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The Lack of MoralVision in Christopher Marlowe's Dr.Faustus Leads to a Tragic End- an Exploration

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Abstract- This study focuses on The Tragic History of ***Dr. Faustus***, tragedy in five acts by Christopher Marlowe, published in 1604 but first performed a decade or so earlier. Marlowe's play followed by only a few years the first translation into English of the medieval legend on which the play is based. In ***Doctor Faustus*** Marlowe retells the story of Faust, the doctor-turned-necromancer, who makes a pact with the devil in order to obtain knowledge and power. Both Doctor Faustus and Mephistopheles, who is the devil's intermediary in the play, are subtly and powerfully portrayed. Marlowe examines Faustus's grandiose intellectual ambitions, revealing them as futile, self-destructive, and absurd. Findings reveal that***Dr. Faustus*** is a tragic play written by Christopher Marlowe, an English dramatis and poet (From 26 February 1564 to 30 May 1593). The play is based on the supposed legend of Faust. The theme is about the man that sells his soul to the devil in exchange of worldly trifles. This paper reveals the intensity of the ongoing war between good and evil as well as the desperation of evil to overpower good.

Keywords – Tragic History, necromancer, devil's intermediary, futile, self-destructive and absurd

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I.INTRODUCTION

One of the most important and prominent issues in ***Doctor Faustus*** is by far the conflict between good and evil in the world and the human soul. Marlowe's play set the precedent for religious works that were concerned with morals and suffering. In the play, Doctor Faustus is frequently accompanied by two angels, one good and one evil. Both spirits try to advise him on a course of action, with the evil one usually being more influential over his mind. These two angels embody the internal battle that is raging inside of Faustus. On one hand, he has an insatiable thirst for knowledge and supreme power; on the other hand, Faustus realizes that it is folly to relinquish heavenly pleasures for fleeting mortal happiness.Although society is accustomed to believing that good will always prevails, evil gains the upper hand in Marlowe's play. Innocent and often devout men are tortured at Faustus's delight and command. He partakes in many pleasures with devils and is even shown the seven deadly sins in person. Thus, Faustus is depicted as doomed from the very beginning. Although he has moments of contrition, he quickly shoves aside thoughts of God and turns to evil. Marlowe attempted to express to his audience that while prayer and repentance are the paths to heaven, sin and mortal pleasure are very hard temptations to pass over.Lucifer's acquisition of Faustus's soul is especially delightful for him because Faustus was once a good and devout soul. Even during his last moments on earth, Faustus curses himself for willingly burning the scriptures and denouncing God. In Doctor Faustus, Marlowe shows the reader that everything in the mortal world is a double-edged sword. In his never-ending quest for knowledge, Faustus exemplifies how even scholarly life can have evil undertones when studies are used for unholy purposes. ***Doctor Faustus's*** miserable defeats against the forces of evil within and without enlighten the reader to beware a surfeit of anything.

In this drama Doctor Faustus as a second issueis that of greed. Like many of Marlowe's heroes, Faustus was self-driven by greed and ambition. In this case, the Doctor tries to satiate his appetite for knowledge and power. These heroes forget their responsibilities to God and their fellow creatures. Instead, they attempt to hide their weak characters with a megalomaniacal insanity. While Faustus is amused by the seven deadly sins, he does not realize that he is guilty of every single one, namely avarice and jealousy. In effect, Marlowe presents to the reader a good soul gone badlya brilliant scholar who squanders his time with necromancy and is later

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November2019

courted by the devil himself. Although he is frequently surrounded by powerful heads of state, beautiful women and servile devils, Faustus is never truly happy. He tries to bury his unrest with luxury and debauchery, to no avail. What Faustus does not realize is that he craves happiness and salvation, not wealth and damnation. Instead, in a tragic cycle of greed and despair, Faustus sadly wallows in riches up to the time of his miserable death.

Next comes, the third important motif in the play is that of salvation through prayer. While ***Doctor Faustus*** is an example of what happens to a wayward soul, the old man represents the devout Christian soul. The old man begs Faustus to repent, regardless of the tortures that the devils inflict on him for this. He clings to his faith to the very end and even Mephistopheles is wary of harming him because of his good soul. Thus, the old man serves as a foil to Faustus's misery and damnation.

