

“Now is hell landed here upon the earth”:  
Renaissance Poverty and Witchcraft  
in Thomas Middleton’s *The Black Book*

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*En 1604, le pamphlet The Black Book de Thomas Middleton a été publié en deux éditions à Londres. Middleton y répond au Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil (1592) de Thomas Nashe et au The Black Booke’s Messenger (1592) de Robert Greene, dans le cadre du débat concernant le Londres interlope des escrocs, des petits voleurs, et des pauvres de la ville. Il y réplique également au mythe de Faust, et contribue ainsi au débat portant sur la sorcellerie et le diable. En examinant The Black Book dans le contexte de ces deux débats apparentés, l’auteur avance que le pamphlet de Middleton met en lumière les fondements et les implications économiques de la représentation qu’avait la culture de la Renaissance des démons, sorcières, mendiants et escrocs. The Black Book propose un Lucifer qui prend la parole pour répondre à l’appel à l’aide désespéré de Pierce Penniless. En faisant endosser le rôle de la Charité à l’ennemi ultime de l’humanité, Middleton remet en question et démystifie les notions contemporaines de sorcellerie et de pauvreté urbaine. Son pamphlet offre un unique commentaire favorable sur la pauvreté et la sorcellerie dans la littérature de la Renaissance.*

In 1604, two editions of Thomas Middleton’s prose pamphlet *The Black Book* appeared.<sup>1</sup> Ostensibly a sequel to Thomas Nashe’s *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil* (1592), *The Black Book* presents Lucifer’s response to Pierce Penniless’s “penetrable petition.”<sup>2</sup> Lucifer “ascends this dusty theatre of the world” (41), acting as “prologue to his own play” (38), appropriately, on the stage of the Globe theater. His one-day tour of London’s underworld involves many costume changes in between his visits to brothel-houses, ordinaries, and even the Royal Exchange. Lucifer ends his stay by bequeathing legacies to his London friends, including “for his redress, / A standing pension to Pierce Penniless” (108–9).

Published during the plague-stricken beginning of James’ reign, *The Black Book* followed on the coat-tails of Middleton and Dekker’s collaborative *Newes from Gravesend* and *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary*, Middleton’s *Plato’s Cap* and *Father Hubbard’s Tales*,<sup>3</sup> and Dekker’s *The Wonderful Year*. Both authors had

turned to prose, as plays were not a profitable venture when the theatres were closed. In some ways, then, *The Black Book* might properly be labeled a “plague pamphlet.” Though its subject matter is not the plague, it certainly has in common with plague pamphlets its sympathetic treatment of the suffering lower classes of London.<sup>4</sup> The form of *The Black Book* connects it not only with other “plague pamphlets,” however, but also to the tradition of rogue literature and cony-catching pamphlets, following the example of Robert Greene (and followed, two years later, by Dekker). Its form, too, is appropriate for a response to Nashe’s satirical prose *Supplication*.

Despite its comfortable seat within the context of prose works and the pamphlet form, *The Black Book* also aspires to drama. Would this have been a “devil” play, had the theatres been open? It is impossible to say, though the aforementioned links to prose pamphlets might argue no. And yet, *The Black Book* is so infused with theatricality that Middleton’s reader is able to envision with ease Lucifer rising through the trapdoor on the Globe stage. Indeed, like Middleton’s sartorially adept fiend, *The Black Book* itself dons many generic and formal costumes: plague pamphlet, prose satire, rogue pamphlet, witch play, devil play, and black book. As Gary Taylor points out, “black-letter type, and the xylographic title page, produce a conspicuously literally ‘black book,’”<sup>5</sup> and the remarkable epilogue, spoken by *The Black Book* itself, refers the reader not only to the content she has just poured over but to the black cover as well as the type: “Am I black enough, think you, dressed up in a lasting suit of ink? Do I deserve my dark and pitchy title?” (824–26).

As Middleton plays with genre and form, he also effortlessly combines and participates in seemingly disparate discourses. The work’s conspicuous relationship with drama, especially witch and devil plays, marks it as kin to *Doctor Faustus* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (for which Middleton, in 1602, had composed a prologue and epilogue), as well as the *English Faust Book* from which the former works themselves descended.<sup>6</sup> Lucifer, we imagine, would have been delighted to change places with Mephistopheles. At the same time, and contrary to what one expects from man’s adversary, the purpose of Lucifer’s visit to London is to rescue Pierce Penniless from dire poverty; this connects the piece to the early modern discourse surrounding beggars, rogues, and the urban poor. Reading *The Black Book* as an intervention in these two different, but intersecting discourses—the one surrounding witchcraft and the devil; the other, rogues and the urban poor—I assert that Middleton’s pamphlet illuminates the economic foundations and implications of early modern cultural attitudes about devils, witches, beggars, and rogues. While situating Middleton’s critique of emergent capitalism among some of its textual influences, including the Faust myth, Thomas Nashe’s *Pierce Penniless*

*His Supplication to the Devil* (1592), and rogue pamphlets like Robert Greene's *The Black Booke's Messenger* (1592), I also consider the cultural circumstances within and against which Middleton writes. As *Doctor Faustus* and *Pierce Penniless* participate in transforming witchcraft from a social means of redress for the poor<sup>7</sup> to yet another form of cultural capital for the rich, rogue literature demonizes the poor, depicts its subjects as recalcitrant "sturdy beggars," and simultaneously confirms that these poor form a tight-knit community in which they get on fine and have no need for help or charity. *The Black Book*, alternatively, gives us a Lucifer who rises, not to respond to the calls of the Faustian over-reachers in the audience, nor to become a "familiar" to a rural "witch" who seeks both sustenance and revenge; instead, Lucifer has been "moved" (93) to pay a visit to London by the resurrected Pierce Penniless' supplication. Middleton's pamphlet problematizes the privileging of the magician and the obscuring of the witch in the cultural imagination of the West; it also points an accusing finger at the literature that is complicit in masking the socio-economic causes of poverty and, more generally, at the social and economic changes that make the arch-enemy of mankind appear to be the last bastion of charity.

### I. Rogues and Witches: Defining Terms

Within early modern rogue and witch discourses, numerous signifiers were placed into circulation. "Masterless men," "sturdy beggars," "rogues," and "vagabonds" named the subjects of rogue literature, while "witch," "cunning" man or woman, "magician," and "necromancer" were but a few terms that appeared in demonological tracts. It is, then, important to define the terms I shall use before continuing my discussion. One of the tasks of early modern rogue literature was precisely to define and distinguish among the several types of rogues; yet, early modernist rogue studies sometimes conflate or obscure important distinctions between city and country, self-consciously literary text and informational pamphlet, and the impotent poor and cunning cony-catchers.<sup>8</sup> To be fair, like much else in the English Renaissance, distinctions within these pairs often broke down. Yet early modern writers are clearly concerned to differentiate between the impotent or deserving poor and "sturdy beggars"—the able-bodied but recalcitrant poor. Vagabonds, or those whom Patricia Fumerton calls "unsettled," were mobile poor, who traveled outside of their home parishes in search of alms or work.<sup>9</sup> Cony-catchers were urban tricksters who preyed upon the naïve country gentlemen who came to the city at term-time.<sup>10</sup> The latter especially defied categorization by class.<sup>11</sup> Broadly, the term rogue is suitable as it can contain all of these. As I focus mainly on the urban criminalized poor, I employ the term

“rogue” in order to encompass both cony-catchers, and those, like Middleton’s Pierce Penniless, who lacked the cunning to survive in the city. For me, “rogue” bears the weight of negative connotations, of demonized and criminalized poor. It might imply cunning, but it does not suggest it with the same force as “cony-catcher.” It hints at one who inhabits an underworld, who flies under the radar.

