

Reading the Afterlife in the Renaissance

A Theological Reading of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and William
Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Mémoire réalisé par
Asseline Sel

Promoteur(s)
Prof. Guido Latré

Année académique 2016-2017
Master en langues et lettres modernes, orientation germaniques, à finalité approfondie

Reading the Afterlife in the Renaissance

Theological Aspects of the Afterlife in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and
William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Mémoire réalisé par
Asseline Sel

Promoteur(s)
Prof. Guido Latré

Année académique 2016-2017
Master en langues et lettres modernes, orientation germaniques, à finalité approfondie

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who made the writing of this dissertation possible, directly or indirectly.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Guido Latré, for his continuous support and his precious advice during the writing of this Master dissertation, as well as for his precious guidance during the entirety of my curriculum. While allowing me to work independently and to develop my own path of research and methodology, he was always available and ready to provide me with useful advice and sources, whenever I felt the necessity to ask for guidance. Secondly, I am indebted to Professor Dirk Delabastita for accepting to be the second reader of this dissertation.

I am particularly indebted to Professor Michael Neills, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and Shakespearian scholar, for his willingness to provide assistance in obtaining sources.

Finally, I must express my deep gratitude to my family and friends. I would particularly like to thank my parents, grandparents, and my sister Émilie for their unfailing support, advice, and infinite patience during the entirety of my University years and the writing of this Master dissertation. I would also like to acknowledge my friends for their moral support and encouragements, in particular my best friends Céline, Clélia, and Francesca. Finally, I must express my deep gratitude to my partner Corentin for his unfailing support, his patience, and his reassuring words and presence during moments of doubts. Thank you.

Table des matières

Acknowledgements	1
Introduction	5
Chapter I – Historical background	9
1. Protestantism and Catholicism: Historical context	9
2. Catholic and Protestant conceptions of the afterlife	10
2.1. Purgatory	10
2.2. Locating the afterlife	12
2.3. Interacting with the dead: hauntings, remembrance, and prayers	14
2.4. Providence, predestination, and repentance	16
Chapter II – Main critical and theoretical trends: an overview of previous interpretations	21
1. <i>Doctor Faustus</i> : the problems of a Protestant morality play	21
2. <i>Hamlet</i> : some early problems and previous interpretations	27
Chapter III – Elements of the afterlife in <i>Doctor Faustus</i>	35
1. Status of the afterlife	35
1.1. “He confounds Hell in Elysium”: Hell as a place of philosophy or a state of suffering	35
1.2. The root of all evil. On Faustus’s self-delusional materialism and literal interpretations	38
1.3. The demonic world	41
2. Boundaries of the afterlife	45
2.1. On the representation of boundaries in the play	45
2.2. Striving for the divine: on Faustus’s pride	46
2.3. Demonic deception	49
3. Predestination and the impossibility of repentance	50
3.1. Early signs of apostasy in the play	51
3.2. “I do repent, yet I do despair”: drowning further into heresy	53
3.2.1. First hesitations	53
3.2.2. Trying to wake Faustus’s conscience: on the old man scene	54
3.2.3. The final scene	56
4. Critical assessment of the elements found in the play: possible subversions or criticisms	57
4.2. Re-assessing Faustus’s materialism	61
Partial conclusion	63
Chapter IV – Elements of the afterlife in <i>Hamlet</i>	65
1. Status of the afterlife	65

1.1.	From a Protestant scholar to a doubter	65
1.2.	“The undiscovered country”: Hamlet’s loss of religious reference points and the soliloquy on suicide	70
2.	Boundaries of the afterlife	72
2.1.	Contradictory attitudes	72
2.2.	Earthly and divine transgression – Hamlet and Laertes	75
2.3.	“How is it that the clouds still hang on you?”: On grief, mourning and burial.....	77
3.	Predestination, repentance, and confession	80
3.1.	“There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow”: Hamlet’s statements on predestination	81
3.2.	On the Prayer Scene	82
3.3.	On confession and repentance	86
3.4.	Hamlet’s destiny – the resolution	87
4.	Critical assessment of the elements found in the play: possible conclusions and subversions	90
4.1.	On the characters’ destinies.....	90
4.2.	“Blurry doctrinal boundaries” and the issue of England	93
	Partial conclusion	94
	Chapter V – <i>Doctor Faustus</i> and <i>Hamlet</i> : a confrontation	97
1.	A generally Protestant representation of the afterlife	97
1.1.	General comments and conclusions on the status of the afterlife	98
1.2.	General comments and conclusions on the boundaries of the afterlife	99
1.3.	General comments and conclusions on predestination and providence	100
2.	Potential wider cultural implications.....	101
2.1.	Possible educational, theological, and political subversions.....	101
2.2.	On the Renaissance man.....	103
2.3.	On nostalgia.....	105
2.4.	Traditionalist views versus social criticism: conclusive remarks	106
	Conclusion.....	109
	Bibliography.....	113

Introduction

“[...] But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will”

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.79-81¹

From time immemorial, the concept of death has “captured the thoughts and imagination of human beings”². Because of its unavoidable nature, death has always been a central part of life³, and many cultures have developed a “widespread belief in the continuity of life after death”⁴. For example, the attested burial practices of prehistorical people might already indicate an early, pagan belief in a form of life after death⁵. Later, Greek and Roman cultures developed a vision of an afterlife situated under the earth⁶. The idea of a possible afterlife, because of its fundamentally unknown and mysterious nature, has unsurprisingly inspired literary authors and writers of all cultures and eras, from early Greek playwrights to the medieval tradition of fireside ghost stories⁷.

The development of monotheistic religions, especially the Christian religion in Europe, did not attenuate this tendency, as many of those religions postulated a dichotomy between the body and the soul⁸, according to which death only meant the end of earthly life. The destiny of the soul after bodily death was often seen as depending on the earthly actions of human beings, who could either be rewarded or punished in the afterlife. Far from reducing the cultural and literary role of death, therefore, Christianity made it the centre of earthly life, preventing unvirtuous human behaviours through the threat of eternal suffering in the afterlife. This central role of death in everyday life was once again an inspiration for authors in medieval Europe, as

¹ All quotations from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* come from the Oxford World’s Classics edition, edited by George Hibbard and based on the First Folio (1623), with modernised spelling (George R. Hibbard (Ed.), *Hamlet. The Oxford Shakespeare*, 4th publ., London, Oxford University Press, 2008 (Coll. Oxford World’s Classics), p. 139-354. The act-scene-line number reference system also comes from Hibbard’s edition. Passages peculiar to the First Quarto (Q1) or the Second Quarto (Q2) are indicated in the footnotes. On the editorial procedures of Hibbard’s edition, see *Idem*, p. 131-137.

² Theo P. Van Baaren, “Death”, in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989 (Coll. Religion, History, and Culture), p. 3.

³ Although this may seem paradoxical.

⁴ *Idem*.

⁵ On this controversial issue, see Frederik Fahlander, “A Piece of the Mesolithic. Horizontal Stratigraphy and Bodily Manipulations at Skateholm”, in Frederik Fahlander and Terje Oestigaard (Eds.), Oxford, BAR Publishing, 2008, p. 30-32.

⁶ Attested in literature, for example. See for instance Virgil (“L’Énéide” [French translation], in Maurice Rat (Ed.), *L’Énéide*, Paris, Flammarion, 1965 (Coll. GF), p. 129-150).

⁷ See Catherine Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the tradition of fireside Ghost Stories”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* LXI/1 (2010), p. 1-27.

⁸ Although the idea of a dichotomy between the body and the soul was suggested before monotheistic religions. Jane I. Smith, “The Afterlife”, in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 85. On the different conceptions of souls in the Christian religion, see Geddes MacGregor, “Christian Concepts of the Soul”, in *Idem.*, p. 214-222.

can be seen in the tradition of Morality plays, which represented a “conflict between the forces of good and evil over the soul of the hero”⁹, influencing the afterlife destiny of the protagonist¹⁰. Similarly, in his 2001 book *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt underlines the importance of literature and fiction in medieval Europe’s belief in Purgatory¹¹, which was one of the pillars of medieval Catholic Europe¹² – as will be further demonstrated in the first chapter of this study. Despite the refutation of the existence of Purgatory by Reformers in the Renaissance¹³, death and the afterlife remained an important part of life in the early modern world. In addition to the refutation of Purgatory, for example, the burial practices were changed under the Protestant system, and Protestant theologians¹⁴ affirmed the existence of predestination, which influenced the afterlife destiny of humans – this will be discussed in more detail in the first chapter.

The religious shift of the Renaissance, and the Reformation that came with it, seems particularly interesting in England, where Henry VIII pronounced the schism from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 and, after a brief return to Catholicism under the reign of Mary Tudor (1553-1558), Protestantism was imposed again under Elizabeth I. This, as can easily be imagined, created an atmosphere of political and religious unrest¹⁵, where some Protestants criticised Catholicism, whereas part of the population most probably still held Catholic beliefs¹⁶. This context of religious unrest, making England almost a microcosm of the theological disputes present in Europe at the time, makes the study of the afterlife in English literary texts of the Renaissance particularly interesting.

This dissertation therefore attempts to study the concept of the afterlife in two contemporary English Renaissance tragedies, namely Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (henceforth *Doctor Faustus*) (ca. 1590-1604) and William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (henceforth *Hamlet*) (ca. 1601). The choice of those authors and plays is motivated by several reasons. First of all, Marlowe (1564-1593) and Shakespeare (1564-1616) are two contemporary major playwrights of the period –

⁹ Douglas Cole, “*Doctor Faustus* and the Morality Tradition”, in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 304.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 2nd publ., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013 (Coll. Princeton Classics), p. 10-101.

¹² Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation. A History*, London, Penguin Books, 2004, p. 10-15.

¹³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁴ For example Calvin. See John Calvin, “The Institution of the Christian religion. Book 1” [Extracts from the 1961 English Norton Edition; modernised spelling], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 240-250.

¹⁵ Peter Marshall, “Choosing sides and talking religion”, in David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (Ed.), *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 40-56.

¹⁶ *Idem*, p. 42-43.

making their works particularly comparable – having achieved success during their lives. Secondly, both authors have been described as independent thinkers and observers of their time¹⁷, which could make the study of their works particularly interesting. Additionally, *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet*, as well as being fascinating in many aspects and being continually reinterpreted because of their numerous themes¹⁸, seem to be particularly relevant in a study of the afterlife, as the “main concern [of both plays] is with death”¹⁹.

Finally, the theology presented in both plays has been deemed controversial. Despite the fact that both tragedies were written in an England where Protestantism was the only officially accepted religion, and should therefore be expected to stage a Protestant afterlife, both plays seem to present potentially subversive elements, as will be discussed in Chapter II. In *Doctor Faustus*, for example, the existence of a Good Angel suggesting repentance to Faustus seems to contradict the Protestant belief in predestination, according to which apostates predestined to be damned are unable to repent. This has led scholars to postulate that the play might be critical towards the doctrine of predestination and, by extension, towards Protestantism itself²⁰. In *Hamlet*, the character of the Ghost seems to mirror an old, Catholic belief in Purgatory, despite allusions to Calvinistic predestination referring to a Protestant view on religion in the play. The theology of *Hamlet* seems inherently contradictory, leading scholars from all centuries and areas to try to solve the apparent contradictions. The Ghost in itself seems an embodiment of those theological problems and, in its inherently problematic and disputable nature, seems to mirror the theological uncertainty of the time and, more generally, the doubts surrounding the play itself.

The aim of this dissertation is therefore to study the elements of the afterlife staged in the plays, in an attempt to get a clearer idea of the religious message carried in both of them. Given the historical context of both tragedies, as well as the fact that censorship and antitheatricalism were not rare at the time²¹, the study will particularly concentrate on whether the plays seem to carry an overall Protestant message, or whether they present a more mixed theology and

¹⁷ See Luciano García García, “Religion and Rebelliousness in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*”, in María Luisa Dañobeitia (Ed.), *Actas del III Congreso Internacional de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Renacentistas Ingleses*, Granada, Sociedad Española de Estudios Renacentistas Ingleses, 1992, p. 105; Peter Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.

¹⁸ *Doctor Faustus*, for example, has been analysed through the prism of feminism (see for example Alison Findlay, “Heavenly Matters of Theology: A Feminist Perspective”, in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 378-390); the psychoanalytical heirs of the Romantics have praised the depiction of a Freudian oedipal complex in *Hamlet* (see for example Theodore Litz, *Hamlet's Enemy. Madness and Myth in Hamlet*, London, Vision Press, 1976).

¹⁹ George R. Hibbard, “General Introduction”, in George R. Hibbard (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

²⁰ See for example Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 101.

²¹ Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney, Bloomsbury, 2010 (Coll. The Arden Shakespeare), p. 30.

possibly subversive ideas. The study will therefore attempt to answer the questions of how the afterlife is represented in *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet*, and what this might reveal about the theology staged in both plays; as well as the question of whether the plays can be recognised as partly or wholly subversive of orthodox theology. Finally, the essay will briefly attempt to study the religious and cultural implications of the elements discussed in the analysis.

In order to answer those questions, the study will be divided into five main chapters. The first one will attempt to draw a general portrait of the theological and cultural background of the Elizabethan era, in an attempt to determine the main criteria differentiating the Catholic and Protestant conceptions of the afterlife. This first chapter will particularly address the question of the status of the afterlife in both religions – whether it is seen as a physical place, or as a state – the possible interactions between the living world and the afterlife, and the question of whether the afterlife fate of humans is determined before their birth. The second chapter will offer an overview of the critical trends surrounding the notion of the afterlife in both plays, addressing the main problems and possible subversions identified in both tragedies, in an attempt to determine the main points needing to be addressed and the general theoretical frame of the plays. The third and fourth chapters will offer an analysis of both plays independently. Both *Doctor Faustus* (Chapter III) and *Hamlet* (Chapter IV) will be studied according to the distinctive criteria identified in Chapter I, in order to determine whether the elements of the afterlife present in the plays are mostly Catholic, Protestant, or ‘mixed’. Both chapters will also briefly address the notion of potential subversions and problems identified in Chapter II. Finally, the fifth chapter offers a brief confrontation of the elements identified in the two preceding chapters, in an attempt to determine to what extent the plays are comparable and how they differ. The fifth chapter will also suggest wider cultural implications and how the plays might be partly subversive of some aspects of society, referring to several elements identified in the preceding chapters. This last section, although still extensively referring to the afterlife, will attempt to slightly broaden the perspective.

Chapter I – Historical background

Before suggesting a personal interpretation of aspects of theology and the afterlife in both Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it seems necessary to briefly draw attention to some theoretical elements. The aim of this first chapter is to provide the reader with a more thorough understanding of the historical context of both plays, as well as to offer an overview of the Protestant and Catholic views on the afterlife. The opposition between Protestant and Catholic beliefs and principles will be central to the following analysis of the plays; the historical context will also be regularly referred to, although more marginally.

1. Protestantism and Catholicism: Historical context

As previously suggested, a succinct study of the historical context seems necessary in order to help understand the theological, afterlife-related elements in both plays, as well as to offer a better, more historically accurate interpretation of those elements. This brief presentation, however, is merely aimed at offering an overview of the theological background concerning the afterlife in England in the 16th and early 17th Century, and is not meant as a thorough analysis of the whole historical context of the time. Therefore, only elements relevant to the subsequent analysis of the plays will be mentioned.

As is widely known, the English Reformation and the independence of the Protestant Church of England from Roman Catholicism was initiated in the 1530s, after the Pope refused to annul Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Through the Act of Supremacy (1534), Henry VIII declared royal supremacy over religious issues, thus effectively rejecting Papal authority in England. Protestantism thus became the official religion, developing over the next decades²², especially during the reign of Henry VIII's heir, the 'fairie queene' Elizabeth I (1558-1603).

Both *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet* were thus written during a time of religious and political unrest – disapproval of the Queen's authority, sometimes resulting in uprisings, was fairly widespread²³ – and, although England was officially Protestant as early as the 1530s, Catholic faith was still widely present among the popular masses. As argued by Peter Marshall, it was almost impossible to know how many still held Catholic beliefs, as those who identified as Catholic showed "outward conformity"²⁴, for example by attending Protestant Church in spite

²² Despite a short return to Catholicism under Mary Ist (1553-1558).

²³ Elizabeth was not considered the rightful heir under Catholic law, as she was the daughter of Anne Boleyn, whose marriage with Henry VIII was not considered official given the refusal of the Pope to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. For example, see Marshall's account of the story of William Skinner, an arrested Catholic who denied Elizabeth's authority: Peter Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

²⁴ *Idem*, p. 46.

of their faith²⁵. This obviously led to a feeling of insecurity. In addition to this, as Protestantism was fairly new, some Catholic concepts were still officially held in the first years of Elizabeth's reign²⁶, and the limits between Catholic and Protestant principles were considered somewhat fuzzy²⁷. Whereas Protestant scholars discussed the absurdity of Catholic doctrines²⁸, the layman – as has been recently argued – probably discussed religion in inns or theatres²⁹. As will be seen later, this context of social unrest, theological debates and ambiguity is relevant to the analysis of *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet*, as both plays seem to contain elements derived from both religions and, possibly, partly criticise the system. The disparity of religious themes partly explains the complexity of interpreting the theological elements in both plays, and will be extensively referred to in the analysis.

2. Catholic and Protestant conceptions of the afterlife

This section will highlight some important differences in the Catholic and Protestant beliefs concerning the afterlife in the 16th and early 17th Century. Although this part will draw a sharp contrast between both faiths, it is important to keep in mind that, as both are part of Christianity, they also share many similar beliefs, including the conception of an immortal soul leaving earthly life at bodily death, being judged for its earthly deeds, and being either rewarded or punished³⁰. It is also important to reiterate that the elements highlighted here will be strongly simplified – as the aim is merely to provide an overview of the main, obvious differences between medieval and early modern Catholic and Protestant doctrines on death.

2.1. Purgatory

The doctrine of Purgatory obviously constitutes the main difference between Protestant and medieval Catholic beliefs concerning the afterlife. Purgatory, a place of temporary punishment and purification³¹, was a central part of Catholic theology in the Middle Ages. It was seen as an “intermediate state after death during which there [was] opportunity for the expiation of venial sins and compensatory punishment for mortal sins, thus providing the ultimate restoration of fellowship with God”³². Because it ‘purged’ the human souls from their

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ For example the adoration of crosses or candlesticks (cf. *Idem*, p. 42), even though Protestant beliefs excluded the sanctification of relics and objects, as will be mentioned below.

²⁷ *Idem*, p. 42.

²⁸ See for example Peter Marshall, “‘The Map of God’s word’: geographies of the afterlife in Tudor and early Stuart England”, in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Eds.), *The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 114.

²⁹ See Peter Marshall, “Choosing sides and talking religion”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 49.

³⁰ Jane I. Smith, *Op. Cit.*, p. 85 and 93.

³¹ *Idem*, p. 93.

³² Linda M. Tober and F. Stanley Lusby, “Heaven and Hell”, in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 153.

sins through suffering, Purgatory was seen as a place of torture strongly resembling Hell. However, whereas souls condemned to Hell could not be redeemed, Purgatory kept alive the hope of salvation, as souls were purified there and could eventually reach Heaven. The duration of the purification process depended on the sins committed during earthly life; however, it was thought possible to shorten one's sentence in Purgatory through – among others – earthly confession, prayers, or fasting³³. In addition to confession and penance before death³⁴, relatives of the departed were invited to pray for his or her soul, and to pay for requiem masses in order to help alleviate the suffering of their loved one³⁵ – or, as stated by Greenblatt,

[T]he whole social and economic importance of Purgatory in Catholic Europe rested on the belief that prayers, fasts, almsgiving, and masses constituted a valuable commodity [...] that could in effect be purchased, directly or indirectly, on behalf of specific dead persons.³⁶

This idea, as will be developed below, implies a clear link between the worlds of the living and the dead, a possibility for the living to interact with the departed.

During the Reformation, Protestants refuted the doctrine of Purgatory. Protestantism was inspired by the developing humanist movement, which insisted on the direct reading of sources (*Ad fontes*) instead of relying on the reputation of an *auctoritas*³⁷. Protestantism therefore insisted on the reading of the Bible as the only Word of God – thus encouraging the believers' and laymen's personal reading of the Gospel – as opposed to Catholic sermons and centralised, dogmatic Church interpretation of the Scriptures³⁸. The Thirty-Nine articles, statements expressing the basic beliefs of the Church of England, confirmed that

Holy Scriptures containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein [...] is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.³⁹

Based on this, Purgatory, as well as beliefs in “pardons, worshipping, and adoration as well as of images as of relics”⁴⁰, were deemed “vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God”⁴¹. As there is no mention of Purgatory in

³³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

³⁴ On the importance of repentance and confession in order to shorten one's Purgatory term, see also (among others) Clive Burgess, “‘Longing to be prayed for’: death and commemoration in an English parish in the later Middle Ages”, in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Eds.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 49. The importance of repentance before death, as will be argued later, is also emphasised in *Hamlet*: the Ghost is “[d]oomed for a certain term to walk the night/ And for the day confined to fast is fire” (1.5.10-11), because he was killed “[u]nhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled,/ No reckoning made, but sent to [his] account/ With all [his] imperfections on [his] head” (1.5.77-79). Cf. also Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 231-233.

³⁵ *Idem*, p. 18-21.

³⁶ *Idem*, p. 19.

³⁷ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Op. Cit.*, p.81.

³⁸ See among others *Ibid.* and Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102.

³⁹ “The thirty-nine Articles” [modernised spelling], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 241.

⁴⁰ *Idem*, p. 246.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the Bible, it was considered an invention – sometimes even one used by Catholic authorities in order to become wealthier by making people believe they could help their loved ones through the buying of prayers for their salvation. Despite the fact that this idea was most probably an exaggeration – even though the economic system established by the belief in Purgatory did make the Catholic Church wealthier and some priests or pardoners might have taken advantage of it⁴² – the Protestant Church thus rejected the whole institution of pardons, requiem masses, or almsgiving.

In the following two parts, two further aspects of the theology of the Catholic and Protestant afterlife will be studied, namely the location of the afterlife, and the issue of interaction between the worlds of the living and the dead. Both aspects, as will be seen, can however be partly linked to the issues discussed above.

2.2. Locating the afterlife

This section will mainly discuss the status of the afterlife in both Catholic and Protestant religions – whether it is seen as a place under or above earth, which can be mapped and located in what has been called a “geography of death”⁴³, or as a place in the macrocosm, not to be understood as a physical, earthly place, or even as a state of consciousness.

As can be expected, late medieval Catholicism considered that the afterlife could be located and mapped. There were efforts to try and represent graphically the different parts of the afterlife – Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory, but also the *Limbus Infantium*, an intermediate place for unbaptised children, and the *Limbus Patrum*, an intermediate place for patriarchs. Heaven was often seen as a place above the earth, located in the sky⁴⁴, as part of the macrocosm; Hell was generally seen as a place under the surface of the earth⁴⁵. There was, however, no consensus concerning the localisation of Purgatory, even though it was generally admitted that it should be situated in the proximity of Hell, given the resemblance between both places⁴⁶. During the Reformation, Catholic authorities admitted that Hell, Purgatory and both the *Limbus Infantium* and *Limbus Patrum* were all situated underground, on top of one another⁴⁷.

⁴² As was mocked and denounced by Chaucer in his *Pardoner's Tale*, for example. I am thankful to Prof. Guido Latré for his insight on this issue, through his ‘LGERM2824 – English Literature of the Older Period: The Canterbury Tales’ course at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, November 2016).

⁴³ Theo P. Van Baaren, “Geographies of Death”, in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 96-101.

⁴⁴ Linda M. Tober and F. Stanley Lusby, *Op. Cit.*, p. 151.

⁴⁵ Theo P. Van Baaren, *Op. Cit.*, p. 98-99.

⁴⁶ Peter Marshall, “Catholic and Protestant Hells in Later Reformation England”, in Isabel Moreira and Margaret Toscano (Eds.), *Hell and its Afterlife. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2nd publ., London/New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 98. On the resemblance between the representations of Hell and Purgatory – both represented as places of suffering through fire, for example – see Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 47-101.

⁴⁷ Peter Marshall, “The Map of God's word”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

Protestantism, on the other hand, tended to refuse this too physical, literal representation of the afterlife⁴⁸. Polemicists mocked the insistence of Catholics on their ability to locate every aspect of the afterlife despite the numerous contradictions and internal disagreements mentioned above⁴⁹. This can be linked to a wider trend of early Protestantism refusing the very literal medieval Catholic interpretations of the Scriptures – as already mentioned, the adoration of relics or images was for instance considered “rather repugnant to the word of God”⁵⁰. On this subject, Greenblatt also notes the mockery by Protestant polemicists of the early Catholic materialistic, physical reading of the transubstantiation⁵¹. The refusal of the ‘geographical’, physical conception of the afterlife, in this perspective, seems to be a logical part of this early Protestant tendency.

There was, however, no universal conception of Hell or Heaven in early Protestant time. Because of the lack of precision as well as contradictory statements on the nature of the afterlife in the Scriptures, scholarly disputes were frequent among reformers⁵², and some still held the belief that Hell was under the earth – although they were not as precise in their locating and representation of the afterlife as Catholics⁵³. However, it was generally admitted that Hell was a place for the damned which might not be situated in the physical reality – “on” or “under” the earth – and could not be mapped⁵⁴. The discomfort with the idea of the afterlife as a ‘place’ was so strong, however, that it was suggested that Hell could be a state of conscience which could be experienced already during earthly life, for example through guilt⁵⁵ – this will be of particular importance when studying *Doctor Faustus*, in which Mephistopheles claims that “[h]ell hath no limit, nor is circumscrib’d/ In one self place [...]” (2.1.117-118)⁵⁶. The Reformation, in short, developed a vision of the afterlife which “abstract[ed] or even internalis[ed] it, [...] moving decisively away from a concern with its geographical configuration and its vicinity

⁴⁸ Linda M. Tober and F. Stanley Lusby, *Op. Cit.*, p. 153.

⁴⁹ Peter Marshall, “‘The Map of God’s word’”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 114-115.

⁵⁰ “The thirty-nine Articles”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 246

⁵¹ Protestant polemicists caricatured this literal interpretation by stating that if the “body of Christ” could be eaten, it could also decay and be digested by worms. This, in turn, can be linked to the graveyard scene of *Hamlet*. Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 240-241.

⁵² Peter Marshall, “‘The Map of God’s word’”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 118.

⁵³ Peter Marshall, “Catholic and Protestant Hells in Later Reformation England”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ Peter Marshall, “‘The Map of God’s word’”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.

⁵⁵ See *Idem*, p. 126-127.

⁵⁶ Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes from Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* come from David S. Kastan’s 2005 edition of the A-Text (A-Quarto) (1604), with modernised spelling (David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 5-53). Quotes from the B-Text, indicated in the text or footnotes, also come from David S. Kastan’s edition (*Idem*), p. 54-122). The act-scene-line number reference system (for the A- and B-Text) also comes from Hibbard’s edition. On the editorial procedures of Kastan’s edition, see *Idem*, p. xiii.

to the physical world”⁵⁷, resulting from a “greater reluctance to affirm the unknowable with certainty, [and] a greater openness to the possibility of allegory and metaphor”⁵⁸.

This short summary, needless to say, is an oversimplification, which does not take into account the diversity of individual beliefs, nor the evolution of faith. As already mentioned, in the early days of Protestantism, a geographical, more physical conception of the afterlife was not inexistent⁵⁹; in the late 16th and 17th centuries, the Catholic conception of the afterlife partly evolved into a more metaphysical, less geographical one⁶⁰. The elements given here, once again, are only meant as indications of the general trends and differences between Catholic and Protestant conceptions in the late medieval and early modern periods.

2.3. Interacting with the dead: hauntings, remembrance, and prayers

This section will briefly review the issue of interaction between the living and the dead in Catholic and Protestant religions, and partly link it with the elements suggested in the previous parts. The issue of hauntings seems particularly relevant to the subject of this study – as ghostly apparition is obviously a key element in *Hamlet*, and ghosts are also mentioned in *Doctor Faustus*⁶¹, albeit much less importantly.

Stories about hauntings, ghosts, reanimated corpses, and dead people coming back from the grave were common upon popular masses in the pre-Christian and medieval eras⁶². This “long tradition of popular ghost lore”⁶³ was not denied by the Catholic Church, but was adapted to its doctrine of the afterlife: souls in Purgatory were said to be able to come back to the living world in order to ask for prayers, almsgiving, etc. from their living relatives. This seems logical according to the previously mentioned doctrine of Purgatory: as the living could have an influence on the fate of the dead, the departed could come back to the living to ask favours from them, in order to be relieved from their torment. In early conception, it was even stated that Purgatory souls were sent to the places where they sinned most during their earthly life, in order to repent and be purified⁶⁴. This doctrine left space for physical interaction and mutual service between the living and the departed loved ones: the living could seek salvation and relief for those they mourned; the departed could seek the help of their living relatives, but also reassure

⁵⁷ Peter Marshall, ““The Map of God’s word””, *Op. Cit.*, p. 129.

⁵⁸ Peter Marshall, “Catholic and Protestant Hells in Later Reformation England”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 97.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 97.

⁶⁰ Peter Marshall, ““The Map of God’s word””, *Op. Cit.*, p. 120.

⁶¹ Faustus, for example, invokes the ghosts of “Alexander and his paramour” (4.1.33-40) – although he explicitly states that those ghosts are merely spirits in the form of those he is asked to conjure (4.1.45-48).

⁶² As has been analysed by Catherine Belsey (*Op. Cit.*, p. 1-27).

⁶³ *Idem*, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 114.

them about the duration of their sufferings, and look after them. As argued by Greenblatt, this system possibly helped the living do “[...] something constructive [...] with their feelings of grief”⁶⁵, as they felt that they could help their departed loved one.

The living, however, were only able to interact with souls from Purgatory – which, once again, seems logical, as it was the “intermediary state” between two permanent afterlives. Souls in Heaven did not need help, as they were already saved and beatified; souls in Hell could not ask for help, as their damnation and torment were eternal. Communication between the living and the dead was thus only deemed possible because Purgatory was an “intermediary”, situated between earthly life – where one had sinned and needed to be redeemed – and the afterlife – Heaven, where the purified soul could live eternally in bliss.

Protestantism, on the other hand, refused the idea of ghosts coming back from the grave to the living world. As Purgatory was declared an ungodly invention, the idea that souls could come back from the dead seemed absurd: as already stated, souls from Heaven did not need help, while souls from Hell could not ask for it. Interaction between the living and the dead was thus deemed impossible. This, however, does not mean that Protestantism renounced to popular ghost lore altogether – apparitions in the form of dead loved ones were still deemed possible. Those apparitions, however, were considered to be demons from Hell, coming to earth in order to entice and trick human beings in order to damn their soul⁶⁶.

As can be seen, the notion of interaction between the living and the dead is thus closely related to the doctrine of Purgatory and intermediate state. Physical interaction, as has been stated, was seen as possible only when dead souls were able to receive help from the living – which seems logical. This, too, can be linked with the notion of requiem masses, prayers, and relics. As interaction between the dead and the living was deemed possible in Catholic religion, requiem prayers directly addressed the departed; mourning lasted longer – as the soul was supposedly suffering in Purgatory and could be helped; and relics of Saints were venerated as having a potential miraculous power on the living. Protestant prayers, on the other hand, addressed the assembly, and not the dead person⁶⁷; a long period of mourning was deemed unhealthy and unreasonable⁶⁸; and relics or adoration of objects, as already mentioned, were considered ungodly. These elements, as will be seen later, are relevant to the plays as well:

⁶⁵ *Idem*, p. 102.

⁶⁶ See for example Catherine Belsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9. It must be noted, however, that Catholics too believed that demons could take the form of the departed in order to trick humans. A careful test was therefore designed in order to identify whether a spirit was a ghost of Purgatory, or a tempting demon from Hell. On this subject, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 103.

