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The Devil in the Machine: The Doctor Travels through Time in Chris Bush's *Faustus: That Damned Woman*

Verna A. Foster

Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL 60660, USA; vfoster@luc.edu

Abstract: Chris Bush's *Faustus: That Damned Woman* (first performed in 2020) is a feminist and contemporary adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. The magus is a woman who travels through time from the seventeenth century to the far distant future. In the process, Johanna Faustus becomes a brilliant scientist who attempts to create digital immortality by uploading the minds of billions of human beings to the Cloud. When a power failure destroys almost all of humanity, it is uncertain whether the universal outage is caused by Mephistopheles (in accordance with the expectations of Faustian fantasy) or is simply an unforeseen but predictable accident (in accordance with the expectations of technophobic versions of science fiction). I argue that Bush's play traces the chronological and generic arc from magic/fantasy to science/science fiction, blending the two so that the age-old monster, the Devil, enabled by Faustian arrogance, is reimagined as an avatar for an unreliable technology that destroys what it is designed to preserve.

Keywords: *Faustus: That Damned Woman*; *Doctor Faustus*; adaptation; devil; magic; fantasy; science fiction

1. Introduction

The Devil has existed in human imagination and belief, in literature, and in popular culture for thousands of years, longer than any other monster, and he has appeared in numerous changing artistic and symbolic forms over the centuries. The Faust legend has provided an especially compelling and productive focus for exploring the desiring, uneasy, and adversarial relationship between a flawed, conflicted, aspiring—in other words representative—human being and a powerful non-human entity that seems to offer much, but proves to be the uncontrollable source of evil. In her study of dramatic versions of the Faust legend, Sara Munson Deats notes that the object for which the Faust figure sells his soul "often reflects the values of a specific society, even as the character of the Devil evolves to represent a particular culture's concept of evil" (Deats 2019). Two of the best-known versions of the Faust legend, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Goethe's *Faust*, are icons of the eras—late-sixteenth and early-nineteenth century—that produced them. Faustus and Faust, both brilliant scholars, have personalities and aspirations consistent with the values of the time in which they live. Faustus sells his soul to the Devil so that he might have all knowledge and immense power throughout his life on earth. Faust stakes his soul on a wager with the Devil: he will be damned only if for one moment he gives up striving after new experiences. The plays' respective devils, too, are quite different. Marlowe's Mephistopheles is a tragic manifestation of a fallen angel seeking souls to join him in torment; Goethe's comically satiric Mephistopheles is the "spirit which eternally denies" (von Goethe 2001). Both plays have generated adaptations in other media (Gounod's operatic version of Goethe's *Faust*, for example) or to make them "fit" in an almost Darwinian sense to address new issues in different cultural contexts.[1]

One obvious context in which a contemporary magus (or magician-scientist) such as Marlowe's Faustus might operate is experimental science, which can both promise immense benefits and threaten unspeakable horrors for an unwitting humankind.[2] In

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the 1960s, Charles Marowitz created a "free adaptation" of *Doctor Faustus* in the collage style of his *Hamlet*, designed to foreground (or create) a parallel between Faustus and J. Robert Oppenheimer. Feeling after successive productions of the play that he had not succeeded because the theological weight of Marlowe's plot and language was incompatible with the contemporary issues he wanted to address, Marowitz wrote a "Conversation in Purgatory" between Faustus and Oppenheimer, in which the two discuss scientific responsibility (Marowitz 1970). Oppenheimer argues that it is Faustus who is the "Father of the Atom Bomb" because he "obliterated the line that marked off the permissible bounds of knowledge" (Marowitz 1970, p. 105). Neither scientist mentions the Devil. But absent the Devil, the Faustian scientist himself becomes the monster who unleashes disaster upon humankind. And that, certainly, is one possible storyline, but it is not the Faustian story. In this essay I examine the Faust figure, the Devil, and the epistemological and generic consequences of the infernal contract in a recent adaptation of Marlowe's play that solves the problem of blending the theological and the scientific by making Faustus a time-traveler.

