The first English printer was William Caxton, who learnt the fledgling art of creating books through movable type on the Continent and set up a printing press in Westminster in 1476. More than 100 years later, Christopher Marlowe’s writings began to appear in print, the first of these an edition of the two parts of *Tamburlaine* in 1590. We cannot be sure that this printing was, in fact, Marlowe’s earliest: editions of individual plays were typically issued in cheap, unbound paper format and were sometimes read to death as they were passed from one consumer to another, so that copies failed to survive into the present. But we can be sure that the printed *Tamburlaine* was popular: it was reprinted in 1592, 1597, 1605–6, and after.

During the late sixteenth century, printed playbooks were usually issued only after a play had been successful on stage; they were designed to extend the play’s afterlife to an audience of readers who could peruse the printed version and recapture some of the élan of watching it in the theatre. However, printing plays that had recently been acted was a new enough practice that many would-be readers found it disconcerting. Contemporaries complained that the playbooks were drab and still, lacking the ‘soule of lively action’ that animated plays in performance. One of the things that made Marlowe popular on stage was his ability to ravish and amaze audiences by dramatising fascinatedly horrific spectacles like mass murder or the conjuring of demons, spectacles that ‘balanced on the nervous razor edge between transcendent heroism and dangerous blasphemy’, creating what I have elsewhere termed the ‘Marlowe effect’. This chapter will contend that early printers of Marlowe sought devices beyond the mere reproduction of the language of the plays to keep the ‘Marlowe effect’ alive in their editions, specifically in the early printed editions of *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*.

Printing on paper is to us now an increasingly outmoded and vanishing technology. But when it was new in the late fifteenth century it aroused strong emotions of fear and wonder: how was it possible, in an
age before mass production, for a mechanical process to produce duplicates so quickly, when manuscript copying had always been very slow and only capable of creating single, unique copies? Printing in the West was invented by Johannes Gutenberg and its most famous exemplar was the Gutenberg Bible. When Gutenberg’s associate Johann Fust, sometimes called Johann Faust and associated with the legendary necromancer Doctor Faustus, took early examples of the Gutenberg Bible to the French court, he was accused of being in league with Satan because the copies were all uncannily identical. Similar rumours dogged Albertus Manutius, the founder of the famous Aldine Press in Venice. Printing as a process of reproduction initially appeared either godlike or demonic because it replicated divine creation, producing a dizzying number of quick simulacra where only a single entity had existed before. As Elizabeth Eisenstein has argued, it also helped disseminate demonic practices by printing both the magic spells and the criteria used to recognise them, as in the comprehensive guide to witchcraft, *Malleus maleficarum* (1486).

