

# Doctor Faustus – A Representation of Morality Play by Christopher Marlowe to Portray a Thoroughly Christian Document

*Fazle Noor\**

*\*Department of English, S.R. Fatepuria College (University of Kalyani), Email: [fazlenoorsrfc@gmail.com](mailto:fazlenoorsrfc@gmail.com)*

## **Abstract:**

“The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus” epitomizes a play written by the pioneer of University Wits Christopher Marlowe, where a man sells his soul to Satan for power and knowledge. At the very beginning of the play the protagonist reaches to the height of his success and achievement and at the end collapse into misery, death and damnation. Faustus in the end seems to repent and regret for his actions and lament if he can pardon and save his damned soul, yet it is perhaps too late or merely irrelevant, since Mephistopheles occupies his soul, so it is obvious that Faustus goes with him to hell. The current research addresses the play of "Doctor Faustus" as a representation of morality play to portray a thoroughly Christian document after explaining the meaning of "morality play" and representation of Christianity, and then its relation with the play.

**Keywords:** Morality play, Doctor Faustus, religious personification, Christianity, devil, Angel, soul, damnation.

## **Introduction:**

Christopher Marlowe born in 1564 and presumably died in 1593, is a playwright from Britain in the Elizabethan era. He is the most famous English tragic writer after William Shakespeare and the representative of the University Wits. He also is known for his blank verse.

Christopher Marlowe was born in the same year of Shakespeare's birth. His father was a shoe maker and Marlowe is given the lesson by his father that power is the symbol of existence and he inherited from his father the power in his plays.

After completing his schooling, he joined the University of Cambridge in 1580. Here the study was of three years but one can last for another three years if the learner intends to obtain the priestly degree. Marlow acquired a Bachelor of Arts and Philosophy in 1584 and then extended his studies for six years, but at the time of acknowledgement of Master degree, the university queried about his activities and come into suspicion in awarding him the degree as he was long absent from Cambridge and his matter seemed terrifying to the authorities who suspected that he was in the French city of Reims and that he was suspected to be the spy of the Protestant British Queen Elizabeth, and transferring the news about the Catholics.

He left Cambridge and went to London where he spent a delightful and charming life. He met with the great dramatist Thomas Kyd and accompanied with Walter Raleigh and other famous intellectuals such as the group of the School of the Night. Marlowe's writings caused violent reactions to the contemporary time, whether due to admiration or hatred. His play "Tamburlaine the Great" in 1587-1588 became very popular. The writing picturizes of ambition and how it made him a ghost terrifying the world hurl the name of Marlowe at the top till calling him the fire pen and the owner of the greatest line and as a writer who glorified the Renaissance passion under the slogan of unlimited science. This was thus great play which was followed by his tragedy Dido, Queen of Carthage in 1586 and his beautiful play "The Jew of Malta" in 1589 which is a blend of tragedy and comedy through the point of view of a man lost between abjection and material.

His play "Edward II" in 1592, also speaks in a historical and tragic way about something that modern writers did not dare talk about, which is homosexuality. Perhaps, his best play is "Doctor Faustus" which is taken from the German story of Dr. Faust dealing with the outrageous human sin in the Bible and evokes the man's tortured conscience. His last play in 1593 is "The Massacre at Paris" which was another door to ambition from the principle of lust for power. Presumably he was killed on 30 May 1593 on Wednesday. Thus the end of the great witty writer, while he was not in his thirty.

### **Definition of Morality Play:**

The morality play is the form of the drama popularised in the fifteenth century. Its general concept revolved throughout the struggle between good and evil for the salvation of the human spirit. The style of moral play was usually metaphorical or allegorical, the actors comprise the qualities of some personalities such as virtue, vice, riches, poverty, knowledge, ignorance, beauty and the seven deadly sins. The play was about a figurative character sometimes called human beings or humanity. At bottom it dealt with some problem of good and evil. The character represented the common people and their lives. The enemy of human

being was usually the vice character, which sometimes focussed in the form of a devil or under other names. It may be that the vice was a comic character with many illusion and stratagem. But in spite of this comedic aspect of the vice character, it was the representation of a human being who is as stupid as the vice deceives him.

Nils-Alex Morner defines that the morality play is a kind of symbolism in a dramatic shape, prevalent at the end of medieval as well as the beginning of Renaissance age. The Protagonist, as all human beings, is surrounded by the embodiment of virtues, vices, angels, demons and death, i.e. all good and evil powers, who are struggling to possess the hero's spirit.

