

**The Transmedia Metamorphosis of Vice: A Comparative Analysis of  
Marlovian Eschatology and the Gamified Deification of the Seven Deadly Sins**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the semiotic and ontological evolution of the Seven Deadly Sins, tracing their trajectory from the didactic moralism of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* to their heroic reimagining in the contemporary digital medium, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin*. By synthesizing Archetypal Criticism and Media Theory, this study argues that the contemporary 'gamification' of vice represents a radical semantic shift. Where the Renaissance stage utilized the sins as markers of human limitation and spiritual decay, the modern open-world RPG utilizes them as catalysts for superhuman potential and narrative empowerment.

**Keywords:** Transmedia Intertextuality, Archetypal Criticism, Heroic Inversion, Gamification of Morality, Renaissance Drama, Digital Humanities.

**Introduction**

The Seven Deadly Sins, Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery have long served as the scaffolding for Western moral cartography. In the late sixteenth century, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* acted as a definitive cultural vessel for these archetypes, presenting them through a lens of strict eschatology. However, the digital age has witnessed a profound recontextualization of this iconography. Through the lens of *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin*, we observe a 'heroic inversion' where the nomenclature of sin no longer denotes a path to damnation but rather defines the unique abilities and tragic nobility of the protagonist. This paper analyzes this transition, focusing on the movement from the externalized 'pageant of vice' to the internalized 'mechanics of

power’.

### **1. Ontological Boundaries: Human Limitation versus Superhuman Potential**

In the Marlovian tradition, the manifestation of the Seven Deadly Sins serves as a structural reinforcement of the ‘Great Chain of Being’, a rigid metaphysical hierarchy that defines the permissible boundaries of human existence. For Faustus, a scholar consumed by a deleterious intellectual vanity, these sins function not merely as moral failings but as literal gravitational forces that anchor his soul to the terrestrial and the infernal. Marlowe utilizes these vices as instruments of ontological containment; they are the symbolic weights that ensure the tragic hero’s ‘waxen wings’ melt under the heat of his own hubris as he attempts to fly too close to the forbidden sun of divine knowledge (Marlowe Prologue.21). Within this 16th-century framework, the encounter with the Seven Deadly Sins is a didactic exercise in human limitation, illustrating that any attempt to transcend one’s assigned station through the indulgence of vice results in an inevitable descent into a ‘hell’ that Mephistophilis defines as a psychological state of eternal alienation from the divine.

Conversely, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* orchestrates a radical semantic inversion where these ancient vices are repurposed as the primary catalysts for ‘limit-breaking’ superhuman potential. In this contemporary digital medium, the ‘Sin’ is stripped of its eschatological terror and transformed into a unique identifier of heroic status and specialized power. The narrative operates on a logic of deification, where the embrace of a specific vice, such as the volatile ‘Wrath’ of Meliodas or the celestial ‘Pride’ of Escanor, bestows the protagonist with the agency required to challenge corrupt authorities and reshape the geopolitical landscape of Liones. By transitioning from the theological to the ludic, the game effectively transmutes what were once spiritual liabilities into essential narrative assets. In this modern context, ‘Sinning’ is no longer the precursor to a tragic fall, but rather the mechanical prerequisite for the player to exert dominance over a hostile world.

### **2. The Pageant of Grotesques: Externalization in *Doctor Faustus***

Christopher Marlowe’s dramaturgical execution of the ‘Pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins’ serves as a critical bridge between medieval morality traditions and Renaissance psychological tragedy. By externalizing the sins as distinct, grotesque entities, Marlowe utilizes a ‘show’ within the play to mirror the internal moral disintegration of the protagonist. These figures are not characters in a modern, psychological sense but are

rather emblematic ‘masks’ of spiritual entropy that personify the ‘rot’ already festering within Faustus’s psyche. When Lucifer summons them in Act II, Scene II, their purpose is explicitly tactical: they function as a sensory distraction designed to stifle Faustus's nascent impulse toward repentance. As they parade before him, they offer a perverted form of ‘entertainment’ that validates Faustus’s rejection of the divine, effectively replacing the sublime aspirations of theology with the base, visceral theater of the carnal world.

