



Periodicity and intimations of a Judaic universe in David Mamet's *Faustus*

MOHAMMAD SAFAEI*

University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (Malaysia)

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ABSTRACT

David Mamet's *Faustus* presents a complex amalgam of various ideas, traditions and cultures. After a preliminary discussion in this essay on the adaptive status of Mamet's *Faustus* and on the myth of Faustus throughout history, I approach the notion of periodicity and time in the play, in its religious and anthropological contexts. I further investigate the same theme in tandem with the Nietzschean doctrine of eternal recurrence and its intersection with Judaism and, in specific, with Jewish philosopher Soloveitchik's conception of halakhic man and its antithetical selves, namely cognitive man and *homo religiosus*. Exploring the echoes of Jewish existentialism in the works of Soloveitchik, I argue that the play, which is categorized as a typical adaptation of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, posits serious questions as to human existence and the significance of intellectual negation and spiritual challenge within a Judaic universe. The essay, beyond the analysis of intertextuality in Mamet's *Faustus*, tends to underscore the play's distinguished contribution to the myth of Faustus from a Judaic perspective.

KEYWORDS: Mamet; *Faustus*; eternal recurrence; Judaism; religious time; existentialism.

1. INTRODUCTION

David Mamet's commitment to the dynamics of ethnicity and ethics is integral to the evolution of his work and theatre. His ethos and his aesthetics are rooted in cultural and intellectual heritage of Judaism. These crucial aspects of Mamet's work have often received meagre attention, for he tends to incorporate his moral vision into texts that appear devoid of

**Address for correspondence:* Mohammad Safaei. University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, School of English, Semenyih 43500, Selangor, Malaysia; e-mail: safaeim@hotmail.com

any references to the Judaic thought and values that are inextricably intertwined with his perception of life and “enable Mamet to fuse identification with Jewish cultural experience and moral imperative” (Kane, 1999: 1-2). Leslie Kane’s observations on Mamet’s ethnicity and moral values are, in specific, pertinent to Mamet’s 2004 *Faustus*, originally entitled *Dr Faustus*, a two-act play that has been, despite its ethnic orientations and profound religious notions, characteristically analysed and evaluated in juxtaposition with Christopher Marlowe’s 16th century *Doctor Faustus*. For instance, Kostic claims that Mamet’s play, notwithstanding its failure to contemporize Marlowe’s sufficiently, succeeds to demonstrate the urgency of affording attention to the suffering of children and to the devastating consequence of separating science and philosophy from human values and conscience (2013). Nadel underscores the artistic and ethical superiority of Marlowe’s play, arguing that Mamet’s *Faustus* demonstrates “nothing except some simple magic tricks” (2008: 220) and how, in contradistinction to Marlowe’s protagonist’s eventual contrition, Mamet’s *Faustus*, by the end of the play, resumes his friendship with Magus “in the hopes that he has become, as he says, complete” (222). Abbotson succinctly conceives of Mamet’s play as a mere “adaptation” of Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (2005: 176).

What is primarily at stake concerning the adaptive status of Mamet’s *Faustus* is that adaptation, far from being a slavish copying, accords with the classical notion of *imitatio* or *mimesis*, and as such, it reflects the dynamism of artistic creativity and the “process of making the adapted material one’s own” (Hutcheon, 2006: 20). Every citation of a previous text or any reproduction of a previous work that differs from its original contributes to the cultural dissemination of the source text and its “social canonicity” (Brewer, 2005: 102). Moreover, one must also heed that the inception of Faustian myth predates Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. Suffice it to say that Christopher Marlowe himself wrote his *Doctor Faustus* by dramatizing the English translation of 1587 anonymous German book, *Historia von Johann Fausten* (Wootton, 2005: xi). In fact, the myth of Faust or Faustus, often involving a scientist’s quest for forbidden knowledge and the sufferings of his transgression, has permeated the works of the writers of diverse cultures and ethnicities, such as Augustine, Christopher Marlowe, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Mikhail Bulgakov, Gertrude Stein and Thomas Mann. One may thus argue that the persistence of the myth and the ever-increasing proliferation of Faustian themes in our contemporary art and literature testify to “our enduring fascination with the occult, with the demonic, with evil and the devil, with superstition” (van der Laan, 2007: 1-2). The proliferation of the myth of Faust throughout the centuries renders its ascription to a single narrative or author impossible. As such, whereas we can readily associate Don Quixote, as a literary or personality type, with Cervantes, or Hamlet with Shakespeare, “no one author can lay claim to Faust” (Hedges, 2005: 1).

