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Power and Humanity in *Faust* and *Aladdin*
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      In 1808 Goethe published the highly regarded *Faust Part I*, which has since become a central part of the Western cannon. The work tells the story of a wager between God and the Devil over one man's soul. In 1992, Walt Disney Pictures released *Aladdin*, which tells of a young boy who is granted three wishes from a genie. At first glance, the two texts may seem only marginally related. However, after close analysis of the characters, plots, and themes, this paper contends that the two narratives in many ways actually parallel one another. By looking at the two texts as analogous stories, it becomes possible to compare the way this narrative was told in 1808 by Goethe's *Faust* with how the narrative was told in 1992 by Disney's *Aladdin*. This paper contends that while *Aladdin* and *Faust* are structurally similar narratives, the texts construct very different discourses of humanity, the supernatural, and gender because they tell the story in very different socio-historical contexts. The first half of the paper builds the case that the two texts are complimentary. The second half examines thematic differences between the two stories and the implications of these differences.

      For the purposes of the scope of this paper, I have chosen to attempt an analysis that deconstructs the representations of two specific binary oppositions in the two texts. These are the dichotomy between the metaphysical and the physical as well as the dichotomy between men and women, where the former term of each pair is the traditionally dominant term. However comparison of the two texts reveals multiple binary oppositions, for example in the treatment of animality or sexuality. I simply found the analysis that follows particularly revealing or interesting. This paper now attempts to draw various parallels between Goethe's *Faust* and Disney's *Aladdin*.

      The antagonist structures of the two texts are extremely parallel. In *Faust*, the antagonist, Mephisto, introduces himself, "I am the spirit of always saying no and I am right, for everything that comes to life is fit to perish. So better if nothing ever came to life. Thus everything that you call sin, Destruction- in brief, Evil – is the element I'm at home in" (1338-1344). Likewise the antagonist in *Aladdin*, Jafar, is described as "a dark man, with a dark purpose". Both antagonist characters are challenged by some all-powerful being. In *Faust*, for example, Mephisto makes a wager with God: "What do you wager? Lord, allow me gently to lead him where I will, I promise you that you will lose him still" (312-314). Jafar is similarly challenged by the Cave of Wonders: "Only one man may enter here, one whose worth lies far within: a diamond in the rough". Structurally both texts recount similar antagonists challenged to seek out a specific human by an all-powerful being. The antagonists, Jafar in *Aladdin* and Mephisto in *Faust*, then disguise themselves and begin their dealings with the respective protagonists in the two texts.

      Turning away from the antagonists now, it also seems that the respective protagonists' subplots in Disney's *Aladdin* and Goethe's *Faust Part I* are structurally very similar. This paper makes a parallel the two characters identified as protagonists: Faust and Aladdin. In both texts, the protagonist is approached by the antagonist, exposed to the supernatural, and is transformed through the supernatural. A key difference between the two works is that in *Faust* the antagonist and the supernatural character are the same, Mephisto, while in *Aladdin* the antagonist and the supernatural character are

different, Jafar and the Genie. I will discuss this difference in detail later. In *Faust*, Faust is approached by Mephisto who uses the supernatural to transform himself into a youthful, handsome man to woo Gretchen. In *Aladdin*, Aladdin is approached by Jafar and finds a supernatural character who transforms him into a prince to woo Jasmine. The source of conflict, character roles, and purpose of the protagonist subplots in *Aladdin* and *Faust* correspond in numerous ways that indicate fundamental similarities between the two texts.

Finally, there is evidence of the structural equivalence between Goethe's *Faust Part I* and Disney's *Aladdin* in the treatment of the female characters sought by the corresponding protagonists: Gretchen in *Faust* and Jasmine in *Aladdin*. Both characters are specifically noted for their beauty. As women, both characters live in a world where they occupy a marginalized social space. Jasmine, for example, complains, "I can't stay here and have my life lived for me". The protagonist transforms himself and tries to win both female characters. Jasmine falls in love with Prince Ali, the transformed Aladdin, and eventually learns his true identity. Gretchen falls in love with Faust in his transformed state, and near the end of the book, finally sees Faust in his true state. After both female characters understand the true nature of the situation and the protagonists, they are saved. Gretchen is evidently saved by angels who take her to heaven, while Jasmine is saved by her father, who declares: "From this moment on, the princess shall marry whomever she deems worthy". The parallels between the subplots of the protagonists' female love interests are clear and striking.

