Pride in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*

*Doctor Faustus* begins by comparing Faustus to the legendary tale of Icarus, who, “swoll’n with cunning of a self-conceit,/ His waxen wings did mount above his reach,/ And, melting, heavens conspired his overthrow” (Prologue, 20-22). This tale of a foolish man who, aspiring to fly, goes beyond the realm of man and too close to the realm of the gods and thus falls to his death, sets *Doctor Faustus* up as a play warning against human pride and ambition. Scholars disagree about whether or not the Renaissance was a time of rigid hierarchy in which pride and ambition were frowned upon, with little social mobility, or a time of upheaval, change, and increasing social flexibility. E.M.W Tillyard stressed the former, saying that “the conception of order is so taken for granted, so much a part of the collective mind of the people, that it is hardly mentioned except in explicitly didactic passages” (Tillyard 18). Other critics differ, saying that “representations of social categories, unlike the rigidity of the Great Chain, were fluid, reflecting real changes in society. The law and traditional norms emphasized the importance of the land, but more and more people were not landed, as groups engaged in trade, manufacturing, and the professions were increasingly significant” (Beier 52). This second perception seems more credible, as Tillyard ignores “the Elizabethan social commentators William Harrison, Sir Thomas Smith, and Thomas Wilson, probably because they did not conform to the model of the Great Chain” (Beier 52). There are various examples of this social mobility: by the end of Elizabeth’s reign, there were several new noble families (eg. Russells, Herberts, Cecils) and “rich merchants and citizens continued to rise to positions of power (administrative posts) and the ranks of aristocracy” (Thomson 170). It is thus reasonable to assume that during the Renaissance,
though pride and ambition may have still been frowned upon, in reality, the Renaissance was a transition period and this ideology was in a process being eroded. Despite the severe warning against pride and ambition found in *Doctor Faustus* (late 1580s), it cannot be assumed that this was the only ideology of social order during this time, as *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1599) rewards ambition, presenting a fairy-tale like exaggeration of the present reality which offers hope for the future to lower class citizens. These two plays represent the tensions between the morality of the medieval past and the emerging ambition of the growing middle class. *Doctor Faustus* is a moralizing tale in which the aspirations of Renaissance humanism are suppressed, while *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* rewards the ambition of a lowly shoemaker and presents a more acceptable version of pride and ambition: that which is not selfish, but, rather, uses its gains for the benefit of others.

*Doctor Faustus* is very much a tragic morality play and thus harkens to a social order rooted in the Middle Ages. Morality plays are a type of medieval drama “in which the crucial events are temptations, sinning, and the climatic confrontation with death” (Abrams, 174). *Doctor Faustus*, though less allegorical than the typical morality play, contains these three elements and is also deeply spiritual. In the first scene the Evil Angel tries to tempt Faustus into a deeper study of black magic, saying, “Go forward Faustus, in that famous art/ Wherein all nature’s treasury is contained./ Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,/ Lord and commander of these elements” (1.1.76-79). Faustus’s sin is one of pride and ambition: in his first soliloquy he rejects the study of philosophy, medicine, law, and theology, feeling that he has conquered them all; he decides to study necromancy, saying “Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires./ Oh, what a world of
profit and delight,/ Of power, of honor, of omnipotence/ Is promised to the studious artisan!/ All things that move between the quiet poles/ Shall be at my command” (1.1.54-59). The climatic confrontation with death is found in the last scene when Faustus realizes that he is facing death and will soon be suffering for eternity in hell; he addresses himself in the third person, reflecting with despair upon his situation: “Ah, Faustus,/ Now has thou but one bare hour to live/ And then thou must be damned perpetually” (5.2.62-63). In *Doctor Faustus* there is also conflict between good and evil forces struggling for Faustus’s soul: the Good Angel and the Bad Angel do their utmost to persuade to either turn to God or to continue is his path of self-destruction. This too is typical of medieval morality plays, such as *Everyman*, in which opposed personifications such as Goods and Good Deeds, are in conflict (Cawley xxi). While it may not be clear why Faustus does not repent, essentially, *Doctor Faustus*, affirms, as is characteristic of morality plays, a moral and thus warns the audience; from the example of Faustus, the audience is to take warning that pride and ambition will ultimately lead a person away from God and towards everlasting damnation.

