

6-2006

Dorothy Sayers and the Wiles of the Wicked One as Observed in Her Contribution to the Faustus Legend, The Devil to Pay

Paul R. Fetters
Huntington University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fetters, Paul R. (2006) "Dorothy Sayers and the Wiles of the Wicked One as Observed in Her Contribution to the Faustus Legend, The Devil to Pay," *Inklings Forever*: Vol. 5 , Article 11.
Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol5/iss1/11

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis & Friends at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inklings Forever* by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.

INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume V

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Fifth
FRANCES WHITE COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

Taylor University 2006

Upland, Indiana

Dorothy Sayers and the Wiles of the Wicked One as Observed in Her Contribution to the Faustus Legend, *The Devil to Pay*

Paul R. Fetters

Dorothy Sayers and the Wiles of the Wicked One as Observed in Her Contribution to the Faustus Legend, *The Devil to Pay*

Paul R. Fetters

Introduction

The reader of the preface to *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis and the preface of *Devil to Pay* by Dorothy Sayers discovers congruency in their beliefs regarding the origin, purpose, and existence of the devil, angels, and demons. Both Lewis and Sayers disclose many of the wiles, schemes, tricks, traps, strategies, deceits, and devices of the Evil One.

In the 1960 preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis presents a lengthy answer to the most common question that he was asked when the book was first published: Do you “. . . believe in the devil?”

The proper question is whether I believe in devils. . . . I believe in angels, and I believe that some of these, by the abuse of their free will have become enemies of God and, as a corollary, to us. These [angels] we may call devils. They do not differ in nature from good angels, but their nature is depraved. Devil is the opposite of *angel* only as Bad Man is the opposite of Good Man. Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite, not of God, but of Michael [Michael the Archangel].

[My answer is given] not in the sense that it is part of my creed, but in the sense that it is one of my opinions. . . . It agrees with the plain sense of Scripture, the tradition of Christendom, and the beliefs of most men at most times. . . .

(Preface SL, p. vii)

Sayers presents a worthy discussion of the literary views of the Devil in the preface of *Devil to Pay*. However, a more personal conviction is written in her *Letters to a Diminished Church*, Chapter 6, “The Faustus Legend and the Idea of the Devil.”

The actuality of evil exists. . . . Evil is the soul’s choice of the not-God. The corollary is that damnation, or hell, is the permanent choice of the not-God. . . .

In the Christian *mythos*, the original head and front of this offending is not placed among mankind. It happened first among another order of created beings. The devils are fallen angels. Satan and his followers chose the not-God, and when they had it, they found that it was hell. In that obduracy they suffer; and into that suffering they endeavor to drag the rest of creation—of which man in particular concerns us. . . .

(Letters DC, pp. 176-177)

From these brief introductory statements, the reader is informed of Lewis’s and Sayers’s belief in the existence of the devil, demons, and angels; their common understanding of the origin of evil as the angelic choosing of not-God; and their clear articulation of the intent of the Devil to drag the whole of creation—and the human race in particular—into perdition and destruction.

According to the Apostle Paul, the purpose of the Devil is clearly singular as written in the Record. (1 Peter 5:8) However, the wiles of the Devil are deceptively myriad. (Ephesians 6:11) In *Screwtape’s* letters from Hell, the reader catches a glimpse of the villainous wiles of the Devil, all stemming from his depraved disposition as a liar. (SL, p. 4) Thus, the readers of Lewis and Sayers are advised to remember that the Devil is a liar. (John 8:44)

In this paper, I will present a very brief paragraph summary of Lewis’s list of the devilish wiles used in *The Screwtape Letters*. In the remainder of the pages allotted, I will analyze the dramatic work of Dorothy

Sayers to garner a list of the wiles, tricks, and devices used by the Devil to blind side or to ambush the children of God. The format of the study will be a perusal of the four scenes of *Devil to Pay* and a summary of insights.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape's advice to Wormwood makes it very clear that the methods of the Devil are selected not to argue with humans, thus enlightening them, but to befuddle their minds, thus stupefying them. "Do remember [Wormwood] you are there to fuddle him." (SL, p. 10) "Jargon is our best ally. . . ." (p. 8) This twisted use of jargon is designed to keep everything "hazy in his mind." Through the use of jargon, the cohorts of hell maintain "maximum uncertainty" within humans through the maligning, misdirecting, and blaspheming of God, along with the slandering of others.

Long before Lewis and Sayers, other writers dating from the 1500s described the wiles of the Devil in works now referred to as the Faustus legend. Two of the most recognized works are *The Tragedical History of Doctor Faustus*, c1588, by a British dramatist, Christopher Marlowe and *Faust*, c1842, by a German author, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Just before World War II and a few years before Lewis published *The Screwtape Letters* in 1942, Sayers's own contribution to the Faustus legend, *Devil to Pay*, opened in London in 1939. Each of the Faustus legends has common episodes and the writing of Sayers is no different.