⁶⁷ As noted by Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 244.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p. 247.

Hamlet's long mourning of his father is deemed unhealthy by the Court⁶⁹; the issue of interaction between the living and the dead lays at the heart of the debate about the Ghost in *Hamlet*; and the adoration of false idols – for example of the miraculous potential of words – is central to *Doctor Faustus*⁷⁰.

These different conceptions of the boundaries of the afterlife can be linked to the notion of the location of the afterlife discussed in the previous section. In the medieval Catholic system, interaction between the living and the dead was seen as possible. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that the afterlife – at least Purgatory – should be considered a physical place, from which souls could temporarily escape; to state that this place was situated under the earth, as Purgatory was considered a place of darkness and suffering, does not seem unreasonable either. In the Protestant system, where interaction between the living and the dead were deemed impossible, it seems easier to assume that the afterlife is either not a place, or a place situated in the divine world rather than the physical one. The assumption that devils could appear in the form of ghosts, even though they do not belong to the physical world, does not seem contradictory, given that demons were seen as 'cosmic', even 'divine' beings⁷¹.

In the next section, one last aspect of the afterlife will be referred to, namely predestination and the notion of repentance. Although less directly related to the elements analysed in the previous sections, this last aspect seems important to the analysis of the plays, as will be discussed below.

2.4. Providence, predestination, and repentance

Although in appearance less directly related to death and the afterlife, the notion of predestination is central when discussing the issue of the fate of human souls after death – and plays an important role, as mentioned above and as will be seen, in the analysis of the plays.

Predestination was a central, although disputed⁷², aspect of post-Reformation, Protestant belief. In England, the thirty-nine articles suggested that

Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby [...] he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honor.⁷³

⁶⁹ As is especially seen in Claudius's discourse to Hamlet (1.2.92-107).

⁷⁰ As discussed by Genevieve Guenther, "Why Devils Came When Faustus Called Them", *Modern Philology*, CIX/1 (2011), p. 48. This will be further discussed later.

⁷¹ Nancy Caciola, "Spirits seeking bodies: death, possession and communal memory in the Middle Ages", in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Eds.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 70.

⁷² Alison Shell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 181.

⁷³ "The thirty-nine Articles", *Op. Cit.*, p. 244.

According to the doctrine of predestination, the fate of humans was decided before their birth – chosen ones were destined to be saved from the beginning; human actions were determined by divine grace, and fortune was guided by God. Calvin (1509-1564), a reformer whose influence was particularly strong during the shaping of the Church of England, suggested that “[...] when that light of God’s providence hath once shined upon a godly man, he is now relieved and delivered not only from the extreme anguish and fear wherewith he was before oppressed, but also from all care [...] so he dare boldly commit himself to God”⁷⁴. Devils, in this perspective, were also set in movement by the will of God, who held them “as with a bridle”⁷⁵; their temptations and deception were therefore part of God’s plan – which could be seen as a comfort for believers, who kept their faith in God’s goodness despite temptation and harm, thus not fearing demon’s attacks anymore.

The doctrine of predestination, however, also entailed that some people would not be saved: William Perkins (1558-1602) defined predestination as “the decree of God by which he hath ordained all men to a certain and everlasting estate: that is, either to salvation or condemnation for his own glory”⁷⁶. Ungodly men, with hardened heart, were therefore condemned to eternal damnation from the very beginning. This system, however unfair it may seem in today’s society, thus suggested that those who were doomed from the beginning could not redeem themselves by nature: it was said that God “blindeth and hardeneth the reprobate, that he turneth, boweth, and moveth their hearts”⁷⁷, and took away from them “the power to see [the truth], obey and do rightly”⁷⁸. This conception that some were fated to eternal damnation from the beginning, could lead to a feeling of despair, or even to the idea that it was useless to avoid sins if one’s fate was decided from the beginning. The 17th of the Thirty-nine articles, however, warned the readers against that fatalistic point of view:

So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God’s predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.⁷⁹

The feeling of injustice, and of inappropriateness of this doctrine with regard to God’s supposed endless grace and mercifulness, was answered by Calvin as well: “He doth not say that pardon is denied them if they turn to the Lord: but he utterly denieth that they can rise unto repentance,

⁷⁴ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ William Perkins, “A Golden Chain, or The Description of Theology” [Extracts from the English translation; modernised spelling], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 250-251.

⁷⁷ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “The thirty-nine Articles”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 244.

because they are by the just judgement of God stricken with eternal blindness for their unthankfulness”⁸⁰. The nuance is thus that a truly repentant sinner would not be rejected – as God is a deeply good and merciful being – but repentance is precisely impossible for those who are destined to damnation. Even though some might seem repentant, their penitence is only an act of egoism, whereby they are not seeking true forgiveness – rather their own interest in salvation. The intent of their prayers, in short, is inappropriate; they cannot see the virtue of God’s grace, hence they cannot attain eternal bliss⁸¹. On this subject, Perkins suggests that blissful ones are full of hope of God’s salvation despite their sins, and able to apply God’s promise of salvation as written in the Gospel to themselves – thus to believe in God’s endless mercy, even though they have not experienced it yet⁸². Reprobates, on the other hand, even though they might seem penitent, are unable to apply such faith to themselves. Even though they might recognise God’s promise to eternally save part of humanity, they cannot apply that promise to themselves – thus are more likely to be desperate and fall into sin and apostasy again⁸³. This, of course, strongly resembles the 17th Article’s warning about desperation concerning God’s predestination.

The doctrine of predestination is, as has been seen, strongly linked to the notion of repentance, and can also be linked to the issue of confession. In the Catholic system, confession to a priest was mandatory at least once a year⁸⁴. Penance according to the priest’s commands was to be performed, which led to the pardon of sins by the confessor. Confession could help shorten one’s term in Purgatory – as previously mentioned. The confessor’s forgiving formula – although it was not absolute, true forgiveness being God’s privilege – was considered a token of God’s mercy, probably alleviating the conscience of the repentant sinner.

During the Reformation, Protestant denied this system – partly because of the system of paid pardon, or indulgences, which offered tokens of forgiveness in exchange for money, and which led some – though not all – shameless so-called pardoners to enrich themselves at the expense of gullible people. Reformers refused the idea that a priest’s forgiveness was a token of God’s own forgiveness – in other words, they refused the idea that a priest’s word was recognised as equal to the divine⁸⁵. In addition to the powerlessness of priests to wield God’s

⁸⁰ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 239.

⁸¹ *Idem*, p. 240.

⁸² William Perkins, *Op. Cit.*, p. 253-254.

⁸³ *Idem*, p. 254.

⁸⁴ Clive Burgess, *Op. Cit.*, p. 49.

⁸⁵ Paul Stegner, “‘Try What Repentance Can’: Hamlet, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority”, *Shakespeare Studies XXXV* (2007), p. 108 – although the forgiving formula of the priests was probably not deemed as absolute as claimed here, even in Catholic times.

words, the supposed claim to help to bring a soul to salvation was seen as heresy: in the doctrine of predestination, only God knew what awaited human souls – and seemingly repentant souls or holy men, because of their possible faking, could be part of the damned⁸⁶. The priest, up to then serving as an intermediary between God and the believer, was thus not considered useful anymore. Because of the possibility of faking repentance in front of a priest, confession became an issue between God and the faithful alone, in which the believer had to face his or her own conscience – a process through which faking was impossible⁸⁷. In addition to that, the idea that confession was most often accepted by God was abolished – only sincere confessions and repentance could be accepted by the divine. These ideas are obviously very close to what has been mentioned about the doctrine of predestination and impossible repentance because of a hardened heart for those condemned to damnation.

This first chapter has helped to determine three main criteria for the analysis of both *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet* – namely the location of the afterlife, the boundaries between the living and the dead, and the notion of predestination, providence, and repentance. Before applying those criteria to *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet* and attempting to offer an interpretation of the afterlife in both plays, it seems necessary, however, to turn to some notions concerning the previous interpretations of theology and the afterlife as represented in both plays, in order to provide the reader with an overview of the theoretical background surrounding the plays.

⁸⁶ William Perkins, *Op. Cit.*, p. 251.

⁸⁷ Paul Stegner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109-110.

Chapter II – Main critical and theoretical trends: an overview of previous interpretations

As previously mentioned, this second chapter is aimed at providing a brief overview of earlier theoretical studies and critical trends concerning the theology staged in the plays, especially surrounding the topic of the afterlife and the three criteria identified in the first chapter. The first section of this chapter will succinctly present the critical trends and earlier works on *Doctor Faustus*, discussing the problematic status of a Protestant morality play staging a probably predestined character, the critical and theoretical attitudes towards predestination and Faustus's sins, as well as the controversy surrounding the possible subversive, potentially Catholic elements in the play. The second section will offer an overview of the critical trends in *Hamlet*, mainly discussing the controversy surrounding the Ghost, as well as the issue of Hamlet's sinful attempt to lead the King him to damnation by killing him while in sin; the potentially Catholic attitude of Hamlet, resembling that of a father confessor; and Hamlet's famous 'to be or not to be' soliloquy.

1. *Doctor Faustus*: the problems of a Protestant morality play

Although the death of the protagonist is only staged at the end of *Doctor Faustus*, the issue of the afterlife permeates the whole play – from the protagonist's deal with the devil, seemingly effecting Faustus's damnation and his afterlife fate in Hell, to the wish of the doctor to "make men to live eternally/ Or, being dead, raise them to life again" (1.1.24-25). The most obvious aspect of the afterlife in the play seems to be the Protestant doctrine of predestination, as well as the notion of repentance. However, other elements – such as the location or state of the afterlife, as well as the boundaries between the living and the dead and whether they can be crossed, can also be – and have been – found and studied in *Doctor Faustus*.

Despite its omnipresence, the doctrine of predestination seems to contradict the fact that *Doctor Faustus* is recognised as a morality play. Whereas traditional morality plays staged a protagonist – generally representative of a wider group of people, sometimes of the whole of humanity – torn between Good and Evil and generally rising to salvation despite his sins through repentance and God's grace⁸⁸, *Doctor Faustus* depicts the downfall of a protagonist who damns himself, emphasising his passivity, as well as the impossibility of his repentance⁸⁹. *Doctor Faustus* thus seems to be a morality play in a Protestant context, in which the passivity and inability to repent seem to come from Faustus's inevitable fate as an apostate – directly linked to the doctrine of predestination. According to this doctrine, Faustus does not damn

⁸⁸ For definitions of the morality play genre, see Douglas Cole, *Op. Cit.*, p. 304.

⁸⁹ Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 106.

himself through the pact with the devil, but is damned from the beginning – the pact is only a confirmation of his apostasy⁹⁰. His pleas to the divine (“My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!” (5.2.113)) are only desperate, possibly insincere attempts at repentance shortly before eternal damnation. Other efforts of repentance, although occurring fairly regularly in the play, are never maintained by the protagonist. As stated by Genevieve Guenther⁹¹, the doctrine of predestination also explains why Faustus strikes a deal with Mephistopheles even though he is explicitly told how the latter is “tormented with ten thousand hells/ In being deprived of everlasting bliss” (1.3.79-80), and despite the demon’s initial frightening appearance⁹². Mephistopheles does not try to entice Faustus using disguise, or pretending to be the ghost from a departed loved one, nor does he attempt to hide his intention of taking Faustus’s soul⁹³. Despite those warnings, Faustus makes a deal with Mephistopheles, thinking that “hell’s a fable” (2.1.123). This “self-imposed moral blindness”⁹⁴ of the protagonist can, of course, be linked with Faustus’s fate: because his heart is hardened and not fit to see God’s grace, he is unable to see how dangerous to his soul the demon can be.

The conjuration of Mephistopheles has been studied in the Protestant context as well. As already mentioned, the doctrine of predestination suggested that demonic apparitions were tolerated by God in order to tempt foul human beings, who were already damned. This, as stated before, and as suggested by Guenther, means that Mephistopheles is not conjured up by Faustus’s magical words, but decides to appear due to Faustus’s overt rejection of God⁹⁵. In addition to being another example of Faustus’s self-delusional behaviour – as he believes that “there’s virtue in [his] heavenly words” (1.3.27) despite Mephistopheles’s statement that he is there “*per accidens*” (1.3.46; italics are original) – this, as noted by Guenther, also shows how the Catholic doctrine is criticised in the play⁹⁶. As previously stated, reformers criticised the literality and materiality of Catholic dogmas, including transubstantiation, the idea of a too physical underground, or the pardon of priests effecting God’s forgiveness. The rejection of the effects of performative language – be it dogmatic or magical – is strongly linked to this, and the fact that Faustus believes that his words have an effect on the demonic or divine world

⁹⁰ Alan Sinfield, “Reading Faustus’s God”, in David S. Kastan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 353. For a more thorough analysis of the protagonist’s damned status and his lack of repentance, see Chapter III.

⁹¹ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.

⁹² The expression of pain in Hell by Mephistopheles, as well as his ugliness, has also been noted by Douglas Cole, *Op. Cit.*, p. 309-310.

⁹³ He explicitly states that he was not conjured up by Faustus’s words, but “[flew] in hope to get his glorious soul” (1.3.47), as will be argued later. See Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 48.

⁹⁴ Douglas Cole, *Op. Cit.*, p. 310. The author, although noticing the self-delusion of Faustus, does not explicitly link it with predestination.

⁹⁵ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 47-48.

⁹⁶ *Idem*, p. 49-53.

proves his heresy, even before his pact with the devil. According to Guenther, believing that words can conjure up spirit amounts to believing that “human beings may rise above their fundamentally wretched place in the cosmos, that they may escape their irreducible dependence on God’s grace for any satisfaction that would transcend mortality”⁹⁷, thus leading to failing “to see the need for faith”⁹⁸. The conjuration of Mephistopheles therefore does not only show Faustus’s rejection of heaven, but also his deep lack of Protestant faith. This aspect will be further explored and analysed in Chapter III.

In her article, Guenther goes further into stating that Faustus’s reason for invoking demons and making deals with them is his physical, literal interpretation of his own life and the afterlife⁹⁹. She suggests that Faustus does not only confuse words with their meaning, but also all vehicles or containers with their contents, all forms with their meanings, thus refusing allegorical reading¹⁰⁰. Because of that, Faustus refuses to believe that his body and souls are distinct; therefore, he feels that the promise of God’s salvation, through which the soul becomes part of the celestial body, is merely a frightful alienation and obliteration of individual identity¹⁰¹. This leads him to see Hell – which he interprets as a place where he could keep his physical body – as an almost pleasant alternative, although this vision of an embodied hell, as suggested by Mephistopheles himself, is also a delusion¹⁰². This, once again, and although not directly mentioned by Guenther, seems a mockery of Catholic literality – showing that a literal, physical interpretation leads to heresy and damnation. This can also be interpreted as a sign of the inner corruption of Faustus, whose nature prevents his repentance. These aspects will be further analysed in the third chapter.

Finally, Luciano García argues that Faustus’s main sin is despair¹⁰³ – which, once again, can be linked to predestination. Because of his fate, Faustus cannot see the virtue of faith in God, and cannot understand the eternal bliss of being saved – therefore, he falls into despair and turns to Hell. When he reads the Bible, Faustus only sees that men, by nature, are driven to sin, and “so consequently die [...] an everlasting death” (1.1.45-46); however, he is unable to see that, because of God’s grace, men can be forgiven, saved, and brought to bliss. Through his

⁹⁷ *Idem*, p. 53.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Idem*, p. 57-58.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Idem*, p. 60.

¹⁰² Mephistopheles openly states that Hell “hath no limits, nor is circumscribed/In one self place” (2.1.117-119). *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

despair, Faustus shows his inability to see “the need for faith”¹⁰⁴, and, thus, his “inward alienation from the spirit of God”¹⁰⁵ – in the end leading to his own “everlasting death”.

As demonstrated above, critics have extensively referred to Protestant ideas presented in the play – as well as referred to Catholic dogmas, especially studying how they were criticised in the text. Some scholarly articles, however, have suggested that the play might be interpreted as partly subversive. Sinfield, for example, describes the play as “at some stage at least [...] written to embarrass protestant doctrine”¹⁰⁶; Guenther suggest that the play was made to lead the viewers to “begin to doubt the goodness of God”¹⁰⁷ – and feel guilty about it, as they would be drawn on the path of despair. The character of the Good Angel, in particular, seems strange in the context of a Protestant play. Although it can merely be interpreted as the Faustian version of the embodied Virtue in traditional morality plays¹⁰⁸, the Good Angel, who regularly appears to show the virtuous path to the doubting Faustus, seems an especially cruel character when analysed in the context of predestination. If Faustus is fated to damnation without any possibility to repent, the Good Angel is only there to “tell Faustus what he ought to do but cannot, so that he will be unable to claim ignorance when God taxes him with his wickedness”¹⁰⁹ – which seems quite cruel, especially given God’s supposed endless goodness. Sinfield states that this kind of process was quite common in that theology, but still argues that the play is ambiguous and probably sets two traps, “one [...] set by God for Dr. Faustus, the other [...] set by Marlowe, for God”¹¹⁰. While studying the same issue, García suggests on the other hand that the Good Angel might be a sign that Faustus is not damned from the beginning and can still repent – thus suggesting that the doctrine of predestination, although strongly emphasised, might not be applicable to Faustus¹¹¹. He goes on to suggest that the deterministic view – that of predestination – is only supported by the negative characters, i.e. the demons, as well as the Bad Angel. In this perspective, the antagonists would try to drive Faustus to believe that it is useless to repent, thus bringing him to his worst sin – despair – while the allies would emphasise Faustus’s power on his own fate. This interpretation, however, does not seem substantiated enough in the rest of the play to allow for an entirely Catholic reading of the play.

¹⁰⁴ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁵ *Idem*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Sinfield, *Op. Cit.*, p. 358.

¹⁰⁷ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁸ As highlighted by Douglas Cole (*Op. Cit.*, p. 306) – although he also notes some differences between the traditional Virtue and the character of the Good Angel.

¹⁰⁹ Alan Sinfield, *Op. Cit.*, p. 357.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

¹¹¹ Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 101. García however recognises that the deterministic feeling and the impression that Faustus is irrevocably damned is prominent in the play.

Both Sinfield and García, despite their different interpretations of the Good Angel, seem to conclude that it is impossible to decide whether the play is merely presenting a Protestant doctrine, or criticising it¹¹².

Other issues leading to a possible interpretation of the play as subverting Protestantism, however, have been commented on as well. Sinfield suggests that the play purposely leads the public to sympathise with Faustus¹¹³. Shortly before his death, and although he is panic-stricken, Faustus sends his friends away, for fear that they would be damned and taken by the demons as well: “away, lest you perish with me [...] Talk not of me, but save yourselves and depart” (5.2.48-50). This concern for those close to him, however near his damnation might be, and however terrified he might feel, makes Faustus appear mild and humane, to the point where – according to Sinfield – he might be deemed a moral character¹¹⁴. When one scholar decides to stay with Faustus, trusting that God will make him strong, another answers “[t]empt not God, sweet friend” (5.2.53): God, in this scene, seems therefore cruel, capable of damning the scholars only because they want to assist their friend Faustus in his last moments. In his concern for his friends, Faustus thus seems “more moral than God”¹¹⁵. In his study of the compassion one might feel for the protagonist, Sinfield also draws attention to the B-text additions, in which the mourning scholars pray and mourn for the dead Faustus, thus emphasising the compassion one might feel for him¹¹⁶. The whole argument of compassion, however, can be objected to: although the reader – especially the modern reader – can feel compassion towards Faustus and he might be deemed moral from a human point of view, it is clearly stated in the Protestant doctrine of predestination – as mentioned in the previous chapter – that God’s plans cannot be understood, and that a man might appear moral during his life and still be an apostate. Believing that God is cruel because of one’s compassion towards a human would be rejecting God’s goodness, thus becoming an apostate in the process – which explains why the scholars should not pray for Faustus, as Sinfield himself notes¹¹⁷. It might be hard, therefore, to state that the empathy felt towards Faustus willingly subverts Protestant faith, or that Marlowe “set[s a trap] [...] for God”¹¹⁸, as this compassion does not prevent the play from outwardly respecting

¹¹² Alan Sinfield, *Op. Cit.*, p. 360. García does not explicitly state that the play cannot be decisively classified, but does highlight that elements of the Protestant doctrine seem to be both supported and subverted in *Doctor Faustus*. See Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102-106.

¹¹³ Alan Sinfield, *Op. Cit.*, p. 360.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Idem*, p. 358.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 361.

Protestant doctrines. The compassion felt by the public does not automatically point to an intentional subversion.

Guenther suggests another interpretation of the phenomenon of compassion towards Faustus. According to her, the feeling of compassion – and therefore the doubting of God's goodness – is not a secondary effect of Protestant theology on modern readers, but rather a wanted effect – even at the time of the play – in order to create dramatic tension¹¹⁹. The viewers, according to her, are driven to feel entertained by Faustus's tricks and the devils' shows, as well as to sympathise with the protagonist, while at the same time knowing that this might lead them to apostasy and feeling guilty about their feelings¹²⁰. The feeling of compassion, therefore, would neither be a subversion of Protestantism, nor a trick designed to test the public's faith, but rather a theatrical means whose main function is to increase dramatic tension, and thus stimulate the public's interest in the play.

A last element has been noted concerning a possible subversion of Protestantism. When studying Faustus's rejection of all arts and theology before his turning to magic, García states that this rejection is caused by Faustus's wrong interpretation of the Bible¹²¹. He then suggests that this risk of a wrong interpretation leading to apostasy would not have been possible in the Catholic system, in which dogmatic interpretations of the Bible were provided by the Church authority, and the faithful were not expected to read and interpret personally the Scriptures in the right way¹²². García links this Protestant tendency with the wider trend of humanism and philology, and suggests that Faustus's wrong interpretation and damnation might indicate a certain bitterness towards the humanist and Protestant ideals of pursuit of personal freedom and refusal of external authority – except that of God – often leading to disappointment¹²³. This statement, however, does not seem substantiated enough in the rest of García's text to indicate a real subversion of Protestantism or humanism – the author, at least, fails to link this to other elements of the text.

In the next chapter of this study, the few elements explained here will be expanded on. Referring more extensively to the issue of Faustus's apostasy and the ways in which it is represented – including his vision of a mapped afterlife, his crossing of boundaries between the living and the dead, etc. – as well as his self-delusion even though the demon overtly tells him

¹¹⁹ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 65-68.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ As already mentioned, Faustus interprets the necessity of God's grace wrongly, as well as the need for faith in order to be saved.

¹²² Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102-103.

¹²³ *Idem*, p. 109-110.

that he is wrong, and the way in which the demons subtly manage to trick the protagonist, the essay will attempt to answer the question of whether the play offers a subversive view on theology, or whether these perceived criticisms are merely modern readers' considerations. The few elements of subversion cited and criticised here will thus be analysed in more details with regard to the text, in order to determine whether they can be substantiated.

Before going further into the analysis, however, the next point will briefly deal with the main interpretative trends and problems concerning *Hamlet* as well.

2. *Hamlet*: some early problems and previous interpretations

As Shakespeare's most famous play, *Hamlet* has, of course, been commented on, analysed, criticised, and interpreted on countless occasions. The issue of the afterlife in relation to the Elizabethan context and religious beliefs has, as might be expected, been extensively referred to in several interpretations of the play. As argued by George Hibbard, "the play's main concern is with death"¹²⁴; the omnipresence of death-related motifs – for instance suicide, considered by Hamlet and committed by Ophelia, revenge through homicide, and obviously the Ghost claiming to be back from the dead – indeed makes it hard to ignore the issue of the afterlife in the play. The Ghost, as the main potential manifestation of a life after death, has received particular attention from critics; the issue of its identity has been – and still is – a source of debate. It has fascinated readers and critics for decades. The Ghost claims to come from Purgatory:

I am thy father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature,
Are burnt and purged away. [...]

(1.5.9-13)

This claim, however, appears strange, given the Elizabethan context of the play. The belief in Purgatory, as previously mentioned, was deemed a Catholic invention by Protestant authorities. The claim of the Ghost thus seems unorthodox, which, given the censorship at work in Elizabethan times, seems surprising.

The identity of the Ghost, therefore, has been seen as problematic. If the Ghost's claim is considered true, and if it really is the spirit of Hamlet's father – as some critics have suggested¹²⁵

¹²⁴ George R. Hibbard, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

¹²⁵ See for example David Beauregard, "Great Commands O'ersways the Order': Purgatory, Revenge, and Maimed Rites in *Hamlet*", *Religion and the Arts*, XI/1 (2007), p. 45-73, and Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.* (although this last source does not identify the Ghost as entirely Catholic, its overall claim seems to point at a Catholic interpretation of the play, and seems to consider that the Ghost is Hamlet's father). Only relatively recent examples have been

– then the claim to come from Purgatory can only be true, given that spirits from Heaven and Hell were not considered able to come back to the living world. This has led several critics to suggest a Catholic interpretation of the Ghost and, by extension, of the play – which, for some, went together with a historical claim that Shakespeare might have been a crypto-catholic¹²⁶.

In addition to the issue of censorship, however, another problem seems to emerge from a Catholic interpretation of the Ghost. In its soliloquy, the Ghost asks Hamlet to “[r]evenge his [thy father’s] foul and unnatural murder” (1.5.25). According to medieval and early Renaissance divine laws, however, an inferior being could not take upon themselves to punish a superior being, even though the latter might be foul – as this form of rebellion was considered usurpation of the role of God himself. This was particularly emphatically expressed in the *Book of Homilies*, a collection of sermons reissued during Elizabeth’s reign:

How horrible a sin against God and man rebellion is cannot possibly be expressed according unto the greatness thereof. For he that nameth rebellion nameth not a singular, or only one sin, as is [...] murder, and suchlike, but he nameth the whole puddle and sink of all sins against God and man [...].¹²⁷

For the Ghost to encourage Hamlet to kill Claudius, therefore, would be to encourage his son to commit a grave sin: Hamlet, though a Prince, is inferior to the King, Claudius; his uprising against the King would therefore be considered an act of rebellion. The Ghost from Purgatory, however – and as noted by Greenblatt¹²⁸ – is supposed to be purged from his earthly sins; therefore, he should be unable to commit new ones¹²⁹. However, this argument is debatable. For instance, it could be argued that the Ghost of the King gives his power and right of revenge to Hamlet. One could also suggest that Claudius, being a murderer, is usurping the throne, and that Hamlet, as the King’s son, is the rightful heir to the Danish crown. In this perspective, Hamlet should occupy a higher rank in the social hierarchy, and would therefore be right to seek revenge upon the murderer. Despite the fact that Claudius is indeed a criminal, it must be

cited here; however, the claim of Catholicism in *Hamlet* is far from new.

¹²⁶ See for example Lee Oser, “Shakespeare and the Catholic Spectrum” [Review Essay], in *Religion and the Arts* XVI (2012), p. 381-390. In this essay, the author reviews several sources discussing whether Shakespeare was a recusant, a humanist Catholic, or a moderate Catholic. The author, as well as those of the discussed essays, seems therefore to generally admit that Shakespeare was Catholic – thus showing that this Catholic interpretation is far from rare.

¹²⁷ “The Book of Homilies” [Extract; modernised spelling], in Stephen Greenblatt et al. (Eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Volume B. The Sixteenth Century and The Early Seventeenth Century*, 9th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2012, p. 693.

¹²⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 127. Even though the author goes on to suggest that Hamlet’s main duty is remembrance – in a Catholic fashion – rather than revenge, he notes that this sinful demand might indicate that the Ghost is a demon from Hell.

¹²⁹ Even though the Ghost is not directly performing it, his encouragement of Hamlet’s sinning can of course be considered a sin as well.

noted that the Danish monarchy presented in the play, as argued by Andràs Bernàth¹³⁰, is not hereditary, but elective – although the elected king is apparently part of the same family. It can therefore be safely assumed that Claudius did not take the crown by sheer force, but organised and won an election. Hamlet seems to state his disappointment over losing of the election in the course of the play: “He [...] Popped in between th’election and my hopes” (5.2.65-66), thus suggesting he held the hope of becoming the elected King¹³¹. Whether the election was rigged in favour of Claudius cannot be decided here – it is possible, as Claudius is obviously a manipulative being and as he states in the play that Hamlet “is loved of the distracted multitude” (4.3.4), but it cannot be verified. The issue of whether Claudius is really a usurper because he killed the former king, or whether he has to be considered a rightful king because he was elected by the people, can therefore not be solved. A last element, however, seems to indicate that Hamlet’s revenge might not be as reasonable as it seems. As suggested by Bernàth, an elected monarch could be deposed by the nobles when he was not considered rightful anymore¹³². Although this could be considered as an argument in favour of Hamlet – who deposes the king through killing him – one could also argue that the illegitimate and murderous king could therefore be removed from the throne in a non-violent way. Hamlet, provided that he managed to prove his uncle’s guilt, could become the rightful king without having to shed blood¹³³. Private revenge, therefore, does not seem necessary in order to avenge the late Hamlet, as a proof of Claudius’s deed would be enough to depose the murderer – and potentially have him officially judged and legally sentenced to death. As demonstrated here, the issue of the Ghost’s request is complex, and it is hard to decide whether Hamlet is right to seek revenge. The several elements mentioned above, however, have led critics to consider that the Ghost’s insistence on private revenge is sinful, as it can be deemed unchristian and could perhaps be avoided through the official deposition of Claudius.

Because of the apparent paradox of the Purgatory spirit requesting the performance of a sinful act, those critics have suggested a more Protestant interpretation of the Ghost – and by extension of the play. In the 1960s, Eleanor Prosser suggested a Protestant approach to the Ghost, stating that it could only be, according to Protestant theology, a deceptive demon in

¹³⁰ Among others. See Andràs G. Bernàth, *Hamlet, the Ghost and the Model Reader. The Problem of the Reception and a Concept of Shakespeare’s Hamlet* [doctoral dissertation], Université Catholique de Louvain, Faculté de Philosophie, Arts et Lettres (Guido Latré, supervisor), Louvain-la-Neuve, 2013, p. 221.

¹³¹ As also argued by *Idem*, p. 221-222.

¹³² *Idem*, p. 222.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

disguise¹³⁴. In more recent years, Andràs Bernàth has also suggested that the Ghost, according to Elizabethan theology, should be considered a lying demon, appearing in the form of Hamlet's late father to lure him into committing a grave sin¹³⁵. This argumentation supports the view that the Ghost is sent to trick Hamlet, who falls into the trap because of his own flaws – his melancholic humour, as well as a most unchristian wish to damn his enemies, thus a wish to take God's role upon himself and decide about a human being's fate after death¹³⁶. In a similar reasoning, Sharon Emmerichs, although not directly referring to the Ghost's identity, has suggested that the whole play points towards a Protestant warning against the crossing of boundaries between the living and the dead – which were loose and fuzzy in the Catholic faith, but much more strictly set and closed in Protestant beliefs¹³⁷. She suggests that Hamlet's desperate wish to cross those boundaries – for example through the contact with and trust in the Ghost – leads to his ultimate downfall¹³⁸.

Next to those debates about the theological origin of the Ghost, other critics have pointed to traditional, folk elements in the play, especially in the depiction of the spirit. Although this study is mostly concerned with the theological aspect of the play, these elements can shed new light on the views on the afterlife suggested in it, and should therefore not be ignored. Catherine Belsey, for instance, studied the figure of the Ghost in relation to traditional fireside ghost stories and winter tales¹³⁹. In this analysis, Belsey suggests that the call for revenge, drawing on the tradition of Senecan ghosts, is not an isolated feature in ghost stories. She draws a parallel between the Ghost in *Hamlet* and ghosts in folk stories, insisting on their nostalgia, physicality – seen in the play through the staging of the Ghost in full armour or in nightgown¹⁴⁰ – as well as their unreligious requests to members of their families, mostly demands of retribution for something wrong in their life or that of their descendants¹⁴¹. In this perspective, perhaps the issue of the identity and origin of the Ghost goes beyond the mere question of Hell or Purgatory, of Protestantism or Catholicism. The Ghost, perhaps, cannot really be limited to one or the other, as many other factors seem to influence its nature and depiction. The issue of the theological afterlife in the play, therefore, does not seem to be complete with the mere study of

¹³⁴ Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and revenge*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1967, quoted in George R. Hibbard, *Op. Cit.*, p. 40. Hibbard, however, strongly disagrees with Prosser's conclusion, which he considers too radical.

