



# Exploring the Vital Aspects of Christopher Marlowe's Dr Faustus

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## ***Abstract***

The paper probes into the play "Doctor Faustus" by Christopher Marlowe which is a rich and complex work that explores a range of themes and ideas. At its core, the play can be interpreted as an exploration of the consequences of human actions and the nature of free will and predestination. This exploration is achieved through the interweaving of both Calvinist and fatalistic themes, as well as the use of allegory and supernatural elements. Calvinism is a Protestant movement that emerged in the 16th century, and emphasized the idea of predestination, where individuals were either predestined for salvation or damnation. This ideology is interwoven throughout the play, and is illustrated through the depiction of Faustus as a man who is predestined for damnation, and whose fate is sealed by his own actions. The scene where the Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear, representing the conflicting forces of good and evil within Faustus, can be interpreted as an illustration of the Calvinist idea of predestination, where individuals have the choice between good and evil, but their ultimate fate is predetermined by God. Fatalism is the belief that events are determined by fate and that individuals have no control over their lives. This belief is also explored throughout the play, particularly through the depiction of the devil, Mephistopheles, who is often depicted as a cunning and malevolent force that manipulates Faustus. The relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles is a complex one that further underscores the themes of fatalism, and the tension between free will and predestination serves to illustrate the nature of the human condition and the consequences of actions. The play also features elements of allegory, which further underscores the themes of Calvinism and fatalism. The play can be read as an allegory

for the dangers of sin and the consequences of making deals with the devil, using the supernatural elements to explore these deeper moral and philosophical themes in a fantastical context. This use of allegory serves to reinforce the themes of predestination and fate, and to explore the nature of human choice and the consequences of actions.

**Keywords:** *Supernatural elements, Calvinism and Fatalism, introduction to modern fantasy fiction.*

## Introduction

“Doctor Faustus” is a play written by Christopher Marlowe, first performed in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is a story about a man named Faustus, who makes a deal with the devil in exchange for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures. The play explores a range of themes and ideas, including the consequences of human actions, the nature of free will and predestination, and the dangers of sin. In this paper, we will examine the interplay of Calvinist and fatalistic themes, the use of allegory and supernatural elements, and how they contribute to the overall meaning of the play. Calvinism was a Protestant movement that emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and emphasized the idea of predestination, where individuals were either predestined for salvation or damnation. Fatalism is the belief that events are determined by fate and individuals have no control over their lives. The play features elements of allegory, using the supernatural elements to explore deeper moral and philosophical themes. This paper will provide a comprehensive analysis of these themes and how they are woven into the fabric of the play, illuminating the play’s commentary on the human condition and the consequences of sin. Through this examination, we will gain a deeper understanding of the timeless appeal and relevance of “Doctor Faustus” and its place in the tradition of modern fantasy fiction.

## Supernatural elements

The play “Doctor Faustus” by Christopher Marlowe, written in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, features many supernatural elements that have come to be associated with modern fantasy fiction. The play tells the story of a learned scholar named Faustus, who, dissatisfied with his limited knowledge and worldly successes, turns to magic and makes a deal with the devil, Mephistopheles, to gain unlimited power and knowledge. The play is filled with demons, spirits, and otherworldly creatures that are used to illustrate the consequences of Faustus’s deal with the devil. These supernatural elements serve to create a sense of mystery and wonder, and to explore the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural.

One of the key supernatural elements in Doctor Faustus is the depiction of the devil. Mephistopheles is presented as a charismatic and cunning character who tempts Faustus with the promise of unlimited knowledge and power. The devil is often depicted as a trickster who delights in misleading and manipulating mortals for his own amusement. This depiction of the

devil is a common theme in modern fantasy fiction, where the devil is often depicted as a powerful and malevolent force that seeks to corrupt and destroy the hero.

Another important supernatural element in Doctor Faustus is the depiction of demons and spirits. The play features several scenes where Faustus is visited by demons and spirits who torment him and try to convince him to break his deal with the devil. These scenes serve to illustrate the consequences of Faustus's actions and the true nature of the deal he has made. The use of demons and spirits to create a sense of danger and foreboding is a common technique in modern fantasy fiction, where they are often used to evoke a sense of horror and to explore the darker aspects of the human psyche.