Chris Bush's *Faustus: That Damned Woman*, first produced in London in 2020, is a feminist adaptation of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in particular, as its protagonist's name makes clear, and the Faust legend more generally.[3] Bush imagines what happens when the Faustian figure is a woman who travels through time. Johanna Faustus sells her soul to Lucifer in exchange for the ministrations of Mephistopheles and 144 years of life to be lived in whatever period she chooses (though she is not allowed to go backwards). The play begins in seventeenth-century London (in the plague year 1665) and ends a thousand years in the future, encompassing witchcraft, magic, historical scientific achievements, and finally science fiction along the way. In a departure from her Faustian predecessors, Johanna rejects Mephistophelian magic, which leads only to evil, and embraces science that she can do herself to benefit humanity.[4] But Johanna's ambitious pursuit of scientific achievement, necessarily depicted as science fiction in the scenes set in the future, leads to global disaster when a power failure destroys the billions of minds she has uploaded to the Cloud. The play ends ambiguously. Has Johanna's science led to near human extinction (in the tradition of technophobic versions of science fiction)? Or has she been tricked by the Devil (in the tradition of the demonic magic embraced in the Faust legend)? As a *feminist* Faust play, *Faustus: That Damned Woman* pursues a woman-oriented trajectory for its protagonist, tracing the struggles and celebrating the achievements of women seekers after knowledge. As a *contemporary* Faust play bringing the legend into the present and the future, *Faustus: That Damned Woman* exists on the cusp between magical fantasy and science fiction and traces the arc from one to the other. The play transforms Marlowe's vainglorious magus who wants to be a god but encompasses only his own damnation into an arrogant scientist whose attempt to make all humans immortal annihilates them instead. The magus becomes a version of Frankenstein, himself a model for scientific hubris, and the Devil is reimagined as an avatar for an unreliable technology that destroys what it is designed to preserve.

2. The Magus

From the historical charlatan at the origin of the Faust legend through the protagonists of the sixteenth-century German and English Faustbooks to Marlowe's Faustus and Goethe's Faust and beyond, Faust figures have almost always been men. Notable exceptions are Yeats's self-sacrificing Countess Cathleen in his play of the same name and the spunky feminist Franziska in Wedekind's secular parody of Goethe's *Faust*.[5] Cathleen sells her soul to devils disguised as merchants to save her starving people from selling theirs; her sacrifice is ultimately divinely justified when she is herself saved at the end of the play. Franziska binds herself to marry a human Mephistopheles after three years of doing what she wants, but ultimately escapes him to live life on her own terms. Chris Bush hews closer to Faustian precedent, choosing in her feminist adaptation of Marlowe's play to put on the stage a female character who is "just as vainglorious and headstrong and morally compromised" and "just as messy, complicated and conflicted", in Bush's words, as any

male version of the Faust figure, but whose "narrative plays out" in new ways because she is a woman (Bush 2020). Unlike Franziska, Johanna refuses Mephistopheles' offer to make her a man, preferring instead "to change the world" to make it more hospitable for women than it was for her mother, Katherine, a healer who was executed for witchcraft.[6]

Marlowe's Faustus sells his soul to Lucifer for his own self-aggrandizement. Johanna Faustus turns to demonic magic to find out the after-death fate of her mother (whose trial and execution she watches in a vision) and to free herself from the patriarchal imperative of finding a caretaker husband as her well-meaning but domineering father insists. Like Faustus, Johanna learns that nothing good can come from a deal with the Devil. Though she finds out that Katherine is not among the damned, by signing a contract with Lucifer, she has separated herself from her mother forever. And while she does succeed in freeing herself from male control, she soon discovers the limitations of her own authority over the trickster Mephistopheles. Attempting to demonstrate her own agency, Johanna resolves to do only good: "I shall save the world to spite the Devil" (Bush 2020, p. 49). She commands Mephistopheles to end the plague, and he does—but by causing the historical fire that in 1666 destroys London.

Terrified and cowardly, Johanna flees with Mephistopheles to the nineteenth century, learns the extent of the damage she caused, including the death of her own father, and distracts herself in a life of hedonistic experimentation until she meets Elizabeth Garrett, the first woman to qualify as a doctor in England. When she realizes that Garrett has achieved her success, not with demonic help as she at first assumes, but through "science" and "hard work and perseverance" (Bush 2020, p. 59), Johanna determines to do the same. She studies for 30 years and by the beginning of the twentieth century, she has become a brilliant scientist on a level with Marie Curie, whom she meets. Relying on her own scientific achievements rather than the demonic magic that she now knows can result only in evil, Johanna uses Mephistopheles merely as her "Executive Assistant" (Bush 2020, p. 76) to pay her bills and arrange her time travel.

In the twenty-first century Johanna heads her own Faustus Institute. She overcomes War, Famine, and Pestilence, the most intractable problems facing humankind, personified in the play as "*grotesque*" agents of hell, "*both human and not*" (Bush 2020, p. 80). Attempting to go further and make human beings immortal, Johanna thinks she has succeeded in creating "[d]igital immortality", her own "silicon Utopia on Earth", by removing "minds from bodies and upload[ing] them. . . into the Cloud" (Bush 2020, pp. 75, 83). But when the power fails, including all back-ups, everywhere, she realizes that she has destroyed ten billion minds, wiping out almost all of humanity. She herself has become Death, the fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse. She flees into the distant future to wait out her remaining time on earth in a world inhabited by the descendants of those few people who refused digital immortality, a world devoid of advanced technology and looking much like the seventeenth-century home she came from, raising the question of whether she ever left in the first place and whether what we have witnessed is reality or dream.

