

# THE RHETORIC OF SEDUCTION IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

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## Résumé

*La communication est l'un des plus grands dons de l'homme. Les hommes communiquent à travers des voies naturelles et aussi par des moyens inventés à l'instar de l'écriture, les chansons et les instruments de sons. La communication peut servir à atteindre un éventail d'objectifs allant de la persuasion à la création de relations.*

*L'objectif de cet article est de travailler sur le volet séducteur de la communication afin de montrer combien la question de l'intérêt constitue un mobile certain dans les pratiques de la corruption de la vie et au déséquilibre tout en se focalisant sur la rhétorique de la séduction dans les publicités. Sous le prisme de l'approche sémiotique qui permet de creuser le sens au-delà des signes perceptibles il a été premièrement trouvé que l'échec de Faustus est foncièrement imputable à la rencontre entre l'ambition de celui-ci avec la rhétorique de séduction couplée de moyens d'incitation soigneusement orchestrés par Mephostophilis et ses agents. C'est en effet, l'ambition de Faustus qui a été exploitée. Il a été secondement découvert que la rhétorique de séduction et l'usage des personnages secondaires ou intermédiaires qui relaient avec insistance les messages publicitaires auprès du public cible implémentées dans les techniques de publicité et de marketing de nos jours sont à l'image de Mephostophilis et de ses agents.*

**Mots clés** : communication, publicité, séduction, illusion, déboire.

## Abstract

*Communication is one of the greatest gifts of human being. People can communicate by natural means and they can also invent means of communication such as writing, songs, and musical instruments. To users, communication can serve many purposes such as convincing, and creating relationship.*

*The main target of this work is to analyse the seductive dimension of communication in order to discover how language can be used to get a result notwithstanding the degree or the greatness of people for language is a tool that can be exploited for profit. The discussions between Mephostophilis and Faustus have revealed the power of seduction of language when it meets the desire of the targeted person. Conducted under semiotic lenses which helps to go beyond the signs to get the deep meaning, this article has come out with the findings that the failure of Faustus is caused by the meeting between his ambition and the rhetoric of seduction of Mephostophilis coupled with the Bad Angel whose role is to hold the pressure by insisting after primary meetings. This method of persuasion is nowadays strongly implemented in advertising and marketing procedures.*

**Keywords:** communication, advertisement, seduction delusion, fall.

## Introduction

Language is a natural aptitude of man that consists in expressing one's ideas through audible and intelligible sounds. Language also stands as an impressive tool to convince and seduce. This impressive faculty of using language is neatly addressed in Christopher Marlowe's play titled *Doctor Faustus* which is built around seduction and delusion accessed through an artistic use of language designed to create excitation as to overlook the bad aspects of decisions. The fall of the brilliant Doctor Faustus exhibits the vulnerability of men whatever their status before the temptation of greed.

This article elaborates on rhetoric as the artful and impressive use of language for the purpose of provoking expected reactions in order to explore its harmful aspect to mankind when it is used for egotist purposes. The study considers rhetoric as a whole and advertising as a profit and commercially oriented use of communication in the light of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as to analyse the seductive facet of language. This orientation helps to understand the role of the rhetorical use of language in the fall of Faustus and subsequently the delusion to which the world is exposed to in commercial deals and advertisements. In substance, this perspective serves as a call for more ethics in advertising nowadays.

To achieve this purpose, the semiotic approach will be of great use to uncover the hidden facets of messages in the field of communication for Semiotic scholars hold that beyond signs, semiotics, deals with the meanings signs convey in communication. In this regard, Remzi Onur Kükürt holds that:

Semiological reading means to interpret the objects that surround our visible environment not just with their primary meaning but also based on their cultural codes, their

metaphorical meanings.  
The signs that surround  
our environment present  
us with an order of  
myths that hide political  
meaning and naturalize  
this meaning.

(Kükürt, 2016: 2167)

The article is sectioned into two. The first section is concerned with the connexion between the artful use of language and seduction to highlight the causes of Faustus' fall; while the second section deals with the implementation of the rhetoric of seduction in advertisement with the purpose to raise awareness upon manipulations therein.

