

# Critically Analyze Dr. Faustus as a Renaissance Hero or Medieval Hero

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#### **Abstract:**

Christopher Marlow's Doctor Faustus was published in 1592. And appears to be an example of Renaissance tragedy. However many critics argue that Marlow's Dr. Faustus owes a lot to the medieval dramatic tradition to be precise, to the morality play tradition. Describing different types of medieval plays. Philip Tilling claims that "The Morality Play as a kind of medieval religious play arouse alongside the mystery play and was to continue, in modifies form throughout the Elizabethan period, culminating in Marlowe's Faustus so Tillip considers Dr. Faustus to be a morality play. In my paper i see Dr. Faustus as Medieval Hero or Renaissance Hero which was to certain degree influenced by the medieval dramatic tradition and had some characteristics features of the Renaissance period.

**Keywords:** Analyze, Hero, Medieval hero, Renaissance

#### 1. Introduction

My research paper deals with teaching literature as undergraduate level. My specific effort in this paper is only just provide information to Second language learners about Marlow's language, style, techniques how he used it Dr. Faustus.

#### 2. Rennaissance Hero

The Conflict between Medieval and Renaissance Values Scholar Devila Rohit 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 centre 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 centre 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 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.

Certain aspects of the drama can be used to support an interpretation of Faustus as a Renaissance hero and other aspects suggest he is a medieval hero. According to the medieval view of the universe, Man was placed in his position by God and should remain content with his station in life. Any attempt or ambition to go beyond his assigned place was considered a great sin of pride. For the medieval person, pride was one of the greatest sins that one could commit. This concept was based upon the fact that Lucifer's fall was the result of his pride when he tried to revolt against God. Thus, for the medieval person, aspiring pride became one of the cardinal sins. According to the medieval view, Faustus has a desire for forbidden knowledge. In order to gain more knowledge than he is entitled to, Faustus makes a contract with Lucifer, which brings about his damnation. Faustus then learns at the end of the play that supernatural powers are reserved for the gods and that the person who attempts to handle or deal in magical powers must face eternal damnation. When we examine the drama from this standpoint, Faustus deserves his punishment; then the play is not so much a tragedy as it is a morality play. The ending is an act of justice, when the man who has transgressed against the natural laws of the universe is justifiably punished. The chorus at the end of the drama re-emphasizes this position when it admonishes the audience to learn from Faustus' damnation and not attempt to go beyond the restrictions placed on humanity.

The character of Faustus can also be interpreted from the Renaissance point of view. At the time of this play, there was a conflict in many people's minds, including Marlowe's, as to whether or not to accept the medieval or the Renaissance view. The Renaissance had been disappointed in the effectiveness of medieval knowledge because many scholastic disputations were merely verbal nonsense. For example, arguments such as how many angels could stand on the head of a pin dominated many medieval theses. The Renaissance scholars, however, revived an interest in the classical knowledge of Greece and the humanism of the past. They became absorbed in the great potential and possibility of humanity.

According to the Renaissance view, Faustus rebels against the limitations of medieval knowledge and the restriction put upon humankind decreeing that he must accept his place in the universe without challenging it. Because of his universal desire for enlightenment, Faustus makes a contract for knowledge and power. His desire, according to the Renaissance, is to

transcend the limitations of humanity and rise to greater achievements and heights. In the purest sense, Faustus wants to prove that he can become greater than he presently is. Because of his desire to go beyond human limitations, Faustus is willing to chance damnation in order to achieve his goals. The tragedy results when a person is condemned to damnation for noble attempts to go beyond the petty limitations of humanity.

When we first meet Faustus, he is a man who is dissatisfied with his studies in dialectics, law, medicine, and divinity. Even though he is the most brilliant scholar in the world, his studies have not brought him satisfaction, and he is depressed about the limitations of human knowledge. In order to satisfy his thirst for greater knowledge, he decides to experiment in necromancy. He wants to transcend the bonds of normal human life and discover the heights beyond. One might say that he wants to have godlike qualities.

Faustus is willing to sell his soul to the devil under the terms of a contract by which he will receive twenty-four years of service from Mephistophilis and, at the end of this time, will relinquish his soul to Lucifer. At first he is potentially a great man who desires to perform beneficial acts for humanity, but as a result of his willingness to exchange his soul for a few years of pleasure, he begins to sink toward destruction. He allows his powers to be reduced to performing nonsensical tricks and to satisfying his physical appetites.