Until this point, the paper has described numerous examples that indicate there are fundamental structural parallels between Goethe's *Faust Part I* and Disney's *Aladdin*. This is not, however, to suggest that this equivalence between the two texts is universally or objectively the case. Instead this paper claims that because there seem to be many strong similarities between *Faust* and *Aladdin*, we can compare the two texts by treating *Aladdin* as a late twentieth century retelling of Goethe's *Faust Part I*. This method of analysis is intended to show how the socio-historical contexts of both texts shape the common narrative.

In Goethe's *Faust Part I*, the universe seems largely characterized by the Christian binary opposition between the metaphysical and the physical. These two terms are structured against one another. The metaphysical world of God and the Devil, heaven and hell, is intrinsically opposed to and dominates the physical world of humanity. Out of this dynamic between the metaphysical and physical exists humanity. Mephisto explains: "How human beings torment themselves, that's all I see. Earth's little god keeps true to type. He was an oddity the first day and still is. Somewhat his life would be in better plight had you not given him the shine of heaven's light. He calls it reason and uses it only to be more bestial than any beast" (280-6). In this framework, humanity is distinguished as corruptible and meaningless. Mephisto also remarks: "That little world of fools, humanity, does like to think itself a whole" (1347-8). While Mephisto may disagree with that assessment of humanity, his statement represents the characterization of the universe in *Aladdin*. Humanity is presented as a whole so that reality is a product of culture and power. Because the construction of humanity is so ubiquitous and nebulous in *Aladdin*, fundamental binaries like the metaphysical/physical dichotomy are situated inside, as a product of, humanity. In *Faust*, humanity is constituted by the binary opposition between the metaphysical and the physical, while in *Aladdin* the

metaphysical/physical binary is actually socially constructed.

The different socio-historical contexts of the two texts clarify this distinction between the metaphysical, physical, and humanity. According to prevailing Christian conceptions of reality around the time of *Faust*, the world was naturally perfect because God ordered the universe harmoniously. Magic and the supernatural challenge the universality of the dichotomy between the metaphysical and the physical. Maxwell-Stuart explains: "ritual magicians set out to discover how to suspend or manipulate the laws of nature, and they do so most frequently by trying to create the necessary conditions which will allow different modes of existence to overlap, thereby providing a space and opportunity for non-human entities to manifest themselves and either furnish the human operator with the required information, or temporarily alter natural law on his behalf" (27-28). But in the Christian framework, the boundary between the metaphysical and the physical is sacred. Discourses that seem to contest the fixed binary opposition are viewed as evil. "The threshold between planes of existence, which the magician creates by means of and during his magic rite, is by nature unstable and in consequence presents dangers to both sides of the process" (Maxwell-Stuart, 30). Evil occurs when the boundary between the planes of existence is broken. For example, man might attempt to make himself devine. Faust, for example, says, "These signs, were they inscribed here by a god? They make the turmoil in me still And my impoverished heart joyful And have mysteriously led The powers of Nature all around me to unveil. Am I a god? I have such light!" (434-9). In *Aladdin* the distinction between the metaphysical and physical is not taken to be so fundamental or universal. As such the maintanence of the boundary between the two terms is not as important, as opposed to *Faust* where the role of the Christian logic of good and evil strengthened the dichotomous structures themselves.

These different frameworks necessarily result in very different representations of the supernatural in Goethe's *Faust* and Disney's *Aladdin*. In both texts, the supernatural character uses magic to help to transform the protagonist and challenge certain seemingly fundamental realities. In Goethe's *Faust* the main aspect of humanity seems to be mortality. Even in the prelude, the poet begs, "Oh give me back my youth again" (197). Mephisto gives Faust the appearance of youth. This can be interpreted to signify that Faust's main flaw is physical, and the supernatural challenges physical laws. In *Aladdin* the characteristic aspect that is challenged by the supernatural is social. Early in the movie, a prince tells Aladdin: "you are a worthless street rat. You were born a street rat and will die a street rat. Only your fleas will mourn you". Instead of understanding humanity in terms of the binary opposition between the metaphysical and the physical by conflating humanity with the physical, *Aladdin* conceives of humanity in a more social perspective.

