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A DEVILISH SCRIPT: THE STRUGGLE FOR "ONENESS" IN GERTRUDE STEIN'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS LIGHTS THE LIGHTS*

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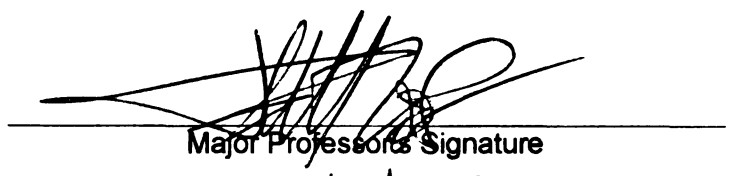

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A DEVILISH SCRIPT: THE STRUGGLE FOR "ONENESS" IN GERTRUDE STEIN'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS LIGHTS THE LIGHTS*

By

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ABSTRACT

A DEVILISH SCRIPT: THE STRUGGLE FOR "ONENESS" IN GERTRUDE STEIN'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS LIGHTS THE LIGHTS*

By

Aryn E. W. Bartley

In Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights,* the two main characters obsess over their inability either to be "the only ones who know" or to access a singularity in meaning itself. While the characters rely anxiously on deductive logic, repetition and social consensus to secure both meaning and "self"-hood, the play suggests that the attempt to permanently stabilize meaning cannot succeed. *Doctor Faustus* participates in the cultural reproduction of *Faust* as a canonical narrative, but simultaneously critiques the processes by which humans attempt to determine linguistically indeterminable categories of existence and meaning, especially in the dramatic form. In particular, the script's abandonment of linguistic and theatrical conventions emphasizes the inherent multiplicity of scripts, performances, and language itself. Confidently masochistic, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* encourages a theater that bursts from the confines of the script, embracing ambiguity and possibility instead of mimesis and stasis.

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In the middle of Gertrude Stein's play *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, Faustus tells the other protagonist, who has come to him to be cured of a viper bite, "Enough said, you are not dead"(103). He repeats these words in various formations five times. "All" on stage join in. Finally, his co-protagonist, the multiply-named Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel whispers "I am Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel and enough said I am not dead" (103). This moment of growing consensus displays the power of mass repetition – "mass" referring here to both number of times repeated and to number of people repeating – to create a collective truth or meaning, at least temporarily. Language in this instance creates "reality." In *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights,* the characters rely anxiously on repetition, social consensus and deductive logic to secure both meaning and the existence of the self. The play, however, emphasizes the instability of signification, undermining the struggle to secure meaning not only within the narrative of the play, but also in the script as a written dramatic form. The script thus invites its interpreter to disregard it. It beckons toward a radical theater in which word and act have no obligation to the other, one where performance constantly shifts and morphs without stable ground.

At a stylistic but not necessarily thematic remove from certain of Stein's later works, *Doctor Faustus* has been described by critics as an anomaly. In the context of Stein's scripts, it is a "narrative" play as opposed to her more abstract "conversation" or "essence of what happened" plays and her later "landscape" or "lang-scape" plays.[1] Stein's plays are notorious for their inscrutability, yet unlike her other plays, the script of *Doctor Faustus* lends itself to staging (albeit a "difficult" staging). The script contains characters, stage directions, dialogue and a plot complete with climax. Because the script in many ways conforms to traditional expectations about what a play is, its idiosyncrasies

stand out. *Doctor Faustus* thus enacts a more compelling critique of traditional assumptions about scripts than Stein's more explicitly avant-garde work.

Doctor Faustus directly interacts with the Faustian tradition. Characters include Faustus, Mephistopheles (or Mephisto), "the dog," "the boy," and a counter-protagonist whose name is "Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel." Those who are familiar with earlier versions of *Faust* will remember that, in Goethe's play, Mephistopheles first appears as a dog, Faust has a young male assistant, and Faust falls in love with two women: first Margareta (or Gretchen) and then Helen of Troy, with whom he has a child. In Stein's play, the dog and the boy function as Faustus' companions, and Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel as a single character takes on a much more active role as a knowledge-seeker with her own obsessions equal to Faustus's. Other characters include a chorus, a "country woman," "the man from over seas," "the boy" (different from the first "boy"), and "the girl," who appear together near the end of the play.

The play begins with an encounter between Mephistopheles and Faustus. In this encounter, which occurs after the exchange of his soul for the knowledge of how to create electric light, Faustus questions not only the existence of his soul, but the purpose of his exchange. His philosophical musings pervade the first scene, and this part of the script includes a "ballet" in which the electric lights "dance," Faustus's song "Let me Alone," and the singing of "a chorus in the distance" (94). Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's entrance, both expected and actual, makes Faustus anxious. Having entered, she muses over epistemological and ontological concerns similar to the doctor's, and then is bitten by a viper. The "country woman" enters and brings her to Faustus's house, where she is ambiguously "cured." In Act II, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel sits with an

artificial viper, surrounded by a "halo . . . not of electric light but of candle light" (104). The "man from over seas" attempts to seduce her. Mephistopheles enters behind the man and tries to make Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel feel dissatisfied with her candle light: "you cannot fool me by candle light, where is the real electric light woman answer me" (109). In Act III, a woman comes and tells Faustus that there is "a woman who can turn night into day" (112). Furious at this discovery, and now aware of his own inability to be the only one with knowledge, Faustus asks Mephistopheles what to do. At Mephistopheles's suggestion, he kills his companions, the dog and the boy, so that he can go to hell. He attempts to seduce Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel into coming with him, but she refuses. The play ends with Mephistopheles lamenting over the fact that he is "always deceived," and a little boy and little girl asking him for attention. Throughout *Doctor Faustus*, the characters obsess over language's ability to destabilize epistemological and ontological certainty, and struggle to contain multiple possibilities by securing and maintaining "oneness" in both meaning and identity.