While I acknowledge Mamet’s partial indebtedness to his precursors and explore, to a limited extent, the intertextuality between Mamet’s *Faustus* and the work of Marlowe and

Goethe, I principally intend to explore, in his *Faustus*, the salience of intellectual dialectics in the achievement of deeper insights into life, its meaning, and its affirmation despite its agonies and imperfections. My approach to Mamet's *Faustus* is informed by three interrelated theories. I initially draw upon the insights, posited by philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade, into the mythical-anthropological aspects of 'periodicity', which is a central notion in Mamet's play. This preliminary discussion lays the ground for an exposition on Nietzsche's conception of 'eternal recurrence' and its pertinence to the theme of periodicity and Faustus's transformation throughout the play. Ultimately and more extensively, I probe the character of Mamet's protagonist, the vicissitudes of his life and the cycle of his transformations by drawing upon Russian-American Rabbi and Philosopher Joseph B. Soloveitchik's conception of halakhic man and his opposing roles within a Judaic universe. As Jewish existential philosophy addresses the diametrical opposition between self-realization and individual autonomy, on the one hand, and the plausibility of devout submission to a halakhic institution, on the other (Leaman, 1997: 720), this essay, besides its investigation of philosophical themes and the ontology of periodicity as the embodiment of "a set of presuppositions about the world and the character of reality" (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1987: 357), is an exploration of Jewish existentialism in Mamet's *Faustus*.

2. PERIODICITY

The notion of "periodicity" has thematic significance in Mamet's play, for not only is it both Faustus's obsession and ultimate scientific discovery, claimed to be "the secret engine of the universe" (Mamet, 2004: 29), but it also embodies the underlying thought behind his transformation of attitudes toward life and its joys and agonies throughout the play. Mircea Eliade, in his ground-breaking *Cosmos and History: The Myth of Eternal Return*, originally published in 1949 as *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour: archétypes et répétition*, elucidates that periodicity is deeply rooted in ancient history, pertaining to man's conception of regeneration and the return of time. It was the origin of cultivation rituals and festivals, and it functioned to guarantee the recurrence of time for the new harvest. One should not, nevertheless, relate the idea of time and its significance for the ancient civilizations to merely social or economic factors, since the concept of time was simultaneously influenced by religious and political discourses. Time began to be divided, in accordance with the cosmic rhythm of the universe, into solar or lunar periods; calendars were produced on the basis of periodicity and specific rites and anniversaries were intercalated. The concept of periodicity has evolved into an acceptable framework for the expulsion of demons, confession, repentance, purification and the regeneration of the soul. The concept of "a periodic regeneration of time presupposes, in more or less explicit form and especially in the historical civilizations, a new Creation, that

is, a repetition of the cosmogonic act” (Eliade, 1959: 51-2). Eliade argues that the myth of periodicity and cyclical return has been revived in diverse forms throughout the past millennia to resuscitate principally the archaic myths of creation, destiny, deterioration, and rebirth. Periodicity has functioned as a paradigm for the eschatological approaches to life and its miseries; it has been adopted as a theoretical ground for the apparently secular conceptualisations of history; and it has been assumed to be influential in the socio-political development or decline of nations and civilizations (Eliade, 1959). Mamet’s *Faustus*, from an anthropological perspective, may be categorized as the contemporization of the ancient theme of return and redemption; yet the play does not thoroughly accord with Eliade’s anthropological conceptualization of the myth of eternal return.

In the first act of Mamet’s play, Faustus conceives of periodicity not only as the “universal” pattern or the ineluctable “recurrence” of both “acts of nature, and supposed acts of will,” such as famine, drought, war, growth and decadence (Mamet, 2004: 28), but also as a curse, a plague. He is immersed in his ambivalent contemplations on the origins of Universe and his grand mathematical formula to explain periodicity; his conception of periodicity is formalized in an equation that occurs to be “abstruse” to his friend Fabian (26) and “beyond” his wife’s comprehension (12). In return for this mathematical achievement, his wife delivers him a poem written by his son, who adores his father like a “god” and “mimics” him in all stages of life (12). The son’s esoteric poem depicts the miserable life of a “hired man” within a dark universe; yet the possibility of “mystic” enlightenment is also prognosticated in the poem (13). Overwhelmed by his scientific hubris, Faustus is unable to discern his son’s optimistic vision. Instead, after pondering a few lines of his son’s poem, the scientist ruefully utters, “Poor child. His work now complete, he, similar to his father, is cursed to begin again” (15). The ordeal of repeating a labour, even after its completion, evokes the mythological Sisyphus, who had to endure the eternal punishment of vacuous labour in the Underworld. He was condemned to roll a massive boulder unremittingly up a hill where it would roll back down (March, 1998). Faustus alludes to Sisyphus to underscore the mode of futile existence that both his son as a fledgling poet and he himself as a scientist philosopher are condemned to suffer. Contemplating on the poem, Faustus remarks, “Hush, he is working; hush, he is done. See: our poor petted Sisyphus, watch his labour now devolve from him” (Mamet, 2004: 15). Faustus’s allusion to the mythical character and his tribulation is commensurate with our conception of Sisyphean torment as man’s punishment to the “endless cycle of repetitions of the same activities” (Reginster, 2006: 219).