The specific rhetoric employed in the sins’ boastful monologues further emphasizes the reductive and earth-bound nature of Faustus's descent. For instance, Pride identifies himself through a rejection of lineage, stating he ‘disdains to have any parents’, which directly parallels Faustus’s own attempt to sever his ties to his creator and the natural order (2.3.114). Similarly, Covetousness articulates a desire to see “this house and all the people in it were turned to gold”, a sentiment that strips humanity of its intrinsic value and reduces existence to mere material hoarding (2.3.124). By presenting these vices as repulsive yet ‘monumental’ figures, Marlowe creates a sharp irony: while Faustus aspires to transcend human limits and become a ‘spirit in form and substance’, he is shown to be increasingly occupied by these fragmented, parasitic impulses. The pageant thus functions as a grim foreshadowing of his ultimate fate, suggesting that the ‘mighty god’ he hopes to become is nothing more than a host for the very vices that ensure his eventual fragmentation and spiritual void.

### **3. The Heroic Inversion: Trauma and Sacred Treasures in *Origin***

The modern franchise *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin*, alongside its foundational source material *Nanatsu no Taizai*, radicalizes the traditional Western moral framework by executing a profound inversion of the ‘moral weight’ traditionally assigned to vice. In this contemporary reimagining, a ‘Sin’ is no longer framed as a willful, transgressive violation of divine or natural law, as seen in the Marlovian tradition, but is instead recontextualized as a ‘historical scar’. These identifiers are often the result of profound past traumas or misunderstood acts of virtue that led to the character’s social ostracization and state-sanctioned infamy. For instance, the character Ban, designated as the ‘Fox Sin of Greed’, is not motivated by a base desire for material accumulation; rather, his ‘greed’ is an expression of a deep-seated sense of loss and an unwavering, desperate loyalty toward those he has lost. This shifts the narrative focus from the act of sinning to the systemic or personal tragedy that branded the individual, effectively turning a theological label into a badge of misunderstood nobility.

Furthermore, this shift is physically codified through the use of ‘Sacred Treasures’ and animal totems that repurpose ancient medieval iconography for a digital, ludic environment. Where historical texts and art used the fox to symbolize the devil’s cunning or the serpent to signify the corrosive poison of Envy, *Origin* transforms these symbols into ‘power-ups’ and essential conduits for ‘Magical Abilities’. The animal totems, such as the Dragon of Wrath or the Serpent of Envy, no longer serve as cautionary emblems of moral decay but act as the primary source of the protagonists’ superhuman agency. By linking these once-prohibited traits to the mechanics of player progression and heroism, the franchise moves from a ‘didactic’ mode of storytelling, which historically sought to teach the audience what to avoid for the sake of their souls, to an ‘affective’ mode. This invites the player to inhabit the “sin” as a core heroic identity, transforming the ancient vices into specialized tools for protecting the innocent and defying tyrannical authority.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis: From Moral Order to Narrative Agency**

The comparative analysis of these two iterations reveals a fundamental divergence in the ontological relationship between the individual and the ‘Universal’. In Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, the moral universe is constructed as an objective, immutable hierarchy where divine law is absolute and any transgression necessitates a catastrophic reckoning. Faustus’s attempt to redefine his ‘sins’ as a conduit for ‘power’ is presented not as a viable evolution, but as a tragic delusion that inevitably culminates in his physical and spiritual dismemberment. Within this Renaissance framework, the Seven Deadly Sins function strictly as instruments of the Law; they are the boundary markers of human limitation. Consequently, Marlowe’s tragedy serves as a starkly didactic cautionary tale, warning of the existential annihilation that awaits the ego when it attempts to usurp the divine prerogative or bypass the ethical constraints of a fixed cosmos.