In all the other Faust legends certain episodes are reproduced in some form or another in practically all treatments of the subject: Faustus's raising of Mephistopheles; his [Faustus's] disputations with him concerning the nature of God; his twenty-four years' bond to Hell; his journeys to Rome, where he [and Mephistopheles] plays tricks upon the Pope, and [to] the Court of Charles V, where he assists the Imperial armies to achieve their victories in Italy; his having Helen of Troy for his paramour; and the final scene in which the Devil comes to claim his own; . . . (Preface DP, p. 17)

However, the conclusions of the Faustus legends differ. In Christopher Marlowe, Faustus dies and is damned in accordance with the terms of the bond. In Goethe, Faustus is saved by God's grace in spite of his guilt and pride, and the Devil loses a wager for Faust's soul. In Sayers's *Devil to Pay*, Faustus signs the bond and dies but must suffer in purgatory, at the hands of Mephistopheles, before entering heaven.

Scene One: Wittenberg in Faustus's study

Scene One opens at Wittenberg, Germany, in the study of Dr. John Faustus, who is weary of the discipline of theology and the slow ways of God in dealing with the ills of the human race. His disillusionment with theology turns to the magical means of alchemy. Faustus, who desires to heal the troubles of mankind with the wave of a wand, declares early, "Oh, God, I am sick at heart. When I see how ill this world is governed, and all the wretchedness that men suffer, I would give my immortal soul to be done with it all. (DP, p. 27) . . . Faustus muses, . . . [what] if magical power can aid me to resolve the mystery of wickedness, lay bare the putrefying sore at the heart of creation. . . ." (p.29) He further ponders, "There must be some meaning to this tormented universe, where light and darkness, good and evil forever wrestle at odds; and though God be silent or return but a riddling answer, there are [other] spirits that can be compelled to speak." (p. 31)

Now, Sayers begins unwrapping the wiles of the Wicked One— his jargon and lies. In a lengthy ritual, her Faustus conjures up Mephistopheles, a minion of Lucifer, the Devil. In his first slanderous declaration, Mephistopheles avows that he is not a liar and claims that all humans are fools.

What lies have I ever told? There is no need for lying, seeing that mankind are such fools . . . tell them the truth and they will mislead themselves by their own vanities and save me the trouble of invention. I sat by Eve's shoulder in the shadow of the forbidden tree. 'Eat,' said I, 'and you shall become like God.' She and her silly husband ate, and it was so. Where was the lie? Was it my fault if they persuaded themselves that God was everything they hankered to be—all-good, all-wise, all-powerful and possessed everlasting happiness? (p. 34)

This denial was followed by questions that Mephistopheles asked of Faustus which were designed to slander God, the incarnate Christ, and the human race.

Is He[God] all-wise, that had not the wits to keep out of the mess He had made, but must needs meddle with this business of being a man, and so left matters worse than He found them? . . . And was not that a prime piece of folly, to show up His nature thus—base and ignorant as any carpenter's son, too poor in spirit to argue in His own defense, too feeble to save His own skin from the hangman? . . . What happiness do you find in the history of the Man of Sorrows? (p. 35)

Dorothy Sayers and the Wiles of the Wicked One in *The Devil to Pay* • Paul R. Fetters

By the consent of Lucifer, Mephistopheles, pledges to do the bidding of Faustus and offers gold to Faustus for buying power:

All the lost treasure of the world is ours, that men have sweated, toiled, fought, and died to gain, and wasted—the pirate’s and the gambler’s spoil, the miser’s hoard, the harlot’s wage, the grudging profits of usury, the assassin’s fee, the politician’s bribe, the nation’s wealth (p. 41)

Not only is there gold for power, but girls for pleasure. Thus, upon Faustus’s request, Mephistopheles offers Helen of Troy, the symbol of the wildest of men’s desire, as paramour:

. . . this is Grecian Helen, hell-born, hell-named, hell in the cities, hell in the ships, and hell in the heart of man. . . . (pp. 40-41)

Faustus: “Hell and confusion, can you take me to her?”

Mephistopheles: “I might, but at a cost you may not wish to pay.”

The gold provides for Faustus power and wealth for the task of relieving the ills of the world. Proudly, Faustus declares: “If God permits such suffering in this damnable world, He’s blind, deaf, mad, cruel, helpless, imbecile or dead! Look, here is gold . . . no man shall want, if Faustus can prevent it.” (p. 42)

In the closing of Scene One, a triumphant Mephistopheles turns aside to the mouth of hell and shouts into the abyss: Lucifer, Lucifer! The bird is caught—you may turn off the lights and put the cat out, and shut the door and go downstairs to bed. I shall not be home for supper. (p. 42)

Scene Two: Rome in the Forum

Scene Two opens twelve months later. Faustus and Mephistopheles have arrived at the Forum in Rome. Here, Sayers embraces the central point of all Faustus legends: the bartering of the soul to the Devil for twenty-four years. During this time, Faustus will have his youth, girls for pleasure, gold for power, and magic to perform miracles for doing what God cannot or will not do. Mephistopheles will be the servant of Faustus protecting him from any danger and providing the means to do what ever Faustus desires. At the end of the twenty-four years of service, Faustus will be the Devil’s servant for eternity.