*Doctor Faustus*, because of its medieval tendencies, rejects the humanism that was emerging in the Renaissance and thus is a play upholding the ideologies of the past rather than reflecting current shifts in thought. Renaissance humanism assumed the dignity and central position of human beings in the universe; emphasized the importance in education of studying classical imaginative and philosophical literature, although with emphasis on its moral and practical rather than its aesthetical values; and…stressed the need for a rounded development of an individual’s diverse powers, physical, mental,
artistic, and moral, as opposed to a merely technical or specialized kind of training. (Abrams 123)

The character Faustus appears to be a model Renaissance humanist: he has a well-rounded education and “was graced with doctor’s name” (Prologue, 17). In his first soliloquy he quotes ancient authorities revered by those of the middle ages and then rejects them. He rejects Aristotle, saying that he, that is, Faustus, has “attained the end” (1.1.10), which is “to dispute well” (1.1.8). He then rejects Galen in medicine, Justinian in law, and the Bible in theology (1.1.12-50). Faustus has risen from inferiority (his parents were “base of stock” [Prologue, 11]) to being a famous doctor, fulfilling the humanistic focus on the ability of man. Diana Henderson asserts,

Faustus’s rational intellect, his love for sensual experience, his ardent curiosity regarding the nature of things, and his belief in his ability to determine his own fate- these are ideals entertained by Marlowe and other bold Elizabeth intellectuals and expressed in the writings of Renaissance humanists…by the end, Faustus comes to the full awareness of what he has feared all along: that the divinity he contemptuously dismissed embodies the truth…his belief in limitless free will to determine his destiny turns out to be a grand delusion. (150-151)

Marlowe “is more medieval than modern, and his response to experience is more anithumanistic than humanistic” (Ornstein 1381). Like medieval thinkers, Marlowe portrays a life of pride and ambition as a path that eventually challenges the authority God: he has Faustus fall as a tragic character, punished for eternity in hell for his prideful
ambition. Thus, Marlowe reinforces medieval thought rather than reflecting the current Renaissance humanism emerging during his time.

Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* presents an exaggerated picture rewarded pride and ambition, reflecting the fact that pride and ambition are no longer the grave offense they once were in the Middle Ages. Eyre’s rise from shoemaker to a position of power is even commended and rewarded by the king: the king is so pleased with Eyre that he allows the shoemakers to do business at the new Leadenhall two days a week (21.153-164). As God’s representative on earth, the king’s approval signifies that Eyre’s ambition upward social mobility is acceptable, at least within the play. However, Dekker does not do away with social barriers in the play: the resistance by Lincoln and Oatley to Lacy and Rose’s relationship is based solely on social reasons. While “the story of the success of Simon Eyre and his shoemakers entail no social upheaval or wrenching of the established scheme of things,” it does imply “the possibility of cutting across class distinctions” (Thomson 2, 1). Simon Eyre’s rising through the ranks of society, from the poorest of tradesmen to the Lord Mayor of London who visits with the King, is not a reality in the Renaissance: sixteenth-century English citizens are still very much restricted by the medieval ideology, but not so much that social mobility is unheard of. As mentioned previously, there are numerous examples in the Renaissance of upward social mobility. Not only is this a reality of the Renaissance, it is also viewed as an acceptable development by several, reflecting the shift away from the complete medieval condemnation of pride and ambition. For example, Sir Thomas Smith (1513-1577), a social commentator, classical scholar, and diplomat during the Renaissance, believed “that competition and mobility were natural to society” (Beier 60). Thus, *The
Shoemaker’s Holiday, though it is somewhat unreal, presents the erosion of the ideology that pride and ambition are evil and does not lack grounds in portraying this social mobility and turn in ideology.