The function of religion, in Faustus’s perspective, is that “under its aegis, nay, in its name” there is more justification for “misery, murder, and starvation” (Mamet, 2004: 32). When Fabian claims that people seek solace in religion, Faustus’s dispassionate, if not atheistic, counterargument is that “the leaf of the chamomile, parboiled in water, conduces to calm” (32). He contends that doctrines attributed to Jesus, such as those formulated by the

Council of Nicaea, were man-made and not divine proclamations. Such attitudes appear to his friend as overt “heresy” (34). In other words, in Mamet’s play, the protagonist’s nihilistic attitude toward life does not comply with Eliade’s conception of the myth of eternal return as a theological justification or euphemistic mythicization of human miseries (Eliade, 1959: 152). Eliade argues that belief in the return of time essentially originated from man’s desire for immortality and resurrection (62). On the contrary, immortality is not favoured by Mamet’s *Faustus*. Nor does a desire for eternal life reflect Rabbi Soloveitchik’s existentialist insistence on the importance of the present, for human beings, he argues, are not able to predict what will happen during the next moment in their existence; immersion in “an illusory eternity” will distract our attention from the religious and social responsibilities which reside in every minute of life (Soloveitchik, 2003: 148-9). As Eliade underscores the resuscitation of the theme of reversible time in Nietzsche’s philosophy (1959: 146), I deem it essential to explore further the theme of periodicity or the reversibility of time by drawing upon the Nietzschean concept of eternal recurrence.

3. ETERNAL RECURRENCE

In his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche affirms, “Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally” (2006: 175). The philosopher conceives of eternal return, i.e. this central teaching of Zarathustra, the Persian prophet and the protagonist of his imaginative work, as a painful contemplation on the cyclical time and the impossibility of moving, via a revolutionary historical decision, beyond the stagnation of current life (del Caro, 2006: x). Nietzsche, in his *Will to Power*, posits a congruous assertion: “If the world had a goal, it must have been reached. If there were for it some unintended final state, this also must have been reached” (1967: 546). The universe is incapable of eternal novelty; life is entangled within a repetitive state: “Everything becomes and returns eternally—escape is impossible” (545). Nietzsche is sceptical of historical telos and a purposeful universe, and his conception of “eternal recurrence” is sometimes construed as a cosmogonic explanation for the universe “according to which everything that exists has already been and is fated to be again, exactly as it was” (Reginster, 2006: 205). Such a deterministic approach towards the repetition of life, implying “reconciliation with the fatality of its course” (209), is discernible in Mamet’s play when the philosopher of periodicity evokes, as explored above, the curse of a Sisyphean life of drudgery to which he and his son are condemned.

Here it is essential to underscore a significant dissimilarity between Mamet’s play and two of its British and German precursors, i.e. 1588/9 Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and Goethe’s *Faust* (Part I & II), written throughout several decades and eventually completed in 1831. Whereas the closing of Marlowe’s play depicts the everlasting perdition of Faustus via

his pact with the devil (Watt, 1996), the finale of Mamet's *Faustus* is not tragic; and unlike the blissful ending of Goethe's *Faust II*, which augurs some mode of salvation for Faust (Hedges, 2005), the triumphant dénouement of Mamet's play is devoid of any semblance of redemption for its protagonist. The noteworthy achievement of Mamet's *Faustus* is that he opts, by declining the offer of eternal bliss, for life on the earth despite its Sisyphean curse. There have been attempts, Hoelzel argues, to construe the fiasco of Faustian characters in literature as the abortiveness of man's struggle against divinity. The dialectics between man and ancient gods has been, in the western tradition, analogous to a Promethean quest for fire, or, to the biblical Adam and Eve's original transgression. That is, the attainment of knowledge is, on the one hand, considered a virtue. Yet the same virtue, within the Judeo-Christian tradition, is, on the other hand, presumed to be conducive to devastation and disintegration (Hoelzel, 1985). Whereas Prometheus's quest constitutes the quintessence of Faustian myth, Mamet's *Faustus* has arguably proffered his version of the myth as a Sisyphean drudgery. Nevertheless, what appears more striking is that Mamet's protagonist, by the end of the play, claims "I am completed", which appears to be the declaration of a new perception toward his ordeal (Mamet, 2004: 102).

Mamet is often criticized for writing the best roles for men; he himself emphasizes that he socializes with men more than women; that he does not possess sufficient knowledge of how women perceive the world; and that he is apprehensive, despite some efforts, of his possible disingenuousness in representing a female voice (Dean, 2004: 19). His *Faustus* is not exceptional. *Faustus* possesses the central part in the play; after him comes Magus the magician and then Fabian. Nonetheless, a line, uttered by his wife in act 1, proleptically encapsulates the crucial reversal in *Faustus's* Weltanschauung. When *Faustus* claims that his "bidding" cannot alter the "growth" of life, his wife asserts: "But it shall affect how I perceive it" (Mamet, 2004: 9). In the course of the two acts of the play, *Faustus* undergoes a spiritual transformation that inspires a shift in his conception of life. During act 1, Sisyphus symbolizes the cycle of tribulations which is assigned to each individual throughout his life. In this sense, *Faustus's* son, according to his father, has to suffer the affliction of a purposeless repetition of a task after its ostensible culmination. To ponder such an absurd recurrence in life merely results in mental collapse, since *Faustus* compares the mind to a "mill" whose "incessant turn" grinds its stones into "dust" (Mamet, 2004: 15). In act 2, *Faustus's* perception of his Sisyphean life morphs into a novel insight into the essence of life with all its vicissitudes. It is at this moment of spiritual enlightenment when the ordeal of leading a Sisyphean life, in *Faustus's* perception, reflects Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence in an entirely disparate sense implying, as Hall avers, that "one must contemplate, construct, and come to accept one's life as an aesthetic creation worthy of reliving infinitely" (Hall, 2004: 76).