¹³⁵ Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, 249-272.

¹³⁶ For the whole argumentation on Hamlet's character and flaws, cf. *Idem*, p. 272-296.

¹³⁷ Sharon Emmerichs, "Shakespeare and the Landscape of Death: Crossing the Boundaries of Life and the Afterlife", *Shakespeare*, VIII/2 (2012), p. 177.

¹³⁸ *Idem*, p. 177-183.

¹³⁹ Catherine Belsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1-27.

¹⁴⁰ According to the First Quarto (Q1). See the annotation of the Oxford World's Classics edition (Ed. by George Hibbard, *Op. Cit.*, p. 282).

¹⁴¹ Catherine Belsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 17, 23 and 26.

the origin and identity of the Ghost. Other elements and factors seem to have to be taken into account and studied in order to form a true opinion on the theology that inspires the play.

In this study, the main focus will therefore not be the determination of the identity and origin of the Ghost – although it will inevitably be referred to – but the wider vision of the afterlife offered by the play. Whereas the figure of the Ghost is obviously inseparable from this issue, the prime focus of this analysis will be set on its function in the wider theology, rather than its identity and aim as a character. This does not mean that the Ghost cannot be seen as a character in its own right, and has to be studied merely as a theatrical function¹⁴², but rather that this study of a character will be left to previous and future essays.

Other elements worth analysing in the play, which have been mentioned above, include the boundaries between the living and the dead, and whether both worlds are represented as totally separated or not – which has already been briefly mentioned in the summary of Emmerichs's article¹⁴³, and is also related to the role of the Ghost – the Catholic and Protestant views on which have been detailed in the first chapter. In addition to this, the study of the views on repentance, predestination and providence in the play seems interesting in order to identify its underlying theology, as the belief in pre-existing fate seems to be shared by Hamlet when he suggests that "[t]here's a divinity that shapes our ends,/ Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11) and Horatio, who answers "[t]hat is most certain" (5.2.12). Later, Hamlet also suggests that "[t]here's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2.166-167), thus seemingly confirming his belief in providence. However, this apparently Protestant belief can be challenged, as Hamlet's statement might be an attempt at reassuring himself before his duel with Laertes, which he is not sure to win. Additionally, and despite the fact that he was a student in the Protestant Wittenberg, Hamlet seems to display attitudes close to those of a Catholic father confessor, as argued by Paul Stegner¹⁴⁴. In his article on confession and repentance in the play, he states that the Ghost embodies the old Catholic system, not only in his coming from Purgatory, but also in his insistence on the fact that he could not confess prior to his death, leading to his longer punishment¹⁴⁵. Hamlet, in response, attempts to bring his mother to confession, which, according to Stegner, points to a more Catholic attitude towards repentance¹⁴⁶. However, he also suggests that both the Ghost and Hamlet depict "doctrinal

¹⁴² As noted by Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 259.

¹⁴³ Sharon Emmerichs, *Op. Cit.*, p. 171-194. For the summary of the article, see p. 30.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Stegner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 113-114.

¹⁴⁵ *Idem*, p. 112-113.

¹⁴⁶ *Idem*, p. 113-114.

heterogeneity”¹⁴⁷. Whereas the former asks Hamlet to leave Gertrude alone with her conscience, the latter insists on the ability of others to fake repentance in public, while expecting sincerity when facing one’s own conscience alone – both of which seem to point towards a more Protestant view on repentance¹⁴⁸. Hamlet, however, also appears to consider himself able to see past others’ appearances, and to trigger their sincerity, which once more seems to point to a father confessor’s attitude; this seems nevertheless erroneous, as Hamlet misinterprets many of others’ actions, including Claudius’s insincere attempt at repentance¹⁴⁹. Hamlet thus seems to take up a role which does not belong to him, and which brings him close to heresy. This heresy, of course, can be linked to Hamlet’s wish to take up God’s role when he refuses to kill Claudius at prayer, because he might be saved: by trying to bring about Claudius’s damnation, Hamlet heretically attempts to act as God, the only one who can decide about the afterlife of human beings. Incidentally, this wish to effect Claudius’s damnation is also revealing of Hamlet’s twisted view on predestination, which will be studied in the following part of this analysis.

Finally, a few words can be said about Hamlet’s famous ‘to be or not to be’ soliloquy (3.1), as it seems central to the study of the afterlife in the play. In this soliloquy, the protagonist ponders on the desirability of suicide, and on the fear of “something after death/ The undiscovered country, from whose bourn/ No traveller returns” (3.1.79-81). When studying Hamlet’s words on the impossibility of knowing what awaits human beings after death, Greenblatt points to the fact that the protagonist seems to ‘forget’ that he knows what lies beyond death – as he met the Ghost confirming the existence of Purgatory, or Hell in the case of a Protestant demon in disguise – suggesting that this internal contradiction might be a way to show that Catholic doctrines cannot hold¹⁵⁰, thus pointing to a rather Protestant interpretation of this element. Greenblatt, however, also suggests that this contradiction strengthens the impression of uncanny in the play, emphasising the fictional aspect of Purgatory, which is part of a theatrical reality rather than a theological one, and therefore does not represent the ‘reality’ of the afterlife¹⁵¹. Belsey, on the other hand, suggests that the seemingly contradictory statement of Hamlet might come from a feeling of estrangement of the Ghost, and might be a form of questioning of the identity of the Ghost and doubting his claim that he is Hamlet’s father¹⁵². In

¹⁴⁷ *Idem*, p. 113.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Idem*, p. 118.

¹⁵⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 252.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Catherine Belsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

this perspective, Hamlet's apparent contradiction might stem from a Protestant awareness that the Ghost might not be what it seems, rather than a theatrical mockery of Catholic doctrines¹⁵³.

These considerations show the variety of analyses and interpretations that have already been suggested with regard to the various elements of the afterlife suggested in the play. The subsequent analysis, as already mentioned, will attempt to go further, referring to several of the elements shortly explained above. In the fourth chapter, issues on boundaries between the living and the dead, as well as on repentance, confession, and predestination, will be studied more systematically, in order to provide a more substantiated interpretation of the play's message, as well as point to possible subversions of official religious beliefs in the play.

This brief chapter has attempted to show the diversity of analyses and interpretations of the plays, the main critical trends concerning major elements of the afterlife in the plays, as well as controversial issues possibly pointing to subversions of the Elizabethan orthodox theology. This succinct summary has pointed to a number of unresolved questions and contradictions within the critical trends, which will be addressed in the next chapters. The following chapter will turn to a systematic analysis of *Doctor Faustus*, addressing the main issues introduced in this chapter, as well as a number of other aspects.

¹⁵³ Belsey's interpretation, incidentally, does not entirely exclude Greenblatt's suggestion that the soliloquy might emphasise the fictional nature of Purgatory.

Chapter III – Elements of the afterlife in *Doctor Faustus*

This first analysis of *Doctor Faustus* will concentrate on three main aspects. Firstly, the status of the afterlife as represented in the play will be covered; this part of the study will refer to what has been introduced in the historical part, namely whether the afterlife is represented as a place or as a state. In this part, the protagonist's views and words on this issue will be compared with the mainstream Protestant opinion of the time, as well as with the divine being's sayings on the afterlife in the play. In a second part, Faustus's wish for divinity and immortality will be studied in the context of a potential wish to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, which in turn will be linked to the protagonist's main sins leading to his damnation. Finally, the issue of Faustus's damnation and sins will be studied in the context of predestination. The inextricably linked notion of repentance, surprisingly shown several times by the damned protagonist in the course of the play, will also be referred to.

On the basis of these three parts, the hypothesis that the play might be at least partly subversive of mainstream Protestant doctrines will be critically assessed. In this perspective, the characters of the Good and Bad Angels, as well as the notion of Faustus's materialism and literal interpretations of the scriptures, will be particularly addressed.

1. Status of the afterlife

1.1. “He confounds Hell in Elysium”: Hell as a place of philosophy or a state of suffering

As already mentioned in the analysis of the historical background, Faustus seems to consider the afterlife as a physical place in which one bodily exists, despite his Protestant education¹⁵⁴. When discussing hell with Mephistopheles in the first act, Faustus states that “he confounds hell in Elysium” (1.3.59), thus referring to the cosmographic position of classical antiquity's hell. The classical afterlife, much like the medieval Christian hell, was traditionally considered to lie under the earth¹⁵⁵. In this simple sentence, Faustus is thus already stating that he considers the afterlife – especially hell – as a physical place, a literal underworld where “[h]is ghost be with the old philosophers” (1.3.60). Faustus's scholarly and humanist

¹⁵⁴ At either Württemberg (A-Text) or Wittenberg (B-Text), depending on the version studied. Despite internal differences – Württemberg is considered a more radical, militant Protestant town, whereas Wittenberg is seen as more traditional and ceremonial –, both towns housed a Protestant university in which Faustus would have received a Protestant education, thus normally not being taught that Hell was a physical place situated somewhere under the earth. On this issue, see also Leah Marcus, “Textual Instability and Ideological Difference: The case of *Doctor Faustus*”, in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 153-171.

¹⁵⁵ As seems to be confirmed in several texts – in Virgil's *Aeneid* (1st Century BC), for example, Aeneas finds the entrance to the underworld at Cumae and manages to speak with the dead. Cf. Virgile, “L'Énéide”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 129-150.

background obviously explains this reference to classical antiquity, without necessarily indicating that Faustus refers to a Catholic conception of the afterlife; however, the fact that Faustus openly admits that he does not believe in the Christian hell and thinks it is a place of discussion and philosophy is an early sign of Faustus's inherently flawed interpretation of theology, possibly pointing to a confusion between classical and Christian principles. Shortly afterwards, Faustus asks Mephistopheles where he is damned, to which the demon answers that he is in hell (1.3.73-74). Faustus's reaction is indicative of his convictions: "How comes it, then, that thou art out of hell?" (1.3.75). This again seems to show that Faustus, in addition to seeing the afterlife as a physical place – a 'where' in which the demon physically suffers – desperately tries to apply physical, material logic and rules to divine matters. This early instance seems to already indicate Faustus's almost too rational turn of mind and materialism, which, if wrongly used, could lead to his downfall. Incidentally, this wrong use of rational thinking could be perceived as an ironical side effect of Faustus's scientific, scholarly background; and could therefore be indicative of a potential mockery of extreme scientific and relativist behaviours – this will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

On the other hand, Mephistopheles openly admits that Faustus's literal interpretation is erroneous. When the doctor asks how the demon can be out of hell, the latter answers that "this is hell, nor am I out of it" (1.3.76), thus suggesting that hell is not a mere physical place, but either a state of consciousness, or at least a place in the divine order where earthly logic does not apply. Although the demon explains that the 'hell' that he refers to corresponds to the deprivation of eternal bliss, thus potentially referring to a more 'metaphorical' hell not necessarily excluding a geographical hell designed for rebellious, damned human souls, Mephistopheles later confirms this version of a non-limited, non-physical afterlife. In the second act, when Faustus once again asks "where [...] the place that men call hell" (2.1.113) is, Mephistopheles answers that

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place, for where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be.

(2.1.117-119)

In addition to indicating that Faustus still holds the belief that hell is a physical place – as his pleonastic "where is the place" seems to indicate – despite Mephistopheles's response in the first act, it furthers Mephistopheles's claim that hell is much more of a state than a material location. Despite this explicit statement, Faustus then states that "hell's a fable" (2.1.123), possibly referring to his idea that hell is not a place of eternal suffering, but the equivalent of

the Greek Elysium – or at least dismissing the demon’s claim that hell is not limited to a mere place¹⁵⁶.

The reverse dramatic tension between both characters, in which Mephistopheles warns a self-delusional Faustus of the dangers of hell despite his demonic status, is even more obvious in the next part of the dialogue:

FAUSTUS – Think’st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine
That, after this life, there is any pain?
Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives’ tales.
MEPHISTOPHELES – But, Faustus, I am an instance to prove the contrary,
For I am damned and am now in hell.
FAUSTUS – How? Now in hell? Nay, an this be hell, I’ll willingly be damned here. What?
Walking, disputing [...]

(2.1.129-135)

Similarly, when Faustus rejoices in his successful conjuration of the demon, Mephistopheles does not try to hide that he appeared “*by accidens*” (1.3.46; italics are original) – because he chose to respond to Faustus’s words, not because he was conjured up by them¹⁵⁷ – and that his sole aim is to “get his [Faustus’s] glorious soul” (1.3.49), although Faustus chooses to ignore those warnings. As Mephistopheles apparently honestly states his intentions, and although he, as will be mentioned later, does trick the protagonist into never truly considering repentance, one can safely assume that the demon does not lie when he presents Faustus with the assertion that hell is not a place in the traditional sense – and therefore with a rather Protestant conception of the afterlife, which seems logical given the historical context of the play. The end of the play, in which hell suddenly gapes in front of Faustus, who is still on earth, also seems to confirm Mephistopheles’s claims that hell is not limited to a single place, despite Faustus’s refusal to believe it.

It could be argued that Mephistopheles, as a demon wishing to trick Faustus into damning himself, is probably lying, and that Faustus is right to question his statements. However, if Mephistopheles wanted to entice Faustus, he would most logically embellish the truth – making Hell appear not as terrible as it is, or minimising the consequences of Faustus’s deeds. The devil does not seem to have any interest in such lies, as can be seen in his descriptions of his sufferings in hell because he is deprived of bliss, as well as in his answer to Faustus’s dismissal of hell:

¹⁵⁶ A literal interpretation of Faustus’s dismissal would be that he refuses the idea of hell altogether. This idea, however, seems to contradict Faustus’s conjuration of a demon and his acceptance to strike a deal with it. It seems logical, therefore, to assume that Faustus’s denial of hell is a refusal of the demon’s definition, or of the traditional or mainstream interpretation of it.

¹⁵⁷ This statement seems confirmed later in the play, when the servants Rafe and Robin also conjure up Mephistopheles despite a failed ceremony (3.2). This conjuration will also be addressed in the third section of this chapter.

“Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind” (2.1.124). One could even argue that presenting Faustus with a truth in which he does not believe is a safe move from the devil, as he indirectly encourages him to maintain his erroneous beliefs, as Faustus probably knows that demons are typically liars. If the demon confirmed Faustus’s beliefs, he might be tempted to question them; his constant disagreement with him, on the contrary, encourages Faustus to never question his own wrong theology. Even though this claim might seem far-fetched, it provides a possible explanation as to why Mephistopheles does not present Faustus with a reassuring lie.

1.2. The root of all evil. On Faustus’s self-delusional materialism and literal interpretations¹⁵⁸

Faustus’s material interpretation of the afterlife seems to go together with a literal and material interpretation of his own body and soul. In his contract with the devil, Faustus mentions that he “give[s] both body and soul to Lucifer [...] and his ministers [...] and furthermore grant[s] unto/ them [...] full power to fetch or carry the said John/ Faustus’s body and soul, flesh and blood, or goods, into their/ habitation wheresoever” (2.1.103-108). Once again, Faustus insists on the geographical aspect of the afterlife (“wheresoever”) this time in contractual, legalistic terms; similarly, he insists that he gives the demon power not only over his soul, but also over his material goods and body – which he repeats afterwards, when the demon tells him that he is necessarily damned because he gave his soul to Lucifer: “Ay, and body too” (2.1.128), thus being more materialistic than the demon itself – thus seemingly contradicting the Christian view of the body as a mere habitat for the true essence of human beings surviving after death – the soul. Faustus therefore seems to consider that the afterlife is a truly physical place, where he will exist in his whole bodily form. Although Faustus, when mentioning Elysium, states that his “ghost will be with the old philosophers” (1.3.60; emphasis added), suggesting that he does not believe that his body will survive after his death, he does mention the possibility of “[w]alking, disputing” (2.1.135; emphasis added) in hell, thus seemingly emphasising how he believes that hell is “an extension or reproduction of the university where he currently resides”¹⁵⁹. This literality and materialism, as was earlier argued by Guenther¹⁶⁰, is found everywhere in Faustus’s attitude – not only in his attitude towards the afterlife. His fear of being physically hurt by the demons leads him to never seek true salvation;

¹⁵⁸ As has been mentioned, this part will partly draw on Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 46-70. However, this section will attempt to go further in the study of Faustus’s materialism.

¹⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁰ *Idem*, p. 57-58.

he dulls his fear of damnation by seeking shallow entertainment and assuring himself that the bodily protection of the demon will help him avoid the damnation of his soul (“When Mephistopheles shall stand by me,/ What God can hurt thee, Faustus? Thou art safe” (2.1.24-25)). Literal interpretations of the Scriptures lead Faustus to declare that “belike we must sin and consequently die” (1.1.45) instead of seeing how God’s mercy can save the fundamentally sinful human soul, and to dismiss theology as “[u]npleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile” (1.1.109)¹⁶¹. His material, immediate conception of time prevents him from planning the future, leading him to trade the eternal bliss of his soul in heaven for twenty-four years of material happiness. This immediacy is also seen in the ‘old man’ scene (5.1): Faustus recognises the wisdom of the words of the Christian old man begging him to repent but, as soon as Mephistopheles confronts him, he refuses repentance and accuses the old man of leading him astray. Finally, he only uses the infinite powers and knowledge provided by the contract with the devil to become a “practical joker [...] and [...] a pliant and servile court-entertainer”¹⁶².

This extreme materialism and literality, as will also be discussed later – especially in the part on predestination – is one of the main reasons for Faustus’s damnation, although not directly a mortal sin. This flaw of the protagonist is what leads him to desperation and the subsequent rejection of God and theology, as he cannot understand the necessity of divine grace and mercy. Whereas a rational, relative approach is necessary in Faustus’s scholarly education, his rejection of any non-material, non-literal interpretation leads him to his worse sins – pride and, most of all, despair – thus bringing about his damnation. Although not directly a sin, literality thus seems to be the root of all evil for Faustus, and could lead to a truly Protestant interpretation of the play. Literal and material interpretations, as mentioned in the historical and critical introduction, were widely criticised by Protestants as a form of Catholic deviation¹⁶³. Transubstantiation, for example, was a wide subject of criticism and mockery, as the idea that Christ’s body could be equalled with the Eucharistic bread¹⁶⁴ was deemed absurd¹⁶⁵; similarly, the cult of images and relics was considered dangerous and irreligious, as it was thought that

¹⁶¹ All these elements will also be reviewed in the following sections, hence the simple naming of the various elements in this part.

¹⁶² Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁶³ As also mentioned by Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 240-241. This statement must be nuanced, given the wide variation existing within Protestant movements. On this subject, see also Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 248-249; 289.

¹⁶⁴ To the point where the Eucharistic bread was sometimes considered as a true part of Christ’s body, or as Christ’s body ‘made bread’. On this point, Diarmaid MacCulloch describes the Catholic Eucharist as “a way to break down the barrier between the physical and the spiritual, between earth and heaven, death and life.”, which can obviously be linked to the notions of boundaries between the living and the dead – another reason for Protestants to oppose the traditional Catholic Eucharist. (*Idem*, p. 10).

¹⁶⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 240-241.

the adoration of images could lead to idolatry, in which the believer would forget the reality represented by the image or relic – the true Christian faith and message – and only adore the mean of conveying this message¹⁶⁶. In this perspective, Faustus's materialism could be deemed an extreme form of what some Protestant theologians mocked and criticised in Catholicism; as the play insists on Faustus's damnation, heresy, and sinful nature, the play would then convey an entirely Protestant message, possibly warning the audience against literal interpretations of the Scriptures, a too materialistic approach to life and religion; and offering a sharp criticism of Catholic mindset through the staging of a character caricaturing those literal approaches. In this perspective, Faustus would almost correspond to a Protestant caricature of the Catholic scholar or monk, who is unable to go beyond literal interpretations and falls into a coarse, materialistic existence, while generally remaining self-important – as will be analysed later – which would create a parallel between Faustus and the Catholic monks “[w]hose *summum bonum* is in belly cheer” (3.1.52; italics are original), on whom Faustus plays tricks in the third act. As the monks and Pope are presented as particularly mediocre characters, immediately fleeing in fear when confronted with what they call “some ghost, newly crept out of/ Purgatory” (3.2.73-74)¹⁶⁷, and framing their prayer to ban the spirit with references to their physical lives (“Cursèd be he that stole away his Holiness's meat from the/ table [...] Cursèd be he that took away his Holiness's wine” (3.2.89-90; 98)), this particularly ironical parallel would make Faustus appear all the more ridiculous and vain – especially as he apparently feels superior to the Catholic figures. This early interpretation, however, needs to be nuanced and completed by the analysis of other elements, as will be seen over the next sections. This early idea will especially be re-assessed in the fourth section of this chapter, where an alternative interpretation¹⁶⁸ of Faustus's materialism will be suggested in the context of his scholarly background.

Before expanding on the issue of materialism and self-delusion in the context of the predestination doctrine and critically addressing the elements presented above, however, it is necessary to study two further aspects of the afterlife represented in the play. In the next part, the question of Faustus's guilt will be studied through the analysis of the characters of the demons and the messengers from hell, in an attempt to determine to what extent the protagonist

¹⁶⁶ See also Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 248-252.

¹⁶⁷ Which makes those characters appear all the more mediocre – as ghosts from Purgatory were not supposed to be dangerous and should be easily dealt with by the Pope. The fact that the supposed supreme Head of the Catholic Church flees in fear and lets the monks deal with the supposed ghost ridicules the Pope – and by extension the whole Catholic Church – even further.

¹⁶⁸ Although not excluding this one.

is negatively influenced by hell; then, special emphasis will be put on the boundaries between the living and the dead, whether and how Faustus wants to cross those limits, as well as his sin of pride.

1.3. The demonic world

As both masters and messengers from hell, the part of the afterlife which is most central to the play, the demons are key characters in Faustus's downfall. They are the figures who lead the protagonist to heresy, and prevent his repentance when he is in doubt. Despite the fact that the demons are not the sole responsible for Faustus's damnation – although they clearly play a substantial part in it, Faustus himself, through his extremely self-delusional behaviour, also participates in his own downfall – they are nonetheless major figures of the afterlife in the play, therefore deserving a more thorough analysis.

Throughout the play, several devils attempt to influence the protagonist. Whereas Mephistopheles, because of his almost uninterrupted presence near Faustus, is clearly the most influential demonic figure, others – such as Lucifer or Beelzebub – also have a substantial, though indirect, role in the doctor's damnation. This short study will primarily concentrate on Mephistopheles's attitude and tricks – although the other demons' attitudes and speech will also be discussed later. Mephistopheles, as already mentioned, does not seem to deceive Faustus entirely – he tells the protagonist what seems to be the truth, as he does not try to embellish the reality of the afterlife by confirming Faustus's erroneous fantasy. When asked about Lucifer's motives, he openly admits that his sole aim is to “enlarge his kingdom” (2.1.39), once again not trying to please Faustus, nor encouraging the doctor's pride through flattery. Mephistopheles's appearance when first conjured up is not deceitful either – the demon does not assume the shape of a human being, nor does he try to hide his devilish nature. Once again, Mephistopheles seems to present Faustus with the true, terrible nature of hell; but the protagonist deliberately chooses to ignore it and asks Mephistopheles to assume the form of a monk instead (1.3.25)¹⁶⁹.

This, however, does not mean that Mephistopheles is entirely innocent, or that he does not negatively influence Faustus at all. From the very beginning, Mephistopheles attempts to stop Faustus from considering repentance. When the doctor realises that his contract with the devil might be an error¹⁷⁰, the demon decides to “fetch somewhat to delight [Faustus's] mind”

¹⁶⁹ Thus further mocking religion, especially Catholic religion. This, however, does not mean that Faustus defends Protestantism – despite freeing an alleged Protestant in the B-Text, which is only meant as another trick and a way to be recognised by the country's authorities. In his constant mockery of religion and Church, Faustus seems to remind the viewer of his rejection of God and theological laws, each time reasserting his apostasy.

¹⁷⁰ In the form of the inscription on his arm, encouraging him to flee: “But what is this inscription on my arm?/*Homo, fuge!* Whither should I fly?” (2.1.75-76). Whether the inscription is a sign from God or a trick from

(2.1.81). In the next lines, he conjures up a flamboyant show, displaying the enormous demonic power that, according to him, Faustus could master through the contract – causing the doctor to immediately forget his doubts and subsequently accept the deal. Later, when Faustus asks the demon to explain how the Earth was formed, Mephistopheles refuses, stating that talking of God is “against our kingdom” (2.3.69), and urging Faustus to not think of the divine; when this strategy does not work, the devil calls to Lucifer and Beelzebub to further impress Faustus, threaten him, and provide him with entertaining, yet unscholarly dumbshows. Shortly before the end of the play, when the old man almost manages to bring Faustus to repentance, Mephistopheles uses Faustus’s fear of bodily harm to force him back into sin and rejection of divine grace (“Thou traitor, Faustus, I arrest thy soul/ For disobedience to my sovereign Lord./ Revolt, or I’ll in piecemeal tear thy flesh” (5.1.66-68)). In spite of his apparent honesty and transparency, the demon thus systematically manages to stop Faustus from considering repentance, or even from thinking about God or heaven. Going further, one could state that Mephistopheles prevents Faustus from thinking of anything beyond immediate satisfaction and vain entertainment altogether. Immediately after Faustus signed the contract, as the protagonist asks for a wife, Mephistopheles manages to convince him of the benefits of lust instead of marriage (2.1.135-154); he uses shows to keep Faustus’s mind concentrated on pure entertainment. Instead of encouraging Faustus’s wish for greatness and scholarly pride¹⁷¹ – which could lead the doctor to realise his mistake through critical thinking¹⁷² – the demon subtly appeals to Faustus’s natural tendency to materialism and literality, thus bringing him further into heresy. This subtlety goes even further as the demon uses magnificent, though empty, theatrical entertainments as means to prove how powerful hell’s magic is, thus tricking Faustus into believing that his wish for divinity and infinite knowledge will be achieved through the contract, when in fact only providing him with illusions. Once again, the doctor mistakes appearance and form for meaning, enthusiastically accepting the shows as proof of the power that he will gain on the world – and on God – when, in fact, they are merely smoke and shadow play. Mephistopheles’s only apparent encouragement of Faustus’s wish for greatness and rebellion against God (“And then be thou as great as Lucifer” (2.1.52)) is therefore not contradictory to that interpretation: the demon only appeals to the protagonist’s pride in order

Faustus’s conscience is left ambiguous. The latter is hinted at (“My senses are deceived; there’s nothing writ” (2.1.78)), but as the inscription later reappears, the former cannot be entirely written off.

¹⁷¹ For instance through serious disputations on the cosmos and afterlife.

¹⁷² Which is emphasised in 2.1, when Faustus and Mephistopheles discuss the afterlife. When Mephistopheles argues that heaven cannot be greater than human beings because it was made for them (2.1.8-9), Faustus shortly realises the emptiness of this argument, before being taken in again by Lucifer’s and Beelzebub’s conjuration, as well as the apparition of the personified seven deadly sins.

to convince him to forget his doubts and sign the contract, before further encouraging him to relish in vain shows while believing he is achieving greatness.

The result of this clever strategy can be seen in the third and fourth acts. Whereas Faustus, before striking the deal, was “[e]xcelling all whose sweet delight disputes/ In heavenly matters of theology” (Prologue, 18-19), he becomes, as also noted by García, a “practical joker who plays tricks on the Pope”¹⁷³, a “passive poor devil”¹⁷⁴ who “tak[es] refuge in an escapist hedonism which, eventually, ruins his overreaching figure”¹⁷⁵ in the next acts. Under the influence of the demon, the scholar conjures up meaningless shows for powerful rulers, in order to gain their favours and be materially advantaged; he plays base, mean tricks childishly mocking religious figures, but also taking advantage of poorer, less educated people¹⁷⁶; he uses his powers for bawdy purposes in students’ parties – all the while believing he is still acting like a scholar, as the use of the words “conference/ about fair ladies” (5.1.9-10)¹⁷⁷ to describe the indecent jokes of bachelors at parties seems to indicate. In short, Faustus, partly because of the demon’s influence, does not realise the devil’s primary aim at all. Instead of becoming a figure of rebellion against what he considered the unfair laws of God, Faustus regresses to a base figure, while generally maintaining his high opinion of himself. It is notable that this attitude seems particularly well illustrated in the partying scene mentioned above (5.1.9-35), where Faustus comes back from a banquet with fellow scholars: the scholars, who apparently partied in their closed group of educated people – as suggested by Wagner (5.1.3-8) – seem to believe in the superiority of their discussion, although they obviously only joked about women. This illusion of grandeur and misplaced pride seem to fully illustrate Faustus’s behaviour during the whole play. Interestingly, the scholars are probably drunk – this state of reduced consciousness interestingly seems to mirror Faustus’s behaviour during the play, as his conscience is repeatedly dulled by illusions, as if drunk.

Faustus’s regression is even more emphasised through the characters of Rafe and Robin, the uneducated and mean servants who attempt to conjure up Mephistopheles (3.2). The servants manage to conjure up the demon with fake Latin and a mockery of a ceremony

¹⁷³ Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ The trick played on the horse-courser, through which Faustus manages to gain money, emphasises the doctor’s baseness. Instead of using his powers to bring justice around him, he mocks less educated people and flatters powerful ones – although he does not need their favours, as his power can provide him with any material satisfaction, including the overthrowing of rulers.

¹⁷⁷ Although this phrase is used by another scholar, it seems to properly illustrate the pride and illusion of grandeur depicted by Faustus during the play. The possibility that this phrase might be used ironically seems very unlikely given the context of the return from a party between so-called educated people.

(“*Sanctobulorum Periphrasticon [...] Polypragmos Belseborams framanto paracostiphos tostu Mephistopheles [...]*” (3.2.25-28; italics are original)), then immediately regret it out of fear for their souls and salvation, and pray the demon to go away. This further emphasises how little Faustus achieved by conjuring up Mephistopheles – as a fake ceremony is enough to summon him, which incidentally confirms his statement that he came of his own accord – as well as how vain Faustus’s illusion of power and his self-important behaviour are. As opposed to the uneducated servants, he is unable to recognise his mistake and seek forgiveness – which seems to indicate that he has regressed below the level of the mean servants who likewise played tricks and sought power on others (1.4; 2.2).

This whole analysis shows that Mephistopheles, despite not using ‘traditional’ methods to deceive the protagonist – such as pretending to be the ghost of a departed loved one, or using reassuring lies to entice him – still corresponds to the Protestant idea of demons using disguise and clever tricks to damn the souls of their victims. Instead of using a physical disguise – except on Faustus’s demand – Mephistopheles uses a psychological one, using the protagonist’s literalism and materialism to trick him into believing that the contract enables him to achieve greatness, while making him fall into baseness. Physical disguises do not work on Faustus – as he states when summoning the ghostly illusion of Alexander:

[...] [I]t is not in my ability to
 present before your eyes the true substantial bodies of those
 two deceased princes [...]
 But such spirits as can lively resemble Alexander and
 his paramour shall appear before your Grace
 (4.1.45-47; 51-52)

Because of this, the demon chooses another approach, corresponding to Faustus’s weakness. The demon sets a frightening trap for the protagonist; Faustus, because of his dramatically flawed nature, falls into it. However, the demon’s cruel approach is probably not to be seen as an excuse for Faustus’s lack of critical thinking. The trap seems specifically set to test Faustus’s resistance to wickedness, and the fact that he falls right into it is indicative of the doctor’s apostasy. The demon’s efficient trap, specifically adapted to the victim’s weakness, is strongly remindful of the very Protestant idea of predestination – which will be analysed in detail below – according to which human faith can be tested by demons under the reins of God.