Yet such fanciful imaginings of an “underworld,” or an underground network were, in part, what permitted early modern Londoners to look the other way in the face of urban poverty.<sup>12</sup> That some “rogues” were self-sufficient may have been true; that they all worked together, as a merry band of thieves, is a quaint (but harmful) fiction, one which Thomas Middleton helps to dispel. For his Pierce Penniless occupies a liminal space—out of work, yet not lame; suffering in privation, yet living in a brothel; praying for mercy, but to Lucifer rather than Christ. His membership in the London “underworld” has gone inactive. Zygmunt Bauman’s term “redundant” may provide us with a helpful way of imagining Pierce and others like him:

To be “redundant” means to be supernumerary, unneeded, of no use—whatever the needs and uses are that set the standard of usefulness and indispensability. The others do not need you; they can do as well, and better, without you. There is no self-evident reason for your being around and no obvious justification for your claim to the right to stay around. To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of *because of being disposable* ... an unattractive commodity with no buyers ... “Redundancy” shares its semantic space with “rejects,” “wastrels,” “garbage,” “refuse”—with *waste*.<sup>13</sup>

No less redundant, in many ways, was the witch. By definition, both in early modern demonological tracts, and as seen in literary texts and plays, the term “witch” referred to the often uneducated, impoverished, rural subjects, mostly women, who, it was supposed, practised magic in order to exact revenge or to gain material wealth (or at least relief from poverty). The term “magician” signified the well-educated and often wealthy subjects, mostly men, who practised the black arts out of curiosity. My usage follows James’ distinctions between “*Magie or Necromancie*” and “*Sorcerie or Witch-craft*”<sup>14</sup> (though his use of “sorcery” as a synonym for “witchcraft” may be confusing, and I will avoid the former term here). In *Daemonologie*, James explains that practitioners of magic are “allured” into the snares of the devil

... by these three passionnes that are within our selves: Curiositie in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great poverty. As to the first of these, Curiosity, it is onelie the inticement of *Magiciens*, or *Necromancers*: and the other two are the allurers of the *Sorcerers*, or *Witches* ...<sup>15</sup>

When I write "witch," I mean the type of subject represented, for example, by Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*. When I write "magician," I mean the type of subject represented by Greene's Friar Bacon, or, more relevantly, Doctor Faustus.

## II. The Faust Myth and Jacobean Witch Beliefs

Who knew, in 1588, that the *English Faust Book* would have both the immediate and the long-term impact it did? Translated from the so-called *German Faust Book* with significant augmentations from the translator, one "P. F. Gent.," the *English Faust Book* was the immediate source for Marlowe's play, for a popular ballad, and for the prose romance *Friar Bungay* (1590).<sup>16</sup> Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* ushered in a new era of stage devils,<sup>17</sup> and the *English Faust Book* itself, even if not a direct influence, was certainly a predecessor of prose works like *Pierce Penniless His Supplication* and *The Black Book*. The Faust myth, especially its Marlovian avatar, enjoyed special success because it manifested and shaped notions of devils and witchcraft in the cultural imagination. It was not just that Faustus was a compelling bourgeois "erring star" whose human foibles and alienated religious views were something the audience could latch onto;<sup>18</sup> *Faustus* was a product of, and capitalized on, contemporary religious beliefs, one facet of which was belief in the devil. The possibility that there might be a Faustian over-reacher speeding towards his damned end right there in London was not beyond the imagination of Marlowe's audience. That Lucifer and his crew would actually pay him a visit and rend his limbs from his body was conceivable. And perhaps as early as 1594, Renaissance audiences associated the performance of Marlowe's play with the possible appearance of a real devil.<sup>19</sup> The notorious rumored incident of the extra devil joining the cast in an early performance of *Doctor Faustus* is symptomatic of the audience's willingness to believe in the devil, and of the fact that the stage was indeed devil-friendly, as the anti-theatricalists had been saying all along.

Devils and witches had made other popular appearances in 1604 and the years just prior. Recently, the controversy surrounding the Puritan "cunning man" John Darrell and what were proven to be counterfeit possessions and exorcisms had been made public in a series of pamphlets from Samuel Harsnett, chaplain and polemicist for the Bishop of London. In 1604, among the new Church Canons, Canon 72 responded to the recent controversy over fraudulent cases of possession and exorcism by expressly forbidding any clergyman to attempt exorcism without the permission of the bishop (which would never have been granted).<sup>20</sup> One of the many revivals of *Doctor Faustus* took place in 1604.<sup>21</sup> In 1603, the year of James'

accession, *Daemonologie*, originally published in Edinburgh in 1597, came out in two London editions, and one year later, the third in a series of witchcraft statutes outlawed practices including invocation of spirits, bringing about of harmful *maleficium*, use of a dead body for magical purposes, and friendly interaction, especially entering into a contract, with evil spirits.<sup>22</sup> Although England never experienced anything resembling the “witch craze” of the continent, James was influenced by continental beliefs,<sup>23</sup> and *Daemonologie* inveighs against such skeptical works as Reginald Scot’s *A Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) and Johann Weyer’s *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563). Devils and witchcraft were taken seriously.

The role James played in shaping early modern witch beliefs is worth some consideration. James believed in witchcraft, and he was influenced by continental texts like Jean Bodin’s *De la demonomanie des sorciers* (1580) as well as Kramer and Sprenger’s notorious *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486). James’s own distinctions between the witch and the magician reflect those expressed in continental demonological studies. The small tract *Newes from Scotland* (1591) describes the attempt on James’ life made by Scottish witches under the influence of one Doctor Fian; the graphic descriptions of the “interrogations” these witches underwent, under orders of the Scottish king, demonstrate that James did not suffer from lack of conviction when it came to indicting witches. Though Stuart Clark maintains that by the time James became king of England his zealous approach to witchcraft had become more moderate and even skeptical,<sup>24</sup> associations between James and witch beliefs surely would have existed in the popular imagination. Thus, while “on the Home Circuit [witch] trials were at their zenith during the reign of Elizabeth I,”<sup>25</sup> the strong association between Elizabeth’s successor and witchcraft may explain the surge in witch plays that occurred in the Jacobean era.<sup>26</sup> The proliferation of Jacobean witch plays and pamphlets suggests that the connection between James and witchcraft may have been responsible for establishing the “witch vogue” that helped define the cultural moment of the early seventeenth century.

At stake in James’s appropriation of continental demonological theory was the particular emphasis on the devil as the malefactor behind witchcraft of any kind. Whereas traditional English witch beliefs focused more on the witch’s ability as a “cunning” man or woman who could heal, find stolen goods, and create love potions or protective charms; with the dissemination of continental beliefs sprang the link between the witch and the devil. Though magicians were technically more culpable and insidious, “as their error proceedes of the greater knowledge, and so drawes nerer to the sin against the holy Ghost;” according to James, witches were equally deserving of capital punishment as they too were guilty of entering into an alliance

with the devil, overtly or tacitly.<sup>27</sup> Thus, witch plays and pamphlets usually involved a devil in some capacity, from Mephistopheles who demands that Faustus write his deed in a manner of gift,<sup>28</sup> to Tom the dog who brings about the downfall of the wretched Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*. If instead of a pamphlet, Middleton's *Black Book* were the play it aspires to be, it would fall right in line with other witch plays of the period.