Conversely, in the contemporary ludic landscape of *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin*, the moral universe is depicted as subjective, fluid, and often structurally corrupt. The protagonists, though branded as ‘Sins’, are recontextualized as the sole protectors of a realm where the traditional ‘Holy’ hierarchy, represented by the Holy Knights, has become tyrannical and oppressive. This transformation reflects a post-modern skepticism toward inherited moral binaries, suggesting that in a world of institutionalized hypocrisy, the ‘Sinful’ attribute becomes the only viable instrument for achieving true justice. Here, the vices are no longer marks of spiritual decay but are weaponized as ‘Sacred Treasures’ used

to defy a broken status quo. Thus, while Marlowe's work focuses on the 'Fall' triggered by hubris, *Origin* emerges as a celebratory epic centered on the resilience and agency of the marginalized ego, vindicating the individual's power to redefine their identity against a hostile universal order.

### **5. Semantic Shift: Eschatology versus Character Builds**

The transition from Marlovian drama to contemporary digital media represents a profound 'iconographic survival through semantic shift', where the morphology of the Seven Deadly Sins remains recognizable while their teleological purpose is fundamentally inverted. For Christopher Marlowe's Elizabethan audience, the 'pageant of the sins' functioned as a visceral, eschatological mirror, a terrifying externalization of the soul's impending judgment and the irreversible reality of eternal damnation. In this pre-secular context, the sins were static, grotesque reminders of human frailty, designed to instill a metaphysical dread that reinforced the divine order. The gravity of these archetypes was strictly theological; to encounter 'Sloth' or 'Pride' on the Renaissance stage was to witness the literal mechanics of spiritual erosion, where each vice served as a milestone on the tragic hero's descent toward an immutable hell.

In contrast, the modern player engaging with *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* interacts with these ancient archetypes through the secularized lens of 'ludic gravity', where theological weight is replaced by tactical utility and narrative lore. In this digital ecosystem, a vice like 'Sloth' is stripped of its status as a soul-destroying lethargy and is instead reimagined as a sophisticated 'character build', exemplified by the character King's levitating spear, which demands precise resource management and strategic positioning rather than moral repentance. This evolution signifies a broader shift in Western consciousness: we have moved from a culture that fears the metaphysical consequences of vice to one that appreciates the aesthetic and functional potential of these symbols. The sins are no longer obstacles to salvation but are the very tools of agency, transformed into 'power-ups' and mechanical archetypes that allow the player to navigate and master a complex, gamified world.

### **6. Analysis of Specific Sins and Characterization Pride (Superbia)**

In Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Pride (*Superbia*) functions as the foundational catalyst for the protagonist's spiritual disintegration, manifesting as a profound disdain for ontological origins and established authority. As the first of the Seven

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Deadly Sins to appear in the Act II pageant, Pride is presented as a mocking, grotesque entity that ‘disdains to have any parents’, symbolizing Faustus’s own intellectual hubris and his desire to transcend human limitation through forbidden necromancy (Marlowe 2.3.114). Within this Elizabethan moral framework, Pride is inherently corrective; it serves as a cautionary spectacle that exposes the ‘pathetic’ vulnerability of the scholar. By placing himself at the center of his own universe, Faustus does not achieve the godhood he craves but instead becomes a fragmented subject, susceptible to the very demonic forces he sought to command. His self-worship is ultimately revealed as a hollow delusion, leading to a tragic ‘sparagmos’ that reaffirms the rigid boundaries of the divine order.

In stark contrast, the contemporary digital narrative of *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* reconfigures Pride through the character of Escanor, transforming a traditional vice into a state of ‘Divine Pride’ and objective invincibility. Unlike the Marlovian model, where pride is a subjective flaw born of vanity, Escanor’s arrogance is tethered to the ‘Sunshine’ grace, rendering his superiority a cosmic and biological fact rather than a moral failing. This version of *Superbia* is not a precursor to a fall but a source of absolute narrative agency; Escanor does not seek to ‘overreach’ like Faustus, for he is already positioned at the ‘pinnacle of all races’. This shift reflects a post-modern ethos in media where ‘absolute self-certainty’ is rebranded as the hallmark of the ‘Alpha’ hero. By decoupling pride from spiritual guilt and aligning it with solar power and protective strength, the game suggests that in modern secular lore, the ego is no longer a site of rot, but the ultimate engine of heroic deification.