Before turning to predestination, however, a short part will be dedicated to the notion of the boundaries of the afterlife, which will expand on some of the issues introduced in this section. The already mentioned issue of the boundaries of the afterlife is strongly linked to Faustus’s pride and wish for divinity, and can also provide another reading of the interactions between the demon and the protagonist.

2. Boundaries of the afterlife

2.1. On the representation of boundaries in the play

Before considering Faustus's views on the boundaries between life and the afterlife, and whether he tries to cross them, one needs to briefly analyse the nature of those boundaries, and how they seem to be represented in the play. Given the Protestant context in which *Doctor Faustus* was written, the worlds of the living and the dead should be represented as entirely separated, without any possible interaction between both. In this respect, some lines in the play might come as a surprise. The conjurations of the ghosts of Alexander and his Paramour, or that of Helen of Troy, seem for example to obviously contradict the Protestant view on the afterlife. In both cases, the ghosts of deceased beings are summoned back to earth, thus explicitly crossing the supposedly closed boundaries between both worlds. In the case of Alexander, as mentioned in the previous part, Faustus admits that the ghosts of Alexander and his mistress are mere illusions, not reanimated corpses. Although the fascinated emperor believes that "these are not spirits, but the true substantial/ bodies of those two deceased princes" (4.1.69-70), the ghosts are probably nothing more than demons in disguise, which were thought the only possible apparitions of so-called ghosts in the Protestant system¹⁷⁸. This is most logically also the case for Helen, whose ghost Faustus conjures up in order to show her beauty to his fellow scholars, and whom Mephistopheles later summons again to bring Faustus back to sin. As the apparition is summoned mainly for sinful purposes, it seems logical that the spirit should be a demon in disguise, rather than the actual ghost of the long deceased woman. These apparitions, therefore, do not seem to contradict the aforementioned Protestant view of the living world and the afterlife as separated entities, and cannot be considered as real counterexamples.

Although the apparitions are probably demons in disguise, they are nonetheless summoned with the intention of crossing the limits of the afterlife – thus to break the rule of the strict separation between the living and the dead. The fact that Faustus – the one who directly asks for the conjuring, or summons the fake ghosts himself – is ultimately damned seems to indicate that this attempt to cross the boundaries of the afterlife is inherently sinful, although the crossing of boundaries is obviously not the only reason for this damnation. However, Faustus is not the only one to rejoice in the sinful conjuration. It must be noted that the scholars who ask for Helen's conjuration, as well as the emperor who wishes to see Alexander, attempt

¹⁷⁸ The B-Text offers a much less explicit explanation for this issue. In the B-Text, Faustus does not mention that the ghosts are spirits and not reanimated corpses; when the emperor attempts to touch the ghosts, Faustus warns him that "these are but shadows, not substantial" (4.1.101). Although this warning seems to indicate that the ghosts are mere illusions or demons in disguise as well, it is nonetheless far less explicitly stated than in the A-Text, as real 'ghosts' can also be represented as not having any physical substance.

to transgress this limit as well. This, in addition to reminding the viewer of how easy it is to be fooled and driven to sin or heresy by entertaining shows, might point to a larger criticism – or mockery – of both scholars and secular authority, which has already been hinted at in the previous section. The former’s potentially dangerous wish to experiment everything in the name of science, as well as both classes’ possible feeling of superiority leading to disrespect the laws, might be indirectly mocked or criticised here – although this assertion would need further research, which cannot be undertaken in this particular study.

Regarding Mephistopheles’s discourse on the afterlife and status of hell, one could point to another apparent contradiction with the idea of life and the afterlife as entirely separated entities. As discussed in the previous section, Mephistopheles states that hell “hath no limits, nor is circumscribed/ in one self place” (2.1.117-118), and that hell is where the demons are. On the surface, this statement can appear to contradict the idea that there are strict, impassable limits between life and the afterlife – as one possible afterlife is seen as existing potentially everywhere, including among the living, as long as demons and suffering are present. However, one needs to remember that hell, in the Protestant conception – and apparently in the play – was not considered a physical place limited by material frontiers. Although it is not entirely possible to determine whether hell is seen as a non-physical, allegorical place, or as a state of mental suffering for tormented souls, it seems clear that the boundaries between life and the afterlife are not physical entities in the play. Instead, they are most probably allegorical limitations, relative to the impossibility of communication between living and dead souls. The statement that hell “hath no limits”, therefore, does not mean that both worlds can meet in any way, rather that Faustus should not interpret hell as a physical place with material boundaries, but as an allegorical place or a state of suffering.

2.2. Striving for the divine: on Faustus’s pride

From the beginning of the play, the wish of Faustus to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead is obvious. The prologue, when announcing that Faustus, in the course of the play, falls into the trap of using magic “[w]hich he prefers before his chiefest bliss” (27) because of his pride, already mentions that “[Faustus] surfeits upon cursèd necromancy” (25). This very specific example of the magical art of communicating with the dead seems to put the crossing of boundaries between both worlds at the centre of Faustus’s heresy, thus expressing, from the very beginning of the play, how central the issue of the afterlife is to Faustus’s damnation. In his first soliloquy, Faustus seems to already confirm this wish to cross boundaries in the expression of a craving for immortality. He first admits that he would like his name to be

remembered: “Be a physician, Faustus: heap up gold/ And be *eternized* for some wondrous cure” (1.1.14-15; emphasis added). This choice of word is particularly revealing. In addition to expressing Faustus’s wish for earthly recognition, it already emphasises the doctor’s fear of disappearance¹⁷⁹, which later leads him to postulate an eternal physical existence in an Elysian hell, thus denying the divine promise of eternal life and revelling in apostasy. In the next lines, he brings this wish for earthly immortality and his fear of disappearance further:

Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man.
Wouldst thou make men to live eternally
Or, being dead, raise them to life again,
Then this profession were to be esteemed.

(1.1.23-26)

In the exposition of his quest for earthly recognition and esteem from his peers, the doctor chooses a particularly topical example, further revealing his apparent obsession with immortality. In this particular example, the wish to cross the boundaries between life and the afterlife – through the achievement of immortality – becomes obvious, as the protagonist openly admits that he would like to be able to bring corpses back to life and therefore interact with formerly dead beings. In addition to depicting the protagonist’s open rebellion against a system which does not see the interaction between the living and the dead as possible, let alone desirable, the doctor already emphasises his fascination for the body and material part of life – as he expresses the wish to reanimate dead bodies, not only bring back dead souls in a ghostly form – thus making this soliloquy an early and obvious sign of apostasy. This also sheds new light on Faustus’s insistence on considering hell as a physical place, where he could exist in a bodily form. The insistence on bodily existence seems to come from Faustus’s fear of disappearance, or what Michael Neill called his “anxiety of ending”¹⁸⁰, and, as stated by Guenther, his fear of alienation in salvation¹⁸¹ – as he would not exist as an individual anymore – leading him to want the eternal prolongation of earthly life. In these lines, Faustus expresses his wish to make death disappear altogether, making the necessary journey between this world and the next avoidable. The fundamentally heretical nature of this wish does not need to be explained further.

Through the expression of his heretical ambition, Faustus already shows how dangerous his pride is. In his wish to go further in learning and knowledge, the protagonist consciously

¹⁷⁹ Fear of disappearance, incidentally, was also what led Thomas More’s ghosts to come back from the dead in a ghostly form and ask for almsgiving (see Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 254). This wish to stay on earth, even though he should rejoice in eternal bliss after death and be happy to sever the bond between earth and heaven, possibly refers to a Catholic intertextuality.

¹⁸⁰ Michael Neill, “Anxieties of Ending”, in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 332-336.

¹⁸¹ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

attempts to become God's equal, or even to surpass Him, in a curious re-acting of Lucifer's "aspiring pride and insolence"¹⁸² (1.3.67). Whereas Valdes, one of the magicians who negatively influence Faustus in the beginning of the play, only goes as far into blasphemy as to postulate that he would "make all nations to canonize" him (1.1.120)¹⁸³, which is even more of a blasphemy as saints are not recognised in the Protestant system, Faustus almost explicitly expresses that he wants to be God's equal, not merely a saint. The denial of divine laws because of their supposed lack of justice¹⁸⁴ is only part of this process – the rejection of God starts earlier than this conscious and explicit denial. In his soliloquy on medicine, the doctor already states that he is "but Faustus, and a man" (1.1.23), indicating his ambition of rising above humanity and reaching a divine-like state. In the next lines, he confirms this bold statement by proclaiming himself master of death – possibly the most fundamentally divine role. The wish to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, in this perspective, is one of the logical consequences of this immoderate, irrationally proud desire of the scholar to gain divine status. In a scholarly rewriting of Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit, Faustus attempts, through his education and knowledge, to cross the boundaries between human and divine; the mastery over death and crossing of boundaries between earth – a human place – and hell – a divine one – is only a logical part of this scheme. However, Faustus's materialism and fear of alienation leads him to a nihilistic perspective, in which only the human, bodily world would exist. This further proves the inadequacy of the doctor's pride, as well as his fundamental heresy, even though he is not under the influence of demons yet; furthermore, this, once again, seems to point to a very ironical, even grotesque caricature of the Catholic belief in the possible interaction between the living and the dead. The Catholic wish to interact with the dead and be able to have an influence on them – realised through almsgiving and prayers for the departed, supposedly helping them to reach salvation earlier and shorten their term in Purgatory¹⁸⁵ – seems to be turned into a fully heretical wish to equal the divine by raising the dead again, thus apparently offering, once again, a strong caricature and criticism of so-called Catholic exaggerations. Finally, this inadequate pride seems, as has been noted in the first section, to partly criticise scholastic pride, which, in the attempt to understand everything through science

¹⁸² Which once again emphasises Faustus's self-delusional behaviour, as this line seems a further warning from Mephistopheles. This parallel was also noted by John D. Cox, "The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama" [Extract], in David S. Kastan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 257-258.

¹⁸³ Although his insistence that Cornelius, Faustus, and him work together as one despite being three different beings ("So shall the subjects of every element/ Be always serviceable to us three" (1.1.122-123)) could be read as an attempt to recreate the Holy Trinity, which would be a much more serious form of heresy.

¹⁸⁴ Which, as stated above, comes from an erroneous, too literal reading of the Scriptures.

¹⁸⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 17-21.

and logic, can easily fall down into the trap of heresy – when scholars attempt to go beyond their human status and enter the divine realm.

Ironically, Faustus later manages to raise the dead again, in the form of ghostly apparitions, as has been indicated in the previous section. Once again, however, this achievement is merely an illusion, although it is praised by the human assistance. Faustus's initial wish for divinity and aspiration to universal knowledge is once again turned into smoke play, an illusion of power with no absolute value or meaning, which Faustus generally seems to mistake for absolute, divine power, as he seems to maintain a positive opinion of himself, his situation, and his craft – even when he uses this so-called divine power to trick less educated, poorer people. Despite the recognition of his power's limits when he admits that he cannot conjure up the true souls of Alexander, Faustus once again seems to hold to a misplaced and fundamentally heretical pride in his own abilities. This only provides further evidence of the doctor's inability to see the difference between form and meaning, relative and absolute values; it once again emphasises Faustus's downfall from a great scholar to a materialistic, unquestioning prankster.

2.3. Demonic deception

As previously mentioned, Mephistopheles does not try to deceive Faustus through lies on the nature of the afterlife, nor attempts to bring him to cross the limits of hell¹⁸⁶. Mephistopheles, however, is not the only demon trying to influence the doctor in the course of the play. In the first act, when Faustus is on the verge of repenting, Mephistopheles calls to Lucifer and Beelzebub in order to threaten the doctor, and convince him not to break the contract. As Faustus renounces repentance, the demon conjures up the embodied seven deadly sins, creating a dumbshow which “fills [Faustus's] soul”¹⁸⁷ (2.3.161). The subsequent dialogue is of particular interest.

LUCIFER Tut, Faustus, in hell is all manner of delight.
FAUSTUS O, might I see hell and return again, how happy
were I then!
LUCIFER Thou shalt; I will send for thee at midnight.
(2.3.162-165)

In these few lines, one can already see that Lucifer's manipulation strategy is not the same as Mephistopheles's. The devil seems to adopt a more traditional strategy, through which he claims

¹⁸⁶ Although he does conjure up the ghosts of Helen and Alexander, he does it when Faustus demands it, and does not particularly encourage it.

¹⁸⁷ The choice of words is particularly interesting and ironical. The dumbshow, as previously argued, is entertaining, yet meaningless. The ‘feeding of the soul’ seems to imply a deeper meaning or knowledge which the light play obviously lacks. This seems like another example of Faustus's confusion of form and meaning, of material and allegorical, or of relative and absolute values.

that hell is a nicer place than it is. Although this strategy seems less subtle than that of Mephistopheles, the doctor seems to believe it without any doubt. This might be explained by the fact that Lucifer is only confirming what Faustus already thought of hell – although it is contradictory with Mephistopheles's interpretation. In addition to this, the doctor is impressed by the terrible appearance of the demon ("O, what art thou that look'st so terrible?" (2.3.83)) and has been greatly amused by the show, which possibly dulls his critical mind; finally, as he already signed the contract and is therefore under the influence of Mephistopheles, Faustus is probably already losing his critical thinking.

The argument that "in hell is all manner of delight" (2.3.162) is almost already an invitation to cross the boundaries between life and the afterlife, although the expression of that wish comes from Faustus himself. Faustus's answer confirms that he is willing to commit that sin – which is not surprising, as the doctor already repudiated God's authority; but, given his previous attempt at repentance, this further shows Faustus's inconsistency. Despite Lucifer's promise, Faustus's visitation of hell is not staged in the play. However, one can assume that the visit – if it takes place – is a mere illusion, a flattering presentation of what Faustus expects to see, rather than an actual overview of hell. Although it could be stated that this illusion is probably not hell, which means that Faustus does not effectively cross the boundaries, his firm intention to do so is already sinful by nature – as was the attempt at conjuring up ghostly apparitions, as well as the wish to bring dead corpses back to life.

3. Predestination and the impossibility of repentance

As briefly mentioned in the critical introduction, predestination is one of the main aspects of the Protestant doctrine which can be found in *Doctor Faustus*. The doctrine of prewritten fate seems to permeate the whole play – from Faustus's early signs of rebellion to his last, desperate soliloquy. Although this has been more than often mentioned in the different critical analyses of the play, a systematic study of the elements linked to the doctrine of predestination in the play seems to lack in most approaches. Before turning to a further critical assessment of some of the elements of the afterlife found in the play, this part will thus attempt to address this problem by focusing on the different aspects of predestination which can be found in the play – namely fatality, sins, and repentance. Some early signs of Faustus's damnation – even though he has not signed the contract yet – will be analysed; then, Faustus's attempts at repentance will be studied, as well as the reasons why they are ineffective. Particular emphasis will be put on the sin of despair as one of the main dangers of the doctrine of predestination.

3.1. Early signs of apostasy in the play

The theme of predestination is less obvious or explicit in the first part of the play than is that of Faustus's sin of pride, or of his wish for immortality and therefore crossing of boundaries between the living and the dead. The prologue does not seem to refer to any form of prewritten and unchangeable fate for Faustus – rather, it seems to emphasise the doctor's responsibility in his own damnation:

Till swoll'n with cunning, of a self-conceit,
His waxen wing did mount above his reach
[...] Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss.
(1.1.20-21; 26-27)

Only two elements can be identified as potentially referring to predestination. On the one hand, the use of the words “fortunes, good or bad” (8) possibly refers to fate in the form of the changing wheel of fortune in the Latin sense of “fortuna”¹⁸⁸, although it may also refer to sheer luck. On the other hand, the phrase “[a]nd melting heavens conspired his overthrow” (22) probably refers to Faustus's predetermined negative fate, although the phrase could indicate that he was not destined for hell from before his birth, but from the moment when he struck the deal with the devil and used magic.

Although it becomes clear in later stages of the play – namely the conjuration of and contract with the devil – that Faustus is damned, the definition of predestination offered in the historical background suggests that Faustus should at least depict a tendency to apostasy from the beginning of the play, for example through a negative mindset towards religion. Although it may not appear obvious at first, such early signs can be identified from the first lines of Faustus's initial soliloquy, when Faustus discusses the Scriptures:

[Reads.] “*Stipendium peccati mors est.*” Ha!
Stipendium, etc. The reward of sin is death. That's hard.
[Reads.] “*Si peccasse negamus, fallimur,*
Et nulla est in nobis veritas.”
If we say we have no sin
We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.
Why, then, belike we must sin and so consequently die.
Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
(1.1.39-46)

In these few lines, what can possibly be deemed as Faustus's worst sin – even more serious, and crueller than pride – as well as one of the main characteristics of the apostate according to

¹⁸⁸ “Fortuna”, in: Félix Gaffiot (Ed.), *Le Grand Gaffiot. Dictionnaire Latin-Français*, éd. revue et augmentée sous la dir. de Pierre Flobert, Paris, Hachette, 2000, p. 689; also mentioned in the English definition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) (see <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73751?rskey=3E4eu2&result=1#eid>, retrieved on 10. July 2017).

the doctrine of predestination, can be identified – despair. Despair is an important aspect of the deadly sin of sloth¹⁸⁹. In the analysis of the historical background, it has been identified as the inability to recognise God’s grace and its necessity to the salvation of human souls; or the inability to mentally include oneself into the community of the chosen ones and apply the principle of God’s forgiveness to oneself, despite the theoretical understanding and recognition of its necessity. This mental exclusion from salvation is exactly what seems to happen to Faustus in the named extract – he understands the rules presented in the Scriptures, the inevitability of sin, and the fact that sin leads to death and damnation; but he is unable to understand the role of God’s grace, and His forgiveness of sins leading to salvation, in this scheme – although it is central to the understanding of the Scriptures. Once again, Faustus’s materialism and literal interpretations is the root of all his evils: as he is unable to read beyond the Bible’s literal words, he cannot understand the absolute, allegorical meaning of the Scripture, and therefore misses the point of the extract. In these few lines, Faustus does not mention God’s grace at all – as though he has already excluded himself from it. This self-exclusion from heavenly grace due to despair is confirmed in Faustus’s subsequent explicit rejection of theology (“Divinity, adieu”) and turning to magic¹⁹⁰, through which he effectively renounces God, religion, and salvation altogether – even though he has not even mentioned the possibility of summoning a demon: “Why doctrine call you this? *Che serà, serà?*/ What will be, shall be? Divinity, adieu! [*Puts down Bible*]/ [*Picks up book of magic*] These metaphysics of magicians/ And necromantic books are heavenly [...]” (1.1.47-50)

This rejection of God and theology obviously culminates in the contract scene, in which Faustus explicitly proclaims his apostasy (“Valeat numen triplex/ Jehovae” (1.3.16-17))¹⁹¹; however, other signs of despair can be found before the conjuration – including, for example, the description of theology as “[u]npleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile” (1.1.109). This definition, coupled with Faustus’s determination to turn to magic (“Valdes, as resolute am I in this [practicing magic]/ As thou to live [...]” (1.1.134-135)), seems to confirm that Faustus’s heart is hardened in both possible ways expressed by Calvin. His power “to see, obey, and do rightly”¹⁹² is taken away, so that he has lost his critical mind, making him unable to see that

¹⁸⁹ Stanford M. Lyman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil*, 2nd publ., Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1989, p. 6; 9.

¹⁹⁰ Going further into heresy as he calls it “heavenly”.

¹⁹¹ The ceremonial tone of which has been analysed as a further sign of Faustus’s materialism and literality, as he is convinced that his words created his apostasy, even though he was an apostate long before; just like he believed that his conjuration was efficient. (Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 48). Guenther notes that this tendency to give importance to ceremonial words and gesture is linked with a much more Catholic approach to religion.

¹⁹² John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

magic can only lead him to suffering¹⁹³, and making him unable to interpret the Scriptures properly or see the truth of God's words, despite his Protestant education and status as a recognised scholar. In addition to this, Faustus's obsession with practising magic seems to correspond to the hardening of negative or heretical will in apostates suggested by Calvin ("[God] stirreth up their wills, and strengtheneth their endeavors"¹⁹⁴, so that "because it was God's will to have [them] destroyed, the making of [their] heart obstinate was God's preparation for [their] destruction"¹⁹⁵).

These elements show how the play, despite neither explicitly stating in the prologue that Faustus is damned from the beginning, nor that desperation is one of the main reasons for his damnation, subtly introduces several hints which, when compared with the theoretical writings on predestination, seem to point to Faustus as being almost a textbook case of the damned apostate unable to see the wrong in his deeds or thoughts. In the next section, further signs of Faustus's apostasy will be studied, especially his attempts at repentance – which, according to the theory on predestination, should not be successful, as apostates, because of their hardened heart, are unable to truly repent. In this section, the attempted positive influence of other characters – namely the old man, as well as the scholars in the last scene – will also be addressed.

3.2. "I do repent, yet I do despair": drowning further into heresy

3.2.1. First hesitations

Despite the fact that apostates are supposedly unable to consider repentance, several scenes stage a doubtful Faustus, realising his mistakes and attempting to turn back to God, or trying to renounce his sinful ways – those scenes are often linked with a staging of the Good and Bad Angels, which will be discussed over the next sections. In the first lines of the second act, for example, Faustus, who has already conjured up Mephistopheles but has not signed the contract yet, is shown hesitating between consciously going further into sin or turning back to heaven:

Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned
And canst thou not be saved.
What boots it then to think of God or heaven?
Away with such vain fancies and despair.
Despair in God and trust in Beelzebub.
[...] Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.

¹⁹³ Later in the play, this will lead him to interpret Hell as a place and the equivalent of Elysium. The misinterpretation of the scriptures and self-delusion, which has been referred to in the study of the nature of the afterlife, can be read as part of Faustus's destiny and hardened heart.

¹⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

¹⁹⁵ *Idem*, p. 239.

To God? He loves thee not.

(2.1.1-5; 9-10)

This scene presents Faustus's first doubts towards his enterprise, although the wish to repent is not yet as strong as it becomes in the next acts. This first manifestation of Faustus's doubts, however, announces what is to follow every time the doctor is seized by doubt and contrition: the doubtful moment does not last, and he is once again brought to desperation ("Despair in God") and effectively excludes himself from salvation by refusing to see God's mercy ("He loves thee not"). The link between this inability to repent and the theory of predestination becomes clearer in the third scene of the second act:

[FAUSTUS] Be I a devil, yet God may pity me;
Ay, God will pity me, if I repent.
EVIL ANGEL Ay, but Faustus never shall repent. [...]
FAUSTUS My heart's so *hardened* I cannot repent.
[...] But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
"Faustus, thou art damned" [...]

(2.3.15-21; emphasis added)

In the rest of the play, the Evil Angel – which can be interpreted as a pseudo-divine messenger, although its nature can be discussed – tries to trick Faustus into turning away from repentance through arguments appealing to his pride or feeling of despair; he does not generally present Faustus with such definite statements. This assertion, in this context, seems to indicate that the Evil Angel knows that Faustus is unable to repent, which prefigures his damnation – although this assertion also contributes to Faustus's desperation. The term "hardened" also strongly echoes Calvin's theory of predestination, in which God hardens the heart of those destined to hell¹⁹⁶; Faustus, once again, seems to wholly correspond to the image of the damned soul, although he does try to repent.

3.2.2. Trying to wake Faustus's conscience: on the old man scene

The penultimate scene of the play seems particularly interesting in the study of Faustus's inability to repent – because it once again emphasises the protagonist's tendency to despair and the inadequacy of his mindset, but also because it provides a further illustration of his already mentioned materialism and how it is used by demons to further drag him into apostasy.

Because of the numerous allusions to Faustus's damnation and echoes of Protestant theories on the afterlife and predestination in the course of the play, which have been mentioned in the previous parts, the viewer – at least the Protestant viewer, most probably the target watcher of the play – has normally already understood that Faustus is not, by nature, able to repent. The old man scene might therefore seem pointlessly cruel, presenting the protagonist

¹⁹⁶ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

with a possibility that he will never be able to reach. However, this particular scene very efficiently presents the inadequacy of Faustus's responses to the positive influence of the old man – as well as to the negative influence of the demons, further emphasising his “hardened heart”, his downfall from a scholar to a vain soul lacking critical thinking, and his extreme materialism. In other words, this scene highlights how Faustus's giving in to the faulty tendencies of his mind – pride, despair, and materialism – has brought him into the circle of vices, which potentially offers a warning to the public. The old man, an exemplary virtuous human soul, is not there to present Faustus with an alternative which he knows that the protagonist cannot have, but to genuinely attempt to bring him to grace. This seems to correspond to Perkin's assertion whereby it is impossible for mankind to truly know whether someone is destined to salvation or damnation¹⁹⁷. According to Perkins, a man can be saved if he truly and honestly repents, even though he might have relished in sin during his life, and an apparently virtuous person can be inherently alienated from God's grace and lacking thankfulness towards the divine¹⁹⁸. The old man, not knowing of Faustus's fate – as opposed to the viewer – is therefore fulfilling his Christian duty by truly attempting to awake the protagonist's conscience, and help him to see the truth by giving him hope. (“Ah, Doctor Faustus, that I might prevail/ To guide thy steps unto the way of life,/ [...] That shall conduct thee to celestial rest” (5.1.35-36; 38); “I see an angel hovers o'er thy head/ And with a vial full of precious grace/ Offers to pour the same into thy soul./ Then call for mercy and avoid despair” (5.1.53-56)). When confronted with the old man's words, Faustus does seem to realise his mistakes, and to understand that he is in need of repentance. However, when trying to ponder on his sins, he “repent[s], and yet [...] despair[s]” (5.1.63), wondering “[w]hat [he] shall [...] do to shun the snares of death” (5.1.65) – once again showing that, despite his attempts, he cannot consider repentance out of true regret and thankfulness towards God, but out of fear of damnation. Faustus, in other words “mourn[s] that is taken from [him]”¹⁹⁹ – salvation and eternal bliss – rather than truly realise his mistakes and seek repentance.

In addition to this, Faustus's efforts to repent do not last more than seven lines. As soon as the old man leaves the stage, Mephistopheles threatens the protagonist to “in piecemeal tear [his] flesh” (5.1.68) because of his “disobedience to [his] sovereign Lord [Satan]” (5.1.67), which scares the doctor away from his attempt to repent; when Faustus asks the demon to torment the old man, however, he answers that “[He] cannot touch his soul./ [...] [W]hat [he]

¹⁹⁷ William Perkins, *Op. Cit.*, p. 251-252.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 239.

may afflict his body with/[...] is but little worth” (5.1.78-80). This dialogue once again emphasises Faustus’s materialism, his lack of critical thinking, and how Mephistopheles takes advantage of it in order to trick him – as has been indicated in the first section. Despite the demon openly admitting that his physical powers cannot hurt the virtuous human soul – as also expressed in Calvin’s *Institution of the Christian religion*²⁰⁰ – which clearly means that Faustus could not be hurt if he repented, Faustus is frightened by the demon’s threat to physically hurt him.

Materialism preventing Faustus from seeking true repentance can be seen in two further extracts, although less strikingly. When faced with his own doubting conscience in the second and fourth acts, Faustus attempts to reassure himself through a self-delusional dulling of his guilt: “When Mephistopheles shall stand by me,/ What god can hurt thee, Faustus? Thou art safe” (2.1.24-25); “Despair doth drive distrust unto my thoughts./ Confound these passions with a quiet sleep./ Tush, Christ did call the thief upon the cross” (4.1.134-136). Although both examples call to a different mechanism, both seem to once again prove Faustus’s material and literal approach to life. In the first extract, Faustus reassures himself through the mention of demonic protection, although he most likely knows that the only protection that the devil can offer him is physical, whereas only his soul is at risk in the afterlife. The second extract seems to exemplify, albeit less obviously, Faustus’s material, immediate conception of time²⁰¹, which prevents him from truly contemplating his own future and the peril of his soul.

3.2.3. The final scene

In the final scene, Faustus finally reveals his contract with the devil to his fellow scholars, who advise him to ask for God’s forgiveness. This time, Faustus’s response has changed: he now states that it is too late, and that his “offence can ne’er be pardoned” (5.2.15). Incidentally, this highlights the paradox of predestination: it has always been too late, as Faustus was destined to never repent; but he also makes it true by believing it. Faustus now falls into self-loathing and probably unfeigned regret, realising his mistakes and foolishness (“For vain pleasure of twenty four years hath Faustus lost eter-/ nal joy and felicity” (5.2.39-40)). Despite this, the doctor, because of his “hardened heart”, is still unable to truly repent (“[...] I would/ weep, but the devil draws in my tears. [...] O, he stays my tongue! I/ would lift up my hands, but see, they hold them [...]!” (5.2.29-32)). Despite his regrets, the protagonist remains self-

²⁰⁰ According to which demons are bridled by God and cannot hurt the chosen ones. See *Idem*, p. 238.

²⁰¹ In which Faustus seems to consider that time can be reduced to the present only, in an almost animal fashion. This epicurean conception is also what leads Faustus to trade eternal bliss for earthly pleasure, as has been mentioned – Faustus is unable to plan ahead and, therefore, vaguely feels that he still has time to repent.

centred; he does not turn to God, nor does he truly ask for forgiveness – he bargains (“[...] or let this hour be but/ A year, a month, a week, a natural day,/ That Faustus may repent and save his soul” (5.2.67-69)); he supplicates (“[...] rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!/ [...] O, spare me, Lucifer!” (5.2.76-77)); and he laments (“Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul? Or why is this immortal that thou hast? (5.2.98-99)), but remains centred on his fear of being damned, and truly despairs rather than turn to God in the hope of being forgiven. It is striking that, despite the length and wordiness of his last soliloquy, Faustus does not once mention the grace of God, only His wrath.

It is tempting to wonder whether Faustus, given more time, would have truly repented and finally turned to God – as he seems on the verge of realising his mistakes before he dies. However, two elements suggest that it is highly improbable. Firstly, the omnipresence of the doctrine of predestination in the play suggests that Faustus would never have repented, either because he is entirely unable to turn to God, or because his prewritten fate, which suggests that his date of death was planned and unchangeable, makes it impossible that he would have been given more time altogether. Secondly, the protagonist’s regrets seem to be triggered by fear, and by the proximity of his imminent death; even then, his response is inadequate. Given more time, Faustus would probably only have further dulled his conscience through shallow material considerations, and would have failed to turn to God in any case.

4. Critical assessment of the elements found in the play: possible subversions or criticisms

In this last section, the elements identified in the previous parts will be critically addressed, in order to see whether they can be deemed subversive. This last part will first focus particularly on the good and bad angels, in an attempt to understand their meaning in the context of a providence leading the entire lives of human beings, as well as their subversive potential; then, an alternative view on Faustus’s materialism will be studied, in order to identify a possible – although not confirmed – criticism of humanism and possibly Protestant education.

4.1. The case of the Good and Bad Angels

Section 1.3. has largely demonstrated the omnipresence of the doctrine of predestination and the message of Faustus’s prewritten damnation throughout the play. Given this context, the presence of characters such as the angels – especially the Good Angel – can and have been deemed cruel, as they seem to only present Faustus with an alternative that he cannot have by nature. This has led some critics to suggest that the play, through the staging of the Good Angel,

might be critical of the doctrine of predestination, of a vision of a cruel God, and by extension of some aspects of Protestantism.