### **1- The rhetoric of Seduction**

Seduction takes in one's desire to make a fellow act or react following one's hidden agenda. In consequence, ill-disposed people with mostly unrevealed reasons exploit their fellows' naivety to their interest by influencing their deeds. This art is mainly used in domains such as diplomacy and cooperation as well as in politics especially during electoral campaigns. Amongst seduction tricks, can be counted rhetoric or the delicate use of language with the unique purpose to convince and create reactions from the influenced person. As the seduced people usually act under pressure, they happen mostly to be negatively surprised in the end by their deeds whence shame and remorse. Seduction takes then in, the ability to depict impressively a common situation so as to have its commonness overlooked or turned to beauty. This can be applied to even horrid situations which trained rhetoricians can easily turn into splendour.

As for the influencer or the seducer, seduction can be said to be a profit use of language or communication by the usage of special diction chiefly concerned with a conscious exploitation of language known as rhetoric which is according to (Birch, 2009:839), "the ancient art of speaking persuasively, much cultivated in antiquity, and revived as a

major element of the medieval and the Renaissance school syllabus up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.”

According to *Oxford Dictionary*, seduction is a technique mostly priced by profit seeking actors such as political and commercial courtiers for their electoral and commercial goals. In the same disposition, seduction is said to occasion severe remorse within the seduced people especially when their reaction towards seduction is incompatible with their real nature.

In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe displays the efficiency of seduction on disposed hearts. For in the light of the tragedy, the sad lot of Faustus can be traced back to his ambition to become famous. Hence, the representation takes into account Faustus’ immoderate desire and unveils his weakness. Early in the play, the playwright has introduced a proud and ambitious Scholar named Faustus. Despite all the privileges that nature has granted him, Faustus is longing to become divine. He would desire to be endowed with supernatural powers to achieve wonders all over the world. Being a theologian, and having read about the capacities of magic, he easily turns to mysticism as the only and appropriate means to quench his thirst of becoming a demi-god. The last verses of the Prologue describes Faustus as a man who takes magic for a panacea and who is ready to explore magic to enjoy its charms. It reads:

He surfeits upon necromancy;  
Nothing so sweet as magic is to  
him,  
Which he prefers before his  
chiefest bliss:

*Doctor Faustus*, Prologue, 26-28 p.5.

Following this portrait of Faustus’ thoughts, Marlowe made him declare:

All things that move  
between the quiet  
poles

Shall be at my  
command:  
(...) A sound  
Magician is a demi-  
god;

*Doctor*

*Faustus*, I, i, 55-56  
&61.

(...) By him I'll be  
great emperor of the  
world,  
And make a bridge  
thorough the moving  
air  
To pass the ocean  
with a band of men;

*Doctor*

*Faustus*, I, iii, 104-106.

These declarations of Faustus stand as the exhibition of his longing for grandeur and his full acknowledgment of the greatness of the power that can be acquired in the practice of magic. In order to reach his goal, Marlowe made Faustus meet the most famous German magicians who taught him the art and showed him the way to meet with Mephostophilis, the agent of Lucifer. Eager to quench his thirst for power, he tried the art in the third Scene of the first Act. His trial has been conclusive as Mephostophilis, the agent of Lucifer appears to him. During their conversation, it appears as if Mephostophilis is just telling the truth. Even though Mephostophilis has been mentioning names like hell and Lucifer without shame, Faustus seems not to consider these words and appears to be visibly comfortable with these tales which would have under normal circumstances provoked apprehension to a scholar of his rank.

Definitely, the words of Mephostophilis reveal the origin of the power that is to be given to Faustus, it also reveals the sad lot awaiting Faustus if he chooses to get in touch with Lucifer. But the commitment of Faustus to fame and grandeur have blinded his knowledge. After his tasting magic by invoking successfully Mephostophilis, Faustus' has been told the conditions for a potential acquirement of power from Lucifer which consists in his sacrificing his soul by means of a contract. Mephostophilis declares:

But now thou  
must bequeath it  
solemnly  
And write a deed  
of gift with thine  
own blood,  
For that security  
craves Lucifer.  
If thou deny it, I  
must back to  
hell.

*Doctor Faustus*, II,  
I, 35-37.

This liberty of expression which can be noticed in Mephostophilis and Faustus' discussions can be seen as an overt revelation. But one should not forget that apart from the meetings between Faustus and Mephostophilis, the latter does not stay all day long with him. There have been times when Faustus was left alone by himself to reason his choices. And during these periods, there is more than a fight in his mind. The calm times that are supposed to help people reason upon their choices, have been occupied by the Bad Angel and the Good Angel who, each, standing on its conviction tries to counsel Faustus either to quit the contract or to get into it.