But Middleton, unlike Shakespeare or Jonson, does not seek to flatter the king.<sup>29</sup> Adopting the skeptical and socially conscious attitude found in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Middleton would appear to be taking a blatantly oppositional stance. In his sole witch play, *The Witch*, Hecate's spells consist of passages lifted directly from Scot.<sup>30</sup> Though some have unconvincingly interpreted this as evidence that Middleton composed this play in haste,<sup>31</sup> I find it more likely that through this intertextuality Middleton deliberately means to call attention to his source. James, who was something of an authority on witch lore, would have recognized it; so would other readers like archbishop George Abbot or fellow playwright Jonson. Middleton sets himself and his politics apart from those who scorn the poor as so-called witches.<sup>32</sup> Like Scot, Middleton was both a Protestant and a skeptic. While concerned with issues of sin and salvation, Middleton emphasizes human agents and their choices, the causes and consequences of their actions, and the material circumstances of their daily life. This in part explains why the witches of *The Witch* are entirely ineffective compared to the courtiers and ladies at Ravenna. Witches cannot in actuality perform the tasks attributed to them. The skeptic espouses a sociological view of witchcraft that reads the social and economic circumstances out of which both practices and accusations emerge.<sup>33</sup> While he did not dwell on the subject, Middleton's one foray into witch drama suggests that Reginald Scot's sympathetic description of how beggars were transformed into "witches" registered in terms of the poet's concern with the demonization of the marginalized poor:

They go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live: neither obtaining for their service and paines, nor by their art, nor yet at the divels hands ... either beautie, monie, promotion, welth, worship, pleasure, honor, knowledge, learning, or anie other benefit whatsoever.

It falleth out many times that neither their necessities, nor their expectation is answered or served, in those places where they beg or borrow ... in tract of time the witch waxeth odious and tedious to hir neighbors ... so as sometimes she cursseth one, and sometimes another ... doubtlesse (at length) some of hir neighbors die, or fall sicke; or some of their children are visited with diseases ...

Which by ignorant parents are supposed to be the vengeance of witches.<sup>34</sup>



*The Black Book* is infused with this notion that it is the witch, rather than her ostensible victim, who is to be pitied. Where other productions and pamphlets titillated with their accounts of the magician's ambitions and experiences, Middleton's work expresses sensitivity to supposed witches and an awareness that "most accused persons lived in a state of impotence and desperation. Their commonest motive was thought to be the escape from grinding poverty."<sup>35</sup> Middleton's Pierce Penniless, though male and urban, bears more resemblance to a traditional "witch" than to a Faustian magician in his motivation for calling on the devil. For Middleton, the impoverished reality, the "redundancy," of the Pierce character is more horrifying than anything Faustus can conjure.

### III. Middleton versus Marlowe and Nashe

While witches might be won over to the dark side by a devil in the guise of a "familiar," who seizes on them in vulnerable moments when they feel the bite of penury and have been forsaken by the community, in early modern discourse the devil is often more interested in gaining the "capital" of magicians' souls. *Doctor Faustus* serves as an example:

Monarch of hell, under whose black survey  
Great potentates do kneel with awful fear,  
Upon whose altars thousand souls do lie,  
How am I vexèd with these villains' charms!  
From Constantinople am I hither come  
Only for the pleasure of these damnèd slaves. (3.2.29–34)

Mephistopheles is not a little aggravated that he has been called from the East by the "slaves" Rafe and Robin, whose silly tricks are the comedic subplot to *Faustus*' tragic plot. Clearly, these two stablemen are a waste of Mephistopheles's time, and he turns them into base creatures, an ape (appropriate because Robin has been "aping" Faustus) and a dog.<sup>36</sup> In the subsequent scenes, Faustus and Mephistopheles, after entertaining the Emperor, come upon a horse-courser, and Faustus uses "reverse psychology" after he has sold his horse to the man, warning him not to take the horse into the water and knowing full well that he will. Faustus delights in cozening the poor man into giving him eighty dollars altogether. According to John Cox's study of devils on the medieval and Renaissance stage, *Doctor Faustus* signals a change in the relations between stage devils and humans: the lower class characters "acquire no mysterious dignity as God's 'freindes dear'" but instead are "mere hapless gulls," and "Mephistopheles thinks no better of commoners than Faustus himself



does."<sup>37</sup> Emily C. Bartels posits that *Doctor Faustus* highlights the difference in value between "unlearned and learned subjects" through Mephistopheles' rejection of "the tavern folk" and his pursuit of Faustus who is "embedded and renowned in mainstream culture, a figure of learning ... who is watched and followed by a fan club of scholars ...".<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, in *Doctor Faustus*, "rising above common origin becomes a good in itself, and the devil despises commoners as much as everyone else does."<sup>39</sup>

Rising above a common origin is precisely what gets Faustus into trouble. Coming from "parents of base stock" (Prologue 11), he is sent to live with his uncle in Wittenberg, "a rich man, and without issue, [who] took this Faustus from his father and made him his heir."<sup>40</sup> Having attended university and surpassed his professors as a scholar,<sup>41</sup> Faustus wants to learn more, but has no one to learn from. Mephistopheles will be his next teacher. However we choose to read the underlying causes for Faustus's over-reaching, it is imperative to remember that Faustus's motivation and ability to call on Mephistopheles first of all depend on his means. Faustus can over-reach because he is at leisure to do so. Rafe and Robin, by contrast, appear to turn to "conjuring" as a diversion from their lives of drudgery. If we take into account historical motives for witchcraft, the horse-courser is the most likely candidate of any in the play to practise the black arts—it would not have been surprising to see him place a charm or curse on Faustus to punish him for the mean trick.

The Faust myth is interwoven in Thomas Nashe's *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil*. Pierce's opening lament is evocative of Faustus' frequent despairing asides:

Why ist damnation to dispaire and die,  
When life is my true happinesse disease?  
My soule, my soule, thy safetie makes me flie  
The faultie means, that might my paine appease.  
Divines and dying men may talke of hell,  
But in my heart her several tormentes dwell.<sup>42</sup>

Just as the *English Faust Book* and *Doctor Faustus* highlight the role of social status in Faustus' necromantic practices while also divorcing the concept of witchcraft from the actual social circumstances of its practice, so *Pierce Penniless* simultaneously discloses and disguises the reasons for practising witchcraft. Pierce is poor, but the problem for him is not poverty in itself. It is rather that, in the upside-down world of nascent capitalism, Pierce is poor while his social inferiors are wealthy:

I grew to consider how many base men that wanted those parts which I had, enjoyed content at will, and had wealth at commaund ... am I better born? am I better brought up? yea and better favored? and yet am I a begger? What is the cause? how am I crost? or whence is this curse?<sup>43</sup>

After considering that he may be a victim of witchcraft, Pierce decries the unworthy hacks by whom true scholars and wits are undone. He reveals that he has “clapt up a handsome Supplication to the Divell”<sup>44</sup> and hints that it was written in blood: “I determined to clawe Avarice by the elbowe till his full belly gave mee a full handle, and lette him bloud with my penne (if it might be) in the veyne of liberalitie: and so (in short time) was this Paper-monster *Pierce Penillesse*, begotten.”<sup>45</sup> If *Pierce Penniless* is social criticism, its momentum gets lost in the lengthy catalogue of vices followed by the Faustian dialogue between Pierce and the Knight of the Post. Pierce is not the *vox populi* inveighing against the evils of burgeoning capitalism and the concomitant rise in poverty; he is bourgeois in his sensibilities and is concerned only with his own social betterment.