Like Marlowe's Faustus and Goethe's Faust, Johanna Faustus is a complex and morally ambiguous figure who elicits both admiration and condemnation. As the protagonist of a Renaissance tragedy, Marlowe's Faustus is a magnificently aspiring scholar-scientist at the apex of every available field of study who uses his new power to fly into space to "find the secrets of astronomy/Graven in the book of Jove's high firmament",[7] seeks to know and be more than it has been allotted for mortals to achieve, and is damned for overreaching. Faustus is alternatively and also the representative human figure at the center of an ironic medieval-style morality play, a fool who uses his power to play tricks on the Pope, settles for a demonic facsimile of Helen of Troy, refuses or is afraid to repent when he is offered opportunities to do so, and is—terrifyingly but justly—carried off by devils to hell. Johanna, too, is brilliant and exceptional, self-centered and foolish, more savvy perhaps than Marlowe's protagonist, but still tricked in the end. As an early modern woman, Johanna has none of the advantages of her scholarly male predecessors—though well-versed in herbal medicine, she lacks formal education (a deficiency she remedies

in later centuries)—but she has more self-knowledge. When Lucifer presents the earlier Faustus with the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, he sees them simply as a form of entertainment without relevance for himself: "O, how this sight doth delight my soul!" (Marlowe 2019, p. 47). Lucifer forces Johanna, by contrast, to "*channel*" the sins through her own body so that she might recognize that, as the "embodiment of every mortal sin" (Bush 2020, pp. 32, 33), she is already damned, regardless of any contract she has signed with the Devil.

Even Johanna's generous impulses are inflected by her pride in her own ability. She desires to benefit humanity out of arrogance—"Because I can" (Bush 2020, p. 69), she tells Marie Curie—and she is single-minded in the pursuit of her scientific goals. Though as a woman she models herself on Dr. Elizabeth Garrett and supports the work of other women scientists, Johanna practices an intolerant brand of feminism. She thinks the time Curie spends with her child detracts from her important work, and she is annoyed with the fictional young scientist Jennifer Wagner, who was "halfway to feeding the world" (Bush 2020, p. 78), for stepping back to be with her dying mother. In pursuit of her goals Johanna is ruthless. Needing human subjects, specifically the terminally ill, for her experiments in uploading minds, she is willing to get the dirty work done in a country more unscrupulous than her own. In prioritizing her own notion of what benefits humankind over the needs of individual human beings, Johanna dehumanizes herself, becoming a kind of monster, earning the grudging admiration of Mephistopheles. Her stringent self-discipline, her lack of ordinary human sympathy, and her vanity lead her to pursue digital immortality as a desirable goal for everyone with disastrous consequences.

Nonetheless, in overcoming war, hunger, and disease (though she has to struggle against them repeatedly), Johanna has also brought about extraordinary benefits for humanity. At the end of the play she boasts to Lucifer of her achievements:

> I know who I am. I am Doctor Johanna Faustus, MD, PhD, Nobel Laureate. I have eradicated plagues and cultivated bacteria on Mars. I have brought rain to the deserts and sucked poison out of festering wounds. I have cured the sick and healed the lame. I am the last in a long line of healers. I am the witch's daughter. I have magic enough of my own. (Bush 2020, p. 91)

In this speech Johanna places herself in the lineage of women seekers after knowledge and conflates the magic with which the play begins and the science—ultimately in the play fictional science—that she herself practiced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Though her speech is boastful and ignores the fact that her hubris has almost destroyed humanity, there is a new humility and a new optimism in Johanna's recognition that she is but one of many women who continue each other's work. The first such woman was Eve. Lucifer probably regrets leading her to the apple, Johanna says, because though she was punished for overreaching, she still "blazed. . . brighter" (Bush 2020, pp. 88, 91) than Lucifer could have imagined. Bush's play celebrates Eve's descendants: the healers accused of witchcraft, like Johanna's own mother; the visionaries Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, whom Johanna regrets missing as she travels through time; the scientists unique in their generation—Elizabeth Garrett and Marie Curie—whom Johanna does meet; the women of the future like Jennifer Wagner feeding the world, and the "daughters" (Bush 2020, p. 92) who will come after Johanna and bring to fruition the seeds she has "scattered" (Bush 2020, p. 91). Through the work of scientists such as these remarkable women, magic becomes science—Johanna's "magic enough of [her] own"—that she says "scares" and defeats Lucifer because he can operate only in the dark of ignorance: "once we can explain something we have no need to fear it" (Bush 88).

3. The Devil

In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* the devils, though sometimes comically depicted, are frightening, and damnation is terrifyingly real. In Bush's *Faustus: That Damned Woman*, the devils are a question mark, and hell exists on earth. The plays explore the nature of what frightens us and of what can be considered inhuman or non-human evil from the

perspective of the centuries in which they are written, coming to different but equally ambiguous conclusions.

