satan, and to the reader of both *Faustus* and *Paradise Lost*. Both texts, I argue, provide that experience; they function to subvert the reader’s certainty of her own knowledge, to undermine empiricist foundations of knowledge.

*Faustus* clearly calls into question the value of learning, suggesting as it does the close causal connection between Faustus’ education and his over-reaching. In addition, the play suggests, nothing can “teach” Faustus to have control over his own mind. Faustus tells his necromantic instructors, Valdes and Cornelius,

> Know that your words have won me at the last
> To practice magic and concealed arts.
> Yet not your words only, but mine own fantasy,
> That will receive no object, for my head
> But ruminates on necromantic skill. (1.1.103-7)

Was it Valdes’ and Cornelius’ words that “won” Faustus? Or his own fantasy “that will receive no object”? Faustus’ mind seems to have a will of its own; try as he might, his language implies, he cannot push another idea in his head to replace that of “necromantic skill.” Here, Faustus demonstrates his tendency to commodify by literally objectifying ideas and conceiving of his mind as a container for them. Faustus’ years of learning, his knowledge, his expertise in debate—none enable him to master his own mind. What Faustus “knows” has little to do with what his “fantasy” chooses to ruminate upon; this recalls Marx’s description of the commodity itself as a “fantastic form” (89) which, here, is seen as impressing itself on Faustus, and he, as a subject under (nascent) capitalism, is at its mercy.
The ostensibly humorous exchange between Wagner and the scholars points to the question of knowledge:

FIRST SCHOLAR: How now, sirrah, where’s thy master?
WAGNER: God in heaven knows.
SECOND SCHOLAR: Why, dost not thou know?
WAGNER: Yes, I know, but that follows not. (1.2.5-8)

Wagner means seriously what the scholars (and the reader) take as a colloquial expression: “God in heaven knows.” The second scholar’s response seems reasonable, but Wagner is quick to point out that God’s knowing has little to do with people’s knowing. The second scholar’s question “follows not” because it binds together what are separate things; the question he should have asked, had he taken Wagner’s statement seriously, would be, “Yes, but do you know?” The one, Wagner shows, has nothing to do with the other. Wagner’s clever assault on the intellect of the scholars represents the play’s effects on the reader—it educates by destabilizing the reader’s confidence in her own knowledge.

Milton’s epic does this at every turn. To recall Fish, the poem “instructs” the reader, not only by making her buy into Satan’s rhetoric only to turn around and scornfully reveal that she is a disciple of the devil, but also, as I have shown, by aligning the reader’s capitalist values and endeavors with Satan’s. Paradise Lost generally assails the reader’s so-called knowledge—of economic value and Christian values—through the problematization of knowledge in the poem. The narrator states, “So little knows/ Any, but God alone, to value right/ The good before him, but perverts best things/ To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use” (4.201-4), foreclosing the possibility that the fallen reader, or Satan, could properly assess the value of the “commodities” Satan espies in Eden (“In Narrow room Nature’s whole wealth” (4.207)). Questions of knowledge are raised repeatedly by the epic, centering as it does on the disobedient consumption of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil: “Knowledge of good bought dear by knowing ill” (4.222). Satan’s angered reproach to the arch-angels who spot him in Eden illustrates the Devil’s apparent certainty of his own value, his own knowledge—he argues that knowledge of him is a measure of self-knowledge: “Know ye not mee? ye knew me once no mate/ For you, there sitting where ye durst not soare:/ Not to know mee argues your
selves unknown” (4.828-30). Like should know like, seems to be Satan’s logic. Satan’s appearance, however, is so deformed that the angels might not recognize him. Even more importantly, it is Satan who does not know himself; his statement is self-reflexive. “Not to know me argues myself unknown,” he might say—and this would be in line with his generally fallacious logic throughout the epic. If hell is the locus of capitalist relations and exchange, as I have argued, Satan’s lack of self-knowledge, his shape-shifting, and his inability to pin himself down, attest to his position as both purveyor and victim of capitalism—a system which creates “selves unknown” through alienation of objectification of labor and through the ideological interpellation of the exploiters of labor power. The bourgeois knows himself no more than the wage laborer.