However, the argument that the Good Angel points to a cruel God, which could mean that the play criticises Protestantism, might possibly stem from a modernistic stand on the play – the doctrine of predestination, from a modern point of view, seems particularly cruel. However, that does not necessarily mean that the Renaissance viewer felt the same, or that the play attempted to criticise Protestant doctrines, especially as characters such as the Good and Bad Angels were not rare in the Elizabethan time²⁰². Additionally, an alternative analysis of the angels can solve the problem of the apparent cruelty of the Good Angel. Faustus is unable to hear the angels, unlike the Vice and Virtue in morality plays – from which the characters of the angels seem to stem. One could therefore wonder whether they are independent entities, or mere projections of Faustus's conscience²⁰³. It has been argued that the angels are probably not projections because they were considered real, independent entities in Elizabethan times²⁰⁴, or because of the aforementioned frequency of such characters during that period²⁰⁵. However, an important detail seems to have been overlooked in such analyses – the fact that the Bad Angel almost always has the upper hand, and is often the last one to speak, although the Good Angel sometimes manages to raise regrets in Faustus's soul. The only exception, in which the Good Angel has the last word and seems to have a bigger influence on the protagonist ("Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin/ (FAUSTUS) Ah, Christ, my savior/ Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul!" (2.3.78-80)), is immediately followed by the apparition of Beelzebub and Lucifer, preventing Faustus's repentance. Although not a proof in itself that the angels are not independent entities, the fact that the Bad Angel almost always prevails seems to mirror Faustus's state of mind – his good conscience seems to be peeking repeatedly, but his bad conscience either dulls his doubts through self-delusion – thus winning the argument – or drags Faustus even more into desperation. In addition to this, it seems to explain why the angels can be neither heard nor seen by the protagonist, even though he hears and sees demons. Although one might object that the demons choose to be seen whereas the angels are made invisible, the fact that the Bad Angel remains unseen despite the fact that he strongly resembles a demon seems inconsistent. This interpretation of the angels as projections of Faustus's own conscience

²⁰² Alan Sinfield, *Op. Cit.*, p. 357.

²⁰³ As morality plays can be considered allegories of human souls and fight for Virtue, an alternative analysis, according to which *Doctor Faustus* follows the allegorical tendency of morality plays, could also confirm the interpretation of the angels as projections of Faustus's conscience.

²⁰⁴ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 306-307.

²⁰⁵ Alan Sinfield, *Op. Cit.*, p. 357.

also explains why the Bad Angel always seems prominent, although Virtue should be stronger than Vice – at least in the morality play’s logic. One could object that the important role of the Bad Angel comes from the fact that Faustus is damned in advance, which makes the influence of the demons – and that of the Bad Angel – stronger, as opposed to morality plays, where the protagonist often rose to salvation, thus making Virtue stronger. However, this objection does not exclude an interpretation of the Bad Angel as a projection of Faustus’s conscience. Additionally, it is necessary to note that an interpretation of the angels as an extension of the protagonist’s conscience does not necessarily exclude the idea that they are real characters or entities – they could be guardian angels linked to Faustus’s state of conscience – but only means that they are dependent on the protagonist’s state of mind.

This interpretation of the angels as a projection of conscience solves the problem of the Good Angel. The argument that the play can be seen as subversive because the existence of the angel makes God appear cruel does not hold if the character depends on Faustus’s conscience – in that case, the angels simply emphasise the numerous scenes where Faustus is staged in his doubts and regrets, but is unable to truly turn to God again because of his prewritten fate. However, another already mentioned possibility has been suggested by García – the idea that the existence of the Good Angel, as well as his hopeful words (“Never too late, if Faustus can repent” (2.3.76)) suggests that Faustus is not damned from the beginning, and that the protagonist simply refuses to be saved because of his pride, and because he is led to believe that he will never be able to repent due to the demons’ insistence on a deterministic and fatalistic view, thus causing his damnation²⁰⁶. In addition to this, García points to Faustus’s dismissal of theology as a refusal of predestination itself, because it is deemed too cruel (“Why doctrine call you this? *Che serà, serà?*/ What will be, shall be? Divinity, adieu!” (1.1.47-48))²⁰⁷, and suggests that the play might point to an affirmation of freewill. In this interpretation, the play would be subversive of mainstream Protestant doctrine because it would question the existence of predestination itself. An argument in favour of this interpretation could be the fact that the demons rush to reclaim Faustus’s soul in the second act – after the doctor has started to realise the fallacy of Mephistopheles’s arguments – even though they supposedly know that he is damned. This element could be used as an argument against predestination, as the demons seem to fear that the doctor will repent, which would mean that the words of the Bad Angel, stating

²⁰⁶ Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 101.

²⁰⁷ *Idem*, p. 105. Despite offering this interpretation, García points to the play’s overarching feeling that it is impossible for Faustus to redeem himself, and recognises the omnipresence of predestination in the play, thus nuancing his assertion.

that repentance is impossible for Faustus, are false²⁰⁸. However, the assertion that the play might be questioning the existence of predestination on the sole basis of the character of the Good Angel seems bold, especially as the angels, as has been seen, can be analysed as a projection of Faustus's conscience, explaining several unsolved questions about them – the fact that Faustus cannot perceive them, or the reason why the Bad Angel almost always has the upper hand. Additionally, the rejection of the doctrine of predestination by Faustus does not really build an argument suggesting a genuine subversion of Protestantism or an affirmation of freewill in the play – although the protagonist does try to free himself from God's control and assert his freedom, he fails; additionally, his unreliability has been extensively shown in this analysis. Finally, the apparition of demons reclaiming Faustus's soul in Act 2 does not really build a counter-argument against the numerous hints towards predestination and Faustus's fate in the play. As was mentioned in the first chapter, demons were seen as bridled by God, sent by Him in order to tempt the faith of believers; true Christians should therefore resist the temptation or assaults of the devils, knowing that their faith protects them from harm²⁰⁹. From this perspective, Faustus's lack of resistance is merely further evidence that the doctor is not truly repentant, despite his regretful words and brief turning to Christ. The demons, in this respect, are sent as part of Faustus's prewritten fate, in order to prove that the doctor cannot hold his decision to turn back to God – or, as suggested by Perkins, the fact that damned souls, although they might briefly see the light of God, ultimately fall into sin and desperation again²¹⁰.

The arguments of a potential subversion of Protestantism in the play, therefore, do not seem to hold when considering the possible alternative analysis of the angels, as well as the fact that the perception of cruelty might stem from a modernistic point of view. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the play offers no criticism or subversion of Protestantism at all – although the elements analysed in the previous sections seem to point to the fact that the play offers a very Protestant view on the afterlife, and that the subversions of these views come from the protagonist, who cannot be trusted due to his heretical status. The final section of this chapter will be devoted to the possible criticisms of Protestantism which can potentially be identified in the play, despite its apparent overall Protestant message.

²⁰⁸ The fact that Faustus could possibly have repented does not mean that predestination does not exist in itself – if the doctor had repented, it could simply be stated that he was part of the elect, and predestined to repent from his sins. However, the demons rushing to bring Faustus back into sin, even though they should not worry about losing his soul given that he is supposedly already damned, seem to question the already stated idea that repentance is impossible for the protagonist.

²⁰⁹ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

²¹⁰ William Perkins, *Op. Cit.*, p. 254.

4.2. Re-assessing Faustus's materialism

The analysis of the different elements of the afterlife in the play has regularly pointed to Faustus's materialism and literality as the source of his misinterpretations of the afterlife – and by extension, of religion in general – leading to his despair, his downfall and his damnation. Section 1.2. has pointed to the fact that material interpretations were criticised in Protestant times as Catholic deviations, thus suggesting an overall Protestant view in the play.

When studying Faustus's misinterpretation, García however suggests that the play might partly criticise the Protestant education derived from humanism, according to which one has to read and interpret the sacred texts for oneself, as opposed to the dogmatic Church interpretation offered by Catholic religion²¹¹. The aim of such humanist education was to give religion back to the layman²¹², but could lead to erroneous interpretations, even from scholars. Although the author, as mentioned in the critical introduction, fails to provide substantial evidence of this in the play, this idea can also be linked to the analysis of Faustus's materialism as the source of his loss of faith. This materialism seems to stem from an extremely literal interpretation of the texts; as has been mentioned in the previous sections, Faustus is unable to read beyond the literal words of the Scriptures, or interprets Hell as a place as a result of his literal reading – which could perhaps be linked to the direct approach of texts promoted by Protestant education, although Faustus clearly mistakes the close reading of texts for a literal one. In this context, it seems worthy to note that the protagonist does not seem to be the only scholar misinterpreting the Scriptures – as proven by the characters of Valdes and Cornelius, as well as the partying scholars who wish to cross the boundaries of the afterlife by conjuring up Helen of Troy; additionally, Faustus is known as an illustrious scholar recognised by the Protestant University authorities, but depicts a materialistic and literal approach to the Scriptures from the very beginning of the play, possibly suggesting that the University, despite its humanist and Protestant authority, failed to notice this tendency – or even encouraged it, just like it probably encouraged Faustus's uncontrolled ambition and pride. As has been seen, Faustus also seems to misuse his humanist, classical education, for instance as he seems to mistake classical texts for religious ones – his conception of Hell is closer to that of the Greek and Roman hell than that of Protestants, which in turn can be linked to the geographically situated Catholic hell and further emphasises the inadequacy and heresy of Faustus's misinterpretation.

²¹¹ Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102-103.

²¹² This assertion also needs to be nuanced, as Protestantism offered sermons as well, albeit differently from the Catholic imposed interpretation. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 584-590.

This misuse of an extensive scholarly background apparently goes unnoticed by University authorities as well. The play only mentions scholars attempting to “inform/ the Rector and see if he by his grave counsel can reclaim/ him [Faustus]” (1.2.36-38) once, and this does not appear to lead to any consequences in the course of the play – although the Rector might try to bring the doctor to reason off stage – as Faustus continues his heretical practice without being evicted from University. This seems to point to a lack of guidance in the protagonist’s education, which can be linked to a potential criticism of Protestant – or humanist – education. In this perspective, Faustus, who has been provided with little guidance in his reading of the Sacred Texts, ironically turns into a Protestant caricature of Catholic scholars or monks – an apostate who falls down from a promising career to a base, coarse materialistic existence, with even less conscience of the sacred than his servants. As has been mentioned, one could object that Protestant scholars still provided public sermons, which did not leave believers entirely unguided. However, as Faustus himself is supposedly a scholar, an independent but religiously accurate interpretation of the Scriptures would be more expected from him than from the average layman.

This possible criticism, however, cannot be seen as a subversion or criticism of Protestantism itself – quite the contrary, as the play seems to offer a very Protestant view on the afterlife, and as elements subverting mainstream Protestant theology are mainly seen in the attitudes and words of the unreliable, damned protagonist, and are strongly mocked. The possible criticism, in this perspective, is not directed against Protestantism itself, but against a form of education leaving too much uncertainty and freedom in the layman’s interpretation of the Scriptures. This possible criticism could interestingly be directed not only against Protestant education, but against an unguided humanist approach – as the latter’s methods were strongly inspired by the former’s. This seems particularly possible, as the scholastic pride and wish to empirically experience and understand everything to the point of heresy – illustrated in Faustus’s wish to equal God by bringing the dead back to life, and in the scholars’ wish to see Helen of Troy despite her death – seem criticised several times during the play, as has been noted in the first and second sections.

Whether the potential criticism seen in the play reflects a form of nostalgia of an all-encompassing, more medieval system where the interpretation of texts was provided by the mainstream Church authority is debatable. One could state that the play points to a criticism of the self-made Renaissance man losing himself by trying to assert his freewill, and to free

himself from God's authority²¹³ – especially seen in Faustus's wish to equal the divine by bringing the dead back to life²¹⁴. This could in turn point to a certain nostalgia of an old system where men were guided in their lives and faiths and had therefore less chance to be lost. Such an assertion, however, could be deemed too bold, especially as the play seems strongly critical of Catholic materialism, thus possibly pointing to a criticism of the Catholic system in general. However, although a strong version of the argument might be too bold, a weaker form could be acceptable, as this interpretation seems to point to a wish for a greater balance between freedom of reading and educational guidance. Although the play does not, in this interpretation, offer a subversion of Protestant faith in itself, it therefore seems to partly criticise the Protestant and humanist system.

Partial conclusion

This third chapter on *Doctor Faustus* has attempted to show how the Protestant doctrines on the afterlife are thematised in the play. This chapter has also suggested how several Catholic elements – such as the idea of a material afterlife, as well as the permeability of the boundaries between life and the afterlife leading, in the case of Faustus, to a wish to bring back the dead – are ridiculed and caricatured through the character of the explicitly damned protagonist. This analysis has therefore attempted to demonstrate that the play, despite presenting several elements potentially subversive of Protestant faith, does in fact seem to defend a strongly Protestant view on the issue of death and the afterlife, and bitterly criticise the Catholic faith. However, Catholicism does not seem to be the only element criticised in the play – as has been seen in the last section, the play seems to at least partly warn against an unguided humanist education, as well as scholastic pride leading to a potential heresy through the wish of going beyond the fundamentally flawed human status. This possibly indicates a wish for a more guided education, minimising the risk of a heretical interpretation – of which scholars themselves would be accused, as is the case with Faustus.

In the next chapter, a similar analysis of *Hamlet* will be undertaken. Shakespeare's play will be analysed according to the three identified criteria, in an attempt to provide an interpretation of the afterlife in the play, and, by extension, a suggestion of potential criticisms or subversions.

²¹³ This will be more extensively referred to in the fifth chapter.

²¹⁴ As partly suggested by García – although his analysis of the elements leading to this conclusion strongly differs from this study. On this subject, García also suggests that this bitterness might stem from the fact that Reformers of the time started to realise that rebelliousness against the tyranny of the old system only led them to a new form of tyranny. This claim, however, seems to remain unsubstantiated in his analysis. Cf. Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 110.

Chapter IV – Elements of the afterlife in *Hamlet*

This fourth chapter will concentrate on the representation of the afterlife in *Hamlet*. This analysis, like in the previous chapter, will mainly concentrate on three criteria, also mentioned in Chapter I – namely the status of the afterlife, the boundaries between the living and the dead, and the notion of predestination and providence. As will be seen, the representation of the afterlife in *Hamlet* is far less homogeneous than in *Doctor Faustus*; one might even be tempted to talk of a fluctuating theology, representing both Catholic and Protestant elements – for example the Ghost and a certain notion of predestination. This mixture of doctrines, however, can especially be seen through the character of Hamlet, who, probably because of the mixed signals present in the play, appears to be lost and not to know what to believe anymore²¹⁵. This chapter will attempt to determine whether this mixture of theology prevents a unified interpretation of the play, or whether it is possible to identify a principal religious trend – possibly a Protestant message, given the Protestant background of the tragedy as well as the censorship at work during the Elizabethan era, making it difficult for a play defending a Catholic point of view to be staged at the time. In the last section, a parallel will be drawn between the fluctuating theology represented in the play and the mixed rites at stake in Elizabethan religion – as mentioned in the historical background²¹⁶ – in an attempt to determine whether *Hamlet* can be seen as partly critical of the system, or as a potential mirroring of a feeling of loss in an England possibly seen as theologically inconsistent.

1. Status of the afterlife

1.1. From a Protestant scholar to a doubter

Although *Hamlet* offers a much less clear-cut view on the status of the afterlife than *Doctor Faustus* – as opposed to the latter, for instance, the former does not explicitly refer to Hell as a place or as a state – several elements, already indicating a certain form of fluctuation in the represented doctrines, can be pointed to when studying the question of what the afterlife is, and how it is considered by the characters. The ghost, obviously, is one of the main problems when considering the question of what the afterlife can be – as he claims to come from Purgatory despite the fact that it was deemed inexistent and a Catholic deviation by Protestant theologians; however, as stated in the critical introduction, the aim of this study is not to

²¹⁵ In her analysis of deathscapes and transgression in the play, Sharon Emmerichs (*Op. Cit.*, p. 178) mentions “blurry doctrinal boundaries”; Paul Stegner (*Op. Cit.*, p. 113) mentions a “doctrinal heterogeneity”.

²¹⁶ And as also partly mentioned by Paul Stegner (*Idem*, p. 105-129). Stegner, however, only concentrates on the subject of confession – which is only part of this analysis. This section will therefore partly extend Stegner’s conclusions, studying how this mixed theology is thematised in the rest of the play, and what conclusions can be drawn from this fluctuating theology.

determine the identity of the Ghost – firstly because it has already been analysed extensively and this particular study could not shed new light on this issue in such limited space; secondly because the focus of this study is mainly theological, and although the ghost can be analysed theologically as a demon in disguise²¹⁷, a more extensive study of the character of the ghost would need to refer to other factors, such as the tradition of ghost stories²¹⁸. This study will therefore merely admit that the Ghost seems a Catholic intrusion in a mainly Protestant system, leading Hamlet to doubt and setting in motion the whole tragedy, but will not attempt to determine whether the Ghost is really a soul returning from the afterlife – which would indicate that the play stages a mixed theology without attempting to give a unified view on the afterlife, possibly mirroring the theological doubts of the era – or a demon in disguise, which would indicate a much more Protestant play, in which the mixed theology is only the result of the characters' actions and words²¹⁹.

The effect of the Ghost on other characters, especially on Hamlet, however, seems interesting in the context of mixed rites and doctrines. Hamlet, who has been educated in Wittenberg and should therefore be considered a Protestant scholar, seems, in the course of the play, to develop a possibly subconscious belief in a form of Catholic afterlife, possibly corresponding to Purgatory. This can already be seen immediately after the meeting with the Ghost, when Hamlet swears “by Saint Patrick” (1.5.141), the saint patron of Purgatory in Catholic theology, which seems to indicate the protagonist's tendency towards the Catholic end of the religious spectrum, under the influence of what he calls an “honest ghost” (1.5.143) – this element has often been noted²²⁰. It could be argued that this apparent Catholic belief could be a temporary state of mind caused by the emotion of meeting the Ghost – especially as Hamlet, as argued by Bernàth, seems to suffer from melancholy, resulting in high excitability and sensitivity²²¹; however, it seems to persist in the course of the play. When deciding not to kill Claudius in the prayer scene, Hamlet mentions that “[h]e took my father grossly, full of bread,/ With all his crimes broad blown” (3.3.80-81) – this sentence, as will be demonstrated in more details later, seems to correspond to the Catholic idea that sins needed to be confessed before death, as auricular confession and the absolution of a priest could alleviate the dying

²¹⁷ Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

²¹⁸ Catherine Belsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1-27.

²¹⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, the Ghost seems to mirror the theological uncertainty of the time and the doubts surrounding the play.

²²⁰ See for example Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 233-235.

²²¹ Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 276-280.

souls and, therefore, shorten their terms in Purgatory²²² – as did almsgiving and prayers for the dead. This does not mean that Hamlet believed in a form of Purgatory or in the efficiency of Catholic confession before meeting the Ghost – Hamlet’s belief on that subject prior to meeting the Ghost is unfortunately unknown, even though it could be argued that, given Hamlet’s Protestant education, he probably believed in Heaven and Hell only. However, the fact that the protagonist unquestioningly believes and repeats the words of the Ghost (“Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,/ Unhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled,/ No reckoning made, but sent to my account/ With all my imperfections on my head” (1.5.76-79)) seems to indicate that, under the influence of the Ghost, he at least developed a certain belief in a form of afterlife ‘in-between’ Heaven and Hell.

Later in the play, Hamlet seems to develop a very physical, almost nihilistic perspective on the afterlife, in which he only appears to concentrate on the corporal and material aspect of death, apparently without considering the fate of the soul anymore. This nihilistic tendency can already be seen in the second act, when Hamlet, talking about the nature of human beings, mentions that to him, men are no more than the “quintessence of dust” (2.2.306) despite the supposedly divine nature of their soul. Similarly, in the fourth act, when asked about where the corpse of Polonius is, Hamlet cynically jokes on the “progress [of a king] through the guts of a beggar” (4.3.30-31) – a clever and morbid joke commenting on the vainness of court culture and social progress when, eventually, all that remains of humans are corpses²²³. It could be argued that Hamlet is playing mad in front of Claudius during this scene, which might explain the prince’s apparent disregard for the soul of the departed. However, the tendency to ignore the fate of dead souls can already be noticed when Hamlet kills Polonius, as he entirely disregards the old man’s suffering and ultimate destiny, calling him “a rat” (3.4.25)²²⁴, turning back to his mother almost immediately after the murder, and hiding the corpse without considering the necessity of a proper burial despite the cultural and religious importance of human beings’ “ultimate resting place”²²⁵ – although, once again, it could be argued that Hamlet

²²² On the issue of confession and the differences between Catholic and Protestant confession, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 14-15.

²²³ I am grateful to Prof. Guido Latré for his insight on this issue, through his ‘LGERM2722 – In-depth study of Shakespeare’s drama’ course at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, November 2015).

²²⁴ This insult is normally addressed to Claudius, as Hamlet mistakes the hiding Polonius for the king; however, after killing Polonius, the Prince does not withdraw it, and adds that he is “most still, most secret, and most grave/ Who was in life a foolish prating knave” (3.4.194-195), further insulting and mocking the dead man.

²²⁵ Sharon Emmerichs, *Op. Cit.*, p. 172. A proper burial was traditionally deemed necessary in order for the soul to attain peace; the influence of such beliefs was still much present in the feeling of urge to bury bodies, especially with the necessity of burying decaying corpses in order to avoid illnesses. On this issue, see *Idem*, p. 174 and Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 265.

is highly distressed by Claudius's confession and prayer, as well as by the confrontation with his mother; and that he does not bury the body in order to appear mad in front of the rest of the court, leaving the burial to those who find the corpse and to Church authorities²²⁶. Alternatively, Hamlet's jokes on the fact that Polonius is "[a]t supper [...] Not where he eats, but where he is eaten" (4.3.18-20) can be analysed as a mockery of the Catholic transubstantiation, seen as a too literal interpretation of the eating of the 'body of Christ'²²⁷. This could point to a wider mockery of Catholicism in the play – which would lead to a mostly Protestant interpretation – or as a reflection of Hamlet's Protestant education, especially with his subsequent reference to "worms", probably both a reference to the German city Worms and to the animal²²⁸. Because of this allusion to transubstantiation, and although it is hard to argue that this cynical joke reflects Hamlet's Catholic belief²²⁹, it could be tempting to link Hamlet's general tendency to see only the physical aspect of death with a wider mockery of Catholicism, as was the case in *Doctor Faustus*. However, Hamlet's tendency to materialism and physicality seems much more nihilistic than that of Faustus, as the former morbidly reflects and jokes on the decomposition of bodies and seems to entirely forget the spiritual aspect of life, rather than wish for an embodied afterlife where he could continue his scholarly existence, or an eternal continuation of earthly life.

This is particularly the case in the graveyard scene (5.1), where Hamlet is only accompanied by Horatio and, therefore, does not need to fake madness anymore. When faced with the skull of the former court jester Yorick, Hamlet, in an almost nihilistic monologue, reflects on the fate of bodies after death, and how the greatest man inevitably returns to dust:

Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion
i'th'earth? [...]
To what base uses we may return, Horatio. Why,
may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till
he find it stopping a bung-hole? [...]
Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander re-
turneth into dust. The dust is earth, of earth we make
loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted
might they not stop a beer-barrel?
(5.1.188-189; 193-195; 199-202)

²²⁶ It could also be added that Hamlet mentions that "For this same lord,/ I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it so,/ To punish me with this, and this with me [...] I will bestow him, and will answer well/ The death I gave him." (3.4.161-163; 165-166). This seems to indicate at least temporary regrets towards his deed – although the calling of Polonius by the neutral pronoun, as well as the fact that Hamlet immediately alludes to his revenge again, does not suggest that Hamlet really worries about the crime.

²²⁷ Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 240-241.

²²⁸ The Diet of Worms was an assembly where the doctrines of Luther were condemned by the Holy Roman Emperor. See *Ibid.*

²²⁹ As he seems to mock such beliefs, rather than asserting them.

This nihilistic, almost desperate soliloquy, from which any considerations on the nature of the afterlife for the soul – supposedly the most important part of the human being, and the one surviving after death – seem to be excluded, appears oddly non-religious. In his fascination for the decay and returning to dust of corpses, Hamlet seems to almost completely forget the supposed immortality of the soul, which is even stranger as he has supposedly been directly confronted with a manifestation of the afterlife in the form of the Ghost, and should therefore, of all characters, not concentrate on the material part of death. The dreary graveyard soliloquy, possibly prompted by Hamlet's return from England where he was supposed to meet his death, seems to point to an almost atheistic perspective – although this assertion might be bold – in which death would be limited to the sole decaying corpse on earth, with no notion of an eternal afterlife.

The fascination for the physical aspect of death was already visible in the first meeting with the Ghost ("What may mean/ That thou, *dead corpse*, again in complete steel/ Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon" (1.1.30-32; emphasis added)); however, in the beginning of the play, the allusion to the physicality of death was counterbalanced by a greater wonder about the reason for the return of the Ghost. In addition to this, Hamlet seems to be fascinated with the nature of the afterlife for human souls during the major part of the play – as will be argued in the next section on the boundaries of the afterlife, Hamlet attempts to control the afterlife fate of his enemies, for example trying to effect Claudius's damnation. Despite the fact that Hamlet does not seem particularly religious in the first part of the play – he is rarely seen praying or calling to God, except in his lamenting and wish for suicide ("[...] that the Everlasting had not fixed/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! O God" (1.2.131-132)) – he could not be deemed an atheist, which makes his sudden absence of consideration for the non-earthly, non-physical aspect of death all the more surprising. The almost atheistic turn of mind seems to be the ultimate step in Hamlet's mixed, fluctuating beliefs, in which Hamlet seems to renounce theology altogether. This possible rejection of God could be interpreted as the result of the loss of stability in Hamlet's religious beliefs, or as Hamlet's ultimate loss of religious reference points. This, in turn, could be seen as the last step of Hamlet's downfall, almost inevitably leading to his death – the negation of God could not, in an overtly religious world, lead to any positive outcome²³⁰. As will be argued later, however, the earthly downfall of Hamlet does not

²³⁰ Although this might not necessarily point to a Protestant interpretation of the play, as Hamlet's downfall could in this case be only the result of his loss of faith.

mean that he is entirely doomed – the ending of the play, as will be seen, seems to offer a ray of hope after Hamlet's gruesome end.

1.2. "The undiscovered country": Hamlet's loss of religious reference points and the soliloquy on suicide

The tendency to lose his certainties on the afterlife does not come as suddenly as it may seem. In the third act, for instance, Hamlet seems to already announce this mindset in his famous soliloquy, where he ponders on the possibility of suicide:

[...] to die, to sleep.
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
[...] Who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all
(3.1.65-71; 77-84)

Although the well-known soliloquy concentrates on the afterlife of the soul and does not really refer to the physical aspect of death²³¹, it can be partly linked with Hamlet's material attitude in the later stages of the play. In this soliloquy, Hamlet seems to insist on the impossibility to know what awaits the human soul after death, emphasising that "no traveller returns"²³² from it. Even though Hamlet, in his reflecting on the potential negative experience in the afterlife, most probably refers to Hell – or possibly to Purgatory, given that he probably believes that the Ghost comes from there – thus still reflecting a certain belief in a religious afterlife, he seems to highlight the uncertainty ("the dread of *something* after death"; emphasis added) of what is

²³¹ The choice of the analogy between sleep and death could be interpreted as partly material, comparing death and the afterlife of the soul with the physical, earthly phenomenon of sleeping and dreaming. However, this analogy seems to be more of a reassuring comparison, meant to convey the impression of comfort and rest felt in sleep, as well as the lack of control in dreams; this analogy, in this perspective, is not to be interpreted as a reduction of death to the mere physical aspect.

²³² Several authors have questioned this paradoxical phrase, which seems to contradict the very existence of the Ghost. In his critical edition, Hibbard (*Op. Cit.*, p. 241) suggests that Hamlet is probably implying that no one returns permanently from death. In the context of a Hamlet in the process of losing all his religious reference points to the point of becoming a nihilistic, almost atheistic character neglecting the allegorical aspect of death altogether, however, this phrase does not seem entirely illogical, despite the apparition of the Ghost. The Ghost, in this interpretation, is precisely the theologically disturbing element which sets in motion Hamlet's interrogations and theological confusion in the rest of the play. Additionally, as will be argued in the next section, this phrase could be interpreted as a remnant of Hamlet's Protestant education.

to follow in the “undiscovered country”. This feeling of uncertainty can be linked to the Ghost’s claim that he is “forbid/ To tell the secrets of [his] prison-house” (1.5.13-14), which could lead the protagonist to doubt what he held true about the afterlife. However, the complete lack of reference to any supposedly attested aspect of Hell or Purgatory – such as the presence of fire, traditionally recognised to be a part of the negative afterlife²³³, and confirmed by the Ghost whom Hamlet seems to trust (“[...] for the day confined to fast in fires” (1.5.12)) – appears to point to a wider lack of certainty about the nature of what is to follow, which in turn could already announce Hamlet’s feeling of loss and subsequent turning to the physical aspect of death and almost atheistic perspective.

It could be added that Hamlet’s soliloquy does not mention Heaven at all, and seems to only refer to the potential negative experience in the afterlife. This could be linked to the idea that suicide was considered a serious sin in Christian religions, as it was deemed to be a consequence of the believer’s desperation and lack of faith in God, as well as an act of homicide²³⁴; the soliloquy, in this case, could be interpreted as an act of rejection of suicide because of its sinful nature. However, Hamlet’s monologue does not make any mention of God, even though the Lord is supposed to be the main, even sole, decision maker concerning the fate of human souls, and the one to whom Christian believers turn in times of hopelessness – as was the case in Hamlet’s first mention of suicide, before the meeting with the Ghost and Hamlet’s loss of religious reference points (“[...] that the Everlasting had not fixed/ His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter. O God!” (1.2.131-132)). In addition to this, Hamlet does not seem to consider the act of renouncing suicide a particularly virtuous or positive deed, as he deems that it is not caused by faith, but by fear of a negative retribution in the afterlife (“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all”). Because of this, the soliloquy can hardly be interpreted as religious, but does seem to already indicate Hamlet’s loss of religious reference points, leading to his loss of faith. The lack of reference to any form of divinity in Hamlet’s words seems significant in this perspective: whereas Hamlet is still considering the afterlife of the soul, he seems to be turning away from God, possibly questioning – or denying, although this might be slightly exaggerated – His existence through language – or rather the lack of it, as the soliloquy does not contain the slightest allusion to the divine.

A wholly Protestant interpretation of the soliloquy could lead to identify Hamlet as an apostate, as he seems to correspond to the definition of the desperate soul predestined to

²³³ On this topic, see (among other) Linda M. Tober and F. Stanley Lusby, *Op. Cit.*, p. 152-153.

²³⁴ Marilyn J. Harran, “Suicide”, in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 24-25.

damnation because he cannot see the necessity of God's grace, and therefore excludes himself from salvation. As will be seen in the third section of this chapter, however, the fate of Hamlet's soul cannot be really determined from the play – although, as will be argued, it is tempting to interpret the final scene as an act of repentance from the protagonist, leading to his ultimate salvation despite his numerous sins. In this perspective, Hamlet's uncertainty leading to an apparent loss of faith would only be temporary – as Hamlet, in a Protestant interpretation of the play, should be considered as an elect, predestined to salvation. Before addressing such considerations, however, the issue of fluctuating doctrines leading to the downfall of the characters – and of the whole kingdom – in the play will be further studied through the analysis of the boundaries between the living and the dead.