The demons in Marlowe's play range from his remarkable creation Mephistopheles to devils with fireworks. Mephistopheles appears, at Faustus's behest, in the guise of a Franciscan friar (a satiric dig at the Catholic Church, but also an appearance underscoring the play's theological foundations). Modern audiences admire Marlowe's conception of a devil who expresses himself with haunting eloquence about his experience of hell as a state of mind, a devil so complex that he can feel sympathy for the mortal he is called on to attend but ensures his damnation anyway:

> Why this hell nor am I out of it.
> Thinkst thou that I—that saw the face of God
> And tasted the eternal joys of heaven—
> Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
> In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
> O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,
> Which strikes a terror to my fainting soul.
>
> (Marlowe 2019, p. 23)

The tragic irony of Faustus's refusal to believe what is in front of him renders him the object of Mephistopheles's sardonic wit. When Faustus denies the existence of hell, Mephistopheles reminds him, "But I am an instance to prove the contrary" (Marlowe 2019, p. 34). Ultimately unable to control the Devil he has summoned, who always manages to get the better of him, Faustus finally comes to depend on the companionship of Mephistopheles. Indeed, his ambiguous last words are "O Mephistopheles!" (Marlowe 2019, p. 110).

Fascinating as the relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles is to modern audiences, Marlowe's contemporaries seem to have responded rather to the way *Doctor Faustus* pulls out all the theatrical stops to entertain and/or frighten its audiences as the denizens of hell populate the stage accompanied by thunder and lightning. The variety of the devilry and the use of stage effects evoking the power of hell are more marked in the longer 1616 B-text of *Doctor Faustus*, on which this essay draws, and more clearly indicate the play's theatrical possibilities. Lucifer, Mephistopheles, and Beelzebub, an imposing triumvirate of demonic power, are supported by other devils, who appear throughout the play, dancing or playing musical instruments to distract Faustus from what is important, or throwing stinky, smoky fireworks, evoking the fire of hell. A further vision of hell (possibly the "hellmouth" designed to fit over the trapdoor listed among the props in theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe's Diary) is "*discovered*" as the play and Faustus's life draw to a close (Marlowe 2019, p. 107).[8] Lucifer bullies Faustus into staying the course of damnation whenever he tries to seek salvation, and the Bad Angel tells him repentance is futile, leading Faustus to the final sin of despair and the terror of his last soliloquy: "O Faustus,/Now hast thou but one bare hour to live/And then thou must be damned perpetually./Stand still you ever-moving spheres of heaven/That time may cease and midnight never come" (Marlowe 2019, p. 108). However, midnight comes, and the scholars who visit Faustus the next morning report on the "fearful shrieks and cries" they heard in the night and describe Faustus's limbs "all torn asunder" by devils (Marlowe 2019, p. 111).

Impressed by the play's audiovisual effects—"the theatre crackt", "wild fire flew"—contemporary audiences found performances of *Doctor Faustus* terrifyingly real.[9] There are multiple stories of an extra (real) devil appearing on the stage during performances of the play. According to anti-theatrical Puritan polemicist William Prynne, the "visible apparition of the Devill" appeared during an Elizabethan performance of *Dr. Faustus* at the Belsavage playhouse; during a later performance at Exeter, reportedly, the actors themselves "were all perswaded, there was one devell too many amongst them", and the audience fled the theatre (Qtd. in Menzer 2019, pp. xii–xiii, and Scott 2024). The fright audiences felt may have been a pleasurable frisson, something like our response to horror films, or it may have

been a very serious fear about the eternal destination of their immortal souls, as they, like Faustus, might be consigned to hell—a hell characterized as the habitation of grotesque devils and by fire, stench, and physical torture, not the intellectual space of mental suffering described by Mephistopheles. Mark Scott argues that the play in performance possesses "considerable potential to provoke salvation anxiety", particularly in Calvinist spectators, through their investment in the play's action (Scott 2024, p. 80). Audiences may have had a mixed response. One defense against fear of the Devil was to laugh at him. In *Doctor Faustus*, as in the medieval cycle plays and later moralities, the forces of evil are represented as both grotesquely comic and terrifying.

In later decades, popular performances of *Doctor Faustus* emphasized devilry, fireworks, and farce, and in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Faust legend fell into disrepute. The story of Faustus became the subject matter of pantomimes and puppet shows. In the nineteenth century, Goethe restored seriousness and tragic potential in his own *Faust* (though ultimately he saved his protagonist), while critics in England rediscovered Marlowe as a sublime poet. The twentieth century restored *Doctor Faustus* to the stage, giving due weight to the complex relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles, finding various inventive ways—grotesquely comic or scary—to present the other devils, and struggling with the ambiguities of the play's genre.