### **Wrath (Ira)**

In Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, Wrath is depicted not as a strategic asset but as a volatile, self-consuming energy that threatens the structural integrity of the individual’s psyche. During the ‘pageant of the seven deadly sins’, Wrath’s entry—symbolically “leaping out of a lion’s mouth”, establishes a bestial, unrefined nature that bypasses human reason. His monologue, characterized by the frantic threat to ‘kill myself’ if denied an adversary (2.3.138), illustrates the Marlovian view of vice as inherently irrational and chaotic. In this Elizabethan theological context, wrath is a spiritual failure, a loss of the ‘temperate’ self that leads directly to the disarray of the soul. It is a centrifugal force that pushes the sinner away from the divine center, rendering them a slave to a blind, reflexive aggression that ultimately offers no utility beyond destruction.

Conversely, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* recontextualizes this archetype through the character of Meliodas, the ‘Dragon Sin of Wrath’, transforming the vice into a disciplined ‘Captain’ figure of immense protective value. Within the game’s narrative framework, Meliodas’s wrath is not a chaotic outburst but a ‘controlled, protective force’ triggered specifically by the violation of his companions or his moral code. This represents a profound semiotic shift from ‘uncontrolled rage’ to ‘justified indignation’. Here, the sin is the foundation of his leadership and his greatest combat utility, utilized to shield the innocent and restore order to the kingdom of Liones. By framing wrath as a responsive, rather than proactive, vice, the digital medium subverts the medieval warning against anger, instead presenting it as an essential heroic trait required to navigate and survive a fragmented, hostile world.

### **Envy (Invidia)**

In the Marlovian theatrical tradition, the characterization of Envy serves as a visceral manifestation of social and intellectual resentment, rooted firmly in the class anxieties of the Elizabethan era. Described as being "begotten of a chimney-sweeper and an oyster-wife," Envy is depicted as a ‘base’ creature whose ignorance is so profound that it "cannot read" and consequently harbors a nihilistic desire for “all books were burned” (Marlowe 2.3.132-135). This portrayal functions as a didactic warning against the corrosive nature of *Invidia*, where the sin is not merely a personal failing but a threat to the established hierarchy of knowledge and divine order. By linking Envy to the ‘lower orders’ and a violent rejection of literacy, Marlowe frames the vice as a regressive force that seeks to pull the ‘Doctor’, and by extension, the learned audience, down into a state of primitive, unrefined malice, effectively defining the sin as a barrier to human flourishing and spiritual elevation.

Conversely, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* performs a radical ‘affective shift’ by reinterpreting Envy through the character of Diane, a member of the Giant Clan. Here, the ‘Serpent Sin of Envy’ is divorced from its historical associations with intellectual spite and class warfare, instead being reimagined as a poignant manifestation of ‘existential longing’. Diane’s envy is not directed toward the destruction of others’ achievements but toward a ‘romantic normalcy’ and a desire for human-scale connection that her physical stature and heritage deny her. This characterization ‘softens’ the traditional vice into a relatable, empathetic trait, transforming a ‘Deadly Sin’ into a psychological coping mechanism for

social isolation. In this digital medium, Envy serves as a narrative bridge that invites player empathy, suggesting that contemporary storytelling is less concerned with the ‘punishment of resentment’ and more invested in the ‘validation of the outsider’s desire’ for belonging.

## **7. Theoretical Frameworks for Expansion**

The following elaboration integrates Northrop Frye’s archetypal frameworks, Bogost’s game design theories, and a comparative linguistic analysis to deepen the scholarly discourse on the evolution of these literary tropes.