Faustus’s learning is undoubtedly greater and now his powers are unlimited. Here in Rome, the Church is not sure whether his wealth and wisdom are of God or of the Devil. Faustus heals the sick, raises the dead, and

corrupts the minds of the poor by his atheistic talk. The churches are empty, and the people throng to Faustus’s lectures. The obduracy of Faustus against the Godhead and Church intensifies, and in this scene he barter his soul to the Devil. He is preaching everywhere that, through the powers of Hell, he can abolish pain and suffering from the world. His mind set has reached the point of blasphemy. He declares that the Church is corrupt, her doctrine is a lie, and God is a cruel tyrant.

I would free you from the burden of fear and pain and poverty that God has laid upon you. Listen to me. If God made all things, He made the evil that torments you, and why should you serve so cruel a master? If He made not all things, He is not God, and you may defy Him as I do. . . . Throw off the bondage of superstition, and learn to know your friends from your foes. . . . God is the enemy of us all. (p. 57)

The Pope pleads with Faustus to repent:

. . . . Not yet
Has thy familiar devil persuaded thee
To that last sin against the Holy Ghost
Which is, to call good evil, evil good.
. . . . this sin destroys
The power to feel His pardon, so that damnation
Is consequence, not vengeance; and indeed
So all damnation is.

Before Faustus can consider repentance, Mephistopheles taunts, “. . . Come, Master—will you take the road to Calvary, and sup at the Skull-and-Crossbones?”

Faustus replies, “. . . Follow Christ? That way is too long and too uncertain.” (p. 60) As a diversion, Mephistopheles brings Helen of Troy upon the scene. Once again, Faustus is impassioned for her. Mindlessly, he asks the price.

“Name the price.”

“The usual price. Your soul.”

“Take it. Sin and soul together.”

The bargaining continues. [Regarding eternal youth], Mephistopheles says, “. . . we can’t sell you eternal youth upon free hold. I could manage a twenty-four years’ lease if that would suit you.”

Faustus accepts, “It would be worth it, were it twenty-four hours or twenty-four minutes.” Thus the bargain is struck. The bond is brought up from hell, read, and signed:

Drawn in the name of John Faustus and of me, Mephistopheles. He to abjure and renounce the worship and service of God, and to enjoy in exchange eternal youth and primal innocence for four-and-twenty years; at the end of which term he, the said John Faustus, shall become forfeit to the Devil, and be carried away, soul and spirit, body and bones, to Hell. (p. 68)

Having committed the unpardonable sin to gain eternal youth and Helen of Troy as his paramour, Faustus sets out on a grand tour of the world.

Scene Three: Innsbruck, The Emperor's Court

Scene Three opens during the world tour in Innsbruck, Austria, in the emperor's court. The twenty-four bartered years have expired. Faustus and Mephistopheles are assisting Charles V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, in the sacking of Rome.

Mephistopheles is conversing with Azrael, a good angel, who appears on the scene knowing that Faustus has spent the twenty-four years in league with the Devil and is about to die. They discuss the primal innocence (the innocence of animals) that Mephistopheles had given to Faustus, which prevents him from knowing good and evil. Faustus has become "... Primitive brutishness. The fellow's grown as mischievous as an ape, lecherous as a goat, giddy as a peacock, cruel as a cat, currish as a cross-bred tyke." (p.78) Mephistopheles continues his conversation with Azrael: "Today, we propose to sack Rome, with lavish accompaniments of loot, rape, and carnage. All this, if you please, by the orders of Faustus, who was once so tenderhearted, he would rescue the fly from the spider . . ." (pp.77-78)

Now, while viewing the battle, Faustus sees the Empress and desires that she be brought to him tomorrow. Mephistopheles, who now has for twenty-four years waited upon Faustus, replies, "... there will not be a to-morrow for you, master. . . . Tonight the compact ends. . . . Then you must die, and be forfeit, both body and soul to hell." (pp. 83-84)

A disillusioned Faustus, considering his youth to be eternal, responds:

. . . There's no such thing as death or hell. . . . Sin, death, age, sorrow—all that was a foolish dream, and fled like a dream forever. . . . Death comes with creaking bones and a sick carcass. Look at me, Mephistopheles. Have I aged a hair in twenty-and-four years? Not I. Then what's all this talk about death? It touches me not. I am the everlasting youth of the world. I am John Faustus. (p. 84)