Between act 1 and act 2, several decades pass. Yet whereas Faustus, an adamant atheist immersed in conversation with Magus, has miraculously remained youthful and robust, the devoted Fabian has grown old and “blind” (Mamet, 2004: 68). Ironically, too, while the friendship between Fabian and Faustus terminates by the end of act 1, the intellectual interaction between Faustus and Magus subsists throughout the play and is conducive to the protagonist’s deeper realization of the meaning of life. Although there is no mention of Mamet’s *Faustus* in Holmberg’s extensive research on male friendship in Mamet’s oeuvre, he argues that the playwright’s films and plays often “dramatize the conflicts, contradictions, and covert affection between men” (Holmberg, 2014: 1). Similarly, towards the end of *Faustus*, there is, between Faustus and Magus, more amity than enmity. Mamet’s Magus strikingly evokes the “demon” in Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* who, in one of our most dejected moments of life, assists us to envision the vista of eternal recurrence and to relish in the perennial repetition of each and every incident, whether trivial or magnificent, which has occurred to us (Nietzsche, 2001: 194). The complementary roles of Faustus and Magus are more prominent in the closing lines of the play. Faustus’s last line is “I am completed” and Magus, in his final line, confirms a congruous completion for himself: “As, My Lord, am I” (Mamet, 2004: 102). The two characters are not antithetical; conversely, Faustus’s audacious acceptance of the Nietzschean “eternal hourglass of existence” (Nietzsche, 2001: 194) has even induced Magus to address Faustus with the reverential epithet “My Lord.” A congenial relation can also be discerned, as van der Laan contends, between Goethe’s Faust and Mephisto, for they together establish the “complementary, polar, or antagonistic aspects of a single comprehensive whole” (2007: 85).

Here I need to recapitulate a few scenes toward the resolution of the play as well as some of my previous assertions regarding the reversal of Faustus’s perceptions towards life. Act 1 represents life, from Faustus’s perspective, as an arduous task that has to be repeated. He is an atheist and remote from conventional and moralistic ideas as to family, friendship, religion, Jesus. Magus the magician engrosses him in an incessant dialogue to the extent that Faustus not only overlooks his responsibilities toward his family, but he commits perjury inadvertently, afflicting death on his wife and son. Act 2 has the ambience of a purgatorial space where Faustus can observe the anguish of his suicidal wife and the heavenly bliss surrounding his son. Faustus realizes that the possibility of a family reunion in the hereafter is rendered impossible as the son and the angelic mother, now “damned as a suicide” are remorsefully separated (Mamet, 2004: 89); and the perjured Faustus has to decide either to enter heaven or hell. Faustus repents of his “petted self-adoration” and “debauchery” (88), but hopeless of divine absolution, he begs for a dagger to terminate his blight by joining his adoring wife. At this moment, the gates of hell open and his wife, dressed “*in torn, soot-blackened garments,*” appear (91). Regretful of his suicidal decision, he entreats his son to intercede with him; the curtains behind Faustus drop and Heaven reveals itself. The child

announces that “Today is the day of atonement” and asks if Faustus has “a petition” (95). In his distressful vacillations, Faustus articulates his aspiration for the recurrence of life on the earth: “that my wife, that my child, and myself may return, to the earth, whole, and restored, as before” (Mamet, 2004: 96). With Nietzschean eternal recurrence as “the highest formula of affirmation—the affirmation and celebration of life, even under conditions of tragedy and its continuous, eternal return” (Plotnitsky, 1998: 208), the all-embracing notion of periodicity and its inherent recurrence, which appear to Faustus a curse throughout act 1, transforms into a blessing by the end of act 2, when he aspires to experience the same worldly life along with his wife and son.