The peak of the angels' interaction with Faustus has been neatly depicted by Marlowe especially during the time that followed his signing the bloody contract. At a time when he was thinking about his

new choice and its outcomes; and even planning to drop it aside and get back to God, which denotes his departing from pride and ambition, both the Good and the Bad Angels came to him and unease his quiet times.

This artful representation of the stream of consciousness within man by Marlowe even though empirically done, has been given scientific explanation four centuries later by Sigmund Freud, an Austrian physician who through his works on mental issues came up with the notion of displacement and condensation illustrated by the constant fight between the id and the superego. The id that is in the image of the Bad Angel was rather encouraging Faustus to follow his heart desires sharpened by pride and the aspiration to possess easily terrestrial riches declaring in (*Doctor Faustus*, II,i,22) “No Faustus, Think of honour and of wealth.” Meanwhile, the Good Angel which according to Psychologists stands for the Superego works to remind Faustus of the risks of his ambitious orientation putting in(*Doctor Faustus*, II,i,16) “Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.” Through this dramatic representation of the Bad Angel and the Good Angel, Marlowe has been able to put on stage the restlessness of human mind. For even people’s silence is made of unheard noises which Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), called ‘noisy silence’.

Within his representation, Marlowe has succeeded in putting emphasis upon the weakness of Faustus and in the same way provoked the sympathy of the audience by arranging the process to have the Bad Angel speak mostly the last. This procedure consist in nullifying the advice of the Good Angel and to print in the stead of the good advice, the corrupted one which corollary is Faustus’ rejection of reason and virtue to hug pride. In the meeting between Faustus and both angels, one can see that Faustus always keeps in mind the last proposal which is that of the Bad Angel for it fits well with his real aspiration hence, at their departure, he could not think about anything else than his fame. In evaluating the fame and the security he could get from the devil, Faustus declares:

Wealth.  
Why, the signory  
of Emden shall be  
mine.  
When  
Mephostophilis  
shall stand by me,  
What power can  
hurt me? Faustus,  
thou art safe:  
*Doctor Faustus*, II, I,  
24-26.

It can be inferred in the light of Faustus' above declarations that, his heart is entirely conquered by the idea of the supremacy he is about to enjoy in practicing magic. Seduction is then onwards in the heart of Faustus. And seduction agents such as the Bad Angel have been witty enough to approach Faustus according to his heart desires. The promise definitely fits the quest motive of Faustus.

It is noticeable through the sequences of the appearances of both the Angel and Mephostophilis that Faustus has gained no lucid time to rethink the terms of the proposals that are made to him for the absence of the Angel are substituted by Mephostophilis. This situation leaves to say that the protagonist has been victim of a planned harassment neatly organised by Lucifer the lord of darkness with the intention to seduce Faustus. In fact, the devil has targeted Faustus. And is exploiting his inordinate ambition and excitement for fame in his favour.

The quest for a better living has been since creation, the very motive which explains people choices and inclinations. To achieve their ambitions, people have been able to move far away from their comfort zones to taste a better one. Migration is one of the signs of man's perpetual quest for a better living since creation. In this respect, the longing for a better living conditions and happiness constitute the weakness of mankind which skilled people exploit to seduce men.



Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* where the brilliant Faustus, has been easily seduced to hand over his soul to the devil as he was longing for grandeur is an evidence of man's longing for fame. To achieve this purpose, the devil simply exploited Faustus' ambition by offering him the capability to achieve all his desires. Promise stands in this play as the bait used by the devil to corrupt Faustus. The rhetoric of seduction takes in promise in the light of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* whence it urges to turn to the field of advertisement to discover the processes of the implementation of the rhetoric of seduction.

## **2- The implementation of the Rhetoric of Seduction in Advertisement**

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, advertisement is referred to as the use of "a picture, short film, songs, etc. which tries to persuade people to buy a product or service". It becomes understandable in the light of the definition issued by the dictionary that the very purpose of advertisement is to raise the income of venders. The interest of the consumer is then not the major concern of advertisement even if it is arranged to put in forwards the profits that a potential consumer may gain in buying the advertised product. Through the lenses of *Doctor Faustus*, this section demonstrates that advertisement is simply the implementation of the rhetoric of seduction on its angle of promise to show out that advertisement is simply seductive and can be taken for a snare to consumers as it exploits their tastes turning consumers into victims of their own appetite as prompted by Faustus in (*Doctor Faustus*, II, i, 11-12) "The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite,/ Wherein is fix'd the love of Beelzebub".