Middleton’s Pierce and his Lucifer differ considerably from their parents. Unlike Nashe’s Pierce or Marlowe’s Mephistopheles, Middleton’s characters are immersed in the economic and social realities of early modern London. Recalling Faustus’s fantasies as he performs his invocation in the beginning of Marlowe’s play, Middleton’s Pierce, rather than imagining *Faustus*’ world of “profit and delight” or envisioning his nation “walled with brass” (1.1.55, 90), instead pitifully

muttered these reeling words between drunk and sober, that is, between sleeping and waking: “I should laugh, i’ faith, if for all this I should prove a usurer before I die and have never a penny now to set up withal. I would build a nunnery in Pickt-hatch here and turn the walk in Paul’s into a bowling alley. I would have Thames leaded over, that they might play at cony-holes with the arches under London Bridge. Well,” and with that he waked, “the Devil is a mad knave still.” (433–40)

While clearly invoking *Doctor Faustus*, Middleton gives Pierce a modest, though bawdy, fantasy; notably, Pierce would find it humorously ironic if he should “prove a usurer” after having been so poor, in other words, if he should suddenly have enough money not only to subsist, but indeed, to lend at interest. To “prove a usurer” would be to become a successful capitalist. Pierce’s chimerical vision is a fascinating representation of the kind of cultural fantasy available to the early modern poor. Who better to illustrate the fantastic wealth able to be had by ordinary people than the figure of the usurer? Much talked about, dramatized, despised, and also resorted to, usurers were depicted as “cormorants” who consumed the commonwealth. They had appetite without end; they were demonized as figures of covetousness who

did not eat their bread in the sweat of their brows. The charging of interest was unchristian and unnatural. When the state sanctioned the charging of ten percent interest on loans in 1571—an act that was meant to prevent “biting usury” or the charging of excessive interest—many, despite the reasonable intention behind the act, took this as a sign that the devil was indeed loose in the world. Thus, Pierce’s brief, “drunken” fantasy of “proving a usurer” is fraught with cultural significance.<sup>46</sup> If we are meant to see Pierce as already damned, already in the hell of urban poverty in early modern London, then becoming a successful capitalist is a way out of hell. Paradoxically, to become a type of “devil,” as the usurer was thought to be, would be to ensure economic and social salvation. Importantly, too, Pierce’s fantasy invokes the “witch’s” fantasy of gaining relief from poverty through diabolical means. For how else would Pierce gain such wealth?<sup>47</sup>

Unlike Marlowe’s Mephistopheles, whose ire at having been invoked by two unworthy subjects makes clear that socio-economic status also matters to the devil, Middleton’s Lucifer is not “vexèd” by Pierce’s supplication. Less interested in world tours and trips to the exotic East, this devil is very much in and of London. From the Globe to Fleet Street, from St. Paul’s to Pickt-hatch, Lucifer knows London like the back of his cloven hoof. Where Mephistopheles snobbishly feels he is too good for the likes of Rafe and Robin, Middleton’s Lucifer would probably not think twice about dropping in on them for some fun. After all, he comes from hell to declare his last will and testament to

... smoky gallants, riotous heirs,  
Strumpets that follow theatres and fairs,  
Gild-nosed usurers, base-metalled panders,  
To copper-captains and Pickt-hatch commanders,  
To all infectious catchpoles through the town,  
The speckled vermin of a crown,  
To these and those, and every damnèd one,  
I’ll bequeath legacies to thrive upon. (100–07)

While Lucifer is here playful, he also has moments of what appear to be genuine sympathy and concern for the miserable Pierce. And not without reason, for Pierce’s living conditions are sobering:

I stumbled up two pair of stairs in the dark, but at last caught in mine eyes the sullen blaze of a melancholy lamp that burnt very tragically upon the narrow desk of a half bedstead, which descried all the pitiful ruins throughout the whole chamber. The bare privities of the stone walls were hid with two pieces of painted cloth, but so ragged and tattered that one might have seen all nevertheless, hanging for all the world like the two men in chains between Mile End and Hackney. The testern, or

the shadow over the bed, was made of four ells of cobwebs, and a number of small spinners' ropes hung down for curtains ... In this unfortunate tiring-house lay poor Pierce upon a pillow stuffed with horse-meat [hay], the sheets smudged so dirtily as if they had been stolen by night out of St. Pulcher's churchyard ... (406–24)

Lucifer's propensity to metaphor and personification is apparent in this passage: the naked wall has "bare privities;" the ragged cloth resembles hanging criminals; cobwebs, like fabric, are measured in "ells;" dirty sheets are like the wool coverings in which dead criminals were wrapped. But amidst his figurative language, the stark conditions are illuminated; Neil Rhodes goes so far as to suggest that the above description of Pierce's quarters "is perhaps the first attempt in English prose actually to visualise what it is like to be down and out in a large city."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, while engaging, according to Rhodes, in this early attempt at "social realism," Lucifer, and Middleton, simultaneously maintain emphasis on the theatrical: even the lamp is "melancholy" and burning "very tragically." Guided by this tragic luminescence, the comedy in which Lucifer has been playing the lead has transformed into tragedy for the moment, and he has found the tragic actor Pierce in an "unfortunate tiring-house."

To the critics who have read *The Black Book*, Pierce Penniless bears a striking resemblance to Thomas Nashe himself. Nashe's influence on Middleton is visible not only in *The Black Book*, but also in other pamphlets like *Microcynicon* (which came under fire, literally, along with Nashe's work, in the Bishops' Ban of 1599), *Plato's Cap*, and *Father Hubbard's Tales*. In the latter, the Nightingale sings a brief ode to Nashe, which mourns the satirist's early demise and inveighs against the Harveys, finally lamenting that "Thy name they bury, having buried thee; / Drones eat thy honey: thou wert the true bee."<sup>49</sup> In *Father Hubbard's Tales*, Middleton is also strangely concerned with "railing like Nashe" (perhaps recalling how in the Bishops' Ban, works were burned for "railing").<sup>50</sup> *The Black Book* does not "rail." Instead, through his revision of the Pierce character and his portrait of the sympathetic devil, Middleton forwards a radical critique of the socio-economic conditions that permitted Nashe to meet his demise as a starving writer. As G. B. Shand suggests, "in *The Black Book*'s compassion for Pierce, and its implied scorn for the world that has so abused him, it is perhaps possible to catch a shadowy glimpse of the retribution threatened by Nashe," and Rhodes posits, "Whereas Nashe's descriptions of sordid living conditions are confined to the allegorical portraits of Greediness and Dame Niggardize, Middleton's account is of Nashe's own circumstances."<sup>51</sup> So, where Nashe's Pierce worries about the "world turned upside down" in which his social inferiors prosper while he receives no patronage, Middleton's re-presentation

of Pierce situates the character in such an alarming state of privation that he is not at leisure to gripe about such things. Precisely because of his sympathy for Nashe, and others like him, Middleton's stress on the poverty not only of Pierce but also of brothel-owner Lieutenant Frig-beard revises the rhetoric of Nashe's Pierce, who complains that "base men" are wealthy. "How am I crost? or whence is this curse?" Nashe's Pierce cries. But Middleton's Frig-beard, broker in the oldest business in the world, similarly laments, "I know not whether it be a cross or a curse, Noble Philip of Phlegethon, or whether both ... but I protest ... Pierce was never so penniless as poor Lieutenant Frigbeard" (372–7). Middleton shows that in early modern London, emergent capitalism damns out-of-work writers and bawds alike. Even sex doesn't guarantee a living.

#### IV. Rogue literature and poverty

As dramatic representations of the lower classes participated in the "desanctification" of the poor, so too did rogue literature. Indeed, as Mark Koch argues, "the desanctification of the beggar found its greatest secular expression in ... the rogue pamphlet or beggar book."<sup>52</sup> Middleton's pamphlets, however, resist the impulse towards demonization, mocking, or strange idealization of the poor—all types of representations that emerge from rogue literature. The genre itself sprang from a matrix of fear and apprehension about the increase in London's poor. As displaced rural labour migrated to the city, and the privation suffered by many urban dwellers became more visible, "rogue" literature sought to assuage the anxieties of the middle and upper classes. At the same time, the "discourse of poverty" articulated through "cony-catching" pamphlets "is riddled with contradictions;" it is reflective of the inescapable paradoxes of its emergent capitalist milieu.<sup>53</sup> In early modern "oppositional thinking," the poor are a necessary counter to the rich, as is shown in this passage from John Donne:

Rich and poor are *contrary* to one another, but yet both *necessary* to one another; They are both necessary to one another; but the poor man is the more necessary, because though one man might be rich, though no man were poor, yet he could have no exercise of his charity, he could send none of his riches to heaven, to help him there, except there were some poor here.<sup>54</sup>