The character is not individual in this type of play. He often occupies a name that sets him apart from others in the same play. Yet, this name is not personal rather universal, rather universal. The reader typically is concern for his communal or societal condition, tendencies or personality. The notable thing which is clear here is that the protagonist stands for the whole Christians and it reflects a clear documentation of Christianity. The chief protagonist has to face various powers embodied by figurative characters. Figurative characters represent different ethical and moral issues. They always are fighting for the protagonist's spirit. The supernatural power always remain in compete to become the possessor of the soul. The combat for possessing man's spirit is possibly considered to be the key theme and notion of morality plays.

Usually, the chief protagonist lives in virtue and purity and but at last becomes the prey of evil powers which lead him to temptation, whereas good powers attempt to direct him towards the holy course, though in vain. This conflict results in the protagonist's fall. The most important and significant presentation of the morality play is the protagonist's repentance, i.e. situation where the protagonist regrets his erroneous behaviour, which is regarded as an essential event. God and other angelic good powers often substitute or replace the protagonist and his forgiveness effortlessly.

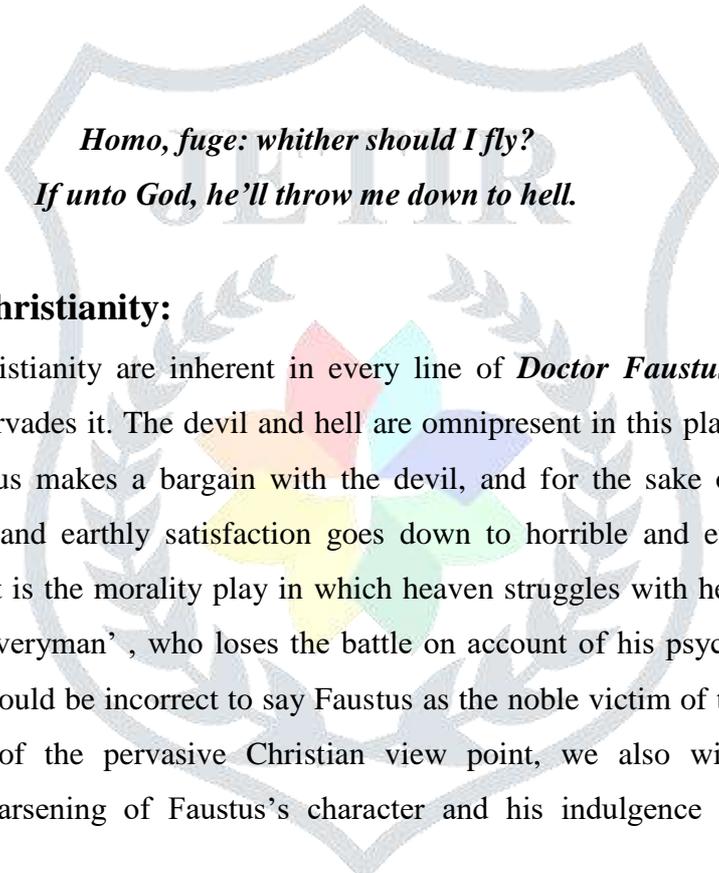
Other significant side of the morality play is the culmination of the English morality tradition. As a morality play, it vindicates humility, faith, and obedience to the law of God. The eminent critic has described that this play reflects the most obvious Christian document in all Elizabethan drama.

Far from being subversive of religion, this play is wholly conventional in its Christians values, and it enforces and illuminates the very basic tenets of Christianity. It preaches the basic Christian values and should therefore be regarded as a morality play.

## The Religious Personification of Idea:

Personification may be conceptualised as the ascription of human being and the attribution to inanimate objects, ideas and concepts like homelands, feelings, as well as natural powers. Its roots are old deep in history and its cultures include usual myths of animals performing the characters. Routinely, populace ascribed man's feelings, thoughts and merits of conduct to beast and pets, too.

There exist many examples of personification as being a literary instrument through the reference of the Bible, Hebrews and the New Testament as well as in some of other religious texts. God is the personification, not a mere person, undeniable interpretation, not the tyrant of another world. If we fail to understand this, we may not understand religion or religious differences:



*Homo, fuge: whither should I fly?  
If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.*

## The basic belief of Christianity:

The basic beliefs of Christianity are inherent in every line of *Doctor Faustus* and the doctrine of damnation pervades it. The devil and hell are omnipresent in this play and are terrifying realities. Faustus makes a bargain with the devil, and for the sake of earthly learning, earthly power, and earthly satisfaction goes down to horrible and everlasting perdition. In this drama it is the morality play in which heaven struggles with hell for the soul of a Renaissance 'Everyman', who loses the battle on account of his psychological and moral weakness. It would be incorrect to say Faustus as the noble victim of tyrannical Deity. As an example of the pervasive Christian view point, we also witness the deterioration and the coarsening of Faustus's character and his indulgence in cheap, sadistic fun.