Faust as a narrative has been reworked again and again since 1589, and has been critically reexamined numerous times – both processes which have led to its status as a canonical tale.[2] Performances of the dramatic script, variations on the story, performance reviews, and criticism of *Faust* all work together to reiterate its status. Doctor Faustus has often been interpreted as a universal symbol of humanity. His arrogant drive for power and knowledge and his misogyny have in many ways been de-historicized and naturalized. The play's stance, however, supports Ellen Berry's argument for the "centrality of postmodern critical categories to an understanding of Stein's fictional experiments" (1). *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, while participating in the

reproduction of the Faustian canonical narrative, challenges its status as a universal tale, implying both in form and content that its "truth" is constructed and unstable. The main characters pursue knowledge and power, the same goals as the canonical Faust, an aspect of the play that seems to support universality. Nevertheless, the play suggests that they can never achieve knowledge. Indeed, the instability of knowledge in the play, the play's language, and unstable scripting which highlights the disjunction between word and act thwarts any struggles to attain stability in meaning. The script undercuts its own importance.

Women, Men and Dogs:

Struggling to Create Existence through Oneness

Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights is preoccupied with the interdependence of meaning and easily shifting language. Faustus is obsessed with his inability to ascertain meaning, and the interplay between this epistemological failure and his lack of a soul. His despair at the indeterminacy of meaning and his attempts to secure it begins with his second line of dialogue, when he states "What do I care there is no here nor there. What am I" (89). The lack of punctuation here, of course, creates numerous interpretive possibilities and nuances. One reading of the sentence appears to establish Faust's acceptance of indeterminacy. He asks "What do I care" and either questions what he is or states that he is "what" (a bizarre but fruitful possibility which would demonstrate that his "self" is based on questioning, on the state of "what"!). The potential elimination of "here" and "there" can be read as the embrace of a state of possibility, where division and distinction are eliminated in favor of free play. While the state of existence is possible

("there is"), however, in this quote, "being" serves only to negate possibility ("there is *no* here nor there").

The juxtaposition of the two sentences implies that the difference between "here" and "there" is necessary in order to establish "what am I." In a general sense, a difference between self and other, between "here" and "there," is necessary in order to establish a subject, an "I" that exists. Faustus asks "what is the difference between a man and a dog when I say none do I go away does he go away go away to stay no nobody goes away the dog the boy they can stay I can go away go away where where there there where" (98). This obsession with physical or metaphysical location, "where where there there where," reiterates the yearning for the positional existence of a self that can fit into one or another category (here or there, staying or going). The very existence of "I" and "he" is threatened, this last quote implies, when the difference between their two categories is erased. "What is the difference between a man and a dog when I say none do I go away," Faustus wonders. The potential of "saying" to erase distinction, and hence his existence as an "I," a subject or individual, intrigues him. Nevertheless, in this quote, Faustus says "no nobody goes away." Lack of linguistic distinction does not necessarily lead to a lack of existence as the separate beings, "I" and "he." Rather, anyone "can" go away, implying that the difference between self and other is chosen by humans to be a factor that affects the ability to exist. Anxiety about this distinction is not inherent or natural. Existence as an "I" thus depends on human definition and choice.

The play also suggests that existence as a self is determined by social consensus and perception of the self by the other: i.e., through social interaction. Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel also worries about the difference between "here" and "there," saying

"I am not there I am here oh dear I am not there" (96). Her "oh dear" implies a level of anxiety about her ability to be only "here," when she wants to be "there." She would consider sacrificing her multiple names in order to be "there": "Would it do as well if my name was not Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel would it do as well I would give up even that for a carpet and a chair and to be not here but there" (96). What does it mean to be "not here but there"? The distinction seems to be one of being perceived as opposed to perceiving. This could be perception by the community or by an aspect of the self, in which perception would be a mode of self-awareness. Later in the play the chorus sings "There she is/ Is she there/ Look and see/ Is she there/ Is she there/ Anywhere/ Look and see/ Is she there/ Yes she is there" (105). She has gained her wish of being perceived by being defined as "there" by the "other" (the chorus). Their song implies that her individual existence is at least partially based on being perceived within the social community. Faustus's earlier lament that "there is no here nor there," then, points to his non-existence as either perceiver or perceived.[3]

The tenuousness of Faustus's "I" is reflected in his questioning of the existence of his soul, which he has supposedly traded. He tells Mephisto: "And you wanted my soul what the hell did you want my soul for, how do you know I have a soul, who says so nobody says so but you the devil and everybody knows the devil is all lies, so how do you know how do I know I have a soul to sell how do you know Mr. Devil . . ." (89). In Goethe's and Marlowe's plays, Faust exchanges his soul for knowledge and/or power. While the significance of this knowledge may be questioned, its existence, once acquired, is not. In Stein's play, on the other hand, Faustus's "knowledge" is profoundly unstable. The potential non-existence of his soul leads Faustus to doubt the meaningfulness of the

exchange of that soul for the knowledge necessary to make electric light. He regrets his decision, claiming with longing "if I had not been in a hurry and if I had taken my time I would have known how to make white electric light"(89), and "I who know everything I keep on having so much light that light is not bright" (89). His desire, once sated, disappoints. Lacking desire, he lacks meaning in his actions. If anything, what he now desires is to desire again, to be in the position of wanting knowledge.