In this complex justification, the existence of the poor is necessary so that the rich, through "investing" in the poor, may expand their spiritual coffers. Yet the poor were also demonized: similar tropes and modes of expression occur in portrayals of the poor, of witches, and of the devil himself. Like the devil, the rogue can "take up" a

multiplicity of identities, can talk on any subject in the world, can insinuate himself into any situation. Like witches, rogues were said to belong to organized hierarchical networks, with a highly systematized language. “Cony-catching” pamphlets “discover” the secrets of the London underworld to potential “conies” who, armed with knowledge, might speak the language and see through the beggars’ potential tricks. “Thus one paradox of their representation: on the one hand, beggars are disordered, chaotic, without self-discipline, utterly alien and opposite to the hard-working proper citizenry; but on the other hand, they are said to make plans, form conspiracies ... and act and sound very much like the proper citizenry.”<sup>55</sup>

In some cases, rogues were cast as “God’s hangmen;” like the devil, they punished vice. In Robert Greene’s *The Black Book’s Messenger* (1592), to take just one example, rogue Ned Browne demonstrates how “conies” are ensnared because of their own vices—lechery, covetousness, gluttony, pride. Greene’s narrator explains how cony-catchers find out the special obsessions of their victims and then play on these vices:

If [the victim] bee lasciviously addicted, they have *Aretines* Tables at their fingers endes, to feed him on ...

If they see you covetously bent, they wil tel you wonders of the Philosophers stone, and make you beleewe they can make golde of Goose-greace, onely you must bee at some two or three hundred pounds cost ...

Discourse with them of Countries, they will set you on fire with travailing, yea what place is it they will not sweare they have been in ... If you request his company to travel, [the rogue] will say Infaith I cannot tell: I would sooner spend my life in your company than in any mans in England, but at this time I am not so provided of money as I would, therefore I can make you no promise ... Tut, money say you (like a liberall young maister) take no care for that, for I have so much land and I wil sell it, my credite is so much, and I will use it ...<sup>56</sup>

In Greene’s pamphlet, the reader derives satisfaction as much from learning the rogue’s tricks as from seeing these particular “conies” caught. Rogue pamphlets like this one are in some ways simple reconfigurations of morality tales, in which “the innocent cony who wishes to play with the devil ‘gets his due’ and confirms for the reader a deeper sense of moral equity in the turns of the world.”<sup>57</sup> But authors also turned away from demonization of rogues and towards idealization. In *The Bel-man of London* (1608), Thomas Dekker expresses an ambivalent appreciation: “this is a Ging [sic] of good fellowes in whome there is more brother-hood ... this is the Ragged Regiment: Villains they are by birth, Varlets by education, Knaves by profession, Beggars by the Statute & Rogues by act of Parliament ...”<sup>58</sup> In pointing out that the identity of the rogues is largely defined by society and the state, Dekker

might be articulating a critique. That he follows up only a few lines later by referring to the people as "idle Drones of a Countrie, the Caterpillars of a common-wealth, and the Aegiptian lice of a kingdome" further couches the potential critique in ambivalence: is Dekker mocking Thomas Harman, whose *Caveat for Common Cursetors* was largely responsible for introducing such terms, and rhetoric, into the culture? Does Dekker mean to sympathize with the rogues, idealize their freedom and fraternity, or demonize their wanton ways? Dekker's ambiguous politics at least make room for a variety of responses.

If Dekker's praise of rogues is balanced with typical condemnations, John Taylor's *The Praise, Antiquity and commodity of Beggery, Beggars, and Begging* (1621) idealizes the beggar and places him in an imaginary pastoral life of ease, where

Heav'n is the rooffe that Canopies his head,  
The cloudes his Curtaines, and the earth his bed,  
The Sunne his fire, the Starre's his candle light,  
The Moone his Lampe that guides him in the night.  
When scorching *Sol* makes other mortals sweat,  
Each tree doth shade a beggar from his heat:  
When nipping Winter makes the Cow to quake,  
A Beggar will a Barne for Harbour take,  
When tree and Steeples are o're-turn'd with winde,  
A beggar will a hedge for shelter finde.<sup>59</sup>

Responding to Taylor's poem, Carroll observes, "This extraordinary idealization of the beggar's life is a species of denial so absolute as to insist upon an inverted reading: it suggests just how desperate the beggars' situation must have been at the time."<sup>60</sup>

Just as Middleton responds to and revises the ideological underpinnings found in James, Marlowe, and Nashe, so too he replies to the multifarious misrepresentations of the poor in various rogue literatures. Middleton's Pierce Penniless lives no pleasant life in the country, seems not to be involved in any underworld gangs of rogues, and, when he speaks, he doesn't speak in a canting tongue. Middleton's Pierce is so far sunk into penury that, apart from checking himself into Bridewell, his chances of attaining work are nil. While Faustus has the time and means to conjure a new tutor to answer his questions, and while Nashe's Pierce is more akin to Melville's scrivener, capable of other work but simply "preferring not to," no character in *The Black Book* is at leisure to care about the philosophical problems Faustus is beset by; none has the time to sit around sulking as Nashe's Pierce does. Lucifer finds Pierce in a wretched state and refers to him as "poor Pierce," "poor



Penniless,” or “poor slave,” five times in less than 100 lines. Notice the emotionally expressive language Lucifer employs as he describes their first meeting:

‘How now, Pierce?’ quoth I. ‘Dost thou call me a knave to my face?’ Whereat the poor slave started up with his hair a-tiptoe. To whom by easy degrees I gently discovered myself, who, trembling ... craved pardon of my damnable excellence ... But at length, having recovered to be bold again, he unfolded all his bosom to me ...

After I saw poor Penniless grow so well acquainted with me and so familiar with the villainy of my humour, I unlocked my determinations and laid open my intents in particulars, the cause of my up-rising being moved with both his penetrable petition and his insufferable poverty ... (441–57)

Lucifer is “moved” by Pierce’s “*insufferable* poverty”: this from the original resident of hell. When Lucifer speaks of “the cause of his up-rising,” we can read “up-rising” as more than just his ascension from hell. Lucifer seems to be rising up, rebelling, against his usual role as enemy and seducer. Playing against type, Lucifer takes on the allegorical role of Charity, as opposed to Temptation or Vice. It is Lucifer, after all, who admonishes the reader:

Wherefore was vice ordained but to be rich, shining, and wealthy, seeing virtue, her opponent, is poor, ragged, and needy? Those that are poor are timorous honest and foolish harmless, as your carolling shepherds, whistling ploughmen and such of the same innocent rank, that never relish the black juice of villainy, never taste the red food of murder or the damnable suckets of luxury (298–304)

Middleton couches the abstinence of the needy from vice in terms of starvation—they have never tasted, never drunk; vice “fats” the rich, while virtue bears no “juice,” no “food” or “suckets.” The irony is that even those poor like Lieutenant Frig-beard who are not “timorous honest” are starving nevertheless. Crucially, however, by writing his critique of the discourses of poverty around the flawed but sympathetic characters of Pierce and Frig-beard, among others, Middleton *humanizes* the poor, rather than demonizing or idealizing, and thus elucidates an alternative to the styles of discourse represented in the texts discussed above.

As in dramatic works like Dekker’s *If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is in It* (1611) and Jonson’s *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616), the Friar Rush motif “of a devil in human guise whose machinations barely compete with those of human beings”<sup>61</sup> functions as a vehicle for social criticism in Middleton’s *The Black Book*. But Middleton’s Lucifer is not inept, and his friends in the London underworld are not particularly cunning. Rather than a simple inversion, of the kind seen in Jonson’s play, where the devils are too “virtuous” to keep up with the infernal Londoners, Middleton’s pamphlet depicts a situation that is more complicated. In *The Black Book*, Pierce

Penniless has invoked the devil not out of boredom or curiosity or an intemperate desire, like Faustus's, to be "glutted more with learning's golden gifts" (Prologue 24); neither has he called on the arch-fiend to set right the inverted social hierarchy so that he can reclaim a place nearer the top. Middleton exposes a reality of the urban poor through his resurrection of the Pierce character, and he opposes the contradictory ideology of beggars and rogues by "discovering" the rogue on his deathbed. Part of the large population of urban poor, Pierce is not a "metaphor" or a "symbol" for the "spiritual struggles" or "conflicted world-view" of the Renaissance; nor is he a wily rogue who successfully dupes innocent gulls. While Lucifer elicits occasional chuckles, Pierce is no laughing matter—Renaissance readers on their way to see a play at the Globe might have easily happened upon Penniless' twin as they proceeded into Southwark.

While the urban poor are humanized through the character of Pierce, those who refuse to offer charity or sympathy are demonized; they are worse than Lucifer himself. John Cox ends his history of the devil on the English stage thus: "[the devil] was the originator of social oppression, as well as other kinds of social ills, and it is hard to see why any peasant would seek a social oppressor for a friend,"<sup>62</sup> but Middleton's pamphlet captures a very different spirit, the same spirit embodied in the harrowing accounts of the very poor who, like Pierce, appeal to the devil out of sheer desperation.<sup>63</sup> That these poor, whether rural "witches" or urban "rogues," might take the devil himself as a figure who might offer help instead of harm was an obvious sign of just how desperate their situations were. Middleton, in casting Lucifer as Charity, was aware of the plight of the England's "redundant" population.

Middleton's Lucifer is unique, too, not just because he gets to play the good guy. Within Middleton's oeuvre, Lucifer is the only character who might rightly be called a "stage devil," the pamphlet form notwithstanding. As a general rule, Middleton avoided the supernatural. With the exceptions of *The Witch* and *A Mad World, My Masters*, the latter featuring a succubus in the form of Mistress Harebrain, diabolical and divine agents are decidedly absent from the drama. Middleton's materialism, illustrated so vividly in the city comedies, is one of the defining characteristics of his work, certainly one of the things that sets him apart from his contemporaries. By the time he writes *A Game at Chess*, his last and, in its day, his most popular work, Middleton reduces hell to a bag of chess pieces. The characters who have been "taken" in moves throughout the game appear at the end, in the bag, quarreling, and the White Knight (Charles) sneers, "Contention in the bag? Is hell divided?"<sup>64</sup>

This is not to say that the devil is never conjured or invoked in Middleton's other works. Certainly, the city comedies display the traditional interconnections

between the devil and usury or other capitalist practices. *A Trick to Catch the Old One* and *Michaelmas Term* give us vaguely devilish characters with suggestive names: Dampit, Gulf, Hoard, Lucre, Lethe, Hellgill, and the Ariel-like “spirits” Falselight and Shortyard. Numerous moments in the dialogue illustrate conventional early modern notions about the mammonesque worship of wealth and the unnatural, apparently magical or diabolical reproduction of money through interest, of coin begetting coin. The usurer is a “trampler of time,” as “old Harry” Dampit is called in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*,<sup>65</sup> precisely because his wealth reproduces unnaturally quickly; interest compounds with dire speed. In the same play, Witgood, pursued by creditors, cries out, “I am in hell here and the devils will not let me come to thee [his friend, the Host].”<sup>66</sup> Finally, the gentleman Lamprey, watching Dampit in a drunken stupor and perhaps approaching death, sententiously observes, “Here may a usurer behold his end. What profits it to be a slave in this world, and a devil i’t’h’ next?”<sup>67</sup> In *Michaelmas Term*, Hellgill suggests that the devil’s current reign on earth prior to the imminent millennial reign of Christ is all the more reason for the Country Wench to become a courtesan: “Wouldst thou, a pretty, beautiful, juicy squall, live in poor thrummed house i’t’h’ country in such servile habiliments, and may well pass for a gentlewoman i’t’h’ city? ... O, now, in these latter days, the devil reigning, ‘tis an age for cloven creatures.”<sup>68</sup> The “cloven creature” is, of course, the courtesan herself, another type of devil who lures men to damnation.<sup>69</sup> One of Vindice’s many aphoristic statements in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* pithily describes the interconnections among women, money, and damnation: “Were’t not for gold and women there would be no damnation; / Hell would look like a lord’s great kitchen without fire in’t. / But ‘twas decreed before the world began / That they should be the hooks to catch at man.”<sup>70</sup> One might go on, but for most readers of Renaissance drama this is standard fare. What is unusual in *The Black Book*, then, is Middleton’s break with the typical linking of the devil with economic oppression.<sup>71</sup> While the city comedies are certainly critical of the emergent capitalist ethos, satirizing it in figures like Andrew Lethe and Quomodo in *Michaelmas Term* and the usurers in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, Middleton’s dramatic works do not elicit the sympathy for the poor that the pamphlets do (*The Black Book* as well as *Father Hubburd’s Tales* and the two collaborative efforts with Dekker). Too, while the city comedies are avowedly secular, invoking the devil in name but in fact depicting human agents, actions, and consequences, and merely describing them as demonic, *The Black Book* goes even further to divorce the devil from the causes of economic and social oppression. Unlike Milton’s Satan, Middleton’s Lucifer is not the cause of “all our woe.”<sup>72</sup> Instead, in casting Lucifer as defender of the poor and fighter of economic

injustice, Middleton extends an incisive critique that upsets traditional ways of thinking about poverty, witchcraft, and the devil. From works that malign the poor tacitly or explicitly as those imposing economic oppression, Middleton's *The Black Book* distinguishes itself in representing the poor as those suffering from economic oppression. Middleton gives us Pierce as an effect, not a cause.

## V. The Faustian Mystique

Finally, I wish to revisit one of the ideas I have touched on here: that the Renaissance witch, as defined above, and the historical circumstances of early modern witchcraft lie in the shadow of the apparently more fascinating figure of the Faustian magician. While countless witches, real and literary, suffered at the hands of their antagonists—everyone from neighbours to the state—magicians had a more visible and legitimate history.<sup>73</sup> Thus, from early modern magicians, like Faustus, Roger Bacon, Simon Forman, and John Dee, to modern representations in such films as *The Prestige* and *The Illusionist*,<sup>74</sup> the Faustian figure of the conjurer who performs amazing feats by what supernatural means the audience knows not still excites. This "Faustian mystique"—our age-old fascination with the over-reaching magician—is, I believe, a symptom of capitalist culture. As David Hawkes so convincingly demonstrates, the Faust myth is a story about the rise in belief in the efficacy of the performative sign, which accompanies the alienation of the soul in capitalist culture.<sup>75</sup> This faith in the sign, exhibited so well by Faustus himself, is itself a sort of "magical thinking." Indeed, "magic tricks" are all about the performative sign: "Hocus Pocus," or "Abracadabra," or, as Middleton's Hecate crows, "A ab hur hus!"<sup>76</sup>

But where stage magicians know—or ought to know—that their magic works not through their words, but through the deception of the audience, often with the help of a confederate (be it a hired stage hand or a more ambiguous helper like Mephistopheles or Ariel), witches' desperate curses had the power to bring about dreadful consequences: their own marginalization, persecution, even trial and execution. In Renaissance England, there probably were middle-class, well-educated people who, like Faustus, "tried their brains to gain a deity" (1.1.65), but these were not the ones who faced the dire ends proposed by the demonologists. The accused—and those who confessed—were the members of the lower classes who were themselves victims of misfortune or indigents whose communities refused to help them meet their basic needs.<sup>77</sup> *The Black Book* captures a bleak reality that is circumvented in the *English Faust Book* and *Doctor Faustus* and that is an instrument for the condemnation of the good fortune of social inferiors in *Pierce*

*Penniless*. Middleton creates a satirical literary response to a *Supplication* to the devil; he replies ostensibly to Nashe, but *The Black Book* can also be read as a reply to actual contemporary appeals to Lucifer for relief.

In the topsy-turvy world of Renaissance England, it hardly seems surprising that the devil, who was ubiquitous and powerful, could shape-shift just as everything else seemed to be doing. The ambiguity surrounding the devil and the dialectical, almost Manichean, relationship between God and Satan intermingled with the social and economic changes concomitant with burgeoning capitalism, allow for a character like Middleton's Lucifer: a devil/deity to whom the poor could turn to help them survive the overwhelming struggles of their lives. Amidst the contradictions of religious ideology and social and economic realities, Lucifer's besmirched reputation does not prevent the weak from calling on him for immediate gratification, rather than waiting for a God who might not accept them anyway. The grim fact of the matter is that whereas Middleton's Pierce receives succour from Lucifer, real early modern "witches" probably did not. If anything, the belief in the efficacy of charms and curses was cold comfort against the harsh life of the poor.

Through Middleton's subversive Lucifer who takes pity on the destitute and incriminates the potential Faustuses in the audience, *The Black Book* opposes the increasingly popular impulse to demonize the poor; Middleton's humanizing portrayal of the unfortunate criticizes the abandonment of charity as a social obligation in particular and the competitive and appetitive atmosphere of the city in general. The mystique surrounding the invocation of devils, black masses, the selling of souls for unlimited knowledge and power, and the tragic end of the over-reacher is a legacy of the Renaissance, but not of Middleton.

### Notes

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1. *The Black Book* has been sadly overlooked in early modern literary studies, especially given its intertextuality with more "canonical" texts. For the handful of existing discussions, see Celia Daileader, *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 132–34; Eric Rasmussen, "The Black Book and the Date of *Doctor Faustus*," *Notes and Queries* 235 (37) [1990], pp. 168–70; Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); G. B. Shand, ed.,

- Introduction to *The Black Book*, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 204–6; Gary Taylor, "The Renaissance and the End of Editing," in *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, ed. George Bernstein and Ralph Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).
2. Thomas Middleton, *The Black Book*, ed. G. B. Shand, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, pp. 204–18, line 456. Line numbers hereafter cited in text.
3. *Father Hubbard's Tales, or the Ant and the Nightingale* (ed. Adrian Weiss, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, pp. 149–82) was published once before the first publication date of *The Black Book* and once again, in an expanded and revised edition, after; Middleton would seem to have been working on these two pamphlets simultaneously at some point. In addition to similarity in narrative style, the two pamphlets express concern for the economic hardships that afflicted Thomas Nashe. See Adrian Weiss's textual introduction to *Father Hubbard's Tales* in *Thomas Middleton and Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 484.
4. Rebecca Totaro convincingly argues that early modern literary texts produced during "plague-time" were profoundly influenced by the plague, whether the epidemic figures explicitly in the text or not, in *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005).
5. Taylor, "The Renaissance and the End of Editing," p. 137.
6. See John Henry Jones's illustration of the transmission of the Faust myth in his introduction to *The English Faust Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 11.
7. When I discuss witchcraft as a means of redress for the poor, I draw on Keith Thomas's influential discussion in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). Witchcraft (not necromancy or magic) was, according to Thomas's research, often motivated by poverty and failure of the community to help sustain its more downtrodden members. To the extent that we have records of people calling on the devil for help (or revenge), we see that grinding poverty and denial of charity were causes. Thomas suggests that the threat of being "cursed" by the "witch" motivated charity and sympathy; witchcraft thus enabled social cohesion and maintenance of traditional Christian values at the time when these were breaking down. See pp. 502–569.
8. Paola Pugliatti rightly emphasizes the need to distinguish between rogue and con-catching literature; she cautions against falling into the trap laid by anthologies and scholarly studies, which regard literature from "the Elizabethan underworld" "as a homogeneous corpus of texts," in *Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), p. 125.
9. See Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

10. For dramatic representations of “cony-catching” see for example Middleton’s *Michaelmas Term* and Jonson’s *The Alchemist*. The genre of city comedy in general shares with cony-catching pamphlets its representations of the city and its denizens as “cony-catchers”; urban London is depicted as a kind of “sin city” where the quick-witted and vicious thrive, but where fun is to be had nevertheless.
11. Pugliatti, p. 127.
12. The mention of networks points to New Historicist readings of rogue literature through the lens of the “subversion/containment” model; however, this essay departs from such a perspective. Steve Mentz’s recent essay, and in general, the volume which he co-edited with Craig Dionne, usefully complicate the traditional New Historicist take on rogue literature. See “Magic Books: Cony-Catching and the Romance of Early Modern London,” in *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, ed. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 240–58.
13. Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 12.
14. James I, *Daemonologie*, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), p. 7.
15. James I, p. 8.
16. *The English Faust Book*, pp. 10–11.
17. John Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 127.
18. Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (New York: Norton, 2002), 1.3.12; act, scene, and line numbers hereafter cited in the text. Jonathan Dollimore’s famous reading of Faustus’s ambitions and transgressions as symptomatic of Renaissance despair in the face of the harsh doctrine of English Protestantism has been influential in recent studies of the play, though I do not read Faustus or his experiences as “typical” results of English religious belief. See Dollimore’s “Subversion through Transgression: *Doctor Faustus*,” in *Staging the Renaissance*, ed. David Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991).
19. The famous performance in Exeter has been commented on extensively; apparently, the actors realized there was an extra one among them on the stage and panic ensued. In *The Black Book*, Lucifer alludes to another possible moment when he says, “He has a head of hair like one of my devils in *Doctor Faustus* when the old Theatre cracked and frightened the audience” (156–57).
20. Thomas, p. 485.
21. The so-called A-text was printed following the 1604 performance.
22. Thomas, p. 443.
23. Stuart Clark, “King James’s *Daemonologie*: Witchcraft and Kingship” in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 189.
24. Clark, pp. 193–4.
25. Thomas, p. 451.



26. John Cox (pp. 209–11) offers a helpful appendix in which he lists all known “devil” plays on the English stage from 1350–1642. Included are titles of many Jacobean witch plays, which contain devils as well.
27. James I, pp. 26, 77.
28. Though *Doctor Faustus* is properly an Elizabethan witch play, it underwent many revivals and came out in many printed editions throughout the Jacobean and Caroline eras, as well as in the Restoration.
29. Both Jonson and Shakespeare clearly draw on *Daemonologie* and *Newes from Scotland* as source material. Though both writers look to other demonological tracts as well, including Scot’s, *Masque of Queenes*, a court masque, naturally aligns itself with the king’s politics; Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, though more nuanced, also pays homage to the king. Middleton’s *The Witch*, on the other hand, defiantly invokes both Scot and the uncomfortable subject of the recent Overbury scandal, a source of some embarrassment to the court. Indeed, Middleton’s play may have been censored for its topical references to the Howard affair; see Anne Lancashire, “*The Witch*: Stage Flop or Political Mistake?” in “*Accompanying the players*”: *Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580–1980*, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich (New York: AMS Press, 1983), pp. 161–81.
30. Marion O’Connor’s commentary for *The Witch* illustrates the extent to which Middleton drew on Scot. See *The Witch*, ed. Marion O’Connor, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, pp. 1124–64.
31. See, for example, K. M. Briggs, *Pale Hecate’s Team* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 81, and Anthony Harris, *Night’s Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in Seventeenth-century English Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 81.
32. Diane Purkiss finds fault with what she believes is Middleton’s recasting of “cunning woman” Anne Turner, who was tried and executed for her role in the Overbury scandal, as “an almost unrecognisable and practically inhuman monstrosity, the witch Hecate” (*The Witch in History* [London: Routledge, 1996], p. 217). Purkiss believes that Middleton “was influenced by Scot’s contempt for popular beliefs and his wish to display them as grotesque and farcical” (p. 217). While it is true that Middleton avoids depicting “traditional” popular culture in favour of contemporary London culture, I read Middleton’s witchcraft scenes in *The Witch* (which are also reinscribed in Middleton’s adaptation of *Macbeth*) as rather more festive and spectacular, and, yes, grotesque, but “farcical” may be carrying it too far. Middleton’s witch scenes do not, to my mind, mock Hecate, or Turner—if that is who Hecate is supposed to be. They do cast so-called witchcraft as innocuous, if grotesque, fun, but they also provide a contrast, so important in Renaissance “oppositional thinking,” by which to understand the true diabolism happening at court in Ravenna. Middleton never aims for the “*frisson* of fear” that Purkiss claims he fails to achieve (p. 219); instead, these spectacles of elaborate song and dance make for entertaining theater and they deflate the notions of true evil attributed to witches by the king. Purkiss suggests that, like Scot, Middleton is misogynistic and eager to remove any possibility of agency

from women witches. But this is certainly not consistent with Middleton's depiction of women as both strong and sympathetic in his other dramatic works. Middleton's treatment of the witches points to an argument that Anne Turner did not merit execution, and it's hard to see why this is a bad thing.

33. This is precisely what Reginald Scot and Keith Thomas have in common, though not all scholars find felicitous the striking parallels in Scot's and Thomas's studies of early modern witchcraft. Purkiss complains, "Thomas and [Alan] Macfarlane's reading follows Scot and [George] Gifford: where they [the latter two] deny the witch all supernatural power, modern historians [the former two] deny her all *social* and *cultural* power" (p. 66).
34. Reginald Scot, *A Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 30.
35. Thomas, p. 520.
36. In turning Rafe into a dog, Mephistopheles casts him as a typical "familiar," a role that Rafe seems to embrace as he realizes the potential for sexual contact with women. The portrayal of the familiar as a sexual partner who regularly accesses "witches' marks" or teats located near the "witch's" genitalia occurs in numerous witch pamphlets and plays. Robin's transformation into an ape resonates with early modern notions of the devil and the magician as imitators of God, "God's apes." Gareth Roberts writes, "the devil was often described from Tertullian onwards only as God's imitator, *diabolus simia Dei*. Devils, and magicians with their aid, thus produce effects which seem real but are not." See Roberts, "'An Art as Lawful as Eating'? Magic in *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*" in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings*, ed. Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 141.
37. Cox, p. 124.
38. Emily C. Bartels, "Demonizing Magic: Patterns of Power in *Doctor Faustus*" in *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) p. 126.
39. Cox, p. 202.
40. *English Faust Book*, 1.22–24.
41. *English Faust Book*, 1.40–42.
42. Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil*, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966), p. 6. In another striking moment of intertextuality, this final couplet is quoted, verbatim, in Middleton's *Yorkshire Tragedy*, ed. Stanley Wells, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, 4.87–88.
43. Nashe, p. 7.
44. Nashe, p. 11.
45. Nashe, p. 12.
46. For anti-usury tracts, see for example John Blaxton, *The English Usurer* (1634; rpt. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1974); Robert Fenton, *A Treatise of Usury* (1611; rpt. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1975); Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury* (1572; rpt. London: Augustus M. Kelley, 1963). Also see 13 Eliza-

- beth c. 9, the "Act against Usury," in *Tudor Economic Documents*, ed. R. H. Tawney et al., 3 volumes (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1924), vol. 2, pp. 160–62.
47. Though Pierce fantasizes about becoming a successful capitalist, clearly Middleton in *The Black Book* and *Father Hubbard's Tales*—and more ambiguously in the city comedies—laments the victory of the new money economy, and Pierce would not, after all, ever become a usurer since this would contradict his position in his "supplication," Nashe's piece, which rigorously attacks usury, avarice, covetousness, and so forth. Like Nashe's *Supplication* itself, *The Black Book* and *Father Hubbard's Tales* criticize the idolatrous worship of gold; both long for the old "gift" economy, wherein a writer could live well by patronage. These days, both works suggest, talent counts for little, aristocrats expect to be valorized in works but do not want to pay for it. Both works not only invoke the traditional associations of virtue with poverty and vice with wealth, but also play with these conventions. While Lucifer is a charitable deity in *The Black Book*, *Father Hubbard's Tales* gives us another ironic revision of an allegorical figure: "cold Mistress Charity" dressed in taffeta disdainfully relinquishes only "a single halfpenny" for the benefit of the mangled, disabled Ant as soldier (lines 1006–1023).
48. Rhodes, p. 59.
49. The Nightingale's ode to Nashe occurs in *Father Hubbard's Tales*, lines 252–69.
50. The Nightingale's verses on Nashe begin with the lines "Or if in bitterness thou rail like Nashe—/ (Forgive me, honest soul, that term thy phrase / 'Railing' ...". Again, in his "Tale when he was a ploughman," the Ant tells us that he "began to rail like Thomas Nashe against Gabriel Harvey, if you call that railing," and further, in the Ant's "Tale when he was a soldier," he recalls his "passionate, but not railing speeches." *Father Hubbard's Tales*, lines 252–54, 655–56, 1028–29.
51. Shand, p. 204; Rhodes, p. 59.
52. Mark Koch, "The Desanctification of the Beggar in Rogue Pamphlets of the English Renaissance," in *The Work of Dissimilitude: Essays from the Sixth Citadel Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), p. 95.
53. William Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 2.
54. Donne, quoted in Carroll, p. 14.
55. Carroll, p. 38.
56. Robert Greene, *The Black Booke's Messenger*, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), pp. 21–22.
57. Craig Dionne, "Fashioning Outlaws: The Early Modern Rogue and Urban Culture," in *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, p. 52.
58. Thomas Dekker, *The Bel-man of London* (London 1608), sig. ref. B4v.
59. Taylor, quoted in Carroll, p. 64.
60. Carroll, p. 66.
61. Cox, p. 158.

62. Cox, p. 208.
63. Thomas, pp. 519–26, 560–69.
64. *A Game at Chess: A Later Form*, ed. Gary Taylor, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, 5.3.198.
65. *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, ed. Valerie Wayne, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, 1.4.43. Anti-usury tracts inveighed against usurers for “selling time.” For example, Wilson writes, “And wil these idle men sell the sunne, the ayer, and the tyme for their proper gayne? Howe can hee bee of god that so dothe?”, p. 288.
66. *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, 4.4.66–7.
67. *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, 4.5.63–5.
68. *Michaelmas Term*, ed. Theodore B. Leinwand, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, 1.3.4–10.
69. There was much punning on the vagina as “hell” or “damnation;” even Dampit’s name bears this connotation, as Valerie Wayne points out in her commentary to *A Trick to Catch the Old One* at 1.4.4.1.
70. *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, ed. MacDonald P. Jackson, in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, 2.1.250–3.
71. Middleton does still derive humour from connecting illicit sexuality, whoredom, or adultery with the devil in *The Black Book*. See Daileader, pp. 132–34, for a fascinating reading of Lucifer’s “prologue to his own play,” and his ascension on the Globe stage in terms of sexuality and black magic.
72. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 1.3.
73. Phillip Butterworth’s recent study of magic on the early stage highlights connections between the figure of the magician, real “jugglers” who entertained wealthy patrons, and cony-catchers, whose illegitimate performances put money in their pockets, in *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Interestingly, many of the early modern magic tricks Butterworth describes come from accounts in Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Though Scot obviously aimed to demystify the supposed “magic” of such acts, the detailed descriptions in his text, as well as in cony-catching pamphlets, show how such books might have been used as manuals or “how-to” books as well.
74. Both films were released, almost simultaneously, in 2006.
75. David Hawkes, *The Faust Myth: Religion and the Rise of Representation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).
76. *The Witch*, 1.2.106. This spell, borrowed from the pages of Scot’s *Discoverie*, was supposed to cure a toothache.
77. Thomas, p. 520.