## Historical Background of Doctor Faustus:

The play may be viewed with respect to a range of cultural changes took place during the Renaissance, particularly the newly discovered pressure on the individual's power and capability rather than the overall pressures on religious compliance and piety. There was the struggle between the English Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church. It undoubtedly affects the critical portrayal of the Pope in the play. The play in which it was pictured, Calvinism was increasing in the Church of England, yet continued to be a cause of argument. The status of the people, the pride of knowledge, according to Calvinism, whether saved or cursed was fated. The readers and researchers have continuously argued

the position depicted by Marlowe's play towards the Calvinist principle of fate: *Is Faustus fated to fall into hell?*

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

The play may largely be called a morality play. By selling his soul to the devil, Faustus lives a blasphemous life full of sterile and sensual pleasures for only 24 years. He criticises Christianity by insulting the Pope with the Holy Fathers of Rome. There is a sharp conflict in his soul between his ambition and conscience, between the good angel and the evil angel who breaks out of this internal struggle. Yet, at the end Faustus yields to the temptations of Evil angel, thus paving the way of eternal curse.

When Faustus has barely an hour to live, he realizes with the utmost pain and horror that his sins neither can be ignored nor be purified and nothing can save him from eternal curse. He realizes that his soul burn permanently into hell and he with the most effective expression scourges of the very tormented soul in his last soliloquy: *"My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!....."*.

The main goal of the morality play was to present educational ethics. It was a dramatic guide to Christian life Christian death. Who ignores the path of virtue and renounces faith in God and Christ and follow the path of Devil and Satan is destined to despair and eternal curse. This is Marlowe's message to his play "Dr. Faustus". The most palpable expression has been found in the sad choir in the final line: I'll burn my books !—Ah, Mephistophilis !

In the depiction of moral plays, abstract figures of vices or virtues were embodied. Here in this drama 'Doctor Faustus', we also find the good angel and the evil angel, the first symbolizing the path of virtue and the last of sin and curse. The old man strongly symbolizes the forces of righteousness and morality. He suggests Dr. Faustus to abjure magic and to come to the path of light. This also bears the witness of morality.

The comic scenes of Dr. Faustus also represent the tradition of miraculous plays and ancient morals. We found Faustus playing despicable tricks on the Pope, who represent the corrupt religion . We also capture Dr. Faustus to make the trick with that of the horse courser who plainly believes Dr. Faustus. When he was overwhelmed for the magical horse, he at last realized the deceive of Dr. Faustus.

The struggle between Faustus's uncontrolled appetites and the powers of heaven continues. Faustus has free will, free choice, and the ability to affirm or deny God. He cannot blame anybody but himself for his act and its consequences. After signing the document, Faustus

says: 'Consummatum est' which was the last words of Christ on earth according to the Gospel of St. John. Marlowe shows a great insight into the twisted mind of the magician by putting these blasphemous words in Faustus's mouth.

We see Faustus, his emotional and intellectual instability is fully revealed. He dwindles and waves between God and the devil. At first he is conscience-stricken: *“Now Faustus, must thou needs be damned, and canst thou not be saved”*. But in a moment he is once more the user of egocentric hyperbole : *“The God thou servest is thine own appetite,/ Wherein is fixed the love of Beelzebub/ To him I will build an alter and a church/ And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes.”*

We may also assume that he thinks the solitary place we go to post death is paradise. He was an atheist. But at the end, it is believed by him that paradise and hell exist and that one may be stay there forever. Faustus can also be considered an atheist while in some chapter he denies the existence of God and believes that the religion is a fake rite. His misunderstand returns he says to God that he wants to weep but his tears are depleted by the devil.

However, it would be wrong to suppose that the highest poetry of the play is confirmed to passages of rebellion against Christianity. As he, at last, asks for mercy and wishes to repent to his creator, he is forbidden and obliged to be eternally in hell. In this play, we are familiarized with Faustus' sacred beliefs and in what way they are related to cultural studies. In other words, while taking into account the fact that thoughts of hell could cause much spiritual unrest to Marlowe.

### **Some Themes Related to Morality in the Play:**

#### ***Temptation & Sin:***

Extremely indulged in Christianity, the play portrays the appealing temptation of sin, its results, and the probability of salvation for a sinner similar to Dr. Faustus. His journey diverts him to the possible path from temptation to sin to redemption: his aspiration is lured by the possibility of infinite knowledge and power, he commits sins to attain this, and then refuses probable salvation and redemption. He is so entranced in his longing for acquiring power that he ignores the results of his dealings with Lucifer and turn him to everlasting hell. Surrendering to his temptations, he refuses God and makes a deal with Lucifer and Mephistophilis and receive rotary motion of sin if there is sin.