As the battle continues, the Emperor desires to have his way with Helen, who now appears high above the Emperor's seat. As Faustus raises a hand to strike the Emperor, Faustus is attacked by the mob for treason. While Faustus, mortally wounded, is being dragged away by the mob, Mephistopheles says, "Faustus, the four-and-twenty years are past. My service is done. The Devil claims his own." (p. 99)

Helen vanishes from the Emperor's embrace and Azrael speaks: "Princes and earthly powers pass like a pageant, and make room for death. Cover the face of Faustus." (p. 100)

As the curtain closes on Scene Three, Mephistopheles and Azrael are contending for the soul of the deceased Faustus. While opening the bag containing the soul of Faustus, Mephistopheles expresses revengeful sentiment regarding his years of service to Faustus:

"Come now, my little master, my high-and-mighty magician, let's have a look at you. Let's see how you like it when I'm the master!" (p. 102) At this moment, out of the bag springs a black dog—the animal that Faustus had become, once he was given primal innocence, thus lacking the knowledge of good and evil. Mephistopheles shrieks in amazement! He had expected the soul of John Faustus, the man—not the soul of John Faustus, the beast.

Scene Four: The Court of Heaven

Scene Four opens in the court of heaven. The wiles of Mephistopheles have not changed. He continues spouting his half truths to gain the soul of John Faustus—the man, not the beast.

In the court of judgment, we hear the following dialogue:

Faustus pleads:

"I was cheated! I did not bargain for a soul like this, but for the primal innocence that was Adam's before he fell to knowledge. . . . Serpent, thou didst deceive me." (p. 109)

Mephistopheles counters:

So Adam said, and Eve; but I spoke [*truth*] to them and thee. I warned thee that the [*truth*] would but beguile thee, as it beguiles all fools. Thou askedst, 'What was I?' and I spoke the [*truth*]; . . . and 'What God was?' and there I turned the question back upon thee, and thou didst answer it according to thine own folly; but I spoke [*truth*]. (p. 110)

"Oh yes," the Judge responds:

The truth, but not the whole truth,
Mephistopheles . . . the hollow half-truth is the
empty dome that roofs the hall of hell,
mocking with echoing shards of distorted
speech. . . . (p. 110)

The judge renders a decision for Faustus: “God gives thee back again the power to choose, weighing the good and evil. . . .” (p. 112) “. . . Take him, Mephistopheles, and purge him thoroughly, till he find himself, as I have found him mine. God is not robbed; . . .” (p. 119)

Conclusion

What insights concerning the wiles of the Devil have been gleaned from *Devil to Pay*? The devil is a liar, the master of fraud, deception, and confusion. He leads the attack on the human race as master of half-truths. He skillfully slanders and continually confuses by raising questions. Each time he speaks, he reveals his underlying wile—slandering in the guise of legitimate questions.

Along with Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters*, this play by Sayers, *Devil to Pay*, is illustrative of the teachings of Holy Scripture. In Genesis 3, the Devil slanders God to man (Adam) as a selfish, impotent tyrant by raising a question about God’s goodness, severity, and integrity. His jargon is aimed to confuse good for evil and evil for good. In Job 1, the Devil slanders man to God by raising a question about man’s motives, wisdom, and sincerity. Satan considers man unwilling to serve God except for material blessings. In the Gospel of Matthew 4, the Devil slanders Jesus, the God-man, by raising questions about his divine identification and about his incarnate role as Messiah. (VD, pp. 7-8)

In Sayers’s *Devil to Pay*, the Devil, a liar, attempts to taunt humans into using illegitimate means for legitimate ends; to emphasize time over eternity; to attain the unattainable goals; to end all suffering; to follow fantasy over reality, to focus on the present rather than the eternal, to emphasize the physical over the spiritual, and promote alchemy over theology. The Devil is constantly and consistently confronting individuals with obfuscating jargon designed to assail, assault, ambush, befuddle, beguile, confuse, cheat, defraud, delude, distort, deceive, misdirect, misconstrue, trick, and trap. All wiles are designed to lure individuals incrementally to perceive vice as a virtue and to give their souls to claim it. Sayers paints an amazingly accurate picture of how the Devil and his demons attack, tempt, twist, and distort all things good with the goal of eternal destruction.

Macmillan Publishing Company, 1961.

Morgan, G. Campbell. *The Voice of the Devil*. Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1967.

Sayers, Dorothy. *Letters to a Diminished Church*. The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil. www.wpublishinggroup.com: W. Publishing Group, 2004.

Sayers, Dorothy L. *Two Plays About God and Man: The Devil to Pay, (A Faustian Drama) and He That Should Come (A Nativity Play in One Act)* Noroton, CN: Vineyard Books, Inc., 1977.

Works Cited

Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: