

Crystal Meph: Christopher Marlowe's Dr Faustus and the evil of addiction

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In *Crystal Meph*, I suggest that Marlowe's c.1588 hit, *Dr Faustus*, is a portrait of addiction; that Faustus's behaviours are characterised by 'overwhelming involvement' with his primary drug of choice, magic; and that his sense of profound 'psychosocial dislocation' manifests in cognitive, behavioural, and physiological symptoms.

Faustus appears to play out on the force field generated by an elemental binary that recurs in addiction testimonies: God is at one pole, Lucifer/Evil the other. In the twenty-four years before he dies and goes to hell, magic delivers repeatedly to Faustus intense feelings of pleasure. He flies around the world, beds beautiful women (including Helen of Troy), learns Ptolemaic secrets and fraternises with heads of state - including the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. However, his fatal addiction to 'that execrable art' takes him, finally, to hell.

Exogenous addiction factors considered include socio-economic/religious metanarrative, and university setting; and the availability of magic (Cf. other addictive triggers). Magic is contextualised in the recent Reformation: transubstantiating prayers, substances, spells, crystal balls (such as the one owned by Elizabeth I's conjurer, Dr John Dee) and rituals were more than hangovers from Catholicism. Discussion of (endogenous) self/personality links with familiar Twelve Step rationale: echoes of *I was born an alcoholic* in the predestinarian, 'melting heavens conspired his overthrow' of the *Prologue*.

Textual evidence frames addiction in Faustus in the religious terms, the paper concludes. Long before Mephistopheles crystallised as the next good idea in the ether of his consciousness, Faustus was already intoxicated and dangerously isolated by his own success. Intellectually unassailable, detached from his fellows, always hungry and restless, his illimitable lust for knowledge yields the singular truth, that, 'All sin tends to be addictive, and the terminal point of addiction is what is called damnation.'

Biography

Charlotte Pickering/Catherine Harrison is a British writer of fiction and non-fiction. The second edition of her acclaimed novel *Messiah of the Slums* (Fey Publishing) was published in 2017 with a Foreword by former Chair of the Booker Prize Committee Sir Gerald Kaufman MP and an Afterword by Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College Cambridge, and former Archbishop of Canterbury. Drug addiction and its personal and social consequences was the pivotal theme in the work. As Catherine Harrison, she has worked for many years as a teacher, music producer & promoter, session pianist and vocalist, and freelance musical director.

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