The seemingly disappointing trade-in of the soul for electric light speaks to the ambiguous nature of new developments in technology. Whereas technology is supposed to bring humanity closer to an illuminating knowledge that "light" conventionally represents, Faustus is unsure that anything has been gained by the exchange. Once one technological development is created, it loses its appeal. More and more "electric lights" are needed in order to sate the modern appetite for the new. This loss of pleasurable desire, this anxious need to want again, to "not know," parallels the loss of the soul.

Faustus imposes the ability to produce knowledge onto the electric lights and states that he knows certain things because the electric lights "tell" him (94). These lights, however, are in the habit of turning on and off at random, and getting dimmer or brighter without an agent controlling them. The image of changeable light providing certainty suggests a fragility in Faustus's epistemological assumptions. The physical existence of the lights is ambiguous: how do they appear in physical form? The lights as described at one point in the play "commence to dance and one by one they go out and come in" (94). At another point, they participate in a "grand ballet" (106). One potential presence of the lights as immobile brightness surrounded by glass is complicated by descriptions linking them to bodies that move, going out and coming in. Thus, even his treasured possession

can be manifested in various ways; the new, modern light that was supposed to be his "one" ends up being his "many."

Faustus's fear of language's ability to destroy his existence as a subject is reflected in his obsessive pursuit of "oneness" in both knowledge and identity. He states, "I am the only one who can know what I know" (90). While he berates the devil for only knowing "one thing," Faustus struggles to maintain his own "oneness." His struggle to secure first, his knowledge as whole and unlacking (as "everything"), and second, his position as "the only one" who possesses this knowledge, link the two pursuits. The knowledge must be "one," and Faustus must be the "only one." The ability to have access to a stable, unchanging knowledge helps to secure existence as a subject.

The play, however, challenges Faustus's ability to be one or have oneness by displaying a female character who is just as obsessed with singularity as he is. The doctor's ability to wield "one" knowledge is seemingly challenged by Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's two (and four, and one) names. The possibility of her name's existence is anxiously challenged by Faustus before she even appears on stage. After the chorus maintains that "Her name is her name is her name is Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel" (94), and the dog and the boy agree that "they know" (94), Faustus replies "no no no no nobody can know what I know I know her name is not Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel" (94). He states, "She will not be . . . never never never, never will her name be Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel never never never never well as well never Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel never Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel" (95). Faustus's repetitious "never never never"s are anxious attempts to establish singularity of his position as sole "knower" against the threatening plurality of her name.

This connection of the woman with a heterogeneity that instantly challenges ontological "oneness" recalls Irigaray's portrayal of women's discourse and sexuality as "multiple" and freeing. In support of female difference, Jane Palatini Bowers argues that "Marguerite's experience will not, in fact, recapitulate Doctor Faustus's since she is a female, and the history of her development must necessarily recapitulate a female, not a male, phylogeny" (105) and reads the play as tracing a woman's sexual initiation. Indeed, unlike Faustus, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is interpellated into a social structure where being "one" can easily be turned into being "won"— objectified and acquired. As readers or audience members, we wonder if Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel recognizes the difference when the man from over seas states "I have won I have won her I have won her"(108) and she sings immediately afterwards, "You do or you do not"(108). Here, she may indeed hear "I have one," an aural ambiguity that both seduces and endangers her.

Is multiplicity, however, inherently female and singularity inherently male? In *Doctor Faustus*, every person – whether male or female – is multiple, and struggles to refashion this multiplicity into a stable "self." While women may have a different relation to multiplicity than men, this is not a psychological connection, but rather a social one. As Harriett Scott Chessman notes, "Stein often makes it possible to imagine male or female speakers within either masculine or feminine modes of language. . . . It is equally possible to find in much of Stein's work the further strategy of a surprisingly ungendered language – a language that calls attention to its freedom from any gender at all" (6). If this a-/degendering applies in the case of Stein's language, it most certainly applies in the case of the characters' obsessions in *Doctor Faustus*.

The cross-gender desire to be singular and unique is displayed when, despite the multiplicity her name seems to suggest, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel desires to be the one with knowledge as much as Faustus. Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's first line instantly challenges Faustus's ability to "know" by setting up her own knowledge against his: "I am I and my name is Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel" (95). While this statement demonstrates the existence of her name's plurality, it establishes that she also aims for oneness. Her statement is decidedly singular: "I am I." She is set up, not as everything Faustus is not, but rather as another person with aims similar to Faustus's. She too is obsessed with existence, knowledge, and identity, and expresses this through questioning and longing of the wish: "I wish, (she whispered) I knew why woods are wild why animals are wild why I am I, why I can cry, I wish I wish I knew" (95).