By Marlowe’s time, much of the anxiety surrounding the process of printing had abated through familiarity, though the term ‘printer’s devil’, used for apprentices in the printshop, may register its continuing presence (the first *OED* citation of the phrase is from the late seventeenth century). But Marlowe on stage was another matter. *Doctor Faustus* in particular, which included several scenes of conjuring on stage, was dogged by sensational episodes of demonic interference in performance. In Exeter, an extra devil appeared on stage, causing panic among actors and spectators; in London, the playhouse cracked loudly during one performance, frightening the audience; at another performance, a ‘visible apparition’ of the devil appeared on stage, to the amazement of all present. Was it possible that a performance of conjuring could actually summon a devil, or that a stage utterance of blasphemy could call down divine judgement upon the actors? Puritans who wrote tracts against the theatre contended that the answer to both questions was yes: many contemporaries feared theatrical performance because of its potential to contaminate the world beyond the stage, and in 1606 an ‘Act to Restrain Abuses of Players’ prohibited spoken profanity in any dramatic production. But what was bad for public morals was often good for business. Marlowe’s printers, I shall argue, devised mechanisms designed to revive some of the frisson that had accompanied early printing by associating Marlowe’s printed texts with the transgressive world of plays in performance and with their divine – or demonic – capacity for performative speech.
'Performative speech' as understood by speech-act theorists is language that brings into being the thing being referenced, as in the biblical story of creation: ‘God said, Let there be light: and there was light.’ Or a commonly cited human example might be the marriage vow, ‘I do’ (in the USA) or ‘I will’ (in the UK), which states the bride or groom’s acquiescence to being married but also performs the marriage. Marlowe’s plays display enormous fascination with the theatrical potential of performative speech. In *Tamburlaine*, as is frequently noted, the hero’s ‘working words’ frequently appear to conjure into being what they ask for. On stage, Tamburlaine’s invocation of an image through the power of his speech is often followed by its material appearance as stage business, so that his declamatory language carries an aura of magical efficacy. After many incantatory repetitions of the word *crown*, actual crowns appear on stage, and the same thing happens to other words – thrones; swords; and the colours white, red, and black. A particularly arresting case is the idea of fire, which, in the language of Jill Levenson, ‘becomes apparent verbally’ in Act II of Part I but ‘threads its way through the drama’ until it emerges visually on stage when Tamburlaine burns the town where Zenocrate dies in Act III of Part II. At another point, Tamburlaine predicts that the defeated kings will draw his chariot and, behold! they do so. According to the stage directions in the 1590 octavo, Tamburlaine is ‘drawn in his chariot by Trebison and Soria, with bits in their mouths, reins in his left hand, in his right hand a whip with which he scourgeth them’. This arresting moment closely resembles the familiar iconic image of the Gallic Hercules on his cart drawn by auditors chained to his tongue, an emblem of the great power of rhetoric to mobilise and control its audience. Through the figure of Tamburlaine, a master rhetorician who enacts swift conquests via language, Marlowe dramatises the power of performative speech. We can speculate that Tamburlaine’s magical ability to conjure up ‘reality’ through his ‘working words’ was a major element of his fascination for the playing public. He was an alien, a Scythian, at least at some points a Muslim and a heretic, but he simultaneously ventriloquised early modern rhetorical culture’s belief in the material power of language.