At various times throughout the drama, Faustus does stop and consider his dilemma and comes to the verge of repentance. He often thinks about repentance, but he consciously remains aligned with Mephistophilis and Lucifer, and never takes the first steps to obtain forgiveness. By the end of the drama, when he is waiting for his damnation, he rationalizes his refusal to turn to God. Throughout the drama, internal and external forces suggest that Faustus could have turned to God and could have been forgiven. In the final scene, the scholars want Faustus to make an attempt to seek the forgiveness of God, but Faustus rationalizes that he has lived against the dictates of God, and he makes no effort to invoke God's forgiveness until the appearance of the devils. By then, he can only scream out in agony and horror at his final fate

### 3. Methods of Teaching

### 3.1 Building background knowledge in Renaissance history and culture

### 3.1.1 Cognitive maps

Following are three cognitive map prompts that show students what they already know in order to build on previous learning. Write a word or phrase on the board or overhead, circle or box it, A Teacher's Guide to the Signet Classics Edition of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and ask students to respond verbally with whatever comes to mind. Write responses on the board, connecting them to the original shape with straight lines. Encourage students to further develop particular responses until the map is detailed and the responses have slowed down. Students may copy the maps in their notes. After the response time has ended, elaborate or add details, and explain how students' previous knowledge will serve as a base upon which the reading will build

- 1. "The Renaissance"
- 2. "The Roman Catholic Church"
- 3. "Elizabethan Theatre"

#### 3.1.2 Art Slide Show

On a PowerPoint or similar computer slide program, show students a collection of Renaissance paintings that are religious in nature or that depict the Renaissance controversy between religion and science. Ask students to write down and share their reactions. Ask them to reflect on the significance of these works. Do they share any patterns in style, subject matter, or theme? A collection of possible works appears below. Explain that these themes are central to *Dr. Faustus*.

- 1. Raphael's *School of Athens* (depicts figures of classical past with facial features of his Renaissance contemporaries)
- 2. Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (one view of the nature of grace and salvation)
- 3. Signorelli's *The Damned Being Plunged into Hell* (an alternate view of the nature of grace and Salvation)
- 4. Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (provokes interesting questions about the nature of Christ, especially since the release of Dan Brown's book and movie, *The Da Vinci Code*)
- 5. Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (illustrates the Renaissance blended interest in art and science)

### 3.2 Web Quests

# 3.2.1 Exploring the Faustian Legend

Have partner groups choose a topic from the following list and explore the Internet for information to be compiled into a short report, complete with clip art if possible. Students share findings with the class while other groups take notes on each presentation. The objective is two-fold: whet students' appetites for uncovering the play's legendary and timeless intrigue, and provide practice in research, writing, and speaking. For all web quests, decide whether to direct students' research by providing websites, which saves time, or to allow students freedom to locate their own websites. A combination of teacher and student directed sites are also appropriate. In any case, a reminder of source validity and appropriateness is always a good idea. Library media specialists are often willing to assist in this endeavour.

1. Explore the Faustian legend through art: find at least three paintings/drawings that depict Faustus. Arrange them in chronological order and give some background on the artists. Sample Internet sites on the Faustian tradition in art:

### http://www.sculpture-painting.co.uk/ed2.html

# http://www.wesleyan.edu/dac/imag/1947/00D1/1947-D1-0212-m01.html

2. Explore the Faustian legend through literature: the story of Dr. Faustus has been told several times, and by authors other than Christopher Marlowe. Trace the Faustian legend through its various versions.

Sample Internet sites on the Faustian tradition in literature:

### http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Texts/Marlowe.html

# http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/faust.html

A Teacher's Guide to the Signet Classics Edition of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* 

3. Explore the Faustian legend through music: find three musical versions of the Faustus story. Arrange them in chronological order and give some background information on the composers. Sample Internet sites on the Faustian tradition in music:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000004AOO/104-2565000-

### 8749559?v=glance&n=5174

(students can listen to soundtrack)

http://www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~jclee/music/damnation.html

### 4. Exploring Renaissance

In groups of three or four, students can take an Internet tour of web sites such as the ones below. Have specific tasks or questions for students to complete before moving on to the next link. Example questions might include: "How did Renaissance theatres light their productions?" "What combination of skills was required of actors from this time period?" "Why?" "How does that differ from modern theatre?" In addition, groups may be assigned separate duties such as compiling a theatre vocabulary list, labelling a drawing of an Elizabethan theatre, or creating a "Who's Who" List of Renaissance actors, producers, and theatres. These assignments can then be compiled into a pamphlet which can be published in print, on digital slides, or on the class web site for all to view.

