The Reformation, Inter-imperial World History, and Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*

Jane Hwang Degenhardt

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Presentation Outline

- **Intro** - Hwang Degenhardt’s argument
- **The Reformation** - Empire & Imperialism
- **Interconnectedness** of global commerce and military conquest
- Transience of Empire
- Our Stance
- Discussion Questions
Hwang Degenhardt’s Central Argument:

“By drawing attention to the global economic developments that subtended the Reformation and locating the Reformation in a world history of empire, 

*Doctor Faustus* suggests that world history is motivated by a common pursuit of power, whether it takes the form of commercial exploitation or military conquest.”
Reformation 1517-1648

- Known as the **Protestant Reformation**
- Started in Wittenburg, Germany with the publication of the ninety-five theses by Martin Luther
- Led to a schism in Western Christianity
- Brought about global commerce
According to Hwang, “Global commerce and its relation to empire provide an expansive historical framework in which the play locates the Reformation and Faustus’s journey toward damnation.”
Inter-Imperialism

- Catholic & Protestant empires sought imperial sovereignty, rule, or dominion
- This led to empires forming allies or rivals to pursue imperialist agendas.
Inter-Imperialism
During Reformation Period

Reformation:
Religious Divide

Global commerce &
Inter-imperialism

IMPERIAL POWER

Commercial Exploitation

Military Conquest
Hwang Degenhardt’s Central Argument:

“Doctor Faustus suggests that world history is motivated by a common pursuit of power, whether it takes the form of commercial exploitation or military conquest.”
"Faustus's temptation to abandon divinity in favour of necromancy takes the form of an imperial desire to rule."

MAGIC = IMPERIALISM
Hwang:
"Thus, his appetite to rule finds immediate expression as an appetite for precious Eastern commodities and for fruits and "delicates" from the areas of the world that suggests potential colonial territories"
Hwang:
“In short, the magic for which Faustus has sold his soul to the devil is, in this instance, that of **effortless global commerce** - or, rather, the ability to attain a foreign commodity while **bypassing** the means of production and contingencies of exchange.”
Hwang:
“Faustus’s political alliance with Charles reflects poorly on Faustus not only because it suggests his collusion with Catholicism and the Counter-Reformation but also because it emphasizes an alignment between his and Charles’s shared desire to rule the world.”
Faustus: “Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies! Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.”
Faustus: “I will be Paris, and for love of thee”

In Greek mythology, Paris’ abduction of Helen led to the Trojan War

MAGIC = IMPERIALISM

Demise
"Doctor Faustus subscribes to a similar premodern imperial schema through its consciousness of the transience of empire"
Our Stance

AGREE

- Magic is a legitimate allegory because it is grounded on scientific knowledge and historical evidence.
- The play is a reflection of real world anxiety
- Marlowe was an alleged spy → supports the reading, real first-hand experience
Our Stance

DISAGREE

- Hwang suggests that Faustus aligns with Catholics and Protestants, and also states that Faustus’ religious stance is ambiguous.
- Speculation?
Discussion Questions

1. How does Hwang’s reading intersect with the conventional reading of *Doctor Faustus* as a moral play?
2. How are the uses to which *Doctor Faustus* puts his powers significant? What do they suggest about his character?
Thank You!
Any questions?