2. Boundaries of the afterlife

2.1. Contradictory attitudes

When studying Hamlet's views on the boundaries between the living and the dead, two contradictory attitudes – broadly corresponding to the Protestant and Roman Catholic views suggested in the historical introduction – can be identified. Most of the protagonist's deeds – as well as some of his words – seem to point to a possibly unconscious wish to cross the barriers between the living and the dead, and to communicate with the afterlife. However, some of Hamlet's words might be analysed as reflecting a Protestant view on the afterlife. Although it potentially expresses the beginning of Hamlet's uncertainty about theology and nihilistic point of view, Hamlet's soliloquy on the impossibility to know what comes after death, analysed in the previous section, can be interpreted as partly reflecting Hamlet's Protestant education. The idea of an “undiscovered country, from whose bourn/ No traveller returns” (3.1.80-81), as has been mentioned, seems to echo the Protestant doctrine according to which the souls of the departed could not cross the boundaries back into the living world – which would make the apparition of ghosts impossible. The use of the word “bourn”²³⁵, in particular, seems to reflect the Protestant opinion that the frontiers between the living and the dead are closed, and cannot authorise the dead soul to cross them again and return to the living world. This interpretation

²³⁵ The English Oxford Dictionary names the example of the soliloquy under the following definition: “the limit or terminus of a [...] journey; the ultimate point aimed at [...]; destination, goal”. However, the first and second definitions suggest that “bourn” can also mean “a boundary”, or “a bound, a limit”, which, in the context of the soliloquy and given Hamlet's following words (“no travellers return”), would strongly echo the Protestant tradition. It can also be noted that Hibbard's footnotes (*Op. Cit.*, p. 241) define “bourn” as a “frontier”, which also echoes the Protestant definition of boundaries between the living and the dead – Hibbard also cites the OED as his source. As is often the case in Shakespeare, the meaning of this phrase is ambiguous, and one interpretation and definition does not necessarily exclude the others. For the OED definition, see <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22121?rskey=HvoBf2&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>, retrieved on 20. July 2017).

seems to explain the paradoxical nature of the phrase, which seemed to invalidate the existence of the Ghost²³⁶, as this potential allusion to Protestant belief is most probably an unconscious reference to Hamlet's Protestant background, and not a conscious effort to contradict the existence of the Ghost²³⁷. This interpretation, incidentally, does not exclude the one offered in the previous section – Hamlet's possibly unconscious allusion to his education does not prevent him from expressing a strong uncertainty about what is to follow in the afterlife; and the lack of religious devotion in the soliloquy seems to confirm that the Protestant intertextuality is not conscious.

Most of Hamlet's deeds, however, seem to point to a wish to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead. The fact that Hamlet accepts to interact with the Ghost, believes his words ("I'll take the ghost's word for a/ thousand pound" (3.2.270-271)), and attempts to have an appeasing effect on his father's soul by effecting his revenge²³⁸, even though the interaction between the living and the dead is forbidden and supposedly impossible in a Protestant system, is the main and most obvious example of this; however, numerous other forms of attempted interaction with the afterlife can be identified in the play. Hamlet's interaction with the skull of Yorick, for example, can be seen as a corrupted form of attempted contact with the dead – the protagonist, in holding and talking to the skull of the dead man ("[...] Now get you to/ my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch/ thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at/ that. [...]") (5.1.183-186)), seems to further express his wish for personal interaction with the dead – although Hamlet probably knows that this interaction is impossible, as his cynical one-way speech to the skull seems to indicate. The same can be said about Hamlet's reflection on the fate of Alexander's corpse, in which he states that the dead corpse might have become a cork. As argued by Sharon Emmerichs, "by intimating that the dead still have purpose and function within living society, Hamlet brushes aside the accepted boundaries between life and death like the very dust he speaks of"²³⁹. Horatio, who – as will be argued – can be identified as a truly Protestant character and a good scholar, opposes this view by stating that "'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so" (5.1.196), thus emphasising how Hamlet's expressed views on the boundaries of the afterlife do not correspond to the Protestant standard anymore²⁴⁰.

²³⁶ See footnote 232.

²³⁷ The idea that death is a trip from which nobody comes back is also "one of the great commonplaces about death", as argued by Hibbard in the footnotes (*Op. Cit.*, p. 241). This explanation, however, does not exclude a more Protestant interpretation of the phrase; nor does it exclude the idea of the expression of Hamlet's doubts.

²³⁸ Which strongly resembles traditional ghost stories, as well as the Catholic tradition of heirs trying to have an effect on their ascendants' term in Purgatory by acting in the living world – through prayers, almsgiving, etc. See Catherine Belsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18 and Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

²³⁹ Sharon Emmerichs, *Op. Cit.*, p. 182.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Emmerichs, together with Michael Neill, also argues that the gravedigger's careless treatment of skeletons, as well as Hamlet's interaction with the corpse of Yorick, is strongly remindful of the medieval *danse macabre*, a traditional representation of dead corpses rising again and dancing with the living, thus representing death as a personal, common issue that plays a role among the living²⁴¹. The *danse macabre*, although a medieval tradition and not directly linked to the Roman Catholic religion, perfectly represents the European medieval tendency to see the boundaries between the living and the dead as blurry and crossable, which was totally refuted by the Protestant religion. The intertextuality between the graveyard scene and the *danse macabre*, although not directly referring to a Catholic-Protestant opposition, does however seem to emphasise Hamlet's conception of the boundaries of the afterlife as permeable and blurry, offering a further example of Hamlet's mixed doctrinal views, and further highlighting how inadequate the protagonist's views on the afterlife are in a Protestant society. Finally, Emmerichs identifies a final element exemplifying Hamlet's – and, in this case, Laertes's – corrupted wish to interact with the dead²⁴². During the funeral of Ophelia, both Laertes and Hamlet jump into Ophelia's grave, as though they were attempting to enter the dead's realm in order to stay with the departed despite her demise. Emmerichs interprets this action as announcing Laertes's and Hamlet's imminent death – as the entrance of a human being into the tomb symbolically means that they will never get out of it, especially in a Protestant context of impassable boundaries between life and death²⁴³ – and as a sign of their alienation from Protestant faith, possibly because of their respective grief leading them to madness.

A last element can be identified in Hamlet's tendency to attempt to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead. When witnessing Claudius's attempt at repentance in the prayer scene (3.3), Hamlet decides against killing him during his prayer, suggesting that killing a repentant Claudius could send him to Heaven, which Hamlet calls “hire and salary, not revenge” (3.3.79). The prince then states that he will kill the king “[w]hen he is drunk asleep, or in his rage/ Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,/ At gaming swearing, or about some act/ That has no relish of salvation in't” (3.3.89-92), suggesting his intention of sending Claudius to Hell. The immoral and sacrilegious nature of this wish has already been analysed by Bernàth²⁴⁴, who emphasises that Hamlet's revenge, even if it was considered moral – which, as has been argued in the critical introduction²⁴⁵, can be debated, especially in a Protestant context

²⁴¹ *Idem*, p. 186-187 and Michael Neill, *Issues of Death, Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

²⁴² *Idem*, p. 188.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.

²⁴⁵ See Chapter II, p. 28-29.

–, should merely consist in killing Claudius, and that Hamlet’s wish to condemn Claudius to eternal suffering is cruel and inhumane – especially as this wish for his enemies’ damnation can be seen earlier in the play (“Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven/ Ere I had ever seen that day, Horatio” (1.2.182-183)), and later in Hamlet’s refusal to let Rosencrantz and Guildenstern confess their sins before being executed²⁴⁶. Bernàth also underlines the heretical nature of wishing to have an influence on the post-mortem fate of fellow human beings, as this – in both Protestant and Catholic theologies – is supposed to be decided by God²⁴⁷.

The wish to take control over other human beings’ afterlife fate could also be interpreted as another form of Hamlet’s wish to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead. The idea that the actions of the living – in this case, the refusal of a last confession, or the killing of Claudius in a sinful situation – can have an impact on the destiny of the soul in the afterlife – damnation in this case – strongly echoes the Catholic belief that prayers and almsgiving from the living could alleviate the suffering of dead souls in Purgatory or accelerate their accession to Heaven, even though, in this case, the actions taken in order to influence the afterlife of human souls do not come from the charitable wish to help a suffering being attain felicity²⁴⁸, nor are they taken after the death of the human being. Hamlet, as a good Protestant scholar, should let God decide of Claudius’s afterlife fate, and trust that he will be damned – or, should God decide otherwise, humbly recognise the limits of his human knowledge. The fact that he refuses this idea proves Hamlet’s defiance of God’s authority and misplaced wish for divinity – which can be compared to Faustus’s; and the fact that he tries to control his enemies’ fate until after their death, even though he should recognise that death is “the undiscovered country” (3.1.80) with impassable frontiers, proves that his wish to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead is inherently wrong.

2.2. Earthly and divine transgression – Hamlet and Laertes

Interestingly, and as has been partly suggested in the critical introduction, Hamlet’s crossing of the boundaries of the afterlife, which indicates a wider defiance of divine authority,

²⁴⁶ This could be considered a Protestant move; however, given that Hamlet seems to believe in the efficiency of auricular confession after the meeting with the Ghost, as well as the fact that it is not the first time that the protagonist expresses his wish to damn his enemies, this interpretation is highly unlikely.

²⁴⁷ Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29. Interestingly, and as argued by Eric Mallin, Hamlet’s suicidal ideas could also be paralleled with a heretical wish to control his own death, normally a divine prerogative – although he does not refer to his afterlife fate. The sinful nature of suicide as a wish to take up God’s role by controlling one’s own death is emphasised by the gravediggers’ comments on Ophelia’s suicide: “Is she to be buried in Christian burial that/ wilfully seeks her own salvation?” (5.1.1-2). See Eric Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare*, London, Continuum, 2007 (Coll. Shakespeare Now!), p. 59.

²⁴⁸ Except for the Ghost. However, even in the case where the Ghost is considered as a human soul coming back from Purgatory, revenge would only help him have no regret from his past life, and would not shorten his Purgatory term, therefore having no effect on his afterlife fate.

can be linked with his earthly crossing of the hierarchical boundaries and defiance of the King's authority²⁴⁹ – as his attempt to avenge himself on the king, supposedly God's elect and representative on earth, against whom no hierarchically inferior being can take action and whose sins can only be punished by God²⁵⁰, can be seen as a refusal to recognise God's authority and choice of a leader²⁵¹. This assertion, in turn, can lead to a new analysis of the classical parallel drawn between Hamlet and Laertes²⁵², which analyses Laertes as a parallel character to Hamlet because he takes up the same role as a faithful son seeking revenge for the death of his unjustly killed father²⁵³. Both characters, however, can also be paralleled in their tendency to transgression and their disregard of limits, caused by an unreasoned grief leading them to a form of madness²⁵⁴. Both characters seem, in their madness, to disrespect both earthly and divine authority, and transgress the boundaries of hierarchy. Hamlet, as already argued, transgresses earthly and divine authority by attempting to kill Claudius and wishing to send him to Hell – which also makes him transgress the boundaries of the afterlife and of divine hierarchy; he further crosses the boundaries of the afterlife by believing and interacting with the Ghost and with corpses. Laertes, on the other hand, crosses the boundaries of earthly authority by leading a revolution against Claudius²⁵⁵; while at the same time recognising that his actions are theologically wrong and an insult to godly authority, as his words seem to express: "To hell, allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil!/ Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!/ I dare damnation" (4.5.131-133). Like Hamlet, Laertes also crosses the boundaries between the living and the dead by attempting to influence Ophelia's burial rites,

²⁴⁹ See the critical introduction, Chapter II, p. 28-29.

²⁵⁰ Even though it could be argued that Claudius does not deserve his throne and that Hamlet should be at his place, which would make Hamlet's disrespect of his authority legitimate – as has been argued in the critical introduction, Chapter II, p. 28-29.

²⁵¹ On the interdiction and sinful nature of rebellion, see for example the *Book of Homilies* (*Op. Cit.*, p. 693-694).

²⁵² For example in Harold Jenkins, "Critical Introduction", in Harold Jenkins (Ed.), *Hamlet*, 2nd publ., London, Methuen, 1986 (Coll. The Arden Edition of William Shakespeare), p. 143-144.

²⁵³ Which also draws a parallel between Claudius and Hamlet, as both are recognised as the villain who killed the avenger's father in that model.

²⁵⁴ Incidentally, Hamlet and Laertes can be called "mad" in both possible meanings – they are driven by anger towards their enemy, and, because of their loss of reference points, depict a certain lack of judgement in their words and deeds. In addition to this, Hamlet fakes madness in the course of the play; this feigned madness is expressed through witty jokes and criticisms, but seems to hide a real lack of good judgement – as has been seen in Hamlet's Catholic and nihilistic ideas, and can also be seen in Hamlet's high excitability leading him to extreme reactions, for example the killing of Polonius. Bernàth links Hamlet's unfeigned madness to his natural tendency to melancholy – in the medieval sense of an excess of black bile. See Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 276-287.

²⁵⁵ In the case of Laertes, the argument that Claudius is not a rightful ruler and that Hamlet should rule in his place cannot be taken into account, as Laertes is a courtier, and has no right to the throne – which makes him hierarchically inferior to Claudius, the brother of the former king, in any case. The fact that the people of Denmark seem to support Laertes is not an argument in favour of Laertes, as the divine right of the monarch seems to be considered superior to the right of the people in the Danish elective monarchy – as Claudius's words seem to indicate: "There's such divinity doth hedge a king/ That treason can but peep to what it would,/ Acts little of his will" (4.5.121-123).

possibly in the hope that it will help her reach heaven²⁵⁶ (“Lay her i’t’h’earth/ [...] I tell thee, churlich priest,/ A minist’ring angel shall my sister be/ When thou liest howling” (5.1.228; 230-232)), which seems to indicate that he tries to influence Ophelia’s life after death – like Hamlet attempted to influence that of Claudius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. Finally, both competing characters leap into Ophelia’s grave, defying each other while affirming their wish to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead one last time, before both of them fight to the death.

Hamlet’s and Laertes’s tendencies to transgress both human and divine limits and disrespect hierarchy, strongly linked to their wish to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, seem to lead to both characters’ violent demises, probably pointing to the sinful nature of their mixed theologies and disrespect of hierarchy. The idea that the transgression of earthly hierarchy corresponds to a transgression of God’s order can be linked with the cultural and historical context of the play – Claudius’s words “There’s such divinity doth hedge a king/ That treason can but peep to what it would,/ Acts little of his will” (4.5.121-123), although ironical given the King’s own sinful nature as a murderer, echoes the idea of the divine ruler, protected by God’s will; which can be linked to the cult of personality and divine nature associated with Elizabeth I, the ‘fairie queene’ – the assertion of whom was even more important as the Queen’s authority was disputed²⁵⁷ and uprisings were not uncommon²⁵⁸. Interestingly, the partial Protestant message – seen through the characters’ sinful and dangerous wish to transgress the boundaries of the afterlife – seems therefore to be linked to a message in favour of the ruler, possibly defending the authority of the Queen – an interesting and subtle parallel between the religious theme of the afterlife and the very earthly political issues of the era, reflecting the strong link between the Church and State of the time, and probably offering a strong argument against censorship of the play, even though, as will be argued, the play’s staging of fluctuating theologies, as well as Hamlet’s feeling of loss leading to madness and despair, probably mirrors the feeling of religious loss of the era in England, possibly partly criticising the religious system.

2.3. “How is it that the clouds still hang on you?”: On grief, mourning and burial

The issue of grief, mourning, and burial is loosely related to that of the boundaries of the afterlife. As stated in the historical background, the burial and mourning traditions of both

²⁵⁶ As also argued by Emmerichs. This also seems to show that Laertes believes in the old, not Protestant tradition of the burial determining the fate of the soul. See Sharon Emmerichs, *Op. Cit.*, p. 175.

²⁵⁷ As seen in the historical section, Elizabeth’s authority was not recognised by Catholic law. Cf. Peter Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

²⁵⁸ Stephen Greenblatt et al., “The Sixteenth Century, 1485-1603. Introduction”, in Stephen Greenblatt et al. (Eds.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 542-543.

Catholic and Protestant religions seem to partly reflect their belief in the afterlife as a world either possibly interacting with, or totally separated from, the living world – making the study of the funeral and grieving staged in *Hamlet* worth studying.

At the beginning of the play, the newly married Claudius confronts Hamlet, asking him why he is still grieving (“How is it that the clouds still hang on you?” (1.2.66)); when confronted with Hamlet’s reproachful monologue on appearances of grief, he states that

[...] [T]o persever
In obstinate condolment is a course
Of impious stubbornness, ‘tis unmanly grief,
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
[...] For what we know must be, and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? Fie, ‘tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature
To reason most absurd, whose common theme
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
From the first corpse till he that died today,
‘This must be so’.

(1.2.92-95; 98-106)

In this monologue, Claudius seems to depict a rather Protestant attitude towards death. He seems to emphasise the fact that death is part of nature and cannot be avoided, and that dead beings cannot come back, thus making it irrational and unhealthy to mourn for too long although it is unavoidable and necessary in order to show respect to the dead’s memory. This seems to refer to the Protestant idea that the living cannot have any influence on the dead anymore, directly linked to the idea that the boundaries between life and the afterlife are closed, and that contact between the living and the dead is impossible. Additionally, the statements that a too long grief is “impious”, “a fault to heaven”, showing “a will most incorrect to heaven” seem to echo the doctrine of predestination. Although it could be argued that the idea of God calling his believers back to him for a reason that goes beyond understanding of the living is fairly common in Christian religion, Claudius’s monologue, because of its emphasis on the unavoidability of death and its almost fatalistic overtones, seems to refer to this very Protestant idea that fates of humans are written in advance and cannot be changed.

This apparently reasonable monologue, however, is used in an inappropriate context – showing that Claudius, despite his apparent Protestant and adequate views on the afterlife, can be deemed neither a good Protestant, nor a good character. The context of Claudius’s hasty marriage to Old Hamlet’s widow – who Claudius calls his “sometimes sister, now [his] queen”

(1.2.8) – gives an almost incestuous background to the scene²⁵⁹; in addition to this, Hamlet emphasises the fact that the mourning period has lasted only one month. Horatio, the model of the positive, rational Protestant scholar, also seems to confirm that this mourning period was abnormally short, when he says that the wedding “followed hard upon” (1.2.179) the funeral of the late king. In this perspective, Claudius’s apparently reasonable monologue seems an abuse of Protestant discourses, in which the new king misuses Protestant principles to justify his own coarse deeds and sins, especially his hasty marriage to the Queen – this is even truer as Claudius is later revealed to have murdered Old Hamlet. This form of corrupt and dishonest Protestantism, used by Claudius only to justify his wicked actions – and leading to his violent death, as will be discussed below – can also be seen later in the play, as will be demonstrated in the part on predestination.

Hamlet, on the other hand, seems to stand on the other extreme of the spectrum. The protagonist seems to mourn and strongly dwell on his father’s image, to the point that he sees him “[i]n [his] mind’s eye” (1.2.185). Hamlet’s state of grief seems to last for the entire duration of the play, although it takes different forms – as his unreasoned and undealt with grief seems to be the reason why he believes and obeys the Ghost, leading the protagonist to lose his religious landmarks, develop Catholic and nihilistic ideas, and cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, which ultimately provokes his downfall. Because he is unable to deal with his grief properly as he is encouraged to “cast [his] nightly colour off” (1.2.68) after a month, Hamlet is led to madness, heresy, hatred, and despair²⁶⁰ in the course of the play – in other words, his repressed grief seems to be the origin of Hamlet’s downfall. The idea that mourners need “something constructive to do with their grief”²⁶¹ seems at least partly linked to the Catholic idea behind the systems of almsgiving and prayers for the dead – which, once again, seems to link Hamlet with the Catholic end of the religious spectrum, although he has not met the Ghost yet. It might not be really surprising, in this perspective, that Hamlet is entirely willing to believe that the Ghost is really the soul of his father returning from the grave, with whom he can interact and whose afterlife suffering he can help to alleviate – although this lack of judgement is what seems to lead him to his downfall and violent death.

²⁵⁹ Especially in Hamlet’s view.

²⁶⁰ Which can already be seen in Hamlet’s monologue after meeting the Ghost: “Yea, from the table of my memory/ I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,/ [...] And thy commandment all alone shall live/ [...] Unmixed with baser matter” (1.5.98-99; 102; 103). This already points to Hamlet’s tendency to react out of proportions, and his lack of balance, which already shows a certain lack of judgement.

²⁶¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102.

Before studying the aspects of predestination in the play, some elements of the funeral rites in the kingdom of Denmark seem worth analysing. Ophelia's burial seems to reveal the existence of contradictory rites in the customs and traditions of the country. The priest, as argued by Emmerichs, seems to express the wish to respect the Protestant rite of burying the body according to its social status²⁶², which would mean that Ophelia should not be allowed into sacred ground – as people who committed suicide are considered heretics, thus socially lowest, in the Protestant system. On the other hand, the priest mentions that it would be improper to “sing sage requiem and such rest to her/ As to peace-parted souls” (5.1.227-228), which seems to indicate that the requiem prayer is usually sung during Danish burials. The requiem, however, can be deemed a mostly Catholic practice – as it directly addresses the dead being, which seems to oppose the Protestant idea of addressing the audience only, as the departed supposedly cannot be contacted anymore²⁶³. Emmerichs argues that the non-respect of the burial rules because of the abuse of power and Erastian measures of the royal family explains the violent death of Gertrude even though she appears to be innocent – as this transgression of rules leads her to cross the boundaries as well, leading her to sin²⁶⁴. One could add that the mixed theology which seems to be at work in the whole of Denmark might partly explain the fate of the whole country in the end – because the excesses of the royal family led the whole country to practice mixed, “maimèd rites” (5.1.209), the kingdom follows its rulers into disarray. In the end, the kingdom is invaded, offering a bitter end to the tale, despite the ray of hope provided by the survival of Horatio and by the possible salvation of Hamlet – as will be argued below. The bitter invasion of Fortinbras following the death of almost every character seems to confirm, once and for all, that “[s]omething is rotten in the state of Denmark” (1.4.65).

3. Predestination, repentance, and confession

This section will mainly concentrate on the issue of the main characters' fates and beliefs – whether they can be deemed predestined in any way, as well as whether they seem to believe that fate is prewritten. The motif of fluctuating religious views in Hamlet will once again be studied, and opposed to Claudius's misused Protestant beliefs.

²⁶² Sharon Emmerichs, *Op. Cit.*, p. 175.

²⁶³ See Diarmaid Macculloch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 577.

²⁶⁴ *Idem*, p. 176.

3.1. “There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow”: Hamlet’s statements on predestination

As has been argued in the critical introduction, Hamlet seems to believe in a form of predestination, as his statement during the graveyard scene appears to indicate: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,/ Rough-hew them how we will” (5.2.10-11). This assertion seems to suggest that human ideas and plans, however well-crafted, are merely drafts of God’s plans, and that every human action is part of a bigger, godly scheme, which humans cannot understand in advance; this idea is very close to the doctrine of providence and predestination, according to which human beings can “boldly commit [themselves] to God”²⁶⁵ because, as stated by Calvin, “the heavenly father doth so hold in all things with his power, so ruleth them with his authority and countenance, so ordereth them with his wisdom, that nothing befalleth but by his appointment”²⁶⁶. This very Protestant idea is approved by the good Protestant scholar Horatio (“That is most certain” (5.2.12)), which seems to confirm that Hamlet’s statement corresponds to the orthodox Protestant theology. Similarly, Hamlet, shortly before his duel against Laertes, states that “[t]here’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (5.2.166-167)²⁶⁷. As briefly developed in the critical introduction, these two statements, which seem to reflect Hamlet’s Protestant belief in providence and predestination, are pronounced immediately before Hamlet confesses his mishandling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and before the protagonist’s duel with Laertes. The former could therefore be interpreted as a way to partly justify Hamlet’s cruel decision to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern without leaving them the time to alleviate their minds through confession – as Hamlet’s wicked deed, in the perspective of providence, could be interpreted as part of God’s plan; the latter could be seen as a slightly fatalistic way to reassure himself before battling to death against Laertes. In the next lines of this monologue, Hamlet adds that “[i]f it be now, ‘tis not to/ come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now,/ yet it will come [...]” (5.2.167-169), which seems to point to a fatalistic acceptance of his own destiny – possibly confirming that the statement about Providence is an attempt at reassuring himself by trusting God with his destiny. Another analysis of both statements is however possible. When considering Hamlet’s comments, Alan Sinfield suggests that God’s providence could explain Hamlet’s numerous fortunes on his way to and from England –

²⁶⁵ John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ This statement, as mentioned by Alan Sinfield, echoes a sentence from Calvin’s *Institution of Christian Religion*. See Alan Sinfield, “Hamlet’s Special Providence”, *Shakespeare Survey XXXIII* (1981), p. 89-98. It also seems to echo a passage from the Bible (Mt 10:29), which could point to the idea that Hamlet might be more religious than he appears. See Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.

particularly the unexpected part on the pirates, which, according to Sinfield, is highly unlikely²⁶⁸. Based on this idea, Hamlet's statements could be seen as a renewed belief in predestination and providence, because of what happened during his dangerous trip to England. Despite the fact that the context does not allow to confirm that Hamlet really believes in predestination, this could more positively point to an at least partial or temporary renewal of belief and trust in God after Hamlet's nihilistic and almost atheistic turn of mind in the previous scene, which could possibly indicate that Hamlet is slowly regaining his senses again, potentially announcing his final reconciliation with Laertes and – as will be argued at the end of this section – his possible salvation in the afterlife.

As opposed to both statements in the fifth act, Hamlet's attitudes and words in the rest of the play do not seem to point to a belief in a form of prewritten fate. Although this does not mean that Hamlet does not believe in predestination in the fifth act – he could have changed his mind, as indicated in the last paragraph – this does once again point to Hamlet's religious inconsistency. The previous lack of belief in predestination is particularly visible in the prayer scene, which is to be analysed in the next section.

3.2. On the Prayer Scene

The prayer scene (3.3) particularly illustrates the opposition between Claudius's sinful Protestant nature and Hamlet's mixed religious beliefs, and shows the extent of Hamlet's lack of religious understanding. In his attempted prayer, Claudius states that he cannot turn to God or truly seek repentance because of his guilt, as well as the fact that he does not want to renounce his benefits from the murder:

[...] Pray can I not.
 Though inclination be as sharp as will,
 My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent
 [...] but O, what form of prayer
 Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
 That cannot be, since I am still possessed
 Of those effects for which I did the murder-
 [...] May one be pardoned and retain th'offence?
 (3.3.38-40; 51-54; 56)

Despite Claudius's apparent intent to pray for forgiveness, he does not appear to be really willing to repent – as he is not ready to renounce material benefits for the salvation of his soul. This is strongly remindful of Faustus's attitude – who appears in doubts several times and attempts to rise to salvation, but is unable to bring himself to truly repent because of his fate as

²⁶⁸ Alain Sinfield, *Op. Cit.*, p. 92. Sinfield also suggests that Hamlet's ability to change the letter to save himself could also be seen as the result of providence – however, he does not seem to consider the inherently sinful nature of Hamlet's killing of Rosencranz and Guildenstern.

an apostate. This could indicate that Claudius, just like Faustus, is an apostate condemned to damnation without any possibility to turn to God again. This seems to be confirmed in the next part of the monologue:

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove above by justice;
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.²⁶⁹
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature [...]
Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay.
Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as the sinews of the new-born babe.
(3.3.57-61; 65-71)

This extract seems to emphasise the fact that Claudius tries to repent only because he knows that his sins cannot be hidden in the afterlife, and because he fears damnation. The first part of the extract seems to imply that, were it possible to fool or bribe divine justice, Claudius would not try to repent at all. Once again, this seems to highlight that the king does not pray with the right motives, and might not be ready to make an effort to be forgiven, as he does not consider the necessity of God's grace nor understand His mercy, and he tries to repent only out of fear of eternal suffering – which, once again, seems to correspond to the definition of a predestined apostate. The last part of the extract, in which Claudius mentions his “heart with strings of steel”, seems to echo Calvin's definition of the hardened heart of reprobates. Like Faustus, Claudius seems to be hardened in both possible ways mentioned by Calvin²⁷⁰ – he is blinded and unable to see the endlessness of God's love and mercy, and excludes himself from salvation through failing to understand the necessity of divine forgiveness; and he is resolute in his sinful plan to keep the material benefits of his sins, thus effectively not truly repenting and not seeking real salvation for his soul.

The possible Protestant intertextuality of this monologue – although Claudius does not seem to realise its implications, which can be interpreted as a part of his blindness due to his

²⁶⁹ The careful reader might notice this allusion to a traditional view of Heaven as situated above earth, in the sky. This, however, could be a mere expression – and not a reflection of Claudius's view on the afterlife –, as well as a reference to a non-physical place outside of earth; therefore, the use of this word will not be analysed further.

²⁷⁰ As a reminder, Calvin mentions that the heart of apostates are blinded so that they cannot have faith anymore; or that their will can be strengthened so that they are resolute in their sinful enterprise. See John Calvin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238.

apostate status – makes Hamlet’s reaction seem all the more absurd²⁷¹. Upon seeing the praying Claudius, and after drawing his sword to kill him while he is defenceless, Hamlet states that

[...] And so he goes to heaven;
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.
A villain kills my father; and for that
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
[...] And am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No.

(3.3.74-79; 84-87)

The allusions to predestination in Claudius’s previous soliloquy might indicate that Claudius is damned and will never be able to repent, confirming that Claudius, despite his Protestant beliefs, is still a negative, wicked character. In this perspective, Hamlet’s allusion to heaven seems all the more contradictory – and might emphasise how inadequate Hamlet’s mixed doctrinal views might be. Despite the fact that Hamlet’s statements further in the play seem to point to a Protestant belief in predestination, his reaction towards the praying Claudius seems to indicate that Hamlet does not, in fact, believe in prewritten fate²⁷². If Hamlet believed that Claudius’s destiny is determined from before his birth, he would not fear that his soul could be saved through a simple prayer – as apostates are not supposed to be able to repent, and as they can appear temporarily virtuous while still remaining sinful reprobates. In the case where Claudius would be predestined to salvation, the fact that Hamlet killed him “drunk asleep, or in his rage,/ Or in th’incestuous pleasure of his bed,/ At gaming swearing, or about some act/ That has no relish of salvation in’t” (3.3.89-92) would not change his destiny. Hamlet, as a Protestant scholar, should normally recognise that he, as a human being, cannot know God’s plan for Claudius; and should not consider the possibility that Claudius might be saved, as he cannot have any control over it. In short, even before considering Hamlet’s entirely unchristian intentions of damning his enemy, his crossing of the boundaries between the living and the dead through the wish to control the ultimate destiny of others, or his heretical wish to take up God’s role by deciding about the afterlife of a human being, the very fact that Hamlet considers that the actions performed at the moment when he kills Claudius might have any influence on the King’s afterlife fate already shows Hamlet’s inconsistent beliefs and non-Protestant tendencies,

²⁷¹ Although the protagonist only enters at the end of Claudius’s soliloquy, which probably means that he did not hear it.

²⁷² Or, as has been suggested in the previous section, that this belief only comes late, possibly indicating a renewal of Hamlet’s faith towards the end of the play, which will be expanded on in the next part.

as he seems to believe that “dying outside of mortal sin [is] key”²⁷³, which, according to Peter Marshall, is part of the “Catholic dispensation of free will and resistible grace”²⁷⁴. This seems to go together with Hamlet’s apparent faith in the efficiency of confession before death to relieve the soul from its suffering in the afterlife; and once again points to contradictory beliefs – as Hamlet later seems to believe in a form of predestination – which, because of the disparity with the Protestant overtones of Claudius’s confession, appears all the more inadequate and seems to announce the protagonist’s downfall. Claudius’s final words, after Hamlet has exited the stage, seem to remind the viewer of this disparity: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below./ Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3.3.97-98)²⁷⁵.