The supernatural characters who bring about the transformation of the protagonist are very different in the two texts. In *Faust*, this supernatural character is the antagonist: Mephisto. He describes himself as, "a part of the power who will evil always" (1335-6). In *Faust*, this supernatural character is conflated with absolute evil because he challenged the natural dynamic of metaphysical and physical law. In *Aladdin* the antagonist, Jafar, also has supernatural characteristics. But Jafar has many very human qualities, and his evil is not tied to blending of the metaphysical and the physical. The supernatural character who transforms the protagonist in *Aladdin* is the genie. The character of the genie is extremely anthropomorphized. He jokes with Aladdin: "ten thousand years will

give you such a crick in the neck". He even levels with Aladdin when he admits that he is not free. While the depictions of supernatural characters in *Faust* are fundamentally different than humans, even the supernatural is humanized in *Aladdin* as the binary opposition between the metaphysical and the physical breaks down. The dichotomy between the metaphysical and the physical does not define humanity, but rather humanity encompasses both sides of the binary.

This paper continues this analysis by looking at portrayals of gender in the two texts, Goethe's *Faust Part I* and Disney's *Aladdin*. In agreement with previous descriptions of the differences between the socio-historical contexts of the two works, we find that the gender binary in *Faust* is consistent with the idea that binaries are legitimate and natural. On the other hand, in *Aladdin* gender operates, for the most part, as if it were purely a social construction. That is not to say that women are depicted as subjugated in *Faust* and liberated in *Aladdin*. Consider a dialogue between Jasmine and her father. The sultan begins, "you must be married to a prince by your next birthday". Jasmine responds by commenting, "If I do marry, I want it to be for love... I've never done anything on my own". Clearly women in *Aladdin* do face gender inequality, but this is presented as a cultural reality. Jasmine consistently contests her marginalized status by running away and with comments like, "How dare you, all of you? Standing around deciding my future. I am not a prize to be won". At one point in *Aladdin*, Jasmine is even manipulative when she tells Jafar: "Jafar, I never realized how incredibly handsome you are". Gender seems to carry very different meanings in Goethe's *Faust Part I* and Disney's *Aladdin*.

It is also possible to see the differences between gender in the two texts by examining depictions of original sin. The idea of original sin, that human beings are naturally flawed, is clearly communicated in Goethe's *Faust* by God himself who admits, "So long as human beings strive, they will go wrong" (316-317). The Christian origin of original sin comes from the story of Adam and Eve. The myth seems to place primary blame for human sin on Eve, the figure of the woman. In *Aladdin* the narrative of Adam and Eve, the origin of original sin, is retold. When Aladdin enters the Cave of Wonders, he is told he is forbidden to touch anything but the lamp. This commandment of the seemingly all-powerful being is violated prompting the Cave of Wonders to exclaim: "Infidels! You have touched the forbidden treasure. Now you will never again see the light of day". But in the *Aladdin* version of original sin, Eve's part is played by Abu. This seems to indicate that the conception of gender based on a man/woman binary as in *Faust* is contested using a larger concept of humanity against which abstract concepts like sin may be defined.

This paper has shown that many structural parallels exist between Goethe's *Faust Part I* and Disney's *Aladdin*. By recognizing that a common narrative exists in both texts, it is possible to conceive of *Aladdin* as a retelling of *Faust* written from a late twentieth century American context. The paper then shows that a comparison between the two texts reveals very different frameworks for understanding reality, humanity, the supernatural, and gender. If *Aladdin* and *Faust* tell the same narrative, *Faust* tells the story in a universe dominated by the Christian binary opposition between the metaphysical and the physical while *Aladdin* tells the story in a socially constructed universe.