In depicting the sinful conduct of Dr. Faustus, Marlow exposes the passive impacts of sin on Faustus himself. In spite of his initially noble aspirations, Faustus finishes up utilizing his magic for practical jokes, tricks, and claiming for a pretty woman for wife, though it is rejected when the ugly one is presented by Mephistophilis. Faustus, a respected scientist, looks like just a shadow of his previous self after bonding with Lucifer. Faustus and his company harm the others through sins, yet Faustus has the option of salvation all through the play. Whenever Faustus revives the name of God, Good Angel assures him to turn to God and become resurrect but the Evil Angel warns that Faustus cannot resurrect. Both angels may be looked at to presenting the opposition of redemption and the temptation of vice and versa. Most of the play, Faustus hears to the Evil Angel, but at the last he repents. The question is that whether he truly repents at the end or not is arguable and has significant insinuations. Clearly it is to state that he was very late to be responded to the way of God. However, whether he repented too late or did not truly repent, he refuses the opportunity of salvation and is cursed permanently in the everlasting torment of hell.

#### ***Flash & Spirit:***

The tussle between flash and spirit is robustly portrayed in Dr. Faustus. Flash is connected to man's physical desires and lusts, whereas spirit concerns faith and God. Flash regards earthly joys more significant, whereas spirit resists these lusts and desires. Faustus was wavering between the two and at last determined that earthly pleasure more persistent than spirit. So as the result Faustus evaluates flash more than spirit.

#### ***Good & Evil:***

The issue of good and evil is very significant in Dr. Faustus. The struggle between good and evil turns the man to be hesitant and remain puzzled and Dr. Faustus is not exception of that. It is the selection of the man that he must have to choose either to good or evil and which way is the good and which way is the bad for him.

#### ***Pride & Sin:***

The factor of pride and sin is the most significant one to the downfall of Dr. Faustus. Considering all the witty intellectuals about the base twenty four years superiority, Dr. Faustus falls in the trap of pride promptly take on sin to realize and achieve his lusts and desires, leading him to hell.

#### ***Salvation & Damnation:***

In the Christianity, salvation is essential for purification of the soul and to preserve the soul from everlasting torment of hell. If a person fails to do so, he will be cursed forever.

Actually, salvation concerns repentance of the soul confessing the heinous deed he has done, but Dr. Faustus rejects to repent, causing his damnation and eternal punishment in hell.

### ***Knowledge & Wisdom:***

Dr. Faustus is hungry for knowledge and in result he always is in quest for that. He studies almost all branches of knowledge as well as religion, yet he still is hungry for more knowledge that is the reason behind adopting the prohibited knowledge "the black magic". Here his incomparable wisdom fails him.

### ***Man's Lust & Power Limitations:***

Dr. Faustus like any other human being, is not exceptional to be desirous and lust such as the lust for wealth, beauty, power... etc, yet when he decides to take the incorrect way to have his desires and lusts fulfilled, he has no success. After selling his soul to Satan by signing the contract for his desires to be fulfilled, he thought that he could do anything in his power, but afterwards he recognized his limitations as a human when he ushered that his black art or black magic just to entertain the dukes. He was unable to create something like God, the Omnipotence, showing his power limitations.

### ***Greed:***

Like the other protagonists of Marlow's plays, Dr. Faustus forgets his responsibilities and duties to God and other creatures. To reach his overwhelming success he tries to hide his weak personality. He was tragic only for his wish to fulfilling his greed.

### ***Conclusion:***

From the abovementioned discussion and the material obtain, we can conclude that Christopher Marlowe is an English playwright as well as a poet in Elizabethan era. He is the first pioneer of Elizabethan tragedy writer of his time. Marlowe provides with the typical model of moral play remarkably in the personalities and characters he utilizes: a lot of whom are figurative characters. For instance, Good Angel as well as Evil Angels may be considered such characters. The first one evidently signifies the good power which attempts to direct Faustus towards repentance, and the evil power which leads him to curse. If it is to be observed to a glance at the play text, one will observe that the Good and Evil Angels often emerge temporarily, and frequently serve as a pause for Faustus' discourse. Afterwards, they vanish once more. This thing implies that their personalities are not real, but it was a mere incarnation of Faustus' ideas and suspicions. Despite of all its connections to the wonders or morals of the Middle Ages, Doctor Faustus may never be treated as a morality play. It is the greatest heroic tragedy because of its enormous pressure on characterization and internal strife in the soul of a lofty character. The play is indeed, a terribly pessimistic statement of the futility of human aspiration. Marlowe here uses a Christian view of heaven and hell to

make a protest which is essentially anti-Christian. We can conclude that Dr. Faustus is both the fulfilment of the English moral traditions and the finest and final of Marlowe's heroic plays. As a morality play, it bears all the relevance and proves humility, belief and compliance to God's law. As a heroic play, it rejoices power, beauty, wealth and knowledge as well as it seems to be a supplement to Marlowe's another masterpiece "Tamburlaine the great".

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