A fourth subject matter in ***Doctor Faustus*** is that of the tragic hero. Despite his unholy soul, Faustus is often viewed by audiences with pity and compassion. A tragic hero is a character that the audience sympathizes with despite his/her actions that would indicate the contrary. Faustus is not the mere shell of a man in the play, existing only to represent the evil in the world. He is a veritable human being with a range of emotions and thoughts. He displays pride, joy, contrition and self-doubt quite frequently. At many times, Faustus alternately displays his cowardice and foolish strength against the devils. Thus, Faustus's one saving grace with the audience is his identifiable character. Although the Doctor himself does not care for humanity, many find themselves identifying with his all too human dreams of power, knowledge and lechery. Unfortunately, Faustus's humanity was not enough in the play to make him repent and save him from the depths of hell.

The Downfall of Dr. Faustus

Christopher Marlowe the great faculties of the mind and body enable our dear ***Dr. Faustus*** to rise to the status of one of the most learned scholars of his age. He is remarked for his excellent understanding of the matters pertaining to human life and other sciences. But the humble study in

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Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

yearning for the most. Though he grew in knowledge and excelled all but he is to be punished for getting beyond the bounds set for human kind. His ambition leads him to the study as well as practice of magic. Faustus is in his study room talking to himself that he despite earning so much repute of a great doctor he is still a man:

"All things that move between the quiet poles shall be at my command:

Emperors and kings are but obeyed in their several provinces".

Good angel warns Faustus of the blasphemy of magic while the bad angel encourages him. But Faustus is almost lost in the dream of becoming a demigod through magic: he would use the spirits.

"**I'll have them fly to India for gold,**

Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,

(Marlowe's, *Doctor Faustus*)

And search all corners of the new-found world for pleasant fruits and princely delicate".

The desire for unbound power corrupts man,

So is the case with ***Dr. Faustus*** becomes his desire for absolute knowledge and power. The tragic aspect of his character highlighted by the words of the devil, Mephistopheles: O, Faustus, leave these frivolous demands, which strike a terror to my fainting soul! But poor Faustus is being led by his desire to be the most knowledgeable scholar of the world. He falls not for his weakness but for the great faculty of his mind which is rather too ripe for the understanding of magic. It could be an ordinary tale of greed and lust followed by damnation but the way Faustus is given hints and direct commands by the heavens makes his character tragic for he always unable to get off the evil desires he has had.

His character depicts a continuous struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. But our dear Faustus remains blind to the fact of life that God almighty is the ultimate ruler and

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

creator of this world and partying with the devil would earn him no good. He fails to see the pain of Mephistopheles:

Am not tormented with ten thousand hells in being deprived of everlasting bliss?

Faustus given the chance to repent on several occasions but, unfortunately, he fails every time the forces of good encourage him for repentance. When the show of Helen is over, an old man approaches Faustus and asks him to repent for:

"Then though art banished from the sight of heaven:

No mortal can express the pains of hell".

The old man also tells Faustus of the possibility of redemption if he repents but the brave Faustus has lost all his senses and cannot repent despite the fact that he sometimes wishes to:

"I see an angel hover o'er thy head, And, with a vial full of precious grace,

Offers to pour the same into thy soul:

Then call for mercy, and avoid despair".

(Marlowe's, *Doctor Faustus*)

Faustus wishes to repent but feels despair. Mephistopheles threatens Faustus with death. And Faustus once again surrenders to Lucifer by his own free will and demands the company of Helen. He satisfies his troubling heart by dissolving his mental faculties into beastly acts of loving and kissing Helen.

Sin, Redemption, and Damnation

Insofar as ***Doctor Faustus*** is a Christian play, it deals with the themes at the heart of Christianity's understanding of the world. First, there is the idea of sin, which Christianity defines as acts contrary to the will of God. In making a pact with Lucifer, Faustus commits what is in a sense the ultimate sin: not only does he disobey God, but he consciously and even eagerly renounces obedience to him, choosing instead to swear allegiance to the devil. In a Christian framework, however, even the worst deed can be forgiven through the redemptive power of

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

Jesus Christ, God's son, who, according to Christian belief, died on the cross for humankind's sins. Thus, however terrible Faustus's pact with Lucifer may be, the possibility of redemption is always open to him. All that he needs to do, theoretically, is ask God for forgiveness. The play offers countless moments in which Faustus considers doing just that, urged on by the good angel on his shoulder or by the old man in scene 12—both of whom can be seen either as emissaries of God, personifications of Faustus's conscience, or both.