The play implicitly refers to Goethe's *Faust* when it merges the names of the two main female characters, Margareta and Helen of Troy, into both many and one (as demonstrated through the "and"). In doing so, the play seems to be parodying the idea that the two women are represented as indistinguishable. Both serve as sexual objects to Faust's lusts and both are dropped as soon as he grows tired of them, Margareta to go insane after he kills her mother and Helen to fade back into the mists of myth. The play's emphasis on this pointed "multiple and one" name converges two women into one, also highlighting that in Goethe's play the two women might as well be one, as they are both portrayed as plot devices and sexual objects. The use of this name demonstrates that, like in Goethe's *Faust*, multiplicity often serves as a front for oneness. Because of her name, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel seems like she should be "multiple," but actually craves singularity. This seeming contradiction, then, implies that notions of an essential

female multiplicity like Irigaray's fall back into "oneness." Women can legitimately desire oneness just like patriarchal notions suggest that men do.[4]

Indeed, during the play multiplicity is threateningly imposed on women, as displayed when the "man from over seas" attempts to seduce Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel by attesting to his love for her. The man's "love" menaces her in part because he seeks to control her positional existence. He states: "She is all my love and always here"(107). This allusion to her earlier anxieties about "being here" implies first, that he does not perceive her as a subject, and second, that his "love" for her is more about his desire to possess her ("She is all my"), than her wishes. In the face of his seduction, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel sings "You do or you do not/ You are or you are not/ I am there is no not/ But you you you / You are as you are not" (108). She first tries to stabilize possibility in action, "You do or you do not," and existence, "You are or you are not," and then reestablishes either her identity ("I am") or that she is "there" to be perceived. She fears the possibility of the inherently multiple paradox: "you are as you are not."

"The man from over seas" threatens Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel because he seeks to impose multiplicity onto her when she wishes to be "one." When he murmurs "yet it would be better yet if you had more names and not only four in one let it be begun, forget it oh forget it pretty one, and if not I will forget that you are one" (114), she "stiffens" and repeats a line similar to Faustus's at the beginning: "I am the only one who can know anything about any one, am I one dear dear am I one, who hears me knows me I am here and here I am, yes here I am" (114). Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel "stiffens" at the possibility of "more names and not only four in one" and the man's

threat to "forget that you are one." She asserts her singularity and her existence. It is utterly fitting, then, that Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel sees Mephistopheles behind the man, says "No one is one when there are two," and faints. "Twoness" on any level – that of the name, the identity, or of a relationship – threatens her. For both her and Faustus, the desire to be "one" determines their actions.

Faustus's determination to attain oneness functions as the rationale for his actions throughout the play, up until Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel acquires the knowledge of how to "make night into day" with candlelight. Faustus has sold his soul to the devil in order to make electric light, while she has created a similar effect with what is already known. She does not pursue modern technology, but accomplishes the same goal of "making night into day." Indeed, she subsumes the devil's symbol, the viper, into artificiality, leaving light natural. Faustus realizes that "never again will he be alone" (113) because he is not the only one who can produce light. If he cannot be alone, or "all one," he decides that she cannot be the only one either, and tries to seduce her into going to hell with him. He murders the dog and the boy to secure his entrance to hell, adopts the appearance of a young man, and tries to convince her to come with him. She, however, resists, saying "I am Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel and I know no man or devil no viper and no light I can be anything and everything and it is always always alright" (118).

At the same time that she denies the doctor's seduction, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel recreates his anxious rhetoric. She echoes Faustus's earlier denial of her name by saying "you are not Doctor Faustus no not ever never never" and "falls back fainting into the arms of the man from over seas" (118). Her denial here combined with

her reliance on the man suggests that she is not as triumphant as might otherwise seem. It is unclear if she will end up going to hell, repeating Faustus' mistakes (as Mephistopheles says, "I suppose so"(115)), but the play ends with a little boy and little girl singing "Please Mr. Viper listen to me he is he and she is she and we are we please Mr. Viper listen to me" (118). This ending implies that attempts to control meaning are likely to continue ad infinitum for both genders. Interestingly, it also suggests that despite their protests, the characters are drawn to the seductive multiplicity the devil represents. The boy and girl ask for Mephistopheles to listen to them. The devil's active denial of singularity paradoxically becomes necessary to determine the oneness of "he being he," "she being she," and "we being we."

Philosophical musings on "oneness" recur throughout Stein's later writings, which imply that the urge for singularity reflects a need to secure meaning and identity. Stein's "An Instant Answer or a Hundred Prominent Men," adds up a hundred "ones" to "make a hundred" (40).[5] Similarly, "Many Many Women" (1932), constructs "many women" out of many "ones." This novella implies that we only know ourselves through our "oneness": "Each one is one. Each one has been one" (126). Being "one" allows the human subject to be unique, separate from another. Ironically, of course, once another person seeking oneness enters the scene, the original "one" becomes a part of many "ones," and inevitably loses any claim to singularity. Being "one" makes us part of a community of other "ones," and thus not unique: "She was that one. There are many of them. Why are there many of them. There are many of them because there are many of each kind there are and she was of one kind" ("Many Many Women," 174).