If the ambiguity of Marlowe's devils concerns their inherent nature and the power they may exercise over human beings, the question raised by Bush's representation of Lucifer and Mephistopheles is whether they exist as such at all. Though Johanna believes that Lucifer and Mephistopheles are the devils they say they are, the audience is left questioning their identity even at the end of the play. Bush downplays any horror associated with the Devil, assigning inhuman cruelty to men such as the Witchfinder who persecutes Katherine and the abominable Doctor Newbury, who tortures young women, including Johanna, to create the magic he believes will summon Lucifer. Johanna herself is not afraid of Lucifer and Mephistopheles. She treats them with scant respect and questions the meaning of damnation. The despairing existential melancholy of the earlier Mephistopheles's "Why this is hell nor am I out of it" becomes bitter social commentary on the injustice of gender and class inequities in Johanna's echo of the line:

> Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it.
> Walk you these streets and say this is not Hell?
> See you these souls and say they are not damned?
> Live you as I, and do the things I've done,
> To daily be debased, and beg for scraps,
> To know your talent far outstripped your means,
> But for your sex and lowly parentage
> Were lost before you even drew a breath?
>
> (Bush 2020, p. 29)

Like Faustus, Johanna conjures the Devil for her own purposes (though in both instances the Devil actually comes of his own volition, to Faustus because he is already heading towards damnation, and to Johanna because Lucifer finds her interesting). Johanna chooses to perform her conjuring by daylight rather than in the dark of night. She creates a circle, lights torches, chants a mocking incantation ("Come out come out wherever you are!" (Bush 2020, p. 27) from The Wizard of Oz), and makes a small incision in her arm. Clearly, she does not believe it necessary to make a great effort. "You don't scare me", she boldly declares, "There's magic here enough" (Bush 2020, p. 27)—whether to summon Lucifer or to protect Johanna is not quite clear. Bush allows her audience a frisson of shock with "*wind, a rattling*", a brief blinding blaze of fire, and the rediscovery of Johanna, her arm "*drenched in blood*" where Mephistopheles, now present, has bitten it (Bush 2020, p. 27). But the entrance of Lucifer is understated. He "*arrives quietly*" (Bush 2020, p. 28) and looks like Johanna's father.

The same actor plays both Lucifer and Johanna's apothecary father, Thomas. Though the connection is suggestive and Johanna is certainly disadvantaged by her gender, I should stress that Bush does not make a simple formulaic equation between men and devils, patriarchy and hell. The ambiguity of the devils in *Faustus: That Damned Woman* is more oblique and subtle than that. In caring for his patients, Thomas is actually a better human being than his selfish daughter, who does not want to take in an orphaned child. When Thomas first appears early in the play standing behind Johanna, he presents a "*sinister image*", wearing a long coat, a "*beaked plague mask*" (an historical protective medical device), and a "*wide hat or hood*" that obscures his face (Bush 2020, p. 17). The audience likely assumes at first that this figure is the Devil. When Lucifer appears in the conjuring scene, he too wears a plague mask, and it is Johanna's turn to be surprised when he removes it that he has her father's face. The uncertainty of Lucifer's identity persists at the end of the play when he again appears wearing the plague mask to take Johanna's soul, or, alternatively, as her father, to offer medical assistance to his deranged daughter. Mephistopheles joins him as either subordinate devil or medical colleague. Johanna is momentarily confused about whether she has dreamed or lived the life we have witnessed. Warned by a vision of her mother, she opts for reality and confidently confronts Lucifer, telling him she is not afraid of damnation and asserting her identity and her lasting accomplishments: "I know who I am. I am Doctor Johanna Faustus, MD, PhD, Nobel Laureate. . ." (Bush 2020, p. 91). However, though Bush allows that Lucifer might sprout "*great black wings*" (Bush 2020, p. 88) if a director chooses to emphasize his demonic nature, nothing that he and Mephistopheles themselves say in the play's final sequence definitively proves their identity as human or demonic.