Having been exposed to the vista of both heaven and hell, Faustus still prefers to further expostulate with Magus, persuading him to confess his “capitulation,” for he has given Faustus “the license to see heaven and hell and walk free” (Mamet, 2004: 101). He assertively demands payment from Magus because it is Faustus who actually entertains him and not the inverse. He triumphantly claims that he has discerned the “sacred light” (101), and yet he declines the opportunity to enter the heavenly kingdom and delight in eternal bliss. Whereas Mamet’s Faustus is an atheist in act 1, he is a believer in act 2; however, there is no semblance of Fabian and his Christian perceptions in Faustus. In brief, Faustus, by the end of the play, is neither a purely Nietzschean atheist nor a conventional religious man with an aspiration for heaven. To explain the nexus between the notion of eternal recurrence and the petition of Mamet’s protagonist—a man who confesses his ethical flaws and has confidence in an eschatological existence and yet has an unquenchable thirst for worldly life—I deem it crucial to further scrutinize his determination and character by drawing upon the Judaic notion of halakhic man.

4. HALAKHIC MAN

In Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* as well as in Goethe’s *Faust* there are several references to geographical locations, and the pact with the devil enables the protagonist to travel across the world. In Mamet’s *Faustus*, such geographical references are scarce. The play is more a journey within the soul. However, the content of certain discussions on “God’s grace,” “power of the Church,” “Christ,” and “Council of Nicaea” (Mamet, 2004: 32-34) affords the play a substantial Christian aura. Nonetheless, one cannot utterly overlook the Jewish origins of Mamet and the resonance of Judaic faith in his *Faustus*. In fact, despite a considerable measure of ambivalence in Mamet’s adherence to his Jewish ancestors and faith (Biggsby, 2004), Kane, with an insistence on Mamet’s employment of language as “camouflage” (1999: 4), asserts that Mamet’s Jewishness, depicted in his implementation of Talmudic concepts, halakhah, Jewish mysticism and aggadic traditions of narration, has constituted the cornerstone of his oeuvre since 1975.

While I acknowledge the importance of cultural locus or the school of thought, e.g. Reform Judaism versus Orthodox Judaism, in the formation of discrepant attitudes towards halakhah, its divinity, and the necessity of adherence to it (Meyer, 1995), I deem it necessary to clarify, to a limited measure, the notion of halakhah and its status in Judaism. Halakhah, with its etymological traces of ancient Aramaic terminology for administration, would denote, in its original milieu, both “a (land) tax” and a “fixed rule” (Safrai, 1987: 121). More broadly, halakhah signifies law, tradition, paradigm or “a worldview and way of life anchored in Judaism’s extensive normative tradition” which a believer has to comply with and practice (Hartman, 1989: 249). Halakhah along with aggadah comprise the entirety of Judaic faith. Nevertheless, whereas aggadah addresses the exteriorities of Judaism, halakhah pertains to its interiorities. Aggadah is concerned with the story of creation, Eden, fall, Israel, exile and the conflict between man’s will and God’s commands. Halakhah, on the contrary, is concerned with the norms rather than doctrinal beliefs, addressing the quotidian conduct that determines the contours of a Jewish life and its sanctification (Neusner, 2002). Halakhah, which evolved extensively throughout the Second Temple and the Talmud eras, is a living tradition that provides the observant Jews with a framework for the enhancement of their lives. It is a compilation of detailed laws, founded on Tanakh, custom or authority of the Rabbinic Sages that address several aspects of life, including adolescence, marriage, funerary rites, Sabbath, commerce, daily prayers, offerings and purification, to name a few. Yet far from being a monolithic system of regulations, halakhah also acknowledges an individual’s degree of piety as well as the diversity of customs and traditions that encompass Jewish communities. It is noteworthy that such cultural and individual differences have, throughout history, stimulated fundamental halakhic debates (Safrai, 1987).

Soloveitchik defines halakhah with a keen attention to the tensions within human sciences, the widening rupture between modern science and philosophy, and the challenges which a (Jewish) philosophy of religion has to confront. As such, halakhah, to Soloveitchik, signifies the objectification or “crystallization of the fleeting individual experience into fixed principles and universal norms” (1986: 85). Halakhic man, too, is a multifaceted concept that I gradually explain in this section of my essay. In his book *Halakhic Man*, Rabbi Soloveitchik conceives of halakhic man not only as an “antinomic” figure (1983: 1) but also as an authentic Jewish hero and “the master of Talmudic dialectics” (5). Halakhic man has to endure “the pangs of self-contradiction and self-negation” (1), for he embodies two disparate selves. On the one hand, he represents the cognitive man, a man of intellect with intense desire for abstract logical thinking; on the other hand, he exemplifies *homo religiosus*, the “possessor of an ontological approach that is devoted to God and of a worldview saturated with the radiance of the Divine Presence” (1). Soloveitchik underscores a crucial point regarding his conception of halakhic man, explaining that whereas one can discuss the features of halakhic man vis-à-vis two other prevalent types, i.e. cognitive man and *homo*

religiosus, one has to heed that a pure halakhic man is an impossibility. That is, he can be analyzed only conceptually. This bears resemblance to our epistemological approach to geometrical spaces or certain notions in social sciences, which can be explored in theoretical terms, despite the fact that their pure forms do not exist in actuality. As such, a “real halakhic” man is a “hybrid” type which can merely approximate the pure or ideal form “to a lesser or greater degree” (Soloveitchik, 1983: 139).