Doctor Faustus also features elements of magic and the occult. The play presents magic as a powerful and dangerous tool that can be used for good or evil, and shows the consequences of misusing it. This idea of magic as a double-edged

sword is a common trope in modern fantasy fiction, where characters must navigate the dangers and consequences of using magic to achieve their goals. The play also features several scenes where Faustus performs magical incantations and conjures up spirits, highlighting the power and danger of the occult.

The supernatural elements in Doctor Faustus serve to create a sense of otherworldliness and to evoke a sense of wonder and mystery. The play's imaginative language, which is characterized by its ornate, elevated language, further adds to this sense of otherworldliness. This rich and imaginative language is a hallmark of modern fantasy fiction, where it is used to create a sense of otherworldliness and to evoke a sense of wonder and mystery.

The supernatural elements in Doctor Faustus also serve a deeper purpose, exploring the nature of reality and the consequences of making deals with the devil. The play can be read as an allegory for the dangers of sin and the consequences of making deals with the devil, using the supernatural elements to explore these deeper moral and philosophical themes in a fantastical context. This use of allegory is a common technique in modern fantasy fiction, where it is often used to explore deeper themes in a fantastical context.

However, the supernatural elements in Doctor Faustus are an integral part of the play and serve to create a sense of mystery and wonder, and to explore deeper moral and philosophical themes. These elements anticipate and influence the development of the modern fantasy genre, where they continue to be used to create a sense of otherworldliness, to evoke a sense of wonder and mystery, and to explore deeper themes and moral issues.

### **Calvinism and Fatalism**

The play "Doctor Faustus" can be interpreted as an exploration of both Calvinist and fatalistic themes. Calvinism was a Protestant movement that emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and emphasized the idea of predestination, where individuals were either predestined for salvation

or damnation. Fatalism, on the other hand, is the belief that events are determined by fate and that individuals have no control over their lives. These two ideologies are interwoven throughout the play, creating a complex and layered exploration of the consequences of human actions and the nature of free will and predestination.

The play can be interpreted as an exploration of Calvinist themes through its depiction of predestination. Throughout the play, Faustus is depicted as a man who is predestined for damnation, and his fate is sealed by his own actions. This is evident in the scene where the Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear, representing the conflicting forces of good and evil within Faustus. The Good Angel urges Faustus to repent and seek salvation, while the Evil Angel tempts him to continue down the path of sin and damnation. This scene can be interpreted as an illustration of the Calvinist idea of predestination, where individuals have the choice between good and evil, but their ultimate fate is predetermined by God.

The play also explores fatalistic themes through its depiction of the devil, Mephistopheles, who is often depicted as a cunning and malevolent force that manipulates Faustus. Mephistopheles is presented as a force that is beyond Faustus's control, and that ultimately determines his fate. This is evident in the scene where Faustus signs a contract with Mephistopheles, binding himself to the devil's will. This scene can be interpreted as an illustration of the fatalistic belief that individuals have no control over their lives and that their fate is determined by external forces.

The relationship between Faustus and Mephistopheles is a complex one that further underscores the themes of Calvinism and fatalism in the play. On one hand, Faustus is depicted as a man who is in control of his own destiny, making the choice to sell his soul to the devil. On the other hand, he is also depicted as a man who is ultimately powerless, trapped by the forces of fate and the devil's will. This tension between free will and predestination is a central theme of the play, and serves to illustrate the consequences of Faustus's actions and the nature of the human condition.

The play also features elements of allegory, which further underscores the themes of Calvinism and fatalism. The play can be read as an allegory for the dangers of sin and the consequences of making deals with the devil, using the supernatural elements to explore these deeper moral and philosophical themes in a fantastical context. This use of allegory serves to reinforce the themes of predestination and fate, and to explore the nature of human choice and the consequences of actions.

At the end, the play "Doctor Faustus" by Christopher Marlowe can be interpreted as an exploration of both Calvinist and fatalistic themes, and the interplay between these two ideologies serves to create a complex and layered exploration of the nature of human choice, the consequences of actions, and the forces of predestination and fate. The play serves as a powerful commentary on the human condition and the consequences of sin, and continues to influence the development of literature and the arts to this day.