The most engaging and intimate relationship in the play, as in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, is that between the magus and Mephistopheles. Bush's Mephistopheles, too, is sardonic, but he does not have the melancholy spiritual grandeur of Marlowe's creation. He is a diminished and more down-to-earth devil with recognizably human feelings. He is in love with Lucifer and peeved that his master has given him away, though temporarily, to serve a human.[10] Throughout the play, Johanna and Mephistopheles try to get the better of one another. Mephistopheles tempts Johanna to obtain what she wants—revenge, fame, progress for women, scientific success—by using his magic; Johanna rejects his trickery when she realizes that Mephistophelean magic produces only evil and she must rely on her own ability. She refuses to help the women's suffrage movement, for example, because she "cannot walk the Devil into their houses" (Bush 2020, p. 72). As they spar with one another over the centuries, they take on the familiarity of a long-married couple. War, Famine, and Pestilence worry that Mephistopheles has become too fond of Johanna, calling him her "poodle" (Bush 2020, p. 80) and saying that she is out of his control.[11] Mephistopheles, rattled, "*snaps*" at them, "her time is not yet up", but he also assures them that "she shall burn!"(Bush 2020, p. 80). Nonetheless, subsequently, after she has all but destroyed humanity, he "*genuinely*" expresses admiration for her: "You have been spectacular, Faustus. You have exceeded my every expectation" (Bush 2020, p. 84), a compliment that is surely ironic in the circumstances, however heartfelt. Johanna, for her part, describes Mephistopheles both to her father in the seventeenth century and to a young woman a thousand years in the future as, in effect, her most significant other (Bush 2020, pp. 47, 87), the only being with whom she has had a real, if unreliable, connection over the centuries. Mephistopheles, understated (though with the potential for a degree of gay flamboyance in performance[12]), insidious beneath a veneer of helpful, even slightly bureaucratic normality, is a companion devil for the twenty-first century. But what he represents and whether or not he is responsible for the power outage that destroys most of humanity remain unanswered questions, because in the final scenes it is not clear if Bush's multifaceted play is operating in the realm of Faustian fantasy or science fiction—or both.

4. From Magic to Science Fiction

As Johanna travels though time, Bush represents time shifts by various audiovisual effects: changes of costume, collages of images, rumblings, falling rubble. In particular, moving from the early-twentieth to the mid-twenty-first century, Johanna and the audience watch "*a hundred years of science and medicine pass*": "*nuclear fission*", "*the atom bomb*", "*diseases cured*", "*DNA being modified*", etc. (Bush 2020, p. 74). If Marlowe's early audiences fixated on the demonic magic represented by his devils, some members of Bush's audience were fascinated by her play's affinities with science fiction. Alex Wood in *What's On Stage* describes how *Faustus: That Damned Woman* "becomes an unashamed sci-fi romp—the stage littered with the ashes of human history as Faustus sears her way through the centuries"; several other reviews reference the BBC's time-traveling science fiction series *Doctor Who*.[13] In the intellectual space between magic and science fiction Johanna creates her own "magic", the scientific knowledge born of imagination and experimentation that lightens the darkness of ignorance, destroys the power of Lucifer, and can bestow, she believes, immortality on ordinary human beings. Her inspiration is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, but she ignores the novel's warning.

Peter Dear, in *Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge and Its Ambitions, 1500–1700*, defines magic as a "technology" that enables "out-of-the-ordinary" things to be done. He distinguishes between "spiritual magic", which used either angelic or demonic aid, and "natural magic", derived from the hidden powers of nature (Dear 2001). Bush's play begins with both demonic magic, identified as patriarchal in Johanna's encounter with its vile practitioner Doctor Newbury, who tortures young girls for his spells, and natural magic, identified in the play as matriarchal and benign. Johanna damns herself by using demonic magic to obtain power and the opportunity to achieve greatness that she lacks because of her gender and social status. However, she also learns from her mother to embrace natural magic, the healing properties of herbs, in preference to the spuriously scientific leeches employed by her father. In the "*far-flung future*" where the play ends, Johanna continues to practice her mother's magic, tending her garden and cultivating "ancient varieties" of seedlings as well as "new strains" she developed through her own scientific experiments (Bush 2020, p. 85).

Dear's definition of magic as a "technology" underscores the easy identification of magic with science. In early modern plays such as Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, magic and science co-exist and overlap with one another. Friar Bacon is based on the thirteenth-century philosopher and scientist Roger Bacon, popularly considered to be a magician. Marlowe's Faustus has "all the principles magic doth require" *because* he is "grounded in astrology/Enriched with tongues, well seen in minerals" (Marlowe 2019, p. 15), that is, *because* of his scientific and scholarly knowledge. Shakespeare's Prospero, too, spent many years in his library before adopting the role of magus during the years of his banishment. In *Faustus: That Damned Woman*, Johanna's time-traveling traces the arc of technology from magic into science into science fiction and perhaps back again into science. As the technology changes, Faustian fantasy blends into science fiction.

Theorists of science fiction have typically distinguished between fantasy literature, which uses magic and the supernatural to achieve its speculative ends, and science fiction, which is characterized by what Darko Suvin has called a "*fictional 'novum'(novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*."[14] The stories of H.G Wells and Jules Verne and their successors depend on such new imaginary technologies—a time machine, warp speed—instead of the Mephistophelean magic that enables the time travel of Bush's Johanna, no less than the journeys and exploits of Marlowe's Faustus. In turning away from Mephistopheles as she travels through time, Johanna enters the realm of science fiction, in which the enabling "novum" is often "extrapolate[d]", as Daniel Dinello explains, "from known technology" (Dinello 2005). For example, the digital immortality Johanna thinks she has achieved can be imagined on the basis of already existing technologies that connect the human brain and the computer (Dinello 2005, pp. 4–5). The technology Johanna devel-

ops can be imagined, though it cannot—yet?—be explained. Arthur C. Clarke famously observed, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (Clarke 1984). Johanna seems to echo this view when, speaking to Marie Curie about radium, she says, "Magic [is] merely science we don't understand" (Bush 2020, p. 69).