Convincing people to have them buy a product is purely a profit oriented activity which finality is to make profit out of the credibility of the consumer. In such circumstances when only the profit of the seller is prioritised, there is no doubt that traders can over praise their products to make them super-efficient than they really are as it shows in Faustus' overexcitement about the promise of the devil without thinking about the temporality of the promised bliss. In fact, the first command he made about having a wife has not been done according to his will. He got instead of a wife, a demon. The stage direction in

(*Doctor Faustus*, II, i, 138-145) clearly describes the reality upon the lady presented to Faustus as follow, “Devil dressed like a woman, with fireworks”. This way of answering the request of Faustus unveils the fake in seduction. For the real need of Faustus is not satisfied.

The fake news represents only one aspect of the ongoing crisis on problematic information. According to (Jack, 2017:2), a fake news is by essence “inaccurate, misleading, inappropriately attributed, or altogether fabricated information.” Fake information can possibly avail in advertisements as traders always exploit the needs of the populations to their advantage. In its Preamble on page two, The Canadian Standard of Advertisement defines advertisement as every message that aims at influencing people’s choices, opinions, and behaviours, « La « publicité » et les « publicités » s’entendent de tout message (autre que ceux exclus du champ d’application du présent *Code*) dont le contenu est contrôlé directement ou indirectement par l’annonceur, exprimé dans quelque langue que ce soit et diffusé dans quelque média que ce soit (à l’exception de ceux figurant dans les Exclusions) à l’intention des Canadiens, dans le but d’influencer leur choix, leur opinion ou leur comportement. This definition from the Canadian Standard unveils the manipulative aspect of advertisement. Hence it can be inferred that manipulation is not all that related to truth. Subsequently advertising messages should be taken with much prudence.

Faustus’ excitement for fame exposes the unquenchable motivation of people to satisfy their needs. This leaves to elaborate on the fact that people are ready for any sacrifice to reach their end. Then as the devil, did in the play, companies all over the world are working purposely their mottos and advertisements phrases both to establish customer loyalty and to conquer potential customers.

With its motto “*Explore beyond limits*” Acer is an electronic company which is specialised in digital commodities, Acer is classified amongst the world five giant industries in electronics. The motto of Acer rings as if with its products, the impossible becomes easily possible. With such a motto, the customer is taken from daily challenges to an experience fit to dream and science fiction. This section does not aim to attack the value or the quality of any product or any firm but it is to

raise awareness upon the rhetoric of exaggeration that is being developed in advertisements.

The very question about Acer will be to know what is meant by limit in a world where everything is limited. How far can people go with *Acer*? These questions raise an issue about the rhetoric of hyperbolic advertisements.

In an article titled “Top 908 Complaints and Reviews about Acer” published on the internet, can be read many complaints related to the dysfunction and indeed their dissatisfaction regarding the computers bought from *Acer*. These complaints related to the inefficiency of some of the *Acer* products all over the world denotes the exaggeration in the terms of its motto. It can also be elaborated that these complaints indicate a margin of failure of *Acer* to move some consumers beyond limits. To this extent, can be observed the deception of consumers and this situation indirectly reveals the limits of advertised mottos.

As for this aspect, the worry is not only with *Acer* or international electronic companies but also with many other companies and industries all over the world. In Togo, there are two telephony companies *Togocom* and *Moov*. The motto of *Moov* reads: “*No limit*”. Indeed, the company is established in Togo for nearly two decades but it cannot cover the whole country of 56600 km<sup>2</sup>. That is to mean that in some areas of the country people cannot communicate on *Moov* network simply because the network does not reach the place. As for *Togocom*, that offers internet services in addition to telephony services, one of their advertisements reads: “limitless access to internet for 30 days”.

Both advertising phrases advance the absence of limit which can be traced back to Faustus desire to have everything to his command. The choice of *Acer*, *Moov* and *Togocom* to emphasise their commercial communications on the absence of limit in view to attract customers visibly denotes people’s penchants to move beyond the possible. It obviously raises mankind inclination towards infinite merriment which even seduced Faustus, the brilliant scholar. Mankind’s inclination to

limitedness constitutes the very Achilles heel discovered by marketing and advertisement firm managers.