### **Theatrical Literature and History:**

# http://library.thinkquest.org/21722/literature%20and%20history.html

Renaissance Theater:

# http://www.northern.edu/wild/th100/CHAPT12A.HTM

English Renaissance Theatre:

### http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan\_theatre

Music of the Renaissance Theater:

### http://encarta.msn.com/media 461531506/Music of the Renaissance Theater.html

An Illustrated Lecture on Elizabethan Theater:

#### http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-

#### fak/englisch/shakespeare/

Elizabethan Theatre:

# http://www.britainexpress.com/History/elizabethan-theatre.htm

English Renaissance Theatre:

### http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan\_theatre

Shakespeare's Theatres:

### http://www.shakespeare-online.com/theatre

Architecture of Elizabethan Theatres:

http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/architecture-of-elizabethan-theatres.htm

### 4.1 Exploring the life of the playwright

Independently or in partners, students can explore Internet sites such as the ones below to learn more about Christopher Marlowe. Then ask students to write a series of short reports to be compiled into a class biography of Marlowe, complete with table of contents, index, and artwork. The biography can be published in print, on digital slides, or on the class website for all to view.

### http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Texts/Marlowe.html

http://www.theatrehistory.com/british/marlowe001.html

http://www.marlowe-society.org/life.htm

#### 4.2 Critical Reading

Because Dr. Faustus, with his superb skill in astronomy, medicine, and divinity, is the classic "Renaissance Man" who defies medieval belief that the Great Chain of Being prohibits him from aspiring to be as great as the angels, he embodies the philosophies of Renaissance humanists, who prized individualism and scientific achievement. It would be useful, therefore, to review the concepts of The Great Chain of Being, Humanism, and The Renaissance Man with students prior to reading the play.

A Teacher's Guide to the Signet Classics Edition of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* A brief discussion of these three topics is found in A Guide to the Study of Literature: A Companion Text for Core Studies 6, Landmarks of Literature, ©English Department, Brooklyn College. This discussion can also be found on line at

### http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/ren.html.

After viewing a classical artistic interpretation of the Great Chain of Being, students may then draw their own, based either on the classical hierarchy or the hierarchy they see in contemporary society A website for viewing the classical depiction is: http://www.stanford.edu/class/engl174b/chain.html.

Ask student groups to describe and draw the new "Renaissance Man." Ask them to consider what he/she should be called? In what disciplines will he be expert? Does such a person already exist? If so, name him/her. Groups can present their lists, examples, and artwork to the class.

### 5. Technique used in the play

### 5.1 Marlowe's use of Dramatic Conventions in Doctor Faustus

An Elizabethan audience did not expect to hear plain naturalistic prose, and the theatres and other venues did not allow drama to produce an illusion of reality. Elizabethan dramatists wanted their audience, inspired by their words, to share their own thoughts and feelings in response to the characters and situations portrayed in the drama. If the communication of the play demanded it, the dramatist would present behaviour quite unlike life, and the audience was prepared to accept and respond to it. Therefore characters speak their own thoughts aloud to the audience in soliloquies and asides, they frequently speak in verse, using figurative language and other rhetorical devices; settings were often suggested or represented, often without even background scenery.

Another dramatic convention centred on the fact that Elizabethan audiences frequently featured both educated and non-educated people. Scenes of low comedy were interspersed among more serious scenes, to keep the groundlings entertained. The distinction between prose and blank verse could be used to elevate serious scenes from scenes of low comedy. This comic sub-plot was often used to parody the main plot

#### 6. Conclusion

In a nut shell I would like to say that Marlowe's Dr. Faustus is really a tragic hero. By studying the play I come to know various types of literary methods of literature and this will help me to teach literature. My paper focuses on Dr. Faustus as a medieval hero. The aim of my paper was only to study the writing, techniques, methods and use of terminology by Christopher Marlowe in Dr. Faustus.

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