In Act V of *Tamburlaine*, Part II, shortly before his own death, Tamburlaine calls for a huge pile of Korans and other ‘superstitious books’ to be burnt, daring Mahomet to save his holy writings through a ‘furious whirlwind’ or some other deus ex machina. The conqueror does not survive for long after the conflagration of the books, but he comes alive again for readers in the printed version of *Tamburlaine*, Parts I and II. Speech-act theorists contend that a written document can carry the efficacy of the
‘performative speech’ it commemorates: a marriage licence, for example, records the effects of the spoken language that cemented the marriage. Similarly, the book of Tamburlaine preserves some of the transgressive power of the plays on stage. All of the early editions of the play were printed in octavo – a very small format that was relatively unusual for the printing of plays: with one exception, for example, all of Shakespeare’s plays that appeared in print before the First Folio in 1623 were published in quarto, and so were other plays by Marlowe. Octavo books could vary in size but were designed to be easily portable ‘pocket books’ narrower and smaller than quartos. The Aldine Press had published a series of octavo editions of literary classics; in England, the small format was frequently used for prayer books, books of hours, and the like. As Ramie Targoff has argued, George Herbert’s volume of devotional poems The Temple (1633) was issued in small format to echo the shape and size of a prayer book. Readers of an early octavo edition of Tamburlaine may have noticed the correlation in format between the playbook and books of devotion, but the ‘devotion’ in this case was parodic and transgressive, giving the book, perhaps, an aura of delicious danger. Its typeface, likewise, echoed prayer books and other devotional materials. It was printed in blackletter (Gothic type), which was still common in the 1590s for many kinds of popular literature but was used most consistently for devotional manuals and law books. In addition, the 1590 Tamburlaine included a portrait of the play’s great hero at the beginning of Part II (sig. F2v). Such portraits in play texts are unusual at this period; this one helps bind the text to its earlier performances by depicting a late-middle-aged, very English-looking warrior in armour, much as the ageing hero of Part II may have appeared on stage (Figure 1). Subsequent early editions continue the same format except that by the 1597 edition the visual effect is amplified by the addition of a portrait of Zenocrate (Figure 2) at the end of Part I (sig. F5r). The 1590 printer’s preface ‘To the Gentlemen Readers and others that take pleasure in reading Histories’ expresses the hope that his readers will delight as much in the book as they have earlier in seeing the play ‘shewed in London vpon stages’ (sig. A2r); but the printer also throws himself upon their ‘protection’ (sig. A2v) – perhaps a mere gesture of courteous humility, or perhaps an acknowledgement that the book’s publication could be interpreted as flirting with blasphemy. What would we know of Marlowe’s Tamburlaine were it not for its early printings? The book of Tamburlaine gives a kind of permanence to its otherwise evanescent stage hero, his monumental exploits, and his gloriously dangerous power of performative speech.
Unlike Tamburlaine, Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus was not published until the early seventeenth century. The earliest extant text is a quarto dated 1604, but that edition exists in only a single copy, and there may have been earlier printings that have not survived. It was reissued in 1609 and
Figure 2  Portrait of Zenocrate, from the 1597 edition of Tamburlaine
1611. A much amplified text was printed in 1616: most notably from our perspective here of the history of the book, the 1616 quarto’s title page includes an image of Faustus holding one of his magic books, standing within a circle of mysterious signs and confronting a black demon whom he has evidently just conjured up (see Figure 3). If Tamburlaine excelled in producing seemingly spontaneous ‘working words’, Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus is an actual magician who has learnt the art of performative speech by following the formulae offered in his tomes. Mephistopheles does at one point tell Faustus that he comes to the magus not because of the power of Faustus’ spells but because of the prospect of tempting a Christian soul into perdition. But why would the Father of Lies necessarily speak truth? As we have already seen, the play’s conjuring scenes were often seriously unnerving for early audiences in the theatre: on those occasions when an extra being magically appeared on stage, or so the actors thought, they were either conjuring successfully or (to take the perspective of enemies of the theatre) they were provoking a demonic visitation through their blasphemy. As Andrew Sofer has cogently argued, Doctor Faustus gets much of its energy on stage from its conflation of magic and theatrical power: is performance mere empty gesture or is it efficacious, and if the latter, how and in what degree? Faustus unleashes the energies of conjuring by blurring the boundary between representing magic and performing it.

All of the early printings of Doctor Faustus use blackletter type, which was becoming increasingly uncommon for playbooks by the seventeenth century and may therefore have helped give the text a distinctive and faintly theological air. Editors have disagreed about the respective quality and authority of the two early texts of the play. The 1604 quarto (commonly known as the A-text) is shorter and lacks many of the rather frivolous stunts that mark Faustus’ progressive decline in the 1616 quarto (the B-text), which may well reflect the ‘new additions’ belatedly advertised in the titles of subsequent quartos of 1619 and 1624. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the textual differences in detail. However, it is worth noting that older editors preferred the B-text because it was fuller and more crowded with stage actions, while more recent editors have preferred the comparative sparseness and tautness of A.

