



Tikrit University

College of Education

English Department

Second Year\ Drama

Academic Year: 2023-2024

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## **Marlow's *Dr. Faustus*: An Overview**

### **The Faust Legend**

*Doctor Faustus* is believed to have been written about 1592, however the precise year of its composition is unknown due to its delayed publication. The idea of a man relinquishing his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge is a longstanding theme within Christian tradition. This motif has been closely associated with the historical figure of Johannes Faustus, an astrologer of questionable repute who resided in Germany around the early 1500s.

In (1587) a book entitled *Faust Book* appeared in Germany and was translated into English under the title *The History of Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr. John Faustus*. Marlow's play follows the *Faust Book* in terms of the general theme rather than in comedy scenes which were probably written by another playwright.

### **Dr. Faustus as a Morality Play**

A morality drama usually follows a protagonist who makes moral decisions, battles temptations, and pays the price. Dr. Faustus, the title character of *Doctor Faustus*, is a brilliant scholar unsatisfied with worldly knowledge and longs for heavenly power. He makes a deal with Mephistopheles, the devil, to satisfy his craving for knowledge and magic. His misuse of power and knowledge lead him finally to his tragic end. As a morality play, Dr. Faustus examines the consequences of succumbing to temptation. This grim conclusion, in other words, serves as a powerful warning to the audience, highlighting the inescapable consequences of immoral actions.

Throughout the play, Faustus experiences moments of remorse and attempts to repent, highlighting the internal struggle between good and evil within him. This internal conflict mirrors the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in morality plays, emphasizing the human capacity for redemption and the importance of repentance.

The character of Mephistopheles serves as a symbolic representation of evil and temptation. He constantly lures Faustus deeper into the abyss of damnation, exploiting Faustus's weaknesses and

desires. Mephistopheles's presence emphasizes the external forces that tempt individuals away from the path of righteousness, reinforcing the moral lesson of resisting temptation.

## **The Divine Chain of Being and Divine Justice in *Dr. Faustus***

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* stands as a remarkable example of Renaissance literature, capturing the essence of the era's intellectual and philosophical currents. One of the prominent concepts explored in the play is the Divine Chain of Being, a hierarchical order believed to exist in the universe during the Renaissance. The Divine Chain of Being, rooted in ancient and medieval philosophy, posited a hierarchical order in the universe, linking all beings from the lowest to the highest, both in the physical and metaphysical realms. This cosmic hierarchy, ordained by God, placed God at the pinnacle, followed by angels, humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Each being had its defined place and purpose within this divine order, and disrupting this natural order was considered a grave sin.

In "Doctor Faustus," Faustus's ambitious pursuit of supernatural knowledge and power challenges the Divine Chain of Being. By attempting to ascend beyond the limits of human knowledge and reach the realm of angels and demons, Faustus disrupts the established order. His desire to wield magical abilities and influence the natural world directly challenges the authority of God and the established hierarchy. Mephistopheles, the devilish figure who tempts Faustus, embodies the disruption of the Divine Chain of Being. As a fallen angel, he represents the perversion of the natural order and the consequences of rebelling against divine authority. Faustus's pact with Mephistopheles symbolizes his defiance of the divine hierarchy, attempting to elevate himself to a status comparable to or even higher than that of angels.

Furthermore, the play explores the theme of redemption and divine justice within the framework of the Divine Chain of Being. Faustus's internal struggle, his moments of remorse, and his futile attempts at repentance reflect the Renaissance belief in divine justice. The play suggests that redemption is possible only through genuine repentance and submission to the divine order, highlighting the importance of acknowledging one's place within the cosmic hierarchy.

## **Dr. Faustus as a Typical Renaissance Character**

1. Intellectual Curiosity: Faustus's insatiable thirst for knowledge and desire to transcend conventional boundaries epitomize the Renaissance emphasis on intellectual curiosity. During the Renaissance, there was a resurgence of interest in classical texts and a profound desire to explore the unknown, both in the physical world through exploration and in the intellectual realm through scientific inquiry and artistic innovation.