Paradoxically, it is the desire for singularity and uniqueness that establishes that a

person can never be "one." In Stein's work, being or wishing to be "one" is to be or wish to be part of "many." Because Faustus and Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel cannot explicitly acknowledge the necessity of multiple modes of knowing or existing, either in a social community or in themselves, they cannot accept that their desire to secure knowledge, meaning, or a stable existence must fail. They continue their anxious pursuit of oneness.

Enough Said?:

Logic, Repetition and Social Consensus as Determining Factors

While language displays epistemological and ontological uncertainties, it also serves as a tool to contain and counter these uncertainties. Faustus's early sentence "what do I care there is no here nor there" demonstrates not just his uncertainty, but his attempt to stabilize his uncertainty. Even if the distinction between "here" and "there" is lacking, by speaking the lack of distinction ("there is no here nor there"), Faustus creates the ontological certainty of "there is." Thus, language not only can create ambiguity, but can be used as a tool to determine indeterminate categories of existence and identity. The play demonstrates how Faustus and others attempt to control meaning and identity by using the specific linguistic tools of deductive logic and repetition.

Deductive logic offers Faustus a seductive means by which to eliminate possibility. It implies the security of a "then" (if A, then B). He obsesses over his soul's existence, attempting to make a rational statement that will somehow secure the "oneness" of knowledge he so desires, even if his logic leads to the singular knowledge that he has no soul. And so, when Faustus questions the exchange of his soul for light, he tries to stabilize his uncertainty by asking "how do you know I have a soul, who says so

nobody says so but you the devil and everybody knows the devil is all lies" (89). Here, he outlines a logical proposition that makes him anxious: if the devil is "all lies," and the devil tells him he has a soul, then he must not have a soul. Faustus implies, however, that the foundation for this proposition could be flawed. If "everybody" knows the devil lies, how does he know whether "everybody" tells the truth or not? Who should he believe, the devil or everybody? While Faustus seeks to establish the truth of his soul's existence, his "oneness," he reveals that the other "truths" he counts on are relational and unstable. Both "everybody" and "the devil" have their own way of defining what truth is, and hence what lies are. In a situation where truth is positional, Faustus cannot rely on deductive logic to determine the indeterminate.

The flaws in Faustus's ability to use deductive logic expose his anxiety about his ability to access knowledge or "truth." For instance, although Mephisto assures him that "yes you are you know you are you are the only one who knows what you know and it is I the devil who tells you so" (90), Faustus rejoins "You fool you devil how can you know, how can you tell me so, if I am the only one who can know what I know" (90). Considering the great lengths he goes to in order to engage in a logic-based dialogue, Faustus's slightly flawed deduction here seems significant. Faustus interprets Mephisto's statement asserting he knows about the act of knowing as an assertion that he knows about the knowing itself. Why does Faustus's knowing somehow eliminate the devil's ability to know that he knows? This slippage, combined with the previous discussion which questions Mephisto's truth-telling abilities, highlights his own anxiety about the stability or instability of his position as knowledge-holder.

Faustus worries that the devil must have some access to his knowledge in order to know its limits. That he is the "only one who can know what I know" is complicated when he tells the devil "You only know one thing, you are never ready for anything, and I everything is always now and now and now perhaps through you I begin to know that it is all so" (91). Faustus states that his knowledge is "perhaps" mediated through the devil. "Now and now and now" suggests that Faustus exists in a state of the continual present and is demonstrating that through his choice to repeat. This further complicates his worries about the lack of categorical distinction. If he worries about a difference between "here and there," between self and other, he seems also to lack a difference between past, present and future. For Faustus, "everything is always now."

Significantly, the doctor's repetitious "now and now and now" appears when he is most struggling to negotiate his singularity. Marianne DeKoven writes that Stein's repetition demonstrates "a fixated, blocked mind struggling to free itself by going over and over the terms of its fixation until it has mastered them" (40). While she is discussing the "terms of [a mind's] fixation" in terms of the content of the repetition, or "what" is repeated, in *Doctor Faustus*, characters repeat in order to examine repetition itself. If "oneness" and their inability to secure that oneness is the fixation of these characters, then repetition is the "terms of its fixation," or the conflict between multiplicity and singularity. At times, it transforms repetition into iteration, where each repetition is both different and the same, is both "many" and "one." In "How Writing Is Written," Stein posits that "[e]verybody is telling the story in the same way. But if you listen carefully, you will see that not all the story is the same. There is always a slight variation. Somebody comes in and you tell the story over again. . . . Of course to my

mind there is no repetition" (448). For Stein, there is no "repetition" because repetition would imply "one" when there are variations.

Nevertheless, in *Doctor Faustus*, the characters use the "multiple oneness" of repetition in order to secure singularity of meaning from multiplicity. Like Faustus's "now and now and now" in the face of an indeterminate identity, and reminiscent of his earlier "never never never" when faced with Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's pluralistic name, the play uses repetition to show its use as a linguistic tool for determining meaning. While repetition seems to succeed, however, *Doctor Faustus* seems to suggest that it works by covering over uncertainty and paving the ground for social consensus. Groups collectively decide what "truth" is. Repetition helps them to do so.

When Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is bitten by the viper, she runs into a country woman. They attempt to discern whether or not she has been bitten by "repeating have I and yes it does happen"(97). The assumption seems to be that the more they repeat, the more likely it is that they can settle the question of whether or not she was bitten by a viper. Despite their repetition, however, the women do not determine the answer. Nevertheless, they act despite their lack of knowledge, and look for Faustus so he can "kill the poison" (97). Thus repetition here does not secure knowledge, but helps them come to a decision about what to do next.

While the efficacy of repetition to determine knowledge directly fails, it helps create social consensus, which does help to determine meaning. Faustus, as Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel post-viper-bite gets weaker and weaker, says:

> And you, you have said you are you
> Enough said.

You are not dead.
Enough said.
Enough said.
You are not dead.
No you are not dead
Enough said
Enough said
You are not dead (103).

The doctor's repetition at first seems fruitless and impotent. While he states "enough said," his excessive repetition of the phrase ironically counters its content.

Nevertheless, repetition, rhythm and rhyme encourage group participation, perhaps working as DeKoven writes, to produce an "incantatory, hypnotic effect" (40) on the other characters like she argues it does on Stein's readers. Faustus is joined by "All" who intone: "enough said you are not dead you are not dead enough said yes enough said no you are not dead yes enough said, thank you yes enough said no you are not dead." The scene ends when:

And at the last
In a low whisper
She says
I am Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel and enough said I am not dead (103).

Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel mimics and internalizes the "lesson" she has been taught. This speech eliminates possibility, and ascertains the "fact" that she is alive.

In this scene, repetition combines with rhythm to encourage mass recital, which in turn seems to produce Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's speech. If language can possibly alter existence, as Faustus fears when he queries the distinction between a man and a dog, the constant reiteration of a valued state en masse can perhaps explain how repetition and social consensus work together to bring about Marguerite Ida and Helena

Annabel's survival. The social and linguistic combine to create a collective "fixated mind" that successfully uses meta-repetition as a way to "deal with the terms of its fixation." The characters, in effect, secure the singularity of their social narrative. They concur that when they say "enough," Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel will be "not dead." At no point after this does Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel come close to death. The potential of being "dead" is effectively, if temporarily, eliminated.

Ambiguous speakers, however, question the existence of the entire exchange in the next Act, asking, "How do you know how do you know that a viper did sting her. How could Doctor Faustus have cured her if there had not been something the matter with her" (104). Just as Faustus questioned his soul's existence, here the viper bite and the cure are questioned. Social consensus in the form of the chorus, however, immediately interjects:

> Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel it is true her name is Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel as well and a viper has stung her and Doctor Faustus has cured her, cured her cured her, he has sold his soul to hell cured her cured her cured he he has sold his soul to hell and her name is Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel and a viper had to bite her and Doctor Faustus had to cure her cure her cure her cure her. (104)

The chorus uses repetition here to determine both "truth" and plot. They insist that "it is true" that her name "is" and repeat that not only have events occurred (the viper bite and the cure) but they were necessary: they "had to" happen.

The play here anticipates Jean-François Lyotard's notion that in postmodern society, social consensus rather than grand narratives like truth, justice, or human emancipation legitimates knowledge.[6] The play, however, ridicules the notion that social consensus can ever create epistemological stability. Mindless hypnosis combined with

the temporary nature of this epistemological "quick fix" suggests that this mode of knowledge legitimization is both cynical and nonsensical. The script immediately shifts focus to Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's acquisition of light-making knowledge. The play thus reflects an urge for "oneness" that is characterized by anxious repetition and parodies the idea that social consensus can ever create epistemological stability.

Doctor Faustus(es)

Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights engages with questions of meaning stabilization on the level of form as well as content. Stein's rewriting of the Faust myth, already intertextually linked with earlier versions and similar exchange myths, while in some way reinscribing "oneness" by participating in canonical reproduction, also critiques the processes by which humans attempt to determine linguistically indeterminable categories of existence and meaning. In its playful attention to ambiguity in language, *Doctor Faustus* highlights the gap between signifier and signified. The play particularly emphasizes and even celebrates the ways in which the dramatic process prevents meaning stabilization. By critiquing any performance's ability to embody a script, *Doctor Faustus* undermines attempts to control or pin down its meaning. The play denies its singularity, implying that the theater lends itself to multiplicity. It suggests that attempts to control the reproduction of meaning through stage directions or adherence to a fictional "pure" script will prove to be just as fruitless as its characters' attempts to control knowledge and the existence of a determinable self.

Stein's plays celebrate language as signifier lacking a stable signified.[7] Betsy Alayne Ryan argues that "Stein advocated . . .a return to the physicality of the theatre" stating that this return is dependent on "a devaluation of language as it is traditionally

used, and the practice of theatre for its own sake and toward its own ends"(1). Jane Palatini Bowers sets her argument up against Ryan's, noting that "Stein's plays oppose the theatricality of performance. Stein's is a theatre of language: her plays are adamantly and self-consciously 'literary'" (2). Despite Bowers' argument to the contrary, these positions are not antithetical. Stein's play celebrates both language and performance. It emphasizes, however, that word and act have no obligation toward each other.