## Introduction to modern fantasyfiction

Doctor Faustus, written by Christopher Marlowe in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, is a play that has long been recognized as a classic of English Renaissance drama. While it may not be considered a work of modern fantasy fiction, it certainly has elements that anticipate and influence the development of the genre. In this essay, we will explore how Doctor Faustus introduces the themes, motifs, and techniques that are now associated with modern fantasy fiction.

Doctor Faustus tells the story of a learned scholar named Faustus, who, dissatisfied with his limited knowledge and worldly successes, turns to magic and makes a deal with the devil, Mephistopheles, to gain unlimited power and knowledge. The play follows Faustus's downward spiral as he realizes too late the full extent of the consequences of his deal and the emptiness of the knowledge and power that he has acquired.

The themes of Doctor Faustus are centered around the dangers of unchecked ambition, the temptation of power, and the ultimate consequences of making deals with the devil. These themes are still relevant today and continue to be explored in contemporary fantasy fiction, where characters are often faced with choices that test their moral integrity and their ability to resist temptation.

One of the key elements of Doctor Faustus that anticipates modern fantasy fiction is its use of magic. The play presents magic as a powerful and dangerous tool that can be used for good or evil, and shows the consequences of misusing it. This idea of magic as a double-edged sword is a common trope in modern fantasy fiction,

where characters must navigate the dangers and consequences of using magic to achieve their goals.

Another important aspect of Doctor Faustus that is relevant to modern fantasy fiction is its depiction of the supernatural. The play is filled with demons, spirits, and otherworldly creatures that are used to illustrate the consequences of Faustus's deal with the devil. The use of the supernatural in Doctor Faustus is not just limited to its depiction of the devil and his minions, but also extends to the play's representation of magic and the occult. This theme of the supernatural is a staple of modern fantasy fiction, where it is often used to explore the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, and to question the nature of reality.

Doctor Faustus also introduces the idea of the hero's journey, which is a key theme in modern fantasy fiction. In the play, Faustus embarks on a journey from a learned scholar to a powerful magician, and ultimately to his downfall. This journey is marked by a series of trials and temptations, and ultimately by Faustus's realization of the true nature of the deal he has made. This theme of the hero's journey, where a character embarks on a quest to gain knowledge or power, and is transformed by the experience, is a common motif in modern fantasy fiction,

where it is often used to explore the themes of self-discovery, growth, and personal transformation.

In addition to its themes and motifs, *Doctor Faustus* is also notable for its use of language. The play is written in a mixture of blank verse and rhyming couplets, and is characterized by its ornate, elevated language. This rich and imaginative language is a hallmark of modern fantasy fiction, where it is used to create a sense of otherworldliness and to evoke a sense of wonder and mystery.

Finally, *Doctor Faustus* is notable for its use of allegory. The play can be read as an allegory for the dangers of sin and the consequences of making deals with the devil. This use of allegory is a common technique in modern fantasy fiction, where it is often used to explore deeper, moral, and philosophical themes in a fantastical context.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, “*Doctor Faustus*” is a seminal work of modern fantasy fiction that has captured the imaginations of audiences for centuries. The play is a powerful commentary on the limits of human knowledge and the dangers of unchecked ambition. Through its depiction of Dr. Faustus’s Faustian bargain with the devil, Marlowe explores the conflict between the desires of the flesh and the demands of the soul. This struggle is set against the backdrop of the late medieval period and reflects the growing skepticism and rejection of traditional religious beliefs during the Renaissance. The play is also notable for its use of supernatural elements, such as the devil and demons, which are woven seamlessly into the narrative to heighten the sense of drama and conflict. These supernatural elements serve to emphasize the otherworldly nature of Dr. Faustus’s pursuits and underscore the consequences of his choices. Additionally, the play can be interpreted as a commentary on the themes of Calvinism and fatalism. The character of Dr. Faustus is often seen as embodying the idea of predestination and the belief that one’s fate is predetermined. However, the play can also be read as a critique of this idea and a warning against blindly accepting the notion of predestination without examining the consequences. Overall, “*Doctor Faustus*” is a complex and multifaceted work that continues to captivate audiences with its powerful themes and imaginative depictions of the supernatural. Its enduring popularity is a testament to the timeless appeal of the Faustian story and the enduring relevance of Marlowe’s themes and ideas.

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