An alternative, and quite different, interpretation of the prayer scene is however possible²⁷⁶. The scene possibly refers to the biblical passage of the Pharisee and the Publican, in which the Publican, much like the praying Claudius recognising that he is unworthy of forgiveness (“O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven/ It hath the primal eldest curse²⁷⁷ upon’t-/ A brother’s murder. Pray can I not [...]” (3.3.36-38)), “would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, O God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13)²⁷⁸. In this perspective, Claudius could be seen as much more repentant than the Calvinistic intertextuality might indicate; and the King could be interpreted as “humbl[ing] himself” (18:14) through prayer and the recognition of his evil deed, which, according to the biblical story, might lead him to “be exalted” (18:14) and rise to Heaven – which would strongly nuance the Calvinistic interpretation suggested above. In this interpretation, Hamlet’s bold assertion suggesting that the King will go to Heaven if he is killed in prayer might be compared to the Pharisee’s proud assertion of his own virtue (“O God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican” (18:11)), in which he seems to imply that he knows who is eligible for salvation and who will be damned, which has been identified in the previous section as a heretical transgression of divine order. Although this

²⁷³ Peter Marshall, “Catholic and Protestant Hells in Later Reformation England”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 93.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Incidentally, the fact that Hamlet enters after Claudius’s first soliloquy on his inability to repent, and exits before this last statement seems to mirror his blindness to Protestantism – the prince could have heard the King’s confession and realised that he was damned, thus fulfilling his revenge and ending the tragedy, but he does not hear the words of reason and instead persists in his Catholic ideas, as well as in his downfall.

²⁷⁶ I am grateful to Prof. Guido Latré for his insight on this issue and the suggestion of this interpretation.

²⁷⁷ This is much likely a reference to the fratricide story of Cain and Abel, as also suggested by George R. Hibbard, *Op. Cit.*, p. 272.

²⁷⁸ The biblical extract comes from the Geneva Bible (1560) [Online version with modernised spelling] (http://www.genevabible.org/files/Geneva_Bible/New_Testament/Luke.pdf (retrieved on 29. July 2017)), already printed in Shakespeare’s time, and of which some scholars suggest that it might be the version that Shakespeare used (on this issue, see among others Alison Shell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7).

interpretation strongly nuances the possible Calvinistic intertextuality of Claudius's words, it still emphasises Hamlet's pride and the inadequacy of his theology²⁷⁹. It seems difficult to affirm that one interpretation is correct; it might even be argued that both intertextual references are intended, creating a strong theological confusion. This could be linked with the feeling of religious loss and possible mirroring of the theological inconsistency in Elizabethan England, discussed in the last section of this chapter.

3.3. On confession and repentance

Before studying the issue of Hamlet's destiny, a few words will be said on the subject of the representation of confession and the beliefs around repentance in the play. Hamlet, as has been seen, seems to believe in the efficiency of confession to a priest before death – a rather Catholic idea, according to which the pardon of the priest could help the soul reach heaven faster, as the priest was supposed to represent God's authority on earth²⁸⁰. Similarly, and as argued by Paul Stegner, Hamlet, when confronting his mother in her closet, seems to try to assume the role of a father confessor, bringing his mother to confession and repentance by reminding her of her sins²⁸¹ ("You go not till I set you up in a glass/ Where you may see the inmost part of you" (3.4.20-21)) and offering her advice as to how to repent ("O, throw away the worser part of [your heart],/ And live the purer with the other half./ Good night – but go not to my uncle's bed./ Assume a virtue if you have it not" (3.4.153-156)) – although it could be argued that this is ironical, as Hamlet is himself in sin and not more moral than his mother. Hamlet therefore seems to hold a particularly Catholic view on confession and repentance, not believing in predestination – except potentially in the end, although the honesty of his statements can be questioned – and thinking that private confession to a priest can alleviate the soul's sufferings in the next world. This is possibly inspired by the Ghost, whom Hamlet seems to entirely believe, especially on this issue. As has been argued in the previous section, Hamlet's beliefs on this matter can hardly be recognised as adequate, as the prayer scene seems to suggest that Hamlet's Catholic beliefs might be wrong²⁸². Additionally, Stegner suggests that Hamlet's attitude as an attempted, but failed father confessor can also be seen in the prayer scene, where

²⁷⁹ Possibly nuancing the upcoming idea that Hamlet might be saved in the afterlife, as the biblical extract states that "every man that exalteth himself, shall be brought low" (18:14). Hamlet's downfall and death, however, can be seen as a humbling of the protagonist, without necessarily implying that he needs to be damned.

²⁸⁰ Although the priest, of course, was not considered the equal of God in Catholic religion. The importance of the priest's pardon as a token of God's forgiveness was, however, important in that system – as argued in the historical background.

²⁸¹ Paul Stegner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

²⁸² Although bringing Gertrude to repentance is not sinful in itself. Incidentally, if the Queen is innocent of the murder of the King – which she seems to be –, she is much less in need of repentance and confession than Hamlet himself.

Hamlet mistakes Claudius's prayer for a sincere attempt at repentance²⁸³, which can be linked to the idea that Hamlet's bold suggestion that he knows who is eligible to salvation is sinful, inadequate, and might lead him to be "brought low", just like the Pharisee (Luke 18:14).

It could be argued, however, that Hamlet's attitude towards his mother in the closet scene is closer to that of the Old Man in *Doctor Faustus* – that of a good Christian trying to bring a lost soul back to Heaven through real, unfeigned confession to God. It can be noted that Hamlet, after lecturing his mother, does not advise her to confess to a priest – one could suggest that Hamlet does not feel that this is necessary, as he acted as a father confessor himself²⁸⁴, or that he does, in fact, recognise the importance of personal confession directly to God. Therefore, nuances need to be added to the claim that Hamlet's confessional habits are entirely Catholic.

Claudius, as opposed to Hamlet, seems to follow the Protestant tradition of private prayer and repentance of the believer, a work of introspection in which the Protestant believers are faced with themselves and their own conscience, in order to avoid the priest's pardoning of sins which are not regretted, only because the believer seems repentant²⁸⁵. Claudius's soliloquy seems to reflect this idea when he states that "there [above] the action lies/ In his true nature" (3.3.61-62) – the king is faced with his own conscience, and realises that he cannot fake guilt and regrets and might not be worthy of forgiveness, although he might "[t]ry what repentance can" (3.3.65).

This very short analysis of the confessional practice of both Hamlet and Claudius seems to confirm Hamlet's Catholic – and probably erroneous – beliefs, possibly developed under the influence of the Ghost; as well as Claudius's misused Protestant habits, which he uses to justify his own sins and coarse deeds, but which also forces him to face his guilty conscience and terrible deeds, possibly pointing to the idea that he might be condemned to damnation in Hell – although the biblical intertextuality, as has been seen, can add nuances to this claim.

3.4. Hamlet's destiny – the resolution

If the play, as has been suggested, carries Protestant overtones and possible references to predestination, one might wonder whether Hamlet, because of his staged downfall from a Protestant scholar to an unchristian being during the play, as well as his tendency to Catholic and nihilistic beliefs and his transgressions of both human and divine authority, is predestined to damnation as well. Although offering no final answer, the scene of Hamlet's death might

²⁸³ Paul Stegner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 117.

²⁸⁴ *Idem*, p. 113.

²⁸⁵ *Idem*, p. 109.

provide a hint as to Hamlet's afterlife destiny – as well as a touch of hope at the end of the play, despite the protagonist's death and the invasion of Denmark.

Before the duel, Hamlet seems to realise and regret his errors, and asks Laertes for forgiveness:

Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong;
But pardon't as you are a gentleman.
This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,
How am I punished with sore distraction.
What I have done
That might your nature, honour, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
[...] Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.²⁸⁶

(5.2.172-178; 187-190)

Although this monologue is addressed to Laertes, it bears a strong resemblance to an epiphany, where Hamlet realises his own misdeeds and errors. In this monologue, Hamlet does not address God; however, his attitude seems to correspond to that of a suddenly repentant soul. He realises that he has been maddened and blinded by grief, melancholy, and hatred ("sore distraction"), which has led him to commit terrible sins and hurt others without realising it ("Let my disclaiming from a *purposed evil*/ Free me [...] That I have [...] hurt my brother"; emphasis added); and seems to realise that he is in need of forgiveness for his sins ("Give me your pardon, sir"). In their final moments, both men exchange forgiveness ("(Laertes) Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet./ Mine and my father's death come note upon thee,/ Nor thine on me!/ [...] - (Hamlet) Heaven make thee free of it!" (5.2.282-285)) – which might be a symbolic representation of Hamlet's humble acceptance of his guilt, turning to virtue by asking for forgiveness, and obtaining absolution for his crimes. In this study of predestination, it might be tempting to assume that Hamlet, in the end, might be part of the elect – in this perspective, he would be what Perking called a "dying member" of the community of the elect and of the Celestial body; a believer who is lost during life but ultimately returns to God, "like unto a benumbed leg without sense, which indeed is part of a man's body, and yet receiveth no nourishment"²⁸⁷. Horatio's last words to Hamlet ("Good night, sweet prince,/ And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." (5.2.313-314)), an almost literal translation of the "*In Paradisum*

²⁸⁶ According to Q1 and Q2. The First Folio indicates "mother" instead of "brother"; I have chosen the Q1 and Q2 version, according to George Hibbard's edition. (See Hibbard, *Op. Cit.*, p. 346).

²⁸⁷ William Perkins, *Op. Cit.*, p. 252.

deductant te angeli”²⁸⁸, might be indicative of Hamlet’s afterlife rest, although it might simply reflect Horatio’s wish for Hamlet’s salvation.

Hamlet’s epiphany, however, is not addressed to God, but to Laertes – which might question the interpretation of Hamlet as a saved being, although it can be stated that repentance towards the ones that he hurt is the first step leading to true repentance towards God. In addition to this, the fact that Hamlet ultimately fulfils the Ghost’s task and kills Claudius could nuance this interpretation. It might be stated that if Hamlet truly realised his wrongdoing, he should renounce the Ghost’s command – as it was what drove him to madness and made him turn to Catholic and nihilistic ideas. On the other hand, it could be argued that, because of Laertes’s status as the one who receives Hamlet’s confession in his final epiphany – which, in the Protestant system, was the role of God – his forgiving words (“He is justly served;/ It is a poison tempered by himself” (5.2.280-281)) could be a sign of forgiveness for that sin, as well as a recognition that Claudius truly deserved his dreadful fate – although this is merely a hint, and no definite proof, that Hamlet might be ultimately truly forgiven²⁸⁹. In addition to this, Hamlet’s condemnation of Rosencranz and Guildenstern to an extremely harsh punishment which they did not deserve despite their political opportunism seems a terrible and hardly forgivable deed, for which Hamlet does not seek forgiveness. In the fifth act, the prince only justifies his deed by blaming his victims (“They are not near my conscience. Their defeat²⁹⁰/ Doth by their own insinuation grow” (5.2.59-60)), which seems particularly cruel; the protagonist does not mention this deed afterwards. This terrible sin, which can hardly be justified, might add a nuance to the idea that Hamlet is saved after his death.

Finally, Hamlet asks Horatio to tell his story, most probably in order for his name not to be tainted after his death (“report me and my cause aright/ To the unsatisfied” (5.2.292-293); “in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain/ To tell my story.” (5.2.301-302)). This could be interpreted as a final materialistic preoccupation showing that Hamlet is more concerned about his earthly survival than about the fate of his soul – which would prove that Hamlet is still

²⁸⁸ I am grateful to Prof. Guido Latré for bringing this to my attention. Interestingly, this almost literal translation seems to refer to a much more Catholic tradition, as it addresses the departed, which might be surprising as it is pronounced by Horatio. This could refer to Hamlet’s Catholic beliefs; or be a further indication of mixed theology in the play and mirroring of mixed rites in Denmark, and in Elizabethan England.

²⁸⁹ This forgiving role of Laertes, in which he receives the protagonist’s confession and forgives him, would interestingly create a rather ironical parallel between Laertes and a traditionally Catholic father confessor, possibly evoking Hamlet’s tendency to turn to Catholic confession rituals. Hamlet, in confessing his sin to Laertes, is nevertheless probably merely seeking forgiveness from the human being that he has hurt the most, and not consciously giving him the role of a forgiving father confessor – especially as Hamlet forgives Laertes as well. The exchange of forgiveness, in this perspective, is not to be interpreted as a further proof of Hamlet’s inadequate theology.

²⁹⁰ According to Q2. The First Folio indicates “debate” himself; I have chosen Hibbard’s version (*Op. Cit.*, p. 338).

unable to consider the unearthly afterlife, like in the fourth act. However, Hamlet does not ask Horatio to embellish his story – which implies that the scholar will probably tell of Hamlet’s madness and sins as well, especially as Horatio, as also argued by Bernàth, is praised as an impartial scholar with good judgement²⁹¹. This request, therefore, could also be seen as Hamlet’s ultimate act of confession to the world, allowing him to leave his earthly life with a clear conscience, and to truly embrace repentance in the last moments of his life. This could be confirmed by the fact that, in the end and after bringing many to death, Hamlet prevents Horatio from committing suicide²⁹².

Hamlet’s afterlife destiny, ultimately, is hard to affirm. Because of the possible final epiphany, as well as the exchange of forgiveness with Laertes and the potential confession to the world, it would be tempting – and hopeful – to interpret the ending of the play as a sign of Hamlet’s salvation. The question remains as to whether Hamlet finally realises the sinful nature of his wish to equal God in his attempted revenge and of his killing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or whether he still considers that he was entirely right. It is possible that Hamlet realises the sinful nature of his wish to damn his enemy – but, knowing that he is already in sin, still decides to kill Claudius in order to fulfil his goal and not “let this canker of our nature come/ In further evil” (5.2.70-71). The ending remains cryptic and open – but the hopeful reader can only hope that the troubled Hamlet has finally found peace.

4. Critical assessment of the elements found in the play: possible conclusions and subversions

This final section will briefly re-assess the ideas evoked so far, in order to examine whether the play offers any subversive ideas. The destinies of the characters and the country will be addressed once again, in an attempt to bring nuances to the ideas and interpretations suggested above. Particularly, Hamlet’s and Claudius’s ambiguous natures, as well as the bitter and ambiguous ending of the play, will be discussed; in the last section, possible cultural implications will be suggested, although this issue will be mostly expanded on in the next chapter.

4.1. On the characters’ destinies

In the previous sections, the characters of Hamlet and Claudius – as the main protagonist and antagonist of the play – have been mostly analysed, in an attempt to identify the flaws in their theologies and religious views or practices. As has been argued, Claudius can be identified

²⁹¹ Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 298.

²⁹² This has also been noted by Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 297.

not only as a villain and the negative character of a murderous and usurping²⁹³ King, but also as a possible apostate – if his attempt to repent is interpreted as insincere – and a bad Protestant character, using apparently reasonable Protestant principles and discourses to justify his own sinful drives, and disregarding Protestant customs when they do not suit him. Claudius, in addition to this, does not seem to be misled by any negative influence or lack of judgement – he seems like an entirely reasonable character, committing evil deeds while entirely conscious of the wickedness of his actions, and unable to repent despite his efforts. The King’s terrible death and most probable damnation thereafter, therefore, might not come as a surprise to the Protestant viewer. The biblical intertextuality of the prayer scene, however, might add a nuance to Claudius’s very negative portrayal and his possible damnation. The Protestant intertextuality, possibly explained by the threat of censorship – as will be argued in the next section – does not necessarily exclude a more nuanced interpretation of a more ambiguous, mainly wicked, but also doubting, Claudius²⁹⁴ – ultimately making the character appear much more human.

This ambiguity can be seen in the case of Hamlet as well. The protagonist, as argued by Bernàth, exhibits a tendency to melancholy²⁹⁵, anger, and hatred from the beginning of the play; additionally, he already depicts a certain wish to damn his enemies, thus already revealing a tendency to sinful thoughts and wish to transgress the divine boundaries. However, the prince, in the beginning of the play, only displays negative tendencies – and cannot be really deemed a sinner. The prince is presented as a perfect Protestant scholar and a man in love, although he seems to feel at a loss in the new, Renaissance world and its never-ending evolutions – as his words to Ophelia seem to indicate (“Doubt thou the stars are fire,/ Doubt that the sun doth move/ Doubt truth to be a liar/ But never doubt I love” (2.2.115-118))²⁹⁶. Hamlet’s ‘madness’ – i.e. the complete loss of his religious reference points, followed by his turn to Catholic and nihilistic considerations making him fall into sin – however, comes from the exterior influence of the unbalancing element – the Ghost – probably enhanced by Hamlet’s frustrated grief²⁹⁷. Hamlet’s falling into sin, therefore, cannot be deemed to be entirely his fault – he is misguided

²⁹³ Although, as has been suggested, this can be discussed – as Claudius was probably elected by the people.

²⁹⁴ Claudius’s possibly good politics and negotiations can be seen as partly redeeming as well.

²⁹⁵ Andràs G. Bernàth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 276-287.

²⁹⁶ This poem is most likely a reference to Copernicus’s modern heliocentric model in astronomy, which replaced the Ptolemaic geocentric model prevailing in the Middle Ages. The geocentric model suggested, among others, that the earth was the centre of the universe – because humans were deemed the centre of God’s attention and love –, and that the sun moved around the earth. Hamlet’s poem therefore seems to echo the feeling of loss brought by the new system, in which human beings were not the centre of the universe anymore. I am thankful to Prof. Guido Latré for his insight on this issue, through his ‘LGERM2722 – In-depth study of Shakespeare’s drama’ course at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, November 2015).

²⁹⁷ As a reminder, Hamlet’s feeling of grief is frustrated because he needs to repress it in front of Claudius and Gertrude, who disapprove of his too long mourning.

by the “perturbèd spirit” (1.5.190) and his frustrated grief, and although he is most probably wrong to listen to the Ghost, this mistake, given the circumstances, seems understandable. Hamlet, in short, seems misled by his ‘madness’, which can roughly be equalled to the Ghost. Mixed doctrinal views, transgression of authority, and the loss of faith are sins which explain Hamlet’s terrible downfall and death – but the fact that Hamlet does not seem entirely responsible for those sins and the fact that he seems more forgivable than Claudius appears to give some hope in his possible redemption. The same can probably be said about Laertes – whose transgressions and sins were also caused by grief coupled with misleading from Claudius, leading him to a terrible death and a probable redemption. Because of his mishandling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, one cannot say, however, that Hamlet is completely guiltless or innocent. Hamlet’s religious inconsistencies can be partly forgiven, as they are possibly induced by the Ghost; however, the prince’s terrible sin towards his old friends is hardly forgivable, and seems to confirm that Hamlet’s death is deserved, although he might be saved in the afterlife. Hamlet, in the end, remains a highly ambiguous character; much like Claudius, through his possible repentance scene, becomes more ambiguous than he might have appeared.

In the end, two main characters remain – Horatio and the finally appearing Fortinbras. Horatio, as has been argued, is characterised as a good Protestant scholar, as well as an honest man and courtier. He fears the Ghost and does not trust him (“To what issue will this come?” (1.4.64); he trusts Heaven to help those in need (“Heaven will direct it” (1.4.66)); he is a faithful friend and servant who helps Hamlet identify Claudius’s guilt, but does not try to rise above his own place. It does not seem surprising, therefore, that Horatio is the sole survivor of the bloodbath – and, despite his sadness and wish to die over Hamlet’s demise (“I am more an antique Roman than a Dane./ Here’s some liquor left.” (5.2.294-295)), he has been given a mission to live by. Horatio, the model scholar and courtier, seems therefore to be given the best fate among the protagonists of the tragedy – which comes as no surprise, given his role as an almost flawless character. However, his destiny under Fortinbras’s authority is unclear, as it is hard to know whether the new prince can be trusted.

Ultimately, the fate of Denmark, led to its end by the wicked actions and mixed theology of its royal family, is left ambiguous. The arrival of Fortinbras might seem hopeful, as the prince seems to promise a good burial to Hamlet (“[...] for his passage,/ The soldiers’ music and the rites of war/ Speak loudly for him” (5.2.351-353)); however, it is hard to know whether the new, ambitious ruler can be trusted, as he did not hold his vow to not invade Denmark (2.2). The destiny of Denmark, much like that of the main characters, seems ambiguous. Despite the protagonist’s possible salvation in the afterlife, the ending of the play seems quite bitter – which

might partly reflect the feeling of loss and uncertainty of Elizabethan England, as will be argued in the next chapter.

4.2. “Blurry doctrinal boundaries”²⁹⁸ and the issue of England

As has been suggested in the introduction to this chapter, one might see a parallel between Hamlet’s feeling of loss and tendency to not know what to believe anymore, and the probable tendency to feel at loss in the new, Protestant system of England – especially as Elizabeth seemed to retain some of the older customs, for example the keeping of crosses in her chapels despite the Protestant refusal of idols²⁹⁹. Although this is not the main focus of this study, it is interesting to note that this parallel might be a conscious mirroring of the difficulties faced by the citizens in the troubled years following the sudden shift of religion by Henry VIII, followed by a short return to Catholicism before the accession of Elizabeth I and the definitive return to Protestantism, albeit with some Catholic elements integrated into it. The staging of contradictory doctrinal elements in the play – for instance that of an ambiguous Ghost, which can be explained by Protestant theology but seems to draw on an older tradition, which appears alongside obvious references to the doctrine of predestination and Calvinistic texts – seems to mirror a society in which citizens do not really know what to believe anymore – especially as the religious change went together with an overarching change in all aspects of society, as was also seen in Hamlet’s comments on the newfound Copernican model – leading them to a feeling of loss and ‘madness’, possibly mirrored in the protagonist³⁰⁰, despite the Queen’s effort to offer a harmonious, quasi-divine façade. In this perspective, it would be possible to interpret the play as partly – and subtly – critical of the Elizabethan regime, hiding a troubled political, religious, and social background behind an appearance of harmony and divinity. Claudius’s mishandling of Protestant faith could possibly be interpreted as a parallel of Elizabeth’s inconsistent use of the Protestant tradition – this would not be the only parallel between Claudius and the Queen, as the comment on the divine protection of the King is also attributed to Claudius. In this perspective, the loss of reference points leading to a loss of belief and a sinful attitude of the protagonist could be seen as mirroring the general feeling of loss of the people, possibly leading them to a feeling of grudge. Hamlet’s failed attempt at rebellion, in this perspective, could also be interpreted as partly mirroring the failed rebellions against Elizabeth, mirroring the political troubles of England. In the play, the sovereign’s mishandling of the Protestant faith and the protagonists’ negative actions lead the kingdom to its end – which

²⁹⁸ Sharon Emmerichs, *Op. Cit.*, p. 178.

²⁹⁹ Peter Marshall, “Choosing sides and talking religion”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

³⁰⁰ This, as well as the issue of the ‘Renaissance man’, will be extended on in the next chapter.

could hint at a possible criticism of, or potential warning against, a loose use of theology. If this parallel is true, it could point to an extremely ironical situation – as Elizabeth would be subtly paralleled to the overall negatively portrayed Claudius, thus possibly pointing to a harsh criticism of the regime; as the play still presents an overall rather Protestant message, thus openly respecting the official views on religion, however, it could therefore avoid censorship despite the possible harsh criticism³⁰¹. This interpretation could also explain the bitter ending of the play, mirroring the feeling of uncertainty and grim perspective for the future existing in England towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, which Peter Marshall describes as follows:

[T]he religious atmosphere of later Elizabethan and Jacobean England, in the Midlands and elsewhere, was articulate, animated, and contested; [...] the religious future of the country was frequently seen as uncertain, and its current state widely regarded as contingent and unsettled³⁰²

This interpretation, which would deserve a much more detailed investigation which this study, due to its limited status, cannot offer, will be more extensively discussed in the next chapter, where both *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet* will be compared, and possible cultural openings and conclusions will be suggested.

Partial conclusion

This fourth chapter has attempted to study the issue of mixed doctrinal views and rites in *Hamlet*, which, because it seems to lead most characters – as well as the whole kingdom of Denmark – to a tragic end, might suggest a mainly Protestant interpretation of the play, although several contradictory elements and the overall ambiguity of the play might add nuances to this interpretation. This part has particularly concentrated on the mixed theology of Hamlet – his representation of an afterlife with which he can interact, his nihilistic and almost atheistic perspective on death, his lack of belief in predestination, and his transgression of human and divine authority – as well as the wicked Protestantism of Claudius – in his use of Protestant principles to justify his sins, as well as his apparent status as an apostate, encouraging the watcher to not follow his example. Despite not explicitly mocking or criticising Catholicism, the play therefore seems to carry a mainly Protestant message, encouraging a unified theology. However, the play remains ambiguous, and could also be interpreted as partly – and subtly – criticising the mixed theology at work in Elizabethan England³⁰³, as Hamlet's uncertainty about what to believe, and the royal family's disrespect of several rules and traditions – including the

³⁰¹ This might be considered as even more important, as Shakespeare's period is recognised as “one of the most anticlerical climates that England has ever known” – although this is especially true of the 1580s and 1590s, shortly before *Hamlet*. See Alison Shell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

³⁰² Peter Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

³⁰³ Peter Marshall, “Choosing sides and talking religion”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

burial tradition – lead them and the whole country to downfall. The play, in this perspective, would mirror the unease and feeling of loss resulting from a rapid shift from one religion to another, probably prevailing in a time of adaptation of both society and the Church to the new, still constantly evolving religion.

Chapter V – *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet*: a confrontation

This brief final chapter will attempt to compare and contrast the different elements identified in both plays, in order to offer a more general conclusion concerning the representation of the afterlife in the context of the English Reformation and of the Protestant-Catholic opposition. Although this study mainly focused on the in-text analysis of the plays in an attempt to study the theological elements of the afterlife, some references to the cultural context are inevitable. This chapter will therefore partly attempt to develop the short cultural openings suggested in Chapters III and IV, and suggest further possible conclusions as to the cultural message of both plays, and what it might reveal about the English Reformation period under Elizabeth I. In a first section, this chapter will compare the elements of the afterlife identified in both plays, in an attempt to draw conclusions on these elements – this will therefore not be a simple repetition of what has been suggested in the two preceding chapters. Secondly, possible cultural implications and wider comments on the plays will be suggested.

1. A generally Protestant representation of the afterlife

As has been noted in the analyses, the plays seem to mainly stage a Protestant afterlife – despite the existence of the Ghost in *Hamlet*. This might seem more obvious from *Doctor Faustus* than from *Hamlet*, as the former seems to present numerous Protestant elements alongside a very harsh criticism and mockery of Catholicism, as has been seen in Chapter III. However, *Hamlet*, because of its presentation of the crossing of boundaries between the living and the dead as potentially sinful, and its staging of Catholic and nihilistic elements leading the characters to their demise, seems to generally point to a mostly Protestant message as well. It could therefore be argued that the plays seem to generally respect the existing theology of the time, thus presenting the viewer with a mostly orthodox and traditionalist point of view – especially in *Hamlet*, where orthodox theology seems to go together with a defence of the traditional theological rights of the sovereign.

This conception of a Protestant afterlife seems to be mainly staged through counterexamples – as the protagonists and, in the case of *Hamlet*, the antagonist, because of their erroneous beliefs and misuse of Protestant doctrines, are led astray and meet a gruesome destiny. It was argued in Chapter IV that Hamlet's main problem is doctrinal inconsistencies; this can also partly be argued in the case of Faustus. Like Hamlet, Faustus is supposed to be a Protestant scholar, and apparently identifies himself as one³⁰⁴. However, Faustus seems to hold unorthodox beliefs, identified in the previous analysis as coming from his base, materialistic

³⁰⁴ As he mocks the Pope and Cardinals in the third Act.

interpretations of life and the Scriptures, which can be seen as a harsh criticism of what Protestants deemed as the Catholic literality. Although it cannot be directly stated that Faustus truly develops Catholic beliefs³⁰⁵, his erroneous interpretations of the Scriptures can be linked, to some extent, to a criticism against Catholic religion – as is the case in *Hamlet*. As Faustus also seems to believe that the Christian Hell is the equivalent of the Classical Elysium, it could be argued that Faustus, like Hamlet, develops a form of mixed doctrinal beliefs, although this was not the prime focus of the analysis in Chapter III – as Faustus’s downfall can more importantly be attributed to his materialism, pride, and despair. In the case of Hamlet, this mixture of beliefs seems to be caused by the intrusion of Catholic elements in his life; in that of Faustus, it seems to stem from the doctor’s self-delusional behaviour and misuse of his scholastic knowledge.

Despite the fact that both plays seem to present a generally Protestant point of view, the theology defended in *Doctor Faustus* seems much more explicit and straightforward than the one presented in *Hamlet*, as will be argued in the next sections detailing the general conclusions on each of the criteria addressed in Chapter III and IV. Particularly, Catholicism seems much more bitterly criticised in the former than in the latter, where, despite the fact that Catholic elements – among others – seem to lead the protagonist to his demise, no explicit mockery or criticism of Catholicism can be found; and the criticism seems to be addressed to any form of mixed doctrinal beliefs, rather than explicitly Catholic ones. Although *Hamlet* can be deemed bitter in many other aspects, for example the ambiguity of the final scene or the nihilistic reflections on corpses, its position towards Catholicism does not seem so clear and so negative as in *Doctor Faustus*. This seems especially true given that the Ghost does not appear to be portrayed entirely negatively, as he is described as “more in sorrow than in anger” (1.2.231), and adopts the attitude of a loving, protective husband towards Gertrude (“O, step between her and her fighting soul!” (3.4.105))³⁰⁶.

1.1. General comments and conclusions on the status of the afterlife

Although the status of the afterlife and its location is much more discussed in *Doctor Faustus*, the comparison of both plays seems to indicate that any form of belief not corresponding to the mainstream Protestant doctrine of a non-geographical afterlife consisting of only Heaven and Hell is generally discouraged – as can be expected from mainly Protestant

³⁰⁵ Especially as Faustus himself still mocks Catholicism. Incidentally, this seems to prove that Faustus still identifies himself as a Protestant scholar, despite his deliberate choice to strike a deal with the devil.

³⁰⁶ Although Bernàth (p. 269) – for instance – argued that this partly positive portrayal of the Ghost could be a trick from the demon in disguise to appear harmless in front of Hamlet, and further lead him into sin.

plays. Although the depiction of erroneous beliefs is very different in *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet*, both lead to the same conclusion – the death of the protagonist – although *Hamlet* might offer a slightly more hopeful ending in regard to the protagonist's destiny, as has been argued that Hamlet might be saved in the afterlife, while *Doctor Faustus* offers no possible doubt as to the terrible fate of its protagonist. The difference in both protagonists' destinies with regard to their belief concerning the status of the afterlife can be linked to their respective situation: in the case of Hamlet, the prince's potentially Protestant beliefs are disrupted by the intrusion of Catholic elements in his life, in the form of the Ghost claiming that it comes from Purgatory. The protagonist therefore seems to be misled by the Ghost, be it a "spirit of health or goblin damned" (1.4.19), which could indicate that he is not entirely responsible for his mistaken beliefs – although he is clearly partly in the wrong, as is especially seen in his sinful wish for divinity, his crossing of boundaries, and his cruel handling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as will be discussed in the next section. Although Faustus is also misled by a spirit – unambiguously a demon in his case – at some point in the play, Faustus's alienation from mainstream Protestant beliefs initially comes from the doctor's materialistic interpretations and self-delusional behaviour; the doctor therefore seems to create his own alienation, which seems to perfectly correspond to his status as an apostate. As opposed to Hamlet, the doctor is not led to develop erroneous beliefs through the intervention of a spirit; on the contrary, he conjures up the misleading spirit because he is already in the wrong, and in sin.