Both fantasy and science fiction enable scientific innovations to be imagined and therefore created. Johanna begins her groundbreaking work, Elizabeth Garrett speaking "*as chorus*" tells us, by "Pursuing strange new forms of healing/Where science and fantasy converge" (Bush 2020, p. 63). Inspired by Shelley's *Frankenstein*—a "monster story. . . but with science at its heart" (Bush 2020, p. 70)—Johanna wonders if she might use the energy emitted by radium to revitalize dead bodies. In the age of computers, Johanna conceives of a different way to make human beings immortal, telling her audience at the Faustus Institute that "the creation of an online consciousness" is "no longer science-fiction" but "a scientific inevitability" (Bush 2020, p. 75).

Johanna's reading of *Frankenstein* marks the turning point in her journey from magic to science and the play's emergence from fantasy into science fiction. Brian Aldiss, himself a major practitioner of the genre, describes Frankenstein (1818) as "the first real novel of science fiction." "In combining social criticism with new scientific ideas", he remarks, "Mary Shelley anticipates the methods of H. G. Wells" and his successors (Aldiss and Wingrove 1986). *Frankenstein* is pivotal in the literary transformation of magic into science fiction. The new way of depicting things that are (currently) impossible is especially apparent, Aldiss notes, in Frankenstein's rejection early in the novel of the "pre-scientific" writings of the old alchemical authorities in favor of "research in the laboratory" and "modern experiment" (Aldiss and Wingrove 1986, pp. 39–40). Shelley's modern Prometheus—regarded as a Faust figure by some critics, including Aldiss—has no need to use magic or make a pact with the Devil in order to achieve extraordinary ends. Instead he—and his successors—engage in pseudo-scientific activities that can be explained by what H. G. Wells called "an ingenious use of scientific patter" (Qtd. in Aldiss and Wingrove 1986, p. 26). However, though there is no pact with the Devil in *Frankenstein*, the Devil creeps back into the story through the titular protagonist's perception and abuse of the being he creates and abandons. Frankenstein refers to the Creature repeatedly as "fiend", "demon", and "devil", and refuses to create for him a mate, fearing that the pair would produce "a race of devils. . . who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (Shelley 1994). Foreshadowing "our fears about the two-edged triumphs of scientific progress", *Frankenstein* anticipates later technophobic versions of science fiction, especially those that deal with "troubling posthuman issues" centered on engineered forms of life.[15]

Frankenstein himself is a prototype for subsequent fictional scientists—including Johanna Faustus—who through hubris or ignorance or irresponsibility fail to foresee, before great damage has already been done, the threat to humanity posed by inventions they cannot control. Shelley couches this danger to the human race in theological terms. A subtext of *Frankenstein* is Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Seeing himself first as an abandoned Adam, the Creature learns to identify rather with Satan, becoming what Frankenstein accuses him of being and declaring "everlasting war against the species" of man (Shelley 1994, p. 111). Adam Roberts, taking a long view of the continuum on which technological science fiction and supernatural fantasy exist, in *The History of Science Fiction* argues that a "theological subtext" underpins the genre of science fiction as a whole (Roberts 2006). Faustian fantasies both show what human beings may aspire to and warn of the dangers inherent in pursuing such dreams. Science fiction does the same, projecting, as Dinello explains in *Technophobia!: Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology*, "a vision of the future against which we can evaluate present technology and its direction", including "unforeseen consequences" (Dinello 2005, pp. 5, 15). One example of an "unforeseen consequence" Dinello offers is a computer virus that could destroy digitalized human beings (Dinello 2005, p. 16). In technophobic versions of science fiction, non-human life forms and mechanical forms of intelligence (robots, androids, self-generating computers, and AI) represent a danger to humanity akin to the Devil of the Faust legend. Introduced into the world by scientists

who may initially deem them beneficial to humankind, such creations take on a destructive force of their own. *Frankenstein* crystallizes metaphorically this fusion of science fiction and demonic magic as the scientist himself redefines his creation as a "devil". In science fiction the source of evil is no longer supernatural, but the consequences can be just as inexplicable and terrifying to those who suffer them. The magus creates a machine, and the Devil, by one name or another, enters it.