Halakhic man is not concerned with transcendental existence, since it is in this world where he can move from the state of potentiality to actuality; it is “in this world, that halakhic man acquires eternal life” (Soloveitchik, 1983: 30). In Soloveitchik’s conception of Halakhah, “the epistemic outlook of halakhic man leaves no room for other worlds and for reality layers other than his epistemic world. Spiritual essences beyond cognition, such as angels and seraphs, are irrelevant to him” (Schwartz, 2007: 129). Soloveitchik propagates a novel philosophical outlook toward Jewish faith and the ideal Jewish man who differs from that in the ascetic traditions in Judaism. He is deeply influenced by Nietzsche and the several references to the existentialist philosopher in *Halakhic Man* testify to the prominence of Nietzschean thought and his criticism of Judeo-Christian self-mortification and disdain for life. As such, Soloveitchik, in his conceptualization of halakhic man, heeds the critique of Jewish asceticism, the importance of sublimating human passions, and the existentialist affirmation of worldly life (Rynhold & Harris, 2008). The tremendous blessing of life is that man, according to Soloveitchik, “is given the opportunity to create, act, accomplish, while there, in the world to come, he is powerless to change anything at all” (1983: 32). To a halakhic man, the idea of eternity is an illusion; “there is no time which lies behind us; everything persists and endures. There is eternal repetition” (Soloveitchik, 2003: 148). Soloveitchik’s insistence on the illusiveness of eternity and the reality of repetition or cyclical time is no more than an affirmation of life, for it is with this perspective that any “fraction of the infinite stream of time becomes precious” (149).

Soloveitchik condemns lewdness, thirst for power, and unbounded freedom and subjectivity; he disdains moral turpitude and the inordinate praise lavished on “the Faustian type and the Dionysian personality” (1983: 141). However, Soloveitchik’s insistence on action, creation and accomplishment is reminiscent of Goethe’s Faust when he ponders different lexical equivalents for “word” in the book he desires to write. Contemplating on his choice of an appropriate word, Goethe’s Faust, in *Faust I*, eventually decides that instead of writing “In the beginning was the Word,” he must opt for “In the beginning was the Deed” (2008: 39). In Faust’s perspective, it is “deed” that must have the supreme status in man’s life. One can identify the residues of this Goethean postulation in Soloveitchik’s philosophy: “Halakhic man is not a man of words” (Soloveitchik, 1983: 86). This conceptual congruity can barely surprise us as the influence of several German poets like Goethe, Humboldt and Herder on Jewish thought has been well underscored (Wertheim, 2011). Further, with regard

to Soloveitchik's philosophical studies in Germany, the influence of existentialist thought on his philosophy cannot be overlooked (Hartman, 1989). A vestige of Soloveitchik's thought resonates in the closing scenes of Mamet's *Faustus*, when Faustus, in the purgatorial sphere, exposed to the images from heaven and hell, confesses his sins and yet asserts, "My life was not without merit," for he was, despite his flaws, "loved" by his son and wife (Mamet, 2004: 87). It is, in other words, the vista of an imperfect life, but with the opportunity to create, act, and accomplish, which enkindles him to return.

Halakhic man is not a purely cognitive man; nor does he utterly represent *homo religiosus*, for he, despite his faith in eternity, "abhors death, organic decay, and dissolution" (Soloveitchik, 1983: 31). Nor is he intoxicated with the promise of a heavenly kingdom; on the contrary, he seeks bliss in the midst of the material world, and his perpetual concern is to relieve other people from misery and oppression (41). A pronounced resemblance between the halakhist and Mamet's Faustus is that the former, according to Soloveitchik, not only conceives of his world like "a mathematician" (Soloveitchik, 1983: 18), but "stumbles across a repetition of events in a certain order," providing him with an "a priori" framework consisting of "rules, judgments, and fundamental principles" for life in this world (19). In the light of Soloveitchik's conception of halakhic man, I contend that Mamet's Faustus, in act 1, represents the cognitive man, obsessed with scientific methodology and imbued with vainglory caused by his ability to encapsulate the mechanism of the whole world in "a mathematical formula...a numeric reduction" (Mamet, 2004: 26). Faustus, in act 1, despises certitude in an immaterial world, conceiving of the "gifts" of heaven as "mendacity" (29). As such, his initial approach to life complies with the preliminary stage of spiritual development for the halakhic man, since "halakhic man's approach to reality is, at the outset, devoid of any element of transcendence" (Soloveitchik, 1983: 17). Faustus's encounter with Magus is the point of departure from the status of cognitive man to that of, by the closing of act 2, halakhic man with an awareness of a supernal existence beyond visible phenomena. Yet, without any aspiration to abstain from the material world, Faustus presents a petition for the resumption of his this-worldly life. This attitude distinguishes Faustus from *homo religiosus*, who is suffused with the urge "to break through the bounds of concrete reality and escape to the sphere of eternity" (Soloveitchik, 1983: 41).