2. Humanism: Faustus's pursuit of knowledge and power mirrors the humanist ideals of the Renaissance. Humanism emphasized the study of classical literature, philosophy, and arts to gain a deeper understanding of humanity and the world. Faustus's relentless pursuit of magical abilities and his aspiration to rival the powers of gods and demons reflect the humanist belief in human potential and the capacity to achieve greatness through learning and innovation.

3. Individualism: Faustus's rebellion against traditional authority and his desire to carve his own destiny represent the Renaissance spirit of individualism. The Renaissance period saw a shift from collective identity to a focus on the individual's achievements and ambitions. Faustus's pact with the devil, a decision made autonomously, underscores his individual agency, even in the face of dire consequences.

4. Moral Ambiguity: Faustus's moral ambiguity and internal conflict reflect the Renaissance fascination with human nature and morality. The Renaissance period was marked by a questioning of traditional religious beliefs and moral values. Faustus's struggle between his desire for power and his moments of remorse and repentance highlight the moral complexity and internal battles characteristic of Renaissance literature.

## **The Structure of the Plot**

"Doctor Faustus" by Christopher Marlowe follows a typical five-act dramatic structure commonly used in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. This structure adheres to the traditional pattern of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution, guiding the audience through Faustus' journey and eventual downfall.

1. Exposition (Act 1): The play introduces the main characters, Faustus, a scholar dissatisfied with traditional knowledge, and Mephistopheles, a devil. Faustus makes a pact with the devil in exchange for magical powers and knowledge.

2. Rising Action (Acts 2-3): Faustus experiments with his newfound powers, performing feats of magic and entertaining himself. He is tempted and encouraged by Mephistopheles to indulge in his desires and ambitions.

3. Climax (Act 4): Faustus reaches the peak of his powers and accomplishments. He performs significant magical feats, gains fame, and experiences both the heights of pleasure and the depths of despair.

4. Falling Action (Act 5): Faustus begins to realize the consequences of his pact with the devil. He is tormented by guilt and fear as the expiration of his contract approaches. He seeks repentance but is ultimately unable to find redemption.

5. Resolution (End of Act 5): Faustus' time is up, and he is dragged to hell by Mephistopheles and other devils, fulfilling the terms of his pact. The play ends with a moral lesson about the consequences of succumbing to temptation and the dangers of excessive ambition.

## **The Three Unities in *Dr. Faustus***

The play does not strictly adhere to the classical unities of time, action, and place. The classical unities, derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*, suggest that a play should take place within a single day (unity of time), have one central plot (unity of action), and occur in a single location (unity of place).

In "Doctor Faustus," the play spans several years, indicating a disregard for the unity of time. The play also involves multiple subplots and events, deviating from the unity of action. As for the unity of place, the play features various locations, including Faustus' study, the Emperor's court, and different countries, which contradicts the classical unity of place.

Marlowe's play intentionally deviates from these classical unities, allowing for a broader and more complex narrative structure. This departure from the traditional unities was a characteristic feature of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, allowing playwrights like Marlowe to explore intricate storylines and diverse settings within a single play.

## **The Function of the Chorus in *Dr. Faustus***

The chorus in *Doctor Faustus* serves several key roles:

1. **Setting the Stage:** The chorus provides essential background information, setting the stage for the events that follow. It informs the audience about Faustus's background, his ambitions, and the impending consequences of his actions. By doing so, the chorus helps the audience to contextualize the unfolding story.
2. **Creating a Moral Framework:** Through the chorus, Marlowe establishes a moral framework for the play. The chorus discusses Faustus's ambitions, the consequences of his choices, and the ultimate fate that awaits him. This moral commentary guides the audience's interpretation of the events, emphasizing the play's moral and ethical dimensions.
3. **Foreshadowing and Commentary:** The chorus also serves as a tool for foreshadowing future events and commenting on Faustus's actions. It highlights Faustus's internal struggles, his inner conflict between good and evil, and the choices that lead him down a path of damnation. This foreshadowing adds depth to Faustus's character and creates a sense of anticipation in the audience.