The massive power outage that occurs at the end of *Faustus: That Damned Woman* thwarts Johanna's crowning ambition in the most horrifying way by destroying the billions of uploaded minds for whom she thought she had created digital immortality. It is unclear whether the power outage is an "unforeseen consequence" of Johanna's scientific work or a final demonic trick. Certainly, Mephistopheles is pretty suave about it: "Chin up. All's done. . . What next?" (Bush 2020, p. 84). But to the billions of minds that no longer exist, it hardly matters whether the machine or the Devil is the source of negation or whether there is any difference between them. If for Frankenstein, his unhappy creation stands in for the Devil, in *Faustus: That Damned Woman*, the Devil finally embodies the uncontrollable but entirely predictable force of science gone wrong.

But though Johanna banishes Mephistopheles and with him the inhuman scientific progress he represents, the play is not entirely technophobic. In the distant future, Johanna continues her healing work, and even as she faces damnation she celebrates the beneficial potential of science, reminding Lucifer of all the good she has accomplished ("I have eradicated plagues" (Bush 2020, p. 91), etc.). Unlike Marlowe's terrified Faustus, Johanna accepts her damnation (whatever that may mean) with equanimity but denies that she is "lost" because she has "faith" that the "daughters"—scientists of the future—who come after her will enjoy the fruits of her work and continue on the path she has established (Bush 2020, pp. 91–92). This note of triumphant optimism is short-lived, however. For as the clock strikes midnight, Johanna suddenly stops laughing at the devils and, looking up, says, "Wait –"(Bush 2020, p. 92), as her mother did just before being executed centuries before (an event depicted in the play's first scene). Again the stage goes black, obliterating both Johanna and the now silent/silenced devils, and the audience is left literally in the dark to ponder what the women may finally have realized or whether the darkness marks the end of Johanna's consciousness—oblivion.

The richly ambiguous open-endedness of Bush's play, its epistemological and generic indeterminacy, is in keeping with both Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and the speculative questioning of science fiction.[16] *Faustus: That Damned Woman* is both Faustian fantasy and science fiction play. In either case, as a force uncontrollable by even the most brilliant of human beings, the Devil or the devil in the details lurks, impassive, imponderable, silent until called into being, still to be reckoned with.

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Notes

1 On the Darwinian implications of cultural adaptations see (Hutcheon 2013) and (Sanders 2016).

2 Herbert Knust draws a line from the Faust legend via science fiction such as *Frankenstein* to J. Robert Oppenheimer. See (Knust 1983).

3 *Faustus: That Damned Woman* was first performed at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, London, on 28 January 2020 in a co-production between Headlong Repertory Theatre and Lyric Hammersmith Theatre. The play, directed by Caroline Byrne with Jodie McNee as Johanna Faustus and Danny Lee Wynter as Mephistopheles, subsequently went on tour.

4 I refer to Bush's Faustus as Johanna to avoid confusion with Marlowe's Faustus.

5 Deats, *The Faust Legend*, p. 2. On *Franziska* as a parody of Goethe's *Faust*, see Philip Ward, "Introduction" to (Wedekind 1998).

6 Bush, *Faustus: That Damned Woman*, p. 38. Subsequent quotations from the play are from this edition and will be referred to parenthetically in my text.

[7] (Marlowe 2019). This edition is based on the longer 1616 B-text of Marlowe's play, which contains more comic episodes and calls for more elaborate staging than the shorter 1604 A-text. Subsequent quotations from the play are from this edition and will be referred to parenthetically in my text.

[8] (Menzer 2019). See Menzer's discussion of this point.

[9] Menzer quotes these observations of dramatists Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker on the audiovisual effects of *Doctor Faustus*, Ibid., p. xiii.

[10] Mephistopheles's love for Lucifer may be inspired by the erotic attraction Goethe's Mephistopheles feels for the young Angels who carry Faust's soul off to Heaven. See Goethe, *Faust*, Pt. 2, pp. 11753–11843.

[11] "Poodle" is an allusion to Mephistopheles's appearance as a poodle in Goethe's *Faust*. A brief reference to an offstage character named Helen in Bush's play (p. 76) similarly evokes both Marlowe and Goethe while underscoring the different path taken by Bush's female Faustus.

[12] (Graystone 2020). Reviewer Peter Graystone refers to Mephistopheles as a "camp dandy" (Lawson 2020). Reviewer Eleanor Lawson describes Mephistopheles as "deliciously camp".

[13] (Wood 2020). For references to *Doctor Who*, see, for example, reviews by Justin Murray (Murray 2020) and Ben Kulvichit (Kulvichit 2020).

[14] (Suvin 1979). Emphasis in the original. Andrew Milner provides a useful account of the history and definition of science fiction and its relation to fantasy in (Milner 2012).

[15] Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree*, p. 51 and Dinello, *Technophobia!*, p. 43 concur in their view of Shelley's prophetic vision in *Frankenstein*.

[16] Deats, *The Faust Legend*, notes the well-known ambiguity of both Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Goethe's *Faust* (44, 109).

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