
Story of Power and Temptation, High-flying Ambition, and Self-destruction in Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

Reflecting the Renaissance spirit of inquiry, Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe (1604) is the tale of an ambitious man whose desire and thirst for knowledge goes beyond limitations. Faustus sells his soul to Lucifer to acquire all the power and knowledge that he desires to realise too late of the hellish price he must pay.

The sixteenth century was a period of questioning and searching for truth. Individuals during this time strove to act in their own best interest and in the name of what was true to them. The 1300's European civilisation began its transition out of the church-dominated Middle Ages into an era that embraced a worldly and humanistic view of the planet. [1]It was a cultural, intellectual, and artistic movement that began in Italy (1618 - 48), spreading across Europe, eventually reaching England around the 1550's; hitting its peak during the reign of Queen Elizabeth and King James. It was during the Renaissance period great turmoil within Roman Catholic Church (The Protestant Reformation) arose as traditional practices were challenged by individuals. In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church ruled the lives of people throughout central and western Europe. [2]However, in the constantly evolving and progressing world of the Renaissance, the Roman Catholic church struggled to maintain a steady and uniting structure for people's spiritual and material lives, igniting a great wave of questioning of practices. [3]

With a literary career spanning over less than six years, Christopher Marlowe influenced English theatre and writing forever. His abstract use of blank verse transformed English poetry, bringing about a new level of maturity to Elizabethan theatre of the time. Christopher Marlowe was born and raised in the primary years of the English Renaissance period which was highly influential to his life, his work, and career. This historic wave of new ideas revolving around science, art, religion and philosophy drove him to become a free thinker; within a group of intellectuals, noblemen, courtiers and commoners who formed an underground club within the school of night that embraced these fore coming new ideas, rejecting the older ones; Dr Faustus was written in this time to reflect the darker side of the period's boundless pursuit of knowledge. [4]

Doctor Faustus, also referred to as The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, explores the conflict one experiences between good and evil within the world and the human soul. This play is based on a German story where a man sells his soul to the devil in quest for knowledge and power. Later on, Faustus learns that he committed a grave mistake of selling his soul to the devil for twenty-four years. Reflecting England's religious climate in the later part of the 16th century, Doctor Faustus takes a witty and comical perspective of Catholicism and its people, whilst subsequently exploring the grave consequences of refusing and denying religious beliefs; comparing the merits of upholding conventional values. Doctor Faustus is often accompanied by two angels, one of good merit and one of evil, both attempting to advise him on his course of action, with the evil being more dominant over his mind. These two angels also act as a metaphorical representation of the internal battle that is raging inside of Faustus. The play demonstrates to an Elizabethan audience the blurred lines between religion and magic; the character Faustus makes a pact with the devil and becomes a magician. Although society in this time was accustomed to believing that good would always triumph, evil gains the upper hand in Marlowe's play. [5]To an Elizabethan readership and audience, this

was a character that was perceived with witch like qualities and it was during this time period, the subject of religion was eventually banned from the Elizabethan stage because of the sensitive subject it provoked amongst viewers within the audience. Due to this, *Faustus* was the last play from the period to openly deal with religious matters and themes. [6]

Human free will versus fate and destiny can be evidently noted throughout the entirety of the playscript. Marlowe suggests protagonist, *Faustus*, has little to no choice as to how his destiny may pan out. Marlowe utilises *Faustus*' apparent vulnerability to explore the idea of predetermination. The predetermined destiny of the character suggests a form of a higher power has influence of the aftermath of *Faustus*' journey. As suggested by Protestant theologian John Calvin, he argued that God being omniscient and all-knowing, recognises from the beginning who will or won't be saved; therefore, human action and choice are not the keys to restoration. This is suggestive that no matter how much control *Faustus* may believe he has in his decision to pursue magic or deny redemption, he is simply playing out a script that has been written. The downfall and fate of this character can be viewed in light of restoration, redemption, and everlasting damnation, all of which are Christian ideals. [7]

In late Renaissance and Medieval Italy, theologians continually emphasised the humanity of Christ and the need for the faithful, and spiritual to lead modelled on Christ's own. This perspective welcomed visual images that stressed his human existence, and particularly favoured themes related to his earthly birth and death. Orazio Gentileschi was an Italian Baroque painter and was one of the most important painters who like many artists working in Rome, Gentileschi began to absorb the lessons of Caravaggio's powerful realism and came under the influence of Caravaggio; being one of the most successful interpreters to inherit and incorporate his style. [8] This is notable in Gentileschi's intense observation from life of details such as hands, feet and faces. Gentileschi turned the horrors of his own life into brutal biblical paintings that can also be interpreted as a cry for oppressed men.

Gentileschi's work lies in a religious renewal. Ignatius of Loyola and others stressed an intimate relationship to God, helping artists find fresh respect for Leonardo's naturalism the gravity of Michelangelo, and the darkness and artificial lights of some early Mannerism. His work 'The Mocking of Christ', remembers the tormenters and even Jesus as individuals, and the rods of torture catch him as in a web. As an older artist, Orazio learns slowly, but he finally gets it. A deathly pallor and an unclear relationship to foreground or background look old-fashioned, but a memory of the Renaissance had revived, and a transition had begun.[9] Gentileschi uses dislocated scale and composition to add dramatic effect. The chronology of Gentileschi's work remains one of the most widely debated issues of seventeenth-century art historical studies. The theme of 'The Mocking of Christ' was treated by Gentileschi's a number of times. His earliest version is a striking Caravaggesque canvas of intense drama with strong contrasts of light and shade highlights the religious climate of the time in which this artwork was produced, reflecting the ways in which people viewed the church and Christianity. [10] Treading a line between devotion and absurdity, this chilly painting pits refinement of means against brutality of subject. 'The Mocking of Christ' is bound to disturb all who come in contact with it and may offend some; within lives its unsettling power.

Doctor *Faustus* continues to fascinate audiences with the mythic appeal of its story of power and temptation, high-flying ambition, and self-destruction; as question between desire and conscience, rebellion and remorse, Doctor *Faustus* still remains relevant today whilst 'The Mocking of Christ' is a chilling and spine tingling comment on the Christian faith; challenging

the values of Christianity.

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