As might be expected given its date of 1616, the B-text of Doctor Faustus shows intermittent signs of stage censorship introduced by the 1606 ‘Act to Restrain Abuses of Players’. At several points where the A-text reads ‘God’, B substitutes ‘heaven’; two A-text references to ‘Christ’ are deleted
Figure 3  Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1616), title page
in B and the oath ‘Swounds’, meaning ‘God’s wounds’, disappears at points in B. However, the necromancy in A remains intact in B, and B draws emphatic attention to the such matters through the woodcut on its title page. This image of Faustus is not particularly well carved and may not have attracted ‘Gentlemen Readers’ to the volume. But it was surely successful as advertising: it reminds would-be purchasers of the thrilling moments of Faustus’ conjuring on stage, moments that they can now recapture by buying the book. As the clown Robin within Doctor Faustus steals one of the magus’ books so that he can raise demons on his own, perhaps naïve would-be readers even hoped to use the playbook as a manual for casting their own spells – or for protecting against them. As Georgia E. Brown has recently argued, Doctor Faustus is ‘obsessed with the relationship between writing, print and performance’, with the ways that ‘textuality and corporeality might overlap’, and with the ‘opportunities and dangers of writing’. The fear of Johann Fust (or Faust) and of printing as demonic that had been common a century before hovers in the background of the play. Even handwriting is associated with danger. Not only does Faustus sign his demonic contract in his own blood, but words of warning – ‘Homo, fuge!’ (II.i.77) – appear mysteriously written on his arm. In the B-text of Doctor Faustus, the magician’s scholars enter at the end of the play, anxious to confirm Faustus’ safety after a night of terrifying shrieks and cries. They discover his mangled body on stage, his limbs ‘All torn asunder by the hand of death’ (V.iii.7). According to Christian moralists of the period, blasphemy was a particularly dangerous form of performative speech in that it tore apart the body of Christ, thereby sacrificing him anew. Faustus’ bodily dismemberment in the B-text is therefore a fitting punishment for a blasphemer, performing on his own flesh what he had done to Christ through language. The material playbook is, among many other things, an extension of Faustus’ body, written over with cryptic spells and warnings yet restored to material intactness.

Although the A- and B-texts of Doctor Faustus are profoundly different in terms of content, they have a curious motif in common. At the end of the text in all early printings of the play, after Faustus has exited accompanied by devils and the chorus have uttered their final words of admonition, we encounter the following inscription: ‘Terminat hora diem. Terminat Author opus.’ Since this line, with its curious lacuna in the middle, is followed by a printer’s device (a decorative emblem) in the 1604 edition, most critics have assumed that it is non-Marlovian and have given it little attention. But the line is, I would contend, key to the
functioning of the printed book, especially for early readers, in that it suggests connections among three seemingly discrete events. ‘The hour [that] ends the day’ is midnight, the hour of Faustus’ exit with demons on the stroke of twelve. At the same hour, readers are allowed to infer, ‘The Author ends his work’ – Marlowe finishes writing or, possibly, the supreme ‘Author’, God, consummates the damnation of Faustus. The gnomic suggestiveness of the line allows a conflation of natural process (the end of the day), Marlowe’s shaping of the play, and the power of the divine to create and destroy. The tag line gives a mysterious aura to the text, drawing a potentially blasphemous connection between human authorship and divine creation and thereby heightening the play’s emphasis on – or status as – performative speech. With succeeding printings, the tag line became absorbed into the text. The 1604 and 1609 texts end with the tag line and after it a printer’s device, but in 1611 the printer’s device below the tag line is replaced by ‘FINIS’ and subsequent printings keep this pattern. From 1611 onwards the tag line is therefore part of the play and reads as the author’s final send-off to the reading public. Small wonder that Doctor Faustus was frequently reprinted: it too, like Tamburlaine, enticed readers to flirt with theological danger, to imagine human plastic powers as verging on the divine. Modern readers who consult early printed versions of dramatic works are often unimpressed with the printers’ artistry and degree of editorial accuracy. But early printers of Marlowe’s plays exploited the resources of the material book in subtle, ingenious ways in order to replicate, or at least gesture towards, the thrilling, transgressive ‘Marlowe effect’ that had captivated audiences in the theatre.

Notes

I would like to thank my graduate students Jane Wanninger and Erin Pellarin, whose work on demonic contracts and performative speech stimulated my interest in the topic of this chapter.


10 The 1594 edition of Marlowe’s *Edward II* was published in ‘quarto-form octavo’, which means that it was based on octavo-sized sheets but printed like a quarto.