1.2. General comments and conclusions on the boundaries of the afterlife

Once again, both plays seem to defend a view of the afterlife as entirely separated from the living world, and see the interactions with it as impossible or forbidden. In the case of *Doctor Faustus*, any contact with the dead is presented as truly impossible. The only manifestation of the afterlife seen in the play are explicitly presented as smoke screens, and the contact with demons – the only part of the afterlife with which the protagonist can communicate – as expected, is entirely negative and contributes to the protagonist's downfall from a scholar to a "practical joker"³⁰⁷. In the case of *Hamlet*, however, the situation seems less clear-cut. As the status of the Ghost is doubtful, it might be said that the afterlife is not clearly presented as closed or separated from the human world, which might point to an at least partly Catholic subtext. However, given the negative influence of the Ghost on the protagonist and the whole country, it can be argued that the intrusion of the Catholic Ghost – or the demon in disguise –

³⁰⁷ Luciano García García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

is overall presented as negative and dangerous, which once again might lead to a Protestant interpretation of the play.

Both Hamlet and Faustus can also be compared in their excessive wish to transgress frontiers – those of the afterlife, but also those existing between humanity and divinity. Faustus, in his attempt to gain a form of knowledge that only God can access – the ability to raise the dead, as well as knowledge concerning the status and location of the afterlife³⁰⁸ – attempts to rise above his “fundamentally wretched place in the cosmos”³⁰⁹; Hamlet, when trying to avenge himself upon the king and control the afterlife fate of his enemies, attempts to take up a role that cannot be his. In this respect, both protagonists could be seen as partial criticisms of an extreme version of the humanist, a Renaissance man having too much ambition, possibly leading him to deny religion – as is quite explicit in Hamlet’s nihilistic points of view, and in Faustus’s materialistic attitude – and to his downfall. This will be expanded on in section 2.

1.3. General comments and conclusions on predestination and providence

Once again, *Doctor Faustus* seems much more explicit in its handling of the theme of predestination and providence. Although some critics have argued that Faustus might not be damned from the beginning³¹⁰, the attitude of the protagonist, his erroneous beliefs from the very beginning of the play, as well as the numerous scenes referring to his inability to repent despite his efforts, especially towards the end of the play, seem to point to a rather obvious illustration of apostasy and prewritten damnation. The depiction of predestination in *Hamlet*, once again, seems less obvious, partly because of the staging of mixed doctrinal beliefs in the play. References to Calvin’s writings in Hamlet’s words seem to point to a certain belief in predestination on the part of the protagonist; possible – although disputable – references to Calvin’s theory in Claudius’s attitude seem to point to a potential prewritten damnation for him as well. However, the references to predestination seem less explicit than in *Doctor Faustus*, especially as the protagonist’s views on this issue are unclear, as he seems to believe that he is the master of his own earthly and afterlife destiny – and possibly of others’, as he tries to control the afterlife fate of Claudius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. Moreover, the biblical

³⁰⁸ Although the doctor, because of his self-delusion, rejects any information not suiting him.

³⁰⁹ Genevieve Guenther, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

³¹⁰ For example Luciano García, *Op. Cit.*, p. 101. Arguments in favour of this theory include the fact that the prologue does not seem to refer to Predestination – apart from the fact that it does announce the ending of the play, which could be seen as a mirroring of Faustus’s predestined life; however, the Prologue announcing the ending of the play is not a peculiarity of *Doctor Faustus* – the motif already existed in Classical theatre, for example Euripides’s *Hippolytus* (see the online version of the text: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Eur.%20Hipp>. (retrieved on 7. August 2017)).

intertextuality³¹¹ of the prayer scene possibly pointing to a humble repentance on the part of the king, which would reject the Calvinistic interpretation of a damned Claudius, raises doubts about whether the characters are predestined at all. The fact that Hamlet's attitude in the same scene seems to mirror the attitude of the proud biblical Pharisee who "exalteth himself", and therefore "shall be brought low" (Luke 18:14)³¹² raises even more doubts as Hamlet's final moments seem to point towards a possible salvation for him – even though Hamlet might be considered humbled by his earthly downfall, which would be shown in his apologies to Laertes and would explain Hamlet's salvation, without excluding the idea that Hamlet might be a "dying member"³¹³ of the predestined elect. Although some elements seem to point to a possible prewritten destiny for the characters, it is therefore much harder to affirm that *Hamlet* defends a belief in Predestination, as opposed to *Doctor Faustus*.

2. Potential wider cultural implications

On the whole, both plays, as has briefly been suggested in their respective analyses, seem to mirror a number of theological insecurities. In their own way, both plays seem to mirror a form of religious crisis, which seems logical in the troubled historical context of the Reformation, especially in England. In *Doctor Faustus*, this crisis seems to be echoed through the strong opposition of Protestant and Catholic beliefs, and the harsh mockery and ridiculing of the latter, possibly attempting to strengthen Protestant unity in a troubled time. In *Hamlet*, on the other hand, the potential insecurities felt by the population of a country whose official religion changed several times over the course of less than a century seem to be mirrored through the staging of a lost protagonist, of Catholic intrusions in a Protestant system – just like Mary Tudor briefly imposed Catholicism back in England during her reign –, and of mixed doctrines and rites leading the country to a dreadful end and an uncertain future.

2.1. Possible educational, theological, and political subversions

As has been argued in Chapter III and IV, both plays are comparable in the fact that they seem to be at least partly subversive of one aspect of society and religion, although the aspect of society potentially criticised seems different in both plays – and, in the case of *Hamlet*, rather uncertain without further historical studies. As has been suggested, *Doctor Faustus*, because of its staging of a bad scholar whose erroneous beliefs are not discouraged by his Protestant

³¹¹ See Luke 18:14.

³¹² From the Geneva Bible Online [Modernised spelling], http://www.genevabible.org/files/Geneva_Bible/New_Testament/Luke.pdf (retrieved on 29. July 2017).

³¹³ William Perkins, *Op. Cit.*, p. 252.

University, seems to point towards a criticism of Protestant or humanist education, and to potentially argue for a more supervised form of teaching of the Scriptures.

In the case of *Hamlet*, a potential criticism of the Elizabethan regime has been suggested despite the defence of the theological rights of the sovereign and the apparently overall Protestant message. This potential criticism and mirroring of fear could explain the overall ambiguous message and theology of the play. As has been argued, Claudius's misuse of the Protestant doctrine could be compared to Elizabeth I's mixture of dogmas, which would point to the play offering a harsh, though partly concealed, criticism of the Queen, while maintaining a traditionalist façade which would allow the play to be accepted by censors. The issue of what aspect of the regime is criticised in the play, however, is debatable. It could be argued that *Hamlet* criticises the Queen's, as well as the country's, theological inconsistencies – as mixed beliefs seem central in the play, and to be the reason for the country's downfall; and as mixed religious dogmas are attested in post-Reformation and Elizabethan England³¹⁴. However, this idea, as was argued in Chapter IV, is hard to assert because of the complexity of the historical background of the time, as well as the uncertainty of Shakespeare's religious beliefs³¹⁵. Peter Marshall, for example, recently argued that Shakespeare, because of the lack of overt religious declarations in his writings, had an “apparent quiet determination, in an age of confessional choices, to choose to refuse to choose”³¹⁶, and suggests that Shakespeare himself possibly held a “hybrid faith”³¹⁷. This would of course seriously question the idea that the country's mixed dogmas are criticised in the play. However, the criticism might not be limited to the mere religious aspect, but might criticise the atmosphere of hypocrisy and hidden troubles of the regime. In this respect, the play, in hiding a potential harsh criticism of the regime behind a traditionalist, harmonious façade, might be playing the same game as the Queen hiding political, social, and religious troubles behind a mask of harmony and quasi-divine status. The criticism would therefore go far beyond the mere religious aspect, and would possibly generally denounce the atmosphere of hypocrisy and unrest of the time, while playing the same game to avoid problems. This would give a whole new meaning to Hamlet's soliloquy on hypocrisy, as well as to his hesitations in “tak[ing] arms against a sea of troubles,/ And by opposing end them” (3.1.60-61).

³¹⁴ See Peter Marshall, “Choosing sides and talking religion”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42-55. The author, for example, mentions the coexistence of Protestant and Catholic faiths in the society, sometimes within families.

³¹⁵ Shakespeare, as mentioned in the analysis of the historical background, has been called a crypto-catholic (Lee Oser, *Op. Cit.*, p. 381-382).

³¹⁶ Peter Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

³¹⁷ *Idem*, p. 55-56.

Even though one might see a criticism of the Queen in the play, this does not mean that the play advocates a true change of regime – as the ambiguous and rather bitter ending of the play, in which the King and entire royal family are dead and the country is taken over by the ambiguous, quite negatively portrayed Fortinbras, does not seem to offer a particularly positive outlook on the future. This seems to point, once again, to the already mentioned attested feeling of unease and grim perspectives for the future towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, described by Peter Marshall:

[T]he religious atmosphere of later Elizabethan and Jacobean England, in the Midlands and elsewhere, was articulate, animated, and contested; [...] the religious future of the country was frequently seen as uncertain, and its current state widely regarded as contingent and unsettled³¹⁸

2.2. On the Renaissance man

Despite the fact that this study mainly concentrates on the theological aspects in the plays, a few words can be said about the notion of the Renaissance man in both tragedies, and how this notion seems to be linked to the protagonists' failures, thus potentially offering a warning against an exaggerated ambition leading to blasphemy. Both *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet* seem to present a protagonist who, at the beginning of the plays, seems to correspond to the general definition of the idealised *uomo universale*, or Renaissance man³¹⁹. Both are educated scholars; Hamlet, before the meeting with the Ghost, seems a lover courting Ophelia through gifts and poems, as well as a good fighter (5.2) and a philosopher, as he seems to admire Horatio who can apply the principles of stoicism in his life:

[T]hou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hath ta'en with equal thanks [...]
That is not passions's slave [...]

(3.2.60-63, 67)

Similarly, Faustus is a self-made man who rose above his low social status ("his parents base of stock" (Prologue, 11)) and became a scholar "[e]xcelling all whose sweet delight disputes/ In heavenly matters of theology" (Prologue, 18-19). Both protagonists' unreasoned and unlimited wish to gain more knowledge, understanding of the afterlife, and control over their own lives and those of others, however, lead them to take up a role that is not theirs and to attempt to become God's equals, as was suggested in section 2.1. This blasphemy, loosely linked to the notion of the afterlife as, in both cases, it goes together with the protagonists'

³¹⁸ Peter Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

³¹⁹ In the general definition provided by the Oxford English Dictionary: "A man who excels in the major fields of learning and action" (see <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73751?rskey=3E4eu2&result=1#eid>, retrieved on 10. August 2017).

wishes to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, is very clear in *Doctor Faustus*, where the doctor explicitly states that he wishes to “raise them [the dead] to life again” (1.1.25), thus stating his wish for forbidden knowledge. As has been suggested in Chapter III, the satire is bitter, as Faustus’s wish for divinity is paralleled with his base, mediocre attitude, making him baser and coarser than his own servants. Incidentally, and although this cannot be addressed in detail in this study, Faustus’s materialistic attitude, which has been deemed a caricature of Catholic elements, could alternatively be seen as an extreme form of Faustus’s scientific method and humanism, putting science and empirical knowledge before the very well-being of his soul³²⁰.

Faustus’s uncontrolled wish for knowledge can be linked with the suggested criticism of humanist education, as it might be said that the humanist teaching encouraging scholars to be Renaissance men did not discourage Faustus’s tendency to ambition – which allowed him to rise above his low social status but, when taken too far, becomes destructive – pride, and exaggerated wish for knowledge. This does not mean that Faustus is not recognised as guilty at all and is only a victim of his education – the strong ridiculing of the doctor in the play makes clear that he is considered to be at least partly responsible for his downfall. The criticism of a possibly inadequate humanist education does not exclude the criticism of an exaggerated pride, ambition and wish for knowledge in humanists themselves.

In *Hamlet*, the perfect Renaissance man seems to fall into madness because of the meeting with the Ghost and his untamed grief; however, the protagonist is not faultless, as he attempts to control the afterlife destiny of others, as well as implicitly claims that he is able to know what awaits others after their death, despite this knowledge being God’s privilege. This implicit claim seems to correspond to Faustus’s proud attempt to gain a knowledge normally reserved to God, although Hamlet does not act consciously in order to gain forbidden knowledge, but implicitly seems to suggest that he already has it. Once again, the Renaissance man, because of an uncontrolled ambition and exaggerated pride – in the case of Hamlet, the fact that he wants to control the afterlife of others, and his claim to know what is to come – seems to be led to his downfall.

This does not mean, however, that both plays oppose the Renaissance man culture or the humanist movement altogether. In *Hamlet*, Horatio seems to be a Renaissance man as well, as he is presented as a good scholar, a probable humanist who masters classical texts (“I am more an antique Roman than a Dane” (5.2.294)), and a philosopher who applies stoic principles in

³²⁰ This interpretation does not, in fact, contradict the one suggested in Chapter III – both meanings and interpretations might well have been intended by Marlowe.

his life, but he does not try to usurp a place that is not his, nor falls into blasphemy because of ambition and pride – and is the only main character alive in the end. In *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus's fellow scholars, although some of them are prone to misplaced pride as well, do not seem as vain as the protagonist, as they “fear he [Faustus] is fallen into that damned/ art for which they two [Cornelius and Valdes] are infamous through the world” (1.2.33-34). Both plays therefore seem to offer a warning against an extreme humanist attitude, which could dangerously lead the Renaissance man to want too much and fall into heresy as a result. Rather than opposing the humanist culture altogether, the plays seem to defend a balanced attitude in scholars, and a respectful attitude towards religion going together with a healthy curiosity and wish for knowledge.

2.3. On nostalgia

The previous sections on subversions and warning against an extreme humanist attitude possibly raises the question of whether a form of nostalgia of the old system, where religion was all-encompassing and theological interpretations were suggested by the Church, can be seen in the plays. It has been argued in Chapter III that this seems improbable in the case of *Doctor Faustus*: the bitter criticism of the Catholic Church and the papacy seems to indicate that the play strongly opposes the medieval system entirely controlling the lives and faiths of the believers. The possible wish for a more guided humanist or Protestant education does not mean that the play argues for a return to the medieval system – rather that it possibly defends the idea of striking more balance between close reading of the texts for oneself, going together with a certain freedom of interpretation, and guided reading or sermons; and warns against the excess of ambition and of the wish to learn and understand.

Once again, the case of *Hamlet* seems less clear. Through the staging of a Ghost initially appearing in an outmoded armour remindful of medieval times³²¹ and showing “a countenance more in sorrow than in anger” (1.2.231), the play seems to look back, possibly nostalgically, on an older time when human beings were still in the centre of the cosmos, therefore in the centre of God's preoccupation. Despite the fact that he is a humanist scholar, Hamlet feels at loss in a new world where he doubts that “the stars are fire, [...] the sun doth move” (2.2.115-116)³²², which possibly contributes to his nihilistic turn of mind in the fourth and fifth act – although Hamlet's loss of belief is probably triggered by the intrusion of the possibly Catholic

³²¹ As argued by Reginald A. Foakes, “‘Armed at Point Exactly’: The Ghost in *Hamlet*”, *Shakespeare survey. An annual survey of Shakespeare studies and production* LVIII (2005), p. 34-36.

³²² Although he asserts his own place as a Renaissance man and puts himself in the centre of the universe by subsequently and quite ironically affirming his own undoubting love for Ophelia.

Ghost. On the other hand, the play gives the nostalgic characters showing signs of older beliefs a cruel death; and offers a better – although still bitter – ending to the good Protestant scholar. It is possible that the play offers a partly nostalgic view of the old, all-encompassing system, while still recognising that a return to that system is not desirable and would possibly be dangerous, as it might bring the system to its end, leaving the country into the hands of a potentially worse ruler, as possibly suggested by the end of the play where nostalgic views and a refusal to let go of the old customs – that of the *requiem*, for example – seem to bring about the rise of the ambiguous, yet probably rather negative Fortinbras. The tragic, bitter and ambiguous ending of the play, coupled with the recurrent, although probably negative, references to the old system, does not seem to leave much space for a very positive interpretation of the play, despite Hamlet's possible redemption in the afterlife. This, as has been suggested, possibly mirrors the feeling of loss, insecurity, and instability developed during the troubled times of Elizabeth's reign, which possibly prompted a nostalgic lookback on what could be felt as a simpler period when God's love and religious values were still the centre of everything, just like the earth was the centre of the cosmos. Given Shakespeare's own witty, free turn of mind, it seems improbable that the play could argue for any return to the old religious all-encompassing system – especially as the fall of the country does not seem to be seen as a positive event. However, this does not exclude the possibility that it might mirror a certain nostalgia, a retrospective look without real wish to go back – just like one might nostalgically look back to one's childhood. Alison Shell also expresses this idea:

Shakespeare has been read, and with reason, as showing something of this nostalgia himself [...] But [...] many of an antiquarian bent, or with an imaginative sympathy for the past, were capable of experiencing wistfulness for the old religion without wishing to put back the clock.³²³

2.4. Traditionalist views versus social criticism: conclusive remarks

As has been suggested in this section, both plays, through their staging of social insecurities or feeling of loss and of Protestant religious beliefs, seem to point to a mixture of religious orthodoxy and mirroring of the general feeling in society, as well as of the possible social issues needing to be addressed – the plays, in this perspective, seem to offer a mixture of traditionalism and, possibly, of more progressive views through possible criticisms³²⁴. This mirroring of social insecurities and possible criticisms seems much stronger in *Hamlet* – whereas *Doctor Faustus* seems to oppose Catholicism much more than criticise society –

³²³ Alison Shell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

³²⁴ Which might be quite representative of the art of the period, although this assertion would require a much more detailed and general study.

although a form of social criticism might be identified in Marlowe's play as well. It is necessary to remember, however, that censorship and antitheatricalism were still going strong in Elizabethan times³²⁵, possibly leading authors to stage Protestant beliefs and traditionalist attitudes without necessarily defending their own opinions. The analysis of the plays, therefore, cannot be considered as an analysis of the playwrights' beliefs or opinions – although the possible criticisms identified in this study might point to some of them. The plays, on the whole, might be quite representative of the mentality of the period – a mixture of Protestant beliefs, possible nostalgia despite the scholarly mockery of Catholicism, “contingent and unsettled”³²⁶ religious beliefs, and an uncertain “religious future of the country”³²⁷ leading to a feeling of social insecurity.

³²⁵ Alison Shell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

³²⁶ Peter Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the representation of the afterlife in *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet*, in an attempt to determine the theological implications of both plays. By addressing the issue of whether the afterlife is represented as either a physical place, or as a state, or an allegory, whether any form of interaction between the living and the dead is possible or desirable, and whether the characters depict a belief in prewritten destiny or seem to be predestined themselves, this dissertation has attempted to interpret the potential theological message underlying both plays. Through the brief comparison of both plays, this study has also attempted to draw some wider conclusions on possible cultural implications and trends of the era, including humanism or the probable feeling of religious unbalance in post-reformation England.

This analysis has allowed to demonstrate that *Doctor Faustus* offers a much more undisputably Protestant message than *Hamlet*. On the whole, *Doctor Faustus* seems to present the afterlife as an allegory or state which “hath no limits, nor is circumscribed/ In one self place” (2.1.117-118), and with which any form of interaction is undesirable, and probably impossible, as both Faustus and Mephistopheles conjure up demons in disguise rather than actual human souls. Faustus appears to be damned from the beginning, as his attitude seems to correspond to that of an apostate unable to repent and easily manipulated by demons, which invalidates his non-Protestant views and beliefs on the afterlife, as well as his attempts to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead. This also makes his proud efforts to equal or surpass the divine all the more vain, especially as he remains self-important and under the illusion of greatness despite being unable to achieve anything except illusions and base tricks. Faustus’s materialism and literal interpretations have also been analysed as the source of all evils for the protagonist, and this dominant theme has been identified as a potential harsh criticism and perhaps even a caricature of Catholicism, possibly confirming the Protestant message.

Hamlet, on the other hand, seems much more ambiguous, as it stages mixed theological beliefs concerning the afterlife without explicitly presenting a system of belief as right. The ambiguous nature of the allegedly Purgatorial Ghost, as well as Hamlet’s development of an almost nihilistic view on the status of the afterlife, in which he only emphasises the destiny of corpses, longs for suicide, and almost forgets the immortality of the soul in his material concerns, offers no consistent belief on the status of the afterlife. Hamlet’s and Laertes’s crossing of the boundaries of life and the afterlife can be seen as sinful, as it is coupled with their general transgression of earthly and divine authority, which, as has been suggested, could point to Protestant overtones. Although some elements might point to a prewritten damnation

for Claudius and a belief in predestination in Hamlet, others could point to a repentant king possibly questioning his apostate status, and Hamlet seems to hold beliefs in an efficient repentance contradicting his apparent faith in providence. However, characters denying Protestant rites and beliefs at some point during the play seem to meet a gruesome end: Hamlet believes and obeys the Catholic intrusion in the form of the Ghost, falls into sin and madness, and dies tragically; Claudius, who misuses Protestant principles to justify his hasty marriage to Gertrude but refuses Protestant rites when they do not suit him, for example during Ophelia's funeral, is killed by the very means intended for Hamlet; Laertes, who attempted to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead by leaping into Ophelia's grave and requiring a *requiem* for her, is killed by Hamlet despite their reconciliation. By contrast, the good Protestant scholar Horatio is the only survivor in the end. Based on this, it has been argued that the play might hold a mainly Protestant message, although this conclusion might be far more debatable than in *Doctor Faustus*, especially as the Catholic elements – for example the Ghost – do not seem systematically or entirely negative.

The study of possible subversive elements in the plays has suggested that they might not be subversive of mainstream Protestant theology itself, although this might be debatable in the case of *Hamlet*. *Doctor Faustus*, in its probable caricature mocking Catholic literalism and materialism, does not seem to subvert Protestant doctrines at all, although the play does stage Catholic beliefs adhered to by the protagonist, for example that in a located afterlife. The refutation of the potentially subversive elements suggested in the literature on the subject – as the Good Angel was interpreted as a probable projection of conscience, making the impression of cruelty associated with the character a mostly modernistic reaction – seems to confirm that the play does not attempt to criticise Protestantism. However, it has been argued that the play might be partly critical of Protestant and humanist education, and arguing for more balance in the humanist movement. Although *Hamlet*, once again, appears much more ambiguous, and one might suggest that the staging of a potentially Catholic Ghost is in itself subversive of Protestantism, it has been argued that the play, because of its probable overall Protestant message, might not be subversive of religion itself, but of the Elizabethan regime and the feeling of unease, unrest, and religious unbalance in post-reformation England. The staging of a bitter and ambiguous ending, potentially mirroring the fears of a grim future in Elizabethan England, might confirm this suggestion. Finally, it has been suggested that *Hamlet*, much like *Doctor Faustus*, might advocate a balanced attitude towards humanism and the new world, warning against the extreme and possibly reflecting a form of nostalgia, also seen in the bitter ending of the play and potential grim prospect for the future.

When studying the role of Hamlet as a father confessor, Paul Stegner mentions a form of “doctrinal simultaneity in which competing beliefs coexist”³²⁸. This seems a particularly adapted summary of what has been found in both plays, and of the potential cultural openings suggested in this study. Mixed theology, which could be found in both tragedies, seem to play a fundamentally different role in *Doctor Faustus* and *Hamlet*. In its association of Catholic elements with the damned protagonist, the former seems to muster Protestant unity against Catholicism, and to defend the official English religion against the continental Roman Catholics. *Hamlet*, on the other hand, seems to offer a much more critical stance on the theological issues of the time, possibly mirroring ongoing fears and bitterness in the population. Whether Shakespeare was directly concerned by those fears, although a relevant issue, remains doubtful and was not addressed in this study.

This essay, however, has mainly concentrated on the in-text elements of the afterlife staged in both plays. Despite several references to the historical background, this study has offered a limited overview of the possible cultural implications of both plays, principally due to space and length limitations. Particularly, the issue of the parallel between Claudius and Elizabeth in *Hamlet*, which has been suggested in this study and was already drawn by authors advocating for a mainly Catholic interpretation of the play³²⁹, has not been addressed in detail, which calls for an extension of the partial conclusions suggested here. In addition to this, this study mainly concentrated on two plays of major English authors of the Elizabethan period. A study of the elements of the afterlife in other plays by different authors of the same period would undoubtedly help to broaden – or refute – some of the conclusions suggested here, especially concerning the cultural implications of the plays, and would allow to draw further conclusions on the staging of the theological afterlife in Renaissance, post-reformation England. The study of minor authors, for instance, could allow to verify whether the staging of mixed theological beliefs, either as a means of social subversion or as an affirmation of Protestant religion, was widespread in theatre, or rather exceptional and a potential prerogative of major authors, such as Marlowe or Shakespeare. This could lead to a better understanding of the function of the staging of mixed theology in the theatre, as well as a further insight into the issue of cultural, religious, and political subversion on the stage.

³²⁸ Paul Stegner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

³²⁹ See for example David Beauregard, *Op. Cit.*, p. 49-50.

Bibliography

Primary sources

“The Book of Homilies” [Extract; modernised spelling], in Stephen Greenblatt et al. (Eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Volume B. The Sixteenth Century and The Early Seventeenth Century*, 9th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2012, p. 693-694.

The Geneva Bible [Online version with modernised spelling], <http://www.genevabible.org/Geneva.html> (retrieved on 29. July 2017).

“The thirty-nine Articles” [modernised spelling], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 240-250.

John Calvin, “The Institution of the Christian religion. Book 1” [Extracts from the 1961 English Norton Edition; modernised spelling], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 240-250.

Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* [A-Text, 1604], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 5-53.

Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* [B-Text, 1616], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 54-122.

William Perkins, “A Golden Chain, or The Description of Theology” [Extracts from the English translation; modernised spelling], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 250-256.

William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, in George R. Hibbard (Ed.), *Hamlet. The Oxford Shakespeare*, 4th publ., London, Oxford University Press, 2008 (Coll. Oxford World's Classics), p. 139-354.

Virgile, “L'Énéide” [French translation], in Maurice Rat (Ed.), *L'Énéide*, Paris, Flammarion, 1965 (Coll. GF).

Secondary sources

David Beauregard, “Great Commands O’ersways the Order’: Purgatory, Revenge, and Maimed Rites in Hamlet”, *Religion and the Arts*, XI/1 (2007), p. 45-73.

Catherine Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the tradition of fireside Ghost Stories”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* LXI/1 (2010), p. 1-27.

Andràs G. Bernàth, *Hamlet, the Ghost and the Model Reader. The Problem of the Reception and a Concept of Shakespeare’s Hamlet* [doctoral dissertation], Université Catholique de

Louvain, Faculté de Philosophie, Arts et Lettres (Guido Latré, supervisor), Louvain-la-Neuve, 2013.

Clive Burgess, “‘Longing to be prayed for’: death and commemoration in an English parish in the later Middle Ages”, in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Eds.), *The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 45-65.

Nancy Caciola, “Spirits seeking bodies: death, possession and communal memory in the Middle Ages”, in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Eds.), *The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 66-86.

Douglas Cole, “*Doctor Faustus* and the Morality Tradition”, in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 304-312.

John D. Cox, “The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama” [Extract], in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 257-265.

Sharon Emmerichs, “Shakespeare and the Landscape of Death: Crossing the Boundaries of Life and the Afterlife”, *Shakespeare*, VIII/2 (2012), p. 171-194.

Frederik Fahlander, “A Piece of the Mesolithic. Horizontal Stratigraphy and Bodily Manipulations at Skateholm”, in Frederik Fahlander and Terje Oestigaard (Eds.), Oxford, BAR Publishing, 2008, p. 30-45.

Reginald A. Foakes, “‘Armed at Point Exactly’: The Ghost in *Hamlet*”, *Shakespeare survey. An annual survey of Shakespeare studies and production* LVIII (2005), p. 34-47.

Luciano García García, “Religion and Rebelliousness in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*”, in María Luisa Dañoibeitia (Ed.), *Actas del III Congreso Internacional de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Renacentistas Ingleses*, Granada, Sociedad Española de Estudios Renacentistas Ingleses, 1992, p. 99-110.

Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 2nd publ., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013 (Coll. Princeton Classics).

Stephen Greenblatt et al., “The Sixteenth Century, 1485-1603. Introduction”, in Stephen Greenblatt et al. (Eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Volume B. The Sixteenth Century and The Early Seventeenth Century*, 9th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2012, p. 531-561.

Genevieve Guenther, “Why Devils Came When Faustus Called Them”, *Modern Philology*, CIX/1 (2011), p. 46-70.

Alison Findlay, “Heavenly Matters of Theology: A Feminist Perspective”, in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 378-390.

Marilyn J. Harran, "Suicide", in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989 (Coll. Religion, History, and Culture), p. 21-30.

George R. Hibbard, "General Introduction", in George R. Hibbard (Ed.), *Hamlet. The Oxford Shakespeare*, 4th publ., London, Oxford University Press, 2008 (Coll. Oxford World's Classics), p. 1-66.

Harold Jenkins, "Critical Introduction", in Harold Jenkins (Ed.), *Hamlet*, 2nd publ., London, Methuen, 1986 (Coll. The Arden Edition of William Shakespeare), p. 1-159.

Theodore Litz, *Hamlet's Enemy. Madness and Myth in Hamlet*, London, Vision Press, 1976.

Stanford M. Lyman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil*, 2nd publ., Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1989.

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation. A history*, London, Penguin Books, 2004.

Geddes MacGregor, "Christian Concepts of the Soul", in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989 (Coll. Religion, History, and Culture), p. 214-222.

Leah Marcus, "Textual Instability and Ideological Difference: The case of *Doctor Faustus*", in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 153-171.

Peter Marshall, "Catholic and Protestant Hells in Later Reformation England", in Isabel Moreira and Margaret Toscano (Eds.), *Hell and its Afterlife. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2nd publ., London/New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 89-100.

Peter Marshall, "Choosing sides and talking religion", in David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (Eds.), *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 40-56.

Peter Marshall, "'The Map of God's word': geographies of the afterlife in Tudor and early Stuart England", in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Eds.), *The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 110-130.

Eric Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare*, London, Continuum, 2007 (Coll. Shakespeare Now!).

Michael Neill, "Anxieties of Ending", in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 332-336.

Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997.

Lee Oser, "Shakespeare and the Catholic Spectrum" [Review Essay], in *Religion and the Arts* XVI (2012), p. 381-390.

Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and revenge*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1967.

Alan Sinfield, "Hamlet's Special Providence", *Shakespeare Survey* XXXIII (1981), p. 89-98.

Alan Sinfield, "Reading Faustus's God", in David S. Kastan (Ed.), *Doctor Faustus. A two-text edition (A-Text, 1604; B-Text, 1616). Context and sources. Criticisms*, 4th publ., New York/London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 353-361.

Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, London/New Dehli/New York/Sydney, Bloomsbury, 2010 (Coll. The Arden Shakespeare).

Jane I. Smith, "The Afterlife", in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989 (Coll. Religion, History, and Culture), p. 81-95.

Paul Stegner, "'Try What Repentance Can': Hamlet, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority", *Shakespeare Studies* XXXV (2007), p. 105-129.

Linda M. Tober and F. Stanley Lusby, "Heaven and Hell", in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989 (Coll. Religion, History, and Culture), p. 151-160.

Theo P. Van Baaren, "Death", in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989 (Coll. Religion, History, and Culture), p. 3-15.

Theo P. Van Baaren, "Geographies of Death", in Lawrence E. Sullivan (Ed.), *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989 (Coll. Religion, History, and Culture), p. 96-101.

Course notes

Notes taken during the lectures of Prof. Guido Latré, 'LGERM2824 – English Literature of the Older Period: The Canterbury Tales' course, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, November 2016.

Notes taken during the the lectures of Prof. Guido Latré, 'LGERM2722 – In-depth study of Shakespeare's drama' course, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, November 2015.

Dictionaries

Félix Gaffiot (Ed.), *Le Grand Gaffiot. Dictionnaire Latin-Français*, éd. revue et augmentée sous la dir. de Pierre Flobert, Paris, Hachette, 2000.

John Simpson (Ed.), *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, www.oed.com (retrieved on 10. August 2017).