Mamet has often intended to universalize his themes, demonstrating the broad implication of his philosophical, spiritual and ethical values through his works. A characteristic feature of his theatre is that he, as the consequence of his American Jewish experience, humanizes the mythologized biblical parables by assigning, for instance, biblical names to his characters or by engaging them in congruous conflicts to emphasize the nexus, or, even to demonstrate the concordance between the modern and the ancient worlds (Kane, 1999). The universalization of themes in regards to 'Adam' in the first act of Mamet's *Faustus* is crucial, for, on the one hand, the belief in the biblical Adam, as the patriarch of

human race, “has been a standard doctrine” in all Abrahamic religions (Livingstone, 2008: 5). On the other hand, the story of Adam not only addresses human responsibility, disobedience, transgression, penance, punishment and the role of evil in human life, but it also involves the story of “the first couple” and their “first offspring” (Meyers, 2012: 138). Magus, in act 1, eulogizes the scientific achievements of Faustus, averring that in people’s opinion “you are like Adam, before whom were brought all God’s creation, and whate’er he chose to call them, so they were called. And now you are complete” (Mamet, 2004: 58).

The exploration of this biblical allusion, by drawing upon Soloveitchik’s exposition on two discrepant accounts of creation in Genesis, can shed further light on the characteristic transformation of Faustus throughout the play. According to the first chapter of Genesis, “God created man in His own image,” “male and female,” and commanded them to “fill the earth and subdue it.” In the second chapter, however, we encounter an incongruous account of creation in the Bible: “God formed the man of dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Soloveitchik, 2006: 10). Much debate has been devoted to the discrepancy between the two narratives and their doctrinal corollaries, with the biblical exegetes traditionally supporting the existence of two distinct origins for the two stories of creation. It is argued that the first story originates from the so-called priestly tradition of the ‘E’ text” where God, in the Hebrew Bible, is addressed by the divine appellation *Elohim*, which is translated into ‘Lord’. Genesis 2, conversely, demonstrates the ‘J’ tradition that addresses God by the dual name *Adonai Elohim*, known in English as *Jehovah* or ‘Lord God’. In Genesis 1, God creates Adam *ex nihilo*, giving rise to the argument that Adam can be construed as a single bi-gendered being with a male and a female side. In Genesis 2, Adam is generated from the soil, underscoring the idea that he could not be completed in the image of God. Consequently, whereas Genesis 2 supports patriarchy, this is the first story of creation, i.e. Genesis 1, which engenders ethical and theological support for human and gender equality (Fletcher, 1999).

Soloveitchik’s approach to the two incompatible narratives of Adam’s creation closely resembles his conception of the two antithetical selves of halakhic man as explained above. Emphasizing the integrity of the biblical accounts of creation in the two chapters of Genesis, Soloveitchik, in his *The Lonely Man of Faith*, originally published in 1965, argues that the two stories of the creation of Adam signify the two ontological and irreconcilable potentialities within human beings, and, consequently, within the halakhic man. As such, Adam the first is “blessed with the gift of rhetoric” (Soloveitchik, 2006: 25), endowed with boldness, majesty, and mental capabilities necessary for the exploration of “the dynamics of the cosmos by employing quantified-mathematized media which man evolves through postulation and creative thinking” (13). Modern scientific man, with the capability and ardour to dominate his environment and exert control over it, is an exemplary manifestation of Adam the first. As Adam the first, Mamet’s Faustus admires “*number*” but “not religion,

which to the scientific mind cannot be quantified” (Mamet, 2004: 33). On the contrary, Adam the second “does not mathematize phenomena or conceptualize things” (Soloveitchik, 2006: 21). Whereas Adam the first, or the “majestic man,” is utilitarian and his interest in social interaction is a consequence of his desire for self-promotion (27), Adam the second, or the “covenantal man,” seeks “intimate relation with God” and believes in the shared destiny and suffering of all the members of his community (48). He is not self-conceited and seeks redemption in his prayers and in his very act of confessing his flaws and creatureliness in front of the creator of the universe (Soloveitchik, 2006). As Adam the second, Mamet’s *Faustus* “convicts” himself “of a life of heresy” (Mamet, 2004: 94) and conceives of his scientific finding as “empty” and “the toy of an overfed mind” (87). It is this redemptive experience that enables Adam the second to discern truth and to move beyond “the closed, vicious cycle of the insensate natural occurrence” (Soloveitchik, 2006: 90).