Each time, Faustus decides to remain loyal to hell rather than seek heaven. In the Christian framework, this turning away from God condemns him to spend an eternity in hell. Only at the end of his life does Faustus desire to repent, and, in the final scene, he cries out to Christ to redeem him. But it is too late for him to repent. In creating this moment in which Faustus is still alive but incapable of being redeemed, Marlowe steps outside the Christian worldview in order to maximize the dramatic power of the final scene. Having inhabited a Christian world for the entire play, Faustus spends his final moments in a slightly different universe, where redemption is no longer possible and where certain sins cannot be forgiven.

The Conflict between Medieval and Renaissance Values

Scholar R.M. Dawkins famously remarked that ***Doctor Faustus*** tells "the story of a Renaissance man who had to pay the medieval price for being one." While slightly simplistic, this quotation does get at the heart of one of the play's central themes: the clash between the medieval world and the world of the emerging Renaissance. The medieval world placed God at the center of existence and shunted aside man and the natural world. The Renaissance was a movement that began in Italy in the fifteenth century and soon spread throughout Europe, carrying with it a new emphasis on the individual, on classical learning, and on scientific inquiry into the nature of the world. In the medieval academy, theology was the queen of the sciences. In the Renaissance, though, secular matters took center stage.

Faustus, despite being a magician rather than a scientist (a blurred distinction in the sixteenth century), explicitly rejects the medieval model. In his opening speech in scene 1, he goes through every field of scholarship, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine, law, and theology, quoting an ancient authority for each: Aristotle on logic, Galen on medicine, the Byzantine emperor Justinian on law, and the Bible on religion. In the medieval model, tradition

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

and authority, not individual inquiry, were key. But in this soliloquy, Faustus considers and rejects this medieval way of thinking. He resolves, in full Renaissance spirit, to accept no limits, traditions, or authorities in his quest for knowledge, wealth, and power.

The play's attitude toward the clash between medieval and Renaissance values is ambiguous. Marlowe seems hostile toward the ambitions of Faustus, and, as Dawkins notes, he keeps his tragic hero squarely in the medieval world, where eternal damnation is the price of human pride. Yet Marlowe himself was no pious traditionalist, and it is tempting to see in Faustus as many readers have a hero of the new modern world, a world free of God, religion, and the limits that these imposed on humanity. Faustus may pay a medieval price, this reading suggests, but his successors will go further than he and suffer less, as we have in modern times. On the other hand, the disappointment and mediocrity that follow Faustus's pact with the devil, as he descends from grand ambitions to petty conjuring tricks, might suggest a contrasting interpretation. Marlowe may be suggesting that the new, modern spirit, though ambitious and glittering, will lead only to a Faustian dead end.

Power as a Corrupting Influence

Early in the play, before he agrees to the pact with Lucifer, Faustus is full of ideas for how to use the power that he seeks. He imagines piling up great wealth, but he also aspires to plumb the mysteries of the universe and to remake the map of Europe. Though they may not be entirely admirable, these plans are ambitious and inspire awe, if not sympathy. They lend a grandeur to Faustus's schemes and make his quest for personal power seem almost heroic, a sense that is reinforced by the eloquence of his early soliloquies.

Absolute power seems to corrupt Faustus. Once he can do everything, he no longer wants to do anything. Marlowe's representation of ***Doctor Faustus*** changes direction through the play. We follow the change in ambition and greed of a human being who seeks pleasure so much that he sells his soul to the devil for a number of years. Does the power that Faustus obtains corrupt him or is he merely dissatisfied with the power he has and is greedy for more. At the start of the play, Marlowe uses powerful language when referring to Faustus' search for knowledge. "O, What a world of profit and delight, of power, of honor, of omnipotence, is promised to the studious artisan". This is what Faustus wishes to obtain, the forbidden knowledge that he can achieve,

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

however it seems strange the Faustus should want to learn more and to be taught and able to understand this forbidden knowledge as he should want to learn more and to be taught and able to understand this forbidden knowledge as he previously bids a farewell to thinking "Divinity, adieu!" "Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy". Faustus is determined to achieve great things but he seems to lose sight of his original plans the further we delve into the play. The most impressive thing he seems to achieve is his provocation of the pope. The way that Faustus is acting is childish and unsophisticated. His behavior can be compared to that of the clowns who, in their dismissal of the seriousness of conjuring the devils, highlight the change in Faustus plans, from grandeur and high aspirations to pettiness and childishness. The closer Faustus gets to the end of his contract with the devil, the closer he is to damnation and the more childish his behavior becomes. Faustus is using his power for trivial matters.