At the end of Book 1, the fallen angels are compared to the “Faerie elves” of English folk tales. Striking about this passage is the “belated peasant’s” experience:

Behold a wonder! they but now who seemd
In bigness to surpass Earths Giant Sons
Now less than smallest Dawrfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that Pigmean Race
Beyond the Indian Mount, or Faerie Elves,
Whose midnight Revels, by a Forrest side
Or Fountain some belated Peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while over-head the Moon
Sits Arbitress, and nearer to the Earth
Wheels her pale course, they on thir mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund Music charm his ear;
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds. (1.777-788 second emphasis mine)

An intriguing image of the laborer returning home from the field, the description foreshadows the image in Book Twelve where “…Ev’nning Mist/ Ris’n from a River o’re the marish glides,/ And gathers ground fast at the Labourers heel/ Homeward returning” (12.629-32), and both of these passages are evocative of the Son’s command that Adam and Eve earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. That Milton’s peasant “sees/ or dreams he sees” threatens the entire existence not only of “Faerie Elves,” but of
everything the peasant ever sees—all of which he might as easily “dream he sees.” In the scheme of *Paradise Lost*, this is, succinctly stated, the condition of fallen-ness. One can no longer trust one’s own judgment; the eyes are not a reliable source of information (and it is perhaps no coincidence that Milton’s epic is inscribed with such a sentiment). The eyes do not see a commodity as “the congelation of homogeneous human labour” (Marx 45), for example. Under capitalist labor relations, they do not see this belated peasant at all; they see the product of his labor, but not him in it. The “dreams he sees” strikes at the reader’s faith in her ability to know in the strongest way. And the peasant’s simultaneous “joy and fear” accurately captures the experience of the early modern subject under emergent capitalism. Like the “Revels” of the “Faerie Elves,” it entices; but the elves are demons, the revels satanic rites, and capitalism, a magical system of exchange that elides labor relations, idolizes the products of labor, and tosses everyone into a state of thinking they see what they only dream they see—and not seeing what really is.

II. “AND ALL THE RICHES OF THE WORLD ENJOYDST”: COMPLICATIONS AND COMPLICITY

When Marlowe was writing *Doctor Faustus*, sometime between 1588 and 1592, England engaged in overseas exploration, seeking new territory, new trade routes, new contacts with other nations. England’s colonial and imperial aspirations were in embryonic form: people like Drake, Cavendish, and Ralegh sought and staked out new territory for England, but their efforts to settle and populate the new colonies did not come to fruition until the seventeenth century. Marlowe’s experience of the new market economy was thus different than Milton’s. In one way, Marlowe’s vision of Lucifer as an imperial monarch whose aim is to “enlarge his empire” must draw on the popular demonization of Spain in late sixteenth-century England. Spain had established its colonies in South America, was importing gold, and, according to Las Casas’ well-known polemic, treated its native slaves with barbarous cruelty. At the same time, however, *Faustus’* setting, Wittenberg, smacks of the Protestant social and economic values of early modern England. Through Faustus as the social-climbing subject who comes from
“parents of base stock” (Prologue 11) and who proceeds to ascend the scholarly ladder of success, ultimately gaining the ability, by virtue of his *libido dominandi* (which inspires him to conjure and bargain with Mephistopheles in the first place), to travel the globe and dine with emperors and dukes, the “embourgeoisement” of the English middle class is reflected and criticized.

Milton’s milieu was in some ways quite different than Marlowe’s. The decapitation of Charles, Cromwell’s republican government, and the Restoration of the monarchy were monumental events in England that took place in Milton’s lifetime. In addition, the burgeoning market economy with its increasingly global trade was changing the face of social exchange: “social relations that had traditionally been conducted between individuals in person had, in many spheres of life, been commuted into relations mediated through money” (Hawkes “The Concept” 70). Hawkes describes the effects of this transformation as seen in capitalist cultures:

All money-based economies impose a financial value upon the things of the world, and especially on human activity, or “labor,” which function as the common denominator facilitating the exchange of qualitatively different objects. As people learn to conceive of their surroundings and activities in terms of financial value their habits of thought are correspondingly altered, and this applies particularly to their conception of their own subjective activity. (“The Concept” 70)

And although the seventeenth-century “world view” had not completely distilled economy and religion into two distinctive spheres, this process was underway. The expansion of the global trade market and the success of England’s sugar and tobacco plantations in the colonies—made possible by chattel slavery—complicated the outlook of Milton’s contemporaries on the capitalist economy. Many people were growing rich, English citizens enjoyed exotic goods, and the aristocracy and the state were being divested of power, while economic power was being acquired by the middle class. Meanwhile, the peasant had become a wage laborer, sold the commodity of his time, and was rewarded very little for it. While Hawkes, I think rightly, points out that seventeenth-century people, and especially someone like Milton, would hardly have espoused the “free market” as a spiritual force for good, or as “an ethically benign
phenomenon” (“The Concept” 70), the feeling seems to have been overwhelmingly one of ambivalence—fear and dismay disconcertingly intermingled with excitement and attraction. The sentiment is the “joy and fear” of the peasant in the passage from Milton above—though for the actual peasant turned wage laborer in early modern England, I suspect the degree of joy would have been significantly less.