### **I. Archetypal Metamorphosis: The Alazon and the Heroic Synthesis**

Utilizing the critical framework established in Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, one may trace the sophisticated evolution of the Alazon, or the ‘impostor/boaster’ figure, from the Renaissance stage to the digital era. In Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, the titular protagonist functions as the quintessential Alazon, a figure whose intellectual hubris, or hybris, results in a catastrophic disruption of the cosmic order. His trajectory follows the classic tragic arc toward a ritualistic sparagmos, a literal and figurative tearing-apart that restores the social and divine equilibrium he sought to subvert. However, the transition to *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* signals a radical archetypal mutation. Here, the traditional traits of the Alazon, grandiosity, self-exaltation, and defiance, are structurally synthesized with those of the Eiron, the self-deprecating hero who masks his true power. This ‘Hybrid Alazon’ is no longer a figure of ridicule or a cautionary tale of over-reaching; rather, he becomes a noble pariah. By imbuing the ‘Sins’ with the tragic weight of the Eiron, modern media transforms the boaster into an aspirational icon of power. The ‘sparagmos’ is replaced by ‘limit-breaking’, suggesting a cultural shift where the individual’s refusal to acknowledge traditional boundaries is celebrated as the ultimate form of narrative agency.

### **II. Procedural Rhetoric and the Gamification of Ethical Choice**

Drawing upon Ian Bogost’s theories of ‘procedural rhetoric’, we can analyze how *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* fundamentally alters the player’s ethical engagement through its core ludic mechanics. In Marlowe’s drama, the sins’ are static, externalized entities that command a passive, didactic reception from the audience, one is meant to witness the sin and recoil. Conversely, the game internalizes these vices, converting them into the primary drivers of player progression and mechanical efficiency. This represents a significant shift in the ‘moral economy’ of storytelling: the player does not seek to purge

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‘Wrath’ or ‘Greed’ through repentance but is instead incentivized to ‘level them up’ to unlock new tiers of combat effectiveness. In this digital landscape, morality is no longer a binary of salvation and damnation but a resource-management system where ‘sin’ is optimized for the protection of the realm. This procedural investment in the ‘sinful’ persona suggests that the digital medium encourages a ‘performative ethics’, where the traditional weight of a vice is stripped of its guilt and replaced by a pragmatic, heroic utility.

### **III. Intertextual Dialectics: From the Sordid Carnal to the Celestial Sublime**

A rigorous intertextual analysis of the linguistic registers employed by Marlowe’s personified ‘Pride’ and the game’s ‘Lion Sin of Pride’, Escanor, reveals a profound transition from the sordid to the sublime. Marlowe’s characterization of Pride in *Doctor Faustus* is grounded in the ‘low’ and the ‘carnal’, with the sin boasting of his ability to “creep into every corner of a wench” (2.3.115). This rhetoric serves to diminish the vice, rendering it petty, invasive, and inherently repulsive to an Elizabethan moral sensibility. In stark contrast, Escanor’s dialogue in *Origin* utilizes the language of the ‘high’ and the ‘celestial’, famously proclaiming, ‘I am the one who stands at the pinnacle of all races’. This shift in register from the anatomical to the cosmological signifies a total deification of the archetype. While both characters employ the rhetoric of supremacy, Marlowe’s Pride is a parasite of the social order, whereas Escanor’s Pride is an elemental force of nature. This dialectical echo confirms that while the nomenclature of the ‘Seven Deadly Sins’ has survived the centuries, its semantic core has been inverted, moving from a warning against human depravity to a glorification of the individual as a sovereign, self-defining deity.

### **Conclusion**

The Seven Deadly Sins have undergone a profound metamorphosis from the stage of the Rose Theatre to the digital landscapes of modern gaming. Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* remains the essential primary source for understanding the sins as instruments of tragedy and spiritual limitation. However, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Origin* demonstrates how these same icons can be repurposed as markers of resilience, trauma, and superhuman agency. This ‘semantic shift’ from eschatology to ludic lore suggests that while our moral frameworks may secularize, our fascination with the ‘Deadly Sins’ remains constant, serving as an eternal mirror for the evolving human ego.

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