Stein's language revels in its indeterminacy, a quality which in this play affects not only the reading of the play, but its performance.[8] While the play's dialogue easily can be performed as grammatically sensible sentences and phrases, its lack of and nonstandard use of punctuation can also lead to numerous other interpretations. Commas, periods and question marks are included sporadically or eliminated altogether. For example, Faustus says: "everybody knows the devil is all lies, so how do you know how do I know that I have a soul to sell how do you know Mr. Devil oh Mr. Devil how can you tell you can not tell anything. . ." (89). Whereas punctuation often functions as a way to stabilize meaning, "How do you know how do I know that I have a soul" defies a singular interpretation. One meaning of this line would be that Faustus is asking how the devil knows, and how he himself knows, that he has a "soul to sell," and concurrently challenging Mephisto's veracity. The line opens itself to a variety of other possibilities, however. Faustus could be asking Mephisto the unanswered question, "How do you know how?" followed by a question to himself "Do I know," or asking how Mephisto knows how Faustus himself knows he has a soul. Perhaps he is not asking.

This playful rhetorical ambiguity around what, in philosophical thought, is a fairly important question – that of human's relation to and knowledge of the soul – both adds

layers to the play (perhaps it implies all three "meanings") and demonstrates language's instability and the variety inherent in performance. It provides levels of ambiguity that do not counter singular interpretations, but rather offer alternate and concurrent possibilities for meaning. Whereas the characters in her play struggle to ascertain a singular "truth" in meaning and identity, the visual appearance of the play's words undercuts these attempts to contain meaning. *Doctor Faustus* demonstrates that written details like punctuation lead to the illusion of a "truth" in language. Thus, just as Faustus here questions the existence of the soul, the play questions "the rules" of the English language itself, exposing them as yet another part of the struggle to determine meaning.

The page layout of the script also challenges the signifier-signified connection, this time as represented by script and stage. Stein's text does not separate dialogue and stage directions, nor does it announce speakers, creating fundamental ambiguities about how the script should be embodied. The play repeats common words in varying contexts. For example, the dog repeats "Thank you" at various points during the play when there is no logical reason to do so, suggesting that the meaning of the word depends on both the context in which it is spoken and the variability of affective performance, which can never be the same twice, and which depends on who or what embodies the dog.

Doctor Faustus not only emphasizes the dependence of scripted meaning on performance, it also privileges words that cannot be embodied, especially in what can be read as its stage directions. For example, in the first scene Stein writes "Faustus gives [Mephisto] an awful kick and Mephisto moves away and the electric lights just then begin to get very gay," tabs the next line in to add "Alright then," and proceeds to announce "The Ballet" (91). This move raises questions about the "objectivity" of stage

directions, usually seen as blueprints for action. Whose definition of "awful" is this? How would performers embody "just then," or "very gay"? Who is "speaking" the peremptory "Alright then"? The play employs indeterminate pronouns (as when it is announced that "someone comes and sings" (103)) and includes verbs that alter the ontological status of their referent nouns, such as when "the electric lights commence to dance and one by one they go out and come in" (94). These rhetorical moves actively oppose illusions about the possibility of mimetic performance.

Embodiment offers a visual and aural representation to an audience that will presumably receive that representation as a sensual object. Some directors wish to communicate a singular meaning, "the one the author intended," and scorn interpretive productions that they feel fail to complete this task. Stein's stage directions imply, however, that the designation of scripts as blueprints and the seeming mimesis of script and stage serve as artistic and representational attempts to determine meaning, or to pin down language through embodiment and vocal expression. The exaggerated, quirky subjectivity of the stage directions expose the unattainability of performing a "singular meaning." No audience member will ever receive the exact same meaning as any other. Not only do the stage directions challenge the ability of performance to embody a written text, they actually disallow a "script to stage" reproduction. In effect they separate the written text from its performance. The play's divorce of script and stage challenges the ability of any narrative to mimetically represent "the real."

The script of *Doctor Faustus* self-referentially celebrates its "script-ness" apart from its socially defined status as a blueprint for embodiment. This paradoxically undermines the power of the written text, freeing production from the illusion of the need

to mimetically re-produce the script. The play's focus on the signifier without a signified opens the space for a focus on the non-verbal aspects of the theater. *Doctor Faustus* undermines illusions of controlling its own staging, thus allowing for multiple "interpretations" of the script that create more than recreate. Hence, the play's notorious "difficulty" becomes freedom of interpretation. At its most extreme, her play invites the director/cast to create an embodiment that shares nothing with the "original." At the most basic level, it foregrounds the inevitability of multiple interpretations and the gap between signifier and signified, both linguistically and between script and stage.

Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights emphasizes the iterative nature of performance, highlighting the multiplicity of both scripts and performances. It takes into account that a script is performed with actors, sets, lighting, etc. Each performance, after all is not "one," just as no piece of writing is one. A multiplicity of interpretations is produced by the interaction between the performance and audience members. Thus, a dramatic narrative is never "one," but rather a collection of "ones" that are already multiple. This collection of multiple "ones" shifts as more performances are produced. It exposes that the reproduction of dramatic narrative is based on the social context of multiple performances. A dramatic narrative, then, becomes a process rather than a result. It is a process not of repetition or "oneness," but of multiplicity and iterativity.