"Shall make poor Faustus to his utmost power both love and serve the German Emperor and lay his life holy Bruno's feet."

(Marlowe's,*Doctor Faustus*)

He has not achieves any of these, which seems to push the answer into being that Faustus was merely greedy. He wanted everything and more. What is really wanted, he would never be able to obtain and he has lost sight of all else. He is unable to distinguish between what is important and what is petty. Faustus has also become unaware of the need to repent. During the first part of the play, he is tempted to repent and break from his contract but then he becomes deluded and tempted by the great power he possibly could have. If he had repented, perhaps he would be closer to the knowledge he seeks than he is in his alliance with Lucifer. Thus, it seems that Faustus' greed is what corrupts him and not merely the power. He has the power to do great things but he has no interest in his aspirations anymore. He is just greedy to obtain the forbidden which he will, ironically, never be able to learn due to turning away from the one who holds it all.

Dr. Faustus as a tragic hero

Doctor Faustus is one of the most famous plays by Marlow. This play while setting its foot in the Age of Renaissance still has deep roots in the Medieval Age. Though not claiming to be a

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

masterpiece, it is one of the most renowned plays of Marlowe. The play exhibits excellence in characterization of the protagonist, ***Doctor Faustus*** as a tragic hero. The recurrent themes of power, knowledge, wisdom, magic, divinity and redemption make the play one of the first of its kind introduced back then, that transgressed the norms and ushered the play into a new era, the age of Renaissance. ***Doctor Faustus*** comes from a low income-family and rises to great academic height. However, his own folly causes his downfall. He yearns for limitless access to knowledge and associates it with power. To yield it, he sells his soul to devil. Lucifer, Lucifer in return gives one of his devils, Mephistopheles, to Faustus for twenty-four years to acquire whatever wants to through his knowledge of the heavens and earth.

Once all the doors towards knowledge and power open to Faustus, he forgets his actual ambition to conquer the secrets of the universe and spends all of the twenty-four years indulged in pettiness, until the devils finally come to take his soul away.

Doctor Faustus is an apt example of a man who is "corrupted" by power. Since, with the available sources of knowledge he comes from a lowly family and acquires great knowledge becoming one of the most erudite men of his time, his over-ambition and pride take their toll in due time. He becomes unsatisfied with the available sources of knowledge and wants to go further, stand out. He believe that he has all the knowledge that Physics, Philosophy, Divinity and Law could provide him with and as a result, he is "still but *Faustus* and a man. He does not want to be like everyone else and thinks of being human as a mediocre. Instead, he wants to become as powerful **"on earth, as Jove in this sky."**"Therefore, he decides to tread into dangerous waters and try the art of necromancy. His hunger for infinite knowledge leads him astray. The desire for untapped, limitless knowledge arises from his desire to become omniscient, all-powerful as Francis Bacon, says, **"Knowledge is power."**

Ralph Waldo Emerson further impresses upon this idea and says, **"There is no knowledge that is not power."**Man, by nature, is curious. He is confused of the existence of his being, decides to look for greener pastures that would better satisfy the mind. In doing so, he is not only increasing the distance between him and God but also the one between him and the knowledge that would explain everything. This might be an action taken as a last resort and seem desperate, but it

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

cannot be unjustified, for the need to expand physical and intellectual horizons are inherent in man. Hence, proven that human desire for knowledge is inevitable and expected, let us now advance to how this insatiable upon expanding.

Before the ruthless pursuit of power, all men have aspirations as to what they would do with it. For instance,

***Faustus* wants "gold"**

"…….oriental pearl, and search all concerns of the new-found world,

For pleasant fruits and princely delicious;

I'll have them read me strange philosophy,

And tell the secrets of all the kings," etc,

However, once you conquer all the knowledge of this world.

(Marlowe's**,** *Doctor Faustus***)**

Like*Faustus,* you are in awe of it and become confused. With such various and different ambitions at hand like those of *Faustus* and no concrete plan at hand, there is no chance that such vast power could be of any use. There are so many possibilities and so many new doors opening for man that he does not understand how to avail the opportunity. Surprisingly, after the tall claims and ambitions declared by Faustus, once he comes in power,

"The first thing he asks for is"……a wife,

The fairest maid in Germany,

The first thing he wants is to fulfill his physical desires,

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

Thus, from the very beginning, absolute power has limited Faustus. His ambitions are belittled to mere physical pleasures. Furthermore, once you attain something, it loses its novelty. It is human nature to desire everything until you have it. Thus losing interest in his new things, he actually tests the knowledge of Mephistopheles by asking him about heavens and heavenly bodies. In his feeling of superiority that has now been enhanced by unlimited knowledge and power, he is actually raising himself in front of the devil. When Mephistopheles answers the first question right, Faustus replies in

"Tush, these slender trifles,

Wagner can decide,

Hath Mephistopheles no greater skills?