It is a real fact that these companies and firms are aware of their weaknesses but why do they promise the chimerical? In the American context the notion of limit is circumscribed in one of their values known as the *Frontier tradition*. The frontier tradition for Americans was in many domains as put by the Senator Kennedy in *1960 Democratic National Convention*: “But I tell you the New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus.” Time controls everything and causes mutations and/or degradations.

Mephostophilis the devil agent sent to Faustus made use of the principles of advertisement that consists in exploiting the weaknesses and the desires of listeners. In this play, Faustus is the first to express his full desire to gain more fame and achieve greater exploits beyond man’s limits. By consulting the devil through magic, he has freely exposed his weaknesses. It takes to note that, while Faustus is interested in his fame, the devil was rather interested in a much precious material which is the soul of the scholar. But the interest of the devil was a little hidden from the consciousness of Faustus as he could not imagine the torments he will experience at his last hours. The desire for fame has so ensnared his logic and reflection that he could not even enquire about what his end is going to look like. Faustus behaviour simply exhibits man’s limits as a reasonable being before fantastic offers.

The skill of the devil incarnated through the actions and speeches of his agents, Mephostophilis and the Bad Angel is similar to that which is used in marketing and advertisement nowadays. In fact, brands invest billions in advertisement to have their way through a world market so invaded by various products of similar utility. According to (Reeves, 1961:11), advertisement on media are not such effective like that which is entertained within friends. As a result, he holds that many advertisements on televisions and radios are just listened to and

forgotten the next minutes. But advertisement is undoubtedly efficient when it is conducted on interpersonal bases or is door to door oriented. In this line, one understands the crucial role of the agents of the devil in the corruption of Faustus' life. He has shown that people are likely to trust their fellows than all that they listen to on media. He names it the "reality in advertising."

Sellers or even marketers get enriched by exploiting the ambitious desires which constitute the weaknesses of their buyers. This is the case with the brilliant Faustus, who, despite his fame, his desire to taste the invisible and become divine has deprived him from his critical observation of things. This incapacity to control desires has weakened his reasoning ability so as to accept a contract which turns him into a defenceless prey to the devil.

In the perspective of limiting abuses in advertisement, the Canadian authorities set a Standard that mission is to control Advertisement. In Consequence, the Canadian Standard of Advertisement issued three main principles that marketers should not violate: veracity, clarity and exactitude. Under this terms many things are fought against such as lie, treachery and abuses.

## **Conclusion**

Through the tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*, Christopher Marlowe has illustrated temptation and the vulnerability of man by staging Faustus' lot. He staged man's vulnerability notwithstanding his social status before the rhetoric of seduction in the light of the Christian faith through the allegory of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Eden Garden whence, he holds for true the weakness and the vulnerability of man before his dissatisfaction towards his belongings. This state of dissatisfaction naturally generates ambitious desires which, when coupled with a constant persuasion of the tempter lead generally to uncontrolled choices. Whence it is perceivable that man is by nature vulnerable. Furthermore, Marlowe has been able to represent the role of the artful use of language in the process of seduction. In this vein, he has shown through the fall of Faustus that even scholars are vulnerable to the rhetoric of seduction combined with fantastic promises. They

can despite their high scholarship lose their lucidity before a persistent harassment as to be lead astray.

The discovery of the vulnerability of man before the artful manipulation of language is intensively exploited in domains such as marketing and advertisement nowadays. The real purpose of advertisement is in fact, connected to profit making. By persuading people to choose the products that they are offered without minding the real reason of the relentless advertisements. Advertisers stand as agents of profit-seeking companies in the image of Mephostophilis and the bad angels whose techniques is founded on the presentation of fantastic promises combined with a special diction addressed here as the rhetoric of seduction.

The above mentioned findings have led to raise awareness upon the abuses in advertisement following, (Reeves, 1961:72) observation who recalls Prime Minister Winston Churchill's observation, on the floor of the Mother of Parliaments, that: "There are two reasons for everything—a good reason, and the real one. "This is particularly true in advertising (...)" it takes then lucid observation coupled to indifferent evaluation of advantages and disadvantages to avoid remorse in matters of choice making especially when proposals come from other persons. It takes every country in the light of the Canadian Standard of Advertisement to institutionalise Standards in order to protect populations from dishonest publicities.

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