While Stein's script reveals a multiplicity of interpretations and performance possibilities of the written text, it implies that multiplicity creates anxiety. In *Doctor Faustus*, indeterminacy of meaning or knowledge is directly linked to indeterminacy of existence as a subject. The characters try to eliminate multiplicity and create "oneness." They attempt to maintain the singularity of their play narratives, as demonstrated by the

social consensus over Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's "non-death." The characters insist that she cannot be both dead and alive; unlike Schrödinger's cat, she must be one or the other. They struggle to secure not only meaning, meaning being seen as the elimination of possibility or doubt, but also their positions as the only "ones" who can "know what they know." Mephistopheles represents that dangerous multiplicity that so upsets Faustus and Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel: the devil means doubt, lies, deception, and "two-ness."

Doctor Faustus implies, however, that the struggle to ascertain any sort of "oneness" in meaning and identity is doomed to an almost farcical degree. Stein's play consistently demonstrates the characters' failure to secure "one" meaning or "one" identity, and instead submerges oneness into multiplicity and vice versa. The division of the script from embodiment challenges the "oneness" or truth capacity of the Faustian narrative by highlighting that every embodiment will be different. Every embodiment will necessarily deviate from the script, which can already be read as containing multiple meanings, none of which can be privileged. By foregrounding its scriptness, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* depicts a fundamental chasm between language and act.

This "devilish" script forces the reader, like Mephistopheles forces Faustus and Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, to acknowledge the impossibility of securing a singular interpretation of a written text.[9] The script gives readers and writers, performers and audience members, possibilities: among them, to stifle the script's multiplicity in pursuit of "one" meaning, or to celebrate it. This self-conscious approach to scripting facilitates active interpretation and evokes theatrical embodiments that are attentive to the range of possibilities the iterative process of performance offers. It motions toward

performances that are free to change as they progress and that play with theatrical convention. Just like Mephistopheles at the end of the play, the script revels in its ability to be "Always deceived always deceived" (118). Confidently masochistic, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* encourages a theater that bursts from the confines of the script, embracing ambiguity and possibility instead of mimesis and stasis.

Notes

[1] Betsy Alayne Ryan writes that in Stein's early plays she "sought to create not the essence of one thing, as she had in her portraits, but the essence of a relationship between things, and to express this relationship 'without telling what happened, in short, to make a play the essence of what happened'" (47). Jane Palatini Bowers refers to the same early plays as "conversation plays." Bowers' terms for the commonly known "landscape plays" is "lang-scape" plays, an alteration which she argues highlights the importance in them of "language and its relation to the performance event; they are about writing for the theater" (25).

[2] "The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus" was first published in 1592, and has been rewritten numerous times, most notably by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1808, Part I; 1832, Part II), Christopher Marlowe (*Doctor Faustus*, 1592), and Thomas Mann (*Doctor Faustus; the life of the German composer, Adrian Leverkühn, as told by a friend*, 1947). Recently, it has been adapted by David Mamet (*Faustus*, 2004).

[3] Ironically, of course, his physical existence never comes into being in the script; as a character, "Faustus" is a collection of words, brought into imagined existence by the reader. If "he" is "here or there," "he" is unaware of it. It is only through performance that Faustus can be "there," and only in the eyes of the spectators.

[4] This, of course, establishes my position in regards to Marianne DeKoven's reading of Stein's experimental fiction as inherently anti-patriarchal. I would rather align myself with Ellen Berry's reading of DeKoven's hypothesis as a compelling but limited metanarrative about femininity.

> [5] I tell their names because in this way I know that one and one and one and one
> and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and
> one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one
> and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and
> one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one
> and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and
> one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one
> and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and
> one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one
> and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and
> one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one and one
> and one make a hundred. (Stein, 40)

[6] Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, seeks to counter Jurgen Habermas' notion that "humanity as a collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the 'moves' permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation" (66). Rather, Lyotard argues that mass consensus is "an outmoded and suspect value"(67) that veils power struggles over knowledge. This scene in *Doctor Faustus* performs and prefigures this critique by parodying the formation of consensus.

[7] In *The New Sentence*, Ron Silliman argues that Stein's "attempts to reintroduce an anti-narrational continuous present" try to confront the marginalization of the signifying novel in favor of "an art with no medium, of a signified with no signifiers" that is

"inscribed entirely within the commodity fetish" (14). Marianne DeKoven writes that "accessible meaning is vital to Stein's experimental work, but referential content is not" (12), and Richard Kostelanetz writes that Stein's words are "autonomous objects, rather than symbols of something else, rather than windows onto other terrains" (in Chessman, 10). Here, however, I would like to emphasize the term "stable," as I think that in this particular play, her language is playfully referential.

[8] This playful approach destabilizes the script's ability to secure a certain embodiment. It also foreshadows European theater of the late 40s and 50s, in which, for example, Ionesco can write in his stage directions for *Jack or the Submission* "he wears a sullen, ill-natured expression. Around him his parents are standing, or perhaps they are seated too," and "All of the characters, except Jack, could wear masks" (80).

[9] Ironically, the struggle to secure meaning that Stein's characters undergo is recreated in many academic arguments, such as this one for example. The play comments on this process and attempts to undo it. By creating a particular argument about what the play suggests, I reproduce the very struggle it undermines. As *Doctor Faustus* (and deconstruction) illuminates, however, my argument, no matter how much I seek to maintain its oneness, is unavoidably multiple.

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