Who knows not the double motion of the planets?"

(Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*)

Thus man's sense of superiority also limits him in the usage and applicant of vast knowledge. Human kind is superior to all other species known but his not enough for him. When he strives for absolute knowledge, actually trying to elevate himself further, assuming the status of a God.

He refuses to accept his immortal and insignificant nature and wants something that he cannot handle. Had man been able to control and use absolute knowledge, all men would be Gods.

However this is not so and there is a reason. Human's physical and mental capacity is limited. Albert Einstein says,

"The attempt to combine wisdom and power has only rarely been successful and then only for a short time."

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

This is so because even as great a scientist as Einstein realized the inadequacy of man understands. Likewise, Faustus also wants such an elevation of his being because he is not satisfied with being a mere human. He says,

"A sound magician is a mighty God.

Here, Faustus; tire thy brains to gain deity,"

Hence, when Faustus pursues such a journey for personal gratification, he overlooks his own pettiness. He does not realize that even knowledge can become a bane if abused. Thus in acquiring this knowledge, he completely ignores that his,

"His waxen wings did mount above his reach,

And melting, heavens conspired his over through".

(Marlowe's,*Doctor Faustus*)

This also limits him in the usage of power.

Conclusion

When power corrupts, it steals you of your better judgment and gives rise to your evil self. This evil self either contains your use of this power for self-aggrandizement and worldly pursuits or limits your insight into the important matters of the worlds and averts you fromyour actual ambition.

"Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Therefore, absolute power, knowledge, of the world and of oneself and power sedate men into triviality. Oscar Wilde says,

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

"Nothing makes one as vain as being told one is a sinner. Conscience makes egotists of all,"

Likewise, although Faustus' initial motives fill the audience with awe, his realization of the same never come to pass. He does experience the pangs of guilt every now and then and asks himself if,

"Thou needs to be damn'd and canst thou be sav'd,

"However, Faustus' vanity always gets the better of him,

and he again refutes the idea of repentance by claiming,

"Think'st thou that Faustus is so found to imagine,

That, after this life, there is any pain?

Tush these are trifles and mere old' wives' tales.

(Marlowe's,*Doctor Faustus*)

Thus, the amount of power Faustus attains only ends in his desire to flaunt and assume status in society, reducing him to nothingness. William Tydeman says,

"All he (Marlowe) does is present the paradox of the clash between human aspiration and the restrictions placed on it not only by an inexorable theological scheme but by human falliability too."

Power limits man's relation with the divine also. When man assumes limitless power, he believes that he is able to do everything. In his blind pursuit, he is forgetting that absolute knowledge must lead towards God and not away from Him. It is only in submission to God and His will that one actually understands the functioning of the universe, the natural and the supernatural. One may deny the Divine existence, but somewhere in his subconscious, he will always associate this

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

power with some being. For example, although Faustus denies in the presence of hell when he says,

> **"I think hell's a fable,**
>
> **But by the end of the play when he asks Helen to make him**
>
> **"immortal with a kiss" and "suck fourth my soul."**
>
> (Marlowe's,*Doctor Faustus*)

He is actually associating Helen with Divine. Thus, in rejecting the supremacy of God and associating it with mere morals, Faustus limits himself. Hence, man by nature is proud, curious, selfish and hungry for power and knowledge.

All these factors combine to make the perfect recipe for disaster. Man's ego cannot handle absolute power for it would inflate to enormous proportions and man would liken his being that of God. He will not remain humble and instead of accomplishing something worthwhile, and over-awed by the immense power, reduce himself to pettiness and mediocrity. A powerful man also has the tendency to overlook the need for a God since he would have all power.

Under all of these situations, man has insurmountable power; however, he is limited in its usage. This is because irrespective of how grandiose an image man might have of himself, his physical and mental capabilities are not ripe enough to handle the magnanimity and responsibility of absolute power.

This fact is apparent in the example of ***Doctor Faustus*** who acts as an accomplice of the devil and attains over-whelming power but is unable to fulfill his ambitions, forever delving in a life of ignominy and paltriness, and a death of excruciating pain and tragedy.

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ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 14
November2019

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