Soloveitchik’s typological analysis of the two Adams, which he further defines as the majestic man and the covenantal man, respectively, emphasizes “the ‘antinomic’ quality of the religious experience” (Singer & Sokol, 1982: 241). In Mamet’s *Faustus*, the characteristics of both Adams are discernible. *Faustus*, in the first act of the play, represents Adam the first who, as Soloveitchik explains, is “a creative theoretician,” endowed with dignity and fame, intent upon “triumph over the cosmic forces” (2006: 18). Whereas *Faustus*, in act 1, lives within a universe that he himself defines and manipulates, the second act presents the spiritual struggles of *Faustus*, as Adam the second, within a different universe where, according to Soloveitchik, there is no dignity or fame but “anonymity” (2006: 25), where “humble man makes a movement of recoil, and lets himself be confronted and defeated by a Higher and Truer Being” (35). The two Adams have contradictory approaches to the Universe. Whereas the ambitious Adam the first is interested in “cosmological” discoveries, Adam the second is engrossed in his “cosmic” encounter with God and with the sublime grandeur of his Universe (49-50). Similar to Adam the first, who, being “egocentric and ego-oriented,” is almost impervious to the suffering of others (Soloveitchik, 2006: 57), *Faustus*, in act 1, is characterized by his forgetfulness toward his family, “self-absorption,” “pride” (Mamet, 2004: 16) and his pursuit of worldly “knowledge” and “fame” (21). He shuns anonymity and aspires that his “renown shines free of accomplishment” (21). Simultaneously, *Faustus* is also suffused with deep contempt not only for the scientific community, the “detractors by profession” (41), but also for the common masses who will mindlessly admire, if he desires, even a “dog’s bone” (Mamet, 2004: 21). Yet, as the awareness and the experience of sharing “the travail and suffering” of others and the desire for offering “petition” on their behalf are the conspicuous features of Adam the second (Soloveitchik, 2006: 57-58), *Faustus*, in act 2, presents a remorseful lonely character, who, imbued “with the anguish of a contrite heart,” “begs for rescission of my child’s death and my wife’s suffering” (Mamet, 2004: 94). He “prostrate[s]” himself before the “mighty

Judge” and “the One True God” (94) and “begs,” on behalf of his family, “to be reunited” (98).

What is, in Soloveitchik’s perspective, more noteworthy is that the phenomenon of cyclical or “reversible time” is suitable to Adam the first or cognitive man (2006: 77). This is the reason that Faustus, despite his familiarity with the anguish of worldly life, still aspires to return to the “Best of the two worlds” safe and sound along with his family (Mamet, 2004: 96). This is the philosophy of Halakhah that manifests itself in the paradoxical roles which are assigned by God to human beings; and this is the very oscillation between the two poles of halakhic man or between the two Adams within him that signifies the teleology of Halakhah, rendering “the act of complete redemption unrealizable” (Soloveitchik, 2006: 76). In *Faustus*, periodicity, an apparently mathematical equation to explain cosmological phenomena, reveals itself as an underlying metaphor to demonstrate oscillation between two selves, or, the cyclical movement from one mode of existence and experience to the other. By the end of Mamet’s play, Faustus has not only experienced the two opposing selves of halakhic man, namely cognitive man and *homo religiosus*, but more crucially, he has reassumed his role as Adam the first, emanating an imperious assertiveness to the extent that Magus concedes his defeat. Faustus’s desire to “return” and his final affirmation of being “completed” can, hence, be construed as his thorough experience of his two conflicting, yet complementary, selves and Adams, marking his engagement in the complete cycle of an authentic Judaic life.

5. CONCLUSION

Faustian tradition is not without shades of darkness, for it characteristically portrays some modes of transgression against ethical and religious norms. The transgression or the dynamics between the seeker of knowledge and the adverse forces including an evil friend, whether Mephistopheles or Magus, renders any Faustian play universal by interrelating the play to an array of deep-seated beliefs and traditions. As such, to conceive of Mamet’s *Faustus* as an adaptation of a singular play does not do justice to his work and to the universality of several conspicuous themes in his play, including the myths of Sisyphus and Creation. Mamet’s universalization of such themes in his play is more remarkable in regards to the question of cyclical time and the notion of periodicity, a presuppositional framework for the interpretation and justification of events, which dates back to the most ancient civilizations across the globe. Periodicity in Mamet’s *Faustus* cannot be readily construed as the mythicization of miseries or as the aesthetic appreciation of the inevitable in life. Religious time or the return of time in *Faustus* echoes a Judaic existentialist conception of life that manifests itself in the antinomic relation between two selves, i.e. cognitive man and *homo religiosus*, within the protagonist, affecting his perception of life and its vicissitudes.

The oscillation between the two Adams, or, the majestic man and the covenantal man, within *Faustus* is no more than the realization of cyclical time. The desire to return, as such, signifies the play's inherent insistence on the significance of worldly deeds and affections despite ineluctable lapses and flaws. On this account, periodicity that initially implies the fixity of events and an unremitting life of drudge emerges as an underlying concept for the experience of antinomic struggles within the protagonist and his affirmation of life without seeking solace in an eschatological, albeit blissful, existence. A significant irony of the play is that *Faustus*'s reversal of perception is caused via his expostulations with Magus. This encounter reveals the significance of intellectual negation and dialectics in the attainment of insight into existence. Mamet's *Faustus* is not a moralistic play, yet it makes a significant, primarily Judaic, contribution to the myth of Faust that precedes Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and surpasses our era.

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