The Shoemaker’s Holiday presents this ambition in a gentle and inflated manner in order to be inoffensive and thus avoid the disapproval of those who still held to the older ideology. Because of the magnitude of Eyre’s advancement, a rags-to-riches theme, the play seems far too fairy-tale like to be taken seriously. The Ralph and Jane plotline is also like a fairy-tale: Ralph goes to war and when he comes back he cannot find his wife, Jane. Eventually, with a twist very much like that of Cinderella, he finds her through her unique shoe that he and the other shoemakers have crafted. Certain ridiculous aspects also make it hard to take the play seriously: for example, Eyre’s hilarious manner of speech and his outlandish way of acting; even the king wants to see Eyre as he acts up, declaring, “I am with child till I behold this huff-cap” (19.10).

Because of this new limited potential for advancement, lower class individuals can now dream, with a glimmer of hope, of monetary and social advancement. The Shoemaker’s Holiday allows them this dream. Through this play, lower class theatre-goers can hope for the day when they, through ambition, are able to achieve this social upward mobility. For them, Simon Eyre is a symbol of their hope, as well as their pride in being trades people: he becomes rich and rises to a powerful position, but never forgets his humble roots. In fact, he is quite proud of them: the care and concern Eyre had at the beginning of the play for his apprentices (eg. his concern for Ralph and Jane when Ralph must goes to war) does not change after he has become Lord Mayor. He still speaks to his apprentices in very companionable manner, rather than in condescending terms.
Within one short scene, he calls them “my jolly Gentlemen Shoemakers” (20.1), “my brethren” (20.3), “my tall shoemakers, my nimble brethren” (20.39,40), “my honest journeymen” (20.46) and so on. Lacy becoming Hans is also appealing and offers hope to lower class citizens: Lacy only is able to be free to do as he wishes when he acts as a low-class shoemaker. This event gives the lower class audience member a certain satisfaction in knowing that there are certain things more attainable at their level rather than at the level of gentry.

*The Shoemaker’s Holiday* not only reflects changing attitudes towards pride and ambition, it reflects a different kind of pride and ambition than is seen in *Doctor Faustus*. Though ambitious, Simon Eyre is not guilty of avarice: he uses his newly gained power for the advantage of others. He promises his apprentices that,

> if ever I came to be mayor of London, I would feast the all; and I’ll do’t by the life of Pharoah. By this beard Sim Eyre will be no flincher. Besides, I have procured that upon every Shrove Tuesday, at the sound of the pancake bell, my fine dapper Assyrian lads shall clap up their shop windows and away. This is the day, and this day they’ll do’it, they shall do’t. (17.47-53)

When Eyre becomes Lord Mayor, he fulfills his promise to his fellow shoemakers. He also continues to be concerned for his apprentices’ wellbeing as he moves upward. He does not close his shop and let them go; instead, he gives his shop and tools over to Roger, makes Firk the foreman, and gives Hans a raise (10.151-153). In the final scene, when speaking with the king, he also does not forget the shoemakers. He asks that they be allowed to buy and sell at Leadenhall two days a week. This request, in all likelihood,
is of little monetary benefit to him, as he is no longer occupied in the business of making shoes and has turned his shop over to Roger. The pride and ambition of Simon Eyre is kindly and non-threatening, even honourable, and therefore much harder to condemn than the pride of Faustus.

*Doctor Faustus* and *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* were written within about ten years of each other. Why then is it that they uphold opposing views of pride and ambition? These opposing views, one of the danger and one of the rewarding of pride and ambition, reflect the shifting reality and thought of their time period. Dekker’s play, *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, though it exaggerates social advancements, reflects that fact that social mobility was happening and was not held in contempt. This play also presents a different variety of pride and ambition than that found in *Doctor Faustus*. Faustus’s pride and ambition is only for himself. Simon Eyre, on the other hand, uses the advantage he gains by his ambition for the good of his former apprentices and all shoemakers, showing less selfish and less offensive pride. *Doctor Faustus* reflects the medieval notion still held onto by many in the Renaissance, that pride and ambition are evil. The ideology of the Great Chain of Being, based on the belief that pride and ambition are evil, is giving way in the Renaissance to more social mobility through the assertion of the individual.
Works Cited