This ambivalence makes its way into *Paradise Lost*. Whereas Marlowe’s reader may suspect that the author both sympathizes with his protagonist and criticizes the harsh Old Testament Jehovah who bends his ireful brow on a despairing Faustus, his critique of capitalist values seems clear enough. Milton’s epic is, however, at times, contradictory. In particular, Michael’s dialogue with Adam in Book Twelve seems to problematize the otherwise clear demonization of capitalism in the poem. The re-educated Adam has learned that

> by small
> Accomplishing great things, by things deemd weak
> Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
> By simply meek; that suffering for Truths sake
> Is fortitude to highest victory (12.566-70)

This all seems fine: Adam has learned to live the humble, Christ-like life. But Michael’s parting words for Adam conjure visions of empire and world domination; yet, they are ambiguous:

> This having learnt, thou hast attaind the summe
> Of wisdome; hope no higher, though all the Starrs
> Thou knewest by name, and all th’ethereal Powers,
> All secrets of the deep, all Natures works,
> Or works of God in Heav’n, Aire, Earth, or Sea,
> And all the riches of this World enjoydst,
> And all the rule, one Empire; onely add
> Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
> Add virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
> By name to come call’d Charitie, the soul
> Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A Paradise within thee, happier far. (12.575-87)

It is important to note here that the “love by name to come call’d Charitie” recalls the Son as the embodiment of Charity in Book Three. “Dwels in all Heaven charitie so dear?” (3.216) the Father asks the angels, knowing that his Son will take up the role of mankind’s redeemer. What Michael seems to be saying, however, is that Adam may amass a great empire and worldly wealth, and that his doing so is fine, so long as he remembers his virtues. The emphasis is on the virtues: even if Adam acquires this knowledge, this wealth, and this land, he should still remember to “hope no higher” and to remain virtuous. But the problematic part is, of course, the wealth, the empire, and the rule—they are acquired at what cost, at whose expense? The vision of the world as Adam’s empire is augmented by the last lines of the epic:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way. (12.646-9)

Adam and Eve as potential colonizers might seem to belie the demonization of colonization we see going in the rest of the poem through the depiction of Satan as a colonizer. The significant difference must be that we are dealing with a repentant and re-educated Adam and Eve who are humble and virtuous—not at all like Satan. Yet through Adam and Eve, Milton appears to offer an apology for the early modern English capitalists who are looking to prospects in the New World. They are not devilish colonizers who spread Sin and Death around the New World; they are rather the virtuous descendents of Adam who bring Christ-like values, who, like Michael, re-educate repentant inhabitants of New World gardens.

*Paradise Lost*, then, would seem to forgive the capitalist reader as it does the humbled Adam and Eve. At the same time, I maintain, capitalism is consistently associated with Satan throughout the twelve books of the poem. That the fallen Adam and Eve are, like English merchants, settling in new territory and, with Michael’s approval, permitted to acquire riches and empire—albeit with virtuous dispositions—does not make this expansion, the move away from Eden, itself a virtuous activity.
Instead, it must be remembered that they are forced to leave Eden because of their disobedience, which was inspired by Satan. Similarly, it is only because of the birth of Satanic capitalism that England has abandoned her inner garden (and transformed its peasant farmers into landless wage laborers) and turned her eyes toward new territory, seeing, or dreaming she sees, marketable commodities, bounteous goods, valuable materials—what Satan describes as “in Narrow room Nature’s whole wealth” (4.207)—while failing to see the labor relations that will make the acquisition and consumption of this wealth possible. It is this system, in which there is a price on everything and everyone, that Faustus’ selling of his soul presages, this rapacious system inveighed against by anti-usury authors when it had not yet come into its own, and this system which Milton describes as he relates the cause of “all our woe” (1.3).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Now that her MA thesis is finished, Meredith Molly Hand will continue at Florida State University as a doctoral candidate. Molly’s interests, in addition to Marlowe, Milton, Satan, and capitalism, include film and literature of the sixties and seventies. She was awarded the Elliot Loyless Fellowship for students in British Literature for the 2004-2005 academic year. At the 2004 Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies, Molly presented a paper on *Doctor Faustus*, and her paper for the 2005 Florida State University Film and Literature Conference explored the horrors of labor relations under capitalism as represented in 1960s British horror films. In her continued studies, Molly plans to focus on Milton and economic theory, both of which will figure significantly into her dissertation.